

Melburnians in Boston when explosions go off during marathon tell of chaos
Jamie First and Jonno Nash

Melburnians at the scene of the deadly Boston explosions have told how they feared more bombs would detonate.

Travis Giansiracusa - the cousin of veteran Bulldog Daniel Giansiracusa - was just 50 metres from the blast.

The Clifton Hill man had finished the race about an hour earlier and had perched himself on a fence, gripping onto an American flag post near the finish line, when the blast happened.

Mr Giansiracusa said people were flattened by the shockwave.

"It was pretty crazy - the noise, and the actual pressure of the blast was quite intense," he said.

"It was a deep explosion. It wasn't just a bang. A lot of people around me fell over because of the blast.

"It was chaos. The fear. You just couldn't believe what had just happened ... my first thought was 'are there going to be more'."

Mr Giansiracusa and his father, Charlie, were on a 45 degree angle from where the blast went off, which probably saved their lives.

"It was pretty powerful and then there was a second blast about five seconds later and everyone just ran. I think we were quite lucky. If it was across the street we would have been gone," he said.

"You see it on TV but you don't actually know what it feels like until you're there and you've experienced it."

Just two minutes earlier, the personal trainer posed for photos with his medal outside the Marathon Sports shop which was destroyed.

The frightened pair ran back to their nearby hotel, but were evacuated a short time later due to fear of further attacks.

With his credit card and \$50 between them, the pair were in the process of negotiating a place to sleep the night with another hotel about three blocks from the carnage.

Mr Giansiracusa said he and his father had been on the trip of a lifetime.

"We've been here a week. We've loved Boston and it's just so sad that on the biggest day it has turned out like this. It had been such a great day. You don't

experience the Boston Marathon until you actually run it and you see for 42km there are so many happy people,” he said.

Did you witness the chaos? Contact our news@heraldsun.com.au or our newsdesk on 9292 1226

Helen Carmody, principal of exclusive Victorian girls’ private school, Toorak College, today told the Herald Sun how she was only 500m away from the finish line before the race was abruptly halted.

She said no one knew why the marathon had ended but word trickled out soon after that there had been a bombing.

“It became quite chaotic. There was just a huge amount of sirens ambulances, police and helicopters hovering above,” she said.

“I was a sombre atmosphere and this terrible fear.”

Mrs Carmody, who had been running for four hours and 20 minutes, said there were thousands of spectators on the street cheering loudly but that was all soon drowned out by loud sirens.

She said the temperature dropped to about 12 degrees and the runners were all shivering in the street before residents came to their assistance.

“They gave us these big black garbage bags to keep warm,” she said.

“If I had run a bit faster everything could’ve turned out very differently I am very, very lucky.”

Victorian Major Events Company chief executive Brendan McClements said SWAT teams with machine guns have secured the hotels adjacent to the finishing line of the marathon.

Mr McClements, speaking from the Sheraton hotel which overlooks the marathon finish line, said the foyer was guarded by heavily-armed police officers as emergency services put the area into lockdown.

“I’m just looking at three heavily-armed military police with machine guns on their hips walking through the lobby,” Mr McClements said.

“We haven’t been able to walk outside. To tell you the truth, we’re happy to stay inside at this stage.

“It (the explosions) was quite muffled because I was sitting in the hotel, which had some sound proofing.

“I heard this dull thud in the distance. And then there was the immediate sound of sirens. I started to become aware that things perhaps weren’t normal.

"The emergency services have been absolutely terrific. There seems to have been an extraordinary response very quickly."

Mr McClements, in Boston for business, said the foyer was packed with spectators and marathon runners seeking refuge from the terror attack. He said the hotel lobby, filled with up to 400 people, erupted in applause following President Barack Obama's address.

Meanwhile, Melbourne man Travis Stevens said he had finished the marathon about an hour before the blasts and was celebrating in a pub when he heard the explosions.

"The locals thought it might have been an electricity fault and then when the second one went off, that's when everyone realised yeah, this is serious," Mr Stevens told 3AW radio today.

"The whole place shook and there were huge plumes of smoke with a red glow."

With downtown Boston's power being shut off in fear of a mobile detonation device, the marathon runner was told to stay in his hotel and "lay low".

"It's like the AFL Grand Final. It's such a family friendly day, so you definitely would never expect this," he said.

"The streets are really quiet, the city has been locked down. Police have evacuated the area and are taking extra precautions."

Finishing the race after three hours and nine minutes, Travis's father Robert said his son was lucky he was out of the way.

"I rang him a few moments ago and he's all fine so we're happy about that," he said.

Ben Hansen, who is studying at Boston, said he was due to watch the end of the race but got delayed with a university assignment.

The 20-year-old from Geelong, who lives 500m from where the bomb went off, said he heard the explosion but had no idea what happened.

"It sounded like a really loud clap and thunder," he said.

"At the start I thought it was a gas explosion."

Mr Hansen said his apartment was locked down and everyone had been told not to go anywhere.

He described a scene of chaos with SWAT teams, armoured vehicles and emergency service vehicles.

“It was like the army was coming to town,” he said.

“Cars had stopped in the middle of the road and police and ambulances were driving on footpaths and in the middle of the road over islands. It looked like they were struggling to get in.

“I had seen this stuff in movies but never in real life.”

Melbourne Lord Mayor Robert Doyle said the bomb blasts in Boston felt personal because of the connection between the two sister cities.

Mr Doyle says the horrific scenes had upset Victorians.

“There is that connection between sister cities that makes it, that it feels almost much more personal,” he told Fairfax radio on Tuesday.

“It's kind of like an attack on Melbourne.

“We do feel very close to our sister city.”

Mr Doyle will send a message to Boston Mayor Thomas Menino.

“Once things have calmed down, I'll certainly send a message of condolence and support,” he said.

Melbourne and Boston have been sister cities since 1985.