

# New Southern Command H.Q.

by Keith Livingston

**N**OT so high but very wide and extremely handsome!

That's the general attitude of members of Southern Command to the new headquarters building at 383 La Trobe Street, Melbourne, which they moved into this year.

The four storey building incorporates design features specified by the AFP.

The moves which led to the new headquarters began in 1982 when plans to relocate Southern Command centred on a building then occupied by ASIO in St Kilda Road.

However it soon became clear with the continuing growth of the AFP which occurred during delays in ASIO moving out, and the further delays which would be incurred as the building was being changed to suit AFP requirements, that the accommodation available was falling behind need.

The building would have needed substantial additions because it would have only housed 50 to 60 percent of AFP operations and continued the then existing fragmentation within Southern Region.

It was decided to resume the search for more appropriate accommodation and an improved location within the central business district, preferably in the area identified by city planners as the 'legal core'.

The 'core' takes in the courts complex, the offices of many hundreds of lawyers, State (and now) Federal, Police.

As well, the conveniently located remand centre, which is still under construction, will provide quick access to remandees for questioning, holding in custody or transport to court.

The pressing need for a new, modern centre of operations in Melbourne for Southern Region was brought to the attention of Government in 1985 when the then Regional Commander, Chief Superintendent W.N. Williams, directed Chief Inspector Mick Kerrigan to formulate a brief on the need to urgently upgrade the unsatisfactory accommodation.

Approaches were made to the Chief Property Officer in the Department of Local Government and Administrative Services, Mr Louis Milkovits, who inspected the existing facilities.

A joint submission from DOLGAS and the AFP was prepared and presented to the respective Ministers for considera-



*The new Southern Command H.Q. (Pictures by Keith Livingston)*

tion by Federal Cabinet.

The then Minister for Local Government and Administrative Services, Mr Tom Uren, and the then Special Minister of State, Mr Mick Young, inspected the Command Headquarters and other standard premises on October 1, 1985.

The impact upon the Ministers was profound and they impressed upon their Cabinet colleagues the need for a new, cohesive complex to replace the fragmented AFP operation in Melbourne.

Approval for a new facility was given by Cabinet on February 17, 1986.

## Moves Begin

The search then started for a new headquarters site and 383 La Trobe Street was identified as the best available and close to ideal for the AFP requirements.

Detailed plans of the AFP's needs were drawn up in close consultation between DOLGAS, the Department of Housing and Construction, the Becton Corporation (which was chosen to build the new complex) and Inspector Mick Kerrigan and Mr Andrew Cheyne of the Office of the AFP.

Contributions in the form of needs, ideas and suggestions for the design concept were sought from sectional heads and Staff Association members and their input was incorporated in the final design where possible, notwithstanding the financial constraints imposed upon the final product.

The final design is the result of carefully considered concepts and a variety of unusual (if not unique) requirements — which most certainly would not appear on the plans of a conventional office — were incorporated in the finished design.

Two years and one month after Cabinet's approval was given for the new Southern Command Headquarters, all operations designated to use the establishment were in full operation — leaving behind the unwieldy patchwork of accommodation endured since the AFP was established in 1979.

The many features incorporated in the new complex include: Anti-terrorism protection; high security storage; scientific laboratories; a communications centre; computer operations; a pistol shooting range; a firearms workshop and armoury; a vehicle examination area; an auditorium; interview rooms; a training area and facilities; a media conference room; document examination and an exhibit examination room.

Each accommodation floor is 2200 square metres (or about three times the size of each floor at the old headquarters at Hamilton House) and the total area is about 9000 square metres.

## Security Measures

Security is very much to the forefront throughout. The reception area is protected by security glass and doors.

Security is continued within the com-



*Inside the new building.*

plex through an electronically controlled access system (ECAS) linked to a central computer which can identify who accessed (or attempted to gain access to) which section, when they did it and how often.

Each officer has been issued with an encoded identification key which must be used each time a designated security zone is entered.

In the unlikely event of unauthorised people gaining access to the complex, highly sophisticated motion detectors will quickly alert security control officers.

Southern Region Headquarters' fleet of vehicles has also been well provided for with 85 parking bays available within a secure perimeter. Once again, personal identification is needed to gain access to the complex, even after passing the garage security doors.

Most office accommodation is positioned around the perimeter of the floor plan, providing most of the staff with natural light. Security and storage areas have been positioned more centrally — well away from the public gaze and in keeping with the security requirements essential for this kind of establishment.

Individual offices are mostly enclosed by floor-to-ceiling glass walls and access is through doors angled at 45 degrees which eliminates the 'dog-box' feeling associated with many conventional office designs.

All important telephone communications go through an NEC 2400 PABX which is almost identical to the system installed in AFP Headquarters, Canberra.

Sections which were not previously

incorporated in Southern Region Headquarters and are now to be found in the new complex include: Training; Legal Services; the Electronic Services Unit; the Scenes of Crime Unit; the Fraud and General Crime Branch; the Internal Investigation Unit; the Exhibit Store and the Currency Branch.

The building also accommodates several new areas of operations not previously available, including an equipment store; interview/fingerprint rooms; medical officer rooms and sick bay and a canteen and auditorium.

### Social Facilities

AFP members can now take advantage of many facilities previously denied them. Social Club activities are catered for in a specific area adjoining the roof of the building.

With fitness in mind, staff are welcome to work out in the gymnasium and are encouraged to use it as much as possible.

A recent building requirement introduced by the Melbourne City Council states that 'low rise' buildings, such as the new AFP Southern Region Headquarters, must have aesthetically pleasing roof designs because they are overlooked by tall office buildings.

The design of the floor plans up to and including the top floor was closely coordinated but the roof design was a matter for the builder.

To the delight of AFP members, the roof boasts a full size tennis court with artificial turf and alongside it is a squash court. At the other end of the roof is an area ideally suited to barbecues.

The biggest problem facing the staff now is who gets the ball when it is sent over the mesh netting surrounding the roof-top court!

### Logistic Advantages

The new building, which brings together so many arms of the AFP's operation, has already proved its value in easier communication between sections and in time saving.

It is a headquarters of which the Southern Region is justifiably proud.



*Former AFP Commissioner, Major General Grey, received the US Secret Service's coveted Honour Award Plaque from the Special Agent in charge of the Asian Pacific Region, Mr Stephen Ramsey, at the AFP College, Barton, on February 5. It is the US Secret Service's highest award and Major General Grey is the first Australian to receive it. The US Secret Service's role is to protect the US monetary system, particularly against counterfeiting and fraud, and to provide close personal protection to US and visiting dignitaries. (Picture by Sen. Const. Wayne McConaghy)*