

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

A History of the Commonwealth Car Service

1910 – 2010



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Director
Communications and Public Affairs
Department of Finance and Deregulation
John Gorton Building
King Edward Terrace, Parkes ACT 2600

Email: financepublications@finance.gov.au

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Steve Keough

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Mr Donovan's work in turn benefitted from that of others who recorded aspects of the story or preserved important records. The most significant of these was Michael Anderson who, in 1990 commenced preparation of the first historical record of COMCAR. Mr Anderson's work was not published but provided a wealth of information, including details of interviews with drivers who were not available to Mr Donovan a decade later.

In conducting his research Mr Donovan also interviewed many past and present staff members of COMCAR who generously shared their stories and their views. COMCAR would like to acknowledge and thank all such contributors for their interest and enthusiasm for this project.

Similarly, COMCAR would like to thank those people who have established historical collections of photographs and memorabilia. Their endeavours have ensured the preservation of important elements of COMCAR's heritage. Many of the photographs from these collections have been included in this publication, greatly adding to its depth and its value.

COMCAR would also like to acknowledge and thank all those who have contributed to bringing this book to fruition, including; Emma McDonald, Suzi Allan and Paul Higgins, Tony Francis for his expertise in the design of the publication and, most importantly, Wally Stopp, National Operations Manager of COMCAR, who has nurtured and managed this project over many years.

Our thanks also go to Ford Motor Company of Australia and Toyota Australia whose support has assisted in making this publication available to COMCAR staff past and present.

We hope that the story presented here enables those associated with COMCAR to reminisce and to understand their place in the life of this great service and its contribution to the continuing history of the Commonwealth.



Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

Foreword from Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

For 100 years the men and women of COMCAR have provided service to the Commonwealth – they have quite literally been “the wheels of government”. This book is their story.

However its relevance reaches far beyond the people employed in the service; the story of COMCAR provides a unique insight into the social and political history of Australia.

The purchase of the first government vehicle by the then Prime Minister, the Hon Andrew Fisher in 1910 was a statement of the changing times; the era of the motor vehicle had arrived. The demands made upon that one car revealed a Government ready to move forward, faster and further, to reach the people of this growing nation.

The following decades saw the Commonwealth car service meet the needs of government through two world wars and the difficult times in between. COMCAR transported members of the armed forces, carried messages and supplies and enabled the government to continue its critical work. It was during these years that COMCAR employed its first female drivers – quite a startling initiative for a traditionally male industry.

In the post WWII years COMCAR became beloved by the ex-service people it transported to and from hospitals and medical appointments. Through the 1960s, 70s and 80s the service grew to form an extensive transport network across the country, servicing a diverse range of clients from government, the judiciary and the public service.

The 1990s saw a change in government policy which required COMCAR to adopt a more commercial approach with a more targeted client group. COMCAR responded to the new economic and political imperatives, changing the range of its services, the size of its fleet, the nature of its workforce and even (briefly) the colours of its cars, but always retaining its ethos of service.

The nature of the Commonwealth car service has meant that it has been associated with many significant events in Australia’s history. Commonwealth cars and their drivers were part of the pageantry associated with the opening of the provisional Parliament House in Canberra in 1927 by the Duke of York and that of the new Parliament House by his daughter, Queen Elizabeth II in 1988. They provided services for the Commonwealth and Olympic Games, the Bicentenary events, the World Expo in 1988 and for the Papal Visit in 2009.



FORE

COMCAR has also been present at times of crisis. The June 1966 shooting of Federal Opposition Leader, Arthur Calwell, occurred while he was in a Commonwealth car: drivers were providing services to delegates to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meeting at the time of the Hilton Hotel bombing in Sydney on 13 February 1978: and the bombing of the home of a Family Court judge in 1984 occurred while a driver was waiting to collect the judge.

