

This interview with the Commissioner by ROB FILMER appeared in the Herald, Melbourne, on 15 March 1986. Other areas of the media have since picked up elements of it and in doing so, have misconstrued some of the Commissioner's responses. It is important that AFP and OAFP members be fully informed on matters in the interview. The article has been reproduced here so that members can be clear on the Commissioner's views.

CRIME WAR

Use Defence cash, says Police Chief

SOME of the money spent on defence could be channelled into the "real war" against crime, the chief of the Australian Federal Police said today.

"We have a war, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in our cities, towns and countryside," Major-General Ron Grey said.

"It is a war carried out by criminals who deliberately erode our rights. They rob, steal and assault, degrade our children with heroin and cocaine, disrupt our economy by massive white collar crime, and have no compunction at living and working outside the law.

"This is the war we should be fighting now, with the full resources and backing of our government and people.

"Concerned citizens could wonder at the massive allocation to the 'non-war' — which is defence in the 1980s. They could compare it with the allocation to the real war of the 1980s — the war against crime.

"I can identify no external threat to Australia — nor can anybody else, to my satisfaction," he said.

"I am not saying we should dismantle our defences . . . the shocking legacies of unpreparedness in the 1930s should remain as a constant lesson.

"I am prepared to make a stand. Those who might be offended would be out of touch with reality and ignorant of the state of society in Australia.

"I now understand that my 35 years in the military, in terms of what I now see so clearly, were a relatively cloistered life in peacetime."

The defence budget is \$6535 million. The 3000-member Federal Police allocation is \$121.7 million.

Commissioner Grey was an Australian Army major-general until he took the top police job.

In an exclusive and remarkably frank interview with The Herald, he spoke bluntly on the war against organised crime, including the growing drug trade, and the shackles on the AFP's operations.

These included the limitations on telephone-tapping powers of the AFP, which handicapped the force's ability to adequately probe criminal activities.

Federal police should be given greatly expanded powers to tap telephones, Commissioner Grey said, including extending the range of crimes for which electronic surveillance was available.

"Electronic surveillance is essential if we are to successfully conquer organised crime," he said.

"There are now carefully observed procedures in telephone intercepts and they apply to the narcotics trade.

"I believe they should be extended to include a greater range of offences."

Commissioner Grey also spoke out on the need for:

- Special powers for the "money trail" — the tracing of criminal funds — particularly the ability to get access to financial records, including taxation data and the records of banks and other finance institutions.

- More resources — "if we want a force capable of dealing with late 20th century crime."

- Legislation — "we must move more quickly towards the forfeiture of the assets — the income and capital — of organised crime."

CRIME-BUSTER EXTRAORDINAIRE

ROB FILMER speaks to Australian Federal Police Commissioner Ron Grey at the start of his fourth year as AFP head.

drugs. Inadequate powers, limited resources and — until recently — frequent lenient sentences are apparently handicapping this fight.

"If criminals were hamstrung by our regulations, boundaries and resources constraints, organised crime would almost certainly lessen very quickly," he said in an exclusive interview with The Herald.

"We are still spread over too many areas of inadequate accommodation — we have become accustomed to sub-standard accommodation. It is time to redress the balance. The new, purpose-built AFP headquarters in Canberra has not yet materialised and has been left off building programs for far too long.

A SINISTER olive-green cylinder squats menacingly on one shelf. It is a once-deadly, now-defused, "jumping jack" land mine — the type used with lethal efficiency in Vietnam. Once triggered, the mine is designed to leap waist-high and cut a man in half.

It is appropriate that it should be sitting in the office of the Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police, Maj.-Gen. Ron Grey.

That is precisely the effect he wants to have on crime in Australia — to hit where it hurts the most.

He is a nuggety, tough-talking, no-nonsense man who detests ineptitude, shuns publicity and is committed to justice. This is the same man who forged a distinguished 35-year military career in just about every post-war campaign fought by the Australian Army.

A career infantry officer, he was twice wounded in Korea, mentioned in despatches in Borneo and awarded a Distinguished Service Order in Vietnam, where he commanded the 7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment.

He also developed an intense distrust of the media.

"Media coverage of organised crime and drugs is blatantly sensational — often supposition, rather than fact," he says.

But as he starts his fourth year in a five-year term as head of our top crime-busters, Commissioner Grey this week lifted the lid slightly on the AFP and its fight against organised crime and

"The government acknowledges the situation and we move into a new office building, hopefully by the end of the year. It was not custom-built for police work and though it's a welcome move, it is still a stopgap measure and will not take all the elements which need to be moved.

"As the government's primary law enforcement agency in Commonwealth matters, the AFP deserves its own proper headquarters," Commissioner Grey said.

Perhaps similar to the one earmarked for the ASIO shift to Canberra, he could have added.

Among the obstacles to the war against crime, according to Commissioner Grey, are limitations on telephone tapping and the inability to scrutinise tax data and the records of banks and other financial institutions.

"The ability to intercept the conversations of criminals is one of the most effective tools available to police," Commissioner Grey says.

"Electronic surveillance is essential if we are to successfully conquer organised crime.

"There are now carefully observed procedures in telephone intercepts and they apply to the narcotics trade.

"I believe they should be extended to include a much greater range of offences."

One recent major morale-boosting coup for the AFP was a lengthy and complex investigation which successfully used the force's "targetting" technique.

This involves concentrating on an individual or an organisation, instead of a piecemeal investigation of reported crimes.

The technique provides evidence of an individual's criminal activities and is intended to lead investigators to associates — and often to other organisations and rackets.

Operation Lavender took 18 months and was an outstanding success.



• Commissioner Grey . . . "Electronic surveillance is essential if we are to conquer organised crime."

THOUGHTS OF GENERAL GREY

... ON CORRUPTION

Corruption of public officials rarely starts with money changing hands, according to Commissioner Grey.

"However, once corrupted, even over a small matter, a public official generally becomes the lifetime servant of a criminal organisation.

The individual finds himself in a position of finding favors for vice entrepreneurs to prevent exposure of past transgressions.

"Many crime leaders maintain an informal central intelligence system among themselves, of compromised solicitors, magistrates, police, accountants, company investigators, parliamentarians, media figures, journalists and assorted public figures.

... ON THE MEDIA

The media has a role to play in the fight against organised crime, Commissioner Grey says.

"But the media, in general, does not serve us well. Exaggeration and innuendo seem to have become part of much crime reporting. Perhaps it is the day of the would-be investigative journalist trying for headlines without proper care or responsibility. Retractions are easy — but the public is always left with a wrong impression.

"In fairness, some particular members of the profession, and some particular newspapers, are even-handed and thorough."

... ON AFP MORALE

Federal police are overworked and many men are under continual stress.

"I would say it (morale) ranges from very high, to a general acceptance of the job, to quite low," he said. "You are welcome to speak to any member of the force to get their private views. . . we have to be open in these matters.

"The AFP, as a body, is not yet seven years old, it is growing fast and has suffered marked changes, but the ability of very many individuals to do a top-grade job has impressed me. With career development, including proper teaching and high standards, as members come through the ranks of policing, we hope to be ready for the end of this century's crime."

... ON DRUGS

"What is so wrong with our society that our young people need to escape it through the end of a needle?

"Here, perhaps, we had best look at ourselves. The present situation is an indictment of us all — as the parents of those young people who get hooked on heroine and cocaine are often the last to recognise their children's dependency. Do we always know where our children are . . . or do we care?

"Thousands of young Australians willingly experiment with heroin every week, while unemployment leads to increased alienation of youth.

"The so-called 'young' violence is lashing out at the problems of society, of frustration and unfulfilled expectations."