

THE UNIT MASCOT

The Unit history would remain incomplete without mentioning the introduction of the first of many kangaroos to the Unit. There can be no better way of recording this history other than to repeat a letter from Warrant Officer Norrie Cross to the Unit in 1977.

“When I took the first 3TU detachment to Learmonth at the commencement of FAR REACH 69, around March 1969 the base was still in a derelict state, looked after by a civilian caretaker, Ken Norton, whose wife catered for the 3TU detachment meals. The first party was due to be relieved after six weeks, but just prior to the arrival of No. 2 team, Dept of Works personnel and plant started to arrive, and work commenced on new bores and a roadway escarpment. A plant operator shot one of the many red kangaroos which were comparatively tame and used to the RAAF boys comings and goings, and after the outraged shouts died down I salvaged a well-developed male joey from the dead doe’s pouch and set up an emergency feeding plan, assisted by Ken’s wife who supplied bottles and milk powder. A day or so later I was relieved by Warrant Officer Bruce McIntyre and his team, and Team No. 1 was flown back to Pearce by C-130, complete with one red male joey. I took him straight out to Mrs Iris Anderson, the ‘Kangaroo Lady’, of Preston Point Road, Bicton, and she weaned and nursed the infant for six weeks. Wing Commander Ryan (the then CO) was amenable to the suggestion that the Unit would be enhanced by some native fauna, and in June 1969 I brought Bluey on to the Unit, keeping him in a compound beside the guardroom. Mrs Anderson had given me her recipe, or should I say formula, for rearing young kangaroos which scour and eventually die if fed an exclusive diet of cows milk, and I gave him about 6 to 8 ounce feed by bottle, with valve-rubber pushed through the teat, and this was his main food source for his first nine months as a member of 3TU. Kangaroo Occurrence Report No.1 was issued by the unit orderly room on this occasion, but not on subsequent occasions when I obtained further orphaned joeys from Mrs Anderson and hand-reared them in turn. Bluey became a huge buck and disgraced himself by attacking most of the shrubs on the unit. On one occasion he completely stripped a 10ft banksia to a bare pole, and eventually I had to remove him and release him in the Brockman River forest area. His replacement was another red named Robbie, followed by a gentle Blue Flyer named Jennie.

He drew the line at my offer of an Emu

Later a small Euro was introduced, but was found dead one morning, apparently having broken its neck in a full flight collision with a small tree. The next introduction was Bindi, of adult size but a bag of skin-and-bones, rescued from a back garden where she had been enclosed by a family who departed for South Australia without making arrangements for her welfare. She had been without food for six weeks, and in this period had eaten all the available grass and gnawed the bark off backyard trees, which all died as a result of ring-barking. It is believed that Jennie was mated with a male grey, and I regret that I missed the opportunity to examine her off spring. Jennie, sadly, was found dead under the old mess, and the joey died of exposure just prior to my return from two years at HQOC. During my absence, the ‘roo population received quite a boost with the introduction of several greys by Flight Lieutenant Whitmore, the Unit Equipment Officer.

The greys proliferated rapidly in their protected environment, and I became a great admirer of the Big Fella, which was about the only name I bestowed upon him. He was a truly magnificent buck with a wonderful disposition and I regret his passing into realms unknown. I would like to think that he has the intelligence to lead his small mob to a place of relative safety.

WGCDR Ryan drew the line at my offer of an emu to 3TU. This animal was released on Bruce McIntyre’s property, but went into a decline due to separation from its life companion, a young male kangaroo. One day it went berserk, attacked Bruce’s son, and had to be shot before Robert dared to come down from the roof of his car. He had been kicking a football and we assumed that the emu’s thought processes went thus:

football = egg

boy kick football = one broken egg

I would like to think that the legend of kangaroos at 3TU takes on the significance of the Barbary Apes on Gibraltar.’’

Since the introduction of the kangaroos to the Unit, there have been many new offspring followed by many cullings. In 1991 the Unit was licensed to have 24 Western Grey Kangaroos in the Unit compound.

For those interested in protecting our fauna, particularly the kangaroo, on the following page is a minute penned by Norrie and addressed to the Senior CPO.

MINUTE PAPER

Subject: UNIT MASCOTS - JENNIE AND BINDI AND BLUEY.

SENIOR CPO

1. It is trusted that the presence of the two kangaroos in the vicinity of the Guardroom will not inconvenience any member of the Commonwealth Police Force detachment. There is no intention to delegate responsibility for feeding or cleaning up the area. However, the mascots appear to favour the area during the hot days for cool shade and grass, and as most members of the Police detachment have volunteered to feed them during weekends, the following feeding information is supplied:-

2. A stockpile of pre-mixed dry fodder will be made available for convenience. The protein-rich mixture consists of the following ingredients:-

- 8 parts chaff
- 2 parts wheat
- 1 part sunflower seed
- 1 part hulled oats
- 1 part whole oats
- 1 part turkey crumbles
- 1 part wheat germ

3. Sunshine Milk only should be used, never fresh cows milk as this causes scouring and is very injurious to kangaroos. The milk powder is mixed as follows:-

- 1 pint warm water
- 4 heaped dessertspoons Sunshine Milk powder

Beat the milk smooth with a fork and pour 6 oz into the feeding bottle, plus 3 drops of Pentavite, for Jennie, and pour the remainder into an open dish for Robbie.

4. Feeding time should be once daily at or about 0900 hours, although water should be available at all times. One dish of dry fodder should suffice but should they appear hungry later in the day there is no objection to them having more dry fodder.

5. Primary responsibility for feeding and cleaning up the area will remain with W.O. Cross N.J., and should any member of the police detachment object to preparing food for the mascots at weekends or on public holidays, a RAAF volunteer will be found to take care of this. Co-operation to date by individual members of the Commonwealth Police Force has been greatly appreciated.