

# Citation

The Newsletter of the Northern Territory  
Police Museum and Historical Society Inc.

Patron: Commissioner Paul White APM

Issued : May 2009



## Vince Kelly's Criminal Past

- See story page 3



## CHIT CHAT

### CHARLESWORTH SEARCH CONTINUES

Ground penetrating radar has failed to find the remains of Mounted Constable Thomas Charlesworth who drowned in Peters Creek February 1884. A spot thought to be the grave site was examined, without success. A further attempt will be made to locate the grave in the Dry as the area is now covered in tall grass.

### IN DEFENCE OF CAMELS - From Tony Kelly

As the last surviving Police Cameleer, I was a bit surprised at some of the comments attributed to Ernest Sell (November 2008 Citation ) concerning a camel patrol with Vic Hall into South Australia: "Riding camels proved painful. Sell vividly recalled skin being rubbed off his backside. When he sought relief by dismounting and walking, he was in danger of being left behind as the beast loped away."

Camels are very social animals. On patrol they keep in line one behind the other. Most are well loaded and they walk at an even pace. A riding camel would not be likely to "lope away" from the other camels. The map I used at Finke had been hand-drawn by an earlier officer, with distances calculated at their walking rate of two and a quarter miles per hour. I had been a bushwalker before I joined the Force, so I walked a lot when on patrol, riding mostly in the worst heat and when I needed to get a better view. Riding, you saw the wildlife that would have disappeared at the sound of human footsteps.

The comfort of the saddle was what you made it. The saddle consisted of two padded parallel iron bars joined by three metal arches. The first two arches straddled the camel's hump. The rider sat between the second and third, on whatever was available and comfortable. People now pay to ride on camels with similar saddles. Bob (not Bill) Buck was pretty sharp, and a joker. The story he told of trying to turn off electric lights like candles was the sort of thing he would tell tourists.

### DEATH OF AN EXTRAORDINARY BLOKE

Arthur "John" Gordon, a true "bush" policeman, died on November 14, 2008. He began his career in March 1936 as a junior constable with SA Police and was sworn in as a constable in the NT Police Force in November 1947. He was a forceful advocate for more comprehensive resources for police. In 1956, following a (successful) search for a crashed plane and missing pilot in the Mataranka district, he made representation – in very strong terms – to his superintendent re the lack of personnel and equipment to undertake such an exercise.

John Gordon's name is inevitably associated with Timber Creek; to this day people he met while serving there identify John and his wife, Jessie, as close personal friends. His interests extended well beyond his police duties to conservation and preservation. In 1958, in a comprehensive report on Gregory's Bottle Tree close to a bank of the Victoria River, he suggested that this historic site be taken over by the Northern Territory Reserves Board "before the whole camp site will have floated down the river and a very valuable historical landmark will be gone forever". After resigning in 1963 he subsequently wrote his memoirs entitled Just An Ordinary Bloke.

# A Gang of Talented Kellys

*Being shown through the NSW Police and Justice Museum in Sydney, NT Police Association President, Senior Sergeant Vince Kelly, did a double take when he saw an exhibit in which his name was writ large.*

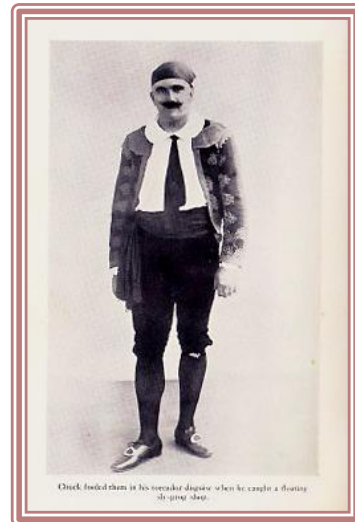
In this case, the person it referred to was not a notorious felon but a highly regarded crime reporter- no relation - who had extensive police and political connections. Vince Kelly, the journalist/author, was a prolific writer of crime fiction. His stories, especially the Inspector Price thrillers, were well known before the 1950s ushered in the boom in crime fiction writing in Australia –Carter Brown, Marc Brody, Larry Kent and K.T. McCann being some who rode the wave.

His Inspector Price was based on Detective Inspector William Prior, former head of the Sydney Criminal Investigation Branch. First appearing in the *World's News* magazine, they later ran in the *Sunday Sun* and were translated into several languages. When run in the *World's News*, the Inspector Price stories were the subject of striking cover artwork with the Vince Kelly byline in large type, making him well known.

Vince Kelly also wrote factual crime features about early forensic work in famous cases like the Pyjama Girl Murder and the Coogee Shark Arm Case. In an article in which it was suggested that flogging should be used to stop bashers and thugs, there was a posed studio photograph of a sinister looking guy with a gat, a hat pulled down over his face, who looked suspiciously like Kelly. Kelly became the first Australian admitted to the American crime writers' guild.

One of his books, *The Bogeyman The Exploits of Sergeant C.J.Chuck Australia's Most Unpopular Cop*, Angus and Robertson, 1965, gave an insight into

crime, police tactics and corruption in the 1930-1940 period. During that time police, including Chuck, used a variety of disguises to catch offenders. Chuck even dressed up as a toreador! A group photograph in the book showed a band of roughly dressed men described as “tough looking hoodlums” who were actually undercover police.



Toreador Chuck

DARWIN'S VINCE KELLY, who reads an occasional crime novel, is busier and nimbler on his feet than your average NSW toreador. As President of the NT Police Association, Executive Editor of the *NT Police News*, President of the Police Federation of Australia and a rugby union tragic, he hardly gets time to shout ole.

His enthusiastic involvement in rugby –he is currently President of the NT Rugby Union - has seen him play in Singapore, Malaysia, France, England and Ireland. He

even had the unusual experience of playing for the New York Rugby Union Club.

In 1996 Kelly captained the NT Police Rugby XV match against the Chinese Taipei National XV, won by the visitors 32 to 24. He was closely associated with lanky Roger Ruddock, a dominant figure in police rugby for a decade, who organized numerous overseas and local matches. Ruddock left the NT Police Force to become a pilot for the Flying Doctor.

One of seven children, five boys and two girls, in a strong Catholic family, Vince Kelly, pictured, was born in Brisbane in 1966 and while at school was inducted into the local religion, rugby league, as a second rower. The family lived next to the Padua State School in Kedron where one of the secondary pupils, Paul "Fatty" Vaughn, later an international rugby league player, threw a discus on the roof of the Kelly home and broke a tile. It rained that night, water came through the ceiling, and Vince said it was the first time he could not be blamed for wetting the bed.

At the age of 12, he moved with his family to Charters Towers, the mining town in North Queensland with grand old buildings, where his father, who had previously trained for the priesthood, was the first lay principal of St. Mary's Catholic Boarding School and Vince's mother the unpaid matron.

They resided in the convent previously occupied by nuns which was next to the girls' living quarters. As part of the deal with his father, the doors between the school sleeping area and the convent were alarmed just in case the boys ventured into forbidden territory. Vince was fascinated by his time at Charters Towers, describing his three years there as a life changing experience. Had the family not made the move, he suspects he would still be living in Brisbane. In the suburb of Kedron a lot

of the kids he knew there were now either dead from drugs or traffic accidents; many of them had not moved more than one or two blocks from where they grew up.



He has observed that children of people who move about, like those in the Defence Forces, taken out of their comfort zone, seemed to develop the ability to mix more readily and cope with changing circumstances. In Charters Towers he enjoyed camping, shooting and canoeing. In 1982, in grade 10 at Mt Carmel College at the Towers he saw an advertisement for a cadet scheme in the Northern Territory Police Force. After discussing the matter with his parents, they insisted he finish years 11 and 12.

Throughout his time in Charters Towers he played rugby league. Another interesting change in life came when his father took up a position in Townsville at the Catholic Education Office and they lived on Magnetic Island for two years at Arcadia. While on the island he joined the Arcadia Surf Life Saving Club and did a fair amount of paddling about on a surf ski. In 1984 he commenced study at James Cook University where his father had just been appointed principal of St Paul's Catholic College, a residential facility. The intention was that Vince would take up teaching like his father. However, he describes his time at university as unsuccessful on the academic side, but superb from the sporting point of view as

it introduced him to rugby union which became a passion. His involvement in the code opened doors and introduced him to interesting and influential people in various parts of the world.

After leaving university he took time off doing a variety of things including manual labour and as a salesman for butchers' supplies. His older sister was a Darwin nurse, so the Territory beckoned once more. In 1986 he applied for a job with the NTPF but discovered that his application had been lost. Eventually interviewed, he was accepted and joined the force on January 12, 1987. On graduating after the training course, his mother's cousin, Mick Gorey, who had been in the Queensland Police Force for 35 years, with whom Vince was close, sent him his old shoulder holster.