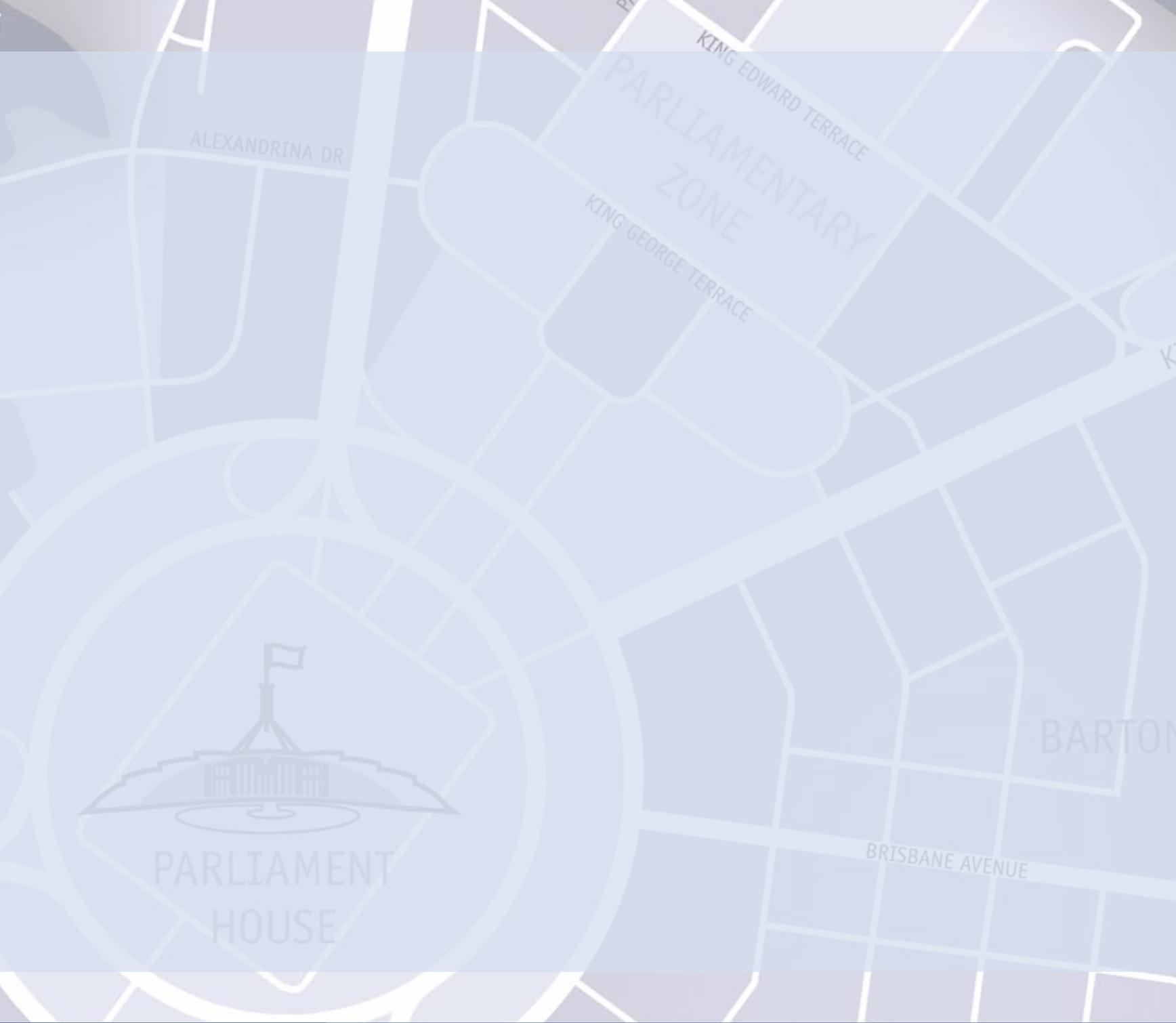
A significant and enduring element of COMCAR's story has been its key role in VIP visits and high profile events. The changing nature of these visits and events reflects the changing political role of Australia in the region and the world. Royal Family members were once the most frequent distinguished Guests of Government and their visits often extended over long periods and included several states, with major logistical implications for those organising these visits. Modern Royal Visits tend to be far shorter and devoted to specific events. At the same time there has been an increase in the number of other Heads of State and distinguished visitors. One of the earliest of these was the visit by American President Lyndon Johnson in October 1966. Since that time the range and frequency of such visits has increased dramatically as the Australian Government frequently hosts visits by leaders from across the world. COMCAR has also served delegates to major regional and international gatherings, such as the World Economic Forum in Melbourne in September 2000, the APEC Leaders' Forum in Sydney in September 2007 and the Pacific Islands Forum in Cairns in 2009. These visits and events have underscored our nation's growing influence in world affairs and COMCAR has played its part.

Throughout the last one hundred years, and in all circumstances and conditions, COMCAR has continued to provide a high quality, secure and uniquely Australian service. "Going the Extra Mile" is truly an apt title for the history of COMCAR and its people.

On a personal note, may I record my gratitude for the professional skill, the courteous service and the generous spirit of COMCAR staff. I have been a client across the years since 1978 as a member of Commonwealth Advisory Councils, Boards, Commissions, as a Commonwealth Public Servant and Public Office holder. On day to day business, special ceremonial occasions, long distances, often late into the night in cities, regional and remote Australia, I have developed a lifelong admiration and respect for this remarkable organisation and its people.

Alan King
28.6.2010.





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