

# A VERY BIG COG LEAVES THE AFP

By Philip Castle

**W**HEN Percival Daniel McConaghy was eight he used to hide in the bushes opposite the Oakleigh Police Station in Melbourne and watch the constables coming out on their bicycles wearing their bell-jar caps. He dreamed of being a police officer.

"I'd always wanted to be a policeman and I've no regrets. There's never been a day I haven't wanted to come to work," he said recently.

June 6 was his last day after 41 years of police service. There would be few police in Australia who could claim that length of service as most did not join at age 19 as Val McConaghy did and only a few survive the stress of policing to reach age 60 in good health.

His father, Percival Senior, is 90, and still leading a full life. To distinguish him from his father he became known as Val. He has been honoured with the Queen's Police Medal, the Queen's Police Long Service and Good Conduct Medal and the National Medal.

Not surprisingly he is not happy about retiring and would willingly carry on, but that's just not possible under the present system.

"I have to retire," he said. "I'd like to see the situation where retirement was left to the discretion of the Commissioner. There has been a trend for police officers to go out early often on medical grounds. I think that has been mainly caused by stress. There have only been about six officers I have known in my 40 years who have retired at age. Fortunately I have had good health and my parents haven't been worried by stress. I refused to be stressed. My father advised me when quite young that if someone or something has got you worried then you are beaten."

Mr McConaghy has been Assistant Commissioner in charge of ACT Policing since April 1982. He accompanied his father to Canberra in 1939 when he was 10. His father worked as the engineer at the Canberra Steam Laundry and worked until he was 75.

Mr McConaghy went to Canberra's historic Ainslie Primary School and then Canberra High School. He left in 1945



Assistant Commissioner Val McConaghy. (Picture by Sen. Const. Wayne McConaghy)

and for a year joined the Federal Public Service and then joined the NSW Police Force on 14 July 1947 because it accepted recruits at 19. He couldn't join the ACT Police Force until he was 21. After two weeks' training he was put on the beat in Bondi Junction working from Waverly Station.

Those who know him associate him with motorcycles. But it wasn't so much a love of motorcycles that got him onto police bikes but a dislike of walking. Until Sydney he had not ridden motorcycles.

"In 1947 it was the days of the beats when you had to go from call-box to call-box," he said. "There was too much walking and I used to see my mates going past on their bikes and I thought that was what I wanted to do."

For a young lad partly growing up in the country town atmosphere of Canberra the beat around Bondi Junction became a good training ground.

"I grew up very quickly then . . . As a beat constable you had to work it out yourself. At Bondi Junction you would get a fight every 100 yards. You must understand that I found myself walking there on my own, on night shift with only one month's service."

Did he get any floggings? "No, I guess I was lucky but there were close ones."

After that introduction he spent the second year of his NSW Police Service as a divisional motorcyclist at Bondi. His training consisted of the initial two weeks, nine months at a station and then a six weeks' training course at the college at Penrith. After two years and almost as soon as he had reached 21 he joined the ACT Police Force on Monday 10 September 1949.

"I was actually still a member of both police forces then," he said. "On the first day I suggested I go back to Sydney for the two week's training but they said 'No, you have done that' so I began duty that day as a general duties constable. The Chief Officer was Mr Reid and there were about 60 officers and we were in the Jolimont Building on the present-day Jolimont site. The building came from Jolimont in Melbourne, hence its name today. Down the other end was the Census Office and the Court of Petty Sessions. They were built later in the same style as the Police barracks."

It was only about five months before he found himself back on the bikes to become the first solo ACT Police motorcyclist to go on patrol. Until then there had been two Harley Davidson side-car motorcycles and Mr McConaghy took delivery of one of the new Thunderbirds.

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It was also the last time he effectively worked night shift.

What was policing in Canberra like in the late 1940s and 1950s?

