



Tony Judge

The finest press money can buy?

The tragic death of Mike Todd, Chief Constable of Greater Manchester, was a major loss to the police service. Mike, quite rightly, has been described as “a copper’s copper”, a soubriquet that he deserved far more than some others who have in the past laid claim to it.

Inevitably, the circumstances of his death ignited a feeding frenzy in the media. With no compassion for his wife and children, or the relatives of others dragged into the affair, the hounds of dirt scabbled for the ‘inside story’.

Morality standards have changed dramatically over the past fifty years. Public concern when a chief constable of a small borough force was sacked because of a matrimonial triangle, and an even more sensational revelation that a detective inspector in a Welsh rural force had spent a night in a hotel room with a woman “other than his wife”, led to the appointment of the

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Royal Commission on the Police 1960-2 to consider relations between the police and the public. About that time, my first experience of acting a ‘friend’ in a disciplinary case involved a PC who was charged with conduct likely to bring discredit on the service. He had been cited as a co-respondent in an undefended divorce case. His chief constable, with bad grace, decided to dismiss the case, and he knew that I would appeal to the watch committee.

Consider the determination to destroy the reputation of Mike Todd, a brilliant and devoted public servant, with the hysterical campaign by the same papers to discredit proposals for ID cards and a national DNA basis.

Both key strategies for fighting terrorism and major crime are attacked as “invasions of privacy.” The only privacy that matters to today’s editors is their own. As the

Todd case reminds us, the biggest threat to personal privacy is the so-called Freedom of the Press. It is a freedom that applies to editors, not citizens. Once again, I am reminded of an obscure poet, Humbert Wolfe, who summed it up perfectly;

*You cannot hope to bribe or twist,
thank God! the British journalist.
But, seeing what the man will do
unbribed, there’s no occasion to.*

Much ado about...

It may only be early spring, but Martin Smith of The Mail on Sunday may already have secured the Crime reporter of 2008 award with a scoop about trigger-sloppy coppers. Casting around for a story, he used the Freedom of Information Act to ask how many times officers have shot themselves, or someone else, by accident.

He discovered that, in the last five years, as many as seven officers have been slightly injured by accidental discharges, compared with just four such incidents in the previous 12 years.

The MoS headline read: *Gun injuries soar as police ‘experts’ blast themselves.* Smith claims such “disturbing” statistics call into question the competence and training of the 6,700 authorised firearms officers in England and Wales.

Last year, firearms were authorised on 18,000 occasions, figures that exclude full-time armed officers.

“Soaring” misfires? Eleven incidents in 17 years? As a famous politician said, years ago, to Lord Birkenhead: “Chuck it, Smith!”

Tony Judge has been involved with the Police Federation for 50 years. He was the youngest police officer on the Joint Central Committee and founded *Police* magazine in 1968.