

Platypus: A survival story

By Terry Browne

Terry Browne has been associated with *Platypus* magazine for almost 25 years. Starting as the publication's graphic designer in 1984, he went on to study journalism part-time. Since graduating in 1993 he worked on *Platypus* in various writing and editorial capacities. In this article he attempts to tell the *Platypus* story in less than 2000 words, admitting it has only been possible to mention a few of the many people who have contributed to the magazine's survival over the years.

While a platypus in the wild can expect to survive for as many as 10 years, corporate publications rarely last that long. Now with *Platypus* magazine reaching its 100th edition there's good reason to reflect on this achievement—if only to ponder how it has beaten the odds.

According to the first *Platypus* editor, Ray Leister, most of the work for the initial edition was finished before the AFP actually began on 19 October 1979, the project being driven by then commissioner Sir Colin Woods.

Recruited from the UK where he had been Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary for England and Wales, Sir Colin was sworn in as AFP Commissioner five weeks before the AFP began. He arrived with a strategic plan that included a corporate publication aimed at unifying the three law enforcement bodies destined to form the AFP. He quickly drafted Commonwealth Police Sergeant Ray Leister as editor.

In his prior life, Ray had spent almost 15 years rising from an apprentice printer to manager of a regional newspaper. Ray points to Sir Colin's Director of Information, Gregson Edwards, for recommending the

name of the AFP's magazine, which in turn had been suggested to him by a couple of police officers with a rye sense of humour. The humour was subtle, and the readers curious, so by the third edition it was necessary to publish the following explanatory snippet:

What's in a name? *Platypus* is a word which was coined to describe a unique Australian animal (do we not fit into this category?). It also has another meaning. *Platypus*, broadly translated from the Greek, means flat (*platus*) foot (*pous*). Flatfoot.

So began the use of the platypus as a symbol unifying members of the fledgling AFP. Ray published two editions before returning to police work. While subsequent editors published four more editions, by mid 1981 *Platypus* had slowly drifted into hibernation. Unexpectedly however, the idea of the platypus had caught on as an alternate symbol for the AFP. Platypus neck ties were in vogue and platypus stick pins were appearing on lapels.

In February 1983 Major General Ron Grey was sworn in as AFP Commissioner and again the spotlight turned to corporate communications. His newly appointed

Director of Information, Peter Windsor, set about resurrecting *Platypus*, but this time in a less time-consuming newspaper format.

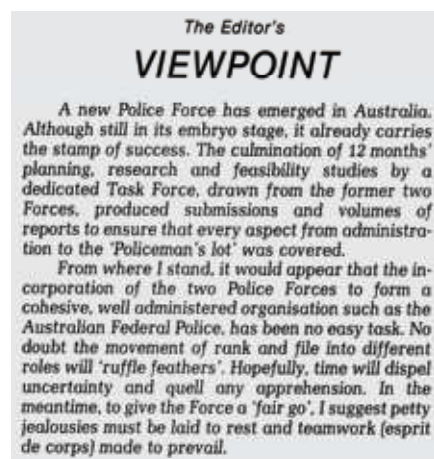
"I don't recall ever thinking about changing the name of the publication, I got the humour of it and the idea that this uniquely Australian animal was a mix of unrelated parts that managed to work together seemed to fit the situation at the time," he said.

"I was able to entice Peter Kowalick away from Customs to work on reinvigorating the dormant publication and his commitment re-established the flow of contributions that had earlier dried up. Gradually, the increased interest made relaunching *Platypus* in its magazine version plausible, particularly since my area had acquired a graphic designer," Peter said.

After nine newspaper editions, a magazine version was published as edition Number 10 in August 1985, with Commissioner Grey's message: "In my view the AFP is maturing into a professional law enforcement organisation which is rightly earning a high reputation both within Australia and overseas. I am hoping that *Platypus*, in its new form, will be a reflection of our professionalism," he said.

At this point, a numbering anomaly in the magazine needs to be confessed. When *Platypus* was reborn as a newspaper in 1983, it began as Number 1. This ignored the first six magazine editions which had been numbered in volume and number style. It is the reborn *Platypus* that has now reached 100. This anomaly means that 106 editions in total have been produced, but further serves to underline the longevity of the support for the publication.

Over the years, successive editors have been responsible for the stewardship



Extract from Vol. 1 No. 1 1979



of the magazine and without fail, each has queried the name, tried to think of a better one, and then succumbed to *Platypus*. Certainly successive editors have added fresh ideas to the publication and if the editions are spread out in order, the changes in design and layout roughly align with the arrival of a new editor.

Support for the platypus symbolism escalated when Commissioner Grey endorsed a sculpted bronze rendition of a platypus as the official corporate gift. The statue, which depicts the animal striving to 'leave no stone unturned', was derived from the name of the magazine.

Subsequently, the platypus as an AFP symbol has surfaced elsewhere over the years. The Mulunggang Indigenous Officers Network takes its name from the Ngunnawal word for platypus, and the Ben Blakeney Award recognising the achievements of the AFP's Indigenous officers is a fluid sculpting of two platypuses at play. On the sporting front, the AFP Sports Federation uses a platypus as its logo, and the AFP internal honours and awards, introduced in 2004, feature prominent images of a platypus on the medals and decorations.

The favourable remarks have come not only from Brisbane but from Cairns, Townsville and the Gold Coast. I would add my compliments for the high standard of this publication which has brought not only credit to the Australian Federal Police but also a good circulation of our functions which were rarely known by other organisations outside of Canberra.

Chief Superintendent R. H. Gillespie
Commander Northern Region
Brisbane, Qld.

