The Northern Territory Police Museum and Historical Society Incorporated

November 2023

Citation

REQUIEM FOR THE ROPER

Nesta Cubis - Post Mistress of The Roper Bar Post Office 1966 - 1971
and
Wayne Cubis, Police Constable at the Roper Bar 1966—1971

By Anthea Hartley

I came to The Territory in January 1964 with a friend with whom I had been nursing in Sydney, I was twenty-three years old, had done four years of my general training and one year of midwifery. I decided to try The Northern Territory because I was looking for somewhere different to work and The Territory paid the best wages for nurses at that time. It was an impulsive decision and I had no idea what I was letting myself in for. I remember the day that I arrived in Darwin in the height of the Wet Season: my friend and I had been to a wedding in Mt Isa en route to Darwin and I was wearing a very unsuitable dress and coat ensemble and a beautiful bouffant hair do as was the style in the sixties.. Whilst in Darwin I met and married my husband, Wayne, who was employed as a member of the local police force. He was born in New South Wales in 1940 and came to The Territory from Sydney after seeing an advertisement in the newspaper, he was about twenty-three years old then, he joined the police force and served in Darwin for a couple of years prior to our marriage and moving to Katherine after our son David was born.

I applied for a job at the hospital in Katherine and was met at the airport by the matron who asked me, as I stepped off the plane: "When can you start?" They were desperately short staffed and once I had found someone to care for David I started nursing in Katherine and remained there for a couple of years. Wayne, meanwhile, applied for a posting at Timber Creek police station. He was disap-

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Died in the Line of Duty

John Charles Shirley

By Mark McAdie

Mounted Constable First Class
Date of Birth – 27th September 1856 in Ireland
Date of Death – 7th November 1883 - aged 27 years

John Charles Shirley joined the South Australian Police on the 10th March 1877 and transferred to the Northern Territory on the 1st July 1880.

Mounted Constable First Class Shirley served at Barrow Creek and was the first constable at the new Alice Springs Police Station when it opened on the 28th April 1879.

On the 29th August 1883 a teamster, Joseph Martin, was murdered at Lawson Creek, between Newcastle Waters and Powell Creek. A search party of seven men under the leadership of Mounted Constable First Class Shirley left Powell Creek on the 29th of October 1883, to search for the offenders. Nothing was heard from the searchers until one of the party, a Mr A M Giles, sent a message from Attack Creek on the 17th November 1883 that all of the party had perished, apart from himself and a native boy.

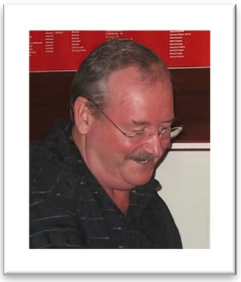
Mounted Constable Willshire from Alice Springs was given the task of locating the party and burying them.

Shirley Court in Alice Springs is named in honour of Mounted Constable Shirley.

Mounted Constable Shirley was the first NT Police Officer to die in the line of duty.

There is a memorial to Mounted Constable Shirley at the rest area at Attack Creek.

Chairman's Message



I have just read a copy of the first *Citation* dated December 1964, and I endorse the Editor's comments (Inspector Jim Mannion GM) made in the Editorial. He explained why the magazine was created:

"Primarily, it is our aim to produce a magazine that will be of real interest and give entertainment to both serving and former members – compiled principally by their efforts…. we hope, too, that the magazine will be capable of working its way out amongst the population at large."

Citation was published as an official publication of the Northern Territory Police Force and was sold for five shillings. It was replaced by other Northern Territory Police publications in the 1980s and the publication and editorial concept of *Citation* was revived by the founders of the Northern Territory Police Museum and Historical Society in 1995. Since then, it has been published irregularly, due to shortages of volunteers with an interest in its publication.

On taking the role of Chairman of the Society in November 2022, one of my goals has been to revitalise *Citation* and make it a regular publication for the benefit of those who serve and have served in the Force. It provides an insight into our policing history and achievements of those that have served, and for the population at large.

For 153 years the Northern Territory Police Force has been serving the Northern Territory, and this publication aims to become a regular feature of the policing narrative. We would like to provide our readers, in hard and digital format, with the stories relating to our history, real and true, mainly good but also some not-so-good.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to recognise the individuals involved in the creation of this edition and thank them for their commitment and dedication in reviving *Citation*. Special thanks to Pat King who has taken the lead role in this project.

Dr Gary Manison APM
Chairman
NTPMHS

Emails to the Editor

We welcome contributions from all our readers.

Please direct all your emails to the Editor of the Citation to:

Citation.Newsletter@proton.me

Requiem for the Roper

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pointed when he heard that our neighbours, Frank and Sondra, had been offered Timber Creek but was pleased when we were offered Roper Bar as an alternative. I had no idea where Roper Bar was, except that it was way out in the bush somewhere. As we prepared to move out to The Roper Bar, my colleagues at the hospital gave me, as a leaving present, a year's subscription to Time magazine. They obviously had a far better idea about where I was going than I did! In the bush you read everything you can lay your hands on, even the jam tin labels!

I'll never forget the day I set out for the the Roper: Wayne had gone out ahead of me to the police station to take over from Ian Evans and his wife Chris who had been posted there since 1964. I boarded the plane in Katherine, still with no real idea of where I was going, it was a Connellan Twin Bonanza and as I sat there with my small son on my lap I was terrified as I noticed the door tied onto the side of the aeroplane with a piece of rope. As it turned out I need not have worried, the door was actually a spare that was being delivered to one of the cattle stations en route to Roper Bar!

We station-hopped our way to The Roper, stopping at various properties along the way and travelling all over the God-forsaken bush until we finally arrived at The Roper Bar airstrip. As we circled and came into land my first glimpse was of the house standing beside a beautiful river, but there was nothing else in sight at all. It was so desolate, there was absolutely nothing else there. I thought "My God! Where have I come to?" I guess I was a bit scared but I bravely told myself: "Well, I'm going to live here for several years, so I had better make the best of it!" There was no sign of Wayne waiting to meet us at the airstrip, or of anybody else for that matter. Eventually an orange, Department of Works, truck arrived and the fellow driving it said

Roper Bar Police Station—1960's

"*Missus, you'd better hop in here!*" - which I did, clutching my baby in one hand and my suitcase in the other. And so I was delivered, somewhat unceremoniously, to the police station a mile further down the road. Wayne explained that he had been unable to meet me because Chris and Ian had taken off in the police vehicle to the neighbouring station, St Vidgeon, to say goodbye to the Howard family who were living there at the time.

The police station was a typical Northern Territory Department house virtually open on all sides and built on stilts. It consisted of a central room which was actually the police station office, this was partially sectioned-off from our living and dining area on one side, and the front bedroom overlooking the cairn to explorer Leichardt on the other. There was a small back bedroom, a kitchen, bathroom and toilet as well as a large verandah. Visitors to the station had to come up the back stairs, through the kitchen and dining room to get to the office. The front stairs were accessed via our bedroom, so there was very little privacy. We had no furniture of our own because our previous Department houses had been provided already furnished, as too was The Roper Bar police station supposed to have been. But, when I arrived I found an incredible hotch-potch of plastic "saucer" chairs, wardrobes without doors and for a side table there was a converted packing case which had been painted white and accommodated a pile of newspapers and a pot plant! There were three fridges upstairs in the dining area, each with a little freezer compartment, but nothing as modern as a large chest freezer. Of course we didn't have any 240 volt electricity, we depended on a 32 volt power generator with back-up batteries which meant that when the generators stopped we were able to have some light.