"It wasn't really all that quiet and the place was full of single men," he said. "There was a lot of building going on and hostels and there was a great deal of loneliness which led to drunkenness, particularly around the hostels of Capital Hill, Hillside, Riverside and Fairbairn. The Hotel Kingston was the main drinking hole and boasted of having the biggest bar sales outside the metropolitan area. There was 6 o'clock closing and the pick-up going round was a Green Chevrolet panel van. It was mostly street crime at this stage. Civic was very quiet. The main entertainment was either the pictures or the Saturday night dances at the Albert Hall. There were no clubs as such.

"The traffic patrols mostly controlled speeding. It was a country town and we all knew each other," he said. "We were gentle with the public; we didn't charge them unless it was serious and took circumstances into account and adopted a sensible attitude. I think that has carried through until today.

"Yes, I do regret the passing of the old style of policing which allowed an officer to take some summary action. Street hooliganism often was dealt with by the officer on the spot rather than taking it to court. It's a pity in some ways that's still not done. However the average police officer was allowed a lot more latitude.

"There were not as many restrictions as there are now on constables but in many ways the policing problems are still the same. There was a lot less paper work. There would have to be at least 10 times more paper work required of an officer in today's police."

He cites as an example the practice of taking drunks into custody and, when picked up, they were often delivered home. One particular man indicated his house but asked if the officers could put him through the window to avoid disturbing anyone. The only problem was that it was the wrong house.

"We used to do pretty much the same then as today," he said. "We'd patrol around the suburbs and by the mid 50s and into the 60s a large building program had developed. This meant that considerable work developed from building sites thefts.

"But the average citizen in Canberra has not changed much. Perhaps the unruly and disruptive element is more aggressive than was the case then and certainly the legislation changes have made it more difficult for the police officer to combat crime. The various legislative changes such as the Com-

plaints (AFP) Act have given the criminal far more opportunity to resist police action.

"Police have lost in recent times with the removal of the consorting laws which allowed us to chase up known criminals for conspiring together and the drinking in a public place provisions. This allowed us to take action when drunkenness was occurring at inappropriate times and in very public places. Boozing was not a feature of this town in public areas and it was policed with discretion.



*Pictured here with Val is his son Wayne, who joined the ACT Police in 1972. As Val had acquired the nickname 'Cogs' from his motorcycle days, Wayne became known as 'Sprocket'. Wayne's seven year old son answers to 'Spanner' or 'Tooth'.*

"There was the occasional serious assault and I entered the CIB at the time of the murder of Miss Beverly Ann Keyes, a hotel receptionist, who was murdered in her bed in 1960, for which a male cook was convicted.

"House break-ins were unusual. I never locked my back door in Canberra until about 10 years ago. I think the real change in crime came in Canberra in the early 1970s with drugs and then the hard drugs brought a new element of serious crime which we see today. This also brought with it the violence. Our first drug squad officer, Charlie Kent, was appointed in the early 70s. I've never charged anyone with a drug offence because my officer rank had by then taken me from the street."

Mr McConaghy was transferred to the CID in 1957 and became a designated detective in 1958 where he worked until he became a traffic sergeant in 1962. He returned to the CID for another two years in 1965 and then returned to the traffic division. He became its OIC as an Inspector in 1970 and later as a Superintendent until 1976 when he became the general duties OIC until 1979.

It was during this time that he believed the ACT Police achieved its professionalism.

"It was in the late 1960s that the Police Force began to change with the appointment of Mr Roy Wilson as Commissioner in 1968," he said. "He re-introduced examinations where performance became the criteria for advancement rather than just seniority. It was under Wilson that the ACT Police Force became a professional force. It was a very close-knit force and proud. You couldn't become a ser-

geant unless you passed the exams and these included aspects of management. I very much supported these changes."

Mr McConaghy is loyal to the job and his officers and for 25 years was active in Police Association matters, first in 1956 as the secretary until 1965, and through this period until 1978 was a member of the Police Arbitral Tribunal.

"Quite early in the piece I took an interest in our industrial conditions which were kept better than anywhere else in Australia," he said. "I served for about 25 years on the Police Arbitral Tribunal and we didn't lose one submission during that time."

