

Denis Joseph Barritt (1926 - 1997)

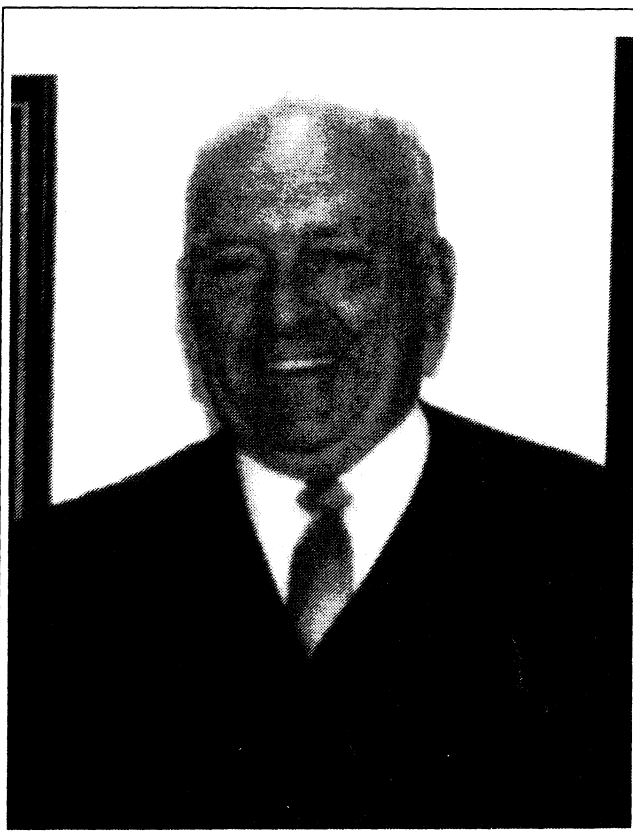
A Tribute

Former Alice Springs SM, Denis (Dinny) Barritt, died in Wonthaggi, Victoria on February 14. His family, friends and colleagues gathered at memorial services held simultaneously in Alice Springs and Wonthaggi and tributes to his memory were paid from many sources in the community. Balance is pleased to reprint here some excerpts from eulogies read at the service in Alice Springs and sentiments expressed by members of the Legislative Assembly during debate on a condolence motion on Thursday 27 February through which a picture is painted of a remarkable, well-loved and respected man.

Denis Barritt was born at Woods Point on the 11th of August 1926, the fifth child and second son of the seven children of policeman James Patrick Barritt and his wife Mary. The family lived in a variety of country locations until the illness of their father forced the family to move to Melbourne. The family was then rendered fatherless when Denis was 11, the ensuing years proving extremely difficult as the pension just covered the rent in Kensington. The additional strain of his mother's illness resulted in the children being orphaned two years later. On his mother's death, he was sent to live and work on Foley's farm at Llowalong near Stratford in Gippsland for his remaining teenage years.

He joined the Royal Australian Air Force towards the end of the second World War as an aircraft instrument fitter after working in a Melbourne garage. He served in the occupational forces in Japan and, for a period, was one of the guards of the Imperial Place. He also visited Hiroshima during this period.

He joined the Victorian Police Force following in his father's and his brother Jim's footsteps, with his brother Barney continuing in the Barritt trade a little later. He was a member of the force for 17 years serving in a variety of locations throughout mainly inner city stations. He was one of the original members of the 'wireless patrol' and served a portion of his career as a detective. He retired from the force as a Senior Sergeant based at Bourke Street West. During the latter years of his police career he returned to school as he had previously only attained the 'merit certificate' in his childhood education. On being awarded his matriculation certificate he continued his quest for knowledge in the pursuit of a law degree at



Denis Barritt, SM, 1986, wearing "the gown"

Melbourne University which he gained in April 1963.

On the 8th of February 1958 Denis married Sheila Ryan at St Joseph's in Malvern, making the family home in East Hawthorn for many years. They set about raising a family: Jim, Des, Tamara (deceased), Tonya, Michael and Rem. He was involved in all the usual activities of a father of five, and in the mid 1960s purchased a holiday home in Dudley South, just outside Wonthaggi. From this point on, every second weekend and holiday period was spent recharging the batteries at Wonthaggi.

