

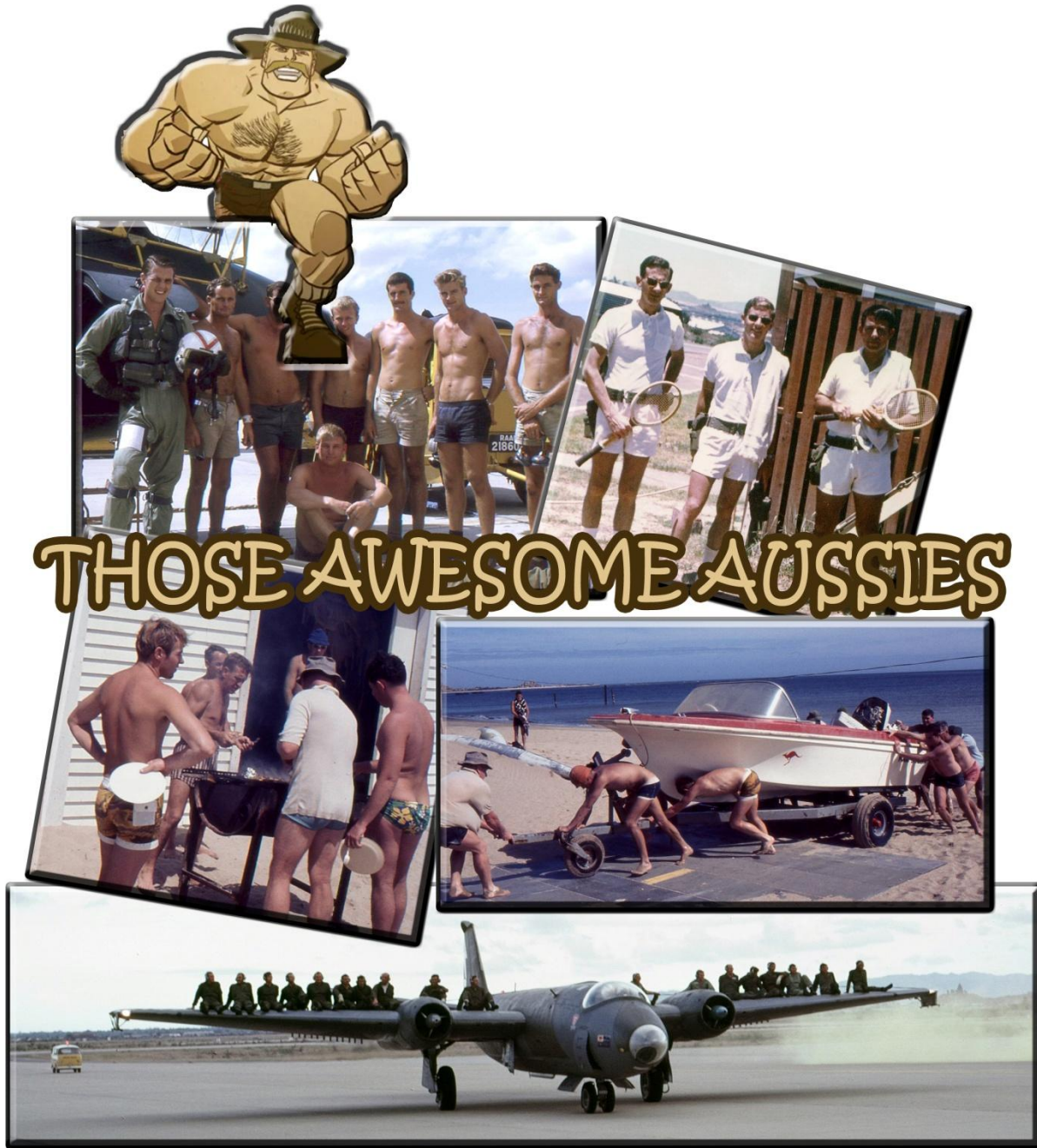
# Phan Rang AB Newsletter

The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.  
"Keeping the memories alive" Newsletter 230

In this issue:

