



Drug Arrests, US Style

Imagine you are about to take part in a bust on a drug den in one of the biggest and toughest cities in the mid-west of the United States. What would you like to take with you? A leopard tank?

Would you settle for an armoured bulldozer?

In fact, you can have an armoured front end loader and customise it with an armoured lid on the scoop so it can carry SWAT officers. They can leap out of the scoop, after it has been used to knock down walls, and arrest the offenders.

This is not a scene from a "Dirty Harry" movie; this is how the city of Minneapolis deals with its illicit drug houses.

The report comes from Constable Clark Wilmont from the AFP Drug Investigation Unit in Eastern Region. While he was on holidays last year in the US, he visited Minneapolis police.

He was told that their number one problem is the cocaine derivative, "crack". It is a drug that has spread across America from Los Angeles to New York. The drug markets in the major cities are saturated, and now the dealers are moving on to northern US cities such as Minneapolis. Crack is readily available in (US)\$10-\$15 "deals".

The drug is sold through "crack houses"; the dealers having to fortify the premises to protect themselves from their clients as much as from the police.



Constable Clark Wilmont.

This is where the 'dozer plays its part.

"It is a big front end loader with a normal scoop and a plate across it that folds down," Constable Wilmont said.

"The plate protects the SWAT team members who sit in the scoop when it goes through a wall. Then the plate folds back and they go in to apprehend the offenders. It's very effective.

"The loader has a normal cabin, but the driver isn't a police officer. He has to be a union member with a ticket, so a couple of SWAT officers sit along side him riding shotgun. The driver trains with the SWAT team."

Constable Wilmont said the SWAT members train frequently, and are usually nuggety 24 or 25 year olds. He was impressed with their equipment, saying, when operational, they looked like fully kitted out commandos. He said they wore close fitting bullet-proof vests under their uniforms which were definitely not cumbersome.

Constable Wilmont found the police agencies of Minneapolis were very well resourced, because they use seized assets to support their crime fighting activities.

He is full of praise for the treatment he received during his stay and hopes to return next year to renew the friendships he had made with US law officers.

Designer Drugs

While the battle against the new drug, crack, intensifies in the USA, the AFP is facing an attack on another front — from the so-called "designer drugs".

"Crack is not hitting here to the same extent as elsewhere because of the more ready availability of other drugs," Assistant Commissioner Lamb said.

"We have seized four small amounts of crack recently, but there is no evidence of conversion laboratories operating in Australia." (Crack is a derivative of the process used for making cocaine).

"We do get media speculation about such drug laboratories but so far it has all turned out to be second hand information which has gone nowhere."

The "designer drugs" such as "ecstasy" are a much bigger problem.

"In one seizure recently in Sydney 32 kilogrammes of 'ecstasy' in the form of 160,000 tablets was found in an imported car. It would have been worth millions of dollars on the drug market," Mr Lamb said.

"Ecstasy tablets can sell for as low as \$10 each in our major cities at a time when the street price of cannabis can be much higher," he said.

Police History Museum

*A feature article on the AFP Police Museum appeared in **Platypus** 26 July, 1989. Unfortunately due to financial constraints and other administrative problems the scheduled opening for October this year must regrettably be postponed. Progress on the display areas is certainly in the advanced stages as will have been noted by the supporting photographs in the last edition. The Museum Committee is to lose Constable Cheryl Richardson for maternity leave and we wish her well. The committee will keep readers posted as to the progress in the next six months.*