

Ceremonial Guard

comes of age

Photos - Brian Hartigan

Over 25 years the Australian Federal Police has founded a range of traditions which have required the establishment of the Ceremonial Guard and other ceremonial support elements to underline the importance of some of the more high profile ceremonies.

The AFP Ceremonial Guard is a voluntary group of serving men and women drawn from AFP sworn and Protective Service uniformed members who make themselves available for AFP Ceremonies including medal investitures, funerals and other ceremonial activities and events.

Coordinated by the Recognition and Ceremonial Team (RCT), the Ceremonial Guard draws its members from a wide range of disciplines.

According to the team leader of the RCT, Federal Agent Vince Pannell, the guard was conceived as part of an overall strategy to support ceremonial events.

“The Guard was established in late 2003 in response to a need to provide a highly disciplined, trained and well turned out presence at ceremonial events,” Federal Agent Pannell said.

“Unfortunately, some of these events have an extremely short lead-in time such as police funerals.

“It is imperative to have people available and trained in order to provide the level of professionalism required and expected for such events.

“Thankfully we have not had to learn everything from scratch and whilst the Guard is made up of dedicated individuals with previous military drill experience or just plain old pride and sense of duty, we could not do without the guidance and participation of people such as Sergeant Phil Spence, whose experience in police ceremonies and traditions has been invaluable.



Under the watchful eye of Sergeant Phil Spence BM, the AFP Ceremonial Guard leads a contingent of police peacekeepers at the United Nations Day march in Sydney in 2004.



“The AFP has always had a need for a Ceremonial Guard or similar, but until the Guard’s establishment, arrangements for support to ceremonial events were far more fluid!”

“With the establishment of the Guard came a determined effort to develop a team with high standards of pride, skill and precision and fair dose of tradition.”

This approach, along with an increased demand for the Guards’ participation in a variety of ceremonial events and activities, has led to the development of formal training including members of the Guard attending a joint Ceremonial and Protocol Officer’s Course with NSW Police in November 2004, conducted at the NSW Police Academy in Goulburn.

This four day live-in course was a combination of history, traditions, theory, protocol and practical ceremonial skills including many hours on the parade ground.

Left: Defence and AFP Ceremonial Guard members combined as part of the funeral with full Police and Military Honours for Protective Service Officer Adam Dunning. Photo - Terry Browne

Below left: The Ceremonial Guard marches out of the Great Hall of Parliament House at the inaugural 2004 presentation of Commissioner’s Awards.

Below: The AFP’s Ceremonial Guard on parade at the Melbourne Cenotaph marking the 40th anniversary of police in the role of international peace keepers. Photo - Theona Poteris





“This course included AFP participants from across the organisation, including Protective Service, and in the wider context is the genesis for the establishment of the Assistant Ceremonial Officers Network.

“The development of the network will see us have trained members across the organisation and various officers who can assist with ceremonial activities such as medal investitures and funerals as well as supporting the Guard when they are deployed interstate,” Federal Agent Pannell said.

Since the Guard was established, members have been deployed interstate to provide support to ceremonial activities.

The 40th Anniversary of Police in Peacekeeping commemorative events in Melbourne in May 2004, and leading the United Nations Day service and march in Sydney in late October 2004.

Sadly, the Guard’s duties in the past few months of 2004 centred around the funerals of AFP members (Federal Agent Bill Sawley, former Chaplain Theo Freeth and Federal Agent Peter Phillips) culminating in the repatriation and funeral with full police and military honours of Protective Service Officer Adam Dunning.

“Regrettably, funerals are one of the roles undertaken by the Guard but it is a role that everyone understands has to be done right and as such is undertaken with pride and professionalism,” Federal Agent Pannell said.

“That’s just part of the territory; the Guard



Day one of the November ceremony and protocol course involved a tour of the AFP Museum at Weston, lectures on history, theory and protocol related to ceremonies. This was followed by practical instruction on the parade ground culminating with an inspection by Chief of Staff Federal Agent Audrey Fagan APM. From there the course relocated to the NSW Police Academy at Goulburn.





needs to look professional and that means maintaining a professional attitude.”

“The Guard has been thrust into the spotlight in recent times, and has provided a new dimension to the AFP in the eyes of many. It is important that when representing the organisation, we do in a way we can all be proud.”

Along with a calendar of events and team web page, the RCT is currently developing the AFP Ceremonial and Protocol Manual to assist in the issues of uniform, wearing of honours and awards as well as practical information on ceremonial events and activities.

Whilst there is no specific recruitment drive, AFP sworn members and Protective Service uniformed members are encouraged to make enquiries with RCT (recognition-ceremonial@afp.gov.au) regarding joining the AFP Ceremonial Guard or the Assistant Ceremonial Officer Network.



The value in having the AFP Ceremonial Guard train with NSW Police enables skills and experience to be shared.

Below: Participants in the November 2004 Ceremonial and Protocol Officer's Course.