**Those Awesome Aussies**

**An Aussie Tale - by Jim Mattison**



**The Awesome Aussie: A close mate of the Dashing Hispanic, the Ragin' Cajun and the Imperturbable Pom, and sometimes can be applied to New Zealanders.**

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Since the ‘**Land Down Under**’ has earned a reputation as one of the most dangerous countries on Earth, due to its harsh environment and myriad of highly dangerous creatures, many authors have reasoned that anyone who can survive there must be quite a bit tougher than your ordinary human. Australians (especially Anglo-Australian men) in fiction are often portrayed as über-masculine rough-and-tumble supermen, champion outdoorsmen who tear up the outback in their Jeeps and have never met a crocodile they couldn't wrestle. Expect a fondness for knives. Some also like to mention the fact that Australia was founded as a penal colony to emphasize how tough they are, as if this is ever taken as a compliment. Obviously not 100% realistic, but there's some truth here. It is notable, however, that the majority of depictions of this trope date from before the Vietnam War and even into the Iraq war.

However, compare that to the typical depiction of Australian Aborigines. They are usually depicted as slender and easygoing; they don't need to be physically tough to survive the Outback considering they know the land inside and out, and know how to live in it without blundering through it.

The Americans that had the privilege of working and associating with these ‘Awesome Aussies’ are honored and they all have fond memories that they will carry with them forever. Many of those more memorable moments, working and playing together, are featured in previous issues of the Phan Rang Newsletters. The friendly rivalry between the two allies is legendary and is well documented in the issues of the Phan Rang Newsletters. Even with the Australian continent being 15,187 kilometers (9,437 miles) from the U.S. those strong bonds still exist today.

**The following pictures capture the spirit of our Aussie comrades. Don't let the pictures fool you, they knew how to party and enjoy life and when it came to supporting the mission, they were professionals all the way.**

The Aussie contingent was almost completely self-sufficient with even a replica of the ‘**Sydney Harbour Bridge**’. They had everything in their own compound necessary to support the combat missions that they engaged in everyday. Just during an average 18

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month period they would be resupplied by RAAF Hercules and Caribou aircraft with over 1,000 tons of palletized material and moving over 3,600 passengers. Even fresh bread was brought in.



**The hamlet of No. 2 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force, as seen from Nui Dat Hill. These were the domestic quarters, with the mess located a distance away along with the aircraft hanger and other facilities on the flight line.**

The rivalry between the 13<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> TBS and No. 2 Squadron was particularly fierce and legendary. They even had a ‘**Davis Cup**’ for the victors as reported on in Phan Rang Newsletter 222. There also was a ‘Cinders Trophy’ which was a 105MM empty shell filled with cinders as opposed to ‘The Ashes’ which was used for a cricket championship. One game of softball, one game of cricket, followed by several cases of beer and cigars.



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### **The group picture for the 1969 ‘Cinders Trophy’.**



**Aussies and Yank teams, ‘Cinders Trophy’, Phan Rang AB 1969**

Those “Awesome Aussies” met their match when they went up against the 35<sup>th</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing in a Sidearm Match. The shootout took place on the Aussie range with air crew sidearm’s designated as the weapon.

The three phases of competition were: firing from any position at 100 yards, standing position at 50 yards and shooting from the hip at 15 yards. A total of 180 rounds were fired. With a point for each round hitting the silhouette target, the final score was 352nd TFS, 157; 120th TFS, 150; 8th TBS, 132; 614th TFS, 128; 615th TFS, 122, and in last place, the challengers with 98 points. Those Aussies challenged the Yanks in a game more of their liking. That story can be found in Phan Rang Newsletter 177.

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Here is a picture of some 2 Squadron tennis players with self-protective side-arms.

From left to right: **Adrian Stootjes**; **Peter Nuske** and **Bob Howe**.



**Jim Mattison** a USAF veteran shares this story that exemplifies the close connection between the forces. He flew on AC-119G Shadow gunships from Dec 1968-Dec 1969 and his crew position was Aerial Gunner.

My crew position on the aircraft required great endurance; as the air temperature even at night was 90 degrees plus. Our standard operating altitude was 3,000 feet; and the humidity was still over 90%. Our standard flight time was 5 hours; but frequently we would be airborne up to 11+ hours. As a consequence, at missions end we would be sweat soaked, down to our knees and exhausted.

