

# Paving the way for peace

## - the first contingent sets up

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Members and reserves of the first contingent to Cambodia on the night of their formal farewell hosted by the Commissioner. Left to right: Sergeant John Rixon, Constable John Andersen (second contingent), Constable Paul Morris, Superintendent Bob Bradley (second contingent), Constable Paul McEwan, Constable Steve Pereira (second contingent), Sergeant Alf Turketo, Constable Jim Williams, Commissioner Peter McAulay, Sergeant Peter Baldwin (second contingent), Constable Shane Connelly, Constable Paul Cartwright (second contingent), Constable Rod Carnall, Constable Kurt Plummer, Superintendent Bill Kirk, Constable Shan Rice and Sergeant Bert Kuijpers.

**S**ELECTED from a field of 130 applicants, 10 AFP officers landed in Phnom Penh on May 19, 1992 as part of Australia's police commitment to the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) and were faced with a bureaucratic jungle thicker than the surrounding vegetation.

The members spent nine months in Cambodia as part of the 3600-strong UN police force recruited from UN member states. The police task was to supervise and control local police forces and investigate alleged violations of human rights and to stabilise conditions for the elections.

While in Phnom Penh, the AFP contingent put its resourcefulness to the test and 'acquired' the necessary provisions and transport in

record time and with a minimum of paperwork.

Under the command of Superintendent Bill Kirk, the contingent headed inland to its designated area of responsibility on Monday June 1 with five German Border Police and six Tunisian Police in tow. Two AFP officers remained in Phnom Penh for administrative duties.

Central to the contingent's area of responsibility was the small village of Thmar Pouk in north-west Cambodia. Rising 70m above sea level and 380km by road from Phnom Penh, it lies 100km by road from Aranyaprathet in Thailand.

Movement to Thmar Pouk from Phnom Penh was slow with the 265km journey from Phnom Penh to Battambang taking between nine and 11 hours.

Thmar Pouk and nearby Banteay Chhmar were under the control of the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF). The KPNLF was formed in 1979 following the Vietnamese invasion. The population of the area was close to 59,000 and the civilian volunteer police force of the group numbered 1056 members with offices temporarily located in Thmar Pouk and Banteay Chhmar.

The contingent lived in an ageing two-storey house in Thmar Pouk while new barracks-style accommodation was built next door. A generator was acquired with the view of outfitting the new building with electric lighting and a refrigerator.

Creature comforts were scarce, but resourcefulness - backed up with a few star pickets, a roll of

hessian and a thunderbox - produced the best latrine in the district located just a quick trot from the back door.

Resourcefulness went a long way in the job as well. With bandits active in the area and heavy weapons commonplace, contingent members were armed only with a broad smile and a firm handshake.

The UN does not arm its police so that they are not seen as a physical threat in their assigned communities.

The contingent derived some comfort from having a Bangladeshi Infantry Battalion located 700m from their house.

Police duty started at 7am and wound down around 5pm seven days of the week. A typical day's work might include routine patrolling, escorting Red Cross workers, assisting with a UN investigation into human rights violations, investigating bandit activity and dealing with cattle rustlers.

Police work is police work anywhere in the world!

The standard roster was 28 days on with six days off. Fortunately the Thai city of Aranyaprathet, was just 100km over the border.

Cooking and domestic chores were done for the contingent by the local Khmer Women's Association.

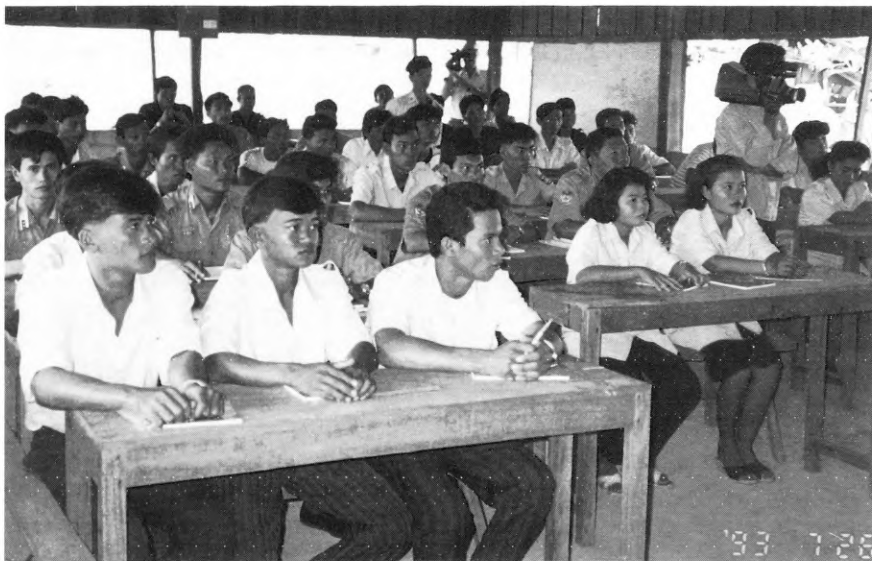
Superintendent Kirk listed the greatest dangers to the contingent as being illness, landmines, and the presence of the international media. He assessed any military threat to the contingent as being low.



*The only accommodation available to the first AFP contingent on arrival at Thmar Pouk was an ageing two-storey house in poor state of repair.*



*Four wheel drive vehicles were no guarantee that the roads anywhere in north-west Cambodia were passable.*



*Local police in training in the newly constructed classroom. The first contingent supervised the building of a police station, barracks, classroom and an ablutions block.*



*Two important symbols that assisted in keeping the well-being of both contingents. The skull and crossed bones indicated unexploded mines and the kangaroo made the AFP contingent instantly recognisable to all factions in the area.*