



The Citation

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY POLICE
MUSEUM & HISTORICAL SOCIETY

This edition of Citation focuses on two dramatic events that have occurred in Katherine. Firstly, the murder of Constable William (Bill) Bryan Condon KPFSM on 9 June 1952 and secondly, the shooting of Senior Constable John Rowe APM QPM & Inspector Bruce Wyatt QPM 17 March 1977.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the death of Constable William Bryan Condon KPFSM, killed in the execution of his duty in Katherine on 9 June 1952.



(Photograph of Bill Condon taken on his wedding day.)

In honour of his memory the Northern Territory Police Museum & Historical Society has arranged a number of commemorative events to be held in Katherine.

The day was 9 June 1952.

Sergeant Jim Mannion and Constable Dickie Barrel were the only two permanent police officers assigned to Katherine during this period,

Twenty-nine years old Constable Bill Condon was stationed at Maranboy, some sixty kilometres south of Katherine. He was in Katherine to assist the local police with the annual race meeting. Constable Condon hadn't been married long and his wife Marie accompanied him to Katherine

Meanwhile, twenty two year old Terry Stapleton, who had been drinking earlier, took his girlfriend into the local milk bar. As she was about to sit down another young fellow pulled the chair away. This was a fairly common joke throughout Australia at that time and nobody got too upset over it. This was too much for Stapleton, he left the milk bar threatening to shoot the perpetrator and returned with a loaded .303 rifle.

Bill Condon was having an evening meal with his wife when he was alerted to a man terrorising the people in a milk bar in the main street.

Constable Condon was driven to the milk bar by a local taxi driver who had

been accosted by the man, armed with a .303 rifle, a short time earlier.



(Photograph with Sergeant Mannion on the left near where Condon was shot. The Police vehicle on the right has the hole in the door as a result of a shot being fired at it by Stapleton.)

They drove down Katherine Terrace and saw the armed man, Terence Charles Stapleton walking near the milk bar. Condon got out of the vehicle and approached him.

Stapleton did not have a good relationship with the local police and when he saw the policeman approach, he brought the rifle around, pointed it, and without hesitation, fired.

The Constable was only about 3 metres from Stapleton when he was shot. He went down, slightly to his left, but appeared to rise up, and as he did, Stapleton fired another shot. Constable Condon fell to the ground, he was shot in the lower abdomen and in the leg.

Stapleton continued firing as everyone rushed for cover. He fired at a nearby car whose occupants fortunately had taken refuge on the floor of the vehicle under the dashboard and were spared.

Sergeant Jim Mannion, the Officer in Charge of the Katherine Police Station arrived in the Police truck. Stapleton fired at the truck. A bullet went through the driver's door and grazed the Sergeant's leg.

Stapleton continued firing before escaping into the bush on the opposite

side of the main street. His immediate escape was made possible as Sergeant Mannion and Constable Barrel tried frantically to revive their colleague. Tragically Constable Condon died without regaining consciousness.

A search party was organised, but was unable to locate Stapleton that night.

Terence Charles Stapleton was arrested the next morning, as he sat on a pipeline north of the township. The Pine Creek policeman, Tom Hollow made the arrest and took possession of the rifle.



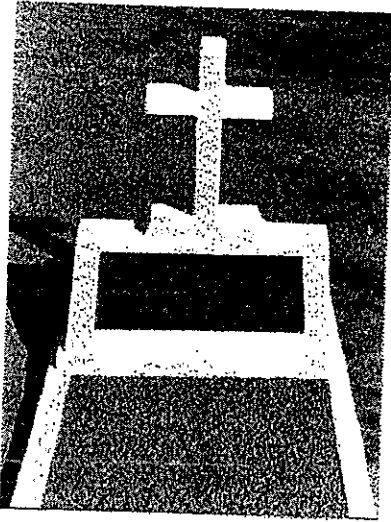
(Constable Tiernan played 'The Last Post' at Condon's funeral.)

Bill Condon was buried in Katherine and a plaque was erected outside the old Police Station in Giles Street. "Killed in the execution of his duty".

Constable Condon was posthumously awarded the King's Police and Fire Services Medal for gallantry.

Stapleton was tried and the jury returned a verdict of "Guilty of Murder" and sentenced him to death. An appeal was lodged, upheld and a new trial ordered. The jury at the second trial could not reach a verdict and a third trial was set.

He was acquitted on the grounds of insanity and was held "until the pleasure of the Governor General is known..."



(Constable Condon's grave in the Katherine Cemetery.)

