

Cutting off counterfeiters at the pass

By Keith Livingston
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SOUTHERN Region's Currency Squad members believe the proactive role they have undertaken is reaping its rewards in the early interception of counterfeit currency and the spin off has been a reduction in the number of incidents of bogus notes being reported.

Principal among the side effects as a result of the squad's activities is the community's continuing confidence in the money it uses in everyday transactions, large or small.

The Officer in Charge of the Currency Squad, Detective Sergeant Dennis Carr, willingly praises the designers of Australia's currency.

Detective Sergeant Carr said, "They have always made the counterfeiting of local notes an extremely difficult task because of the amount of detail and other security features they have included in their product.

"Through their constant research and endeavours to make it even better, they have developed the polymer, or as they are more commonly known, plastic notes.

"While the polymer notes produced to date (\$5 and \$10) are not the favourites for the counterfeiter due mainly to their low value, offering a low return for a counterfeiters efforts, it is not without interest, that to date, we have not received any reports or encountered any serious attempt to reproduce them illegally.

"If this is reflected over the years and higher denomination notes are developed and released, it could be argued that the squad will cease to have a role to perform in the future

"Regrettably this will not be the case," Detective Sergeant Carr said.

He went on to say that while the production of the polymer or plastic

notes will be a major blow to the counterfeiters, the inventiveness and ingenuity of the criminal mind will no doubt concentrate on other ways to get rich quick.

"Besides, while Australia is at the forefront in developing new techniques to defeat the counterfeiter, there are a lot of other currencies which are just as negotiable (if not more so) which will still pose a problem for many, many years to come."

Since January this year, members of the squad have conducted a number of seminars with the enthusiastic support of senior management at the various banking institutions.

The lecture sessions, which last about one and a half hours, are attended by middle management and counter staff who are instructed on the methods of identifying counterfeiters from genuine currency.

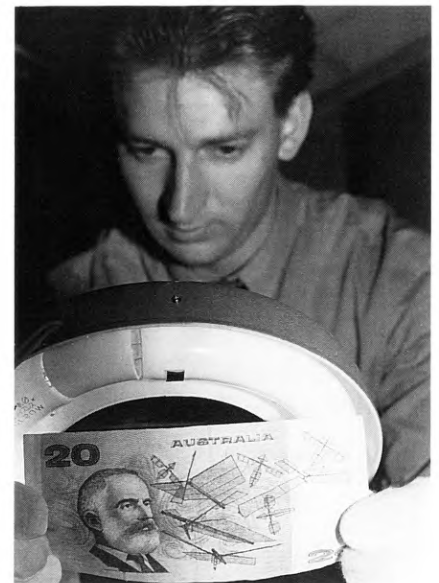
The Currency Squad members attend the lectures 'armed' with an information kit which explains their role and function and includes a check list of those features to look for in fake notes.

The squad members believe this has had a positive outcome with timely reports from cash handlers, leading to the early detection of counterfeit currency.

Casino staff

With the opening of the Crown Casino in Melbourne, the Currency Squad believed it appropriate to approach the Casino's management to suggest a series of lectures similar to those given to bank staff, focussing on those responsible for handling the huge volume of notes the venue would attract in exchange for gambling chips.

The offer was accepted and the



Casino's staff entered into operations with a far greater understanding of the nation's currency.

Overseas visitors

The AFP Currency Squad's success in detecting counterfeiters and arresting extends beyond local currency.

Over the years, the AFP's Currency Squad and United States Secret Service members have enjoyed an excellent working relationship which has led to joint operational successes in the detection and seizure of counterfeit United States currency being manufactured and uttered in Australia.

The American (US) 'greenback' is recognised as the 'world's currency' – and a major target for counterfeiters, and during February 1994 Senior Special Agent Greg Gitschier from the Field Office of the United States Secret Service in Honolulu visited Australia to conduct training lectures.

He conducted in-depth seminars on the identification of counterfeit United States currency in Melbourne and Sydney for AFP members involved in the investigation of counterfeit currency.

The series of seminars was extended to include banking and financial institutions, centring on the larger banks which handle substantial quantities of overseas currencies and particularly the United States 'greenback'.

Disincentive to potential offenders

Detective Sergeant Carr believes recent publicity about the AFP's successes in its investigation of uttered counterfeiters has also had a large part to play in the substantially reduced number of reports being received.

He cited the recent arrest and trial of Mr Eddie Grant of the eastern Melbourne suburb of Box Hill.

Grant had produced some very good quality \$50 and \$100 fakes and at the time Federal Police Currency Squad members executed a search warrant on his residence found counterfeiters with a face value of \$164,000.