Vince was posted to Alice Springs in mid-1987 and subsequently served in Ali Curung, Katherine, back in Alice and in Darwin CIB, now Major Crime, and became OIC of Casuarina. He was

promoted to Detective Sergeant in 1999 and Senior Sergeant in 2002. In May 2001 he was elected president of the NTPA and has since been re elected three times unopposed. As president of the NTPA he held a position on the Police Federation of Australia executive and served as its treasurer and vice president, becoming its president in November 6, 2007.

His wife, Andrea, was born and bred in Alice Springs. They were married in 2003 on the Wednesday before the Rugby World Cup Final in Sydney and attended the final. Vince had an uncle in Darwin- Kevin Kelly- who worked at the *Northern Territory News* for nearly 50 years and helped keep the presses rolling under difficult conditions from the old Tin Bank days with its clapped out equipment. Kevin not only looked like Vince's father, he also had the same poor eyesight. Unfortunately, Kevin collapsed and died from a heart attack after a daily run and Vince attended the incident.

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## NT's HALL OF FAME

Anecdotes about Vic Hall seem endless. There is no doubt that he was an exceptional character. Museum committee member Denzil McManus tells of the time Hall returned to Darwin on a State Ship after an eye operation in Perth. Denzil picked him up at the wharf. A crewmember he (McManus) knew said Hall, with a flourish, had introduced himself to passengers as Hall, V.C. Some people took this to mean he had been awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery and had shouted him a drink or three.



*Two unusual articles compiled with the extensive assistance of New Zealand journalist /author Ross Annabell about major Northern Territory news events involving police - the wild uranium boom which saw fortunes made and lost, and the dramatic Petrov Affair at Darwin Airport. A renowned Australasian feature writer, Annabell taught journalism at the Wellington Polytechnical College, has been known to make home brew in his bathtub, knows a recipe for dandelion wine and, now 80, still writes for publications. Any publisher looking for new material should look at Annabell's novel about a pirate queen on the Great Barrier Reef and his personal account of 50 years' hunting, fishing and shooting in Australia and New Zealand which contains a substantial NT section.*

## 1. Follow That Motorbike to Rare Adventures!

AFTER MORE than half a century, a motorbike which once belonged to former Mounted Constable Vic Hall has, figuratively speaking, been dusted off and revved up. Hall had a long love affair with motorbikes as he had one when stationed at Anthony's Lagoon in 1930. Reporter Ross Annabell, who edited the *Northern Territory News*, the *Northern Standard* and worked in the Darwin ABC office in the 1950s, recalled buying the bike in amusing and informative emails sent to the Northern Territory Police Museum and Historical Society. The bike is pictured here, a kerosene tin attached to the rear to convert it into a packhorse. Shirley Freedon, the sister of the then *NT News* manager, is sitting on the seat, tall speargrass in the background.

A considerate son, Ross Annabell kept in touch with his mother back in New Zealand through regular letters written as he roamed about Australia in various journalistic posts, including starting up the *Mt Isa Mail* newspaper, and a period commercial fishing off the Queensland coast. Roaming about Cape York he met up with miner Joe Fisher who later came to the Northern Territory and became a Member of the Legislative Council. After carefully reading each letter, his mother kept them and they were eventually passed back to him years later.

A late 1953 letter said Ross had bought a secondhand 1950 model LE Velocette motorbike for 90 pound (\$180) from Vic Hall, an author and artist. Hall, he wrote, was "a very interesting old bird" who knew the Territory like the back of his hand. The bike was cheap because Hall had lined up a 1951 model Velocette with less mileage for the same amount of money. The cheque Ross gave Hall had been handed straight over to the vendor of the later model. For his part, Hall, out of the police force and with poor eyesight, was often seen riding about Darwin on his Velocette with his wife on the back.



Annabell's bike came complete with an unusual accessory – a thick lump of electric cable – attached to the handlebar. Hall told him this was to “dong” attacking dogs. The cable was thrown away by the new owner who regretted doing so when riding along the Esplanade and a fox terrier attached itself to his ankle.

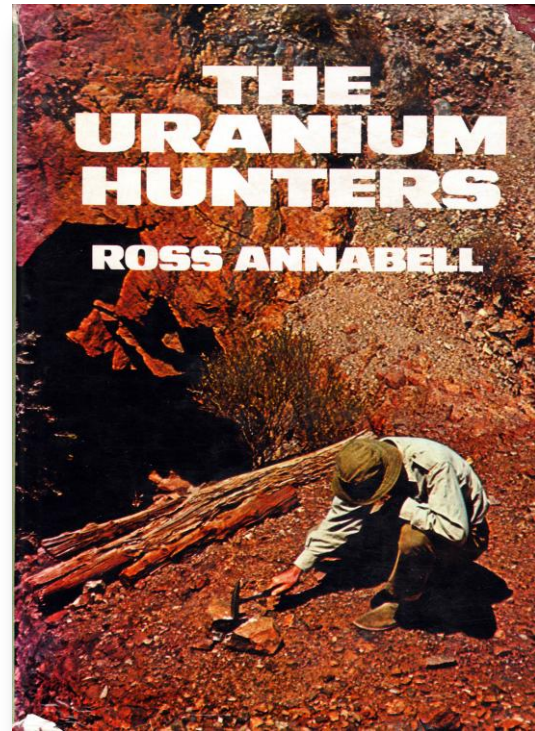
In his letter home, Annabell said Velocettes were slow old crates, his not capable of more than 40mph. English - made and described as a businessman's bike, it was built like a car with a water-cooled engine. There was not much wrong with it- except the self starter would not engage and it needed a new cog or “something” at a cost of about a “ tenner ”all up. Apart from that, the motor ran like a bird.

One of the many extraordinary characters Annabell came in contact with in the Territory was Jack Gardner, a knock about prospector who had recently spent time in Fannie Bay for supplying liquor to an Aborigine. Gardner and two others stumbled upon a uranium find at Adelaide River, the Lennox Find, for which they were eventually paid \$220,000.

While negotiations for the sale of the deposit were going on, Annabell, caught up in the uranium fever which gripped the Top End, took Gardner down to the find on the Velocette. With all their gear for an overnight camp and two people aboard the motorbike it was a slow trip. They did not exactly rough it out in the open, as Gardner insisted they bunk down on the Adelaide River railway station.

Soon after the exciting trip, Annabell and Darwin ABC journalist Tony Crew, an Englishman, who operated out of an office in the Hotel Darwin, decided to form a syndicate and search for uranium in a bid to also strike it rich. Mining engineer Eoin Macdonald was also brought in as an

advisor because of his geological knowledge. Macdonald, working for a company, had found a uranium deposit at Brock's Creek which he named Fleur de Lys after a French barmaid at the Hotel Darwin, Lys Petou.



Because Annabell was freelancing and covering the uranium boom for many southern outlets, he became the syndicate's main prospector. He met all the leading players in the uranium search and was smuggled into Rum Jungle mine to expose the primitive conditions under which the men worked and lived.

The motorbike did a lot of bush bashing as he eagerly clambered about the countryside seeking his own Eldorado. Crew and another Kiwi journalist, the then *NT News* editor, Hugh Mabbett, came out bush with Ross on weekends. Mabbett had been gold prospecting in North Queensland but got lost and the Adelaide Police Station was alerted. With a police party, including Trackers, about to set out to look for him, Mabbett turned up and

was abused by his mates who had spent an anxious night worrying about him.

The Velocette was often loaded down with tools, stakes, tucker and camping gear.

With the help of a geiger counter, Annabell eventually found a promising deposit which became known as Annamount. Despite moments of elation, the find did not make the syndicate's fortune.

They received \$1000 from mining entrepreneur, the "Maori Mayor of Tennant Creek", Al McDonald, who vigorously, but unsuccessfully, tried to flog Annamount to a group of Sydney speculators which included author Frank Clune, who came up and looked at the site. McDonald sealed the original contract with Annabell and partners with a down payment of one pound (\$2), certainly not

enough with which to go out and paint the town.

Samples gathered on further prospecting trips were sometimes carried in a pillow slip Crew purloined from the Hotel Darwin, which would have upset the owner, Mick Paspalis, had he known. Out of those heady days came Annabell's book, *The Uranium Hunters*, published by Rigby in 1971, now out of print but deserves to be republished because of the fascinating period it covered in NT history.

NOTE: The NT Police Museum and Historical Society would dearly like to obtain photographs anyone has of Hall with the motorbike he had in the 1930s and others in later years. The whereabouts and titles of Vic Hall paintings would also be appreciated as it is intended to compile an inventory of his works.

