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The Dodger

A former detective traces the turbulent life of Australia's most notorious cop, Roger Rogerson, writes **John Dale**

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The Dodger

By **Duncan McNab**

Macmillan, 288pp, \$32.95

IT was with some trepidation that I approached this book. Marketed as a behind-the-scenes account of the most notorious ex-cop in Australian police history, *The Dodger* is an attempt to explain the rise and fall of a charismatic man who, since the 1981 shooting of Warren Lanfranchi, has captured more media headlines than Fred Krahe, Chook Fowler, Trevor Haken and all the other disgraced detectives in NSW put together. The name Roger Rogerson has come to be synonymous with police corruption in the way that Shane Warne has with spin bowling.

Rogerson was dismissed from the police force in 1986 for publicly naming Neddy Smith and Lenny McPherson as his informers and labelling the unbribable Michael Drury as corrupt. He was also found guilty of operating two false bank accounts totalling \$111,000, the equivalent of a detective sergeant's salary over three years.

So what new information can ex-detective Duncan McNab bring to light that hasn't been revealed in the Independent Commission Against Corruption hearings, the Police Integrity Commission tapes or Rogerson's countless court and coronial appearances?

In his day, Rogerson was a man to be feared. He had killed in the line of duty and in dispatching Lanfranchi in a Sydney alleyway he discovered that "he could literally get away with murder - or a very aggressive form of self-defence". His colleagues and superiors thought he was a dazzling officer while the underworld and a handful of investigative journalists regarded him as a brazen killer. As Lanfranchi's girlfriend Sallie-Anne Huckstepp put it shortly before her own murder, "there's not many men I'm afraid of, but Rogerson's the worst".

Rogerson, now 65, is described as a broken-down old man. Released in February this year from Kirkconnell Correctional Centre near Bathurst, he suffers from the same Parkinson's disease that afflicts his former partner in crime, convicted murderer Neddy Smith. But my unease was not connected with Rogerson's reputation with a gun and badge so much as with McNab's previous book on the late Abe Saffron. If Paul Barry's unauthorised biography of Warne could be described as an odiography, McNab's Saffron effort was hagiography, albeit enjoyable. Was McNab also going to depict Rogerson as "a bit of an old rascal"? Until his recent imprisonment, Rogerson had been touring the country with the esteemed Mark "Jacko" Jackson in a comical attempt to reinvent himself in the public eye as a loveable old rogue, "a normal guy with seven grandkids and two wonderful daughters". Nostalgia for the good old days when police dealt firmly with criminals is a popular pastime in some pubs.

Fortunately, McNab doesn't go down the treacherous path of trying to restore his former colleague's reputation. Instead he explores the closed culture in the NSW police force that enabled men like Rogerson to flourish.

Wining and dining with Australia's most violent criminals, cutting deals, bestowing favours and dispensing justice whenever he sought fit, Rogerson was not simply above the law, for many years he was the law. He could make charges disappear, and criminals, too, if he gave the order. To operate with such impunity, he needed the tacit support of his fellow officers, the judiciary, politicians and the media, all of whom were complicit to some extent in the systemic corruption that existed in the elite squads of the old Criminal Investigation Branch, or CIB.

Rogerson joined the armed hold-up squad in 1974 and quickly made his mark as a brilliant detective. Police roundsmen regarded CIB detectives as their drinking mates and didn't probe too deeply into their methods. The end result, as McNab asserts, was that "the papers got their headlines, police became heroes, the government was happy and the public were also happy, if ignorant".

The Lanfranchi shooting was a prime example. To the police and most of the media, Lanfranchi was a drug-dealing hoodlum and whatever the circumstances of his death, it was good riddance to him.

But the shooting of Drury, a senior constable, in his kitchen in 1984 was different. Two bullets struck him in the chest and abdomen moments after he had fed his three-year-old daughter. Drury was raced to hospital and fearing that he would die in surgery, he made a sworn deposition naming Rogerson as the detective who had offered him a \$30,000 bribe. The next morning, Drury's deposition arrived at internal affairs. There was enough evidence to consider Rogerson as chief suspect for conspiracy to murder. Yet as Detective Inspector Bill Smith later told the Wood royal commission: "It become blatantly clear that the initial investigation was an absolute cover-up in relation to Roger Rogerson."

For many honest police such as McNab, Rogerson had gone too far. When McNab realised the internal affairs investigation had stalled - "It can't be Roger, he's too good a bloke" - he and a colleague decided to act. They contacted investigative journalist Wendy Bacon at The National Times and handed her a copy of Drury's deposition. It was a courageous effort, given the dangerous times. As soon as the police minister got wind that the Times was about to publish, the race was on to charge Rogerson first.

On November 28, 1984, he was served with a summons for attempted bribery. Although he would eventually be acquitted, he was overheard in the cells confessing to his wife Joy about his two false bank accounts. With internal affairs and the Australian Taxation Office on his trail, Rogerson's downfall was assured.

The Drury shooting was a turning point and McNab's role in revealing Rogerson's involvement an important one. What makes The Dodger more successful than McNab's biography on Saffron is that it adds to our knowledge of how Rogerson was exposed. It also provides the reader with a personal insight into the "us versus them" mentality that pervaded NSW police during the Rogerson era, a force aptly described as the best money could buy.

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