At Grant's trial, the Judge was told that in addition to the counterfeiters, he also had in his possession, sufficient paper with the potential to print an additional \$2,200,000.

Detective Sergeant Carr said, "He had already uttered a number of counterfeiters. The notes that were subsequently detected were of such good quality, that they had passed through most cash handlers without initially being detected," he said.

"Fortunately from our investigation's point of view, Grant made some errors in his 'operation' which flawed its success and provided the vital clues necessary for the Currency Squad to track him down.

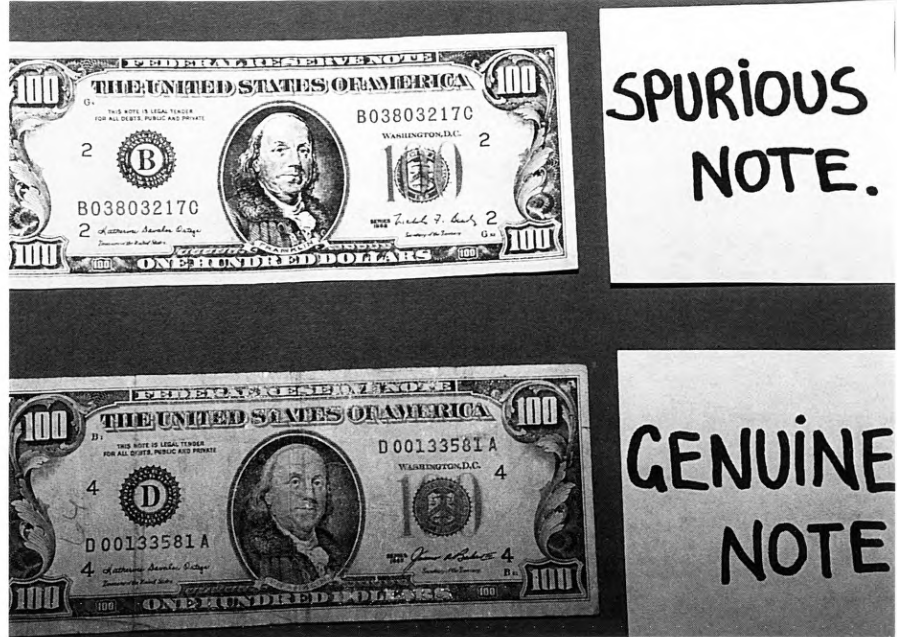
"As the offender was a perfectionist he was always endeavouring to improve the standard of his product and if he had the luxury of more time before we arrested him, one can only imagine how much more difficult it would have been to identify his 'perfected' product," Detective Sergeant Carr said.

Subsequent publicity about Mr Grant and the lengthy prison sentence of seven years (with a minimum of five years) he received, I believe is a continuing major disincentive to those who think they may be able to beat the system," he said.

Modern technology

Assisting the AFP and the offenders Detective Sergeant Carr believes that modern technology is a double edged sword.

On the one hand it has resulted in



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the production of the polymer \$5 and \$10 notes and will soon see the introduction of a \$20 note to replace the existing paper notes.

By 1997 it is anticipated that all Australian bank notes will be polymer (or plastic).

He said the difficulty in replicating the polymer notes is witnessed by the absence of attempts to counterfeit them.

Conceding that the low denomination could also be a major factor, Detective Sergeant Carr said he is still confident that the technology employed in the production of the note will be extremely difficult to replicate for some time to come.

Detective Sergeant Carr said that on the other hand, new technology, such as that used by Mr Grant is now available to just about everyone in the community.

"We are not deluding ourselves into a sense of smugness following our successes.

"We fully realise that someone else like Grant who has first, the ability, second the intent, and third, the necessary equipment, still poses a constant threat."

Detective Sergeant Carr said that the successes the Currency Squad enjoys in its investigations, coupled with substantial penalties of up to 14 years

imprisonment for offences should reassure the community that their currency is well regarded and secure.

He does however, urge the community to be wary of complacency and to learn more about the money they handle in their day to day activities.

He said, "Australian paper, and now plastic notes, have excellent security features."

As examples he points to the watermark of Captain James Cook and the metal thread in paper note, and the clear window and converging star pattern in the polymer notes as good examples of such security.

Both also feature highly detailed fine print which is extremely difficult to duplicate successfully.

"If the public is aware of what to look for they will continue to be the counterfeiter's greatest enemy because they won't accept what is being passed as the real thing if they have doubts about its being genuine.

"We know this to be fact, as many reports of notes being passed are reported to us by members of the public.

"They will also be reassured about the security of their day to day currency," Detective Sergeant Carr concluded. □