

Murder investigation course



The AFP is exposed to an increasing number of homicides. Alongside community policing in the ACT and Australia's external territories, our growing international role includes dealing with homicides through transnational investigations, war crimes, overseas deployments and counter terrorism investigations such as the Bali bombings.

This experience has highlighted the importance of being able to identify and apply best practice in homicide investigations, both within Australia and overseas.

In support of this, the AFP School of Community Policing, Learning and Development recently conducted its inaugural Homicide Investigations Program.

Twenty-six members from around the country participated in the intensive two-week training program held at Barton College in May. Participants came from areas as diverse as border and international, surveillance, counter terrorism, the IDG and ACT Policing.

Topics covered included categories of investigations; crime scene analysis; major incident rooms; coronial briefs; victim issues; sensitive and political investigations; defense tactics; criminal investigative analysis; tactical intelligence; forensics and forensic pathology.

Detective Sergeant John McIntyre from the School of Community Policing developed the program to reflect the AFP's community, national and international responsibilities.

"The ACT used to be the only area involving homicide investigations, but now there is more of a need for national training," he said.

"The aim is to ensure we have a group of people around Australia who can be called upon if needed, who are all trained to the same high standard and can work on the range of different homicides now covered by the AFP's expanding role."

Two experienced Visiting Fellows provided advice and assistance to participants throughout the program. Federal Agent Greg Ranse shared his experiences investigating murders in East Timor and as team leader for *Operation Cablet*, the investigation into the murder of a Saudi Diplomat in Canberra in 1998. Detective

Senior Sergeant Phil Swindells from the Victoria Police Homicide Squad brought considerable homicide experience to the program, including leading the Purana Taskforce, which investigated Melbourne's underworld and gangland homicides.

"I think the program provided participants with a basis from which they can feel confident to go out and investigate a potential homicide or suspicious death," Detective Senior Sergeant Swindells said.

"It's different to a basic detectives course because there are issues relevant to homicide investigation that a detective attached to general crime is not exposed to, such as assessing forensic evidence and crime scene analysis.

"With the commitment of the AFP internationally, it needs to have a core group of investigators who are conversant with homicide investigations and how they are conducted, what avenues of inquiry they can make, and the impact they may have in an international forum."

The program included case studies by guest presenters, where in order to encourage interaction, many presented the facts up to a point and then asked participants to strategise next steps, before discussing what actually happened.

High-profile investigations included the Port Arthur massacre, the backpacker murders and the investigation into the deaths of Kathryn Folbrigg's four children in NSW.

An international perspective was provided through presentations on the *Operation Alliance* investigation into the Bali bombings, and *Operation Faendemaot*, the investigation into multiple murders, abductions and arsons in the Solomon Islands.

Sydney Federal Agent Geoff Turner found the work done in the Solomon Islands most interesting.

"Obviously the forensic services aren't available there, so it was fascinating to hear about some of the issues they had to deal



with, including what was basically a bush autopsy," he said.

"We also discussed the importance of being culturally aware when you're working overseas. For example, when the villagers wanted to bury people but the AFP needed to find out more about the background and the story behind what had happened. This type of experience is more relevant now with the increased number of overseas postings."

The intricacies of cross-border issues were also discussed in context of the Bega murders, where while the abduction occurred in NSW, the homicide occurred in Victoria and a person of interest was in custody in the ACT. Sensitivities and issues related to investigating a police officer were also discussed during a presentation about the Conway murder in the ACT.

"One of the best things about the program was the chance to hear from the experts about current high-profile investigations and the different approaches that people took," Federal Agent Turner said.





"The case studies weren't just about what went right, they were also about what went wrong; the things people missed and if they were to do it again, how they'd do it better.

"The presenters were very honest; they explained the mistakes they made, the things they didn't do so well, the obstacles they faced and how they got around them."

The training also went well beyond the usual classroom setting and included site visits to the courts and the Kingston Forensic Medical Centre.

"Advances in forensics and DNA have had a major impact and, as a corroborative tool, forensics really assists the investigator," Detective Senior Sergeant Swindells said.

"Similarly, there's a large ambit of technologies available to investigators to assist in preventing or investigating homicide offences. Best practice is the ability of members to attend such training programs so they have an awareness of ongoing developments forensically and technologically."

Participants had the opportunity to put theory into practice with two practical exercises at simulated crime scenes. Setting the tone on the first day, participants were driven out to a staged crime scene where a headless corpse had been dumped in the bush some two weeks before.

The second scene, at the CIT Department of Laboratory and Forensic Sciences, was set up to mirror an historic NSW homicide. The CIT facilities include a Big Brother style house with a wide

internal observation corridor where instructors can watch participants as they move around the rooms. The house had been set up with blood spatter and graffiti on numerous walls, and the body dismembered and scattered throughout different rooms.

During these practical exercises, participants had to work in small teams to identify the priorities for investigating the scene, decide which resources should be called in and how best to brief and work with forensics teams.

"I think the practical exercises gave participants an opportunity to be exposed to differing forensic analysis and gain appreciation and knowledge of working as a team and sharing their specific expertise and experience," Senior Sergeant Swindells said.

Prior to the program, each participant had to produce a 2000-word research paper on topics ranging from forensic pathology, odontology, anthropology, psychology and entomology, to the use of Guthrie cards, blood spatter pattern analysis, the use of hypnosis, the issue of diminished responsibility, battered wife syndrome and behavioural analysis in staged crime scenes.

These papers have been compiled and produced as a comprehensive reference book, now available as a resource for the AFP.

Participants were also assessed on their ability to successfully manage a homicide crime scene, including identifying relevant issues, appropriate legislation and avenues of enquiry, and applying appropriate investigative techniques.

"Overall, the experience was very valuable," Federal Agent Turner said.

"It was good to be taken out of what I'm used to doing and put into something I haven't had much involvement with. It was challenging in that way because you were thinking outside your area of normal operations."