

— Bruce Crawford — Retiring police chief ruled roost his way

By JOHN LOTT
Special to
Economist & Sun

OK, Bruce Crawford: You know what they say about you.
They use words like tyrant and dictator. They call you stubborn, pompous, belligerent. And worse.

"I know what's been said," the police chief replies. "They say: 'He's a shit-disturber, that Crawford. He's an arrogant SOB.'"

Well, what about it?

"Tyrant? No. I'm not a tyrant at all," he says evenly.

"Dictator? I don't entirely disagree with that. It's a slight exaggeration, but there's some merit to that."

"The boss has to be dictatorial. The man at the top has to make the decisions. He has to say: 'This is the way it's going to be.'"

Bruce Crawford is nothing if not blunt. His hard-nosed, gunslinger style raised hackles almost from the day he rode in from Metro to become York Region's top cop 15 years ago. He fought with politicians, clashed with the press and ruled the police force with an iron hand.

But this week, as he starts retirement at age 60, he doesn't take any of it back. He did what he had to do. And, he says, he did it well.

York's roads are safer, its crime rate is the lowest in Canada, and York Regional Police protection is the best buy in Ontario, Mr. Crawford says.

The facts on Bruce Crawford

Born in York Township in 1925, Bruce Crawford attended York Memorial Collegiate Institute and served two years in the Royal Canadian Navy before starting his 40-year police career in 1945.

Crawford became York Region's first police chief in 1971 when the region's population was 150,000. His starting salary: \$21,500. The force had 200 men and a budget of \$2.3 million.

Last year York's 400-person department had a \$21.7-million budget to serve a population of 324,000. Crawford's 1985 salary: \$81,058.

Crawford was recently named a special consultant to the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

He and his wife Violet have been married for 35 years. They have two sons and a daughter.

In his retirement, he and his wife plan to travel. He likes deep-sea fishing — when the sea is calm. And, he says, he's looking for a job.



BRUCE CRAWFORD - 1971
A new chief takes over

Problems within force

"If you look back over my 15 years, I never had any trouble with the people of York. I never had any trouble handling crime. My problems have always come from within the force — and in the early years, from the elected people."

And yes, despite his tough-guy image, he was wounded by the criticism. The attacks from within the police force, which escalated over the last two years, "hurts more than anything," he says.

Back in the early 1970s, Mr. Crawford admits he was sometimes "cocky" and "looking for a fight." But during his final years as chief, he'd lost his zest for battle.

"I'd had too much of it. I began to feel like a boxer — punchy."

On Saturday, Feb. 1, his retirement becomes official. He leaves as he arrived 15 years ago: an outsider, a loner.

If Bruce Crawford were to write his autobiography, he'd probably portray himself as a tragic hero. And he'd call the book My Way.

Controversial figure

"I couldn't be anything but controversial," he says, "because of the things I had to do."

Out of the pressure-cooker at last, Bruce Crawford lowers his big frame into a soft chair by a window in the family room of his King Township home, while a sleepy English sheepdog sprawls in a corner. Outside by the bird feeder on the lawn, two blue jays screech at each other, the way Mr. Crawford and police commissioner Ray Twinney used to spar over radar enforcement in the 1970s.

He seems relaxed. Over the years, he'd granted countless interviews, many of which he regretted ("the reporting is lousy up here in York," he says). But at home on this grey winter morning, he seems less wary, perhaps even a bit vulnerable.

His policies gave York residents "first-class" police protection, he says, yet he seldom made news unless someone was criticizing him.

"It would have been nice if someone over the years had said, 'You're an odd SOB, Chief, but you've done a good job.'"

Mr. Crawford is proud of his 40-year police career, which began late in 1945 after two years in the Royal Canadian Navy. As a young constable, he patrolled the Keele-Eglinton area of York Township where he was born and raised.

He was a good young cop and he was lucky, piling up eight com-

mendations in his first six years. "Everything just seemed to fall in my lap," he recalls.

Like the time in the late '40s when he caught up with a car that had run a red light and discovered the occupants had just robbed a bank. Or the time he stopped a "suspicious-looking" driver who handed him a bloody knife and announced: "I just killed my wife."

After York Township became part of the amalgamated Metropolitan Toronto police in 1957, Detective Bruce Crawford was assigned to the Court Street station in downtown Toronto ("where the action was") and rose quickly through the ranks.

He was sergeant of detectives when he left in 1966 to become one of the architects of the new Port of Toronto police force, the first of its kind in North America.

After two years as deputy chief, he was named chief of the port police, but the job lost its challenge before long. "There just wasn't enough to do," he says.