Apart from being the policeman's wife, I discovered on my arrival that I was also to be the official Post Mistress of The Roper Bar Post Office, a role for which I was totally unprepared. I was supposed to conform to the normal Post Office hours and if I needed to

leave the Post Office I had to get in touch with Katherine and seek permission which, of course, I never did. I was officially employed by the PMG and received a pittance for my efforts, hardly anybody could get to The Roper Bar to post a letter anyway. I was my own best customer, I wrote many letters home, with perhaps a small contribution from Urapunga Station and the official police mail. My duties involved tying-up the diminutive bundle of mail with a piece of string, placing it in an enormous mail bag which was also secured with string and then, to ensure maximum security, clamped it with a lead seal! This official, almost empty, mail bag was then handed to the pilot of the aircraft who exchanged if for another official bag which contained the incoming mail, which it was my duty to distribute. The Roper River Mission, St Vidgeon and the surrounding stations had their own private mail bags which they delivered and collected from the Roper River Mission airstrip twice a week.

As the official Post Mistress I was entrusted with a kitty of about twenty dollars worth of stamps and a pair of scales (the scales came in handy for weighing the baby, but little else!) The first time my PMG employers dutifully arrived from Adelaide to do an audit on my Post Office they enquired as to the whereabouts of my Receiving Slips. "What Receiving Slips?" I asked. Apparently I was supposed to have retained all the slips that I had received with each mail delivery. I explained that I had not realised that I was supposed to have kept them and that I had thrown them all away! This initial visit by my mentors occurred just before Christmas and I had used all the stamps in the kitty to send my Christmas cards, so that too was woefully depleted. The men from the PMG looked at me, sighed, and decided that they would be better off fishing than trying to do an audit! They caught a heap of barramundi and returned to Adelaide very satisfied!

We received a wide range of visitors at the police station from all walks of life. We didn't see many itinerant types, our visitors were mostly fairly well-heeled people who were not trying to see Australia on sixpence. They would arrive at the police station in a good vehicle and with a good caravan, mostly retired professional people who had read about the Roper's historic involvement in the laying of the Overland Telegraph and who wanted to explore and find some good fishing. They would call in at the police station to say "Hello!" and then drive on down to camp by the river. In those days you could camp anywhere because the Police Reserve was sixty-seven square miles and there were no restrictions. If we were away from the station when a visitor called, our police tracker would inform us: *"A Land Rover called in, Boss*" and he would write down in the sand the registration number of the vehicle. He couldn't read or write but he could copy. As far as our tracker was concerned, all four-wheel drive vehicles were Land Rovers, and all cars were Holdens! He always knew exactly were the visitors were camping and what they were doing, he'd say "*Oh Boss, a Land Rover came and those people live down at the Boat Landing*", he knew who was around and he kept an eye on everything and everyone. Of course we had regular visitors from neighbouring cattle stations: Urapunga, St Vidgeon, Roper Valley, Moroak and from the Roper Mission. They were all within Wayne's police area which extended from Numbulwar on the Rose River across almost to Borroloola, a vast distance for one police constable to patrol. The police station was a bit of a staging post for almost everybody: men from the government Fisheries Depart-

Roper Bar Police Station 1933 - with Mounted Constable Sheridan and his wife

ment would call in when they were in the area checking stocks and looking for poachers, the Water Resources people would drop by when they were out there checking water levels and the state of the river, croc shooters, fishermen and, later on, teams from the Works Department when work started on the roads. Local priests and churchmen, pilots and their passengers, all were made welcome at the police station in those days, everyone called in if they were passing through.

Occasionally we were a little surprised by some of our guests. The mail plane pilots stayed with us overnight twice a week, come Hell or high water they always made sure that they arrived at The Roper before last light. On one occasion they arrived unexpectedly with a female passenger who was less than impressed with the somewhat minimal accommodation that we could offer at the police station, there was no private accommodation and it was a matter of mucking-in with the rest of us.

She complained bitterly about having to overnight at The Roper Bar until eventually I pointed out to her that we didn't usually accommodate visitors, except the pilots, and that she was lucky to be offered food and accommodation at all. As the evening wore on the pilots, as was their usual routine when they overnighted at The Roper Bar, prepared to go fishing for barramundi. The success of this extra curricular sporting activity did nothing to enhance the smell in the cockpit on the flight home the next day! On this occasion they took the complaining woman passenger with them and introduced her to the delights of catching fresh water crocodiles on The Roper. By the time they returned to the police station she was completely hooked on The Roper! It transpired that she was a journalist for a magazine in South Australia and she was so grateful for having had such a fantastic time that she sent us a copy of an article she had written describing her wonderful stopover at Roper Bar. We were so thrilled and amazed because her visit, which started out as a complete disaster, turned into one of the highlights of her trip to the Northern Territory.

On another occasion, whilst I was at the house on my own, I heard a 'plane land at the airstrip but did not go to meet it because I had no vehicle and I didn't really feel like walking, besides we weren't expecting any guests that day. Shortly, two very nice, middle-aged ladies arrived at the house and I wondered what on earth I was going to do with them. I invited them in for the inevitable cup of tea and we started chatting. It turned out that one of them had been a contemporary trainee with the matron who had trained me during my general nursing course, it is a small world out in the bush! Having finished their tea, they walked back up the road to the airstrip and flew their 'plane away. It was, literally, a matter of them dropping in for a cuppa!

Another time Wayne and I arrived back at the house to be greeted by the tracker who said: "*Boss, that fellow's asleep in that bedroom.*" Wayne's hackles rose as he went up the stairs, prepared to take on this person who had dared to make himself at home in our bed! However, as it turned out, our 'Goldilocks" was a pilot who had become ill with food poisoning whilst flying solo and had made an emergency landing at The Roper Bar. I forget his name, but he kept in touch with us thereafter.

Wayne's duties included the registering of all the cars, guns and other routine paperwork so we were often visited by the local station people coming in to renew their various licences and complete a range of documentation. There were incidents from time to time: road accidents, murders and people going missing but such problems were rare then, largely because alcohol did not play a part in the lives of the Aborigines and neither was it readily available to the other people who lived and worked in the area. We would try to avoid becoming involved with Aboriginal politics, it was very difficult because there were grey areas between their tribal law and our law, but on the whole it was not too problematical.

Wayne would have to deal with a huge variety of situations, turning his rand to almost anything. He was responsible for the airstrip at The Roper Bar, for ensuring that there was sufficient fuel available for sale to visiting aircraft, this is where the mail 'plane landed and it was supposed to be an all weather runway where aircraft would land and take off even during wet weather.

Despite this, 'planes would get bogged and Wayne would be up at the airstrip pulling them out with the Toyota. The surrounding cattle stations and The Mission would also rely on The Roper Bar airstrip when their own airstrips were waterlogged and out of action. However, the road between the police station and the airstrip became impassable in The Wet and I can remember walking the mile to meet the mail 'plane, squelching along with the mud up to my knees. When Wayne was home, he would saddle up the horses and take the mules to fetch the mail, he wasn't. a bad rider either, but on one occasion he'd collected the mail and had it hooked on the pack saddles when the horses and mules

bolted.

I wouldn't be surprised if some of that mail is still lying out there in the long grass somewhere! On another occasion the medical plane arrived with a small Aboriginal boy on board who was suffering from muscular dystrophy. In those days the Health Department had a habit of just sending people home to the Mission without knowing, or caring, whether their airstrip was operational or not. In this case, the Mission airstrip was closed so the child had to be dropped off at the nearest place which was Roper Bar, and therefore promptly became Wayne's responsibility. I looked out of the window of the police station and there was Wayne coming down the road with this little black boy wobbling all over the place in front of him on the saddle. He brought the child in and sat him on the floor in the kitchen whilst arrangements were made to take him on down to the Mission by boat. Finally it was agreed that the people at the Mission would come and collect the child at the same time as they collected their mail, which had also arrived on the 'plane. The last we saw of the poor little fellow was him setting off on the twenty mile trip up the river to the Mission, wobbling all over the place because he had no control over any of his limbs. It was probably the greatest time this little child ever had in his whole life! It was some time before Wayne stopped carrying on about the Health Department being so stupid, he was really very kind and felt sorry for the little boy.

