

CRIME

IN THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

THE people of Canberra have been told in no uncertain terms that they have an equal duty with the AFP to counter the growing crime rate.

'Unless the people get behind us we won't be successful,' Chief Superintendent Alan Mills (ACT Command Operations) told ABC Radio on November 11.

'Increasing crime levels are a community problem; they are not just for the police alone,' he said.

Chief Superintendent Mills went on air following press reports which claimed that the AFP appeared to be fighting a losing battle against burglaries in Canberra.

He told interviewer, Pru Goward, that about 80% of the burglaries in the national capital were drug associated.

'It is not just a matter of police resources. Drug use and the resultant crime have to be tackled community-wide,' he said.

'Not even putting another 200 police on the streets of Canberra would be effective against the drug problem.

'I saw a similar situation when I worked in Washington. The US authorities found that putting more police on the street was not necessarily the answer to a social problem.'

Chief Superintendent Mills said the crime scene in Canberra was further complicated by the fact that many of the burglaries were committed by outsiders.

'We know that people come into Canberra, commit the offences, and leave. They're gone before we know the offences have been committed.

'Canberra is such an affluent city that it is a good target for drug-driven thieves.'

Chief Superintendent Mills said it would be an exaggeration to say that

the level of break and enters in Canberra was out of control.

Neighbourhood Watch had been a moderate success to the extent that some thieves were turning their attentions away from private homes to warehouses and shops in industrial areas such as Fyshwick and Mitchell.

Chief Superintendent Mills said that overall, Canberra's level of crime was below that of the Australian state capitals but this did not mean there was no need for concern.

'Canberra is developing into a city where we have, in moderation, all the crime trends evident elsewhere.'

And he had a few suggestions on how to tackle the problem: 'Neighbourhood Watch should do more to report anything suspicious in the streets. Even the smallest piece of information may be of use to police looking at the larger crime pattern.

'Most housebreaking happens in the afternoon and the thieves take easy-to-sell items such as videos and television sets - someone must see them coming out of the houses.

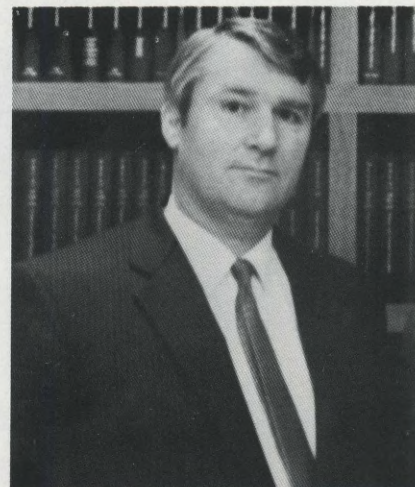
'Australians don't like interfering or reporting on others, but unless the people get behind their police force we won't succeed.'

He said while acknowledging there had been a decline in the ratio of police to population in Canberra, it was the courts, sentencing, bail and probation conditions which were making it more difficult for the AFP.

'Take away the drugs and you would take away the reason for much of the crime.'

Chief Superintendent Mills said the clean-up rate for break and enters in Canberra was not very high at 8% but the figure did compare fairly well with the rate interstate.

The AFP would like to see a much higher clean-up rate but again, the



Chief Superintendent Alan Mills

force needed a lot more effort from the community to help collate information.

'After all, some one has to be buying the proceeds of the break and enters,' he said.

The situation was further complicated by the fact that Canberra is a very transient society.

CAR THEFT

Chief Superintendent Mills said the changed attitude to other people's property had got to the stage in Canberra where a young person would come out of a tavern and steal a car to go home.

'A lot of kids in Canberra are competing against each other to see who can be the first to have stolen 100 cars,' he said.

Car theft in Canberra was on the increase - 1247 last year compared with 1000 in 1986. About 60% of Canberra's stolen cars were recovered but many of them were taken interstate.

Summing up, he told 'Platypus' the police could not operate without public support.

'The AFP is not in a vacuum; the public has to help us through programmes such as Neighbourhood Watch and by general vigilance in reporting suspicious activities. Drug use and the attendant crime must be a question for us all.'