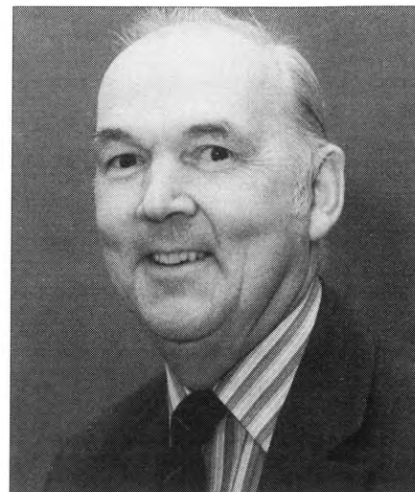


VETERAN OFFICER RETIRES



*Chief Inspector Derek Sharp
(picture by Sen. Con. P. McFawn)*

A once shivering Bow Street constable in metropolitan London left the AFP on November 3 after 41 years as a police officer.

He is Chief Inspector (Electronic and Technical Services Division) Derek Sharp, the last serving AFP officer who formed part of Commonwealth Investigation Service.

'Part of the Bow Street beat covered Australia House and in the winters of 1948 and 1949 the pictures outside of Australian beaches looked mighty attractive,' Chief Inspector Sharp said.

'I really got the call to come 'down under' and in those days the entry formalities could be completed at Australia House and I joined the Victoria Police after training in Melbourne.'

Mr Sharp was already versed in police work before his 15 months with the London Metropolitan Police.

He had joined the Palestine Police in 1946 and remained in that service until it was disbanded in 1948.

'My service there certainly opened my eyes to the ways of the world. A lot of the terrorists the Palestine Police were chasing later became politicians.'

Mr. Sharp still subscribes to what he believes could be the oldest continually published police magazine in the world.

It is the 'Palestine Police Old Comrades' Association Newsletter which is published quarterly.

'The magazine has never missed an issue since 1949,' he said.

Mr Sharp's wanderlust was not cured by his move to the Victoria Police.

After seven years and reaching the rank of detective, he accepted a contract with the Kenyan Police as an Inspector.

'It was the time of the Mau Mau but I was stationed up-country in an isolated area. We had a force of 100 constables and the main problem in our part of Kenya was cattle stealing.'

Mr. Sharp returned to Australia in 1959 and joined the Commonwealth Investigation Service.

'I'm the last member of the old Commonwealth Investigation Service to leave the AFP.'

'I was based in Melbourne and we investigated matters such as social security fraud and cases of false pretences against the Commonwealth.

'In 1960 the CIS was amalgamated with the security body, the Peace Officers' Guard, to become the Commonwealth Police.

'The Commonwealth Police ran until 1979 when the AFP was set up,' he said.

Prime Ministers and Princes

Mr. Sharp spent a substantial part of his career as part of the VIP Escort Squad.

'I saw a lot of the world as escort to former Prime Ministers Harold Holt, John Gorton and William McMahon. I was also personal police officer to Prince Charles during his stay at the Timbertop school.'

There was a marked contrast between royalty and the politicians when it came to security in those days.

'Prince Charles had had police with him from the time he was small and he was used to it', he said. 'He was an excellent young lad and didn't give me any worries. There were about 125 boys at Timbertop and he would have got on with 100 of them. There was some baiting but he took it in good part.'

The London-born Chief Inspector said his work with the politicians was not so easy.

'In those days politicians didn't accept the need for security as they do now. That attitude made the job very difficult. Mr McMahon accepted it more than had Prime Ministers Holt or Gorton. Of

course the situation is so much different now with the need for security being so readily accepted', he said.

Mr Sharp's overseas work also included six months at the Australian Embassy in Saigon in 1963.

'I can't complain about the travel during my police work. If it hadn't been for my work with the VIP Escort Squad I might never have met my wife who was with the Department of Foreign Affairs and on Mr McMahon's staff', he said.

And how does this long-serving officer see the AFP of today? 'The force has got a lot bigger and more sophisticated', he said. 'We didn't have the drug area when I was in the Commonwealth Investigation Service.'

'Police are having to do a lot more now with drugs, organised crime and big frauds on government departments.'

'The area of work covered by the AFP is enormous now and the job in general is probably a lot tougher'.

On the issue of corruption Mr Sharp said AFP officers were probably fortunate because they were not generally in as close contact with the public as the state police in the major cities and so were not as prey to the same temptations. He said Canberra had community policing but the ACT community had nowhere near the drug, prostitution and crime problems of Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane.

Retirement

Mr Sharp said leaving the AFP would give him more time for what had become his main hobby: 'I've been doing carpentry for the past 12 years. I've done a few jobs for some of my mates on the force and now that the word is out that I'm going I'm sure there'll be a few people knocking at my door looking to have a job done. After all, they're all good detectives aren't they?'