Dinny left the police force and began a different facet of his law career as an articled clerk for twelve months, using the first and last period of long service leave for the initial months. He

was then called to the Victorian Bar on 1st June 1965, practising as a barrister based at Owen Dixon Chambers in Williams St, Melbourne. He specialised in criminal law from 1965 until 1978, gaining much experience and forging many friendships.

On the 1st of July 1978, the Northern Territory's first day of self government, he was appointed as a Stipendiary Magistrate and Coroner for the Northern Territory based in Alice Springs. In that position he was one of two magistrates who covered the bottom two thirds of the newly appointed territory. He loved the Territory, its remoteness and beauty, and particularly the people, adapting quickly to life in the outback.

He carried a heavy load with the many issues which were placed before him throughout his career, campaigning many causes and tackling injustices with an unmatched passion. One of the more notable was the Chamberlain inquest which, despite the media trial, was one of the easiest findings of his career. There were many other cases and inquests, issues and causes which he would rather be remembered for. The issues of the Aboriginal people, the need for improved safety legislation, improved forensic standards, appropriate mental health facilities, instigating effective alcohol abuse and petrol sniffing solutions were but a few of his very passionate causes. He retired to Wonthaggi following successful treatment for cancer, and reaching the mandatory retirement of 65 in 1991.

Although his health slowly deteriorated

continued on page 9

Denis Barritt - A Tribute

continued from page 8



Denis Barritt with long time secretary and football rival Lina Totani

rated, he had the pleasure of making some very special friendships amongst his dedicated health support teams at Monash, St Vincent's and Wonthaggi Hospitals. He enjoyed visits from his children and grandchildren, family and friends, and was very proud to give his daughter away at her wedding in June last year. He was awarded the Order of Australia in 1993 for 'service to the law and the community'.

He died peacefully on February 14 1997 at the Wonthaggi & District Hospital.

Denis Joseph Barritt was many things; a loving husband and father, son and brother, a friend to many, a dedicated worker for justice in his roles as a policeman, lawyer and magistrate both in Victoria and the Northern Territory. He was committed to leaving Australia a better place and this he achieved admirably. We remember a man who contained a wealth of knowledge on virtually any subject, and derived great pleasure from passing on his knowledge and experience. The difficulties he faced as a child created a strong character, who excelled in all he turned his hand to. He was an honest and deeply religious man, who never failed in providing for his children or helping his neighbour when required. He was a great Australian.

- Mick Miller
Retired Victorian Police Commissioner

Dinny was a fearless and respected Magistrate in the community. He was never afraid to speak out at problems

and injustices he saw, regardless of whose toes might get trodden on, be it the legal profession, the police, government departments or in fact the government itself.

Dinny usually came to the right result in court matters, even if he sometimes did it in unorthodox ways. He had legislators pulling their hair

out at the novel ways he could avoid taking away a family's livelihood by getting around a mandatory suspension of driver's licence provisions. Dinny always found his position as a magistrate challenging and full of interest and worthy of all the effort he put into it.

- Roger Bennett
on behalf of the Law Society

It didn't take me long to work out just how the court staff felt about this great man. Almost from the moment of my arrival I've met with advice that I should do things the way Dinny did, or I shouldn't do things because Dinny didn't do them that way. This despite the fact that he had left his position as Magistrate about five years earlier. It didn't take me long to realise that the advice to follow Dinny Barritt's example was great advice indeed. It remains a fact that those of us who continue on as Magistrates have absolutely huge boots to fill. [...]

I came to realise that the love of the staff for that man was well deserved and the standard that he achieved was lofty indeed. Those that had the opportunity to work with Dinny were privileged and are all the better for it. He may have finally succumbed but his influence will remain.

- Warren Donald, SM, Alice Springs

Mr Barritt had a great sense of concern for Aboriginal people who would come before him on numerous occasions as repeat offenders. He had met with myself and the Aboriginal Council to discuss these concerns on a number of occasions over the years, but I didn't really understand the depth of compassion until the death of my

own father. The CAALAS lawyers had apologised to me that they were unable to attend my father's funeral because they were before Mr Barritt, it was the third day of a hearing and the matter was about to be finalised. I fully understood that. After the church service I was with my family and so many people were coming up to pay their respects and I saw this giant figure. I looked up and there was Mr Barritt extending a hand in sympathy and friendship and I saw the compassion in this man's face. Mr Barritt had adjourned all matters until 2.00pm to attend the funeral.