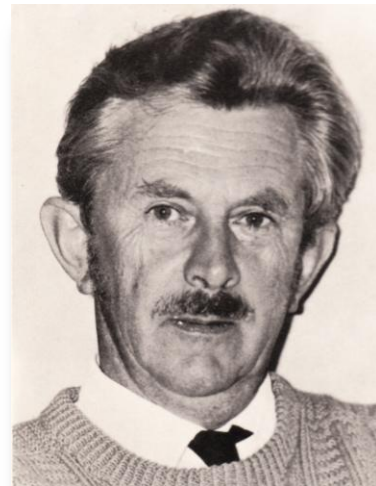
## 2. Eyewitness to a Dramatic News Event

*ON HIS TRUSTY Velocette motorbike, Ross Annabell sped to Darwin Airport on April 20, 1954 to witness the dramatic rescue of Mrs Petrov, wife of a Russian defector, from her armed escorts. Photographs of Sergeant Greg Ryall with a headlock on a burly Russian were flashed around the world. From his extensive files, Annabell sent the NT Police Museum and Historical Society a copy of the Life magazine front cover story of the Petrov Affair and his eyewitness report of the event written at the time. His graphic account reads as follows:*

Darwin April 22, 1954.  
By Ross Annabell

Tense drama amazed the Western world this week as Mrs Evdokia Petrov, wife of defected Russian spy Vladimir Petrov, made her last-minute escape from armed Russian embassy staff in Darwin on Tuesday.

Diplomatic, civil, and security police, Pressman and photographers watched the





amazing story unfold as Australian police struggled with Russian diplomats trying to forcibly return Mrs Petrov to Russia against her will.

The dazed and weeping woman eventually chose political asylum in Australia.



Drama had been expected in Darwin on Tuesday morning following an amazing scene of mob antagonism when Mrs Petrov was dragged aboard a BOAC constellation on Monday night at Sydney airport.

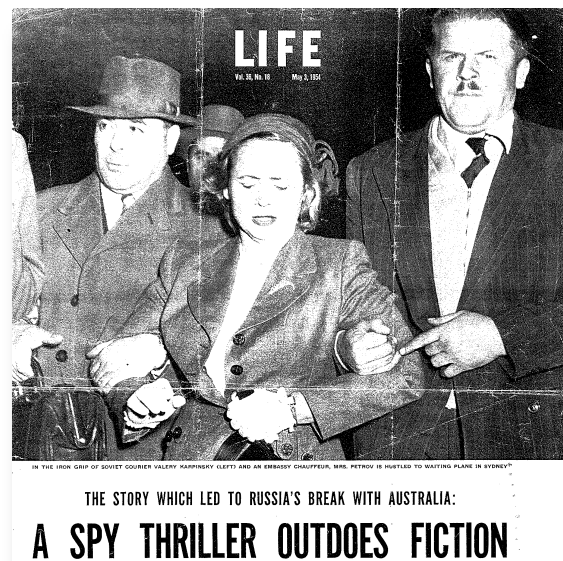
Darwin police had been alerted that there could be trouble on the plane's arrival and there was a security guard at Darwin Aerodrome's entrance. Armed police and airmen patrolled the gate and no one could enter without authority. Police manned the customs area with revolvers conspicuous on their hips.

Word had been sent back to Sydney by the BOAC's captain that at least one of the Russians was armed with a revolver or pistol.

The government secretary for the Northern Territory Mr R.S. Leydin (the Acting Administrator) was waiting at the drome with instructions to interview Mrs Petrov and ascertain if she really wanted to stay in Australia, and if so to grant her political asylum. When two of the Russian couriers stepped out of the aircraft they were requested to surrender their arms if they had them. The Russian Zharkov, a big heavily built, dark jowled man and Karpinsky burly and fair-haired said they were diplomats and refused to hand over weapons.

Immediately the civil police under Superintendent W. Littlejohn moved in to search the Russians.

Zharkov protested immediately a hand was laid on his clothing and a fierce fracas followed with Zharkov struggling and throwing punches. One of the Russians attempted to strike Mister Leydin with an attache case. Zharkov looked as though he was attempting to draw a weapon but Constable Davis grabbed an overcoat and wrapped it around Zharkov's arms. Then unarmed combat instructor Sgt Greg Ryall applied a quick stranglehold around the Russians neck and pinned him upright, struggling and protesting.



IN THE IRON GRIP OF SOVIET COURIER VALERY KARPINSKY (LEFT) AND AN EMBASSY CHAUFFEUR, MRS. PETROV IS HURLED TO WAITING PLANE IN SYDNEY™

THE STORY WHICH LED TO RUSSIA'S BREAK WITH AUSTRALIA:  
**A SPY THRILLER OUTDOES FICTION**

Sgt Ryall told me afterwards that he expected Zharkov to shoot if he got his revolver out. "He was fighting mad and as he struggled and fought, he was sliding to the ground, out of the grip of Constable Davis's pinning arms. Once on the ground he could have sprayed the lot of us with bullets. I saw his arm going for his pocket, so grabbed him in a headlock."

The headlock broke up the fight. Police disarmed the two Russians and released them.

The third Russian, second Secretary F.V. Kislitsin of the Soviet Embassy, was asked whether he had a revolver but said he was unarmed and police did not search him.

Kislitsin claimed that the police action in searching them was unwarranted and a breach of diplomatic immunity. He was told that it was a breach of Australian aviation regulations for loaded weapons to be carried in an aircraft. Arms should be handed to the captain and no ammunition carried on an aircraft in any circumstances, the Russians were told.

Meanwhile Mr Leydin was talking to blonde, attractive but dazed Mrs Petrov. On the aircraft she had thought her husband was dead, until she was given newspapers telling of events leading to her departure from Sydney. She read and reread the newspapers and during a conversation told a member of the BOAC crew that one of the couriers was armed. That information was relayed back to Sydney by the BOAC's captain and security officials in Darwin warned what to expect.

At the terminal Mrs Petrov remained in conversation with Mr Leydin for about an hour in spite of attempts by the Russians to get her away from him. Mr Kislitsin repeatedly asked to be taken to Mrs Petrov.

Mr K.S. Edmunds, Northern Territory Crown Law officer, told Kislitsin that while in Australia Mrs Petrov was free to do as she wished. Kislitsin claimed the Australian officials were holding her against her will but Mr Edmunds denied this. He said she wanted to talk to the Australian officials.

I watched Mr Leydin and a security officer take Mrs Petrov into the opaque glass windowed quarantine station and close the door. There she was able to speak to her husband by telephone in Canberra, by arrangement with Mr Leydin. I could see her silhouette against the opaque glass window and she appeared to move backwards against it and throw her arms over her face as if distraught. Meanwhile armed police and security men were clustered around the door and all were tense in the passenger lounge as we awaited the next move.

The three Russians sat side-by-side across the lounge watching the door through which she had disappeared. They looked nervous and angry and were smoking incessantly or drumming their fingers on the wooden seats.

Kislitsin suddenly leaped up, crossed the room and knocked heavily and repeatedly on the quarantine room door, shouting "Where is Mrs Petrov--- take me to her." He was told that she was still talking to Mr Leydin, and police stopped him entering. He strode angrily back to the other Russians. Several press men then moved over to interview the Russians but they refused to talk.

Then out of the corner of my eye I saw a side door of the quarantine room opening. Mr Leydin moved out and behind him, half running, was Mrs Petrov. I saw her back vanish around the corner of the corridor. Then a car vanished swiftly down

the drive, and I realised Mrs Petrov was free.

Minutes crept by and the Russians were still watching the door of the now empty room. Kislitsin could finally wait no longer. He strode back to the door angrily demanding to see Mrs Petrov. "She has gone" Crown Law officer Mr Edmunds told him. Said Kislitsin: "She has been kidnapped. She has been taken away."

Mr Edmunds told them she had gone to Government house. "She wants to be alone," he said. Kislitsin then demanded to be allowed to telephone the Russian Embassy in Canberra. The Russian was then told that Leydin understood Mrs Petrov would not be leaving on the aircraft. It was then 7:20 am and the BOAC was ready to leave. Edmunds said he would arrange for Mr Kislitsin to phone Canberra and their aircraft would be held until he had done so.

Soon every telephone line out of Darwin was jammed with calls by newspapermen. The three Russians moved to the Qantas office and stood by awaiting their call but the lines were jammed and there was a long delay. Other passengers had to hang about waiting for the aircraft to leave.

At 7.50 am Mr Edmunds announced that Mrs Petrov had asked for political asylum and it had been granted by the government. Kislitsin said he did not believe it and wanted to speak to her personally. Mr Edmunds said he would try to arrange it. Meanwhile the Russians were connected to their embassy in Canberra, and Kislitsin spoke rapidly in Russian for some minutes before hanging up.

When Mr Edmunds had failed to get through to Government House by 8:30 am the Russians went aboard the aircraft. Their guns were delivered in a sealed package to the captain and they were told

the ammunition had been removed and would be returned to the Russian Embassy in Canberra. The BOAC flight took off for Singapore shortly afterwards.

Meanwhile back at Government House, nestled on the cliffs above Darwin Harbour, a heavy guard had been posted at the gates.

All that day and night armed men patrolled the grounds. Reporters were refused permission to interview Mrs Petrov. During the afternoon we saw her walking in the Government House garden looking much happier and relaxed. As darkness fell the guards remained at the gate, and there was no sign of activity in the house.