It could be very lonely at the police station, Wayne might be away for as long as two or three weeks at a time and I would be there on my own with David, who was three or four years old by now. Wayne usually tried to leave a tracker with me, or one of the trackers wives, but a lot of the time I was there by myself and there was nobody to talk to. The relationship between myself and the Aboriginals was friendly, but their life style and culture was vastly different to ours. In the beginning the wives would help in the house and we'd make sure that they and their children had clothes and we looked after them, but with the introduction of equal pay we could not afford to employ them officially. David always helped me, he'd line all the tracker's children up on the stairs to the kitchen and tell me that this one had a sore here, and someone else had a sore somewhere there, and so on. I was not officially employed as a nurse but my nursing skills were very useful. I applied to the Health Department to be employed in an official nursing capacity but they decided that we didn't have enough people to warrant a full time nurse. However, being a nurse, I had a medical kit which contained morphine, pethidine and snake anti-venom. Thankfully I never had to use the anti-snake venom because it can be very dangerous, especially if you're not sure what you are treating. There is always a great fear of snakes, but actually we saw very few indeed.

I did have to deal with the occasional medical emergency. One of the worst incidents was when a person from Roper Valley station arrived at the house one day and told us that one of the ringers had been out mustering when he had impaled his arm on the branch of a tree, it had penetrated right through his arm. We took the unfortunate bloke back to the police station in the Toyota and called the medical 'plane to come and fetch him and take him into to the hospital. He was a lovely young man and he made a full recovery from his accident.

My nursing skills came in handy again when I had to deal with a bloke from the Department of Works who was currently employed in our area. There was a big works camp at Hell's Gate where they were blasting to make a road through between Mataranka and The Roper Bar. The camp consisted of a number of men who camped in caravans and moved along the road as the construction progressed, they were self-sufficient with their own stores, water truck, generator, freezers and even their own camp cooks. It was a big operation. one of the men was brought in to me with a very bad leg, he had terrible cellulitis, the leg was quite enormous, swollen and infected and he had a high fever. I called up the medical 'plane to come and collect him and it was only as an afterthought that I mentioned to the pilot that the patient weighed-in at twenty stone! A very significant detail when dealing with light aircraft! Sometimes Wayne and I were invited to dinner at the Department of Works camp, I would never go up there on my own or uninvited because it was a camp full of men, but the dinners were very formal affairs. All the men would put on shirts or singlets and they would be very, very proper, there would be no swearing that evening! I was treated like a queen and everyone was most respectful!

Communications were very basic at the police station. We had a two way radio which was for official and emergency use only, no social chattering was allowed! I was terrified of the radio, frightened that I might call the wrong signs. We had a medical schedule twice a day when we could speak to the doctor, but for social communications we had to send telegrams via the radio. I don't recall a regular delivery of newspapers on the mail 'plane but occasionally we could pick up some news from the two-way radio, it

was rare and the reception was very poor indeed. We tended to lose touch with the outside world, as far as topical news was concerned we became used to not involving ourselves in current affairs, but I did miss that involvement terribly during our posting at Roper Bar.

Our greatest source of pleasure and entertainment was when we had the opportunity to make contact and socialise with our neighbours on the surrounding cattle stations. We would arrange get-togethers and parties but the really big thing was actually going into town, the major events being the Katherine Show and the Mataranka Races, these were very special times for everyone. The trip into Mataranka was one hundred and twenty miles and took in excess of five hours, the first part of the road to Roper Valley station was just a narrow bush track but from there onwards it improved slightly until we reached Elsey station where it became bitumen.

Christmas was a very happy time with plenty of interaction and social contact with friends and neighbours. I remember one year we spent Christmas with the Howards at St Vidgeon station, the men decided that we would have a “hungi”, which was a Hawaiian (or New Zealand) hole-in-the-ground oven with stones and a fire, the food is then cooked in banana leaves. We had a quarter of a beast, a whole pig, a barramundi, a bag of potatoes, onions and cabbages, the whole lot went into the ground oven and was covered and left to cook. We had carefully selected a clearing near the airstrip in which to site the “hungi” and the boys put the food on to cook at about mid-night on Christmas Eve, thinking that it would take about twelve hours to cook. However, the food was ready much earlier than was anticipated and the men had us all up at the crack of dawn to eat our Christmas lunch! We were all standing round this hole in the ground, which looked rather like a grave, whilst they shovelled all the food into two large galvanised iron tubs, the pig's head perched on top of one of the tubs, staring at us, which was a bit disconcerting.

We carried the food back to the house where we all sat down around the dining table and proceeded to eat out Christmas lunch - all day! It was certainly a Christmas with a difference!
Although the Roper Mission was fairly close by we did not involve ourselves very much, some times I would visit the shop there and Wayne would go on patrols in the area. The shop sold mostly tinned or packet food and a few fresh vegetables and fruit but it was rather expensive. Sometimes, when I visited the shop, the missionary's children would come over and say that their Mums would like me to go and visit them for morning tea. It made a welcome change for me because I didn't have a lot of contact with other women at the Roper Bar, so it was very pleasant to be able to accept their invitations.

We weren't active church-goers, in the bush one's particular choice of denomination made little difference. We would receive visits from ministers of many different denominations: The Church of England 'Bush Brothers" from Katherine would come to see us, the United Church minister came out once too. Father Ormand, the parish priest in Katherine, was another welcome churchman who called in at the police station. He arrived one day when all the Howards from St Vidgeon were staying with us at The Bar, they had come in to collect Father Ormand from the 'plane and take him back to St Vidgeon with them. Being Mexicans they were practising Roman Catholics and therefore members of Father Ormand's official "flock" and he would fly over to the homestead periodically to take Mass and hear Confessions. On this particular visit I had to warn him that, because of the limited amount of accommodation available, he would be sleeping in the back bedroom with all the children. He really was a most delightful man and said that he didn't mind at all because he was going to take a sleeping pill anyway! He was always in the thick of everything, even though he was quite elderly, probably well into his seventies. I remember that he would come down to the boat landing at the river and join in the swimming and swing on a rope overhanging the water. Some of us were saying Hail Marys and hoping that he'd surface again, but I'm not sure that it helped much because we weren't Catholics!
He was a lovely man.

There was a Salvation Army minister called Vic Pedersen who brought his own 'plane, an Aster, he would fly out from Katherine to visit us at the Roper Bar police station. We had known Vic whilst we were living in Katherine and I remember one day when he crashed his aeroplane near the road between Katherine and Pine Creek. Apparently Vic wasn't too badly hurt, just a few broken ribs, so he climbed out of the wreck and started walking down the road looking for a lift into town, but because he was so covered in dust and dishevelled he looked more like a Black Fella than a Salvation Army minister and nobody would stop and give him a lift! Meanwhile, Wayne was sitting guarding the wrecked aircraft until the Department of Civil Aviation people arrived to investigate the crash. The other policeman's wife and I took some cold drinks and food out to Wayne and her husband and were amused to find them sitting beside the aircraft which was draped in string beans and all sorts of vegetables tum-

bling out of the windows and door! Vic had been returning from a trip round the cattle stations and it must have been the veggie season because he was piled-up with gifts from grateful station owners! That's the way it was out there, people were very generous and gave anything that they could offer to passing visitors especially string beans!

There were sad and difficult times too, living at The Roper Bar. For example I had a miscarriage out there, that was fairly awful: it started at The Roper Bar whilst we were preparing to drive to Mataranka. I actually had the miscarriage in Mataranka, Wayne and another policeman were enjoying a drink in the pub with the locals. I didn't feel too well so I went straight back to the house with David and I received very little sympathy! I then drove myself up to Katherine for treatment because I was Rh. Negative and Wayne was Positive so I needed to get an anti-D injection to stop the anitbodies building up in my body. I had the injection and drove myself back to Mataranka.

