



Photo by Senior Constable Dean Williams, QPS Photographic Section

Lighting casts a purple hue over the National Police Memorial during the dedication ceremony.

Nation gathers for 'unforgettable' tribute

By Simon Kelly, Media and Public Affairs Branch

As daylight faded on September 29, the memories of 135 Queensland police officers began to burn brightly in the Canberra twilight.

In all, 719 touchstones – each bearing the name of an Australian police officer who has been killed in the line of duty – were the focus as the National Police Memorial was dedicated in a special twilight ceremony.

Police and relatives of fallen officers were among the thousands who gathered for the memorial dedication in Kings Park on the northern shores of Lake Burley Griffin.

Prime Minister John Howard led the ceremony, arriving at the memorial site on a Water Police launch as the sun began its final descent.

“We do take their service for granted and on an occasion such as this the entire community should recognise and give thanks to the dedication, integrity and commitment of Australian police,” Prime Minister Howard told the gathering.

The dedication was an historic event in Australian policing history, being the first time since the opening of Parliament House in Canberra in 1927 that police

services from all jurisdictions had gathered for such a ceremony.

And the significance of the event was not lost on those who were there.

“It was a one-off event that will never be forgotten in our lifetime,” retired Queensland police Assistant Commissioner Greg Early said.

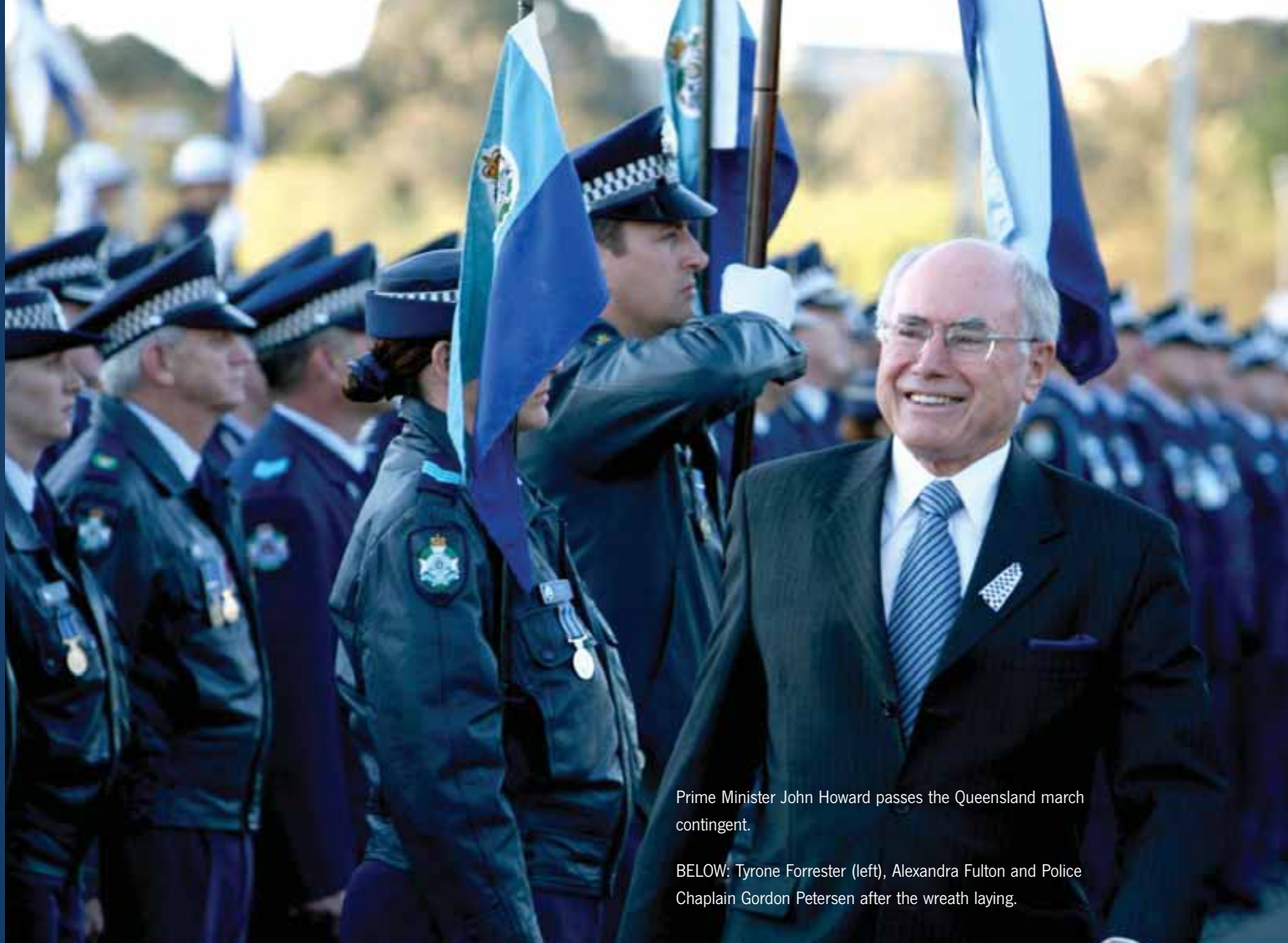
“It was expertly planned and presented and we were privileged to be present.”

