

Women in policing

by Senior Constable Susan Beatty

The Australian Federal Police Force has 195 female officers covering most ranks, with expertise extending to a wide range of specialist duties including street policing, criminal investigation, juvenile welfare, intelligence gathering and protective security policing.

As little as ten years ago, in the traditionally male-dominated law enforcement arena this involvement would have been considered impossible. But dramatic changes have occurred in a profession where women had never constituted more than a small percentage of the total police workforce in any country.

Australia can be justifiably proud of the fact that it was among the pioneers in the employment of women in law enforcement. In 1915 both the South Australian and the New South Wales Police Forces made their first female appointments.

In the past few years attitudes toward the employment of policewomen have gone through two separate but major periods of change. The first period brought the gradual acceptance of women into police organisations because of their originally specified role, that of dealing with the protection and care of other women. However, the second stage has been the acceptance and attempted integration of women in all aspects of policing, including routine general patrol work.

Predictably, such changes must bring barriers of resistance that have had to be overcome. The loudest protestations concerned the traditional fear of women's physical inabilities in circumstances where partners are dependent on each other for their very lives. However, this could be well equated with the physical capability of a slightly built male officer, an officer nearing retirement age or an overweight and out-of-condition male officer of any age.

It has only been since forward-thinking administrators have stopped worrying about their well-being simply because they are women that it has been possible to examine the inherent skills and unique benefits

that women can bring to policing. Coupled with the fact that women volunteer to take on police work as an occupation, management has become convinced that the assets offered to law enforcement by women far outweigh any physical liabilities.

It has taken only a short number of years for Police Forces to realise that policewomen are here to stay. They are not in the force to be protected by male officers any more than one male partner would protect another male partner. They are simply there to do the job, whatever the job happens to be.

Another factor to be considered in favour of women playing an integral part in law enforcement is that just over 50% of our population is female. Therefore the presence of women police officers gives each force a more balanced representation of the public it serves.

In a survey conducted by the American Police Foundation it was found that women police officers tend to defuse possible volatile situations (i.e. domestic disputes) and the



Senior Constable Susan Beatty, 32, is a fourth generation Australian police officer. In 1966 she followed her father, Sergeant 1st Class Norman Beatty (ret.) into the NSW Police Force. Constable Beatty joined the A.C.T. Police in 1972.

incidence of violence between police officers and citizens has been significantly reduced since they tend to provoke less hostility than men.

As a direct result of their bringing many women tend to contribute a compassionate, humanized approach to their work. To work successfully with equal opportunity in police force need not mean that women lost their individual traits. In fact some of these traits could prove to be just as valuable to policemen.

In simplistic terms it is more a matter of male and female officers learning to appreciate and use their inherent talents and strengths of each other.

Women's interest in police work is very real and understandable. It can provide benefits and challenges that more traditionally female oriented jobs do not. It is a career, not merely a time filling gap between school and marriage. On commencement it provides equal training and salaries and the opportunity to meet and serve the community at large. It also offers security in today's growing employment crisis, with attractive holiday and sick leave benefits. In reality women are attracted to police work for similar valid reasons that men are.

Very few studies have been conducted on the effect of women in policing. However, there have been an amazing number of unsupported assumptions and statistics given in support of male officers as opposed to female.

Some of the more familiar and often quoted include: society has reared women to be passive and not active; men are rational and women more emotional; men can handle crises but women fall apart; men have greater motivation to achieve but women are not as ambitious; men are capable of performing more difficult jobs but women are content with repetitive tasks; men's dominance commands respect and women by their passive motives cannot achieve leadership.

The Australian Capital Territory and Commonwealth Police Forces that have now become the Australian Federal Police, have both been worthy of congratulations in not being influenced by the trite expressions offered on women's ability to successfully perform law enforcement duties.

Female officers comprised approximately 11% of the total workforce of the Commonwealth Police Force, deployed in both plain

clothes and uniform divisions; ability and not gender being the governing criteria. The Australian Capital Territory Police, recognising the contributions to be made by women in law enforcement, for some five years now has assigned women to general patrol duties and given female officers the opportunity to train as detectives.

Given the opportunity to demonstrate the valuable contributions they can bring to their respective forces, the rest could depend on the women themselves. The indications are that women officers are just as capable of handling their duties as their male counterparts. As they continue to demonstrate that they can do the job, the previous negative attitudes and reactions will tend to disappear as they are accepted as full time police officers in their own right.



ASSOCIATIONS' PAGE

Continued from page 15

Attorney-General
Parliament House
CANBERRA, A.C.T. 2600
8 October, 1979

Dear Mr Page,

I refer to your letter of 18 September 1979 concerning the resolution passed at the recent Bi-ennial Conference of the Police Federation of Australia relating to the Criminal Investigation Bill.

As you will be aware, when the Criminal Investigation Bill 1977 was left to lie on the table of the House, a great deal of comment was received from both interested individuals and organisations. These comments have now been closely examined. However, the Government has not yet decided whether a revised Bill will be proceeded with.

Should the Government decide to proceed with the introduction of a new Bill ample opportunity will

be afforded for comment by the public including the Police Forces.

Yours sincerely,
(PETER DURACK)

Mr R. W. Page,
Secretary,
Police Federation of Australia & New Zealand,
P.O. Box Q.283,
Queen Victoria Building,
SYDNEY, NSW 2000

In closing, may I take the opportunity of extending, on the behalf of my members, best wishes and expressions of our continued support to Sir Colin Woods in this task as Commissioner of the AFP, and also extend to our counterparts from the former Commonwealth Police our firm undertaking to do all in our power to create a common bond of understanding.

Alan K. Bilbie
Secretary,
Federal Police Association.

Languages:

NOT EVERYONE SPEAKS STRINE

Have you ever wished that you could speak another language? Perhaps, as a police officer, you have encountered a person whose English is difficult to understand.

Australia is a multi-racial society and newly-arrived settlers need some time before they have a substantial grasp of English or, as it is becoming known, Australian-English or "strine".

But perhaps you are an AFP

member who can speak one or more foreign languages. Languages spoken by members include Greek, Macedonian, Yugoslav, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Kiswahili, Japanese, Indonesian, Russian, Vietnamese, Dutch, Polish and Esperanto.

(At the AFP training college in Barton, A.C.T., a handful of instructors are even able to master a few key phrases of Pidgin and Motu —

the result of friendships with officer-trainees from Papua-New Guinea.)

If you are an AFP Member who is able to write another language, the Editor would be grateful if you got in touch. Perhaps you could help *Platypus* by contributing a short article in another language.

By publishing AFP stories in other languages, we hope to get *Platypus* articles reprinted in some of Australia's many foreign language newspapers.