

YOU TOO MAY QUALIFY

by Brian Minards

Do you really want to be an Inspector? Three AFP members here give their impressions of Commissioned Officers Qualifying Course 8003 which ran from September to December 1986.

SELF esteem and pride in a job well done are important factors in any successful career.

If you like, the foundation stone and the building blocks.

For those who strive for the best in their chosen career these qualities play an integral part in training techniques and in the learning environment, be it theory or practice. The police officers who took part in Commissioned Officers Qualifying Course 8003 at the AFP Training College at Barton in Canberra late last year would probably want demanding, dedication and good old fashioned hard slog added to the list of requirements.

Not only did the course take in all of those things, meeting the selection criteria was an achievement in itself.

Those who took part were recommended by their Officer-in-Charge after being interviewed by him to determine their suitability. With his recommendation accepted the candidates then attended a three day induction course at the college as a further test of their capabilities.

From these pre-requisites emerged the 26 hopefuls who embarked upon the course.

The real test was about to begin.

One of those who faced up with no illusions to the following ten weeks was Station Sgt. Alan Bilbie, Staff Officer to the Chief of Staff at Headquarters in Canberra.

Station Sgt. Bilbie said previous experience told him the mental approach has to be right.

"First of all you've got to want to be an inspector. There is no point to undertaking a course of ten weeks duration which is intensive and stressful unless your ambition is to be an inspector."

Station Sgt. Bilbie said the amount of stress encountered was perhaps unnecessary but it was applied to see how those involved reacted to it and to ensure that they could make the right decisions in such circumstances.

He said some of the stress was self-imposed.

"If you waste time you get behind and that's when the stress sets in.

"It's all about time management, if you can manage your time to fit in with the demands required by the course and its

content you won't have any difficulty."

Station Sgt. Burnie Doyle was one of those on the course who had to travel from interstate.

He is in the drug unit in Eastern Region in Sydney.

Station Sgt. Doyle said he didn't find the study part difficult but not having done the Stage Seven course in the command segment he had to spend a lot of time he didn't have picking up the basics and what was expected of him.

"If you haven't done the Stage Seven course, talk to people who have and find out what will be expected of you.

If you don't do that you're in for a rude shock."

Did he experience a feeling of greater isolation with his family in Sydney more so perhaps than those who lived in Canberra?

"Well it may have been an advantage being away from home. If you lived in Canberra you may have been tempted to visit the family for one reason or another which could be a distraction.

"In one sense it was a test not only for me. During the course the hot water system burst at home and the wife had to fix it herself. She did a bloody good job too."

Station Sgt. Doyle said a bond built up between those on the course.

A pact was made at the beginning that all would finish and they would help one another; the course came first then the individual. One of the things he said he has come to appreciate more is the responsibilities placed on management.

"When you're in the lower ranks you find it easy perhaps to criticise and question why this is not done or that is not done. But once you start to aspire to higher levels in courses such as we're talking about you start to appreciate how it must be impossible to please everyone."

Station Sgt. Doyle said the demands and sacrifices made over the length of the course were well worth it.

A keen Rugby League supporter he said he had to leave Sydney on the day of the grand final to sign on in Canberra.

With somewhat of a wry smile he said he was glad it happened last season.

"Western Suburbs will probably be in

the grand final this year, how could I have left town if that had happened last year?"

Station Sgt. Sandra Peisley, the only woman on the course, works in the Internal Investigation Division in Canberra.

She began her police career in 1974 with the former ACT Police and is one of those quiet achievers.

Station Sgt. Peisley says she has never had any regrets about the choice of career, adding that she was fortunate that in the formative years she had as one of her Officers-in-Charge Joanne Wendler, now Chief Inspector in the AFP's Northern Region office in Brisbane, to guide and advise her.

She went into the Officers Qualifying Course fully committed.

"I'm into sport in a big way, mainly basketball and running and some squash.

"I told everyone I would be out of action for 10 weeks. My family is also a close one, we gather together every Saturday and I told them and my friends the same thing."

Station Sgt. Peisley said dedication was of the utmost importance.

She said the course was certainly a difficult one but that she didn't find any one part more difficult than the other.

"I just took every day as it came and hoped to do well."

Being the only woman on the course could have led to some good natured leg-pulling but in the ten weeks there was not much time for that.

There certainly has not been any leg-pulling since and for one compelling reason; Station Sgt. Sandra Peisley topped the class.

Each officers course is taken overseas to study the structure and methods used by police forces in other countries.

Course 8003 went to New Zealand and was given a thorough insight into New Zealand police operational procedures.

They were briefed on the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior and taken to the location. They were briefed also on the police response to the Air New Zealand-Mount Erebus disaster in Antarctica when the bodies of those who died when the plane slammed into the mountainside during the ill-fated sightseeing excursion had to be recovered and identified.

The Course studied also New Zealand community policing methods. Two distinguished speakers on the course were the then Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, Sir Harry Gibbs, and the Deputy Assistant Director of the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation Academy Jim O'Connor who was visiting from Washington. Mr O'Connor accompanied the course on the New Zealand tour and later complimented the College on its standard of training and the students for their professional conduct.