

TED RICHARDS - from the ranks to Commissioner

By former Superintendent Don Bosman

When Ted Richards was appointed Commissioner of the Capital Territory's police force on 5 October 1955, he went down in history as the first territory member to be promoted from the ranks to that level.

Former Commissioner Richards, now 84, still remembers the occasion with justifiable pride.

In fact, there's not much of his 37 years of police work he didn't recall as he sat in the house in the Canberra suburb of Ainslie in which he and his wife Anne have lived since 1937.

His knowledge of the history of policing in the Capital Territory is intimate and the mark he left on the progress of ACT policing is undisputed.

Ted was born on 3 July 1905 in St. James, a small town in Victoria's

wheatbelt south-west of Albury, son of a blacksmith, a trade Ted also learned. He started his working life at 15, as a wheat-carter.

In 1911 his father sold up the blacksmith business and bought the property next door when the owner, George Coles, moved from the district to establish the Coles empire. His father bought a further 1100 acres of land and established a wheat-carting business in the Riverina.

"That's where I cut my teeth, clearing the land and cutting timber," Ted says.

Different future

But he realised his future lay in other directions and he joined the Victoria Police on 15 November 1928. It is said that he saw his cousin, a member of the



Commissioner Ted Richards

force, wearing a gold watch and he decided that if the pay was that good he, too, was going to enlist.

He served for 10 years in the Melbourne District at Kyabram, Victoria Docks and then at Russell Street where he had two years with the wireless patrol and two years in plainclothes.

It was in these latter years that he received two commendations, one in 1937 for perseverance, ability and cooperative efforts displayed with other members which resulted in the arrest and conviction of a persistent housebreaker.

In 1938 he was again commended for intelligence, perseverance, zeal and ability displayed with two other members resulting in the arrest of two other active housebreakers.

Ted was sworn in by the Commissioner at the time, Brigadier General Thomas A. Blamey, later Field Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey, Commander of Australian forces in World War 11. Ted served for a period as his orderly.

"I learned one thing from him and that was always to address your envelopes correctly," Ted said. "The General refused to look at mail that was incorrectly addressed."

He married Anne in 1936 and on their honeymoon in Canberra she persuaded him to call in to see the Chief Officer of the Police in the Territory, Colonel H.E. Jones. Anne's relatives lived in Sydney and her interest for him to join the police in Canberra was understandable.

Important step

In 1938 a vacancy occurred and he resigned from the Victoria police with a certificate of exemplary conduct. He joined the territory police on 15 February 1938 and began the most important part of his career that was to lead him to become the first police Commissioner to be appointed from the ranks in the



Constables Ted Richards, left, and David MacKay shortly after joining the Victoria Police in 1928.

Capital Territory.

It was during the same year that the title of 'The Territory for the Seat of the Government' was amended to the 'Australian Capital Territory'. Ted proudly displays his original identity medallion bearing the Australian Coat of Arms and the words 'Commonwealth Police' and the royal crown and his force number 21 on the obverse.

He was the 14th policeman in the force and was joined by his best friend, David MacKay, also from Victoria Police, who was issued with number 22. His brother-in-law Neil Gillies joined after World War II, receiving number 34.

Promotion to Senior Constable followed in 1941. However, with the war at a critical stage, Ted applied for a commission in the Administration of the RAAF (Service Police). He joined with MacKay and was appointed Pilot Officer the following year after attending a RAAF training school set up at Trinity College, Melbourne University.

He was elevated to Acting Flying Officer and finally to Squadron Leader, Assistant Provost Marshal.

From the headquarters at Adelaide, Ted travelled to Darwin and Alice Springs visiting units and carrying out investigations.

Fired two shots

In 1944, while at the base in Adelaide, he was shot by an 18-year-old imposter wearing an RAAF uniform. Ted realised the youth was not well by his incoherent speech and offered to take him to hospital, but he pulled out a gun. He fired and the bullet penetrated Ted's epaulette. During a struggle, a second shot struck Ted in the groin, breaking his pelvis. Ted finally disarmed the youth.

Meanwhile, in Canberra, Federal policing was having its troubles.

In 1942, the Attorney-General initiated a departmental inquiry into the administration of the force under the command of Colonel Jones.

Ted says this was brought about by prevailing dissatisfaction among members of all sections of the force — the Peace Officer Guard, Commonwealth Investigation Service and the members performing general policing.

Deputy Commissioner Tom Lynch, of the NSW Police, conducted the inquiry and recommended that the ACT police component separate from the other services and operate under its own Commissioner.

Ted was called back from the RAAF to give evidence before the inquiry.

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Early days in the Victoria Police. Ted Richards, top right, as a piper member of the Victoria Police Highland Pipe Band. He's pictured with Chief Commissioner A. Duncan, front left, Inspector A. McKenzie, front right, and R. Bennett.

