



by P.S. Constable Barry Slade

Hollywood actor George C. Scott, best known for his starring role in the movie 'Patton', almost certainly has never heard of the Australian Federal Police Force.

But the veteran screen tough guy, unknowingly, has helped ensure that A.F.P. recruits are among the best trained policemen in the world.

It all began one night in Canberra more than five years ago. Chief Superintendent Peter Dawson, then an inspector in the former A.C.T. Police Force, was at home watching television.



It was a movie starring George C. Scott entitled 'The Young Centurions' about the lives of two Los Angeles policemen. Scott played the role of a hardened uniformed street cop who had been assigned a new buddy fresh out of the police academy.

The raw rookie rapidly develops into a competent police officer able to cope with any situation, thanks mainly to having worked closely with an experienced policeman and having seen how police really operate in the street.

"That film was the clincher," Chief Superintendent Dawson recalls. "Before I saw it I had been concerned for some time that our recruits were not being trained properly.

THE BUDDY SYSTEM

A SPECIAL PLATYPUS REPORT

"They would come out of the training college, be assigned to a beat on the street and be expected to know exactly what to do in any situation."

This was a bad state of affairs because there is so much to learn about police work that can't be taught at college, it can only be taught through on-the-job experience and preferably under guidance," Mr Dawson said.



Problems

At that time in 1976 Mr Dawson was undergoing a three-month stint, relieving as Officer-in-Charge at the Police Training College and he was fully aware of the problems confronting young policemen coming out of college.

"I remember how I used to be in and out of trouble all the time when I first came out of the Police College," he said.

"So while I was relieving OIC at the college I submitted a recommendation that a buddy system, similar to the system depicted in 'The Young Centurions', be introduced in the A.C.T. Police."

It was agreed to try the idea on a three-month trial basis and how things have snowballed since those days. The buddy system is now so widely acclaimed that the NSW Police Force has adopted it and, more recently, it was introduced into the training programme of the A.F.P.'s Protective Service recruits.



The buddy system is officially referred to at the A.F.P. College as the Field Training Programme and the experienced policemen who act as tutors in the field, are referred to as Field Training Officers.

As the system currently exists for training General Duties police, a recruit undergoes 16 weeks training at College followed by 12 weeks in the field with his Field Training Officer and rounded off by a further six weeks back at College undergoing what is referred to as retention training.

Retention training consists largely of analysing what has been learned during the Field Training.

Because police duties are not so varied in the Protective Services, recruits in this component undergo a condensed training programme with five weeks study at the College followed by a fortnight with a Field Training Officer and finally a week's retention back at the College.

Before the formation of the A.F.P. the usual practice for Commonwealth Police recruits graduating from College was to assign them to a defence complex or some other

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station where they could come under close surveillance from their superior officers while gaining the necessary experience in the field.



Competent

However, under the buddy system, Protective Service graduates are generally competent enough to be assigned to any station including posts like The Lodge and Government House which were previously served by more experienced members.

Mr Dawson explained that Field Training Officers used in the buddy system are selected only if they are proven performers and experienced in all aspects of their particular duties.



He pointed out that it was in the interests of policemen seeking promotion to have served as a Field Training Officer (several policemen are currently assigned to their sixth buddy).

Mr Dawson recalled that there was some resistance from the

members when he first suggested the buddy system in 1976. Much of the criticism was based on the fear of possible personality clashes arising from a situation in which two people have to work so closely.

However, by employing a type of match-making process when pairing-up Field Training Officers with their buddies those fears were proved almost entirely unfounded.

Mr Dawson can remember only 3 cases in more than five years in which the training officer and his buddy were unable to work harmoniously and had to be swapped.



Friendships

Mr Dawson says the buddy system has proved particularly helpful to recruits and their families who are newcomers to Canberra. Usually the field training officer and his wife are the first friends to be established by the recruit settling in with his family.

"Many lasting friendships have developed this way," Mr Dawson said.

Mr Dawson is satisfied that the system is working satisfactorily. "You only have to look at the current standard of paperwork from these men to appreciate that the quality of work is getting better all the time," he said.

He pointed out that only 12 of the 1027 charges preferred by police in Canberra last month were faulty in their preparation.

"This is a far cry from the days before the system was introduced when police new to preparing briefs of evidence would have to do retype after retype," Mr Dawson said.

The A.F.P. is obviously not content to sit back and let the Field Training Programme carry on its own way. In fact, the programme was reviewed recently by A.F.P. Training College instructors with a view to improving it.

A report has been prepared on the findings of the three-man investigative team comprising Sergeants C.J. Eaton and L.J. Lambert and Senior Constable J.W. Martin.



Both advantages and disadvantages of the programme are outlined along with recommendations aimed at upgrading the system.

The report concludes: "As experienced Police Instructors, we feel that the most important period of training for the new recruit is not in the normal course of events, his formal College instruction, but his field training experience. We feel that this is so important, that even its retention in the present form is essential to overall quality training".