We were billeted in Quonset huts through the fall of 1969. Afterwards, the “air-conditioned aircrew barracks” were completed. Our billets were Q4; Quonset huts that used to house the AC-47 enlisted personnel. Our Quonsets were located up near the “rock crusher”; away from the main base. This was a former processing station for the concrete needed for initial construction of the base. The building was H shaped, with latrines in the connecting corridor. There were sandbag bunkers surrounding the building. This provided a readymade “patio” in the back. We had half barrel barbecues on the patio; frequently BBQing steaks or other mystery meats.

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Our gunship squadron, the 71st SOS, had revetments near the RAAF (Royal Australian Air Force) #2 Bomb Squadron. No 2 Squadron proudly flew and supported the Canberra Medium Bomber. Our two squadrons struck up a friendship based on both Squadrons being “outliers” or tenants on base.

Often was the case that we would be returning to our billets after a long arduous mission. We were hot, sweaty, exhausted, and salt rings stained our flight suits and jungle fatigues. We were dropped off by the crew bus, actually just a pickup truck with a plywood cover. As we clambered out of the bus, we sometimes were greeted by loud voices and music. We sometimes were handed a Fosters as we entered the Quonset hut. On occasion we would also be surprised by the sounds of female voices laughing or singing.

There were Australian Bands that would tour the bases. They would also coincidentally have some female singers/dancers as part of the entourage. Our mates from #2 Squadron were always happy to cajole the band into a jam session at our Quonset hut. The bands would stop by after playing the clubs on base. The merriment sometimes lasted until daylight. We didn't mind at all. After a shower and a Fosters or other beer, all was good for us.

On a few occasions we would arrive at the Quonset hut with the Aussies in the midst of peculiar games.

One game was called “tickle”. There two players in the game; both enhanced by massive amounts of adult beverages. The object of the game was to see who would start laughing first. Simple enough you say? Well, here's the fine detail; which set us aback the first time we saw it. The two players were completely



naked. It gets better though. Each player had one outstretched hand nearly contacting his opponent's nether region. At the start signal, each would begin tickling the others nether bits. First man to break down laughing was the loser. The loser usually had some penance to perform; maybe chugging a Fosters or some other agreed upon task.

**"I dare you to 'tickle' me".**

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The wildest game we saw them play was a two man “race”. This was another game induced by adult beverage consumption. In preparation, long slender cones were fashioned from note paper. The players were once again completely naked (I sometimes wondered about those Aussies). The paper cones were then inserted between each man’s butt cheeks. There was a starting line created; with both players standing in a runner’s stance. Just prior to the start signal, the cones were lit on fire. Once the flames were stable, the starter yelled GO! The object was to see who could last longest while running with a flaming cone in their derriere. Funniest thing we had ever seen. **Those (Awesome) Aussies were the finest kind!**



Just like their American counterparts they were very active in civic action projects. Here is No. 2 Squadron Medical Officer, Dr. Bill Knox, about to take a deaf S Nhut Air Base (Saigon) for treatment. Naturally flying from Phan Rang Air Base on ‘Wallaby Airlines’, a C-7 Caribou.



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**“We few. We happy few.  
We band of brothers, for he today  
That sheds his blood with me  
Shall be my brother.”**

— *William Shakespeare, Henry V*



**Before boarding his air-conditioned B Mk. 20 Canberra bomber on a mission over South Vietnam, Pilot Officer *Barry Carpenter* poses with RAAF 2 Squadron ground crew.**

**The Royal Australian Regiment (RAR)** is another segment of that hardy population that fought bravely in Vietnam and we need to remember the contributions and sacrifices that our most



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important ally made. The connection between the ground and air forces were made in Australia almost 50 years after the fact and that connection is well documented in Phan Rang Newsletters 186 through 188 in articles “Blondes, Bombs and Bunkers” and “Magpie 31”.



**Roger Lambert**, Platoon Commander, 9 Platoon, C Company contributed many stories documenting the RAR’s Vietnam Adventures and they can be found in Phan Rang Newsletters 192, 193, 206, 207, 211, 216 and 219. The stories give a glimpse of the ground war in Vietnam and sometimes demonstrating that humor can be found, even in a war zone.



