

It's job interest that sharpens the memories

Pix of past a change

Reliable memory is of crucial importance to police officers, although when interest in the job fails, then it seems that memory does too.

Three AFP members interviewed recently — officers who have a reputation for being able to remember certain facts in detail — all said interest in their job may be the motivation behind their memories.

One of the three, Senior Constable Ron MacFarlane, of the ACT Task Force, is well known, so his name will be used here. The other two will be referred to as Constables Smith and Jones because they work in the intelligence area and one of them is often used for targeting work.

Each of the three officers said they had never studied the sequence of memory or why they could retain details in a manner which seemed to be out of the ordinary.

But all said, without prompting, that they were interested in their work.

Senior Constable MacFarlane's reputation has grown because of his ability to find stolen cars.

"I can remember car numbers, colours and models as well as their year of manufacture," he said recently. "But I cannot always remember what my wife wants from the shop."

He made the statement in jest, but it is true.

Senior Constable MacFarlane weekly collates a list of outstanding vehicles in the ACT, and he can usually remember each of the 40 or more vehicles — in detail — on that list.

"I really can't tell you why", he said. "I know I am interested in recovering stolen cars and bikes and that is the only pointer I can give which may be the explanation of being able to remember certain facts."

MEMORY FOR FACES

Smith and Jones have memories for faces.

Constable Smith, because of his ability, is often used by the CIB to target people.

He said he fell into the intelligence area by chance, hated it for a while, but then began to like the work when it gave him job satisfaction.

But it is not only the face Smith can remember. He can often recall a person's Modus Operandi and associates.

"I can sometimes recall what vehicles certain people use and what areas of town they live in and what their reactions have been in the past when confronted by situations", Constable Smith said.

He said natural peculiarities and the places they frequent make people stand out in his mind.

For instance, a person described on a Crime Circular, wanted for offences around race tracks, had, to Smith's mind, the look of a person who goes to the races.

"It is his general appearance. Perhaps people can be put into categories very easily", he said.

When on a targeting job, Constable Smith avoids the pitfall of looking at people. He said he tries to glance at them without taking the risk of having them realise that he is in fact observing them.

"I have never studied memory — I believe self-motivation is the best way to get the memory to work," he added.

Constable Jones said he believed his memory was efficient because, like other police officers — he liked to see criminals brought to justice.

"Job satisfaction," Constable Jones said. "Detectives come down to the collation area and want as much information as possible on certain people."

"I try to build a picture for them to work on so that they have starting points."

"They are not magicians, unfortunately, so memory could play a vital role in police work if properly trained. I have never studied why I can remember the things I do," he said.

NOT PHOTOGRAPHIC

None of the above officers has a photographic memory, or an eidetic imagery capacity, which is the correct name for the ability to retain precise details of an incident or scene.

Identification is not a simple affair and laws and procedures governing person identification are increasingly being called into question.

But that is one step beyond initial identification and a different area of investigation. Psychologists offer different reasons for people who seem to have a better memory than others, but these three officers can pinpoint the one related factor which helps them — and that is interest in their job.



It's good to have 'down memory lane' photographs for a change.

In this case, both are from the days of the former ACT Police.

We don't have all the names, particularly of the larger group. That picture is the annual get-together of the former ACT Police elite group who held badges numbered from 1 to 99, with some who held badge numbers 100 to 200 being invited.

The 1984 get-together was held at the Ainslie Rex Hotel and some of the more familiar faces include Bernie Rochford (far right), Joan Coleman (centre), Dud Martin (and Jack McFeat

between the two), Joe Medwin and Jack Franklin immediately to Joan's right, Harry Luton, John Scougall, Hec Holmsby (far left) and Arthur Allman (sixth from the right). Some of the longer serving readers may be able to put more names to faces.

The smaller group is an on-the-spot photograph taken outside the Police Station, Northbourne Avenue, in 1958. From left: Commissioner Len Powley, with Harry Luton (again), Bob Prigg, Charlie Kent and Jack Dealy. Note the 1957 model FC Holden, International van and the Chevrolet sedan in the background.



Short Cyprus postings favoured

Reduction of tours of duty in the Cyprus peacekeeping force to six months has made postings there more attractive to AFP officers, according to members of the latest contingent to go to the divided Mediterranean island.

The 21st contingent, all AFP members left for Cyprus in June — with the exception of the new commander, Chief Superintendent Alan Morley, formerly OIC Southern Region. Chief Superintendent Morley left Australia in mid-August to join his men.

It is the first contingent to be

posted for a six-month tour of duty. Members say the previous 12-month period was too long for many officers who did not want to be separated from their families for so long.

Induction training for the posting includes lectures on the island's history, politics and geography, mines identification, firearms training and four-wheel driving.

Among the latest contingent is Senior Sergeant John Streeter, from Western Region, who has been to the island twice before — with the British Army in 1946 and in 1977 with the peacekeeping force.

The now tiny UNCIPOL force once comprised Danish, Swedish, Austrian, New Zealand and Australian police as an adjunct to the United Nations military forces on the island. Now, only Sweden and Australia continue the commitment.

In those two decades, three Australians have been killed while the AFP's Sergeant Jack Thurgar was awarded the Star of Courage after rescuing a Greek-Cypriot farmer seriously injured in a minefield explosion.



Members of the 21st Cyprus contingent at Canberra Airport before their flight to the island. They are, from left, Trevor Clarke, Bob Platt, Keith Martin, Bill Kirk, Peter Atkinson, Frank Harlevich, Gary Wills, Dick Maughan, Chris Hengst, John Streeter, Dave Cottrell, Ken Secagio, Glen Roper and Neil Hammond.