

THE 'expert' WHO BECAME AN 'EXPERT'

by Philip Castle



MR VEROLJUB (BILL) BIORAC is known to almost every AFP member as the manager host of the AFP's residential college at Barton. He has been there since 1980 and supervises the 28 staff who can accommodate up to 170 staying guests and often many more as dinner guests. At 63, Bill is now considering hanging up his chef's hat and retiring.

What many people may not know about Bill, having tasted his excellent cuisine, is that he became a chef more by default and in his career has served Royalty, Prime Ministers, Ambassadors, Head of States, Olympic champions and, of course, police officers with equal skill.

When Bill arrived in Australia in 1949 as a Serbian World War II refugee he was sent to the Migration Camp at Parkes, NSW, and was asked to work in the kitchen as "it was known that I knew something about cooking".

As he explained, this was only because when he fled his native Yugoslavia in 1945 to Italy after fighting with General Mihailovic's Army — and to this day still carries the scars and wounds to his legs — he ended up in some overcrowded UN camps and for something to do began working in the kitchens.

"When I came to Australia it was a case of everybody thinking that I could do it and as I was very ambitious, I just did it," he said. "I think I surprised myself. But even today as then, I just give it everything I know. When I came to Canberra on 12 February 1951 I was still keen. I knew a little about cooking

and everyone said I was an expert so I was. Everyone thought I was better than I was so I became better."

That certainly paid off because in 1956, Bill was selected from all over Australia to work as a chef at the Olympic village in Melbourne and cook

for the Russians and Czechoslovakians. He agrees they would have been hard to please but they were well satisfied. He was then offered jobs as a chef overseas but decided that Canberra was his home.

He lived initially with his former wife and son in Yarralumla and worked as a cook at the Riverside Hostel which was just next to the present AFP Barton 5 Building. He then moved to the Eastlake Hostel which had 500 residents and was located near the Railway Station on the present site of the Tip Top Bakery.

Then he became the first chef ever to work on Canberra's most prestigious site, the opening of the almost notorious Hillside Hostel in 1953, which was located on the present site of the new Parliament House. That hostel was soon followed in 1956 by Capital Hill hostel where the combined numbers for meals exceeded 900 people.

Because of his now acquired skill, 10 years, in 1958 he was asked to become the ACT's Commonwealth Hostels chef training officer and worked all over Canberra for seven years. He was present

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Above: Mr Bill Biorac (right) shows assistant manager Bill Stoijanovic some of the Officers' Mess silverware.

Below: Mr Bill Biorac (seated) for a change being served by his own staff, left to right, Maria Kosutic, Dragica Matas, and Slavca Obradovic.



when the glamour hostel, Gowrie, was opened in 1965 and helped establish its kitchen.

In 1965 he was appointed manager of the Commonwealth Hostels Food and Preparation Store at Kingston on the former site of the Eastlake Hostel. When Macquarie Hostel was opened in 1973, Bill was again asked to establish and run its kitchen and continued to be area catering manager of Government cafeterias at the Admin Building, Russell Offices, Campbell Park and others.

In 1980 he became manager of the AFP's college at Barton which he says has been the most enjoyable of his entire working career. He said that the AFP's college was in fact formerly Lawley House and built about 1948. Barton House was next door until pulled down recently. About the college, he said, "I love'em. I have enjoyed my time very much here and I feel quite sad about leaving and also that it is now being sold off to private enterprise. That is a bad decision and I think all the staff are a bit worried about what will happen to us.

"I have been treated very well by all the Commanders here and I have had a lot of satisfaction from organising the formal and graduation dinners, the Commissioner's farewell dinner and the many impromptu services that we provide."

Because of his continued excellent service and dedication, Bill was this year given the Commissioner's Commendation and the Australia Day Medallion by former Commissioner Grey.

As Bill looks back over his years, first as a volunteer cook in the UN camps of Italy and then his time serving meals on such special occasions as Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies Christmas party in 1956 and the Queen's visit in 1954, he does not seem ready for retirement.

He is President of the Serbian Ex-servicemen's Association and regularly attends the Anzac services. He played first grade soccer in Canberra until 1965 with the Napad club. He says, with a smile, that he used to play soccer against the present Commander of the college, Chief Superintendent Peter Dawson, and he still maintains a keen interest in soccer. He has two children, a 39-year-old son by his first marriage, a 25-year-old daughter by his second, and he has two grand-children. He now lives in Chapman where he is a keen gardener so when asked what he'll do when he retires possibly in the next few months, he pauses. "Maybe I'll do a little travel, maybe some gardening but what I really want to do is cook . . . I love cooking and I love food," he said.

Some people make their hobby their life's work. Gook luck and thanks from us all, Bill.

INVENTIVE OFFICER

by Paul Lewer

AN AFP officer who has invented a much improved descending device for special operations teams is looking for help to develop the idea.

"I have taken out a patent, but I don't want to make any money out of it," Constable Tracy Wilson said.

"All I want is the best that is available for our people from a safety point of view."

Commissioner Peter McAulay has presented Constable Wilson, 26, with a cheque for \$500 for a Field Initiative Award from the Adelaide-based National Police Research Unit for his invention which he has dubbed the "Jet Descender". It is the NPRU's largest award so far.

The device allows an officer to quickly release himself with safety after rappelling down the side of a building to a window ledge, for example.

Using the device the lowering rope can be operated in either hand which would allow an officer to draw a weapon if he needed to defend himself while on a manoeuvre during a seige or any other life-threatening situation.

"There is nothing on the market like it," Constable Wilson said.

"The use of the device is easily learned; it allows quick release from the rope; it consists of only one piece of equipment and it is quiet.

"All the conventional devices force the operator to spend too much time in getting off the rope. The equipment is designed more for cavers and climbers where the need for quick release is not so important.

"Conventional equipment has the karibiner (locking device) separate from the descender but mine has the karibiner built in.

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Constable Tracy Wilson demonstrating his rappelling device. (Picture by Sen. Const. Wayne McConaghy)