Many will recall the heady days of demonstrations in Canberra beginning in the mid-1960s, first over the Vietnam War, and then about South African apartheid and Aboriginal rights. These centred around the Australian National University with protests outside Parliament House, the Lodge, the South African Embassy, US Embassy and marches through Civic. The ACT Police and demonstrator relationship was friendly, almost in the fashion of a

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football contest. Demonstrator organisers and police would consult beforehand and virtually agree on strategies. The Festival of Aquarius and the Day of Rage in May 1971 changed all that. On that day there were more arrested than had ever occurred in one day in Australia.

"The Commissioner placed the control of all demos under the traffic branch as he considered it a traffic problem and as I was in charge of traffic it became my problem," he said. "The demonstration era became an extremely volatile situation. This was unusual for Canberra. The police were excellent. It was hard to appreciate the situation where during the Springbok Tour Manuka Oval was ringed with barbed wire with more than



*Sergeant McConaghy, Traffic Branch 1964.*

400 police officers, our own and NSW, with smoke bombs going off."

Looking out his city headquarters office he said. "It's hard to realise that this police headquarters was held at siege by hundreds of chanting demonstrators throwing bricks and items at the building and those guarding it. I think that would be the only time in Australia's police history that a large station was besieged in that way. It was during the Day of Rage and ended with a police baton charge down University Avenue towards the ANU. There were more than 250 people locked up in one day and more than 350 during the week's festival. There were people from out of town some 10,000 of whom were camped at the Showground. It remained quite serious after that . . . a new element had changed the nature of demonstrations and we saw some nasty incidents outside Parliament House during the Aboriginal Embassy protest era too."

*Platypus 22, July 1988*

With the formation of the Australian Federal Police in October 1979, Mr McConaghy was promoted to Chief Superintendent in charge of the CID (South Eastern NSW and the ACT) Division until 1980 when he became the OIC of Eastern Division based in Sydney. He was posted back to the ACT in November 1980, first as acting Assistant Commissioner in charge of Operations which included the ACT, and then promoted permanently on 14 April 1982.

One of the highlights of his career he felt was his Churchill Scholarship which he undertook in 1975 when he visited the California Highway Patrol, the Chicago Police, the London Metropolitan Police and the Central Midlands Police in the UK during 14 weeks.

"This was a great opportunity to broaden my ideas about policing and cemented my views that we were actually doing quite well ourselves," he said. "I did pick up some new initiatives, particularly Unit Beat policing which we then set up in Belconnen . . . in fact this is one of the few regrets that I have. I would liked to have seen it properly introduced in the whole of the ACT where the police officers actually get out and regularly meet the public and get to know them. It means the commands are split and given a greater association with the public. It is very labour intensive and does require a greater ratio of police to the population. I am pleased that Neighbourhood Watch, which I have implemented there, has seen a flattening out of the number of break-ins. There are lots of attempted break-and-enters which means there is more prevention

and of course the NRMA has just announced that house insurance premiums have been reduced."

#### **About the future?**

"I think there has been a big move towards professionalism, not just in AFP or ACT policing, but generally throughout Australia," he said. "A young person joining today has a lot more study ahead of them than we had. The job is still the same in the sense that the officer has to protect life and property. The drug menace is still a major problem and computer crime and the use of computers will be much more important in the future. There are the new crimes of large scale frauds and where criminals become active in a number of different areas.

"The job is not really more dangerous but it is more difficult. I believe the general public has become sick and tired of their houses being ransacked and putting up with loutishness in the streets. We see the politicians taking notice in recent times on law and order issues and I think we will see changes back towards more protection of people and their property.

"People are also objecting to the penal system and the attitude of giving bonds to criminals and not incarceration."

