

DASPO

Operation Pacific Bond

Photos turned in during Oct conference

DASPO Cover Operation Pacific Bond

With years of Australia being a staunch ally of the U.S. fighting the communist during the Vietnam War, the two nations decided to have friendly rivalry. Both countries agreed on having a 40 man platoon exchange in the fall of 1972. The decision was that the exchange would take place among the 25th Infantry Division who's home base was Schofield Barracks, Hawaii and the smaller contingent Australian Army.

Selecting the most deserving unit was by competition on both sides of the equator. Marksmanship skills with various weapons, physical training and conditioning scores, infantry tactics and maneuvering were some criteria on the agenda for selection of the highest rated most proficient unit in each country's combat troops. The recompense was a free training exercise and vacation to the other nation's paradise.

DASPO Pacific Detachment had a photo team on the C-141 Starlifter, that took the American platoon from Hickham AFB, HI to Australia. Several days later a Royal Australian C-130 landed at Hickham bringing the Australian troops to Pineapple Land, with welcoming ceremonies flowers leis, bands and opening greeting remarks by army officialdom. The VIP platoon were transported to base and given a day or two off, allowing their circadian rhythm to adjust for crossing the International Dateline.

One segment of the joint training was an overnight bivouac on the Schofield Training Range. The DASPO Team unable to film nocturnally, opted to attach themselves with the visiting troops at daybreak. Having explicit directions of the Aussie location, all that were seen were American Troops, with radios blarring, mess kits jingling and generally un-military like conduct. Questioning the whereabouts of the Aussie troops drew a blank. Nobody seen nor heard of the Australian position. In total frustration, the DASPO Team was ready to trek back 20 minutes for further disposition from the 25th Information Office, when one Aussie was spotted on the dirt road. He guided the DASPO Team to their secret spot.

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While the 25th Div troops were talking, radios both commercial and military volume turned up and making as much noise as possible; the Aussie Platoon were using LRRP (Long Range Recon Patrol) tactics. The Australian troops had camouflage make-up on their exposed skin, bushes and grass in their helmets and clothing. They had used natural thick brush for cover and arm and hand signals to communicate. Their conversation was a whisper and radio volume barely audible. The Australian platoon was roughly 50 feet from the American position and in excellent location to ambush the 25th Inf Div troops, inflicting heavy U.S. Casualties, if they weren't playing friendly war games.

The obstacle course posed a different situation. One event had both country's platoons climb a rope to a second level. The U.S. troops performed this task with modest difficulty. The visiting nation's platoon had limited arm strength conditioning program, with few Australian soldiers capable of climbing the rope with combat packs. Later the reverse was proved true. In the fireman's carry, picking up a disabled comrade and carrying him to safety, the Australian platoon showed they had excellent leg training, by virtually running much longer distances, than the U.S. counterparts were capable of doing.

On the rifle range the Australian contingent was astonished. They told me, " I'm surprised by the quantity of ammo you Americans spent. Back home it's tighter controlled. Our training is one bullet, one KIA, not spray the whole area." Others stated your one squad wasted more ammo than an entire Australian Army Company would use. At the recoilless Rifle Range, the Down Under troops were further amazed. The platoon NCOIC, told me they had the 90mm and 106mm Recoilless weapons in their army, but not at their home base. He thought that one member of the platoon had fired the gun. The Australian platoon was totally dumbfounded hearing the American instructors, tell the platoon to form up into 10 groups of 4 men and 25 percent of the Australians would pull the trigger, using live ammo in these weapons. Both the NCOIC and Assistance NCOIC of the visiting platoon told me, " This is unbelievable, it would never happen back home, but we're thrilled to no end at the chance to shoot the recoilless weapons.

Practical training took probably 50 percent of the guest platoon time in the Hawaiian Islands, the other $\frac{1}{2}$ was devoted to leisure activities taking in the island's attractions,

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One evening the 25th Division guests were treated to a luau in Waikiki, where they pigged out eating pork and poi, and entertained with hulu dancers whetting their appetites for more. Poi a derivative of the Tara plant root, was one of the few starches in native Hawaiian diet, but tastes exactly like wallpaper paste.

The Pearl Harbor Tour, with boat ride to the Arizona Memorial was part of the Australian platoon's agenda of non-training sites to visit. The U.S. National Parks Service explained to the Aussie's the significance of the ship's tomb, and our two countries entry into World War II.

At Sea Life Park, the Down Under troops were entertained by various oceanic mammals which included; seals, porpoise, dolphins and killer whales, trained to perform for the tourist, in a hour long program. The splashing whales cooled off some front row guest, I don't remember if the Aussie troops got wet or not.

The Polyneisian Cultural Center, operated by the Mormon Church, was at the time a major attraction for all visitors to the island of Oahu. The exhibits portrayed life styles in ancient times of the island nations comprising Polyneisia, they were Figi, Tonga, Hawaii, New Zealand, Samoa and Tahati. Each island nation had simitarities in fishing, fruit and plants, yet many differences in dress, home and boat construction and entertainment were vastly altered among the countries, as the Australian Soldiers saw while touring the exhibits and watching the hourly shows.

On the island of Maui, the Australian Troops climbed the extinct volcano to the caldera of Haleakala. I was not part of this journey. I remember being on the Big Island of Hawaii Pohakuloa Training Area crawling around in lava flows filming soldiers in war games. I think we flew the 200 mile trip in the morning and returned to Ohau that evening. I believe the Australian Troops were transported to KMC Kilauea Military Camp, within the rim of the world's most active volcano for a few days of rest and recouperation, before returning to Schofield Barracks and their trip home.

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