

It's no advantage for them to look like a police officer; in fact, it's a disadvantage. For instance, the protection squad members might attend a function with the VIP. Instead of standing around staring at everyone, the protectors aim to look like just another person in the entourage. They'll be having a good look around all right, but they'll be doing so unobtrusively."

Witness Protection

While VIP's maintain a high profile, witnesses try to maintain no profile. They often have very nasty people looking for them.

It is the task of the Witness Protection Branch to guard important witnesses. They can look after Federal, State, NCA or joint task force witnesses.

"Generally we tend to get everyone's most difficult 'children'," said Detective Superintendent Peter Scott who has headed the Witness Protection Branch for four years.

Peter began his policing career with the ACT Police and was also instructing at the ACT Police College immediately before joining the Protection Division.

"We have to become a protected witness's father-confessor and umbilical cord", he said.

Witness protectors can spend days and weeks locked up in hotel rooms with their clients. They have guarded their charges as they've gone through pregnancies, marriages and serious illnesses. In one case the AFP protected a witness continuously for four years, two shifts a day.

A witness protector is given the opportunity to make a great many decisions. "Witness protectors need to possess very special qualities," Peter said. "They need to be extremely flexible, and be able to keep their own counsel. In a sense they need to be non-policemen. And they have to watch out for the 'Stockholm Syndrome' and remember whose side they're on." (The Stockholm Syndrome refers to a well-known hostage siege in Sweden where the hostages

after a long time began to sympathise and side with their captors.)

The volume of work has increased dramatically since 1979. In late 1988 the Government decided the AFP would provide a national witness protection service on a user-pays basis and that will lead to an extended role for the AFP.

The witness protectors also provide new identities for their clients and help re-establish them in new locations.

"We try to hide them in an appropriate background and find them a job," Peter said. "It's a difficult process because there is no legislation to support us. We have administrative arrangements with other departments and receive a great deal of co-operation from them. We aim to provide a reliable service and give our witnesses a good chance of survival and the opportunity for re-entry into the community."

Discreet plainclothes protection during a royal visit. (From left) ex-Det. Supt. Bob Pight, former OIC AFP Protection Division; Supt. Jim Beaton of the London Metropolitan Police, Escort to the Queen; Sgt. Bill Morrow, (wearing sunglasses). AFP Protection Division assigned to the Governor-General; Det. Supt. Roger Martindale (next to the Prime Minister) and Sgt. Larry Andrews, both of the Prime Minister's Protection Squad. (Photo: Australian Press Services.)