Similarly, the birth of our second son, Andrew, was not completely without a drama. I shouldn't really have been at the police station but my mother and my aunt were due to visit and I felt that, because I was a nurse, everything would be allight. At the time that the baby was due, an aerial survey was being carried out in the area using a World War II Hudson Bomber, the type of aircraft that had the glass-like front and a bomb bay. The morning that I went into labour the survey team were out at Rose River and so I waited for them to return in order to ask Brian, the pilot, if he'd take me into Katherine. Meanwhile, I packed a little suitcase but did not tell my mother that I had already started the first stage of labour because she would have had a fit, but I told my aunt because she was older than Mum, she was also more sensible and had delivered lots of sheep! My aunt accompanied me into Katherine but the 'plane was not really set-up to carry passengers, there was no interior lining in the cabin, it had very basic seats, the noise was horrendous and it shook throughout the whole journey. On our approach to Katherine it was discovered that we had lost all hydraulic power and that the wheels could not be lowered for landing. We circled over Katherine to jettison the remaining fuel and prepared for an emergency landing. Fortunately, at the last minute, they managed to wind the wheels down and landed safely on the grass airstrip. Luckily the hospital was just across the road, so within a couple of hours of landing in Katherine my second son, Andrew, was born.

I wonder if it is purely coincidental that he has grown-up to become an aircraft engineer!

Living in a remote area like the Roper Bar had its advantages, as well as its disadvantages. It had a detrimental effect on my nursing career because there were great advances in medicine in the time that I was out there and consequently, when I returned to nursing, I found it very difficult to get back into the stream again. I would keep myself mentally stimulated by ensuring that I had plenty of reading material, it was pretty awful when I ran out of reading matter. Most of all I missed the company of my friends and colleagues, I was used to working in a hospital environment with lots of people, stimulating conversation, interesting work and then, suddenly, I was in the middle of the bush.

This change in my life style was not a problem, I had plenty to keep me busy and new skills to learn.

I had to make my own bread and deal with freshly killed meat, I had to discover the art of planning and ordering our stores for The Wet when we would be cut-off for months at a time. The only way that we could get supplies then was by the barge that came up the river from Groote Eylandt to the mission every six weeks, I had to work out what to order and to think ahead. The stores came from Brisbane, we could order fresh perishable goods by radio from Katherine and they would come out on the mail plane once a week, but it was very expensive and we kept it to a minimum.

The tracker's wives would sometimes help with the housework and the washing, but they never became involved with the cooking. I had a very good relationship with the local women and they were very supportive towards me. We didn't become great chatty pals, but if Wayne and the tracker were both away sometimes the tracker's wife would come and sleep under the house because she was worried about me. We cared for each other. They would keep an eye on David too, sometimes they'd take him off into the bush to gather food and he'd come home and say that he didn't want any tea because he'd had goanna down at the Aboriginal's camp. That was a bit difficult the first few times and took some getting used to!

Wayne had a very good working relationship with the Aboriginals too, he's an easy sort of person to get along with and he took everything in his stride. He completely trusted his trackers and I think that they trusted him too. The first time that he had to go out to Num-

bulwar on the Rose River he had to follow nothing more than an overgrown track, he relied completely on the tracker's judgement for telling him which way to go because he knew that the tracker had "bush-walked" all that area before. Wayne loved working in the bush at The Roper, he didn't want to leave when it was time for his posting to come to an end, he still goes back to The Roper regularly on fishing trips although much has changed since we lived at the Bar.

One of the advantages of being posted at The Roper was that I met so many very interesting people that I would not otherwise have had the opportunity of meeting. There was a group of foreign doctors, from one of the communist countries I think. They were specialists, one was a paediatrician, and they were on their way to the mission but called in at the Bar en route. Dieter was a good friend, I was very fond of him and he was a mine of information about The Roper and contributed a lot to our local knowledge of the area. The Inspector of the Northern Territory schools would call in and have a chat sometimes and Lionel van Praag was someone else I'd probably never have met elsewhere. He was the World Champion motorcyclist as well as the chief pilot at Dastra Aerial Surveys, he'd been very sympathetic when I was pregnant. Brian's wife had had a baby a couple of weeks earlier and he knew the ropes, he was the full-bottle on pregnant women! If I hadn't been living at The Roper I would never have met people like the Howards at St Vidgeon. I hadn't come across any Mexicans before, so having a friendship with the Me'dcan women was special because they had different customs and did things differently. Marguerite didn't speak much English but we managed to get along well, we shared the cooking and the children and so forth, like any other neighbours would. We both had a lot to learn about living in the bush, both in practical terms and emotionally. I was still quite young and I think I learned, amongst other things, the value of patience.

In more practical terms I had to learn to manage our meat supply, which was a bit daunting at first. Wayne and the trackers would go out to find a suitable beast for eating, we'd try to only kill cleanskins, although we had permission from the adjoining station to take some 'killers" from their property, but it didn't seem fair to take something that they had worked hard to muster and brand.

The only times that we may have had to kill a branded beast was during The Wet when there weren't any cleanskins about or we couldn't get to them. They'd bring the beast home and I'd be told "Here's a beast, do something with it!" and they'd dump the carcass on the table, skinned but still quivering! Wayne's father had been a butcher so he already knew a bit about cutting it up and became quite an expert. I remember, as a child, seeing my mother salt meat after we had killed a beast at home. We'd share it with our neighbours and she would use coarse salt and saltpetre to preserve our share, so I followed her example. Once it was salted I put it in a plastic tub and kept it in the fridge, it would make its own brine and last for months, we'd eat it cold and it was delicious. The first night after we had killed a beast, we would have a barbecue and eat the chuck steak, which was the rubbish steak, but if it was cooked straight away it was very tender. The offal had to be eaten straight away too. We'd share the meat with the trackers and their families and they in turn would share their fish with us when they had had a successful catch. They loved to eat the guts, the heads, the bones and offal, I learned to eat and even to enjoy some obscure cuts of meat, I hate to think which part of the beast they had come from! We'd keep the meat in the fridge for quite a long time, sometimes it would go green on the outside but it was perfectly alright and it was always tender because it had been kept for so long.

We didn't have much success keeping chooks, the snakes or something ate them, so we had to get fresh eggs in from town. We had a good vegetable garden but we didn't manage to grow any fruit, except limes, we relied on tinned fruit, except for mangoes that grew in the bush at Old St Vidgeon. It was a ritual: we'd all go every year, the Howards from St Vidgeon, the Arbons from Urapunga, Dieter and anyone who happened to be staying at The Roper at that time and we'd get up to high jinks. We packed-up the trucks with our camping gear and made a week-end of it, visiting the cave and swimming in the billabong by the old ruined homestead, people had been doing it for years but sadly the trees have gone now. We all got together, people didn't judge one another, we learned to respect others and to accept people at face value, we didn't look for faults.

When the families met-up at week-ends, the children always got along and played happily, they were pleased to see each other and they shared everything willingly. Probably one of the hardest adjustments that David had to make was when we left the bush and he went to school in town. The town kids were very different, they were more selfish and didn't appreciate the value of other children's company. Our

kids weren't used to seeing other children very often, so when they did it was very special and they really enjoyed themselves. It was much easier to discipline our children in the bush because we did not have so many outside influences with which to contend, on the other hand if they were badly behaved we only had ourselves to blame!

I started teaching David at The Roper by correspondence which was fun for both of us and quite fulfilling for me, but because it was on a one-to-one basis it didn't take long each day and of course there were distractions: each time a vehicle came past a helicopter landed David would stand on the desk and look out of the window, the arrival of a visitor was a big occasion and it would be good-bye David! He learned and experienced many things that the town kids missed out on, he'd be given rides on the graders by the men from the Works Department and trips up in the helicopter and he too met, and made friends with, children from all walks of life.

