

Regional HQ towers above TNT

By Stephen Simpson

EASTERN Region's new purpose built headquarters is state of the art in design and facilities for the AFP's Regional role, and is testimony to the Government's commitment to the future of the AFP. But according to Barry Leyshan, the Region's Building and Property Manager, we haven't always had it so good.

Except for a period during the 1970s, Barry has worked for one of the AFP's predecessors, the Commonwealth Police (Compol), since 1966 and can trace the history of the Region's accommodations since then.

Compol, according to Barry, in the early days in Sydney was housed in City offices at 119 Philip Street and then moved to Chifley Square into the monolithic Commonwealth Centre, which was recently demolished.

In 1961 Compol relocated to offices in Darlinghurst, known as Sundek House. The address was Brisbane Street, but it is more like a laneway and runs off the infamous Oxford Street, which was relatively innocuous in those days. Sundek House, which still stands, is only 100 metres or so from the new headquarters in Goulburn Street.

The new headquarters was built on the site of the former Vanity Fair Hotel, a well patronised watering hole for many of the tenants of Sundek House.

With its lack of facilities, cramped conditions, no air conditioning and with a carbon factory next door coating everything in grime, Sundek House accommodation was a little on the primitive side. By 1972, with its numbers expanded to around 120 members, Compol had well and truly outgrown its headquarters. The then Superintendent Roy Farmer, who was the Regional OIC, gave Inspector Keith Strickland the job of finding new premises.

TNT Tower No. 2 in downtown Redfern got the nod and six floors of the building were eventually



Impressive from a distance, TNT Tower No.2 gave no indication of the well-worn interior when occupied by the AFP.

leased in November 1977. In what initially was relative luxury, Compol resided in the tower until its successor, the AFP, came into being. The building was retained as the AFP's headquarters from 1979.

During the 1980s the AFP continued to expand in Eastern Region and eventually occupied all 11 floors of the TNT Tower, as well as three floors of an office in Goulburn Street and another building in Surry Hills, which housed the then Organised Crime Unit. The Region was bursting at the seams. Whilst externally the TNT twin towers were a distinctive feature on the Redfern landscape, Tower No. 2 internally at least, was gradually becoming dilapidated: worn carpets, dirty walls and windows and lifts designed for the adventurous; one might have thought that rent payments were behind!

The building had no specific communications, scientific, training or secure facilities, all of which must have had an adverse impact on the functioning of the Region. Nor was there any internal car parking. This forced officers to escort offenders to and from the building to cars parked in the street, much to the delight of the television media, who would camp outside on the footpath when they got wind of a major operation and record the 'traffic.'

In 1982 an exhaustive search began for a new headquarters. The AFP agreed in 1984 to a joint tenancy of the Redfern Mail Exchange with the Department of

Administrative Services, but Australia Post later withdrew the exchange from sale. After much planning and negotiation, tenders were called in 1986 for developers to construct a purpose built building for the AFP in Sydney. Seventeen offers were received, of which six were considered suitable.

The Goulburn Street proposal was selected because it was close to the courts and the various authorities with which the AFP has daily contact; it was on the fringe of the Central Business District and vehicle access and public transport were good. The building, including its specialised fitout, was completed in November 1990.

The \$35 million structure comprises 10 floors totalling 12,000 m² of first class office accommodation and special purpose installations, plus a four level basement car park for 150 cars. With designated communications, forensic and physical evidence installations, as well as vaults and an indoor pistol range, Eastern Region certainly has the infrastructure to do the job. Staff too are well looked after with a cafeteria, lounge, gymnasium, squash court, locker rooms and showers.

From Sundek House to the TNT building to Goulburn Street; each move has meant a huge leap in the quality of facilities and accommodation for Eastern Region's members and staff. The lease is up on Goulburn Street in 2005. It is hard to imagine what might supersede it.