

# ASIAL 1969 – 2009

## THEN AND NOW: SECURITY OFFICERS

By Rod Cowan & Ken Corbett\*





THEN	NOW
<p><b>JOB TITLE</b></p> <p>Guards, gatemen, or nightwatchman.</p>	<p>Guards, gatemen, or nightwatchman. Security officers, guards, Private Security Contractors (PSCs), Close Personal Protection (CPP).</p>
<p><b>UNIFORMS</b></p> <p>Wearing a uniform as it is now was fairly rare in 1969. If anything, things were much less formal and militaristic, and, except for high profile jobs, a guard would most likely wear a dustcoat.</p> <p>Firearms were a rarity, though would become increasingly common.</p>	<p>Most companies have highly visible uniforms. In some cases, especially larger contracts, uniforms may be in the client's corporate colours. Special events may even have designer uniforms. On occasions security staff wear suits or blazers for CPP work and in foyers of high-rise buildings, corporate entrances. Carrying firearms has waned, except in cash carrying, due to tighter firearms controls.</p>
<p><b>TRAINING</b></p> <p>No formal training whatsoever. The only type of training was on-the-job training usually conducted guard to guard. On some occasions a supervisor might get in on the act but the norm was to employ someone, send them off to the job, where he – and it usually was a he would be shown what to do.</p>	<p>While some companies trained staff before, training came to the fore when NSW introduced security legislation linking training to licensing. Since then training has exploded to the point of becoming draconian in some States. The individual has mostly borne the cost of training. Specialist training has also become the norm in certain circumstances, such as airport screening.</p>



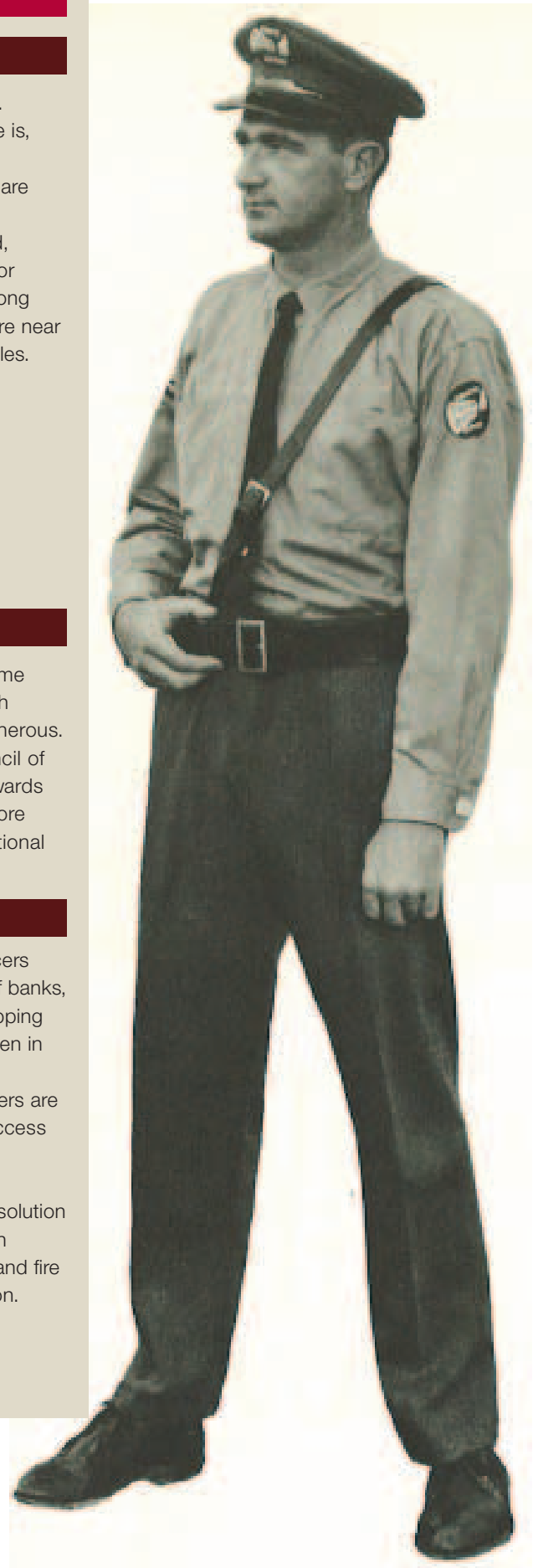
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Photos courtesy of SNP Security



