



Tony Judge

## Much ado about nothing?

“I knew him well; a fellow of infinite jest,” as his creator, William Shakespeare, said of Yorick, another of his jesters who came to a sad end. Starting with the first issue in September 1968, Dogberry has been a seemingly indispensable part of *Police* magazine. That’s 468 issues. But is it now time to kill the column off, as Metin Enver, managing editor, suggested in his editorial last month?

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The least the old boy deserves is a decent obituary, and who better than the editor who chronicled his doings for 25 years, to write it, me? Metin says the column is, “Merely funny stories; that’s all it was ever meant to be”. I beg to differ; the column began that way, but over the years it evolved into something far more significant. It probed previously hidden corners of the world of policing, mocking the jobsworths and the petty tyrants who used their rank to make life miserable for those below them in the pecking order.

Dogberry exposed bad management, stifling bureaucracy, and examples of political correctness, something that was beginning to emerge in those early days and, *Police* magazine says, has now reached the point where it is no longer safe to challenge its oppressive absurdities.

In his heyday, Dogberry had a legion of informants whose anonymity was guaranteed. The stories that appeared were just a small selection of examples of what went on in forces throughout the land. We named names, much to the far from occasional fury of those whose follies were exposed. Before long, some culprits, realising what they were saying or doing, threatened

their underlings with dire consequences if anything appeared in Dogberry. Very senior officers, chiefs and HM Inspectors, tried to persuade the Federation’s national officers to exercise censorship, arguing that the column was giving the service a bad name. I’m grateful to a succession of chairmen who resisted such unsubtle pressures. By the way, there were a few chief officers with a sense of humour who implored me to give them an MID (Mentioned In Dogberry) to go along with their OBEs.

The rank and file loved Dogberry. He was a safety valve, using the most devastating weapon to employ against bad management – gentle mockery. Often enough, out of sheer embarrassment, chief officers intervened to put their houses in order.

Outside the service, he hit back at the legion of police bashers in and out of Parliament, describing them for what they were and standing up for the officers at the sharp end. Once, Dogberry received a huge accolade; Kelvin Mackenzie, the legendary editor of *The Sun*, gave the column full page exposure for three successive days.

Unfortunately, some of Dogberry’s victims sought to sue, from then on, every draft of the column had to be vetted by lawyers. Naturally, they erred on the side of caution and many good stories never reached print. Is the kindest thing to kill of Dogberry?

- See pages 9 and 10 for readers’ responses

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.