



More Groote In the 70s!

When I first went to Gove in the early Seventies, the alumina refinery was just starting up after a number of years of construction and it was still very primitive in terms of the town and facilities.

My wife, kids and I lived in a transportable house at Nhulunbuy South as the main town of Nhulunbuy was still being constructed. Our house was on the

“ . . . A couple of hours after dark we all got a hell of a shock when suddenly a group of guys in black wetsuits carrying lots of guns materialised in the wheelhouse and took us all captive . . . ”

edge of the bush with no fences.

One night we were woken by the whole house shaking. On investigation we discovered a huge buffalo bull scratching his backside on the corner of the house after raiding the neighbor's vegetable garden and eating the lot.

At the time there was no radio reception except Radio Australia's

Ebb & Flow

with Neil Dunstan

Indonesian service, no TV and the phone system was a H.F. radio system which only worked sometimes. I eventually got involved with the local Air / Sea Rescue organisation which was run by the Northern Territory Police, and our rescue boat was originally the police boat from Darwin. It was a nice boat, basically a 32 foot plate alloy cruiser built by Striker.

As it had been a police boat, the cabin was set up as a temporary lock up so that there was no access to the wheel house or the engine bay except through locked metal doors. It was powered by a Caterpillar 3208 diesel engine with shaft drive, but being normally aspirated, was badly under powered and pretty slow.

One weekend we were asked to go down to an area around Port

military reserve group called "Norforce" were planning a marine exercise in their large inflatables with twin outboards.

It was to be an exercise in seamanship and navigation so they decided to travel with us and join us at Port Bradshaw for the search. What they didn't tell us was that a group of SAS-type professional soldiers from Darwin were to accompany them, and use it as an exercise to train the volunteers.

We left our mooring opposite the refinery in the late afternoon, and proceeded east for about thirty five nautical miles till we rounded Cape Arnhem and headed south down the Gulf. The weather was not very good as a south/easterly had been blowing strongly for about a week and with a fetch of nearly 400 n. miles across the Gulf the swell was approaching five metres on the beam.

A couple of hours after dark we all got a hell of a shock when suddenly a group of guys in black wetsuits carrying lots of guns materialised in the wheelhouse and took us all captive.

They had snuck up on our boat in a couple of inflatables painted black, got aboard without anyone noticing and captured us easily; thank goodness they are on our side!

We got our own back on them as they travelled with us on the "Norforce" for the rest of the night and as we were rolling badly in the beam seas, the whole mob of them were terribly

seasick. Some of them were so bad lying on the back deck that that I could have knocked them over the side with a wet rag.

Eventually we arrived at the mouth of Port Bradshaw and made the run with large following seas which were breaking right across the entrance.

As it was also very shallow we bumped the sandy bottom a couple of times, a very dangerous situation, but we made it in ok.

We searched all the creeks and gutters in the dinghy and inflatables and we eventually found the body but all that was left was from the waist down; there are lots of megacroc in this area.

The return trip was declined by the army blokes who had called up their base and arranged for a couple of Land Cruisers with trailers to come across country, and take them home.

There are lots of aborigines in Norforce, and their knowledge of the area including all the tracks and bays, is encyclopedic, so I doubt that anyone could invade us through that area of coast line without being spotted by them.

If the SAS guys were with them, the 'enemy' wouldn't know what hit 'em.

*Neil Dunstan.
Sarina Beach.*

F&B