No statement had been issued as to what was going to happen to Mrs Petrov. After midnight a car dashed out of the drive. A photographer tried to get a picture but an armed constable leapt in front of him and pulled his camera down. The car contained the Administrator, Mr F. J. S. Wise, and the Government Secretary Leydin.

Soon afterwards it returned. Government House remained in darkness with police patrolling. Around 2 am there were signs of activity in the house. Lights went on a while and then switched off, but there were two cars in the drive beside the house, and the occasional glow of a cigarette.

Then Superintendent Littlejohn of the police arrived and drove into Government House. A few minutes later engines revved up and two cars came tearing out of the drive. A photographer at the gate tried to get a photo but a constable grappled with him and tore his flashgun off the camera. There were three people in the back seat of the front car. One was a woman seated in the middle, holding something white over her face. Superintendent Littlejohn was at the wheel.

We journalists gave chase, following the cars to Darwin aerodrome, where the gates opened for us to go through. On the tarmac an Air Force transport plane was waiting all lit up with armed police and security men clustered around it. Pressmen who got there first had seen officials rush a woman aboard.

For 15 minutes reporters and photographers clustered around waiting for the plane to take off. The Administrator and Mr Leydin drove a car load of baggage to the back of a hangar near a Dakota aircraft which was standing in the darkness. Somebody said that the first aircraft was only a security decoy, and we all rushed across to the Dakota.

The aircraft was lit up inside, with crew moving about and ground staff were busy with chocks. An Air Force jeep stood by with airmen armed with rifles. Fifteen minutes later a car appeared, driven fast to the door of the plane. Two men with a woman between them made for the plane's entrance door, as burly security men surrounded them. I was aiming my camera at the woman when a big figure jumped in front of the lens and blocked it with his briefcase. I tried to dive sideways, but so did he. When a woman and her escorts were safely in the plane, he said: "When will you fellows realise that this woman's life is in danger?" He then vanished after

her into the Dakota, which took off shortly afterwards.

Other police officers involved in the airport drama were Senior Inspector W. McKinnon, Sergeant Syd Bowie, Senior Constables L.J. McFarland, L.C. Hook and F.J. Fay and Constables T. Hollow, W.J. Taylor, A.F. Metcalfe, J.S. Kilworth, A.D. Wilson, G.E. Raabe, J.B. Tiernan and A.C. Rose. The *Life* magazine account written by *Melbourne Herald* Darwin based journalist Doug Lockwood carried a full page picture of Sergeant Ryall referring to him as a good country cop clamping a stranglehold on an armed guard. Constable "Fangs" Metcalfe, a pistol attached to his waist, also featured in the coverage.

Annabell's book *The Uranium Hunters* covered the event and contains additional information about Superintendent Littlejohn's involvement in the affair. Annabell bought a BSA Bantam on hire purchase with money from a cheque he earned writing about the uranium boom and eventually rode to Sydney on the machine.

For his part in the Petrov Affair, Superintendent Littlejohn had very little to say about the matter. In one account, he said thus: "The two blokes had firearms in their pockets, so we grabbed them with a headlock. They had no hope in the world."

### SQUEAKY CLEAN:

When Denzil McManus was a Probationary Constable at Katherine he was instructed by Station Sergeant Dennis "Dinny" Smyth to help Vic Hall move furniture stored in the station to his cottage on the bank of the river. His possessions included valuable paintings which Denzil was instructed had to be handled with care. There was a heavy Silent Knight fridge which Denzil checked, cleaning the flue and trimming the wick. Better service than Grace Bros.



## Difficult Reign of the Abbotts

**LIFE CERTAINLY** was not easy for Charles Lydiard Aubrey “Strawberry” Abbott when he was both the NT Administrator and Police Commissioner from 1937 to 1946. The son of the Chief Stipendiary Magistrate in Sydney, he was a Mounted Constable in the NSW Police Force and a confidential clerk at police headquarters from 1908 to 1914. While in the latter position, his family referred to him as “the sleuth”. Abbott confessed that when he was a mountie, he never rode the range, working inside.

The *NT Dictionary of Biography* states he was in the force sent to capture German New Guinea, went ashore at Gallipoli, served in the Light Horse Brigade and seemingly led part of the famous last cavalry charge at Beersheba, later explaining his leading part on an intelligent, small mare which insisted on following a narrow Turkish patrol path. In that action Abbott only fired one shot from his revolver and almost reluctantly asked a Turkish general to hand over his sword.

In Egypt he also met Hilda Gertrude Hartnett, said to be the first Australian woman to serve overseas with the Red Cross, proposed to her in front of the Sphinx, and they married on October 24, 1916. The daughter of grazier, she had travelled widely in Europe, South East Asia and New Zealand and had worked as a secretary in a law practice. During his wartime service he also met Lawrence of Arabia.

Abbott resigned with the rank of captain, entered politics, strongly attacking the Labor Party and its association with “Communists” and in 1928 became the Minister for Home and Territories in the Bruce –Page Government. In that position he had responsibility for the NT, divided into Northern Australia and Central Australia in those days. The next year he went on an extensive tour of the outback, which included Wyndham in WA, in the chartered plane, *Canberra*, piloted by Captain Holder. As a result of that tour of

inspection he ordered the Government Resident to issue dress regulations for police constables in Central Australia. Numerically numbered badges were to be issued to each police officer and those who had the old NT police badges were to exchange them for new ones. An inventory of all government property was also ordered.



Abbott lost his seat when the Scullin Labor Government came into power and soon after wrote an article for the *Sydney Morning Herald* about the problems and possibilities of North Australia revealed by his tour as minister. In it he said the future of the Territory depended on the meat export trade. However, the bloodstock had to be improved and runs had to be fenced. The lack of development should be laid at the door of certain British companies, two of which held 50,000 square miles of the best country in North Australia and ran them with the least possible expenditure. They did not pay many white men wages

and he would be surprised to learn that they paid their managers, housed in hot, galvanized residences, a high salary. There could be a big future for sheep. Agitators were a problem in Darwin. The best peanuts in Australia grew down the Daly and coconuts seen at the Botanical Gardens in Darwin were equal to any South Seas plantation.

The article attracted the attention and ire of the pastoralist company Vestey's. Its Australian attorney, C.W.D Conacher, said Mr Abbott had made a very serious charge against British companies, with as little foundation as many of his other statements. Vestey's had spent more than 200,000 pound (\$400,000) on improvements. He referred to one of "Mr Abbott's wildest statements". Every federal government had shirked the problems of the Northern Territory, Conacher wrote. Politics being what they were, he could see little prospect of the problem being faced unless the Press and the public in the south woke up to the waste of men and money that was going on up there, and insisted on a progressive policy being carried out, which had the endorsement of the people on the spot, whose assistance should be invoked to carry it out. The people in the north were not politically strong enough to make themselves felt without the assistance of their enlightened brothers in the south. Abbott was re-elected in 1931 and 1934.

A writer, Mrs Abbott co- wrote *Life on the Land* in 1932 and, under the nom-de - plume, Haliden Hartt, penned an item for the *Sydney Morning Herald* of February 18, 1933 about Canberra's river, the Molongolo. An interesting and little known aspect of their life during the Depression was her husband's close connection with Eric Campbell, head of the New Guard movement in Sydney, a member of which, Captain Francis de Groot, slashed the ribbon before NSW

Premier Jack Lang officially opened the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1932. Riding a small riding school pony, de Groot was dragged from his mount by police and taken to the Callan Park Asylum reception centre, but later discharged

The New Guard, consisting mainly of ex-Army men, feared law and order would break down under the economic collapse of the Depression, the controversial bank plans of Premier Lang and that Communists would overwhelm police. It intended to back up authority in any such confrontations. Its detractors claimed it had Fascist tendencies.

Describing himself as the virtual founder of the New Guard, Eric Campbell, in his book *The Rallying Point*, Melbourne University Press, 1965, detailed his involvement with Abbott, whom he suspected was connected with the Old Guard establishment known as the Goldfinch organization, consisting of leading businessmen. Abbott called upon Campbell, offering advice and wanting details of the New Guard's planned actions.

Campbell, a lawyer who had been a colonel in WW1, wrote that perhaps his most pleasant association in talks and advice had come from the Hon. Aubrey Abbott, whom he had met in the early days of the New Guard.

It was through Abbott's good offices that I had an interesting conversation with the late Sir Earle Page (one of the founders of the Country Party and a surgeon) who expressed himself as being enthusiastically behind the New Guard, but his counsel was much more militant than I was prepared to accept. Our conversation was mainly directed to the New State Movement and water conservation. It was after I was appointed Chief Commander that Abbott and I really got together. He

called many times at my office and he was always welcome and helpful discussions took place. Abbott, I believe, was sympathetic to the New Guard and he expressed himself as most impressed with its efficient organization. In fact, I think he was a bit scared as to what we might do next. I really think this was one of his reasons for keeping in close touch. He explained to me he was that he was so pessimistic about the economic and political outlook, and so certain that Lang and his Plan would wreck the state, that he had gathered together a representative group of Sydney businessmen –all leaders in their respective jobs-who were well qualified to give mature and top level counsel. He asked, almost begged, me to put myself in their hands for guidance in New Guard matters. They would not join the New Guard but were to be a consultative body in the offing.

