



# GOODBYE, FAREWELL AND AMEN

By Jon Goddard

Photos: NSWPF, Facebook & various

With phones in hand watching the minutes click over, a black mobile phone screen displays 12:01am. In normal times the first minute of a Monday would pass without incident or notice but these are far from normal times.

A sergeant walks over to a humming light tower surrounded by moths and flicks the switch plunging the quiet country road back into the darkness it had previously taken for granted. The generator shuts off and the sound of silence again fills the air.

It's Monday 23 November 2020 and, as two Police vehicles drive away, they bring to an end without fanfare the biggest Police operation of a generation. The only even close comparison being the policing response at the Sydney 2000 Olympics.

The last of the hundreds of thousands of permits had been checked and our 1400 kilometre land border was again open, by order of the NSW Government, and our southern neighbours could travel without restriction into the great state of New South Wales.



The numbers and logistical needs behind this operation are staggering.

Since 8 July 2020 over 63,000 shifts have been performed as part of the border operation isolating New South Wales from the country's worst outbreak of COVID-19 in Victoria. These shifts

were across the 25-plus full-time border checkpoints, numerous smaller reduced hours check points and the multiple operations centres in both Sydney and country locations.

Fourteen-thousand of our members were transported to the NSW/Vic border crossings across 28 separate deployments. We worked again with our colleagues from the Australian Defence Forces for part of the deployment.

Police transport whilst initially by road only, proved problematic and, following consultation with NSW Police State Planning, members arrived and departed by plane, train and automobile and were sourced from across every single region of the NSW Police.

Numerous changes were advocated for and made to streamline members' travel and time away from home throughout the 28 weeks of the



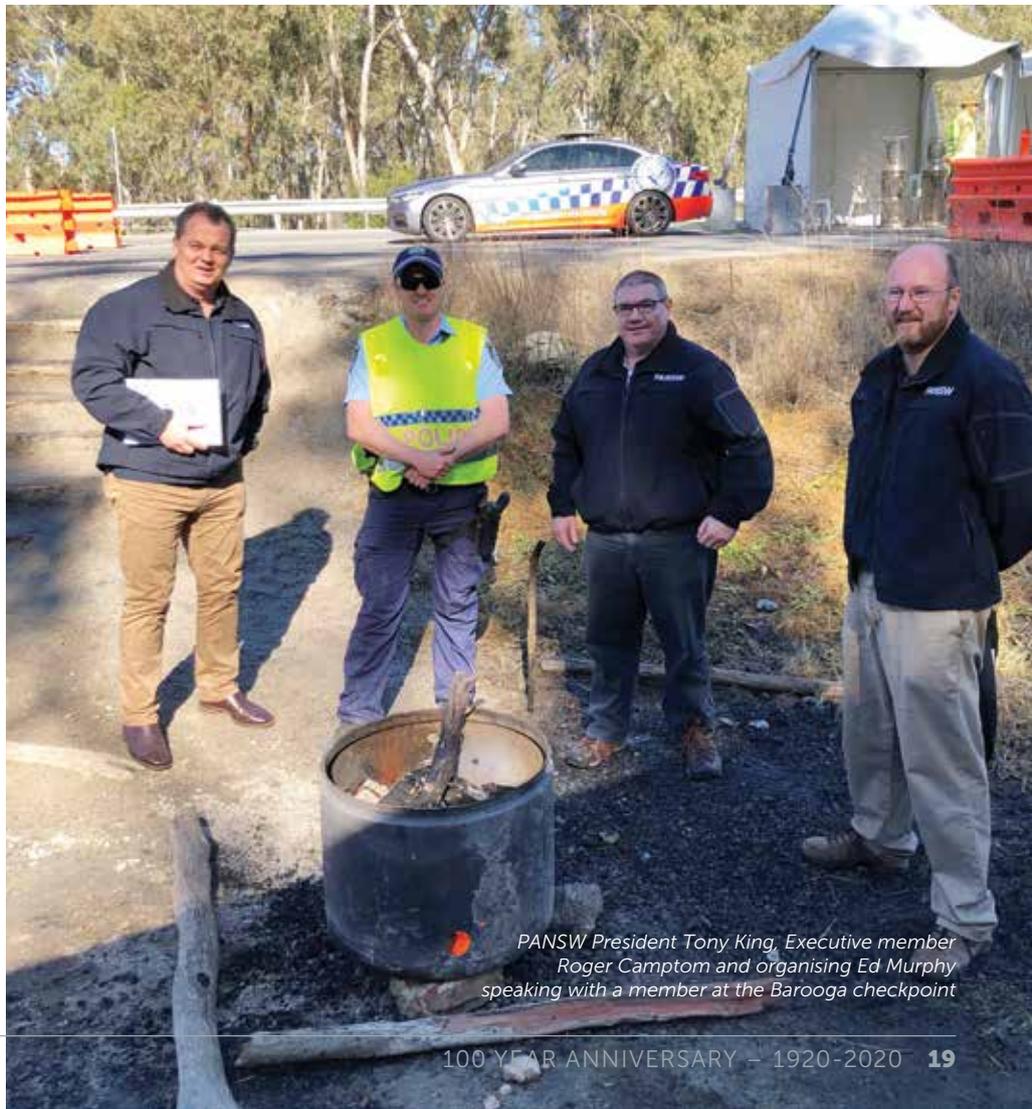
operation. This included the first time use of sealed Police only carriages on the XPT services out of Central Station.