This group of **Air Field Defence Guards** part of the RAAF contingent is responsible for both on airfield security as well as conducting patrols outside the base perimeter. There are two excellent stories about these brave hero’s in Phan Rang Newsletters 124 and 221.

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Aussie BBQ (Barbie) at 2 Squadron's boat club, Phan Rang Beach



2 Squadron's boat “**Four dozen**” is hauled ashore after towing water skiers off Phan Rang beach. It was so named as it was purchased from friendly Americans on the base at the cost of four dozen cans of Aussie XXXX beer, which were very much prized items.



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**The Awesome Aussies were master at improvising and taking advantage of every situation, even in a war zone. Pictured is a Chariot race with finely crafted chariots, costumed participants and squadron members taking the place of horses. Great fanfare surrounded these events and they were well attended by all base personnel. This is only one example of the ingenuity they displayed in staging events like this.**

**The “Soap-Box Derby” was another event that probably required months to prepare for because they constructed elaborate vehicles that were capable of racing down the hills of Phan Rang AB. The derby was held on the road leading down from the Officers Mess and in celebration of Australia Day, 26 January. In true fashion they were not powered. See Phan Rang Newsletter 135 for pictures.**



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Look closely and you'll see two guys preparing an aircraft for flight...no not a Canberra, but a model airplane. Taken near the officers' quarters around mid 1969. Right-to-left are: Merv Lewis, John Wilkinson, Ross Hardcastle (white shirt), Lloyd Brown (throwing stone), Al Blyth, John Kennedy, unknown Intell/Ops O leaning against wall and some visiting musicians all identified by Trevor Benneworth.

LAC **Brian Grebert**, No 2 Squadron, made headlines in the local paper on November 1967 when the model airplane he was flying was caught up in strong winds and was carried toward the Peak of Nui Dat Mountain and was never heard from again. Kangaroo Switch was silent...not one person called in to report a sighting.

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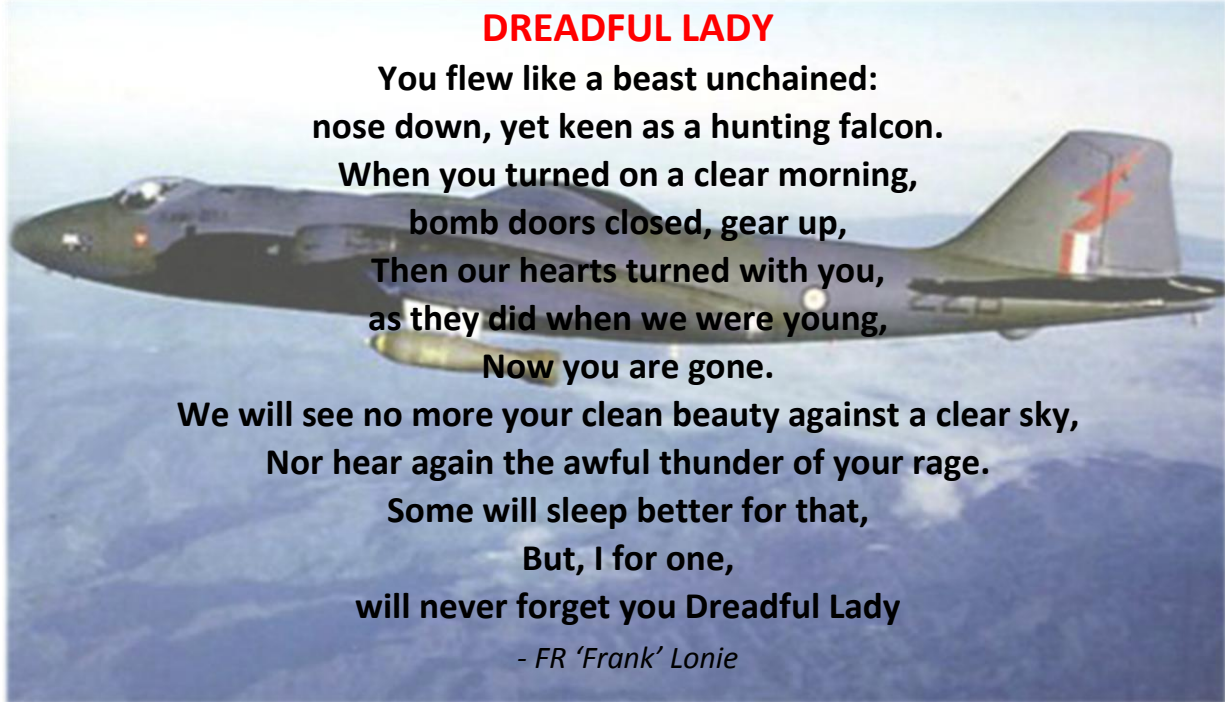
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**No. 2 Squadron ground crews catch a ride on a taxiing B Mk 20 Canberra at Phan Rang.**

