

# Deputy Commissioner retires



One of the AFP's longest-serving members has retired amid accolades for his tenacity, dedication and renowned investigative skills.

**When John Lawler joined the Australian Federal Police in 1980 the organisation his father had helped create was barely a year old.**

Few people have done more to shape the values and culture of the organisation than the man who rose from recruit to Deputy Commissioner during a career spanning almost 29 years.

"When he came into my office for the first time, he was everything I expected," federal Attorney-General Robert McClelland told Deputy Commissioner Lawler's farewell dinner in January. "Down-to-earth, practical and well informed on serious and significant issues of national security."

AFP Commissioner Mick Keelty was a recruit training instructor when John Lawler first joined the AFP. He said that John Lawler's career was peppered with accolades.

"As Commissioner, two of the most important qualities of a senior executive are integrity and loyalty," he said. "I have come to the conclusion that John rules by fear. Not fear of repercussion, but fear of disappointment. When you combine John's integrity with his skill and commitment, nobody wants to fail to meet his standards."



Deputy Commissioner Lawler and Commissioner Keelty at the farewell dinner.

From the very beginning of his policing career, John Lawler excelled. He was Dux of his training courses, and received two Commissioner's Prizes in the first five years of his service. During his time in ACT Policing, John Lawler had the reputation of being a great detective. He was renowned for his tenacity, famous for his thoroughness and widely recognised for his results.

He played a key role in the investigation of the murder of AFP Assistant Commissioner Colin Winchester, who was shot outside his home in 1989. The investigation ran for more than five years and led to the conviction of David Harold Eastman. John Lawler was a Detective Sergeant in the Major Crime Squad at the time, and led the team responsible for identifying the murder weapon and linking it to the suspect.



Attorney-General Robert McClelland speaking at the farewell dinner.

Federal Agent Andy Thorp remembers the time he spent living and working with Deputy Commissioner Lawler. "In September 1995, John was asked to lead an AFP team in a joint AFP/WA Police (WAPOL) review of a WAPOL investigation into the theft of diamonds from the Argyle Diamond Mine," he said.

"I lived with John and other AFP members in Perth for six months. In typical style he set about not wasting a moment while deployed. John would be waiting in the vehicle in the morning with the engine idling like an impatient father keen to get the workday started. His renowned thoroughness extended into his leisure time – he would have activities planned including visits to Rottnest Island and the Margaret River region. His cooking skills were also appreciated."

In 1997, Deputy Commissioner Lawler was posted to Washington DC as the AFP's Senior Liaison Officer responsible for the United States, Canada, the Caribbean and Central America.

"To represent the AFP overseas is a great honour, and John served our country with distinction in that role," Mr McClelland said.



Deputy Commissioner Lawler receives a gift from the Manager Spectrum Program Doug Witschi.

John Lawler returned to Australia in 1999 to take up the role of General Manager, Protective Security and was responsible for supervising and coordinating the AFP's security role during the Sydney Olympics.

Between 2000 and 2003, he held the position of General Manager Eastern Operations, the AFP's largest operational office. He returned to Canberra in February 2003 to fill the position of General Manager Executive Services and National Operations, a role responsible for all AFP media activities, parliamentary interaction, legislation formulation, the Commissioner's office and oversight of AFP national operations.

Through 2002 and 2003, he regularly performed the duties of Deputy Commissioner and Executive Director Protection. In 2004, he was appointed to the position of National Manager Border and International Network, responsible for the AFP's International Network and Transnational Crime Operations. His appointment as Deputy Commissioner was confirmed in July 2004.

Deputy Commissioner Lawler was awarded an Australia Day Medallion in 1997 and the Australian Police Medal, Australia's highest law enforcement award, in 2003. He is the recipient of the AFP Operations Medal for Operation Sorbet and the ACT Emergency Medal which is awarded to recognise courage, leadership, teamwork, professionalism, innovation and integrity during emergencies.

Operation Sorbet was an extensive AFP investigation which resulted in the successful conviction of four people and the seizure of 150 kilograms of heroin – Victoria's biggest known attempted heroin importation.

The AFP's Senior Liaison Officer in London, Chris Lines, said Deputy Commissioner Lawler was awarded the ACT Emergency Medal for his actions during the 2003 Canberra bushfires. Federal Agent Lines was the Police Forward Commander on the day the bushfires struck the Canberra suburb of Duffy.

"It was a tragic day for Canberra, as you can imagine," he said. "The Deputy Commissioner worked side-by-side with



Former Governor-General Michael Jeffries with Deputy Commissioner Lawler.



Deputy Commissioner Lawler riding a camel in Sudan.

me in the command post from early evening until late that night. He offered guidance, advice and counsel as the night progressed and the full extent of the devastation became apparent.

“The most significant feature of his contribution that day was his care and concern for those police officers and their families who lost their homes in the fire. After a full day’s work in tense circumstances he went into Duffy seeking out the homes of those officers he knew lived there and he called on one who had managed to save the family home and spent time with them. All that together is the reason he was awarded the ACT Emergency Medal.”

Federal Agent Thorp recalls the medal presentation ceremony. “I do know he was somewhat embarrassed when he was presented with the medal and played his role down, typical of John,” he said.

In concluding his speech at the farewell dinner, Commissioner Keelty recounted a story that epitomised Deputy Commissioner Lawler’s commitment and dedication. During the 2003 bushfires, Deputy Commissioner Lawler had been helping his parents, Sir Peter and Lady Doreen Lawler, fight the fire which threatened, and eventually claimed, their Duffy home. Later, when he was touring the affected areas, Commissioner Keelty found Deputy Commissioner Lawler at the command post helping other police members, despite his obvious senior rank

and despite the personal trauma of having witnessed the loss of his parents’ home.

“To me, that says it all about John Adrian Lawler: proud to be a Deputy Commissioner, proud of the AFP, proud to wear the uniform and be involved, but never too proud to do whatever is needed to get the job done,” Commissioner Keelty said.

“Two of Deputy Commissioner Lawler’s achievements that will endure in the wider Australian community are his work implementing the National Police Memorial and his contribution to the establishment and functioning of the National Counter Terrorism Committee.”

Deputy Commissioner Lawler has received several AFP Commissioner’s Commendations for his contribution to strategic initiatives and his dedication to duty on a number of key investigations. He has also been awarded the National Medal and Clasp for 25 years of diligent service.

“In recent years members who did not know John well spoke of him with a mixture of respect and awe, but also some trepidation,” Federal Agent Thorp said.

“Word was that he had a photographic memory, kept notes of everything and nothing got past him. It was impossible to pull the wool over his eyes and he would always know the answer to the question he asked.

“John expected and rewarded honesty. He was intolerant of disloyalty to the

AFP, or dishonesty. His visits to the workplace or a summons to his office therefore often generated nervousness, even if it was not warranted.”

At his farewell dinner, Deputy Commissioner Lawler reflected on the changes that had taken place during his time with the AFP, including the complexity and challenges of 9/11, the Bali events, the tsunami and the Yogyakarta plane crash. But as he reminded those attending, policing is also about everyday acts and the rewards of service are obtained through results both large and small.

“Policing is all about serving people,” he said. “Some years ago, I took great pleasure in returning a stolen engagement ring to an elderly lady. It had belonged to her mother.

“I strongly believe in the need to remain vigilant towards the threats against us. Integrity, teamwork and collaboration are our best chance of success.

“To the women and men of the AFP, there is one clear thing I would like to say: my achievements are your achievements. My achievements are our achievements, and achieve we have.”

Deputy Commissioner Lawler leaves the AFP to take up the role of Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Crime Commission.