



## Tank 7, towers 0: it has the ring of a phoney war about it

**ANGELA CUMING. LEMA SAMANDAR**  
A MAN who allegedly went on a tank rampage through the streets of western Sydney, destroying several mobile phone towers, had been lovingly restoring the vehicle, his employer said.

John Robert Patterson, 45, of the Sydney suburb of Dharruk, has been charged with predatory driving and six counts of malicious damage.

He was arrested early yesterday after police encountered an armoured personnel carrier destroying an electricity substation in the suburb of Minchinbury.

In the next 90 minutes, the tank brought down four Telstra mobile phone towers and damaged three Optus towers. The rampage continued until the vehicle stalled on the way to another phone tower.

Mount Druitt police chief inspector Guy Haberley said: "He continued to destroy mobile phone tower communications sheds by crashing through the perimeter fence and colliding with structures, causing significant damage."

The tank was allegedly stolen from A-One Lift Truck Services, where it was available for hire and was popular with students who used it for school formals.

A-One owner Greg Morris said he hired Patterson, a friend of a friend, on a six-month contract to help restore the armoured personnel carrier, made in 1967.

"We worked on this together, and he loved the work he was doing," Mr Morris said.

"I remember once when we took it out, someone touched it, and he lost his temper with them. That's how much pride he took in his work.

"He put hundreds of hours of work into it and helped build it. He loved it just as much as I did."

Mr Morris said he believed Patterson had once worked on tanks in the army. Patterson's neighbours said he had been a technician for Telecom, now Telstra, who received a compensation pay-out about 15 years ago after a head injury.

The tank rampage stunned many local residents. Witness William Errin-

gton said he began following the vehicle with his friends after they heard loud noises and police sirens. "The tank was being driven all over the place, on footpaths, on the wrong side of the road," Mr Errington said.

"It was a bit scary, but it wasn't something you see every day."

Mobile phone services were disrupted yesterday while technicians prepared to move into the area and fix the damaged phone towers.

A Telstra spokesman said temporary structures had been erected to replace four mobile phone towers that were destroyed in Mount Druitt, Emerton, Plumpton and Minchinbury.

An Optus spokeswoman said three towers had been damaged. Mobile phone services were expected to return to normal today.

Patterson faced a Sydney court on charges that included malicious damage; breaking, entering and stealing; predatory driving; possession of a prohibited drug; use of a weapon to avoid apprehension; and driving in a dangerous manner. He was refused bail.



Police inspect the armoured personnel carrier (left) that brought down four Telstra mobile phone towers, and damaged three Optus ones. One of the destroyed towers (below left), and the man arrested and charged over the rampage.

PHOTOS: JACKY GROSSER, GORDON MCCORMICK

