

# Colin Winchester

## *a friend remembers*

“An Australian in the best sense of the word” is how the then Acting Assistant Commissioner (ACT Region) Alan Mills, described Colin Winchester for *Platypus Magazine* in a commemorative edition that followed the 13 January 1989 funeral of the slain officer.

“He was an Australian through and through; a man with a love of the bush who had been on many hunting and fishing expeditions in Western NSW with his mates,” he said.

“Col had our best national characteristics, he had that irreverent quality of the Australian. You could say he was a rough diamond and a larrikin in the best sense of those terms.

“But overall he was a professional; he was totally competent in his profession and he projected, and maintained, high standards.

“His death is a tremendous loss, not only to his family and friends but also to the whole police profession in Australia. There is outrage felt by police and decent members of the community everywhere that such a man could be so brutally killed.

“He was certainly no ‘grey flannel’ person. His murder gives us all a real sense of loss because Col absolutely exuded vitality. I still expect him to walk through the door at any moment.”

His death was particularly poignant for Mr Mills because they both joined the old ACT Police within four months of each other in 1962.

“To a large extent our careers followed one another in different roles and we overlapped quite often at different times,” he said.

In the early days of the AFP Mr Winchester had developed the policies which placed the organisation on a good footing.

“He would work extremely long hours to ensure the AFP was made into a professional organisation,” he said. “There was very little indecision about him and he was very rarely wrong because he would take counsel before making a decision, and once having made it, stuck to it.

“His regard for his troops was typified by his behaviour last Christmas Day in Canberra when he came in from leave to visit the officers on duty in the various stations in the ACT.”

The Assistant Commissioner’s no-nonsense, “fair dinkum” approach had been typified by one event when he had been involved in selecting officers to go on courses to become investigators.

“Col held hundreds of interviews around the country to assess the officers’ potential and I remember when one hopeful had the



*Assistant Commissioner  
Colin Winchester*

temerity to put on the application form that he had extensive court experience.

“Col probed him on this point in the best police manner and the member confessed that his ‘extensive court experience’ had consisted of having been a court orderly for some time.

“Winchester rapidly rose to his full height and ordered the unfortunate to leave the room immediately! Needless to say that particular member was not successful in his application.

“Col often used to say the two most stressful occupations were mining, number one, and policing, number two, and from his days as a mine worker at Captains Flat to his time as a senior AFP officer he had worked in both of them.

“But Col could work under stress and it stimulated him.”

Mr Mills said Col would also be remembered as a first class family man who was extremely proud of his family.

Another endearing characteristic was his wit.

“He was a man who had an endless supply of stories and virtually all of them had an Australian flavour. He would often have his audience rocking in the aisles,” he said.

Mr Mills smiled at the memory.. but his expression changed as he made his final remark: “Assistant Commissioner Colin Winchester’s death is the end of the age of innocence for Australia.”

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