He befriended a little half-Aboriginal boy called Joey whose parents worked on Urapunga station. David would invite Joey over to play and we would read stories and have bubble baths, and Joey would be absolutely beside himself with happiness. He would say to me 'Do you do this every night?"! Joey didn't have an easy life but he was the dearest little boy and David really took him under his wing and they had a lovely time together. Then there were the Howard's children at St Vidgeon: Chico and Bibi. They were similar ages to David and they all got on well when there was an opportunity to play together, which wasn't very often.

On balance, I'm glad that I spent those years at The Roper although there were times when I felt unfulfilled and lacked a sense of purpose. It might have been better if I could have been working there in a nursing capacity, but such a job did not exist at that time. I was happy, but there is nothing that I particularly miss about living at The Bar now, I would not want to go back there because it has changed dramatically and the people are different. It was a great relief to get back to town and to be in communication with the outside world once more, being limited to only a two way radio for communicating was very restricting and I longed to hear the world news once more.

The most significant turn of events during our time at The Roper was when the missionaries left the Roper Mission and the administration of the settlement was taken over by the Welfare Department, although I believe that the minister himself stayed on at the settlement. Their departure heralded an end of many years of religious influence and support for the Aboriginals and so it was the beginning of a new era and the settlement was renamed "Ngukurr". The transfer of administration didn't affect us very much except that we had become quite friendly with many of the missionaries and their families who were very pleasant, rather conservative, people. After the missionaries left and the Welfare Department took over, a Community Town Council was set up which consisted of Aboriginal people who eventually managed their own affairs. The funding was now the responsibility of the Government and not that of the missionaries.

The police station remained situated at the Roper Bar at that time and continued there for several years after we left. There were, however, to be changes in the police force too. The bush stations ceased to be one-man stations, nobody lived on their own in isolation any more. Two-man stations were introduced in order that there would be some support and back-up in the case of any violence, there was a greater need for more policing once the road through to The Roper was completed and the area was subjected to outside influences. The Aboriginals had access to alcohol and there was an increase in car ownership which lead to many more road accidents. The police were unwilling to be posted out there on their own, they did not consider that it was safe for them and their families.

Several years later the police station at The Roper was abandoned and a new, two-man police station was built on site at Ngukurr settlement itself. The Roper police station was to become a subject of national historical interest but, following a drinking binge, was destroyed by fire one night and only the shell remains.

The building of the road to Mataranka was probably the biggest single development to effect our lives at The Roper. Originally the road to Roper from Mataranka was part of the cattle road into the Northern Territory and it took two days to get to Darwin from The Roper, we would overnight at Mataranka, but now it can be done in less than eight hours. Over a period of time the road was improved and it was put through Hell's Gate, although it was not actually sealed it was very much better. Even then, during The Wet, the road would still become impassable in places. Wayne would go away for a couple of days, but if it rained he might not return for at least a week, he might be just up the road on the other side of the bog hole but unable to get all the way home. His schedule was very unpredictable, there were times when I

simply didn't know when he would be returning home.

Everyone was very hospitable in the bush. If Wayne was passing a homestead at lunch time, he would be invited in to share the family meal, if he became stranded he would be invited to stay.

Similarly, anyone passing the police station would be invited to stay and eat with us, we could start out the day with just the family and by the end of the evening there could be as many as twenty of us sharing a barbecue. It was open house everywhere in the bush. The changes that we witnessed were both for the better and for the worse: the road was a big improvement but with it came trouble too. The Aboriginal

Roper Bar Police Station—after the fire

Town Council at Ngukurr wisely decided to ban alcohol in the community and as far out as The Roper Bar, but unscrupulous people trying to make money would drive consignments of alcohol out from Mataranka and the Aboriginals would go to The Roper Bar to drink it. Another place they used to drive alcohol to was across the river from Ngukurr, on the road to St Vidgeon, the Aboriginals would go across and drink there because it was "off limits" and outside the "dry area".

Of course, we had a lot of happy times at the Bar, and in retrospect many of them were amusing.

It was absolutely essential to retain a sense of humour and keep incidents in prospective, even if it was hard to see the funny side of the situation at the time. For example, there was the time that Fito Howard had gone mustering and left his prize young blue heeler bitch in my tender care for safe keeping. This was a mistake! We also had the Howard's children to stay whilst their parents were away, to amuse them Anthea (the author) and I took them fishing on the river bank by the Bar close to the police station and of course the puppy came too. After a little while we noticed a fishing line hanging from the pup's mouth and realised that it had eaten the baited line and swallowed the lot!

We were horrified to think what Fito would say about his precious dog, and our incompetence, so we dashed up to the house, snipped the fishing line off as far down the dog's throat as we could and fed the wretched animal a whole tray of freshly baked scones that I had made that morning and hoped that the dough would help cushion the effect of the hook passing through the animal's digestive system. We didn't tell Fito what had happened and, as the dog obligingly declined to die, I guess my scones must have done the trick! It wasn't much of a compliment for my culinary skills!

Navigating the river at night on the way home from a party could be extremely dangerous, but at the time we thought it was hilarious! One time, on our way back after a party at the mission, the river was very swollen and running with a fast and strong current against us. The police station was about twenty miles upstream from the mission and we had to past the wreck of the Young Australian en route, which made a good navigational reference point. We had a problem with floating pandanus leaves which kept getting wound around the propeller of the outboard and so we would have to stop and disentangle them several times. What we didn't realise was that every time we stopped the engine we would be swept downstream, back passed the Young Australian towards the mission again!

It was very dark and although we had a powerful torch with us we were reluc-

tant to switch it on because it would instantly be surrounded by a cloud of biting insects. Thus, it was only when we had passed the Young Australian for what must have been the fifth or sixth time that I realised what was happening! If we hadn't been returning from a party we might have viewed the situation more seriously!

Competing with, and living alongside, the animal life at The Roper produced a few amusing moments. I had an abhorrence of snakes, so when I found one curled up on the cistern of the toilet I shouted for Wayne to come and deal with it. Wayne arrived clutching the .410 shotgun, accompanied by a tracker carrying a six foot long fishing spear with three sharpened wire prongs at the end of it.

The tracker strode into the toilet and speared the snake in the tail, but it then started to wind its way up the handle of the spear. Between them they despatched the snake, but Wayne decided that it was time I learned how to handle a fishing spear and the .410 in order that I could deal with any future snakes myself. I had news for him - there was no way I was going to spear a snake in order to take it outside and shoot it. An awful vision flashed through my mind of the back wall shot-out of the shit-house! I drew a line at some things and spearing snakes was one of them!

Then there was the morning I woke up to find a goat at the end of our bed! I had heard this "tap dancing" going on in the bedroom and sat up to discover the goat prancing about the bedroom. I elbowed Wayne in the ribs who manoeuvred the animal back downstairs amidst a string of blasphemous expletives. It had managed to push its way in through a small, and now much enlarged, hole in the flywire.

