QUEENSLAND NEWSLETTER APRIL 2012

OFC
The Coffee morning was held on 18 April 2012.

Present were 4727 Mike Edden, 5450 Dick Howlett, 6604 John Gold, 7012 Mike King, 7432 Will Keys and his friend Frank Gutteridge (ex-Rhodesian), who occasionally comes to our functions. In addition the gathering was graced by the presence of 7638 Gordon Hodnett and 8868 Ian Daniel, the latter was an early member of the Qld branch and turned out to be the ex-member David Cushworth and I visited some years ago when David came to stay with me and film me and Air Marshall Norman Walsh’s memories of the raid upon Chimoi Operation Dingo. 28014Z Mike Hayes is thought to be back from his trip to Africa but has yet to come to the meeting and 6278 Gerry Dyer and 6969 John (Billy) Budd were still absent from Australia, although Billy was due to return either today or tomorrow.

I took the opportunity to get some background details from Mike King so that I can submit a review of his book “The Horns of a Dilemma”, for the BSAP website.

Gordon Hodnett brought a book by an author Ben Leeman who lives in Toowoomba and regular shops at Gordon’s supermarket. Leeman describes his book “Racing Mandela” as the story of the “Lesotho Liberation Army” and the “Azanian People’s Liberation Army”, which is likely to be a thought provoking tale and which Gordon suspected might be of interest to me.

Mike King produced a colour album of his and Ginny’s recent visit to the Okavango, which was an excellent production of that visit and enabled them to take some fascinating pictures of elements of the Big 5.

LOCAL POLITICS
Will Keys has returned from his foray into local politics and while his party failed to dislodge the power base of either the LNP (Liberal National Party), which swept to power in a landslide over the ALP (Australian Labour Party) the Australia Party (The Katter Party) did quite well, and Will himself polled a very respectable 17% in the Ipswich seat. He is to be congratulated on his personal results and the party is hoped to be a sufficient thorn in the side of the ALP to replace it as the official opposition in time to come.

GENERAL
The proposed gathering in June has been amended to the first Wednesday in June to meet up with Rod Finnegan who is visiting relatives in Australia and has asked to meet up with old friends.
At the March gathering, it was hoped to resurrect the luncheon “Christmas in July” and some discussion was held regarding the menu and possible venue. I was offering to use my residence as the venue but this is likely to be placed on hold as I have now received a letter from the Logan Hospital to say that my appointment with a specialist to discuss my physical disabilities is to be on the 15th May and, hopefully, arising out of that will be an operation to replace my left hip and come up with a practical solution to strengthen my right ankle. I personally am delighted with his first step, as I look forward to being able to walk properly again without the constant use of a stick and “rollator”.

STORIES BY MEMBERS
The first is by 9596 Nick Russell, who relates a tale of his service at BSAP Mount Darwin.

“What you mean you not Greek? You speak Greek, you look Greek — even your bladdy name is Greek.”

And so began my introduction to one of the more memorable characters of Mount Darwin — ‘Stav’ Georgiou, the village’s short, round, heavily-tanned “Mayor” whose firm handshake belied his stature and whose eyes had a permanent twinkle — especially when it came to matters of business and finance.

It was June, 1976 and I had arrived the previous afternoon direct from Morris Depot — where I’d spent nearly six months following a years’ stint as a cadet in Sinoia.

National Service Patrol Officer Paul Filer, Darwin’s police quartermaster, had collected me from Depot and driven me and my katundu the 156 kms to Darwin where, unknown to me at that time, I was to spend more than four years.

On the hour and a half trip north-east through Mazoe and Bindura, Paul’s tales of derring-do in Darwin included commentary on most of the major characters in the district, and a promise to introduce me to some of them, including Stav, the next day.

