

Bruce PROVOST
Retired Detective Superintendent AFP740

Bruce grew up on a farm in Macksville and was an active member of his local surf lifesaving club. He was a vintage car enthusiast and had an old 1936 Fargo Dodge Ute, from his Uncle Ernie's property at Taylors Arms transported to Sydney, so that he could restore it. Such was his passion and as a means of relaxation, it was not uncommon for Bruce to rise out of bed early and put a few hours in restoring his Fargo before heading off to work.

Retired Superintendent Ron CRAMP, (AFP541), put together his memories of his time working together with Bruce for his Eulogy; and the following insights were extracted from Ron's notes.

"In late 1982 I was attached to the Organised Crime Branch, Sydney. I was pleasantly surprised to be told that I would be working with Bruce PROVOST, along with other Detectives, investigating False Passport matters and Italian Organised Crime.

During our investigations, Bruce, who was in charge of my team at Organised Crime Branch, developed an informant who was registered under the code name of "Tack". This person later became known as a "Supergrass". "Tack's" information was invaluable as it gave an insider's view of the activities of Robert TRIMBOLE and his associates. One valuable piece of "Tack's" information identified a person working in the Sydney Passports Office who arranged false passports for TRIMBOLE. That person was subsequently prosecuted and imprisoned.

About this same time the Stewart Royal Commission into Drug Trafficking into Australia commenced. The Commission looked into various suspects and organizations believed to be involved in drugs. The main concentration was on a group who were known as the "Mr Asia Drug Syndicate".

The main characters in this Syndicate had decamped overseas to England and various other places. Those persons included Terry CLARK, Jimmy SHEPHERD, and Alison DINE. When they left, Robert (Aussie Bob) TRIMBOLE took over the running of the heroin importation and distribution organization. TRIMBOLE later became aware that AFP, NSWPOL and VICPOL were investigating him for various criminal matters and he also fled overseas with his de-facto wife and her daughter.

Bruce and our team continued with our investigations of Robert TRIMBOLE and his criminal activities.

In February 1983, a Joint Prosecution Team was formed between the AFP and NSW Police to investigate details that witnesses alleged to have happened regarding the importation, distribution and trafficking of narcotics. Solicitors from NSWDP and CDPP were also part of the Team.

Bruce PROVOST and I were the obvious choices from the AFP. Our tasks were to investigate and prosecute those members of the Mr Asia Drug Syndicate that had been mentioned in the Royal Commission. Our 4 main targets were; Terry CLARK, James SHEPHERD, CHOO CHENG KUI and Robert TRIMBOLE. Subsequently, Bruce and I travelled around most states of Australia, and to New Zealand, Hong Kong and England conducting inquiries and obtaining detailed statements from a large number of witnesses.

*We usually shared a room at Motels and Hotels to save some "pocket money". Bruce used to take delight in telling those that we met from various police forces that, **"Ron and I have not only slept together around Australia, but almost all around the World"**.*

Whilst in Hong Kong we would walk from our hotel to the Police Headquarters building where we were working. The local Chinese people would just stop and watch Bruce walk by. They could not get over how big and tall he was.

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During our investigations, Terry CLARK died whilst in goal in England. Bob TRIMBOLE was arrested in Ireland. He was released on a technicality and later fled to Spain which had no Extradition Treaty with Australia. The supplier of the Mr Asia Heroin, CHOO CHENG KUI (known as "Chinese Jack"), was extradited from Singapore to Sydney and James SHEPHERD was extradited from USA to Sydney.

The Trials for both SHEPHERD and CHOO commenced as combined Trials. Witness evidence proved in Court that 60 kilos of heroin had been imported into Australia by the Syndicate, but the witnesses had estimated there had actually been over 200 kilos imported by CLARK and his associates during the period 1976 to 1979. SHEPHERD was convicted on charges of Conspiracy to Import illegal narcotics and Trafficking illegal drugs and sentenced to two lots of 20 years imprisonment. CHOO was convicted of Conspiracy to Import illegal narcotics and was sentenced to two lots of 14 years imprisonment.

The success we had in that case was largely due to Bruce's leadership and tenacity in bringing the offenders to justice. After the trials were completed I was promoted to Brisbane and Bruce was seconded to the National Crime Authority in Sydney.

It was certainly my pleasure to have known and worked with Bruce Provost. He was an inspiration to me and one of the best investigators I have known. May he now rest in peace."

Bruno Robert "Aussie Bob" TRIMBOLE died aged 56 years, apparently of a heart attack, on 13 May 1987, at a villa near Alicante, Spain. As TRIMBOLE had used aliases to flee Australia and to avoid arrest Bruce flew to Spain to verify the deceased body as being that of Robert TRIMBOLE.

Bruce longed to get back onto the land and prior to his retirement he purchased property at Bungonia, (near Goulburn), and went to night school to learn how to care for and raise cattle together with other necessary agricultural skills.

Upon his retirement he moved to his property, built a home and began the process of becoming a 'man on the land'. Not unlike many others there was personal tragedy in his life, however, his final years were brightened when he married Helene'. Unfortunately, his retirement was cut short when he was diagnosed with a cancer which then moved through his body over a number of years. He is also survived by his daughters Belinda and Rebecca.

Regarding Bruce's nicknames, I believe "Slug" was given to him when in the Organised Crime Branch (OCB), Sydney, and I don't know the origin of the term. Police have a funny sense of humour and following the creation by ABC children's TV of Bananas in Pyjamas, B1 and B2, it was only appropriate as the OCB had two Bruce's, they should be renamed, Bruce ONLEY became B1 and Bruce PROVOST B2, (alphabetical order of course!).

Prepared by Ian TORRANCE with assistance from Ron CRAMP and others.