

ON TARGET

CONTROVERSIAL new ammunition and a comprehensive refit are the latest developments at the indoor firing range at the AFP Training College, Weston.

Commissioner Grey recently approved the use of hollow point rounds to replace hard jacketed ammunition.

The upgrading of the range, which is expected to be finished soon, will make it one of the most up to date in Australia. It is the first refit since the range was opened eight years ago. The range has an impressive record.

There's never been an accident in those eight years,' the officer in charge of firearms training, Sergeant David Ford, told 'Platypus'.

That's particularly memorable when you bear in mind that between June 1986 and May 31, 1987 a total of 219,070 rounds were fired and there were 3,655 individual attendances by shooters,' he said.

'Each year 1 1/2 tonnes of lead is retrieved from the bullet trap and sold with the receipts going to Consolidated Revenue.

In other developments, every operational member of the AFP undertook a course last year to re-qualify in firearms training. The courses were held in Canberra and the regions.

On the issue of hollow point ammunition, Sergeant Ford said the question was one of safety.

'We have changed from 158 grain metal point to 110 grain hollow point ammunition

The hollow point ammunition has more stopping power and the bullet does not leave the body,' he said.

The Refit

Sergeant Ford said the work on the range would upgrade the targetting capability and the instructors would be able to do a lot more with it because the targets would be much more realistic.

The range can already be used for any type of rifle or hand gun. The highest calibre hand gun ever used on the range was a 44 calibre magnum and even a 7.62 millimetre rifle can be used on full automatic without any effect on the bullet trap.

Basic Training

'The basic firearms course is structured on the basis of recruits never having handled a firearm before,' he said.

'A large percentage are able to pass by the end of the third day but some we have to bring back for extra tuition.

'During that basic course they squeeze a revolver trigger with an 8 to 10 lb. pressure up to 1,500 times which can be a little tough on the fingers'

The recruits are trained on 38 calibre Smith and Wesson revolvers, the standard AFP issue, and they are encouraged to come back to practise as much as possible.

Other Courses

'We also train people for witness security, members of the Special Operations Team and marksmen,' Sergeant Ford said.

The training covers weapons such as Colt M16 rifles, 7.62 millimetre SLR army rifles, shotguns, nine millimetre semi-automatic pistols, 357 calibre magnum revolvers, UZI sub-machine guns and the 37 millimetre tear gas gun.

The basic SOT course runs for two weeks and the Advanced SOT Course for four weeks. There's also a Marksman's Course which runs for five weeks.

'We recommend that recruits who show potential with firearms undertake the advanced training. Sometimes we get recruits who have been in the Army's crack Special Air Service and they are generally snapped up for the SOT,' he said.

'Entry standards for the advanced courses are very high, particularly the physical standards, and only a percentage of the applicants get through.

'We also have a basic firearms instructors' course which runs for three weeks and an advanced instructors' course for weapons other than revolvers.'

Dont's

And what are the major failings of the new recruit when it comes to weapons training?



'The biggest fault is erratic trigger application - they pull rather than squeeze,' Sergeant Ford said.

'Recruits also often have problems with getting a correct sight picture because they focus on the target rather than the sights of the weapon.'

With all that shooting one would think Sergeant Ford would be a gun enthusiast.

'I do enough shooting on the range to keep my hand in, but away from the job the only projectile I like to throw around is a dart - and I haven't has much time for that lately!' he said.

Firearm Safety -

The AFP's four rules:

1. Treat every firearm as if it is loaded.
2. Never handle a firearm unnecessarily in the presence of others.
3. Never point a firearm in the direction of any person or where they are likely to be.
4. Make yourself familiar with any firearm under your control.