

# What happened to the good old days?

*Having spent 25 years working in an executive capacity for the AFP, John Ireland has contributed to Platypus Magazine on a number of occasions.*

*For the AFP's tenth anniversary in 1989 he recalled the work that had gone into the AFP's establishment and early years.*



*John Ireland, recently retired Manager People Strategies*

A review of the past serves for some to enhance their reputations as historians, others to engrandise their past glories. It leads some to comment 'what happened to the good old days?', and others to postulate that new members have never had it so good.

Whatever the reason, it does help us to put in perspective the future. Undoubtedly, change will continue if the AFP is to meet challenges which will confront it; the lessons of how well we have coped in the past should not be forgotten.

On 19 October 1979, a small group of officers of the former ACT Police, the Commonwealth Police (COMPOL) and the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) breathed a sigh of relief after spending the previous 18 months putting together arrangements for the Australian Federal Police to begin operations.

We thought the hard work was over. It wasn't; it was only just starting.

The process towards creating the new police force began with the Sydney Hilton Hotel bombing during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Conference in Sydney in 1978. Sir Robert Mark, GBE, QPM, former Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police in London and Chief Constable of the City

of Leicester, was commissioned by the Government on 1 March that year to report on the organisation of police resources in the Commonwealth area. His report was presented to the Government on 6 April 1978.

After an unusually expeditious consideration, the Government adopted Sir Robert's report and set up a small task force under an inter-departmental committee chaired by Sir Peter Lawler to implement its major recommendation, the creation of the AFP.

The task force was headed by Mr Geoff Halliday, a first assistant secretary of the Department of Administrative Services, and had as members and principal police advisers, Deputy Commissioner John Johnson (ACT Police) and then Acting Assistant Commissioner Roy Farmer (Commonwealth Police). Many members of the former forces were involved in the task force deliberations, either as representatives of their organisation on working parties or as elected Police Association officials.

## New framework

It was made clear to all involved from the outset that the question

of whether there would be an AFP was not open to debate. The task was to put the organisation together, firstly through providing a legislative base, and then developing the administrative and operational framework for the new organisation.

Compromise was inevitable. Most participants still had fresh in their minds the abortive Australia Police exercise of the mid-1970s and were mindful of protecting their professional standing and that of the new organisation. The two-component police force was the biggest compromise and while it served its purpose in establishing the organisation, it continued to dog the amalgamation process and divide the AFP until the establishment of the Australian Protective Service some five years later.

Having settled on the legislative framework which provided for an operationally independent yet administratively accountable police service, the task force turned to issues which would impact more directly on the members of the new organisation, such as pay scales and conditions, rank structure, badges of rank and uniform.

## Complaints procedures

Passage of the AFP Act through the Parliament in May 1979 enabled limited sections to come into effect on Royal Assent. The first AFP Commissioner, Sir Colin Woods, was appointed and took over the final planning for the commencement of operations.

During this time, Sir Robert returned to Australia to provide further advice to the Government, including the introduction of complaints against police procedures. Incidentally, Sir Colin, who was Sir Robert's Deputy at Scotland Yard, found it ironic that Sir Robert was here to, *inter alia*, advise on external complaints procedures when he had fought it so vigorously while Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police.

I was told at the time by Sir Robert that he had also advised Mr Justice Williams, heading the Federal Inquiry into Drugs, that he did not think it was a good idea to give the fledgeling organisation

the drugs function. However, following Justice Williams' report to Government, the functions and staff of the former Federal Narcotics Bureau were transferred from Customs to the AFP on 7 November 1979 some 18 days after it commenced operations.

During its first year of operations, the AFP budget was \$72,806,676. This compares with a budget last year [1988-89] of \$163,338,000. There were 1134 members appointed to the General Police Component and 1443 to the Protective Service Component. There were 375 Public Service members which included the former Narcotics Bureau officers.