- Patricia Miller
Director, CAALAS

Dinny Barritt was a top bloke and a good friend, but more than that he was a man with a well-established sense of values. One of those many values was the need to contribute to the community in which he lived [...] During his time as president he guided the club and its members through changing and turbulent times, and his composure, knowledge, wonderful way with people and wicked sense of humour bonded together a collection of people from all walks of life in the common aim of developing the club and its facilities into what it is today.

Mal Cornock
Alice Springs Bowls Club

The following tributes were paid to Denis Barritt during a condolence motion before the Legislative Assembly on Thursday 27 February.

continued on page 10



Dinny Barritt, policeman (following officer in helmet)

Insurance Body Backs Graduate Diploma

The Australian Insurance Law Association, as part of its commitment to promoting insurance law education, is sponsoring a Graduate Diploma in Insurance Law at the University of Melbourne.

AILA, a national organisation whose members include insurance company staff, loss adjusters and assessors, and accountants and lawyers working in the insurance industry, is providing funding of \$15,000 over five years, plus marketing support.

Chris Rodd, a solicitor and national claims manager for Insurer Commercial Union, is AILA's representative on the university's course advisory board. Geoff Masel, a life member of the AILA, and a consultant with Phillips Fox, is

also a board member and a lecturer for the course. Mr Rodd said the graduate Diploma in Insurance Law, launched in 1996, was of great value to senior members of the insurance industry.

Kaye Nankervis, University of Melbourne Law Faculty, said the Graduate Diploma offered advanced legal study blending theory and practice. The diploma can be completed over one or two years. Candidates must complete four subjects selected from comparative tort law; the insurance contract; insurance intermediaries; insurance litigation; professional indemnity insurance; and reinsurance law.

For further information, contact Kaye Nankervis tel: 03 9344 6190 or Chris Rodd tel: 03 9601 8036.

Mock Trials Underway

The first scoring round of the 1997 Interschool Mock trials competition was completed on Wednesday 26 March, with four teams progressing to the next round in the knockout Darwin competition. Successful teams were Kormilda College 2, Katherine High School, Sanderson High School and Dripstone High School who emerged winners after debating a case on copyright.

In the Alice Springs region, St Phillips College teams won both their rounds against two teams from Centralian College. The competition in this region is played as a round robin, with the winner on points over the three scoring rounds to face the winner from the northern region in June for a Grand Final.

Denis Barritt - A Tribute

continued from page 9

As a magistrate, he had a great sense of fairness and compassion. Defendants always had a choice before Dinny Barritt. In his own words, "If you want justice, plead here today. If you want the law, go to Darwin." He enjoyed a special and somewhat different relationship with the Supreme Court. From time to time, when his judgments were appealed, the court would invariably comment: "This is another appeal from Mr Barritt." Interestingly, many of his judgments were left intact.

He was a colourful character with a great sense of humour. I recall he was in the forefront of introducing gowns for magistrates. That was considered quite a novelty at the time. I was in court in Alice Springs the day Dinny first wore his gown - indeed, it appeared to be more of a smock. He appeared resplendent in his gown, complete with walking socks and shoes. A hush fell over the court. He stared down at the bar table and said: "The first one who laughs is out."

- Chief Minister, the Hon Shane Stone,

Dinny was one of the last of the bush magistrates of which the Northern Ter-



Dennis (centre) with brothers Jim and Barney - all detectives

ritory has a wonderful tradition. Dinny's court hearings at Yuendumu were always lively. They were always based on what Yuendumu was all about. [...] He was not simply walking into a community full of strangers. He knew a good deal about the community and what was happening there. He used common-

sense and his knowledge of the environment. He talked to people directly and followed his nose on many occasions to obtain a better result.

- Mr Toyne, MLA, member for Stuart

Quite often there would be raised eyebrows at some of the decisions he made, but I do not think I have ever met a policeman who spoke critically of Dinny Barritt. In fact, the comments were always very supportive, along the lines that, at the end of the day, the police always knew that the decision that Dinny Barritt made was probably right for everyone concerned. That kind of result, after such a period of time as a magistrate, really points to his capability and his social understanding.

- The Hon Daryl Manzie, MLA

Balance thanks Mr Barritt's former secretary at the Alice Springs Magistrates' Court, Lina Totani and Alice Springs practitioner, Mary Ridsdale and Mrs Sheila Barritt for their assistance in providing material for this tribute to the late Denis Barritt.