Extract from Vol. 18, September 1987

Philip Castle followed Peter Windsor into the job in 1986 and being fresh from *The Canberra Times*, brought with him a newshound's pragmatic approach to the job. Phil recalled he was given wide latitude for the publication and this period saw the introduction of a range of new ideas including cartoon strips, crossword puzzles and a greater use of photographs.

"Some of these ideas worked and others didn't," Phil said.

"Commissioner Grey wanted other police forces and the ever-watchful politicians to take notice of *Platypus* which now had a role in showcasing the AFP's unique international, national and ACT policing role.

"My aim was to make *Platypus* a highly readable magazine for all AFP members, both sworn and unsworn and to equally represent all levels of work in the AFP. I also aimed to help reduce some of the professional differences which had arisen from the 1979 amalgamation, and I think we succeeded in those aims.

"When I see how *Platypus* has grown and survived since that time I'm proud to have been part of it," he said.

Brian Swift arrived in 1989 from *Army Newspaper* in the wake of the media onslaught following Assistant Commissioner Colin Winchester's murder. Brian also brought with him years of experience as a subeditor adding greatly to the expertise of the editorial team.

With *Platypus* now seeking a wider external audience, *AFP News* was created in 1989 to enable faster communication of the tide of organisational change that was sweeping through the AFP.

Steve Jiggins was Director Media and Public Relations from 1994 to 2002. He recalls that when he was appointed, the AFP had three print communication vehicles: *Platypus*, *AFP News* and five separate regional newsletters.

"The first thing that struck me was the lack of differentiation in the content of the three formats," Steve said.

"I implemented a rationale for each based on the desired target audience: *AFP News* became the corporate voice of the AFP and material selected for *Platypus* was primarily relevant to a wider law enforcement audience and the regional newsletters were abolished.

"With the evolution of AFP investigations into emerging crime areas, *Platypus* now featured ground-breaking articles on cybercrime, transnational crime and emerging drug trends. Key stakeholders were encouraged to contribute articles which eventually included pieces from the head of the FBI, the secretary of Customs, and the head of AUSTRAC among others," Steve explained.

"This led to a broader law enforcement readership with a number of overseas law enforcement agencies signing up to our subscription list, and it was interesting to note an increasing trend for AFP members wanting to contribute articles. I recognised this was an indication that *Platypus* was accepted by the readership for what it was: a high quality law enforcement journal," he said.

Under Steve, the media and publications team acquired extra personnel. Janice Jarrett, a former journalist, did a stint as editor from early 1996 and recalls that *Platypus* was well-established and a respected communication vehicle within the AFP as well as externally.

"*Platypus* provided the opportunity for those in the AFP to keep up with emerging issues in law enforcement and also to make contributions in their particular areas of professional expertise or study.

"Looking back, *Platypus* was certainly at the forefront in providing professional literature on issues which are now part of our established business practice and operational work," Janice said.

By 2002 there was a trend throughout the corporate world to take a good hard look at their particular position in the marketplace. Whether it was sport, government or law enforcement, the emphasis turned sharply to defining the brand, developing the brand and protecting the brand.

Marketing and branding consultant Anne Lyons arrived as Manager Media and Communications in 2002, with a mission to stabilise the AFP's branding situation.

She discovered that there were almost 50 variations to what could be defined as the AFP brand, without even considering where the platypus imagery stood in this mix. *Platypus* managed to survive the cull again demonstrating its 'unique ability to survive increasing pressure ... adapt to change ... and maintain its special place'. These words belong to the more refined explanation now printed on the inside cover of the magazine.

Having survived the branding blitz, the value of *Platypus* as a corporate communication tool was confirmed when edition 90 was used to launch the new branding philosophy in March 2006.

Perhaps the most difficult *Platypus* editions to produce were the first two of

2007 which covered the deaths of some well known AFP members. Newly arrived editor Anne Quinn said her first three months in the job proved to be a personal and professional challenge.

On a more uplifting note, Anne said she has enjoyed telling the AFP's stories. "My first interview was Andy Hughes, who at the time had endured intense political pressure as the Fiji Commissioner of Police. I was quite nervous about interviewing someone so highly regarded in national and international policing. He must have sensed this, because in his typical professional (and charismatic) manner he set about making it enjoyable. This was an experience that has encouraged me to pursue other inspirational stories about the AFP," Anne said.

And inspirational is the right word. As a corporate journal, *Platypus* has carried its fair share of management-initiated articles, but just as regularly within the covers of its 100 (plus) editions have been stories of the remarkable exploits of AFP members at work around the globe; stories sent from the jungles of Cambodia, the deserts of Sudan, the high-rise canyons of Los Angeles and the mass graves of Bosnia. There have been

LETTERS

Sir,

I was recently given a copy of the September, 1987 issue of '*Platypus*' which I read with considerable interest.

I found the range of articles to be diverse, informative and timely; a number provided members of the public with a good insight into the current and future operations of the Australian Federal Police.

These articles were balanced with valuable articles from contributors as notable as the recently-retired High Court Justice, the Right Honourable Sir Harry Gibbs.

I would like to congratulate you and your staff on the production of such a high standard publication. I look forward to reading future issues.

Yours sincerely,
(Dr) Malcolm C. Hall,
Managing Director,
Forensic Science,
Technology International Pty. Ltd.
South Australia

Extract from Vol. 19, November 1987

stories about investigations at the top-end of town and at the bottom-end of drug couriers, along with the occasional story about the sometimes troubled streets of Canberra. *Platypus* has been the record keeper of the AFP's achievements and has been supported over the years by a wide variety of administrators, editors, writers, designers and contributors who have kept the magazine going since the AFP's beginning. Hopefully that will continue well into the future.



From left: Present editor Anne Quinn swaps stories with former editors Brian Hartigan, Kate Mokrij, Terry Browne and first editor Ray Leister at the *Platypus* morning tea.