The compromises leading up to *Day One* had to be overcome and the aspirations of the Government and members for the organisation achieved. As far as the Government is concerned its aspirations for the AFP have been reflected in the various statements provided to respective Commissioners.

The first such required the then Commissioner to "...lay the foundation for the Australian Federal Police and build the new force into a first class police organisation imbued with integrity; the confidence and pride of the ACT community and the nation; and which will be highly respected internationally..."

Subsequent direction by Ministers built on this theme and provided or refined specific directions on the objectives and priorities to be pursued. In these documents the longer term role envisaged for the AFP emerged as that of



Clipped from Edition No.5 of *Platypus Magazine* dated August 1984, this conference was dealing, among other things with the establishment of the Coastal Protection Unit and the separation of Protective Services.



*Deputy Commissioner Roy Farmer and OIC Coastwatch Dick Dixon photographed at the Canberra offices of Coastwatch. The AFP administered Coastwatch from 1984 to 1988.*

“...an effective federal investigative body, functioning as the Commonwealth’s primary law enforcement agency...”

## Changes occurred

In achieving objectives, significant change has occurred over the 10 years, change which in some way has been a precursor or stepping stone to the present proposals for change which will see the AFP successfully move into the anticipated difficult environment of the 21st century.

On 20 October 1984, the creation of the Australian Protective Service saw the separation of the Protective Service Component. As distinct from the short timeframe in which the AFP was created, the gestation period for the birth of the APS was long and difficult. Again the trauma that accompanied this change was felt by all, regardless of whether they were to be transferred to the new organisation or remain with the AFP. While the strength of the AFP was reduced by some 600 personnel, what was left was a far more cohesive homogeneous organisation.

How were we to take this streamlined organisation into the future? Commissioner R.A. Grey took up this issue when he established the 1984 Joint Management Review (JMR). The implementation of the recommendations of his review, although less traumatic, were nonetheless just as important

as the protective service change for they recognised, essentially for the first time, the requirements of the unique role and structure of the AFP when compared with other police services. They sought to question traditional police solutions to problems, realised that the AFP with a future strength consisting of 70 per cent detective and 30 per cent uniform functions could not rely on traditional recruitment and personnel practices; and strengthened the administrative accountability of the AFP required by Government.

As Commissioner Grey put it in his 1984–85 annual report to Government, the JMR changes “... established a firm foundation necessary for the AFP to build itself into a modern and yet more effective federal law enforcement agency”.

The development of the AFP on the basis of this foundation continues today and will in the future if it is to remain effective and responsive to the demands of Government and the community it serves.

## Coastal surveillance

As a result of a report by Mr Kim Beazley, the Minister assisting the Minister for Defence, presented to Government in 1984, the role of coordinating Australia’s coastal surveillance was transferred to the AFP on 1 April that year. Mr Beazley was given the task by the Government after an earlier inter-departmental committee had difficulty in setting a firm recommendation on the matter, despite some 37 meetings.

The reasons for transferring this function to the AFP were apparently obvious at the time but not so four years later when the functions were again reviewed by Mr Hugh Hudson, retiring Chairman of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, and then transferred to the Australian Customs Service. It was evident, however, that Customs got a far more viable function than the AFP inherited four years earlier.

The work of the AFP has led to, and at times been the catalyst for, developing changes in attitudes at the highest levels of Government and in the community to law enforcement. Common police services, including the Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence, have the genus basis for their establishment in the AFP Act or as AFP initiatives. The review of AFP Resources in 1985, prompted by Commissioner Grey’s *Cost of Efficient Policing* paper, led to the Fraud Review which heightened the interest of Government in fraud and the development of more effective fraud control measures.

The direct crediting of Social Security payments can be attributed in no small measure to the work of people like the late Assistant Commissioner Winchester. These are but a few of the significant changes effected at both Government and departmental levels as a result of the work of the AFP. Internal changes initiated within the AFP have led both Commonwealth and State agencies to take a long, hard look at their own systems and procedures.