As we entered Stavros Garage’s workshop I immediately spotted someone who could only have been the man himself — working away under a Landrover bonnet. Uttering the only Greek word I knew, “Yasu,” I put out my hand. Jokingly, Paul said, “Stav, meet our new P.O., Nick Papadopoulos.” Stav’s subsequent flow of words in his mother tongue ceased when I told him I wasn’t a countryman of his. It really was all Greek to me.

If the term, ‘a real character’, is used rather liberally, when describing folk it certainly does apply to one Jeremy Brink Warwick Webster, a farmer’s son from Norton, who joined us at Mount Darwin in late 1976. A couple of years older than me, Jerry didn’t take long to live up to the reputation of a likeable skellum that had preceded him from his previous station.

Darwin station’s Section Officer Chris Aitken often resembled a bulldog chewing a wasp while questioning Jerry over his sometimes superficial attempts at standard police work, but no amount of persuasion would make Jerry pick up his game. It wasn’t long before he found a niche as part of a special investigation team on anti-terrorist patrols, and later as a trainer of Security Force Auxiliaries at Mukumbura and elsewhere on the Zambezi Valley floor, where I once paid him a visit on a Dakota re-supply run in failing light with the place crawling with gooks.

He got into numerous scrapes with the enemy and was very nearly charged when, after escaping a hail of bullets in his Landrover during an ambush in Kandeya TTL, he turned around and drove back through the killing field — this time returning
automatic fire with the side and front-mounted AKs he’d forgotten were fitted to the vehicle.

Watching Jerry relieve himself at the bar of the Darwin Country Club without bothering to remove his camouflage jumpsuit, while actually engaging in a deep and meaningful conversation with the Officer Commanding, Bindura District, was a favourite party trick—made even more memorable when the similarly half-inebriated officer commented that it appeared someone had spilled their beer.

A giant of a man, Webista, as he was known to our African members, also had a large heart and was generous to a fault. He was very badly injured in a landmine explosion later in the war and spent several months in and out of hospital, and at Tsanga Lodge in the Vumba, where a group of us paid him a visit. His best mate, and another colleague of ours at Darwin, P.O. Alistair Taylor, was killed in action after Independence during a battle between ZANLA and ZIPRA elements near Bulawayo where the reliable men of the BSAP were sent to sort things out.

My first member-in-charge at Mount Darwin, and with whom I have maintained contact during the past 25 years, was Dave Young. A dry-humoured, highly intelligent man in his early 30s; he and Chris Aitken were a great combination in getting the best out of their men, while treating us ‘lighties’ with fatherly thought, not paternal attention.

Dave saw something in me as a just-turned 18 year-old that I didn’t and, for nearly six months, I was Darwin’s very own PP (public prosecutor). I was given just two week’s notice and spent until the early hours every morning swatting up on Roman-Dutch statute law in readiness for my first cases before Justice Bill Cutler, the circuit magistrate based in Bindura.

My first case one Tuesday morning was one of bicycle theft and I was petrified in anticipation of my first appearance. My leather leggings, brass belt buckle and insignia were shined by Shorty, my batman, who had also pressed my No. 2 (summer) uniform to within an inch of the manufacturer’s recommendations. I managed to get a conviction, despite being chided by the magistrate, Bill Cutler, for leading the witness, and acted as witness when the miscreant, a young man from Pfura Township, was subsequently dealt six cuts to the backside with a cane across the prosecutor’s table in the courtroom.

The feeling of dread that I’d stuff up, and belief that I actually had—every week, never left me during my stint in the job—so it was with great surprise that I received a minor commendation from the OC Bindura District following receipt of a memo to him from Mr Cutler that I’d done an excellent job as PP.

All regular P.O.s were required at some stage during their posting to Mount Darwin (radio callsign 260) to man or relieve one or other of the station’s satellite outposts; Mukumbura on the Mozambique border, Dotito in Kandeya TTL, Swanbase at Swan Lake farm, owned by Dennis and Jacky Watson, and occasional stints at Rusambo in Chimanda TTL, Rushinga in Masoso TTL, and Bveke and Karanda, also in Kandeya TTL.

