

A New Force

By Jeffrey Woodgate

On 1 July 1990, the most significant change to ACT policing since the formation of the AFP is set to begin. That's when the new ACT Government becomes responsible for the territory's police and court system.

At present, the Minister for Justice has indicated that he favours the AFP contracting out its services to the new Government under conditions similar to those in Canada where the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, also a national force, police most of Canada's provinces on a contractual basis.

The Assistant Commissioner (ACT Region) will become effectively the 'Commissioner of the ACT Police'. Although members of the Region are an integral part of the AFP, they already have a great deal of autonomy in their operation.

This autonomy will be more apparent when they become accountable to another tier of government, in addition to the Federal Minister for Justice.

The AFP has been policing Canberra since 1979 — one of the few places where AFP men and women can be seen in blue uniforms performing familiar community policing duties. They also police

the Commonwealth territory of Jervis Bay on the NSW coast, the external Australian territories of Norfolk and Christmas Islands, and provide a uniformed contingent to the UN peace-keeping force on the island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean.

The 720 men and women who today police the ACT are generally younger than the average member of the former ACT Police, many of whose members now are involved in national policing in central office, the regions or overseas.

New force, new name

It is a vastly different police commitment to the one which existed when the site for the national capital was annexed from NSW in 1911. At that time, members of the NSW police covered the territory in conjunction with their duties in the surrounding southern districts.

In a memorandum to the Attorney-General on 19 July 1927, the Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department, Mr Robert Garran, pointed out that the policing of Canberra was being performed by a sergeant and four constables. He recommended that the numbers be increased and the function removed entirely from State control and placed under



the direction of Major H.E. Jones.

It appears that Cabinet took only six days to approve the recommendations and also a strength of 18 men — one sergeant first class, two sergeants second class and 15 constables.

The new force was given the name 'the Commonwealth Police (Federal Capital Territory)', more commonly referred to as the Federal Capital Territory Police.

Major Jones, in a memorandum to the Solicitor-General on 20 September 1927, recommended that Sergeant Phillip Cook be offered the position of Sergeant First Class. He appears to have become the first active member of the new force.

Efforts to fill the rest of the positions began almost immediately with the District Superintendent of Commonwealth Peace Officers, Sydney, directing Acting Sergeant William Tandy and nine other Peace Officers to transfer to Canberra.

Resident Constable

When Government House was occupied by the Governor-General, Lord Stonehaven, during 1927, a member of the Federal Capital Territory Police, Constable Edward Bresnan, was stationed at the gates during the day, but in 1938 the post was taken over by Peace Officer Bill Wintle, of Melbourne.

On 9 September 1931 Constable William Fellows was transferred to take charge of Norfolk Island, which was then administered from Canberra.

During November the following year it was decided that because Jervis Bay had



The AFP's first Commissioner, Sir Colin Woods, makes the acquaintance of Constable Kenny Koala, a popular figure with children in the ACT community relations program. Over the years, the puppet has played an important role in safety education for children.

become a holiday resort and the lessee of premises known as 'The Wardroom and Single Officers' Quarters' had been granted a liquor licence, it was necessary to provide a resident constable at Jervis Bay.

Federal Capital Territory Police began duty there several weeks later.

More members were added to the force during Sergeant Cook's term and by 1937 the total strength, including Jervis Bay and Norfolk Island, was 20.

When the Federal Capital Territory was renamed in 1938, the title became Commonwealth Police (Australian Capital Territory), better known as the ACT Police.

Mr Robert Reid, formerly a member of the Northern Territory Police, took up duty as Inspector-in-Charge on 14 July 1943 and five months later was appointed Chief Officer of Police on the retirement of Colonel Jones.

Wartime changes in criminal activities highlighted the need for investigatory functions to be increased and a Plainclothes Branch was established in July 1945. Constable B.A. Rochford was appointed a plainclothes constable and the following year, Sergeant D MacKay took charge. The growth of detective activities saw the name of the branch change to Detective Branch, and still later, the Criminal Investigation Branch.

First policewoman

The first policewoman, Alice Clarke was appointed to the force on 18 April 1947, the same year that legislation was enacted to provide for a Police Arbitral Tribunal to determine all matters relating to the pay and conditions of service of members.



A 1936 photo of Federal Capital Territory Police members. Lieut.-Colonel H.E. Jones is fourth from left in the front row, while second left front is Sergeant-in-Charge P. Cook. First left back row is Acting Sergeant W.J. Tandy.

On 1 July 1950, control of the force was removed from the Attorney-General's Department and placed under the then Department of the Interior. In the next 29 years, many changes evolved under the direction of a succession of dedicated commissioners.

Mr Reid retired from the force in August 1955 and was succeeded by Senior Inspector Edward Richards as Commissioner. During his command, a steady growth of a Federal capital identity developed and the name of the force was changed in 1957 to, simply, the ACT Police. Canberra's population was still less than 20,000 at that time. Ted Richards remained Commissioner until January 1966, when Mr L. W. Powley, the then Superintendent of Police, took over. He, too, retired five months later.

Mr Roy Wilson, a Senior Inspector in the South Australia Police, became

Commissioner in June and remained head of ACT Police for 11 years before handing over to Mr Reg E. Kennedy, who came through the ranks after joining as a constable in 1946. Mr Kennedy was the last ACT Police Commissioner and when the AFP was formed, became its first Deputy Commissioner.

For the ACT Region, the most significant change to policing in recent years has been the regionalisation of command. The ACT has been divided into three districts: North (Belconnen), City (Civic) and South (Woden and Tuggeranong), each headed by a District Commander who is responsible for deploying available resources.

Under the AFP the community of the ACT has enjoyed the benefits of great progress in community policing. One of the most far-reaching has been the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme, which has seen the incidence of crime against property drastically reduced since its inception.

The Children's Services Ordinance brought new procedures for dealing with young people in crisis and the establishment of a Sexual Assault Unit, to make first contact with victims, has proved its effectiveness, along with the Domestic Violence Crisis Service.

The opening of AFP shopfronts in major shopping centres at Belconnen and Civic, with plans for others at Woden and Tuggeranong, has brought the role of community policing back into the everyday lives of residents.

All have been significant developments in policing to meet the ever-increasing changes in the nature of crime. ■



The Australian Capital Territory Police Headquarters, Northbourne Avenue, in 1958, with, from left, the then Commissioner, Mr L. Powley, and members Harry Luton, Bob Prigg, Charlie Kent and Jack Dealy. Superintendent Bob Prigg is still serving in the AFP.