THE AGE OF ELECTRONIC POLICING

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- **The AFP has some of the most comprehensive computer systems of their kind in the world. Their full potential has yet to be attained, but with a commitment to make the best use of these facilities, the future role of the AFP in its law enforcement activity can be startlingly improved.**

THE GROWTH of organised crime, increased drug abuse problems and crimes against the community have tested traditional policing methods around the world.

The AFP has faced its share of problems.

The response has been to seek the most effective and efficient means available to meet the new challenges and increasing workloads.

The AFP, like other police forces, has moved into the world of automatic data processing (ADP) to match the criminals. It has proved one of the biggest challenges yet for the AFP in its six-year history. And potentially one of the most important.

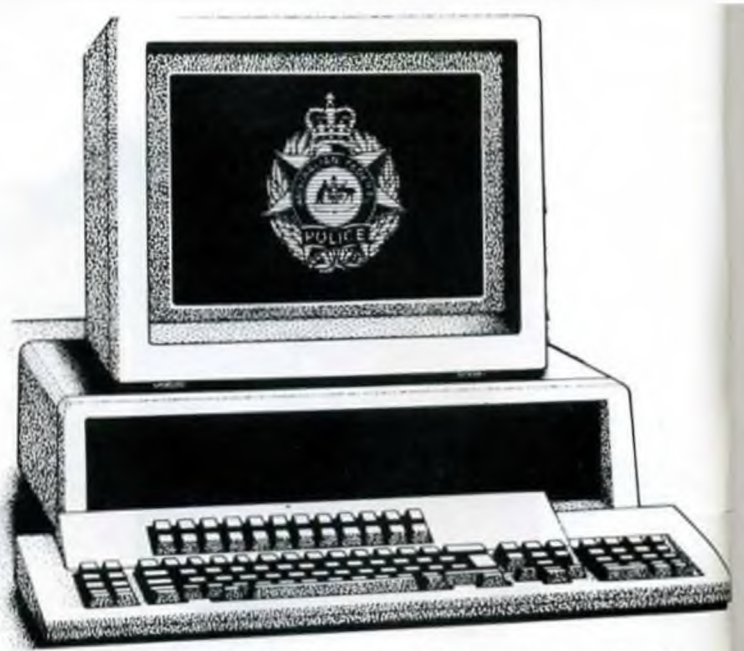
Computer technology's ability to help law enforcement activity has been dramatically illustrated by the world-wide growth in computer-based systems that now support virtually every aspect of police activity.

The police force's lifeblood is information. Rapid access to accurate and up-to-date information is essential. Conventional approaches have not been able to cope, particularly in the more complex investigatory and intelligence work.

This is where the computer has had its biggest impact for the AFP. After the limitations of manual recording methods, officers have found real benefit in such facilities as faster and more accurate access to more types of information; better control of information; improved analysis; increased exchange of information; and greatly increased police efficiency with a corresponding improvement in cost effectiveness.

The AFP's introduction to ADP began shortly after its formation in 1979 when a planning and design study examined the information processing and communications needs of the force.

Second-hand computer equipment and a borrowed site were acquired to develop a series of records management applications.



Late in 1980, the AFP began providing computer services for the Costigan Royal Commission, at the same time gaining valuable experience in the development of computer systems in the analysis of criminal activity.

Responsibility for servicing the Royal Commission was transferred to the Department of the Special Minister of State late in 1983.

But progress was already being made with AFP data processing.

Early in 1983, the initial computer was replaced by equipment with greater capacity to provide improved reliability and allow the use of modern systems development and data management aids.

Since then, development has been aimed primarily at supporting investigations and intelligence activity with the extension of services to all major AFP offices. Some of these services, particularly the INTELL and Names Index Facility (NIFTY) systems, also are used by the Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence and the Australian Customs Service.

The encrypted communications network now services about 75 sites throughout Australia, and since September last year has been co-ordinated from the AFP's new secure computer site at Weston.

More recently, resources also have been devoted to supporting the administrative side of police operations such as management of personnel and financial resources.

Early this year, the central site capacity was again increased — by almost twofold. However the extra 'horsepower' was quickly absorbed by the introduction of enhanced versions of INTELL and Personnel systems and keeping up with growing demands.

Another major upgrading is scheduled for next year.

To operate the computer project, an ADP Branch and a Systems Design Branch were set up under the Superintendent, Information Systems and Scientific Services Division. The project is oversighted by the Systems and ADP Committee (SADP) which is chaired by the Deputy Commissioner, Administration.