About the future of ACT policing he said,

"I believe it would be a retrograde step to go back to an ACT Police Force. A few years ago I went to Canada at the request of the Commissioner and looked at the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and their contract system. Their arrangements would work here. I understand the system would be acceptable here and was acceptable to the former Police Liaison Committee. The effect of self government should be to have a closer relationship with the ACT Administration. The new Commissioner has insisted on that and it is happening. But the plans for policing in the event of self government is a political question."

About the establishment of a casino in Canberra he said he had personally no objectives but it would have an impact on policing.

"A casino would attract large amounts of money and with that there are other problems such as money laundering. There would have to be a close examination of those who visited it and used it. There would often be an element of criminals attracted to it."

Yes, if he had his time over again he would choose exactly the same career. He considers his best time was in charge of traffic in the late 60s and early 70s. He felt he had his best command of men as

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the Commissioner allowed him to pick those he wanted.

"It's been a marvellous career and I've had so many jobs that I have undertaken and I've enjoyed them all. I have a full expectation that the AFP will continue to strengthen. I know of no corruption in the ACT and if there was there is only one way to deal with it . . . harshly."

He is extremely proud that his only son Wayne joined the ACT Police in 1972. He and his wife Margaret, whom he married in 1950s, have also two daughters both living in Canberra — Diann, 31, a teacher educator, and Gail, 28, a nurse.

#### His plans for the future?

He's taken up golf but on his admission is too healthy to sit around in retirement. He has been too important a cog in ACT Policing not to find something worthwhile soon.



*Inspector Horrie Grangel (deceased) with First Constable Val McConaghy outside the Canberra Police Station, Jolimont Building, Civic, mid 1950s.*

## POLICE HISTORY

*by Chief Inspector Don Bosman*

In the past the history of policing has generally been sadly neglected and it is only in recent times that social historians, police officers and other interested parties have been motivated to record, for posterity, the policing role.

In 1985, in England, a Police History Society was founded and a year later Ray Bedford (Australian Federal Police — Brisbane) was nominated as the Australian representative and was instrumental in forming the Australian Branch of this Society. The Branch is going forward in leaps and bounds and it is a credit to his efforts that three Australian Branch journals, of a very high standard, have been published to date.

While serving on Christmas Island in 1982 I found some photographs in the police station depicting police activity on the island. In my efforts to date

and identify the photographs I became completely engrossed in the historical aspects of policing and as a result produced the publication entitled 'Christmas Island 1958-1983' covering the period since Australia obtained a mandate to administer the Territory.

To produce a collection of information with supporting photographs in nine months, in time for the 25th anniversary, was quite a task but without the full support of former serving police officers the publication would still be on the drawing board. It is with this support in mind that I make this appeal to all past and serving members of both the former Australian Capital Territory and Commonwealth Police to assist in coming forward with material that can be used either in the AFP Museum and/or in future proposed publications. Indeed any photograph of significance to policing in Australia would be of interest and may be of value in a wider, national context.

I recall when I was on the island I made a similar appeal and suggested Islanders search for photographs that they may have stored in shoe boxes. However, I received a number of comments that the proper place to retain photographs was in albums. So if you do have photographs of interest in your albums (shoe boxes) please come forward to assist us in this all important project. It is important, however, that you endeavour as far as possible to identify both the date, the circumstances, the scene and individuals encaptured in the photos.

In preparation for the anticipated rush, a member of the AFP Museum Committee has been appointed in each Region who will ensure that all photographs contributed will be reproduced and the original/s returned to the owner.

AFP Museum representatives are:  
ACT Region: Const. Cheryl Richardson.  
Eastern Region: Station Sergeant Vince Dainer.  
Southern Region: Senior Sergeant Colin Arnold.  
Tasmania Region: Senior Sergeant John Jennings.  
Central Region: Inspector Brian Guest.  
Western Region: Inspector Richard Maughan.  
N.T. Region: Senior Constable Murray Geale.  
Northern Region: Senior Constable Ray Bedford.



*A typical 'shoe box' find that would interest the AFP Museum, supplied by Senior Sergeant Vern Chandler of himself (far left) on duty on Norfolk Island in 1975.*