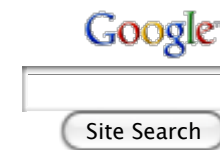


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New Delhi



NSG commandos relive anti-terrorist operations

Parul Sharma

Despite the gruelling action they show no sign of fatigue

'The first priority was to take the guests out and then neutralise the militants'

'The team went inside the Oberoi Hotel from a route not covered by the media'

NEW DELHI: As he laughs heartily, exchanges jokes with his colleagues and chats about his family, it is difficult to imagine that this National Security Guard commando was involved in the anti-terrorist operations in Mumbai till about a day ago.

However, a bruise on his left ear indicated that this officer was in the thick of things. "A bullet fired by a terrorist brushed past my ear," he says nonchalantly, playing down the consequences if the bullet had been two inches to the right.

Despite a gruelling counter-offensive operation against the terrorists holed up at three different places in Mumbai, the commandos of the elite force who returned from that city to the Capital in two batches on Saturday night and Sunday afternoon showed little signs of fatigue.

Talking to reporters on Sunday, Colonel Sunil Sheoran, a highly decorated officer and the group commander of the 51 SAG (Special Action Group), said their first priority was to take the guests out and then neutralise the militants.

'Test of training'

"I told my jawans that this was a test of all the training that they had undergone so far. There were many rooms at the Taj Mahal hotel. There was no point in sending a large group to a room, as we would have ended up with collateral damage. So we made small groups to sanitise the rooms."

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He mentioned how all three places – Taj Mahal Hotel, Oberoi-Trident Hotel and Nariman House – had their own “peculiarities and difficulties”.

A commando who was involved in the operations at the Oberoi Hotel said the team went inside the building from a route not covered by the media.

Recounting the operation, he said: “Initially the two terrorists at the Oberoi were together on the 18th floor, but one of them came out and was looking for an exit that our team was manning. He opened fire and we returned it.”

“After a few rounds, he limped back as he was hit by us and took shelter in a dark place and we cornered him. We were operating in back-up power. We were careful not to let him slip out at night. We engaged him till the first light next morning and then shot him after knowing his exact location,” the officer said.

The second terrorist who was lodged in the room number 1856 was also killed by morning.

Some commandos revealed that what delayed the operation even after the militants were killed was that people inside the rooms did not respond even when the NSG group knocked on the door to check. “People inside were cautious and despite our pleas they would not come out. The hotel staff tried calling the internal phones, but the guests did not take the call. We could not make any central announcement, as we were not sure if there were only two terrorists in the building,” he added.

The team that flushed the militants at the Oberoi-Trident said the hotel staff, particularly a security officer, was of immense help during the 30-hour operation.

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