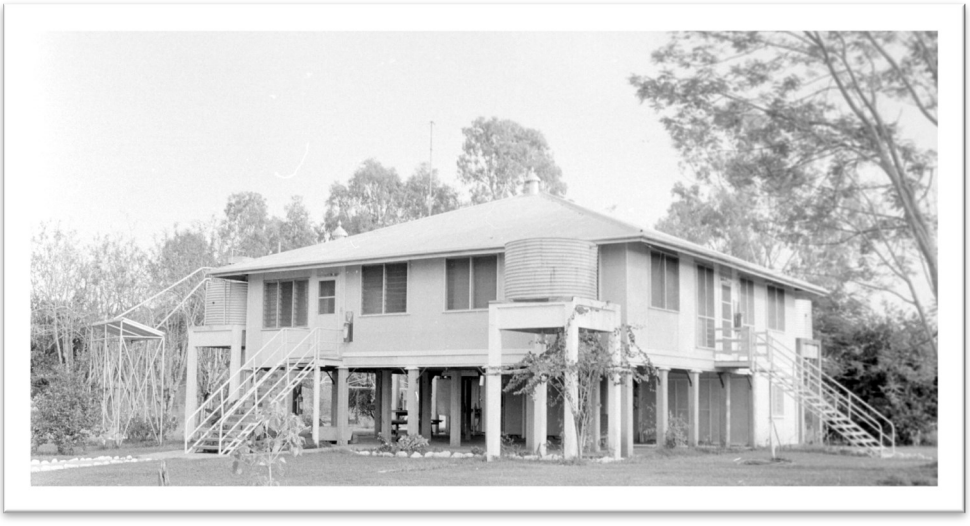
The goat was not the only nocturnal visitor we received. The horses would regularly come in from the bush, arrive at the house and camp beneath our bedroom floor for the night. Wayne had to learn to shoe the horses himself, he acquired a great diversity of skills whilst stationed at The Roper.

Communications, or rather the lack of, was the greatest drawback of living in such a remote place.

I never really felt that my life was in danger, but there were times when things could have gone seriously wrong. The road in and out of Mataranka had some very wet patches, particularly between the Roper and Roper Valley Station, where we were prone to becoming bogged. We had no mobile phones then and it was a matter of luck if somebody picked up our radio signal, not that there were many people living in the area who could help us anyway. I would watch the light aircraft flying overhead and wish that they could see us stranded. Roper Valley Station came and bailed us out a few times and I can remember sitting in the Toyota one time waiting for some help to arrive. I had to keep chain smoking to prevent the insects from eating us alive, despite being pregnant with Andrew.

It was always a worrying time if any of us became ill, especially the children. One time David got the croup badly and that scared me, there was nowhere to go, the roads were closed and it was in the middle of the night. I couldn't get on to the doctor on the radio but I did have the medical kit, so I mixed up some ephedrine and phenobarb tablets and took a guess at the size of the dose and prayed. Steam was supposed to ease the effect of croup so I stoked up the stove and boiled pans of water to make a steamy atmosphere, we had no electricity at that time foi a cooker or electric kettle. I must have dozed off because I was woken at four o'clock in the morning by a small voice saying "*Mummy, Mummy, I've stopped skurping*!" Those were the sweetest words I ever heard.

Because of the isolation, when we got together to party we took it very seriously! We travelled long distances to party with our neighbours and everyone would stay until the food and drink ran out. We made the most of the oc-



Roper Bar Police Station—1973

casion and had a lot of fun. If there was still some drink left but the food was finished, someone would go and get another "killer" and we would party on until the drink ran out completely. I remember one party where we had been on the go for a long time and Wayne sneaked off - he just needed a break. We couldn't find him until, eventually, he was spotted fast asleep in a bath tub and someone had thoughtfully put a shower cap on his head! In the morning we would have a traditional station breakfast: steak, more steak, eggs, tomatoes and home made bread. Meanwhile the beer was still flowing with the occasional carton of soft drink for the women and children. The parties would last for days.

Time has moved on and so have the people living at The Roper, it is very different now. We still keep in touch with old friends like Dieter and an occasional phone call to the Howards in Mexico. I still see Shirley Arbon from Urapunga, although she now lives in Darwin, but we have all gone our separate ways and have fewer interests in common now.

The greatest contributory factor to the changes is the improvement in transport. Whereas it would take us days to get into Darwin, it now only takes a single day. Because of the state of the roads and tracks we relied on horses and four wheel drive vehicles to get about. To travel up the river we used an outboard attached to a "tinnie" (a small, metal, punt type of craft.) The trouble was that anything mechanical owned by the Aboriginals, didn't last very long because they were great "helpers" and fiddlers with other people's gear. So, if one bloke had an outboard motor that didn't start, one of his mates would fix it for him - and he'd "fix it good and proper!"

Communications have improved radically too, we struggled with old fashioned radios, they were the original Traegars. They had crystals that had to be pushed in and pulled out for different frequencies. They were oblong things with a handle on the front, like the ones is the old war movies. There were different crystals for different frequencies but in the Toyota it was on the aerial, we would move the wire up and down the length of the aerial to find the different frequencies. I wasn't allowed to use the police radio, that was restricted to police business only, a rule strictly adhered to. Even if Wayne was a week overdue returning home from a trip, I wasn't allowed to call him up to see if he was alright. I was stuck there on the river bank with a small child, no vehicle - nothing, and not allowed to use the police radio, hoping my husband was safe. I would listen in and hear his voice talking to a colleague and so then I'd be reassured, but I daren't speak to him myself. The same rule applied to travelling in the police vehicle: I wasn't supposed to use it, not even to accompany Wayne. When we went into town I was deposited on the outskirts of Katherine so as not to be seen in the vehicle.

The wives and children of the bush policemen were given little sympathy or any concessions, considering their isolated life style. Of course it is all different now: they have got satellite dishes, telephones, mobile phones and so on. The mobiles have to go through the satellite which is rather sophisticated and they cost thousands of dollars. We see some of the Aboriginal children in Darwin hospital with their own satellite phone so that they can talk to their families at home. The Aboriginals are great users of the phone.

Living at The Roper police station taught me to manage with the bare minimum of trappings and conveniences, also not to expect help - to be self-sufficient. I'm not a consumer who is susceptible to market forces, I can manage on the minimum. I learned to cope with most situations, and I discovered the importance of sorting out ones priorities. Now I only sweat about the big things in life.

We did not become too involved in the day to day lives of the Aboriginal trackers and their families. At the same time that we were stationed at The Roper the system was being changed from the trackers being looked after by the police, to them receiving equal pay and looking after themselves.

However, because they had been looked after for so long they still expected us to help them. It was a big thing to suddenly say to them "Well, you're on your own now, Jack, you've got only ten dollars a fortnight less than us. The Missus doesn't keep your stores for you any more." But, of course, we did keep a little bit because we couldn't see them starve. They'd be given their money but very little instruction on how to use it, how to shop for food in the store. It was very difficult for them. Our old tracker was very sweet: he'd go into the store and always buy some fruit for the children. We noticed that the trackers would buy similar provisions to those which had previously been supplied by the police tea, sugar, flour, tobacco and fresh vegetables. They didn't really buy much to eat, they would go out and get a bit of bush tucker, they certainly weren't into meat and three veg like we were. They tended to eat when they were hungry or when they had food readily available, not necessarily at specific times. We all led fairly separate lives - they down at their camp and we in the

Requiem for the Roper

house. The Aboriginals girls would come and help in the house but otherwise we all kept pretty much to ourselves, there was no problem because we weren't competing for the same space. They wouldn't come and eat with us at the house, but if we were out at camp we would have a cup of tea together but generally they didn't want to be with us. Now days everyone is living a similar life style and competing for the same things.

Trackers would come and go quite frequently, we had two at a time but our old tracker used to keep coming back because he was born there at the Roper Bar police station, so that had been his whole life. There was another old chap too, but he's dead so I mustn't mention his name, it's a tribal custom not to mention the dead by name, I might upset his family. I remember that this old bloke was very partial to the chilli relish that Wayne made to go with fish, it was almost like sweet and sour chilli, so Wayne gave him a bottle. Anyway, the following morning Wayne asked him if enjoyed the relish and he replied "*Ah, good Boss, but proper cheeky longum arse*!" It had come through and burned his bottom, but he was always after a bottle of *"That chilli, Boss*". Generally their food was quite bland but if they went out hunting and gathering their diet was fairly rounded, years of tradition had taught them what a good diet consisted of- The women would go out and pick the berries and the men would go and hunt kangaroo or goanna now and then, but although they were called "the hunters" it was really the women who provided most of the food.