After the separation in 1943, Ted and David MacKay, after a number of attempts, obtained their release from the RAAF and returned to the police in Canberra. Ted received a promotion to Sergeant shortly after, while MacKay served with the then Governor-General, the Duke of Gloucester, until the end of his term of office. He finally left the police in 1949, opening a hardware store in Lonsdale Street, the forerunner of the BBC hardware stores.

Change in control

Recruiting continued, with new members being sent individually to courses in Sydney and Melbourne whenever vacancies occurred.



Ted Richards is proud of his original identity medallion which bears the Australian Coat of Arms and the words "Commonwealth Police".

Ted Richards progressed up the promotion ladder in 1946 to commissioned rank of Inspector, followed by Senior Inspector in 1951.

In 1950, control of the police moved from the Attorney-General to the Department of the Interior. The Secretary of the Department then decided that recruits would be sent in batches for training so that the best recruit of each course could be awarded the lowest force number. It was at this time decided that the force needed its own cap badge to replace the Commonwealth Police badge still being worn. The task fell to Harry Luton, a member of the force, who, after a number of attempts, had a final design accepted which is well known today and was worn right up to the time of the amalgamation in 1979.

"The transfer was in the best interest of the force and by 1962 we had progressed with training, development of traffic and detectives," Ted says.

"Ranks and branches had been formulated and good conditions, first-class equipment and transport had been acquired. We were then well on the way with the planning of the new headquarters."

Ted was appointed Commissioner on 5 October 1955.

For his organisation of police protection for the first tour of Australia by a reigning sovereign, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, in 1954, he received the award Member of the Victorian Order (MVO).

Continued on page 12

From the ranks to Commissioner

- Continued from page 11

New badges

September 1961 saw him attending the 30th General Assembly of Interpol (ICPO) held in Denmark. After the two-week conference he stopped over in Paris and it was there that he first sighted the pocket badges worn by the French gendarmes on their right pocket. At his request, samples were sent to him and he designed a pocket badge which was later worn by members of the ACT Police. A similar style of badge is worn today in the AFP.

Looking back on his early days of policing, Ted recalls that he had not had the opportunity of serving in a decent police building and, although deeply involved in the planning of the new headquarters in London Circuit, he retired in January 1966 before it was officially opened and occupied in December the same year.

He worked many long hours in the service and even kept a diary which reflected that he accumulated five years of unpaid overtime in 19 years of service.

"In Melbourne, you worked 13 days out of 14, take it or leave it, when I first joined," he said. On the other hand, he remembers being offered free accommodation or 2 shillings and sixpence in lieu as a subsidy when he arrived in Canberra.

It was an interesting time for policing, he recalls.

"I shall never forget one incident," he said. "A young general-hand at Duntroon somehow conned a young female accountant to go for a walk with him and in the hills he sexually assaulted her and eventually returned to his quarters.

"The young girl complained to her mother who, armed with a riding crop, sought out the villain. She found him in a shower cubicle and set about him, giving him the thrashing of his life.

"Later, the general-hand appealed to the police for protection which he received in the form of seven years' imprisonment imposed on him by the court."

Record of history

Apart from leaving his mark on the progress of ACT policing, Ted is credited with the preparation of the article entitled 'History of the Australian Capital Territory' which he presented to the Canberra and District Historical Society in 1959 after years of research.



Memories of Ted Richards' Air Force days. Ted, right, is pictured with his close friend David MacKay, centre, and Warrant Officer Willis Richards.

This excellent record of the early history has been the source of many articles since written in police journals and magazines. In fact, it was the main source of information resulting in the publication of a supplement to *Platypus* edition No.20 of February 1988. The late Inspector John Friend, who presented the article, readily acknowledged the research of Mr Richards.

All those members who served with Ted refer to him as one of nature's gentleman. It is stated that he has never been prone to the use of expletives and instead frequently substituted the term 'floggit', a nickname by which he soon became known to all in the force.

With his intimate knowledge of the history of policing in the Capital Territory, Ted is quick to point out: "It is

always said and written that Sergeant Cook was the first policeman to start policing in Canberra, when in fact it was Stuart at Molonglo."

Records show Constable John W. Stuart, a member of the NSW Police, arrived on 22 January 1922 to take over the new police station at Molonglo. It was on 4 May 1923 that Sergeant Phillip J. Cook, of Kiandra NSW Police, took over from Stuart.

Sergeant Cook was appointed to the police force in the Territory, with 10 other Constables, on 28 September 1927, but ironically was only sworn in on 28 January 1929.

The traditions of policing continued in the Richards family with Ted's son Alastair (Mick) Richards, who retired recently as Superintendent in the ACT Region of the AFP.