

# platypus

AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE OFFICIAL JOURNAL

## What's in a Name

'What? Platypus!!' was the usual reaction to the name of this our official journal when Vol. 1 No. 1 appeared last November. 'Why platypus?'

The answer is simple. Platypus is a word which was coined to describe a unique Australian animal (do we not fit this category?).

It also has another meaning. Platypus, broadly translated from the Greek, means flat (platus) foot (pous). Flatfoot.

As we all know, flatfoot has long been a slang term for a police officer.

But in our particular case, there is another antecedent to what we smugly feel is a neat piece of nomenclature.

The first platypus to serve an Australian police force was a different animal altogether.

It was the name proudly carried by the craft pictured here commissioned in 1967, as the first police launch in Canberra.

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Front Cover: Constable Robert Dawson of the Safety Education unit speaks to a group of pre-school children on road-safety and 'stranger-danger'.

Opposite: Chief Inspector John Thurgar is honoured for bravery at a special ceremony in Cyprus recently. See story page 4.



# AUSSIE CITED FOR BRAVERY

*The editor of platypus gratefully acknowledges permission to reprint the following article in full from a recent edition of THE CYPRUS WEEKLY.*

**'Seeing the mines all around me made me even more nervous. Believe me I was shaking... my knees felt like jelly.'**

These are the words of a brave man, Chief Inspector Jack Thurgar, 30, the Australian police officer who risked his life earlier this month by walking into a minefield to rescue a seriously wounded Greek Cypriot farmer who had just been blown up.

Thurgar, a soft-spoken six-footer, is being cited for bravery. 'We have recommended him very highly for gallantry', the Acting Australian High Commissioner in Cyprus, Miss Erika Grimwade, told the Cyprus Weekly.

It took a lot of persuading before Thurgar, of Scone, New South Wales agreed to talk to the Cyprus Weekly about the rescue, described by a National Guard officer as 'a very brave act indeed'.

'I remember it was my wife's birthday that day, and I had to tell her when I got home. She's used to the things I get up to, but then I never tell her anything until it's all over', he said.

On 9 October, he added, he was in the Omorphita suburb of Nicosia, supervising some farming work going on in the buffer zone between the National Guard and Turkish occupation forces.

His main concern, as well as that of the National Guard was to prevent any-

one straying into a large minefield. And that is precisely what happened.

'I saw an unauthorised farmer — that is a farmer who had not obtained clearance — go charging past the National Guard post driving his tractor straight into the minefield. The guardsmen yelled at him, obviously telling him to get out but he just went on', Thurgar said.

## Cut in half

'He had harrowed about 100 yards and tried to turn round for another run when his left rear tyre struck a land mine. It cut the tractor in half.'

'The back part of the tractor and the driver were thrown some 30 ft up — it looked like a rocket, with lots of dust, and his tyres went shooting up.'

The driver, Chrysostomos Seas, of Athienou, had hit the mine within two minutes of entering the minefield.

'I could see the farmer was still alive. His left arm was lacerated and he managed to get on to his elbow. He was trying to wave at us. I could see he was covered in oil and he was blackened all over from the oil and the blast.'

'His shirt was completely blown away from his body and the front of his shirt was absolutely peppered with small holes. The way he looked, I thought "Jesus. He's had it".'

## Help

'He could not move his left arm or his feet. All he could do at this stage was put his right hand out in a gesture of help.'

Nine years ago Chief Inspector Thurgar was blown up by mines in Vietnam and badly wounded but he does not like talking about it now. 'I've

had experience with mines in Vietnam', he says simply.

## Winch up

Getting a helicopter to the trapped tractor driver would take too long, he thought, and in the serious condition that the man was, time was vital.

'I could see how serious it was from the man's pleading motion, so I decided to go into the minefield myself. I told my sergeant not to allow anyone else in.'

'I could see old tractor tyre tracks and I thought if someone else could do it so could I. But I did not go as far as the tractor.'

Thurgar had gone some 50 yards into the minefield when he heard someone from the National Guard post shout: 'Go back, go back. There are more mines near the tractor'.

## Like Jelly

But he was already half way to the badly injured man. 'I could not leave him there. I can tell you I was very, very, nervous. My knees felt like jelly.'

'I walked another ten yards or so, looking for prongs. Usually when anti-tank mines are laid it is normal practice to put anti-personnel mines around them. As I was going along I could see the big anti-tank mines. The rain had washed some of the earth away.'

'Seeing the mines all around made me physically even more nervous. Believe me I was shaking.'

'At this point I asked myself the question — is it worth it? But then I was no more than 30 yards from the man. His left leg from the heel to the knee was just

**continued next page**