One of those in the group recommended by Abbott was said to be the general manager of the Bank of NSW, Mr Alfred (later Sir Alfred) Davidson. Mr and Mrs Campbell were invited to drinks with the Abbotts in their Darling Point flat. In turn, the Abbotts discussed the economic and political problems at a luncheon at the Campbells' Turramurra home.

Campbell was invited to drinks and a chat by John Scott, D.S.O., an ex- AIF major, who had previously been asked by PM Stanley Bruce to organize a force of 500 men to assist police handle feared demonstrations over the possible deportation of two waterside workers. Abbott was present and questioned Campbell about New Guard plans. Out of those discussions, Campbell said it confirmed his belief that "Abbott's brain's trust was the Goldfinch committee". Soon after, Campbell continued, "sinister rumours" were spread about the New Guard which he attributed to "Langites", so took no notice of them. However, when

"sound New Guard members" like aviators Charles Ulm, Charles Kingsford Smith and Major Leslie Ellis repeated these stories and said they did not come from Lang supporters, he paid more attention to them. Four New Guard "plants" within the Goldfinch committee reported back that it was "absolutely definite" that it (Goldfinch group) was responsible for spreading the adverse rumours.

Campbell said others who offered him advice were A.B. "Banjo" Paterson and outspoken journalist Eric Baume; the latter said to be keen for "chucking Lang out of office by force, pursuant to the Cromwellian precedent". (Baume journeyed to Alice Springs on his way to report on the Granites goldrush in the Depression. In the early days of TV he had a regular spot called *This I Believe* in which he forcefully expressed his views, sounding off about gambling despite regularly cranking the arms of poker machines at the Journalists' Club. Later on, he featured in *The Beauty and the Beast* –naturally, he was the beast.)

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FLAK STARTED to fly before and after the 1937 official announcement of Abbott as the NT Administrator and Police Commissioner was made. Some Country Party members were miffed about the way the appointment of Abbott, the MHR for the NSW seat of Gwydir, was handled, one leading member feeling he was more suitable for the job than Abbott. It was revealed Abbott had been offered the post six months' previously, but had knocked it back.

In Darwin, strongly unionised with a long history of clashes with Administrators, there were mutterings about the appointment. *The Dubbo Liberal* newspaper, however, supported the appointment, saying his many qualities

should stand him in good stead in “this difficult position.” It went on to say he should make a firm and humane Administrator.

Entertained at a farewell luncheon at the Millions Club in Sydney, Abbott was photographed with a leading businessman, Sir Arthur Rickards, and the Vestey’s pastoral company Australian legal representative, C.W. Conacher, who had strongly criticised Abbott’s 1929 review of the Territory in respect of British landholdings.

Mrs Abbott was interviewed aboard the vessel *Merkur*, just before it set out from Sydney for Darwin with her husband. Their daughters, Cherub and Dorothy, were there. Mrs Abbott was looking forward to Darwin, now no longer a far flung outpost of Empire, but the doorway to Australia due to aviation. She liked entertaining and meeting people; there was no servant problem in Darwin, according to information given her.

When asked what she thought about the controversy surrounding her husband’s appointment, Mrs Abbott reportedly sidestepped very diplomatically. “Isn’t that the bell to go shore?” asked Mrs Abbott, as she terminated the interview. Travelling on the boat, giving the Abbotts profuse advice on how to do their job, was none other than the querulous author, Xavier Herbert, his book *Capricornia* soon to be published, who had been lobbying down south to either have the NT Director of Health, Dr Cook, sacked, or for him (Herbert) to be made an Aboriginal patrol officer working under Dr Cook. Mrs Abbott, who mixed in Sydney literary circles, had supposedly met Herbert through P.R. “Inky” Stephensen, the controversial Rhodes Scholar, author and publisher responsible for the publication of *Capricornia*, who was locked up during

WW11 under the wartime security measures.

At a public reception in the Darwin Town Hall, North Australian Workers’ Union fiery Scottish secretary, Jack McDonald, delivered a speech in which he said he hoped Abbott remained in office for as long as he carried out his job to the benefit and approval of the people. This was undoubtedly a threat that he could be thrown out by the workers as had Dr Gilruth and other high office holders. Abbott responded by saying that when his time as Administrator and Police Commissioner came to an end, he hoped the people would say he wasn’t a bad bloke and did his best. Abbott opened himself up to scorn when he wore a special dazzling white uniform, complete with pith helmet, bought from a Sydney tailor who supplied vice –regal gear. Mrs Abbott polished its brass buttons.



A *Smith’s Weekly* cartoon, seen here, presented Abbott, bow –legged, in his uniform, the pants looking like jodhpurs, a large pistol tucked in his belt, helmet in one hand, an umbrella in the other. And in



the background are two Aborigines – one hiding a guffaw with his hand, the other saluting. The *Northern Standard* told its readers that police were used as “lackeys”, serving morning tea, collecting laundry and running errands. (Police were sent down the track to pick up vegetables from Adelaide River and even called in to look for stray peacocks, according to an officer.)

Questions were raised in the House of Representatives about the Northern Territory Police Force. The Member for the NT, Mr Adair “Gunner” Blain, also nicknamed “Chill”, in September 1937 spoke of the “grave dissatisfaction” in the NT Police Force”. He asked the Minister of the Interior -

- Will the Minister sectionalize the force and place the Darwin area under the Administrator, and the mounted outback section under the Attorney – General with conditions similar to those enjoyed by the police of the ACT?
- Will money be made available for further household and transport staff to be added to the Residency in Darwin?
- Is it a fact that new recruits receive no training whatsoever from the time of joining till they finish their probation?
- Is it a fact there is no police instructor in the force?
- Will the Minister obtain the loan or services of a senior officer of the NSW police to inquire into the conditions of the force and recommend instruction similar to that in force in the states?

Replying, the Minister said that despite recent Press reports, inquiries revealed there was no grave dissatisfaction in the force. These reports were for the most part either totally inaccurate or greatly exaggerated. Only one constable had resigned. Sectionalizing of the force would achieve no good purpose and would undoubtedly impair efficiency and smooth working. There was no need for further

full-time household and transport staff at Government House, also called the Residency. The Minister said it was not true to say recruits received no training. He went on to say an additional appointment of an inspector had recently been made in Darwin. One of the duties of this officer was to impart instructions to new recruits.

Arrangements had been made with the NSW Commissioner of Police for NTPF recruits to undergo a short course in Sydney prior to proceeding to the Territory to take up duty. There was no need for an inquiry into the force, the Minister concluded.

Abbott’s son-in-law, Colin Bednall, was the *Melbourne Herald* journalist based in Darwin for 12 months before leaving for London in early 1938. In his autobiography, he stated that Government House got the town’s first septic system - double pans surmounted by a great mahogany throne, reached by polished steps. He also said the Administrator and the “crabby” judge, Mr Justice Wells, were always feuding. The Northern Territory Police Museum and Historical Society has perused Administrator Abbott’s personal scrapbook in NT Archives.



The *NT Dictionary of Biography* states the Abbotts were snobbish and that Administrator Abbott classified Darwin’s population into four groups, permanent residents described as not having a mentality of a very high standard.

A poem Mrs Abbott wrote about Darwin was lampooned in the *Northern Standard*. Mrs Abbott, stylish and green-eyed, exhibited the same vice-regal image as that radiated by her husband in his uniform, supposedly referring to Territorians as “our subjects”. She revived the Red Cross in town and designed a desk for Government House. Administrator Abbott directed that members of the public service join with the Army and Navy to unload a ship to, as he put it, prevent residents from starving. This action led to a general strike and Abbott being dubbed “a miniature Mussolini”.

Up against constant union criticism, sniped at by the union owned *Northern Standard* newspaper and having differences with Judge Wells, there must have been moments when the Administrator wondered why he took on the job.

Still, he managed to build up the clerical staff and better their working and living conditions, getting funding for two messes, male and female, with associated accommodation. In the case of female public servants, he insisted they should be skilled in shorthand and typing, be over 20 and under 30, and be reasonably good looking, a requirement which would cause an indignant outcry today.

Because there were more men than women in Darwin, Abbott reckoned a good looking girl was better able to look after herself than a “plain” one. And, “naturally,” she had a much brighter time. The Public Service Commissioner suspected he was establishing a “harem.” Many girls with these qualifications came to Darwin, married and “lived happily ever after”.

