



Drugs “Eye Opener” for AFP Veteran

A transfer to the Telecommunications Intelligence Branch brought home the extent of the drug problem in Australia to a 35 year police veteran who retired from the AFP on July 28.

“It was a real eye opener for me,” Superintendent Dick Allatson said. Superintendent Allatson was made Deputy Commander of what was then the Special Project Branch in 1986 and became Commander of the re-named branch in 1987.

“The extent of the drug problem shown through the work of the branch was a revelation,” he said.

“It is important that the size of the problem be kept before the public and government.

“The branch had a staff of 25 three years ago and the current staff level of 46 demonstrates the ever growing amount of work the area is handling.

“This is a very critical area operationally and of great assistance to the drug investigation area.”

Superintendent Allatson said the number of warrants issued for telephone intercepts had doubled since 1986. The number of warrants allowing the use of listening devices issued up to May this year was nearly as high as for the whole of the previous 12 months. Listening devices warrants in particular indicated the level of AFP work in the drug area.

He paid tribute to the staff of the branch, saying the AFP had been lucky in getting good people for what was a highly sensitive and confined environment, and in keeping them.

Superintendent Allatson began his career in 1954 with the Norwich City Police in England, served with the Cyprus Police during the fighting there in 1957-59 and later became an



Canberra, 1989.



Nyasaland, 1960.

complaining that he had not been paid in full.

“At the subsequent murder trial the ‘crocodile man’ had argued that as he wasn’t himself at the time of the death but had been in his reptile form, he could not be held responsible.

“The court had a European judge who was advised by three local tribal elders. They supported the defendant, but the judge found the accused guilty and sentenced him to death. Magic was part of the way of life.

“I met a European farmer who had driven 1,000 miles from Kenya along dirt roads in his brand new Mercedes to consult a renowned witch-doctor in my area. He was convinced some of his staff were stealing his cattle and he wanted to be able to go back and threaten them with the power of the witch-doctor.

“Nyasaland was a real change after Cyprus where Greek Cypriots were fighting for ‘Enosis’, or union, with Greece,” he said. “Several police were killed, usually from ambush while performing police duties or while off duty. In one incident we lost four officers in one morning. They were new to the island and were ambushed while sight-seeing.

“The best thing that came out of Cyprus for me was meeting my wife, Rosalind, there. She was also serving with the police on secondment from one of the UK forces.”



Novel transport — Cyprus, 1977.

Inspector with the Nyasaland Police in what is now the African republic of Malawi.

“Some of the cases there were somewhat different to what I was used to,” he said.

“I remember a family feud during which a man alleged to have the ability to turn himself into a crocodile was hired to kill a young girl whose drowned body was subsequently found in a river with a broken arm.

“The case came to the attention of the police when one of our sergeants heard the ‘crocodile man’



Superintendent Allatson was to see Cyprus again — he returned in 1976 as part of the UN peacekeeping effort and again in 1980 as commander of the first AFP contingent to go to the island. (Previous Australian police involvement had been under COMPOL).

When Nyasaland gained its independence from Britain, Superintendent Allatson returned to Britain in 1964.

“Going back on the beat in the UK was very hard for a while but in 1966, Mr Ray Whitrod, who was then the Commissioner of COMPOL, recruited me and several other British police for his force.

“March 19 of that year saw me as a uniformed constable in the Commonwealth Police in Canberra, and I started my progress up through the ranks again!”

He had seen the pressures on police during his long career. “It is much

harder for officers on the street now. When I started as a policeman people had much greater respect for the police and we seemed to get more support from the public.

“The greater emphasis on civil liberties these days can mean more attention is paid to the welfare of the minority than the majority. What we have in effect is a curfew on law-abiding citizens because the hoodlum element is getting too big a control of the streets of our cities at night.

“The level of violence is much worse than it was. When I first came to Canberra 23 years ago murders and armed hold-ups were unheard of, now they are almost commonplace,” he said.

Superintendent Allatson plans to spend his retirement expanding his work with the Lions organisation, trying to reduce his golf handicap and “a bit of fishing”. May all the bites be big ones.



A 'Debonair' Superintendent Allatson.