(Information obtained from NTPMHS Condon file - January 2002 and the Katherine Times Newspaper).

25 YEARS AGO

TWO POLICEMEN, wounded in a gun battle at Tindal air field yesterday, are in a satisfactory condition in Katherine hospital.

The two were wounded in an exchange of fire with a man on the run for two days. Inspector Wyatt was shot in the arm.

A second bullet narrowly missed Constable Rowe's ankle and lodged in his in-step.

A historical reminder appeared in the Northern Territory News of 16 March 2002, mentioning that 25 years ago two Northern Territory Police Officers, Inspector Bruce Wyatt and Senior Constable John Rowe were wounded in a gun battle near the Tindal airfield south of Katherine on 17 March 1977.



(Inspector Bruce Wyatt.)

Police had been pursuing the man for two days.

This article had its genesis in the main street of Katherine on 15 March 1977. Constables Eric Courtney and Martin James were on routine patrol in the main street in Katherine when their attention was drawn to a man known to police as John Plunkett, standing outside the Taxi Rank, holding a rifle, which was partly out of a gun case. The Police Officers decided to speak to Plunkett and drove up alongside him on the footpath. As the Police vehicle approached Plunkett, he pulled the rifle out and aimed it at the driver. Plunkett pulled the trigger but the round failed to fire. He quickly reloaded the rifle and aimed at the driver again, pulling the trigger. Again the rifle misfired. Police were quick in removing themselves from the locality, and Plunkett ran into the scrub nearby. The two members called for reinforcements and a full-scale search was commenced. The immediate search failed to locate Plunkett.

Plunkett was known to local police as he lived in the bush at the fringe of the town. He had often acted strangely and was always seen wandering the streets.

Police made enquires and established that Plunkett had purchased a hundred rounds of ammunition just before being approached by Police near the Taxi Rank.

Inspector Bruce Wyatt immediately organised for an early morning search for Plunkett. Senior Constable Rowe, and other members, were attending a wedding when told of their forthcoming duties. Due to a shortage of official firearms on issue to Police, members were allowed to utilise their own firearms. Senior Constable Rowe intended to use his own 12g pump action shotgun, however there was no ammunition on hand. He finally ended up being issued with a station issue .38 revolver. Inspector Wyatt used his own high-powered rifle.

Information was received that Plunkett was sighted near the old Tindal Airbase south of Katherine.

In the early hours of 17 March 1977 a large contingent of Police including Inspector Wyatt and Senior Constable Rowe, travelled to the area. The wet season had produced the usual forest of spear grass in the area. Upon arrival they were informed that Plunkett was seen travelling south along the old

railway line. Inspector Wyatt instructed Constable Jack Clifford to climb a nearby tower as an observation point. The plan was that Inspector Wyatt and Senior Constable Rowe would travel south and position themselves in front of Plunkett. The other members would line search behind Plunkett, moving him towards Inspector Wyatt and Senior Constable Rowe.



(Constable Janell Cox with the weapon used by Plunkett at a Darwin Show display.)

Inspector Wyatt and Senior Constable Rowe positioned themselves south of where they believed Plunkett would be. Plunkett however had moved faster than expected and was almost immediately opposite where Wyatt and Rowe had parked their vehicle. They commenced to walk towards the railway line, walking through the spear grass when, all of a sudden Plunkett confronted them at very close range. Plunkett immediately aimed at Inspector Wyatt who called upon him several times to drop the gun. Plunkett commenced firing with his semi automatic .22 rifle at Inspector Wyatt who returned one shot from his rifle, missing Plunkett.

Senior Constable Rowe then fired three shots at Plunkett who then turned his rifle on the Senior Constable and fired off a volley of shots at him, wounding him in the foot and knocking him down into a muddy drain, causing him to lose his firearm. Senior Constable Rowe then saw Plunkett running towards Inspector Wyatt, firing his rifle, one shot having struck Wyatt in the elbow. Inspector Wyatt, although injured managed to fire off one shot striking Plunkett in the thigh, disabling him. Senior Constable Rowe had no doubt the action taken by Inspector Wyatt had saved his life.

Both members were extremely lucky in the shooting incident, as time has proven that many Police Officers have lost their lives in similar circumstances.

John Plunkett, 36 years old and a recent arrival to the Territory, appeared in the Northern Territory Supreme Court and pleaded guilty to two counts of attempted murder. He received a sentence of 5 years imprisonment on each charge, to be served concurrently, with a non-parole period of 2 years.