Ita Buttrose, a businesswoman, journalist, author and media personality who also has policing in her family, was the master of ceremonies at the event.

It featured an official blessing, flypast by police aircraft, wreath laying, flag presentation and a moving video presentation of policing history set to live music.

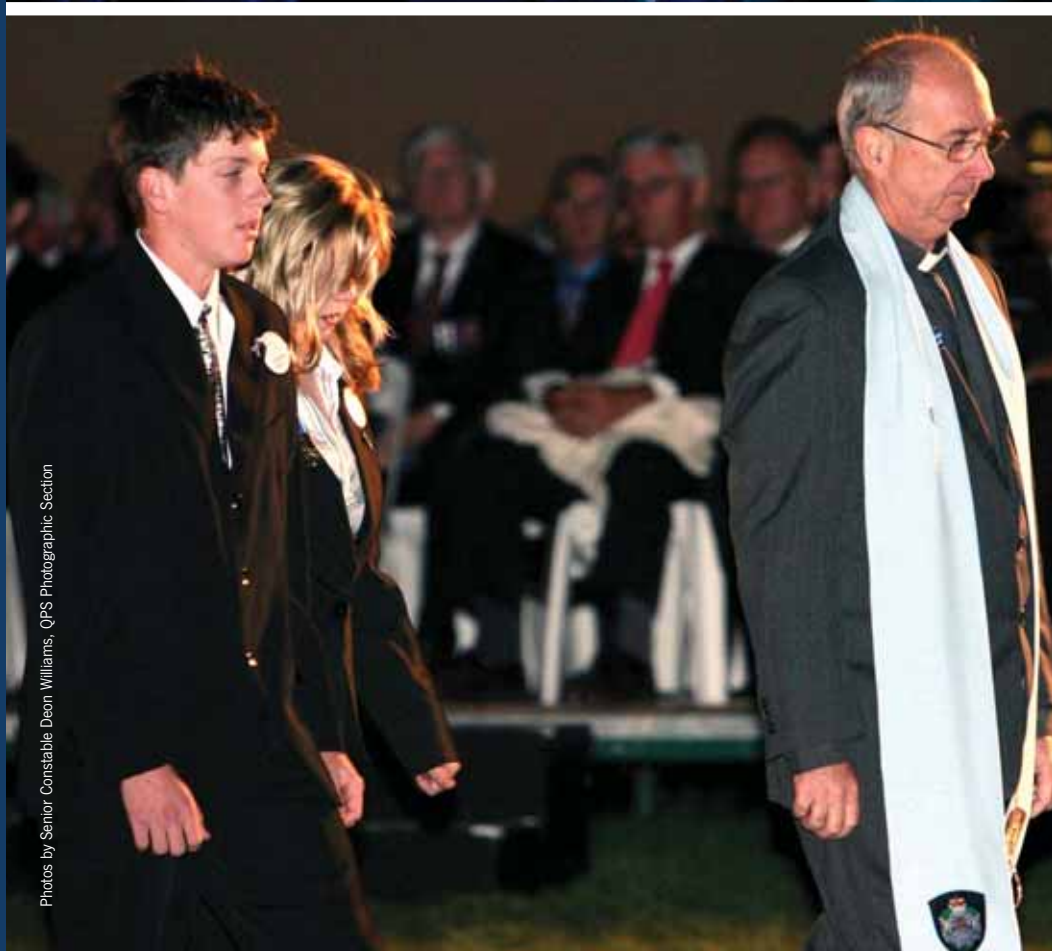
But perhaps the most emotive moments were when *The Requiescant* – a policing equivalent to *The Last Post* – was played, followed by one minute's silence and the sound of the nearby carillon reverberating throughout the still night air.

The carillon chillingly tolled eight times, once for each policing jurisdiction in Australia.



Prime Minister John Howard passes the Queensland march contingent.

BELOW: Tyrone Forrester (left), Alexandra Fulton and Police Chaplain Gordon Petersen after the wreath laying.



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Australian Federal Police (AFP) Commissioner Mick Keelty said it was a day for the families of police.

“After all it is the families of police who endure the trauma of suddenly being left without a husband, a wife, a partner, a father, a mother, a son or daughter, or simply their best mate,” he said.

Two Queensland children – Alexandra Fulton and Tyrone Forrester – laid wreaths on behalf of bereaved families and the Queensland Police Legacy Scheme during the ceremony.

It was a particularly poignant moment for them, having both lost their Queensland police officer fathers in recent years.

“I miss him (my father) every day,” Alexandra said. “It’s good there is somewhere to go if you feel like you want to visit him.”

In a symbolic tribute before the dedication ceremony, about 500 police officers from around Australia marched 1.6km from Old Parliament House to the site of the National Police Memorial.

Spanning several hundred metres, the march included a massed band, mounted police and flag parties.

The jurisdictions marched in the order in which they were established – South Australia, Victoria, Western Australia, New South Wales, Queensland, Northern Territory, Tasmania and the AFP.