Abbott also took credit for encouraging a southern syndicate to build the Darwin Hotel. The syndicate had insisted the Darwin Oval site was the only one for the

hotel, but he told them it could not be there and that the old Club Hotel was the better position. Acting on this advice, the impressive hotel was built there, Mrs Abbott performing the opening in 1940. It became known as the Raffles of Darwin and the Grand Old Duchess, until destroyed in 1999.

In 1941, with war jitters growing in Darwin, there was a call for Abbott to be removed for failing to take steps to prepare the place for attack. Lawyer Dick Ward, later a NT Supreme Court judge, the people’s representative on the Citizens’ War Effort Council, was quoted as saying a petition calling for the removal of Abbott, carrying the signatures of the bulk of Darwin residents, would be presented to the Minister for Interior and southern trades and labour councils.

It was alleged that food arrangements for ship workers had failed, no action had been taken to prevent profiteering and nothing had been done to make Darwin a place in which it was fit to live. Judge Wells reportedly stated that six senior public servants had told him they could not work with the Administrator; Wells had advised them to stay on for the sake of their careers. With the dramatic build up of shipping and increased cargo coming across the wharf there were bottlenecks. Abbott subsequently blamed union obstruction to having three shifts to speed up unloading at the wharf for more deaths and shipping losses than there could have been when the Japanese attacked.

In a bid to overcome the bottleneck, workers from interstate were flown in to supplement the local workforce. These men were known as “the Flying Wharfies”. Abbott cited an instance when he was given a few hours notice that a party of watersiders from Townsville was about to arrive in Darwin and he was expected to make arrangements for them.

In a letter dated January 13, 1942, a little more than a month before the first raid, he wrote a letter to Canberra praising the way Sergeant Littlejohn had handled the needs of the Townsville men, being in charge of their billeting and feeding arrangements, carrying out his duties efficiently and tactfully. The workers had unanimously praised the officer for his efforts. The Abbotts attended several social functions aboard American naval vessels which passed through the port. One was USS Houston, sunk in the battle of the Java Sea, the warship favoured by US President Roosevelt, which still had the ramps used for his wheelchair as he moved from cabin to cabin.

Mrs Abbott was involved in an odd episode with a startled 16-year-old pastry cook, Francis Barker, in Smith Street, on February 11, about a supposed driving offence which had caused her "unnecessary inconvenience". Her Vauxhall, No.1, was slowing down, in the centre of the road, the driver giving no hand signal, apparently about to turn right into a driveway near the US Army premises. Barker, coming from behind, pulled into a parking space at the Taxation Department to his left, stopping almost parallel with the Vauxhall. Mrs Abbott, sitting in the back, called Barker over and, after telling him he should not pass on the inside, said he should not have a license. Furthermore, she would report the matter to the police, which she did. Her car had backed down Smith Street and turned left into the Taxation Department.

The police report on the incident, complete with a diagram, said Barker was known to be a careful driver and no offence had been committed. However, Barker was "strongly admonished" and told to be more careful in the future.

When Darwin was bombed the Government House office was hit by a

1000lb bomb. The Abbotts dragged the Aboriginal maid, Elsey, from the wreckage; Administrator Abbott also rescued another Aboriginal employee, Leo, but the laundry maid, Daisy Martin, 18, buried beneath a wall, could be heard screaming and eventually died. Buried at Kahlin Beach, she was later exhumed and moved to the Berrimah War Cemetery and eventually the Adelaide River War Cemetery.

On February 19, 1972, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing of Darwin, the *Sydney Morning Herald* ran Mrs Abbott's own recollection of the event, written while she was resting at Mt Kosciusko two months after the raid. After saying she saw 11 ships go down, the harbour covered in oil and columns of black smoke, Mrs Abbott wrote that they emerged from where they had sheltered at the end of the first raid. Then her husband said they should have a cup of tea, so the servants went off and returned with the silver teapot and they all sat about drinking. What had been the office was a crater into which rested the safe that contained old Worcester china, silver and glass that had been placed inside for safe keeping, now "shattered into bits".

The police barracks across the road had been sliced in half and the cottage next to it looked like a heap of matchsticks. Her husband had told her to take the servants and drive as far as Adelaide River as he had a lot to do. He told her the women in town would be evacuated by train and she must meet them and lead the women out.

Mrs Abbott was about to drive off to the Red Cross offices, to gather records to take to Alice Springs, with Leo, Elsey and the Russian cook, Mrs Kampur, when the second raid began. They took refuge in a big drain with some navy men, one giving Mrs Abbott a tin helmet. With the maid Elsey, a cushion from the veranda of Government House, and a bottle of

vermouth, Mrs Abbott set off for Adelaide River in the Vauxhall which had numerous bullet holes in the mudguards and bonnet. Her husband had also given her the Australian flag from Government House which had been repeatedly shot at by the Japanese, the large white star (the Federation Star) blown away, and it was eventually handed over to Australian War Memorial.

At Adelaide River there were several air raid warnings that night and Mrs Abbott took refuge in a buffalo hunter's camp, hiding in a hole in the Adelaide River. At 4am the train arrived from Darwin with 22 women, some of the wounded, several nuns and Aboriginal children. Mrs Abbott did not hear from or see her husband for two weeks.

Shocked by the attack on Darwin, the Federal Government on March 3, 1942 appointed Mr Justice Charles Lowe to inquire into the bombing. The next day he flew to Darwin and took statements from about 70 witnesses until the 10th. The resumed hearing took place in Melbourne from March 19-25, during which Administrator Abbott appeared. It was stated in the report that some sections of the population had a lack of confidence in and respect for the Administrator. However, it was at least dangerous to draw an inference on partial evidence against the Administrator when examination of all relevant evidence might lead to a different conclusion.

In a detailed five page defence of his actions before and after the bombing, Abbott wrote to the Minister for the Interior, Senator J. S. Collings, on April 11, 1942. At the outset, he said he was at a "tremendous disadvantage" replying to criticism which was practically "tantamount to charges of neglect of duty". He had little knowledge of the evidence given to the commission and had not been

able to see a transcript of some evidence. Some witnesses had been informed their evidence would be secret. When he first appeared before the Commission in Melbourne, the evidence of certain witnesses read to him made it clear that "deliberate and wilful perjury had been committed". A Darwin witness had been asked if he realised the seriousness of statements made under oath. "He said he did, and continued to commit perjury," Abbott wrote. "Yet this deliberate and malicious lying is privileged."

Abbott said he had effectively disposed of the "lying evidence" given against him in respect of what supposedly happened at Government House in connection with the claimed loading of glass and china aboard a truck while the half-caste girl was said to be alive and buried under the rubble of the office the day of the bombing. Sergeant Littlejohn, whom he described as one of the most outstanding officers in the NT Police Force, had confirmed the loading of china, silverware, code books and confidential papers had taken place on the evening of February 21, not February 19. It was an "extraordinary fact" that although Sergeant Littlejohn had been in Darwin when the Commission took evidence, it did not call him as a witness.

The "lying evidence" about this incident had subjected him (Abbott) to hours of cross examination. The fact that the items had been loaded two days after the raid made it obvious that police were not diverted from other more pressing duties the day of the attack. Challenging the Commissioner's statement that leadership had been lacking and that he had not exercised his role as Administrator in every possible way, he submitted his movements after the second raid on February 19-

12.30, Took charge at the Police Office;  
12.45, Went to Larrakeyah Barracks to see

what arrangements could be made about a train for the remaining women ; 1.45, Returned to Police Office; 2.30, Went to Public Works Yard and gave instructions regarding petrol supplies; 2.45, Placed Judge Wells in charge of entraining evacuees; 3.15, Made arrangements regarding feeding of civilians remaining in Darwin; 4.00, Had wine and spirits sent away from Government House; 4.45, Went to Eastern Café, which was feeding civilians and spoke to cooks and men; 5.30, Went out to Civil Hospital which had been bombed, went through wards, spoke to patients, nurses and doctors; 7.00, Dinner with Commandant and arranged to meet Bank Managers; 8.00, Returned to Police Office and received Superintendent Stretton's report that the town was quiet; 9.00, Discussed position with Bank Managers and arranged for them to leave Darwin with their securities; 9.45, Walked through portion of town to Railway Station with Judge Wells to see about further trains and returned through town which was quiet and in darkness to Police Office; 11.45, Driven out to Commandant's house by Sergeant Littlejohn after Superintendent Stretton had again reported to me that all was quiet.

Commenting on Abbott's strongly worded defence, the Department of the Interior's Secretary, J.A.Carrodus, in a memorandum to Senator Collings, dated April 13, 1942, said Administrator Abbott had effectively disposed of the allegations made against him in Mr Justice Lowe's report. Official communications had indicated Abbott did everything that was humanly possible in the circumstances and that he remained at his post even after the control of Darwin had been placed under the Military Commandant. The memorandum ended:

In my opinion, there is no justification whatsoever for any disciplinary action against the Administrator. On the other hand, I consider that he is entitled to be

given access to the transcript of evidence so that he may know what evidence was given against him and the persons who gave such evidence. If, as alleged by the Administrator, some persons, including junior members of the Police Force, have committed perjury, they should not be protected at the expense of the reputation of the Administrator.