Wayne would have to tell the trackers what was expected of them. They weren't simply trackers, they also helped maintain the police station, water the garden and so on. They were invaluable with their knowledge of the country and of course as interpreters too, they enabled the policeman to carry out his job more easily and effectively. However, they never looked very busy, they'd wander about and sit down on their haunches with the hose going on the yard and smoke cigarettes. There was no sense of urgency.

Yes, much has changed, but that is how it was then.

Advertisement for the 1988 Australia and New Zealand Police Games

Mystery Object

What is the mystery object? Please submit your answers to the Editor at:

Citation.Newsletter@proton.me

Disappearing Stations
Alice Well Police Station

By Mark McAdie

Alice Well was a police station in the Finke district of the Northern Territory. Its predecessor had been a police station at Illamurta some 160 km west of Alice Well. It was ultimately closed on the establishment of the Charlotte Waters Police Station, which replaced it.

Alice Well is located on Maryvale Station about 155 km south of Alice Springs. There appears to be no official documentation but Alice Creek is apparently named after Alice Todd, wife of Sir Charles Todd who was in charge of the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line (OTL) in 1870 when surveyor John Ross recorded the name. Construction teams of the OTL may have sunk Alice Well sometime after 1870.

Ruins of Alice Well Police Station

It had been concluded that Illamurta was in too isolated a location to be effective and the location at Alice Well was chosen to replace it. It had the advantage of being co-located with a Telegraph Station and would soon have a telephone for contact with the outside world.

From the account given by the Inspector of Police in his Report to the Administrator in 1912, a Police Station at Alice Well was established in May 1912:

"Alice Well was a police station in the Finke district of the Northern Territory. Its predecessor had been a police station at Illamurta some 160 km west of Alice Well. It was ultimately closed on the establishment of the Charlotte Waters Police Station, which replaced it."

> "The constable at Illamurta was moved to Alice Wells about 100 miles south of Alice Springs on the overland telegraph line, in May last, and as a telephone is to be installed, the constable will be of more service than at Illamurta, which was too isolated." (Report of the Administrator for the Year 1912, p104)

It seems the telephone was added as he wished in the following year:

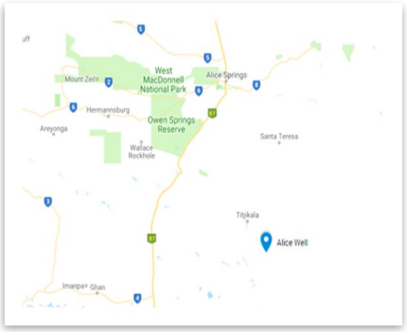
> "The placing of telephones at Alice Well Police Station and on the railway line has been a great convenience…"
>
> "Improvements have been effected to the police stations, Alice Springs, Alice Well, Horseshoe Creek, Pine Creek, and Brock's Creek, and these stations are now much more comfortable. A stone lockup has also been built at Arltunga." (Report of the Administrator for the Year 1913, p71)

Constable John Mackay closed Alice Well Police Station on 23rd October 1919 and took up duty at the Frew River Police Station in the Davenport Ranges east of Wycliffe Well. The closure seems to have been temporary as Inspector Waters reports at the end of the 1919 – 1920 financial year:

> "The strength of the Force on the 30th ultimo was 1 Inspector, 1 Senior Sergeant, I Sergeant, 2 Acting Sergeants, 27 Constables, and 28 Native Constables, and were stationed as follows….
>
> *Alice Well.*- 1 Constable, 2 Native Constables." (Report of the Administrator for the Year 1913, p71)

Alice Well remained in operation for only 16 years when, as a result of being offered the Charlotte Waters Telegraph Station to use as a Police Station, Alice Well was closed and Charlotte Waters (about 130 km to the south and near the SA/NT Border) re-opened.

At Charlotte Waters Police Station, a journal was entry made on the 10th September 1930. It was made by Mounted Constable H.F. Cameron, the first constable to be appointed there. He was assisted by Trackers Ted and Willie At the take-over they were assisted by the Government Resident, Sergeant Lovegrove from Alice Springs and Dr Kirkland the Government Medical Officer. M.C. Cameron closed Alice Well Police Station for business and transferred to Charlotte Waters" (McLaren, W.J., The Northern Territory and its Police Forces, unpublished manuscript, p829)



Location of Alice Well

The After Life of Daniela Mattiuzzo-Ford

By Danni Mattiuzzo

When did you join NT Police?

I joined as a Police Cadet at the age of 16 years in 1985. The training centre was in Cavanagh Street where the Mirambeena is now. It was known as "Cockroach Castle"

When did you retire?

I retired in July of this year, after 38 years and my entire adult life spent as a Police Officer.

What is a memorable moment for you?

So many, funny, sad, scary, infuriating, happy, dangerous, terrifying, insightful, life changing, wonderful moments I am struggling to narrow them down.

There are incidents I went to and jobs I investigated that changed my life and who I was and who I am. I think that this is true for all police officers.

I lost my police issued uniform dress on a fence as I climbed it whilst chasing an offender. I opened a wardrobe door and found the burnt body of a child hiding from the house fire he had after started playing with a lighter. I held a young man's hand at a car crash and promised him that he would be ok. I wanted this to be true, but he later died. I gave CPR to a small child who breathed again. I got punched in the face. I got pushed down a flight of stairs (by my police partner at a DV job- that's a bigger story). I walked beside so many young girls and women supporting them through child abuse and Domestic Violence. I rode in ambulances, fire trucks, helicopters, an FA18, on motorbikes, quad bikes, horses. So many incredible experiences, good, bad, ugly and downright unbelievable that regular "civvies" would never experience.

What inspired you to join and then to stay?

I was about 12 years old when I announced to my very traditional Italian father that I was going to become a Police Officer. I thought I could change the world. I thought I could make the world better. It was the naivety and innocence of that 12 year old girl that never left me (well maybe every so often, but never for long). I am by nature an eternal optimist, and for many years my nickname was "Constable Unicorn" or Constable "Rainbows" :)

There were times when the black dog chased me and I survived PTSD so it definitely wasn't always rainbows and unicorns, but overall I loved policing and loved my khaki/blue brothers and sisters.

Danni Mattiuzzo

Who were some of your mentors and greatest influencers?

There were many. Some were Sgt Steve Wallace (dec), Warren O'Meara, George Watkinson, Jeanette Kerr, Anne Marie Murphy, Marcus Tilbrook, Kate Vanderlaan, Megan Rowe are only a few. I have worked with, for and beside some of the most incredible humans on this planet. There is such a unique, intimate, special bond we share with our police colleagues, a bond that only frontline workers will understand and experience. It has been such a privilege.

What did you do to prepare yourself for retirement?

I was quite nervous about the financial implications of retiring. I actually went to three financial advisors before I found the one that listened to my concerns and made me comfortable with my financial options. Over the years I have heard the term "financial hostage" often get thrown around in our profession and for some of us the money we earn is hard to give up. I never felt like this but I was nervous regardless. Vicki Lamp of Darwin Financial Services was excellent. I am working again doing some contract work for a NGO and mediations for the Community Justice Centre.

I think what works well is to plan a holiday straight after your retirement date. The prospect of finishing work on Friday and waking up on Monday with no where to go or to be filled me with dread. I left on a short holiday as a circuit breaker. I also think it's important not to make any monumental life changes straight away. You may be completely ready to retire, sell your home, buy a boat and sail around the world, but this just wasn't for me. I am much more of a slow and steady, pros and cons kinda gal.

How does it feel to be retired?

Strange, scary, exciting, overwhelming, unsettling. I have to say that the lead up to my retirement date was filled with anxiety. I have been a cop my whole life and I am still struggling with the "what now, what next, who am I if I'm not a cop" questions.