Deployments started in cold climate and ended in extreme heat with temperatures ranging from minus 5 degrees in July which saw our members rugged up in cold climate gear including beanies and neck warmers to 38 degrees in November, which triggered the implementation of the heat policy.

Cold Weather and Hot Weather uniform packs were an agreeable solution to the extreme temperatures on both ends of the scale for our members who were not used to working in such conditions. Incredibly in unique Australian style the varying weather down on the border saw the need to supply both the hot and cold uniform packs on some deployments.

For the Police Association of NSW our core business in this situation is to make sure that our members have the best and safest facilities, accommodation, uniform, meals and transport plans and options available even in the most remote areas. The allowance initially paid to Non Commissioned Officers and then to all staff deployed was the start of us working collaboratively with the NSW Police to achieve outstanding outcomes.

Direct lines of communication with both the Commander of the shut



*PANSW President Tony King, Executive member Roger Camptom and organising Ed Murphy speaking with a member at the Barooga checkpoint*



Barry Way checkpoint in Jindabyne



Tuggerah Lakes deployment



Members worked with colleagues from the ADF for part of the deployment. Above police and naval personnel at Jindabyne which experienced some of the heaviest snow fall in 10 years this winter. Photo: Petty Officer Jake Badior



There's no knowing when police will be called on next for pandemic-related duties. On 12 November 2020, Marine Area Command delivered COVID-19 test kits to the Haruna Express, a 28,000-tonne oil tanker following reports that crew members had symptoms of COVID-19. Police Launch WP25 remained alongside the tanker while staff were swabbed and then conveyed the swabs to NSW Health for analysis. The vessel was not allowed entry into Port Botany until negative results are confirmed for all crew members.

down and reopening of the Borders Assistant Commissioner Scott Whyte and Superintendent Mick Rochester of the State Planning Unit allowed for the memberships views and issues to be taken directly to decision makers.

We reviewed over forty new accommodation locations to ensure facilities were suitable, we reviewed meal locations and menus, healthy options and managed dietary requirements and resolved the small number of issues identified by members within a day.

PANSW Organisers and Executive members visited every border checkpoint and managed individual officers' concerns. Extensive amounts of work by the PANSW industrial team resulted in the decreasing in turnaround

time for travel payments by the New South Wales Police.

By far the most pleasing part of the operation was how our members were adopted by local communities for the time they were there. We saw example after example of cakes, meals, coffees and fire wood being dropped to the membership. Café owners opening up at 3am to allow day shift their much needed caffeine infusion before a day on the line or restaurants staying open to allow afternoon shift to eat later are just some of the examples.

Over just the last week of the Operation when the temperatures soared, a local woman pulled up and handed the members a bag of frozen Zooper Doopers to cool them off. Our membership have

helped build the bond between the community and the Police.

As the final evidence of the police "camps" was loaded onto trucks and the final deployment police moved onto transport for the trip home out of Albury, I am reminded of the final scenes of the celebrated M\*A\*S\*H series.

So to the New South Wales/Victorian Border all 1400 kilometres of her and, on behalf of all those who policed and guarded her during the great COVID-19 lockout of 2020, Goodbye, Farewell and Amen. ■

**About the author:**

Jon Goddard is the PANSW's Lead Organiser