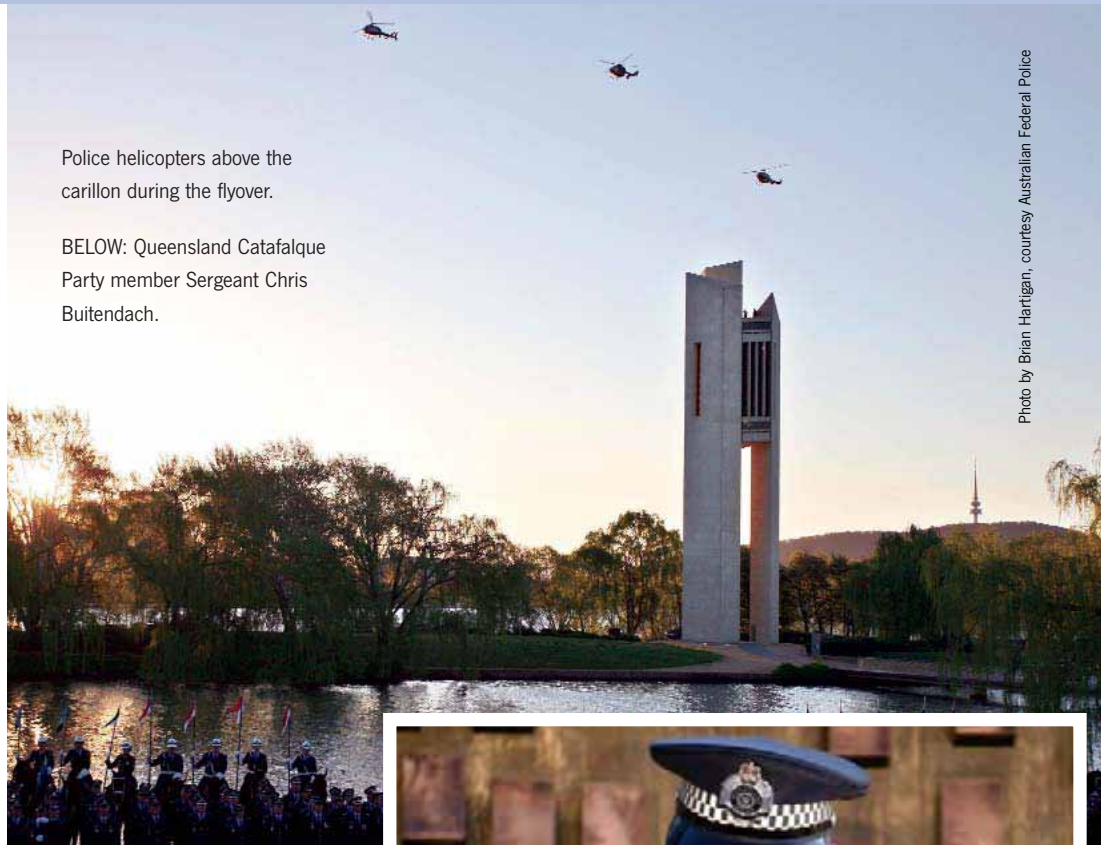
Police gathered in Canberra as part of Operation Echo Luker, named after Constable Joseph Luker - the first police officer to be killed on duty in Australia - who died in Sydney Town in 1803.

Queensland contributed 66 police to the march as well as mounted officers and the Queensland Police Pipes & Drums.

Chief Superintendent Steve Hollands, the Overall Commander of the Queensland Police Service contingent in Canberra, said the National Police Memorial and its opening had been a fitting tribute to police who made the ultimate sacrifice for their communities.

“The memorial exceeded every expectation, and a visit to the memorial is a must for any officer visiting Canberra,” he said.

“I would particularly like to thank Commissioner Bob Atkinson for his generous support for the Queensland police participation and Inspector Paul Fogg, Acting Senior Sergeant Nyree Whelan and Barry Martin, to mention just a few, for their tireless effort in ensuring that the Queensland police participation in the event was of an exceptionally high standard.”



Police helicopters above the carillon during the flyover.

BELOW: Queensland Catafalque Party member Sergeant Chris Buitendach.



The dedication took on extra significance after the death of a New South Wales police officer during rehearsals on the eve of the ceremony.

Sergeant Col McKenzie, from the NSW Police Highway Patrol at Lismore, collapsed during the march rehearsal at the memorial site, with several of his colleagues from NSW and other policing jurisdictions going to his aid.

His tragic death was announced before the rehearsal ended, with the march contingent pausing for a minute's silence in the darkness on the slope leading up to the memorial.

Following the ceremony, the family and colleagues of fallen police were able to have their first look at the memorial.

The decision to build the memorial was made by the Australasian Police Ministers' Council in 2001.

What followed was a collaborative

effort between the AFP, state and territory police jurisdictions, and Australia's police associations/unions through the Police Federation of Australia.

The National Capital Authority then provided a site for the memorial,

and managed its design, development and construction.

September 29 was chosen as the date for the dedication to coincide with National Police Remembrance Day.

Photo by Brian Hartigan, courtesy Australian Federal Police

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