The sentencing Judge noted that Plunkett who had no formal education was mentally retarded and suffered from a condition of simple schizophrenia.

Inspector Wyatt and Senior Constable Rowe both received

the Queen's Police Medal for distinguished Police Service. Both went on to give dedicated and outstanding police service. Inspector Wyatt rose through the ranks to become Assistant Commissioner & Senior Constable Rowe became Sergeant.



(Constable John Rowe)

Assistant Commissioner Wyatt retired to South Australia whilst Sergeant Rowe is presently on extended long service leave pending his retirement in July 2003. John was awarded the Australian Police Medal in the 2001 Australia Day Honors list.

VOLUNTEERS

What would we do without our volunteers? They work tirelessly for many hours – without them this society would not exist!

A special thanks to Rosemary & John Rowe, Denzil McManus, Janell Cox, Steve Burke, David & Val Watters, Denzil McManus and John 'Pastry' Wilson to whom we extend our best wishes and

wish him a speedy recovery from recent surgery. Get well soon Pastry!!!!

Membership Fees

The Northern Territory Police Museum and Historical Society is a community-based organization that is dedicated to the preservation of the history of the Northern Territory Police Service from its inception to the present day.

As you will appreciate the various services provided by the Society, including displays of Northern Territory Police history for various events throughout the Territory, incurs considerable expense and along with conservation and preservation costs our finances are always stretched to the limit

We offer the following opportunity to become a member of our society and help with the preservation of our history, much of which has already been lost:

- 1) become a Full Member @ \$10 per year or alternatively a Life Member of the Northern Territory Police Museum & Historical Society @ \$100 per membership (**membership fees will increase to \$15 on 1 July 2002 and life membership fee will increase to \$150**).
- 2) Alternatively, offer a donation to the Society to help us record and preserve the history of the Northern Territory Police Force.

We advise that family members or friends are also able to join our Society as an Associate member, costing just \$10.00 per year (increasing to \$15 after 1 July 2002).

CURATOR'S REPORT

Since the last newsletter to the members a number of interesting events have taken place within our Society.

Firstly, since the last Annual General Meeting, I have been Curator of the Police Museum in Darwin and have been ably supported by some wonderful dedicated volunteers who have made my job much easier. Special thanks to Rosemary and John Rowe, Steve Burke, Val and David Watters, Denzil McManus and, of course, John 'Pastry' Wilson. These people are the life-blood of our Society and we must ensure that we don't lose them due to lack of interest or interesting things to do.

The Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, through the Regional Museums Support Officer, Sue Harlow, has provided a number of our members with some training in relation to Cataloguing of the Collection; Preservation and Conservation of Papers and Preservation and Conservation of Metals. The Northern Territory Archives Service, through the Oral History Unit's Francis Good, have provided us with a better understanding and methods in relation to undertaking one of our major projects - "Oral Histories".

To both of these bodies, we thank you sincerely.

As a result of all this knowledge we have now obtained, we have now

commenced the conservation work on our collection of documents and photographs. Our volunteers have been coming in each Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings for a couple of hours and are slowly working their way through the collection. They are also becoming great sources of information due to the fact that the most important part of the work is actually reading the documents. I am sure that they are truly amazed at some of the antics that some of our former members got up to. At this time we have only been working on the files that relate to deceased members of the NT Police Force, but this, obviously, will change in time. If anyone else is interested in participating in these "hands-on" days, please feel free to drop into House No. 2 on any of those days and we will certainly get you started.

Our records are only as good as the collection and we are seeking assistance from all former members and their spouses or families to consider donating items to enhance this unique collection.

To date we now have four "travelling displays" ready to be sent out to a variety of locations at any time. They are: "Policing the Tablelands", "The Last Hanging", "In Honour of Courage" and "Police Stations of the Northern Territory from 1870 to present".

We are now working on future displays and invite anyone with information, or who would like to assist with the preparation and research on these exhibitions, please contact us. The topics of the future displays include: Sporting Achievements of Police Members; Transportation in the NT Police; Trackers/Police Aides/Aboriginal Community Police

Officers; Wars / The Nakeroos. If you have any other suggestions, please give us a call.

Obviously, all of this work costs money and we have been fortunate enough to receive a grant from the Regional Museums Support Program that has provided some funding for conservation materials and also part of my wage. We have recently applied for a grant from the Northern Territory History Grants 2002 to commence our work on the Oral Histories Project. The forthcoming "Condon Commemoration" in Katherine has also provided us with an 'event' for the 2002 Year of the Outback and as such we have also applied for a Grant to assist with that as well.

