

## Nirimba Robbery 1988

Helen Harrison says: I was the SNRWRWTR (Smith) along with SNRWRWTR Lisa Butler who were the pay officers at the time of the robbery. We were taking the payroll from the pay office to the Apprentices Mess area for pay parade when we were held up. The Supply Officer Cash was Leut Veitch and the Stores Officer stepped in as the second paying officer as the Midshipman was late that morning. I believe the CPOWTR was CPO Douglas.

The pay was held up by someone who had taken the stores vehicle from behind the Wardroom, and stopped us at the end of the road outside the apprentices accommodation blocks. I remember standing there why the robber was waving a gun and demanding the pay boxes be put in the back of the ute, it seemed like ages (but probably wasn't) that the stores officer (I vaguely remember him being senior to the SO(C)) took both boxes and put them in the back of the ute. The second paying officer then ordered the sentry to run to the Apprentices' accommodation and ring the guard house to get the gangway closed, it later turned out they went out through the back gate/fence. Lisa and I continued to the pay parade and it wasn't until we got to the guardhouse and it was on the radio that it seemed real. The ute turned up at a local shopping centre.

The day before when we had been checking off the pay envelopes when they came back, we had been talking in the pay office that the only time you did a hold-up drill was at recruit school. Following that I was convinced to go on maternity leave, I was about 7 months pregnant at the time and security was ramped up considerably with the QMG's taking over sentry duty with SLR's. And not that long later net pay deposits came out.

Were they ever caught ?

Helen adds: "Not to my knowledge. But I do know a lot of people thought it was an "inside" job. Whether an ex member or not, as they would have had to know the daily routine with the car, the payroll was walked to the pay parade the same way every fortnight and that it was a mid year leave pay (so reasonably big) about \$131K.

Thankfully as writers we got our pay the day before when it first got to sit

Andy Siegman adds:

Wow, this happened almost 25 years ago. I drafted in a few months after it happened, and if pissbar talk can be relied upon, this is what happened.

The robbery happened some time in 1988 - in the days of cash pay.

The Paying Officer, Witnessing Officer, Sentry & Scribe were walking from the Pay Office to the pay point at about 0800, when a clearly recognizable Pusser's ute pulled up beside them. The occupant, dressed in Action Working Dress, pointed a weapon (shotgun I think) out the window and instructed the paying officer to put the box of pay envelopes in the back, which he dutifully did. The Paying Officer was LEUT Veitch.

The Paying Officer was unsure what to do next. He returned to the Pay Office then rang the WOCOX to ask if the "exercise" had finished. The WOCOX denied all knowledge and the Paying Officer then turned a shade of grey and explained to the Swain what had happened.

There must have been a fair bit of inside knowledge - the culprit knew that the key was permanently stuck in the ignition of the Victualler's ute, and also knew that this ute was used by the Officer of the Day after hours. The culprit was clever enough to realize that the Victualler's would not miss the ute as they would think the OOD still had it. In fact, the OOD had already returned it to the Victualling Yard. The culprit also knew how to make it look like an exercise so as to delay things for long enough to make a smooth getaway. Apparently, the culprit had earlier cut a padlock on one of the gates but left the gate closed - during the getaway, the Victualler's ute suffered a bit of damage. The Police had found the ute abandoned only a couple of km away from NIRIMBA.

Later, the TV program "Crime Stoppers" came to NIRIMBA to re-enact the robbery. They even used the actual Victualler's ute. To make it look like the ute was bursting through the gate, they took the camera shot from behind and had two people pull on ropes attached to the gate, but out of camera shot, to make it look like the van was genuinely crashing the gate. Alas, one of the rope-pullers was a fraction too slow and the Victualler's ute ended up back in the panel beater's shop.

Detectives even came to NIRIMBA to look through some personnel files of discharged personnel (the old 75/ files) to see if they could come up with some suspects/clues, as there was clearly a good deal of insider knowledge. However, nobody was ever known to have been charged with any offences. Looks like the culprit got away with it!! Not much was ever known about this incident. Even today, a Google search on the topic does not provide very much.

Final Say from Helen: I read the item that Andy sent in, and the bar talk wasn't far off. She says there was no rank on the action working dress the robber wore. One of the reasons they didn't suspect it was an exercise because if it had been, once the pay envelopes had left our sight, they would have all had to have been rechecked before pay could happen. The officer of the day used the stores vehicle and it was left behind the wardroom with the keys in it - apparently that had been the routine forever. As had the way pay was conducted.

The pay office Chief Writer was CPO Dicky Douglas - I remember him complaining to the LSWTR in the afternoon about the lack of work that had been done that day. Leesa and I had been down the police station all morning and when we got back we went to the bar for lunch - as you could in those days. WO Brian Eagles was the Perso and PO Sandie McKandie was there. But it was 24 years ago - I was pregnant with my son and was pretty much forced out of maternity leave after that.