After the relative safety of Mount Darwin magistrate’s court I found myself in an altogether different place at Christmas 1976 when posted for three months to Mukumbura in the hot, wet and pretty dangerous Zambezi Valley, 75 or so kilometres as the crow flies north of Darwin.

The three hour, circuitous route to ‘Mukkers’ strapped tight inside a mine-protected Hyena, expecting at any minute to be ambushed, was not pleasant, and indeed got worse later in the war when the Roads Department just wouldn't risk men and machinery to grade the potholes and corrugations. Every few kilometres we’d see
evidence of landmine activity — twisted wrecks of buses and cars — and fresh craters and blasted trees. From late 1978 the road, known as ‘Land Mine Alley’, was more or less abandoned, except for very heavily protected convoys with air cover, led by a mine-detecting 'Pookie'.

‘Accommodation’ at Mukkers comprised a fold-up stretcher under a mozzie net inside a sandbagged bunker. The heat and humidity was like a heavy, wet blanket and the paraffin fridge often went on the blink meaning warm beers at the Mukumbura Surf Club.

Every so often we'd get stonked with a half dozen mortar rounds from across the border. If it was raining we wouldn’t even bother returning fire.

A smart Brown Job decided to relieve the tedium during the hot, humid days that summer by excavating a lounge room-sized hole behind the Surf Club and filling it with bore water. The first few days were fun for all but we quickly abandoned the ‘pool’ when the water turned to thick, clinging mud.

Late in the evening of December 23rd the alarm went off in the camp office monitoring the Israeli-designed cordon sanitaire (a wire fence corridor encompassing a sometimes elaborate minefield), indicating there had been a breach by terrs infiltrating from Mozambique. At dawn, Jim Datsun, a one-legged (blown off) army engineer and his African detail in a Leopard, and me, and several black policemen and white police reservists in the Hyena, set off to investigate.

In pouring, tropical rain we had almost reached the scene when, near the confluence of the Musingwa and Mkumvura Rivers — tributaries of the Zambezi — I drove the Hyena through a stretch of water, only to get completely bogged.

With only one-day’s Rats (ration packs) each we were a pretty skraal bunch until Jim’s improvising nature saved us. Using wire cutters, he breached the cordon sanitaire and, using a shovel, removed several AP (anti-personnel) mines from the minefield. He somehow cobbled these together and hoiked them into a calm area of the river.

There was a surprisingly gentle eruption of bubbles and within minutes a dozen or so vundu rose to the surface. They tasted like crap but at least we had something to eat. We camped out in our vehicles all Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and most of Boxing Day before a rescue party from Mukkers reached us and winched us clear.

It was clear they'd not rushed to our aid — it was Christmas after all — but it was good to get back to the sophistication of Mukumbura and enjoy a few chibulis and some gifts from the Border Patrol Welfare Fund.

After my return to Darwin I took 10 days R & R —several at the Monamatapa Hotel in Salisbury at the $9.00 per night Security Force’s special rate, spending my hefty salary (paid in newly-printed $2.00 notes), including the whopping $3.75 per day T & S (travel and subsistence) allowance I had accumulated at Mukkers.

Several fruitless raids with a variety of former squad-mates and Darwin ne’er-do-wells on the Andrew Fleming Hospital nurse’s hostel after an afternoon at the Terreskane or Park Lane hotels, invariably ended with outright failure in the quest for l’amour, and consoling toots at Le Coq d’Or, followed by an obligatory punch up inside, down the stairs and outside with RLI okes. We never won — those bastards deployed Stop Groups—even in Civvy Street.

This mildly amusing but sad and inevitable procession was repeated by me and countless hundred young servicemen right until the real end of hostilities in early 1980.