The Australian National Library in Canberra also have what are known as the "2002 Community Heritage Grants" and we are currently working on that submission seeking funds to continue our valuable work on the conservation and preservation of the collection.

As you can see - a lot of work is going on behind the scenes and we hope that more of our members will become involved. If you are able to assist - even for a short time - please consider "Your museum".

**MUSEUM'S AUSTRALIA
ANNUAL CONFERENCE
ADELAIDE - MARCH 2002
CURATOR'S REPORT**

Walking into the Adelaide Convention Centre to register for the Conference with a sea of unfamiliar faces - a hat - I must see a hat - at last - Mickey

appears - hat and all - now at least I know someone!!

I was then introduced to a myriad of people - all seem to know Mickey so I figured that I would benefit immensely by staying in contact - for the first part of the program anyway.

I attended a variety of sessions and two Special Interest Groups (SIG) sessions. I could have attended more but due to the time frames it was only possible for me to attend the Travelling Exhibitions and Community Museums programs.

Both were of great benefit to me personally and obvious benefits will flow to our museum. I really though that I was in the wrong place at one stage when the speakers at the Travelling Exhibitions SIG were talking of staff of around 20 (including design managers, curators, IT experts etc) and budgets in the vicinity of \$500,000 plus!! Wow!! My Travelling Exhibitions consist of 3-4 people assisting and a maximum budget of \$4,000. But and most importantly, we have always achieved our aims and objectives.

Whilst in Adelaide I took the opportunity to make contact with and attend the police museum and historical society who have a common interest with our society. This meeting and tour was a very productive day and have provided our organization with a valuable link in our history. We have now formed some formal links with exchange of material and information that is relevant to both groups.

The 'Regional Rave' was a great opportunity to hear how other regional museums achieve their aims and objectives. The discussion groups provided for an interesting look at a variety of scenarios and how we would deal with them.

The receipt of the bursary enabled me to attend the Conference with minimal cost to our Society. This experience has been invaluable to me personally and to our Society as a whole.

Roll on May 2003 and I hope to be in Perth for "The Other Side".

A special thanks to Daena Murray, Mickey Dewar, Pauline Cockrill and Janie Mason who all provided moral support from the Territory. A great event and well worth the effort of attending.

(This article was my report to the Museums Australia - NT Branch.)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

President	Dr Bill Wilson
Vice President/Public Officer	Mr Sean Parnell
Secretary	Mrs Jan Woodcock
Treasurer	Mr John Jones
Curator	Ms Janell Cox
Committee	Mr John Rowe Mr Denzil McManus Mr John Woodcock Mr Bob Crowell

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ORAL HISTORIES

One of the major projects being undertaken by the Society is that of Oral Histories of former members and their spouses.

We have a number of members, in Darwin, who have been trained to be able to undertake this task.

We are seeking the assistance of as many former members as possible to provide us with either a written or oral record of your Northern Territory Police Service history.

The histories should include the following basic information:

- Date and place of birth
- Schooling level achieved
- What employment you undertook prior to joining the NTPF
- What made you join the NTPF
- When you joined and where you undertook your training (if any)
- Where you were stationed and the people you worked with, persons of interest you have met and interesting stories you may have come across
- Any major or interesting investigations that you were involved in
- The reason why you left the NTPF – either age or medical retirement, resignation or due to your marriage

Colin Pope has offered to undertake the interviews in Adelaide where he now lives. Colin will be contacting Adelaide people in the near future. All assistance would be appreciated.

The aim of this project is to compile a comprehensive record of the histories of as many former members as possible. Our criteria for the recorded oral histories is someone who has served at least 10 years in the NT Police or who has been involved in a major or interesting event whilst they served. The criteria are obviously flexible because if you have interesting information that relates to historical significance (ie persons you have met, buildings of interest, local history etc)..

IMPROVING OUR COLLECTION

As most of you are already aware, our Curator and a number of volunteers are currently working on the current collection of photographs, documents and articles to conserve and preserve them. We are seeking further items for our collection and invite members to contribute to the collection.

If you are unsure of what type of items we are interested in collecting, please contact Janell at the office on (08) 8922 3374. If you were able to assist with some items, it would also be appreciated if you could identify the item, photo or document and anyone who is depicted in them. Bearing in mind that we really do have limited space for the collection, maybe a phone call first would be the best option.

We look forward to receiving the items etc from you.