So on Dec. 28, 1970, he came to Newmarket for a job interview. York Region's new police commission hired him the same day. He had no headquarters, no office and three days to get ready to lead the newest municipal police force in Ontario.

His mandate was simple, he recalls: "To create a first-class, effective police force." His raw material: 14 small, folksy police departments, one for each of the former towns and townships in York County.

Plus 14 police chiefs.

Before Mr. Crawford was hired, the incumbent chiefs had their own ideas about who should sit where in the new regime. Naturally, their plans did not include a hotshot hired gun from the Big City.

"We had to bring in an outsider," says Gordon Cook, a member of York's police commission for its first 10 years. "We had to bring together 14 police forces. The job needed a very strong person and a very strong leader."

Iron-fisted rule

Four months into the first year, Mr. Crawford reclassified the former chiefs. One — former Vaughan chief Bill Shimmin — became a deputy chief, while the others were given ranks ranging from inspector down to constable. That tough task completed, the new chief started the long process of making the York force his own.

His first priority was to start weeding out the policemen who didn't meet his Metro standards.

Some, he says, never should have been cops in the first place. The culling process "wasn't very easy and it wasn't very nice," he recalls.

"I didn't enjoy it. But I was hired to do it. It was my job."

He knew the job would make him a sitting duck for criticism. Often the small-town cops were friends of the small-town politicians, many of whom resented or feared regional government.

The new police force was the most visible sign that a new broom was sweeping through old York County. And big, blunt Bruce Crawford was the clearest target.

Mr. Crawford weathered many controversies in York's formative years — reclassification of chiefs and sergeants, a headquarters crisis, budget battles — but none rivalled the radar ruckus that started in 1971 and erupted sporadically for the next seven years.

Classic conflict

It was a classic conflict, pitting Mr. Crawford against Ray Twinney: the Gunslinger vs. the Godfather.

Mr. Crawford argued that he had to crack down on speeding drivers because York had the worst record of traffic deaths in Ontario. Police Commissioner Twinney retorted that the chief was overzealous, forcing his men to harass responsible drivers, leaving his officers no discretion. When Mr. Crawford and Mr. Twinney squared off, fur flew and bold headlines followed.

Mr. Twinney, now Newmarket's mayor, was then the town's regional councillor and a regional appointee to the police commission. His "Godfather" nickname was a local joke, and one Mr. Twinney enjoyed.

Like the chief, Mr. Twinney favored plain talk. In one 1977 newspaper account, he blasted Mr. Crawford's "rigid" radar policy and called the chief a dictator. Mr. Crawford countered by curtly inviting Mr. Twinney to prove his accusations or quit the commission.

Mr. Crawford vigorously defends his radar policy. "It saved lives," he says. In one year in the '70s, the highway death toll fell from 53 to 24 after the chief "lowered the boom."

Mr. Twinney's police-force pipeline kept him informed of cops' complaints against the chief and spawned charges of a recurring "morale problem" among the rank and file. Mr. Crawford replied that his force had no morale problem; morale in York was typical of major police forces everywhere, he said.

Now the region's longest-serving police commissioner, Mr. Twinney looks back on Mr. Crawford's performance with mixed feelings.

"It's been proven that he did an excellent job overall," Mr. Twinney said in an interview last week.

But right to the end of Mr. Crawford's term, Mr. Twinney had three serious concerns about the police force.

One was staff morale. "A police force doesn't have to be treated like an army," Mr. Twinney says in reference to Mr. Crawford's style.

The second was the police attitude toward people in the 17-20 age group. "Our police often treated kids like second-class citizens," he says.

The third: Police are too aloof from the citizens, Mr. Twinney says; they should get to know the people in the areas where they work.

Hillock takes over

Mr. Twinney says new Chief Don Hillock has assured the commission he will deal with those issues. Mr. Hillock, a deputy chief under Mr. Crawford, has been a policeman for 25 years — all in York Region.

The Board of Police Commissioners is the chief's boss. But despite occasional opposition, Bruce Crawford usually had his way with the commission. He may have been too "regimental" at times, Gordon Cook recalls, but he had the commission's respect.

"Bruce Crawford really knew police work," Mr. Cook says.

Mr. Crawford didn't lose many arguments as York's police chief. His critics would reply that he was insensitive to opposing views and too stubborn to admit he was wrong. But says his critics — even his own officers — often misunderstood his motives, misrepresented his manner and ignored his results.

"I'm not hard to reach. I'm accessible. I'm not terribly responsive. I'm not connable. And this is why I think I have the trouble with the men in the force."

"They can't con me. I've been through all that they're going through, and I know when they're conning me and when they're not. I can't be conned. I hate being with anybody attempting to con me."