In the bush we knew that every minute could be our last, and in the city we lived as though it was. I usually slunk back to Darwin, halfway through my R & R and imposed myself on my best friends, the Hucks. I had a dream of one day becoming a
cattle or tobacco farmer when all this madness was over and was keen to learn the ropes. Mary Huck had recently lost her husband Dick and I had become good mates with her youngest son Rod, who, at five years older than me, was a dashing, fit fellow, a wicked wit and with not a few female admirers.

The Huck’s farm, Fura, was on the main drag to Darwin and, being adjacent to Madziwa TTL, and to the east, Pfungwe TTL (a major CT infiltration route from Mozambique), I was made welcome not only for the extra firepower I brought but, with all of my immediate family in England (from where Mary and Dick had emigrated 30 years earlier), except for my Salisbury-based uncle, I was on my own and, still only 18, going on 19, I probably needed a bit of emotional support.

I was to increasingly depend on this during the escalation of the war and, more than 30 years later, I still maintain contact with the extended Huck family — some of the most wonderful people I have ever known.

Fellow Centenary East and Darwin-ites will forgive my rather truncated summaries of folk; most of you will remember coming across at one time or another;

Ivor Furman: followed Paul Filer as BSAP QM. A mild-mannered, orthodox Jew, Ivor was a fish out of water in Darwin and brought a sense of calm to the tempest swirling all around us. I was quite taken aback to hear, in the late 1990s, that he was a kingpin in South Africa’s adult entertainment publishing industry.

Bomber Jones: Thus nick-named by previous and then fellow-Darwin SB colleagues who couldn’t be bothered pronouncing his Welsh moniker ‘Geraint.’ Erroneously labelled by a less intelligent (and vastly superior in rank) Darwin JOC officer as a ‘pseudo-intellectual’, Bomber proved an invaluable member of Rhodesia’s own ‘War against Terror’ and has subsequently gone on to feature prominently in international security and police academia.

Bob Schonken: ‘Schonks’ was my plain-clothes boss for nearly two years but space doesn’t allow me, or many Darwin/CE folk, to express our universal regard for the man. Bob is still in Zim and will be unimpressed by any references to him. In my own case, Bob, unknowingly, filled a gap for me with my still-loved, but estranged father, and he treated me as one of his ‘boys’, of whom there were several. Schonks is a Zimbabwean down to his toenails and, as readers who were there and are still there will know, it is his love of his country, and its people, that keeps him there — despite many opportunities to ‘gap’.

Bob Gash: Bob was killed late in the morning on February 19th, 1979, on the Chesa Road about 18kms from Darwin. Schonks, Bob, me and a variety of other types used to play tennis at the Darwin Club most nights, followed by sundowners. Bob had recently married and had a child. A very tall, bearded African CID/SB colleague of ours, Detective Constable Choba, and Bob, were called for a CT investigation mid-morning, and were ambushed in Chesa. Bob was killed instantly. Choba ran through the bush and raised the alarm. Bob was buried in Umtali, and about a dozen of us, including several farmers and Intaff guys went there for the funeral. Afterwards we spent the weekend at Leopard Rock hotel in Vumba and drank the place dry. A few months later it was closed down after being attacked and badly damaged.

Some of my other police colleagues during the years 1976-1980 included (and I apologise to those I’ve omitted): Mike ‘Squirrel’ Frankleyne, ‘Plug’ Bromley, John Bell, John Raubenheimer, Steve Spivey, John Gray, mess cooks the two Johns (one small and effete, the other a Hungarian), the magnificent cook George (camp as a row of tents and game for a laugh), Mike Tasker, Pete and Wendy Long, Hennie van der Merwe, Ian Marsh, Hugh Montgomery, Tim ‘Problem Child’ Addison, Peter Beck,
Bob Wishart, Caroline Witts and several others out of the Bindura and Mount Darwin Selous Scouts ‘forts’ who definitely wouldn’t appreciate a mention here.

My black SB colleagues included the brave Richard Chikati, Sgt Chris and the late David Chamba and feature prominently in my memories.