I am only a few months in and it still feels strange. I do still get a pang of sadness when I see a uniformed member or I drive past the police station. I have always been heavily involved in the community so boredom is certainly not an issue. I have decided that it's ok to feel unsettled and a bit lost for a while, and life will still be great, it will just be different.

How are you looking after yourself now?

I laughed when I thought about this question, as my answer feels a bit of a cliche. I'm busy doing lots of yoga, lots of gardening, lots of socialising, a bit of work and a bit of travel. It's early days so I am still ticking off all the jobs that have been on the 'to-do' list for years. I still get a twinge in my gut when I hear a police siren or when I see something I would have previously "stuck my nose in". Hard habits to break. I wonder if you ever stop being a cop? Maybe you can take the cop out of the uniform but the cop is still always a cop!

Died whilst Serving

William Davis

By Mark McAdie

Constable (Water Police)
Date of Birth - not known
Date of Death – 16th November 1872

Constable William Davis joined the Northern Territory Police on the 19th September 1872.

Constable Davis was taken by a crocodile in Port Darwin harbour. It was the first tragic death of an officer in the Northern Territory Police Force.

Constable Davis had just finished guard duty at 5a.m. and gone for a swim in the harbour.

A John Atkin, from the schooner "Jepie" said at the inquest into Davis' death, that he "had seen the man in the water near what appeared to be a log; then he saw "the log" dart towards the man, seize him and drag him under the water."

Constable Davis' body was later found washed up on the beach. Doctor Robert Leslie Kennedy examined the body and as the head and other injuries would not have caused death, advised the cause of death to be asphyxia or suffocation by drowning.

Constable Davis' death was the first death of a Police Officer in the Northern Territory.

Davis Court in Palmerston is named after Constable Davis.

Dingo's Killing

By Peter Leacy

Whilst stationed at Pine Creek, horses were again used in the district, in the disappearance of a Miner, Ron Harrington. Harrington was a returned soldier who was gravely wounded fighting the Japanese in New Guinea in 1942. He received a head wound and suffered terrible headaches. It was believed he had a metal plate in his head.

The officer in charge of Pine Creek, Graham Browning 'Lovey' asked me to arrange for Jindare horses and Aboriginal trackers to help with the search. Sergeant Alan Wilson from Darwin would also be on horseback to assist in the search along with the trackers and myself.

Darwin rescue squad also attended. The area to be searched covered a large area of bushland around the Umbrawarra Gorge National Park. Sergeant Wilson with a couple of the trackers would cover patrol of the main gorge area. While in company with tracker Benny Lee, I would patrol an area which would cover Black Bullock yard and Copperfield Creek areas, returning through the flat area to the main search area and rejoin other search parties. It was during searching the flat area that tracker Lee and I came across a fight to the death.

An old man Kangaroo who stood a good six feet, was being attacked by five dingoes. We sat in a clump of bush and watched in awe of the tactics of the dingoes against the old Roo. We could see the Roo was tired and had been unable to outrun the dingoes as they had managed to cripple him by continuously biting at the join where his tail me the body. The tail was well over half bitten into. One dingo would dive in for a further bit while a couple of his mates would attack from the front. It was then that we noticed two dingoes were not participating in the hunt as they were injured. The Roo must have been able to strike them by grabbing each one and using the toe of one foot putting them out of action.

We watched for half an hour before I put an end to the spectacle. I took my horse towards the Roo who fell over and no doubt have a painful death half eaten alive, and shot him with my revolver, killing him instantly. I put a bullet in the dingo who seemed not to be able to get to his legs. The other four took off and one was limping badly with blood around his rib area. We could have ridden away, however I figured this made it clean as Mother Nature can be cruel.

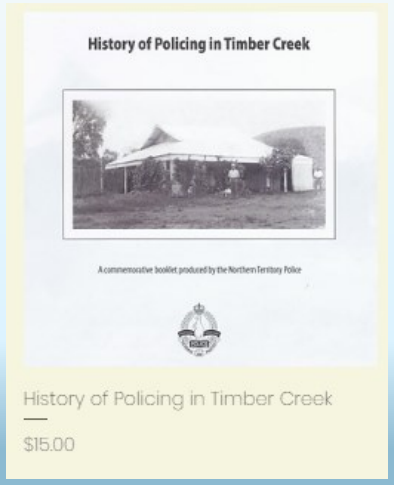
During this mercy bit our horses not used to gun fire and the smell of blood pranced and pig-rooted for fifteen minutes or so as we departed the scene. The tactics of animals in the wild also amaze me.

The search continued for a couple of days without finding Ron Harrington. Human remains were found six months later but were not Harrington's. It was also rumoured that he was murdered. I remember that his camp had been ratted, but this often happens when an owner goes missing, as there is always a belief that gold has been stashed somewhere.

Another secret of the bush to be revealed one day perhaps.

Peter Leacy

Merchandise



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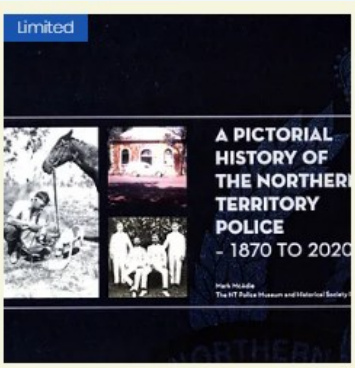

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Step into the rich tapestry of history and witness the legacy of the Northern Territory Police Force come to life at the Northern Territory Police Museum and Historical Society.

Constables Mettam, Darken and Waudby at Alice Springs—1948

In 1995, a vision was born when the Northern Territory Historical Society Incorporated was founded, with Mr. Peter Young leading the way as its inaugural President. Though faced with challenges, the society rose again in May 2000, reborn as the Northern Territory Police Museum and Historical Society Incorporated.

Today, our society extends its reach beyond borders, uniting individuals from the Northern Territory, interstate, and even overseas, who share a common passion for preserving the remarkable history of law enforcement in this unique part of the world.

Behind the scenes, a dedicated and passionate group of volunteers breathe life into our mission. They work tirelessly to conserve and protect the physical objects, photographs, documents, records, voice recordings, and electronic files that encapsulate the Northern Territory Police's rich heritage. We're honoured to receive guidance from the NT Museum and Art Gallery, ensuring the preservation of our shared history is nothing short of impeccable.

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Join us on this incredible journey and be a part of something greater than yourself. Become a member or volunteer, and together, we will continue to script the captivating narrative of the Northern Territory Police Force.

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Editor's Message

If you had told me twelve months ago that I would be taking on Citation I would not have believed you but, here we go. Citation restarting would not have been possible without the help and support of extensive team of people behind the scenes. It is very important to acknowledge John and Trish Pini for their commitment to Citation over many years, their knowledge, input and dedication has been outstanding. John, Trish you are part of our Blue Family, never forget that.

I also acknowledge the support by the Genealogical Society of the Northern Territory (www.gsnt.org.au) for allowing me, as a member of their organization, to use their resources. As I sit here in their office I am surrounded by a painting and pictures of old police stations. Many of our old police officers are mentioned in the Pioneer Registers of the NT which can be accessed at the Genealogical Society office at Harry's Place.

Our aim is to produce four copied of Citation each year in February, May, August and November but we need your help to do this. Please send your stories, poems, photos and cartoons to the Citation Newsletter email address. February 2024 will feature Overseas Service and the UN. December 2024 will be a bumper Cyclone Tracy issue so please start forwarding your stories now.

The November edition of Citation highlights the story of Nesta Cubis when they lived at Roper Bar. It is an intriguing and insightful story of an NT Police wife written by Anthea Hartley a journalist who now lives back in the UK.

I eagerly anticipate the journey ahead, and I'm especially excited about the valuable contributions that will come from you, our gentle readers.

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