# SECURITY – THEN AND NOW

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<p><b>STAFF</b></p> <p>As far as staff was concerned then, there was a very high turnover. Because there was no training, there was no such thing as a security professional. Some were marking time between jobs until they found something else. More than likely they would be older men in their late 40s or 50s ó had come to the end of a career and would make do with guarding work. Sometimes, in-house guards would be retiring or made redundant and put to use in the gatehouse.</p> <p>Getting people to do such work was tough and turnover high, giving rise to the use of contract security companies to solve the problem of finding people to fill positions.</p>	<p>Getting good staff remains hard. Keeping them even harder. There is, however, more of a career path developing and specialist areas are growing.</p> <p>More women are being found, especially in corporate settings or airports, but the industry has a long way to go before it gets anywhere near an equal mix of males and females.</p>
<p><b>LICENSING</b></p> <p>Not so much. Some states had various Commercial and Private Inquiry Agents Acts, which involved a criminal record check, but no other qualifications were required.</p>	<p>Each State and Territory has some form of licensing regime. As with training, requirements can be onerous. Latest moves through the Council of Australian Governments are towards mutual recognition or, for the more ambitious, the holy grail of a national licensing system.</p>
<p><b>DUTIES</b></p> <p>Pretty simple, really. More often than not the job was about stopping people thieving from companies as it was keeping criminals out. Electronic security was fairly novel and not well understood or, for that matter, trusted all that much. As such, buildings vacated after hours were a crime target and often secured by full time guards. The work was more likely to be gatehouse duties, factory patrols, and building site watchmen. About the most technical thing a guard would have to do was work a weighbridge, which was a pretty simple sort of operation and even then he would be</p>	<p>Definitely more demanding. Officers can now be found at the front of banks, corporate foyers, car parks, shopping centres, public transport, and even in war zones.</p> <p>On the technology front, officers are expected to operate complex access control, CCTV, and building management systems.</p> <p>Soft skills, such as conflict resolution and customer service, along with practical skills, such as first aid and fire fighting, are increasingly called on. In some organisations the job is combined with other duties, for example, paramedics.</p>