The Systems Design Branch has about 15 police positions and is responsible for representing police needs and providing co-ordination between the 'users' of the computer facilities and the 'technicians'.

The computer keyboard has become an important part of the electronic policing age. Left, these trainees get the feel of video display units.

The ADP Branch is more technical in nature and, as well as assisting police in defining their information and communication systems needs, designs systems, produces and maintains programs and provides a range of support services including operation of the central computer installation. It looks after forward planning of resource requirements and implementation strategies. There are about 65 positions in the Branch.

The project group concentrates on development and support of systems based on using the central computing facility at Weston. The communications network uses Telecom lines for access to computer maintained information via remote terminals located at all major AFP offices, international airports and other agencies.

Systems currently available are:

Message Switching — A 'bread and butter' application in a police environment which provides for entry, storage, transmission and retrieval of text. Messages can be sent to any nominated terminal.

Names Index Facility (NIFTY) — A system for indexing matters relating to a person or an organisation. Aliases, nicknames, document references, miscellaneous references such as phone numbers, passport numbers and other details can be recorded. This was the first and still is the most widely used system in the AFP. Both exact matches and sound-alike matches can be obtained for names.

Persons of Interest — Records persons of interest to the AFP, both on the national level and in the ACT Region. They may be wanted for warrant, sought for interviews, a missing person or a deserter from the armed forces.

Vehicles of Interest — Records vehicles in which the AFP has an interest, such as stolen cars, planes, boats and motor-cycles, and vehicles under observation.

Criminal History — A system for recording the criminal histories of people convicted under Commonwealth Laws. Personal particulars are at present recorded, but actual criminal histories are to be added later. Retrieval on fingerprint classification is possible.

Traffic History — Records details of traffic convictions in the ACT. Chronological listing of the convictions for court hearings and adjudications is a main feature of this system.

(The above systems, apart from message switching, were recently integrated to become the MNIFTY system.)

Running Sheet System — Assists investigators and their supervisors in conducting investigations. It provides facilities to record and index all identified tasks associated with an operation, who is performing the task and when the task should be performed. The system also replaces the existing manual procedures for creating dossiers and cross indexing multiple cards to running sheets.

Document Control System — Was devised as an investigation tool to provide organised recording of large volumes of documentation that may be required for an investigation. It places great emphasis on the recording and retrieval of specific details of documents.

INTELL System — Provides for the recording and retrieval of information which may be of longer term interest to the AFP, ABCI, BCIs and Customs. New operations frequently are initiated by information stored in INTELL from a previous operation.

Link Analysis — A system which records information about people and organisations and the relationships between them. It can produce reports of connecting paths.

Financial Analysis — Designed to handle all kinds of financial data, with the ability to break it down into separate financial transactions for individual accounts. Data can include such things as bank statement credits and debits, deposit slips, receipts, cheques and invoices.

In addition, administrative support systems are provided for such requirements as file control, personnel and establishment records and management systems.

The provision of such wide-ranging systems has involved a huge amount of planning and development for the ADP project group. But the work doesn't end there.

The future looks just as busy as the past six years.

The next central computer site upgrading early in 1986 will at least treble the capacity of the main processor and help overcome current slow response times at terminals and allow for further systems development. Plans to replace and expand the communications network will improve its reliability and function.

To date, systems developments have been concentrated on 'strategic' applications such as common usage services provided from the central computer via the communications network. The recent advent of relatively cheap processing power in the form of microcomputers has brought a proliferation of 'personal' computer systems with functions varying from word processing to graphic aids. Many have provided great productivity benefits.

However, some have resulted in wastage of money and effort. Enthusiasts responsible for the acquisition have either not appreciated the limitations of the equipment and software or have set up systems improperly and then changed jobs, leaving problems for others to sort out.

Now, with growing experience in the use of microcomputers, we are planning approaches which will enable the force to benefit from this technology without falling into the traps which other organisations have encountered.

Although continued growth in the size and complexity of the centrally based systems is necessary, thought is being given to increasing the number of microcomputers connected to the network.

Another consideration is to acquire minicomputers for major sites and set up local area networks which are in turn connected to the main communications network.

Such developments, planned in conjunction with continuing liaison with AFP 'users', will help ensure that the AFP has the tools to maintain a position at the forefront in law enforcement. It remains the responsibility of every member of the force to obtain the best results from these facilities.