

Recruit Diary

An overview of recruit training and her first month on the job by Julianna Balogh



I began the Federal Police Development Program in April 2003.

The training program was varied and interesting, and at times, quite demanding, both physically and mentally. For 22 weeks I was living and working with 19 other people, ranging in ages from 21 to 42 – a total of 11 women and nine men, from diverse backgrounds.

We began by meeting at an informal gathering the day prior to the start of the course and became progressively familiar with each other as we were put through a range of exercises, group assignments, tutorials, scenarios and sporting activities during our training in Canberra. Although very different, we all had one common goal in mind – to pass the course and become federal agents.

The first two weeks consisted of a number of introductory sessions, but soon the assignments and exams commenced and there seemed little time for much else.

We had a team-building day on our second week, held at the Royal Australian Air Force base in Fairbairn. This outdoor event involved group exercises to tackle a number of obstacles, where communication and

problem solving were themes for the day. Emphasis was placed on team work and it became evident that in order to pass the course we had to work together and deal with any potential conflicts and differences that were likely to arise.

During week four we started Defensive Tactics training at the Weston complex, which continued once a week for 10 weeks. This involved a number of exercises involving strikes, holds, handcuffing, the baton, Oleo Capsicum (OC) spray and firearms, and conflict and negotiation techniques.

During one of the final lessons we were given the opportunity to experience OC spray for ourselves, an event I am unlikely to forget. A rigorous decontamination process was provided immediately after exposure but the pain experienced was something I had never felt before. It was certainly effective and I don't believe anyone from our group emerged without feeling the effects.

I began firearm training in week 10. There were a few of us in the course, including myself, who had never held a firearm before, but we were given a week to complete the requirements for firearm handling. Due to the bushfires earlier in the year the indoor firing

range had been destroyed so our group undertook this training on an outdoor range. As it was the middle of winter in Canberra we also had to contend with extremely cold conditions throughout the day.

All the skills acquired during defensive tactics training were in preparation for the Redman scenario – an exercise that went towards the use of force qualification. Redman was considered one of the more demanding assessments of the course as it was used to test our ability to use our initiative, communication skills and physical competency in relation to use of force principles. After the test, I believe we all came out with some valuable advice and experience, thanks to the training provided by the Operational Safety instructors.

Other physical requirements of our training included fitness tests conducted throughout the 22-week period. The majority of us improved in all aspects which involved running, an agility test, push ups, sit ups and grip strength. It was a good sense of achievement to see improvement after each assessment. There was no physical training component of the course so it was left up to us to maintain a program in our own time. Group activities were organised to assist us, but only when time permitted. More often we arranged our own programs, tailored to achieve personal fitness goals.

Week 11 saw us undertake driver training, which involved five days of various exercises, both in the classroom and on track. We were given lessons on skidding, loss of control, emergency braking, posture, steering, cornering, night driving, interception and reversing. I found this one of the more enjoyable aspects of the course, and was surprised to learn that there are a number of techniques to many aspects of driving, which we all came to master by the end of the week.

The theory component of the course included lessons covering evidence, police powers and PROMIS, our police information management system. A number of people from different areas of the AFP came and spoke to our group on their respective roles throughout the course. They included representatives from Professional Standards, the Confidant Network, Quality Assurance Team, Staff Movements, Psychological Services, Chaplaincy, Counter Terrorism, and MOSC. Representatives from the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Ombudsman's office also featured in the program.

We were given tours of National Headquarters in Canberra, the High Court of Australia, Forensic Services at Weston, Corrective Services Remand Centre at Belconnen and had the opportunity to visit the morgue and observe two autopsies.

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Other lessons covered the preparation of witness statements, taped record of interviews, search warrants and brief preparation. Practical training was provided for each of these, which were then brought together in the major scenario - a 10-day exercise, commencing in week sixteen, which involved a variety of tasks and scenarios.

The days were expected to be long and shift work was envisaged. This was definitely the case, but it equipped us with some valuable experience and enabled us to take on a different role almost every day.

During the 10-day period we also undertook surveillance duties, informant handling and monitoring of the listening post. Following this a mock court was provided so we could each take the stand as a witness and experience the process in court. Based on our police statements, questions were posed to us by instructors acting as defense counsel and prosecution. They provided us with advice and guidance throughout the trial to reflect real life scenarios. I think we all found this a very worthwhile experience.

Other highlights of the course included a day out at Wee Jasper to tackle an obstacle course on high ropes, producing a search warrant training video with all of the team taking on a role, and quiz days.

We met with Commissioner Mick Keelty on two occasions, including our very first day of training and in week 18 where we had the opportunity to ask him any questions. Overall, I found our Program Manager and all the instructors involved very helpful; it was also interesting to hear about their experiences with the AFP.

Finally graduation day came. We had a few rehearsals during our final week at the College to ensure all went according to plan for the ceremony. Family, relatives and friends flocked into Canberra throughout the day and we were finally presented with our badges and sworn in as federal agents.

I left early that evening to catch a flight back to Adelaide and it was an emotional farewell to those I had become close to. The team separated for postings with 12 off to Sydney and the other eight, including myself, to Melbourne. It was not until I was at the airport that I really felt a sense of completion.

I arrived in Melbourne on a Sunday night in preparation for my first week in the region. For the next five days we were provided with a series of talks from members of the Melbourne office, including representatives from People Strategies, Finance, Drug and Property Registry, OST, Information Management, Axiom, Forensics, Surveillance and the Police Technical Team.

On Thursday we were introduced to our new teams, mine being the response team at Melbourne office. Looking around the floor that afternoon I could see a few familiar faces – members I had seen at the AFP

College during training, and who themselves had recently graduated.

One of my first jobs was to oversee an examination of ecstasy tablets by the forensics team which took almost a day to complete. I then accompanied some of my team members on search warrants and assisted with witness statements, exposing me to some of the more common jobs encountered as a member of response.

By week seven I had been involved in seven search warrants, either as a searcher, property officer or warrant holder. The jobs varied and were the result of Centrelink fraud, drug importation, working as an unregistered migration agent, falsifying passports, non-citizens working unlawfully, and bribing a Commonwealth Public Official.

On the eighth week I was sent to Canberra to assist with security for President Bush's visit, part of a group of 30 people selected from the Melbourne office. We travelled to Canberra on the Tuesday for crowd control training and to collect the appropriate gear.

A number of other members were already there, including those from the Eastern and Northern regions, and members of the Special Response Security Team and general duties police officers from Canberra.

I returned to Melbourne just after lunch on Friday and it was back to work on Monday, ready for another week of the unexpected.

So far I have found the work interesting and varied. Obviously at this early stage of my career with the AFP I have been exposed to only a small component of the work involved. In reality, after my observations and from accounts of current members, it is extremely diverse and unpredictable.

It is the people and potential opportunities for movement to different areas and locations that keep me motivated, intrigued and privileged to be part of the AFP.