Gordon Cook, who worked with Mr. Crawford for a decade, says the chief did his job "with great dignity and honor." Mr. Crawford may have been a lightning rod for criticism in York Region, but among his peers worldwide he is highly respected, Mr. Cook says.

For eight years Mr. Crawford was the only Canadian on the executive of the International Association of Chiefs of Police. That organization recently appointed him as a special consultant.

Back home in York, "the public respected Bruce Crawford," Mr. Cook says. "They didn't always agree with him, but they respected him."

As he looks back on his years as chief, Mr. Crawford says he sometimes wonders if it was all worth it. He considered quitting "hundreds of times," he says.

He has no grandiose farewell statements about the intangible rewards of police work, and he repeats a comment that he made a year ago: He wouldn't take the job again for \$10 million.

But then he says: "I don't make any apologies to anybody for what I've done over the years. I was given a mandate to do a job, and I did it, and the results have been good."

"I've made mistakes. But the nice feeling is that I did it my way, and I won. Like Frank Sinatra, you know?"

"You have to admit, I did it my way."



BRUCE CRAWFORD
40 years on the job

LET'S WARM UP WITH CHEERFUL TROPICALS & FLOWERS

White Rose SALE!

EXOTIC CYCLAMEN
Finest Floral Quality! White Rose brings you these long-lasting blooms. Lush green foliage supports elegant pink & white flowers. Makes a nice gift to give or to receive. Gift wrapped in foil.
1/2 PRICE 488
Reg. 7.99

YUCCA CANE
LARGE 6 FT. TALL SPECIMENS
Here's your chance to decorate your home or office with a truly unique tropical plant... 4 canes, up to 6' tall, with super large heads of lush shiny green foliage. Complete with your choice of wicker pot cover or 16" contemporary planter.
SUPER SPECIAL 744
Reg. 149.99

COLOURFUL CROTON OR BRONZE ARLIA
Both tropicals come complete with your choice of bac bac basket or 12" decorator planter.
YOUR CHOICE: 2444

CLEARANCE 75% OFF BAC BAC Pot Covers
White Rose makes it easy to decorate, with quality hand-crafted lined pot covers. Ideal for tropical plants, wicker baskets and more! Assorted sizes and styles. Reg. .99¢ to 10.99
SALE PRICED 25¢ TO 2.75

FERTILIZER SPIKES
Easy to use fertilizer spikes. For all your indoor house and flowering plants. Reg. 1.19
SPECIAL 88¢

GROWERS QUALITY WHITE ROSE SOIL MIX
Top quality blend for starting seeds & potting plants. Completely weed & disease free, large 35 L bag.
SALE PRICED 288
Reg. 4.25 35 L BAG

25% OFF OUR ENTIRE SELECTION
WHITE ROSE QUALITY DESIGNER POLYESTER FLOWERS
Cheer up your home this winter with bright spring colours and decorator shades. Professionally designed quality polyester flowers... Perfectly crafted to White Rose specification. Choose from carnations, roses, mums, polyester greenery and so much more. Pick from thousands of blooms.
2 WEEKS ONLY, SHOP EARLY!
SALE PRICED FROM 52¢ TO 3.97
Reg. .69¢ to 5.29

FLORAL FOAM
A professional quality floral foam for all your fresh and polyester flower projects.
SUPER LOW PRICE 99¢
Reg. 1.89

FLORAL TAPE
Easy to use convenient rolls (1/2" x 9') available in green, white & brown.
149¢ A ROLL

BOUQUET HOLDER
Ideal for designing your own wedding bouquets. Sturdy plastic & foam.
129

1/3 OFF WALL DECOR
Accent your home with these easy-to-decorate handcrafted straw hats, brooms, & rattan shapes. Choose from our entire selection. Now at money saving prices.
SALE PRICED: 26¢ TO 4.66
Reg. .36¢ to 6.99

1/2 PRICE QUALITY DECORATOR CANDLES
White Rose makes it easy to create your own beautiful arrangements. Quality smokeless, dripless, 12" long tapers... Now available in 12 fabulous decorator colours at a sensational low price. Only while they last!
SALE 29¢
Reg. 59¢

OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK OPEN SUNDAYS
HOURS: Mon., Wed. 9:00 am. to 6:00 pm.
Thurs., Fri. 9:00 am. - 9:00 pm.
Sun., and Holidays 9:00 am. to 6:00 pm.

UNIONVILLE
No. 7 Highway
East of Woodbine Ave.

UNIONVILLE
PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE. PERSONAL INTEGRITY. HAVE MADE US WHAT WE ARE TODAY.