Acting on this memorandum, Minister Collings wrote to Prime Minister John Curtin recalling he had written to the PM seeking the transcript of the shorthand notes to which Mr Justice Lowe referred. While this would be for his personal information, the Minister felt Mr Abbott should be entitled to see certain sections. Unless he, Senator Collings, had the transcript he was not in a position to properly evaluate many of the comments made by the judge. A further request for the transcript had so far not been productive. He enclosed Abbott's report to him and went on to say-

From reading the Lowe report, I have received a strong impression that Mr Justice Lowe bases some of his findings which reflect upon the Administrator on the evidence of one section of the Darwin community. His Honour himself speaks of the difficulty of evaluating correctly this evidence. Whilst I would not for one moment desire to champion the Administrator if anything concrete could be proved against him, I do feel, out of ordinary justice to him, that I should tell you that, from the time I became Minister, I received a steady flow of complaint from one section of the Darwin community. Although sweeping accusation were made against the Administrator, none of the accusers ever made any effort to substantiate his charges with sworn statements, although I repeatedly asked that this should be done and promised immediate action upon same. Being

personally acquainted with some of the persons complaining, I was definitely of the opinion then, and I still am, that the complaints were biased and made with little sense of fairness or responsibility.

Minister Collings respectfully submitted the Administrator had effectively disposed of the allegations against him in Lowe's report. The Administrator had asked the matter not be left where it stood. His reputation had been attacked, but he had not been given an opportunity to know the basis of the judge's criticism and the persons who gave evidence against him. He felt Abbott should be given the opportunity to see the evidence relating to him and make comment about it and the persons who gave it. On the facts before him, Mr Collings could not see any justification for recommending that any action be taken against the Administrator. His last telling comment, "Rather do I feel that he did a very good job of work in most difficult and trying circumstances."

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IN ALICE SPRINGS, where the Abbotts remained for almost the remainder of the war, they came into frequent conflict with the wartime military supremo, Colonel Noel Loutit, who boasted to this writer shortly before he died that he cut off the Army canteen's chocolate frog supply to the Administrator and tried to have him sacked by the Governor –General. Abbott and the Colonel wrote unflattering reports about each other. Colonel Loutit also made it difficult for Mrs Abbott to return to Alice when she went south.

Abbott wrote to Colonel Loutit wanting to know why the connection of water to Superintendent Littlejohn's house was taking so long. And records show that Mounted Constable Vic Hall had a row with Abbott over the treatment of Aborigines at a mine in Central Australia.

As a result, Hall resigned soon after and joined the Army as advisor on Aboriginal matters, an appointment which one suspects might have been engineered by Colonel Loutit to annoy the Administrator.

When the Abbotts returned to Darwin in 1945 they again made use of police for various tasks. Mrs Abbott, apparently wearing a Red Cross uniform, was on hand when the Oranje arrived in port during September of that year with 760 prisoners of war aboard. Mrs Abbott purchased a large dining room table of Queensland red cedar, seating up to 22, sideboards and chairs for Government House.

Administrator Abbott was shocked and furious to hear on the ABC news that he was going to be replaced by West Australian, Arthur Robert "Mick" Driver, an engineer, who had served in Darwin before the bombing, and later on was in charge of rebuilding the wharf over the Neptuna which was sunk in the first raid. The government claimed a letter had been sent to Abbott informing him of its decision, but it did not arrive before the announcement.

The Darwin Police Station day journal for the last part of the Abbotts' reign in Darwin in 1946 reveals obvious tension and resentment among police in dealings with Government House. The Abbotts attended several social functions, using police to drive them about. Mrs Abbott was usually chauffeured around in the Vauxhall, identified as V1, and her husband went in a Chevrolet, C2. There is reference in the journal to a Chevrolet called "The Flying Bedstead", but it appears not to have been the official limo. From time to time the Vauxhall and the Chevrolet broke down and were towed or taken away to the Hans Nudl garage. When both headlights burnt out on the Vauxhall there were no spares in town and it was off the road for a lengthy period.

On May 3 the Abbotts hosted Lord Louis Mountbatten when he passed through Darwin on his way to Singapore. During the morning of May 8 newspaper executive Keith Murdoch, Rupert's father, arrived in Darwin by air and had breakfast and a tub at Government House.

Police officers were variously instructed to convey the Abbotts to and from social functions, pick up vegetables at Kafcaloudes Store, drive a "coloured musician" to Government House, transport the band from a visiting Portuguese warship and direct traffic and help in other ways at parties. One run was to the 10 mile to pick up fowls and eggs from Mrs Yates. A constable who was reprimanded by Abbott over an episode involving serving tea to guests at Government House later became a high ranking officer in Canberra.

A constable was left sitting in a car until 2am in the morning. When a constable failed to turn up as arranged to drive Mrs Abbott, the Administrator rang and complained. He was unable to drive himself because of illness. Constable Jamieson was dispatched on Constable Mutch's pushbike to look for Constable Whitcombe, who was rostered for Government House duty. The journal entry said Constable Waudby had meanwhile hopped on his motorbike and sped to Government House where he found car No 1 was not in the garage. Sergeant Graham rang Government House to find out what had happened and was told by the maid that, as far as she knew, Mrs Abbott and a visiting relative had left in a car driven by a constable.

After returning from running Mrs Abbott to church one Sunday, an officer made an extraordinary entry in the day journal which leaves no doubt about the animosity towards Government House duties. It said that at the church the "usual indignities of opening the door, etc took place in full

view of several of my personal friends". It continued, "This duty is very much resented by myself."

On May 21, Constable Bill Waudby was sent to Darwin Hospital to pick up the Administrator who had been admitted the previous day, but he was not ready to be discharged. At 10 am, the constable was told to go and park around the side; he was relieved by Constable Berman, who waited two and a half hours. The Administrator rang the police station and said there was a blackout at Government House. Sergeant McKinnon rang the powerhouse to find out what was wrong and was told the matter was in hand.

Mrs Abbott had to be conveyed to the hospital to have an index finger bandaged. Another amazing entry in the journal said that on May 23, Constable Berman drove Mrs Abbott to the hospital at 4.45 and "performed other repulsive duties on her behalf," including selecting reading matter from the Red Cross library.

The Abbotts snubbed new Administrator Driver when he arrived at the airport. He was met by the Acting Government Secretary, Reg Leydin, and a constable who drove him to accommodation provided by the Army at Larrakeyah. The Abbotts had stated there was no suitable place for Driver at Government House while they were in residence.

Without any fanfare, the Abbotts, their luggage previously delivered to an RAAF plane by police, flew out to Brisbane. There is almost a note of jubilation in the police journal entry for Sunday, May 26. In the margin, there is a heading DEPARTURE followed by MR AND MRS ABBOTT, all strongly underlined, it read: *Constable Berman drove Mr and Mrs Abbott to plane and saw them on their way.* A bracketed comment has been

penned out so that, even with the help of a magnifying glass, it is illegible.

Speaking to the Press at Brisbane, Abbott made it clear that that he felt he had been shabbily treated by the government. The NT, especially the situation in Darwin, was “hopeless”. The NT was anchored to a government department completely absorbed in Canberra affairs, said he. *Sydney Daily Telegraph* journalist, Eddie Sier, who had just spent three months in Darwin, painted a grim picture of Darwin soon after, a ramshackle place where Qantas planes arrived between midnight and 4am so that travellers were spared the sight of the broken down gateway to Australia.

Soon after leaving the Territory, the Abbotts travelled to Britain where Mr Abbott gave a series of talks about the future of Australia, the NT in particular. On their way home from the UK, the Abbotts were interviewed at Natal and it was stated that Mr Abbott would probably consider re-entering politics. He did attempt to gain pre-selection for a Liberal seat, but was rejected.

In subsequent talks and articles, Abbott was critical about the way the NT was administered and called for a new state to be formed north of the 20<sup>th</sup> parallel.

In 1950 his book *Australia's Frontier Province* was published by Angus and Robertson. In reviewing the book, Guy Harriott, of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, quoted Abbott as saying the Territory was regarded by many legislators as the bastard child of the Australian family. Nevertheless, he had complete faith in its future.

Abbott believed that given a properly thought out policy, more railways, and less indirect control from Canberra, the Territory could be a great national asset,

especially if suitable European immigrants settled here. He said he went to the NT with high hopes with the federal government behind him but within two years war clouds resulted in plans for development being put aside. “I went through some very worrying times while I was Administrator and, I am afraid must add, experienced some harsh and unjust criticism.” The book contained unflattering comments about union secretaries which he said illustrated how hopeless the situation was from the industrial angle. Discord was always at hand and the extremist mob rule of the twenties had been exchanged for the more destructive but more subtle doctrine of Communism.

