

# Worlds apart, but policing together



**01:** Sergeant Brett Swan with Australian Defence Force personnel Chief of Joint Operations Command, Lieutenant General Mark Evans and Commander Joint Task Force 633, Major General John Cantwell at the PTC

## The AFP's experiences in Afghanistan show there's a vast difference about what it means to be a police officer if you're from a country torn apart by conflict.

Afghanistan is a country of stark beauty and contrasts. There are patches of lush green around watercourses and tracts of barren wasteland. Mountains appear to rise straight from desert plains. It is bone-chillingly cold in winter but temperatures soar during dry, dusty summers. Wild camels and goats roam freely, and communities made up of mud-brick homes known as qalaa seem to spring from nowhere.

AFP members stationed in this country of contrasts are also struck by the immense differences between what it means to be a police officer in Australia and Afghanistan. To begin with, there are dangers associated with being a member of the Afghan National Police (ANP) that cannot be imagined in a stable democracy.

Rather than walking the beat, ANP officers are responsible for running check-points and patrols in a country where insurgent forces and Improvised Explosive Devices create a highly dangerous working environment. Instead of oleoresin capsicum spray and Glock pistols, police carry AK-47 assault rifles, light

machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades. Some also carry side-arms. Merely surviving can be a daily challenge.

This creates a unique training environment and AFP members stationed at the Provisional Training Centre in Tarin Kowt, Uruzgan Province, know that ANP recruits have much more on their minds than passing an eight week course. The centre itself is a far cry from the AFP's training college at Barton in the ACT.

It was built by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and is supported by NATO, the AFP, the European Union Police Mission and the United States Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. All deployed personnel are restricted to an inner compound which is protected from insurgent attacks by an outer perimeter fence, but this does not provide protection from the fine dust that seeps into every aspect of Afghan life. In summer it lies inches thick on the ground and clings to hair, skin and clothes. In rain or snow the landscape is transformed into a quagmire of sucking mud.

Members of the AFP living at Tarin Kowt share a room the size of a small shipping container with three other people. The room contains two sets of double bunks, but there are no wardrobes or shelves. Members who want storage space are encouraged to build their own with materials from the storeroom. Toilet and shower facilities are in a separate building. Drinking water has to be shipped in because the local bore water is not suitable.

For Australians, the diet can also be challenging. Most of the food is pre-cooked and frozen in Europe. So, while there is a café-style eatery which serves milkshakes and hamburgers, on weekends the mess serves a Dutch-themed brunch of pickled herrings and rollmops. However there is always plenty of food and fresh fruit is always available.

For many Afghanis, hunger is a common complaint. Australians at the training centre say it is not uncommon to see ANP recruits filling their pockets with bread and fruit from the mess to take home to their families. Recruits will often have multiple



servings at lunch, because it is the only meal they will get to eat that day.

As a result, some ANP recruits suffer from malnutrition or other health complaints. There are few medical facilities available in Afghanistan's rural areas, and minor illnesses can lead to serious health complications. AFP trainers need to take such issues into consideration during the course.

Over the two months, Afghan recruits are given a full overview of the skills they will need

as police officers. These are broken down into their basic components because, unlike Australia, the country's recent history has not provided a background of stability where the rule-of-law is taken for granted.

ANP members are given instruction in values, ethics and police duties. They are introduced to the Afghan constitution and shown how it underpins everything they will do during their career as a police officer. This is an essential element of the work being done by agencies such as the AFP. Members of the

ANP must understand why they need to uphold and protect rule-of-law principles if there is to be any chance of ongoing stability. The international community recognises that a strong commitment to the rule of law must underpin all training activities and capacity development programs that are underway in Afghanistan.

In addition to this important work, the AFP also provides practical training to new members of the ANP. Recruits are instructed in the use of force, first aid and human rights. They are also taught how to investigate traffic violations,





accidents and incidents of domestic violence. One week of the recruit course is dedicated to firearms training, another to tactical training and the final week involves a series of combined practical exercises.

It will take time for the benefits of this kind of capacity-building work to flow through the entire ANP, although there are signs that the recruits are taking pride in their profession and the skills they learn from the AFP. For

example, despite the significant personal danger they face from insurgents, six months after completing their course, ANP recruits are still wearing their full police uniform to work every day.

These small but significant achievements help to motivate AFP members at the training centre. Superintendent Allan Spencer spent around nine months in Tarin Kowt working with ANP recruits.

"Knowing that these men are proud of what they have learned and the skills they have developed gives me a real sense of achievement," he said.

"It can be a very difficult working environment, and sometimes it's lonely, even with good communications between Afghanistan and Australia. But helping the ANP develop strong policing skills and a good governance framework is important to the country's future, and it's an honour to be able to be a part of that effort."

**01:** A footprint in the thick dust **02:** Sergeant Brett Swan shows Lieutenant General Mark Evans around the PTC **03:** A plane lands at Tarin Kowt in a cloud of dust **04:** Snow turns the dust to slush **05:** Amenities block viewed from the living quarters at the PTC **06:** Aerial view of PTC.