### **DREADFUL LADY**



You flew like a beast unchained:  
nose down, yet keen as a hunting falcon.  
When you turned on a clear morning,  
bomb doors closed, gear up,  
Then our hearts turned with you,  
as they did when we were young,  
Now you are gone.

We will see no more your clean beauty against a clear sky,  
Nor hear again the awful thunder of your rage.  
Some will sleep better for that,  
But, I for one,  
will never forget you Dreadful Lady

- FR 'Frank' Lonie

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**No matter where in the world you find Australian and New Zealand troops on 25 April you will find them honoring their fallen on ANZAC Day.**



The Australian and New Zealand forces landed on Gallipoli on 25 April, meeting fierce resistance from the Ottoman Turkish defenders. What had been planned as a bold stroke to knock Turkey out of the war quickly became a stalemate, and the campaign dragged on for eight months. At the end of 1915 the allied forces were evacuated from the peninsula, with both sides having suffered heavy casualties and endured great hardships. More than 8,000 Australian soldiers had died in the campaign. Gallipoli had a profound impact on Australians at home, and 25 April soon became the day on which Australians remembered the sacrifice of those who died in the war.

**ANZAC** stands for **Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.** and ANZAC reports can be found in Phan Rang Newsletters 106, 149, 195, 198, 204 and 225.



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**We do not know one promise these men made, one pledge they gave, one word they spoke; but we do know they summed up and perfected, by one supreme act, the highest virtues of men and citizens. “ -James A. Garfield**



These Awesome Aussies from left to right: *Bryan Francis Fitzpatrick, Robert Melville O’Hanlon, Robert Charles Carver, Ivan Alfred Wooley, Michael Patrick Herbert, Trevor Graham Petith and Ronald David Hewitt.* These are the men that were with No. 2 Squadron, RAAF, assigned to Phan Rang Air Base and they only represent a small fraction of the 3,629 Australian casualties during the Vietnam War (1962-1972).

***“We will remember them”***



**Doug’s Comments:** This newsletter is my attempt to demonstrate my great admiration to those people from the land down under affectionately known as ‘Aussies’. It’s not my place to thank them for their service, but I will anyway...Thank you. I truly believe that any veteran that has had the pleasure of working or just knowing these ‘Awesome souls’ will join me in saying thank you as well. Throughout their history they have fought bravely in many battles

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and military service built on an idealized conception of the Australian experience of war and of soldiering, known as the ANZAC spirit. These ideals include notions of endurance, courage, ingenuity, humor, larrikinism (the state of being noisy, rowdy, or disorderly), egalitarianism (the idea that all humans are equal in fundamental worth or moral status) and mateship; traits which, according to popular thought, defined the behavior of Australian soldiers fighting at Gallipoli during the First World War. The Gallipoli campaign was one of the first international events that saw Australians taking part as Australians and has been seen as a key event in forging a sense of national identity.

I hope that you enjoyed this newsletter. If you have a story to tell, please write it down and send to me so that your unique experiences can be saved for posterity. This newsletter was composed by Douglas Severt and all photographs by Bob Howe and all graphics by Douglas Severt. To ensure your news is not disrupted, keep your email address updated. To see a list of all previous newsletters click [here](#). To unsubscribe to Phan Rang News, mailto:mailto:<mailto:dougsevert@cox.net> and put ‘unsubscribe’ in subject line.