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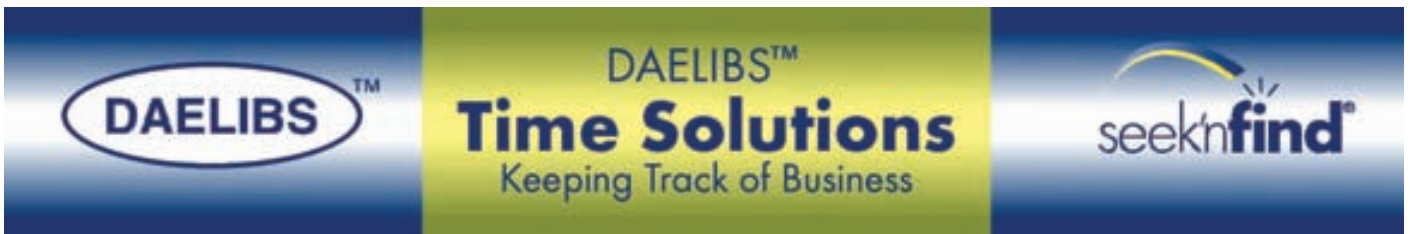
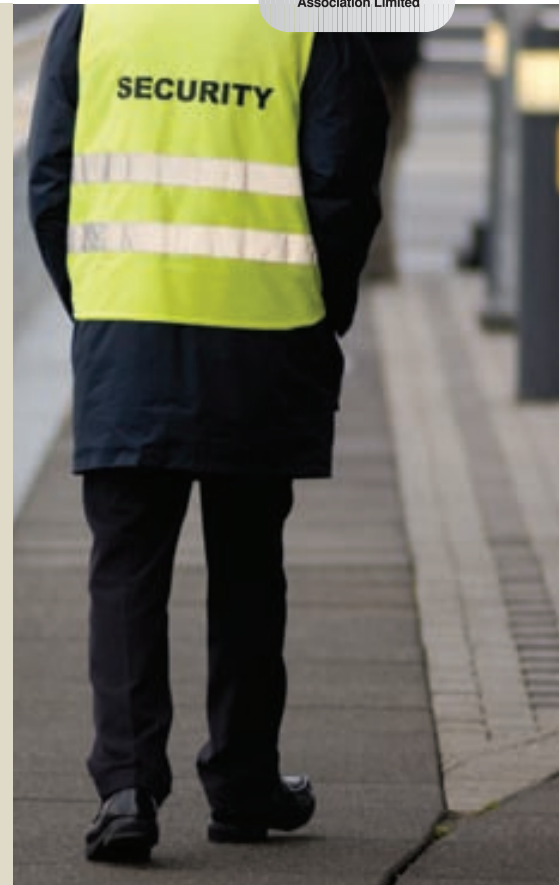
THEN	NOW
<p><b>DUTIES</b></p> <p>paid an allowance for doing so. There would also be the bundy clock, which would be carried on a leather belt on patrols. At certain points, keys would be hanging on the wall, which would be inserted into the bundy clock and mark a paper disk which was turned by an internal clock. No security or building management systems. Airport passenger screening didn't get into full swing until the 1970s.</p>	
<p><b>EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS</b></p> <p>The unions were stronger and a significant influence on the industry, which meant a lack of flexibility that exists now. In the case of security, it was the Miscellaneous Workers Union. Major companies, especially in Victoria and NSW, were closed shops altogether. No union membership – no job.</p>	<p>General employment and discrimination laws have improved the security officer's lot. Union membership is no longer compulsory. Competition in attracting employees has led to improvements in training, employment, and conditions.</p>
<p><b>SUPERVISION</b></p> <p>Supervision was someone going round during the quiet hours to ensure that guards were awake.</p>	<p>Supervision is no longer just about making sure officers are awake. It has become the next rung on the career ladder and many large contracts demand a level of supervision. Concerns will be about performance, compliance and occupational health and safety issues.</p>
<p><b>INDUSTRY PROSPECTUS</b></p> <p>The industry was seen as a growth area. Clients were less demanding and margins healthy. Less competition, too, with a couple of major players in each state and a handful of smaller competitors.</p>	<p>Well, guards didn't go the way of the whale as predicted with the influx of electronic options. It has, however, become more problematic. Margins are often insanely low. There has been a massive increase in competition. Clients are more demanding and contracts more complicated.</p>



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<p><b>PUBLIC PERCEPTION</b></p>	
<p>Watchmen and security were held in low regard. The police attitude was one of suspicion towards the industry, especially when uniforms became commonplace, attracting all manner of “cowboys.”</p>	<p>Not much better. At best security officers are accepted as a part of modern life but little has moved in terms of improving the industry’s image. It is hampered by security being lumped in with crowd controllers. Police attitudes are changing in some areas, but by and large security remains an object of suspicion, rather than a valuable resource and partner in crime prevention. Some senior police talk about police and private co-operation. Project Griffin in the UK is held out to be the gold standard in this area. But, in the next 40 years, who knows?</p>
<p>* Ken Corbett was one of those people on his way to somewhere else when he started as a casual guard with Wormald Protective Services, as it was then (later Chubb), and stayed for 32 years, leaving in 1994 as State manager. He wrote a book commissioned by Chubb Security, called Brazier Bundy to Bright Blue Sky. Rod Cowan is an independent Contributing Editor. He can be contacted at mail@rodcowan.net</p>	



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