

Peacekeepers in Cambodia

By Superintendent Bob Bradley

THE AFP's ten peacekeepers with the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) have been serving overseas now for more than four months.

The changes since their arrival are most noticeable, particularly to those at the General Policing Policy and Arrangements Division who monitor the contingent's progress. The Officer in Charge of the contingent, Superintendent Bill Kirk, reports regularly to GPPAD, providing an outline of the unit activities.

The contingent arrived in Phnom Penh on 19 May and briefings, administration and kitting-out were completed. It was initially tasked with establishing an UNTAC Civilian Police presence in the area of Banteay Chmar/Thmar Pouk to monitor and control the police and generally to help bring about an environment conducive to the holding of free elections planned for May 1993. This would be followed by a second phase which would include the training of the local police and to assist in this, six Tunisian and five German police were attached to the group.

After surveying the area, Superintendent Kirk selected the village of Thmar Pouk for the establishment of the CIVPOL HQ for the district. The village is central with good access to the Thai border town of Taphraya and to the 2500 square kilometre area for which the contingent is responsible. It is bounded by the Thailand border to the west, while to the east and south the cease fire lines loosely separate the Khmer Peoples National Liberation Front military from the Government forces. Unfortunately, the location is remote, being two days' drive from Phnom Penh over roads which, in the wet, are often impassable or flooded.

Thmar Pouk has few traditional buildings. It is a very basic rural community with no electricity, tel-



The Police complex in Thmar Pouk. The AFP contingent is housed in the larger building, which also contains the general recreation room and kitchens.

ephones, banks or postal service. Water is drawn from wells or water holes and sanitation and hygiene are generally very basic. The contingent's initial accommodation was on the first floor of an old French colonial barn, the lower level of which was occupied by the village domestic animals, a situation which created its own problems.

On arrival the change of environment, food and sharing of the water with local animals accounted for bouts of stomach upset among the men which, even though the contingent was well-equipped to counteract, soon outperformed any weight loss programs undertaken in Australia. The contingent 'medic', Sergeant Bert Kuijpers administered the appropriate medication which assisted all to recover and a later report indicated that they were in excellent health and even gaining weight.

The establishment of a new bore with better quality water has enabled the members to shower and clean their teeth with more confidence. Bert has also established a

rapport with the skilled international doctors at Kowi Dang Hospital in Thailand, 50 kilometres from Thmar Pouk which is comforting for the members.

Three months and much hard work after arriving in Cambodia, the members moved into new premises in the village. The police building, accommodation, shower and toilet blocks, complete with Australian standard plumbing and flushing toilets, generators and communications tower, was built with local labour using a grant of \$10,000 from UNTAC, cash from the members and much ingenuity. A further \$4000 has been requested for roads, drainage and a parade ground. Whilst it is not home, the addition of an air conditioner and a video and television from Canberra, provides a little comfort after working in the heat of the day.

So, what constitute's a typical working day? To say policing is difficult is an understatement in a country where there are no effective laws and no formal justice system. The day begins at 0700

hours and concludes at about 1800 hours, seven days a week with 28 days on duty and, if the situation allows, six days off per month. Tasks range from patrolling villages and roads, providing escorts for the Red Cross and other organisations, conducting investigations with local police and providing on-the-job training.

However, the day does not necessarily end at 1800 hours. After dinner in the evening, the members have been conducting English language classes for both adults and children in the village. The local police, in part uniform and some of who are outfitted with shoes and torches provided with funds from AFP members own pockets, patrol the village on foot at night. However, progress is being made - UNTAC is in the process of extending the provincial level of policing as more police enter the country (there are presently 1800 police). The UNTAC Human Rights group in Phnom Penh has prepared draft interim laws for Cambodia, which it will present to faction leaders for possible implementation. Options for courts are also being considered, among them international jurists on circuit courts; circuit courts with Cambodian lawyers; and UNTAC sector military leaders. However, even though the situation is improving, crime is still rampant.

The most prevalent criminal problem in the area is that of bandits. They usually consist of groups of 12 to 80 unpaid armed soldiers and criminals, who conduct armed holdups and raid outlying villages, stealing and in some instances, killing citizens. At the time of writing more than 10 murders had been investigated, however, in many other cases it has been difficult to locate bodies, and investigations came to a standstill. It is suspected that domestic violence is commonplace, and that the practice of men having two wives creates family pressures with problems between wife number one and two.

Some of the incidents in the district during July included:

- The theft of 109 head of cattle from a village in Thailand (Koh Tahan) by 12 armed bandits who escaped into Cambodia. One bandit was



During July, Senator Jocelyn Newman, Shadow Minister for Defence Science and Personnel visited Thmar Pouk.

captured but later escaped. Two automatic weapons were captured and handed to the UNTAC military personnel.

- An attempted rape of a 15-year-old female was reported. A male offender was later apprehended and is awaiting to appear before a committee of justice to answer the allegation.
- Between 10 and 12 armed bandits attacked two houses within a 'handicapped' centre. About 26,000 Baht (Thai currency), a 9mm pistol, and gold was stolen from the residents.
- Armed bandits attacked the village of Tra Yoeung. They stole a tape recorder from one of the villagers and a number of other villagers were injured, although not seriously.
- Two badly decomposed bodies were discovered in shallow graves outside Thmar Pouk. They were later identified as two Thai nationals, husband and wife, 50 and 47 years-of-age respectively. They entered Cambodia to travel to the market and were attacked and murdered by bandits. Their vehicle and other unidentified personal property was stolen.
- Bandits attacked civilians on the road between Site Two (a refugee camp) and Banteay Chmar.
- An attempted murder was reported - an anti tank mine had been placed under the house of a villager in Thmar Pouk. The suspect was the estranged husband of the complainant.
- A farmer was allegedly attacked by two armed bandits about

five kilometres south east of Thmar Pouk. He was allegedly tied up and his two cows were stolen.

- Inquiries were conducted into the murder of a woman at Treas Village. A suspect was questioned but later released due to lack of evidence.

Superintendent Kirk reported that the contingent is progressing rapidly to overcome the difficulties faced in completing their tasks. Radio communication has been improved significantly with the installation of a 30 metre aerial and repeater.

The AFP's Superintendent Barry Carpenter, who is seconded to the United Nations Border Relief Organisation, is now in direct radio contact, as is the refugee camp in site two in Thailand. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has increased the number of returnees to the zone to about 1000 per week and, while this places additional strain on the society, their plight has been somewhat alleviated with recent heavy rains enabling crops to be sown. Perhaps the most positive aspect for the AFP members is that training has begun for police and it is hoped that it will include police from all factions in the near future. Superintendent Kirk reported that the Australian contingent is the best prepared police contingent within UNTAC. He wrote, "Credit for this is due to your personal support [Mr John Ireland, GPPAD], and the dedication of the team around you.

"Each of us gives special thanks to Dr Navin for his attention to our medical requirements both with inoculations, research and advice. "It certainly gave us confidence to hear the German medics say that our presence for a check up was a 'waste of their time'".

"Further, Superintendent Bob Bradley and the team of reserves' effort in maintaining contact and ensuring the flow of equipment is appreciated."

He said that the men in the contingent "are performing admirably and are a credit to the AFP".

"They are dedicated, but each is making an immense personal sacrifice," Superintendent Kirk wrote.

The team spent some rest days at Phuket in August - their first days off since 25 May.