

Retirement approaches for sporting family man

ANY long serving police officer knows the demands the job places on a family and Eric Dix, who is retiring aged 55 later this year, said that despite these demands, he has thoroughly enjoyed his police career.

"Working for the Commonwealth has allowed me to raise a wonderful family," he said.

Eric joked that Joan, his wife, has never forgiven him for drawing the duty of escorting a ship-jumping Italian sailor to Rome in 1977 when he had never taken her any further overseas than Kangaroo Island.

Then there was also the time in 1974 he that he boarded an RAAF Hercules and headed to Darwin just a few hours after the birth of their third son. Eric spent the next 10 weeks in Darwin as part of the Cyclone Tracy relief team.

Joining the Commonwealth Police on 20 November 1967, aged 28, he started uniform duty at Salisbury Weapons Research Establishment. By the time he became a plain clothes detective in 1973, he had worked at Pine Gap, Nurunga and Woomera. In January 1974, he completed the investigators course at the Australian Police College, Manly.

His fraud experience started with investigating Department of Social Security frauds.

"In those days it was not unusual for a crim to peddle along behind a posty and pluck the cheques out of the letter boxes," he said.

In 1977 the region started the Railway Squad working out of Norwich under Inspector Mick Kerrigan. The Railway Squad policed the Australian National Line (Commonwealth Railways) in an effort to stop pilfering from freight trains. One particularly successful operation became known as the 'Nurom job'.

Over a three to four month period

there was about \$100,000 worth of pilfering between Mile End and Port Pirie. The method became clear when a freight carriage security seal was found by the tracks at a place called Nurom.

Apparently thieves were boarding the train out of Port Pirie at a point where the train would stop for an electric staff change. This was a procedure that required the train to stop and the guard to walk the length of the train. As the guard walked down one side of the train, the thieves entered the freight carriages from the other.

The gang then would gather the goods ready to load into a van that was hiding at the location of the next electric staff change. Again as the guard walked down one side of the train the gang would load the van from the other.

To catch the gang, Compol officers hid in the freight carriages and waited for the criminals to turn up. The stake-out ended with a chase across freshly ploughed fields.

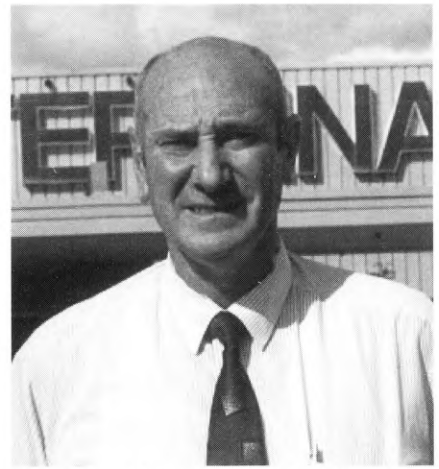
Eric said it was like something out of a James Bond movie with offenders running in every direction closely pursued by police. One of the thieves evaded capture by hiding in a deep furrow only to surrender himself at the Port Pirie office the next morning.

"We had chaps walking down the street with lawn mowers handing them in, once they knew they'd bought stolen goods," Eric said.

The Railway Squad lasted only two years but Eric said he was proud of the work they did.

He was also a member of the team of Compol officers brought to Sydney for extra security after the bombing of the Sydney Hilton during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference in 1978.

He said that the change from



Eric Dix on duty at Adelaide's international airport

Compol to the AFP in 1979 had little effect on the nature of his work, other than that the Career Structure Review (CSR) flattened the rank structure. He said he had put considerable effort into getting to the rank of Detective Senior Constable, but that rank disappeared in the CSR.

He said that over the years technology had enhanced the job. "There's no doubt about it. It's the way to go. We've got to move with the times."

Eric's second AFP career began at the age of 40 when Central Region was invited to join the state police basketball competition 14 years ago. He took it up because his boys were playing basketball in primary school and he wanted to learn the game. Eric has recently retired from the court but his boys have become talented players.

His eldest son, Anthony, aged 25, plays for Army in the services competition, Christopher, aged 24 has played in the National Basketball League with the Adelaide 36ers, and youngest son, Jason, aged 18, recently won a \$5500 basketball scholarship which provides specialised coaching and three weeks in the United States participating in tryouts for college selection.

Perhaps it is not surprising that Eric's sons are successful in sport. He was a West Torrens ruckman in the South Australian Football League from 1959 to 1966.

Eric will see his career out working in the Airport Intelligence Section where he has been for 20 months, having spent eight years in BCI before that.