District Commissioner Jim Latham, his wife Jill and son Brian (who was one of the last three ‘foreign’ journalists forced to flee Zimbabwe in 2005) were prominent in Darwin and held generous parties at their residence. On the one and only occasion Jerry Webster was invited he discovered that goldfish can’t drink — alcohol that is. Jim and Jill were seriously unimpressed.

Jim’s Internal Affairs’ District Officers with whom some of us cops had infrequent ideological clashes included Tony Harris, Jim Porter, Ken Tuckey, Rob Carruthers, Mike Bellis, Charles Gurney and Francis Wauchope, who later became my best man. As a permanent member of the Darwin scene over several years I, by necessity, needed to get along with these people — although there was always a great deal of rivalry between us — which came out especially during a big night at the Changamire Arms. Any enmity between me, at least, and Intaff went away in November, 1978, when I supervised the collection of Rob Carruthers’s body from the airfield after it had been recovered from his fatal ambush on the Valley floor. His colleagues were in deep shock and unable to clean him up for the transfer to Salisbury. I washed and tidied Bob and made him look as decent as possible. A few days later Tony and Jim asked me if I’d like to mess with them at their house and I did so until the end of the war.

After my public prosecuting stint I was posted to head Ground Coverage duties at Swan Base, taking over from Brian Talbot.

Special Branch Detective Chief Superintendent Stan Hancock would visit every month or so to liaise with local farmers and chat to me and the other details about the local situation. Stan took a shine to me — possibly not connected to the regular fleecing he and Tom Thomas gave me when playing stud poker — which might explain why I wasn’t put on a charge after accidentally discharging my Uzi on one of his visits. The bullet went right through the wall of the bathroom where Stan was shaving, between his legs and ricocheted off the bath.

He gave me a grim look, but that was all. Charles Gurney, later a prominent Harare merchant banker, caught me out with a frightening prank one day at Mukkers. I was in his heavily-fortified office and questioned the wisdom of his playing around with a grenade which he continually flipped in the air like Mike Proctor practising a leg-break bowl. “Shouldn’t worry, old chap” chirruped Charles, “It’ll only go off if I pull the pin.” At this point he did pull the pin. “Christ Almighty,” I yelled, “Don’t let go” (or words that effect). He did, and I managed to dive through the door and over a blast wall before hearing hoots of laughter. Gurney had been flipping a defused grenade. A few months later I pulled the same stunt at the Changamire Arms with a Chinese stick grenade I’d dismantled in preparedness for turning it into a salt shaker. What was really disappointing was that Tony Harris and Jim Porter didn’t move an inch when it landed at their feet. But then, they had had quite a few toots.

The Roads and Traffic Department’s Darwin supervisor, Bill Cooey, was a diminutive son of Belfast with a singular penchant for singing juice. His drinking bouts were legendary and no doubt contributed largely to his looks. I remember clearly his answer to my question about his unique nose which lay almost at a right angle to his face: “I was talkin’ when I should have been listenin’.”

After Mukkers I was dispatched on several 10-day patrols to different parts of Kandeya TTL, with only a black constable for company. In retrospect it is incredible
that as late as mid-1977 we would be risked in what was rapidly becoming a ‘no-go’ area with a heavy CT presence. Only lightly armed with FN and sidearm, I’d hole up in PVs at night, often as not to the delight of the lonely Intaff oke —the only white man for miles — and help him out with his bottle of Bols. My constable would bunk with the DAs.

The next morning we’d head off and do the ‘hearts and minds’ stuff with local kraal heads, and investigate petty crime. I remember Tom Thomas, aka ‘The Japanese General’, who ran GC/SB at Dotito, had pinned to his office wall a modified slogan from the only recently finished Vietnam War which read “When you’ve gottem’ by the balls, their hearts and minds will follow.”

Within a year all patrols of this nature were ceased following the ambush death of Darwin’s first black Patrol Officer — PO Onisimo, who was killed between Bveke and Dotito — a road I and others used all the time.

