

FOR THE INITIATED, ANDREW WHITTEN THE SKYDIVER WAS WENDELL CANINO THE CRWDOG. THE REASONS FOR THE NAME ARE, LIKE MOST SKYDIVING IDENTITIES, LARGELY LOST IN TIME AND KNOWN ONLY BY A FEW. BUT THE LAST THING THAT ONE WANTS TO BE KNOWN FOR IN SKYDIVING IS WHY YOU GOT STUCK WITH A NICKNAME. IT IS WHAT YOU COULD DO IN THE AIR, AND WHAT YOU CONTRIBUTE TO OUR SPORT, FOR WHICH YOU ARE REMEMBERED.



# R.I.P Andrew Whitten



If that is the yardstick, then Wendell is unlikely to be forgotten. He has left an indelible mark on Australian skydiving and he deserves to be remembered for his contributions to the development of canopy formation in Australia as a long-time national and international competitor and as an innovator in terms of ideas, theory and

technique. He was unique.

He started on his jumping career in early 1984 on static-lined "roundies" as many of his peers did. Unlike most of us, however, who as soon as we got off the static line and started doing "Head-down" and Freestyle while grappling for our ripcords, Wendell took to the air as though he was born to it. His confidence and ability quickly saw him picked up by his more experienced peers and he fell in with his first team, the Junior Woodchucks, at Ramblers. The next year, he won his first trophy by bringing home to Ramblers the coveted Aratula Cup. Think skydiving State of Origin at the time. That had not been done before or since.

Within four years, Wendell was invited onto the famed Early Openers 8-way Canopy Formation team. That team, based at Ramblers, had placed third at the Canopy Formation World Championships held in Australia the year before. Wendell's innate abilities saw him assume a leadership role even though he wasn't the leader. He took one of the more important slots on the dive, and led largely by example. The end result of this saw the team take the silver medal in France losing to the U.S.A. only on a protest.

History tells us that two years later Early Openers armed with their secret weapon in Wendell became Australia's first World Champions in Thailand in 1990. If Early Openers had been the Beatles, Wendell would have been John Lennon.

Wendell continued to compete at international level for years after that mentoring, passing on his knowledge and further cementing his credentials with his peers at home and abroad. He was without doubt the finest exponent of canopy formation that Australia has produced and in the top three or four that I have ever seen. I always thought that he could chase down a bat in a

**By Andrew "Sarge" Preston Photo by Steve Fitchett**

windstorm under his canopy and I was privileged to have seen in action many hundreds of times from the best seat in the house – that is, right up there next to him.

There is of course, always a new generation coming through and Wendell had also made the decision to spend more time doing other things. He had a family, Janine, Rhomaney and Tait and skiing seemed a lot of fun. He certainly wasn't doing any canopy formation.

It is at this point that I can point to just how great Wendell actually was at parachuting. The proof lies in knowing this brief background about the lead up to the 100-way Canopy Formation World Record. The 100-way CRW Diamond was intended as the culmination of a series of events planned over the previous decade. It was a once in a lifetime thing. Numerous people were required to attend selection camps held in Europe or the U.S. And to the organiser, it didn't matter who you were – friend or former team mates – you had to prove your credentials. Enthused, I returned from the U.S.A. after the 64-way World Record and organised an attempt at the Australian 25-way Canopy Formation Record. I had arranged the services of Chris Gay, the organiser of the world record campaign and the man who would pilot the 100-way if we ever got there, to come to Australia to help out, train people, give guidance, pilot our little 25-way and generally lend his expertise. He was also the selector of the world record team. We had the numbers, but needed people in key positions. Wendell had stopped crashing his canopy into other people some time before that but I asked him if he would like to come along and play. He agreed but didn't have a parachute. I organised one for him.

Within two jumps, and on video footage alone, Chris Gay selected Wendell for the 100-way CRW world record attempts that year even though Wendell had turned up only to help out rather than try out. Without trying and without attending a selection camp, Wendell gained selection on the Canopy Formation World Team and became part of the largest canopy formation ever flown. He was the only person accorded that privilege. That's because there is only one Wendell.

*Vale Wendell*

*Editor's Note: Wendell died recently from an aggressive form of Liver Cancer.*