An energetic person, Mrs Abbott wrote a children's book, gave radio talks, was commissioned to carry out interior decorating in Sydney's Wentworth Hotel bedrooms, participated in film work for the Australian Museum in Africa, and may have been connected with the 1948 American scientific expedition into North Australia, visiting Roper River and Arnhem Land. Another source of income for her was as a ship's welfare officer working with immigrants. She made numerous radio broadcasts and wrote many articles.

Late in life and short of money, Mr Abbott was granted a grace in favour payment by Prime Minister Menzies. Upon his death on April 30, 1975, aged 88, he was given a state funeral, a fact he was aware of before his death, causing him satisfaction because he would not have to pay the expense of his own funeral.

The highly regarded *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist Lenore Nicklin presented an interesting insight into Abbott in an article written soon after his funeral. Entitled *My Friend Mr Abbott*, she described him as a splendid raconteur and a not so gentle wit whose best barbs about



people in public life she dare not repeat. He could quote “yards” of Shakespeare, Churchill, Kipling and Banjo Paterson. When Nicklin first interviewed Abbott, he and his wife were living in a converted garage at the back of their son-in-law’s Point Piper home in Sydney.

On the wall was the sword he had taken from the Turkish general at Beersheba. Abbott told Nicklin many entertaining stories about his time in the Northern Territory. He recalled the time the famous author H.G. Wells was put up in Government House and requested “a certain utensil” to put under his bed. As there was no such thing in Government House, Hilda looked in the broken crockery cupboard; a tin utensil was found, washed and given a squirt of eau de cologne. According to Nicklin, Abbott liked to take sherry while listening to the midday news and whisky with the seven o’clock news.

When the Abbotts moved from Point Piper to a small unit at Elizabeth Bay along went the Turkish sword, paintings and books not sold to Berkelouw’s, the second hand book dealers. Being an old Tory, the article stated, Abbott probably felt the country had gone to the dogs. Abbott told Nicklin an outstanding story about seeing Prime Minister Whitlam in Canberra. Mr Whitlam had said, “Aha, Mr Abbott, we’ve got your son-in-law working for us now.” (This was Colin Bednall, mentioned above in connection with the impressive Government House “throne”, a former newspaper editor, and television executive who at the time was working as a consultant to the Prime Minister.) On being told this by the PM, Mr Abbott replied, “Didn’t you know that Colin was dropped on his head when he was a baby?”

Mrs Abbott departed life on May 26, 1984-38 years to the day since she and her husband had departed Darwin in high

dudgeon. In August of that year NT Administrator Commodore Eric Johnston was presented with portraits of Mr and Mrs Abbott by the Abbotts’ daughter, Marion Bednall. Mrs Abbott’s portrait went to the Red Cross after which the organization’s cottage is named in Darwin.

In December 1988 Mrs Bednall said she was distressed by the way her father had been portrayed in a TV series *Australia’s Greatest Shame*, about the bombing of Darwin. The program had been vicious, biased and unfair, she said, based on transcripts of evidence given in secrecy by malcontents. It was a lie to say her father had ignored the screams of the maid, Daisy Martin, and had left her to die. Mrs Bednall was reported as saying her children and grandchildren had been distressed by the documentary.

In his book *AUSTRALIA’S FRONTLINE: the Northern Territory’s War*, Frank Alcoorta, a former *NT News* reporter, said much had been written about Administrator Abbott, mostly critical. However, an objective examination of his service career and his performance as an administrator showed he was an intelligent and dedicated man who performed remarkably well under almost impossible circumstances. The NT had not been kind to Abbott. But history should, he concluded. Abbott Crescent, Darwin, is named after the former Administrator. Red Cross named the Hilda Abbott Cottage in Darwin after Mrs Abbott.

#### FOOTNOTE:

Administrator Driver stopped the practice of using police officers to carry out Government House runs. He also strongly suggested the Administrator not be the Commissioner of Police. Riding bicycles, two young boys, each with a rifle slung over his back, were stopped by a police officer late one afternoon in Darwin. They had been out shooting wallabies and it was

getting dark. Asked for their names and address, they both gave Government House as their abode. It was Mike Driver, son of the Administrator/Police Commissioner, and Bas Wie, the Indonesian 12 year old boy who had stowed away in the wheel nacelle of a plane on a flight from West Timor to Darwin. Administrator Driver took Wie into Government House where he lived for

five years. Recalling the episode with the rifles when they were questioned by the police, journalist Mike Driver, in Darwin from Canberra this year to see two daughters off to military service overseas, said his father had sent a car to the police station, and a verbal kick in the posterior had been delivered when they arrived at Government House.

## **Bomb Response in the NT**

**THE HILTON HOTEL BOMBING in 1978 demonstrated the need for governments to provide a capacity to deal with politically motivated violence that may affect Australia. The threat of bomb attacks was at the top of the list.**

In response to the attack the Australian Government formed the Australian Federal Police and the long titled *Standing Advisory Committee (for State and Commonwealth cooperation) for the Protection Against Violence (SACPAV)* which has since been replaced by the *National Counter Terrorism Committee (NCTC)*. Soon afterward SACPAV which included Commissioners from all of the Australian police jurisdictions began to augment training and equipment for specialist units to provide a number of different counter terrorism (CT) capabilities such as marksmen and police assault group operators, CT negotiators and bomb response units.

The Australian Bomb Data Centre (ABDC) was formed to provide a base of technical expertise and as a repository for operationally relevant information. In the NT bomb technicians trained to deal with explosive devices, bomb appraisal officers trained to conduct search and for evaluation of suspicious articles, have been provided increasingly sophisticated training and equipment in order to improve the capability. The capacity resides with the Territory Response Section (TRS)

which has previously been identified as the Territory Response Group (TRG), Task Force and originally as the Emergency Squad. A capacity for post blast analysis is maintained as a Forensic Science capability.



Bomb Response Unit Response Vehicle

The procedures and techniques used by bomb response members are carefully guarded to prevent would be bomb makers from being able to counter what is known as 'render safe procedures' Therefore any discussion of the history must similarly be limited to information that is already well known in the public domain. One well

known piece of equipment for the bomb technician is the bomb suit designed to protect a bomb technician against fragmentation blast and thermal effects of an explosion. In the NT there have been two different manufactures of bomb suits that have been used operationally.



Bristol Bomb Suit employed by NT Police

The first suit was made by Bristol in the UK who also made the bullet resistant vests in use at the time. Despite the advances in technology the original Bristol suit provides a good level of protection and would still be capable of getting most jobs done in a pinch. The Bristol Bomb suit was replaced by a Canadian suit made by the company MedEng (short for Medical Engineering). The model designation is EOD, standing for explosive ordinance disposal. A variety of models have been used with progressive refinements in protection, communication, and at least in theory, cooling systems. The suit has become more flexible and functional but has any savings made in weight from better material technology have been countered by the need to

continually add new modules or equipment items for operational use.



MedEng EOD Bomb Suit

Thankfully the NT has been free of terrorist violence and despite the large amounts of explosives used in the NT there has been relatively little criminal use of explosives at least toward the serious end of the scale. Regardless there is a need to maintain a response capability and while the threat is low there have been incidents where explosives have been used for criminal purposes both with intent to damage property (as happened last month in Alice Springs when a large explosion damaged a storage tank) or intended to kill as an instrument of revenge. Explosives have also been used for suicide and as hoaxes which can range from school students aiming to skip exams to an armed robber who used a convincing hoax device to rob a bank. In other cases the use of explosives has been thwarted or deterred and in 2008 there was a case involving

criminals sourcing explosives in the NT for robberies that were to be committed on banks in Sydney.



A home-made pipe bomb after deactivation

The pipe bomb above was rendered safe by NT bomb technicians after being found abandoned several years ago.

Having been bombed repeatedly during WWII Darwin is also home to a wide variety of military ordinance. Many Japanese munitions were based on ‘Picric Acid’ or analogues which can crystallise and become increasingly sensitive with

age. The responsibility for response to cases of military ordinance lies primarily with the Australian Defence Force (ADF) by an agreement that has police bomb technicians primarily responsible for all responses for civilian or improvised explosives. Of course an explosive may cross boundaries or its nature may be unknown requiring close cooperation between the police and military technicians.



Bomb response technology continues to evolve to enhance the capability and safety of the bomb technician. Above a ‘tEODor’ bomb disposal robot investigates a suspect device during an exercise near Katherine.

**OFFICE ADDRESS:**

House No.1  
Peter McAulay Centre  
Berrimah Northern Territory 0800  
Australia

**Postal Address**  
PO Box 39764  
Winnellie NT 0821  
Australia

**OFFICE BEARERS**

<b>President</b>	Mark McAdie
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	Peter Simon

**Phone/Fax:** 08 8922 3374    **E-mail:** ntpolicemuseum@ntpa.com.au