On one of the patrols I went as far as Pachanza, at the ‘Bull’s Nose’, a place at the eastern edge of the Mavuradona Mountains, just as the road north drops to the Zambezi Valley floor. I was introduced to Parangeta, one of country’s most important zvikiros who lived inside the protected village. I had to remove my shoes, remove any red item and crawl inside his hut. I don’t remember what was discussed but I’ve never forgotten the extraordinary, pungent aroma of the hut, comprising assorted dried animals, roots and God knows what, used in the business of the paranormal.

Parangeta, as I recall, was regarded as being ‘on-sides’ by the government, while being seen as on their side by the terrorists. Inevitably, he came to a brutal end at the hands of the terrs that used his death as a not-to-be disregarded message that they were in charge.

At the end of my patrols I was asked to submit a detailed report on any issue I regarded as noteworthy. I put a fair bit of effort into it and duly received a relayed ‘Well done’ from the OC SB Bindura District.

I didn’t think much of it until the following year when I was seconded directly from Uniform Branch to Special Branch, without the customary stint in CID. Apparently, my blunt ‘we’re losing this war’ report on the Kandeya had earmarked me for plain-clothes antiterrorist duties.

A far more enjoyable and somewhat less fraught regular patrol in my early Darwin days, again with a single, black constable, was that of the Centenary East and Mount Darwin European farming areas. I’m not sure who derived the more pleasure from these visits, again of 10-days’duration — me for the hospitality, or the farmers who had extra firepower in the event of an attack. It was difficult not to put on weight, such was their generosity.

Weekends were invariably spent at the Centenary East Country Club where the womenfolk would put on a veritable feast in their efforts to out-koeksuster each other. Everyone drank like fish — almost the only coping mechanism that anyone in our little community had — other than our solidarity in the face of war.

During the 18 months to the ceasefire in December 1979 I worked as SB liaison officer with several army units on certain aspects of the war in the Darwin area and had a couple of involuntary stays at Andrew Fleming when my luck ran out.

Much has been written about the characters of these communities but I would particularly like to mention some of these folk, whose sheer guts and determination, astonishing bravery in the face of adversity, genuineness of spirit and generosity is scorched in my memory.

Cynthia and Ralph Edwards, whose braais at their dam were the stuff of legend; Jimmy and Marian Rankin and their Sunday afternoon croquet gatherings at
Donhop; Mary, Dick, Rod and Anne Huck who gave me and other single men in the security forces a bed for the night, a few cold beers, a game of snooker and a home from home; Vic and Olga Light — Olga was my surrogate Mum and someone I could turn to when things got too much; Wally and Erica Barton, possibly the most-respected — and most 'revved' of all farmers; the ever-optimistic and cheerful Hennie and Jenny Jooste; Doug and Margie Stoole, and Tony and Mabel Hawkins, near-neighbours whose farm attacks (more than once) I attended. Despite being almost totally wiped out they came back and started all over again.

Others like the Faasens, Watsons, Kershaws, Cilliers, Krogs, Muirs, Whiteheads, Van Edens, Burls, Middletons, and Hindes also deserve mention for their contribution to the success of the Mount Darwin and Centenary East areas over decades — the last being the most difficult.

Tragically, just when the war finished and the new country could have benefited from what they had built up, it was snatched from them. In a few years after 1980 what had been one of the most productive farming areas in the whole of Africa was gone.

I visited Zimbabwe regularly throughout the 90s with Geoff Hill and was drawn back to the north east. I saw only raw bush, barren fields, the shells of once splendid farmhouses and the sports clubs, and painstakingly-built dams breached and dry. It was enough to make me weep.

Darwin and Centenary East may be no longer, but nothing and no one can ever diminish the pride generations of its people still feel for what was achieved against the odds.

DSO Nick Russell C881/9596


Best wishes Mike Edden
ADMINISTRATOR