

OP

KRUGER

A job at the German embassy passes without incident – and that's exactly how the MPs of the SECDet personal security detachment like it.

Sergeant Rohan Clapman's team of bodyguards provide the inner cordon for Australian diplomatic staff at their embassy in Baghdad – whose safety is SECDet's whole reason for being.

If the MPs appear calm while escorting their charges, it hides an intense scrutiny of their surroundings.

Sergeant Clapman describes a PSD member as similar to a swan swimming on a pond – serene on the surface, while beneath the water, legs flail and churn. Yet the principals shouldn't see any creases on foreheads he says.

"We are looking for things that shouldn't be there, like a car that wasn't there before."

The PSD has evolved since SECDet I, of which Sergeant Clapman was a member.

"We do it a whole lot better now than back then. It certainly is a big step forward," he says.

"We have been able to validate our role, improve SOPs and courses, and structure them to cater for our job here."

He says the threat, too, has evolved.

"Back in 2003, the ground war had just finished; former elements of the Iraqi army were disorganised; everywhere was dangerous; there was little to no law and order, and the US military was everywhere."

"Now the military groups have had a chance to organise, they have external support and have developed their own agendas. They have also developed their tactics."

It is a long way from the Victorian police officer's usual beat, having left full-time soldiering for civilian policing.

"In Melbourne, there aren't organised enemy groups targeting police. Baghdad

makes you change your mindset," he says.

"You can't really compare the two yet – being a police officer in Melbourne and being in the red zone in Baghdad. Here you are amongst it all the time."

The PSD leave the front gate in the knowledge they could be wounded by a round intended for their principals from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

"You don't go on a job thinking you might get shot or stop a bullet, because, if you did that, you wouldn't get out of bed," Sergeant Clapman says.

The PSD often shepherd diplomatic staff new to the inherent dangers of Baghdad.

"Initially the embassy staff who haven't worked in a place like this are in awe, especially if they came from a nice posting like Paris."

Sergeant Rohan Clapman, left, and his German counterparts escort a German delegation through the Green Zone.
Pic: Corporal Rachel Ingram



A member of SECDet XIV scans for danger on Route Irish.
Pic: Corporal Rachel Ingram



German officials talk with their CPP detail while Australian CPP members Corporals Mick Burkitt, Adam Gardiner, and Sergeant Rohan Clapman stand ready.
Pic: Corporal Rachel Ingram



Pre-move briefing at Baghdad International Airport.
Pic: Staff Sergeant Amanda Cartier, US Air Force



"But, if we didn't have a good relationship with the DFAT staff, it would be a long and painful deployment for both of us."

Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard was one of many VIP visitors adding to the team's protection duties recently.

During her visit in June, Ms Gillard signed six historic memoranda of understanding with Iraq, following a meeting with Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki.

Operation Catalyst, the ADF's contribution to the US-led multinational force effort to develop a secure and stable environment in Iraq came to an end on 31 July, after a seven-year commitment.

Operation Kruger, the ADF's ongoing contribution to the provision of security to the Australian embassy and its staff in Iraq, continues.

Private Ivan Valjan cracks a funny with DPM Julia Gillard.
Pic: Petty Officer Dave Connolly



Sergeant Rohan Clapman.
Pic: Corporal Rachel Ingram

