

THE RAN BAND TAKES A MESSAGE OF FRIENDSHIP TO THE NANCHANG INTERNATIONAL MILITARY TATTOO

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THE ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY BAND LEAD THE INTERNATIONAL CONTINGENTS THROUGH THE STREET OF NANCHANG

Fifty one members of the Royal Australian Navy Band have just returned from a ten day visit to historic Nanchang in southern central China, scene of the August 1, 1927 Communist uprising, and birthplace of the Chinese Peoples' Liberation Army.

The band was one of 15 musical groups invited to participate in the 4th Nanchang China International Tattoo, and performed alongside other military bands from China, Belarus, Turkey, Poland, New Zealand, Tonga, Russia and France. Australia was the only country represented by two groups, sharing the stage with the O'Shea-Ryan Irish Dancers from Victoria whose members ranged in age from eight to 80.

In addition, there were very colourful and talented school and university bands from China, Thailand and Malaysia. It was particularly pleasing to observe that of all the military bands the Royal Australian Navy Band had the highest proportion of female musicians, some bands, even in the 21st century, still not having any. And, somewhat surprisingly for a tattoo, there was not a bagpipe in sight!

The band's invitation to attend resulted from a relationship forged by the Director of Music, Commander Phillip Anderson OAM, RAN, with the PLA-Navy Director of Music during Chinese ship visits to Australia in recent years. It was fitting therefore that the RAN Band shared the stage with the PLA-Navy Band for a concert in the Nanchang Radio and Television Centre.

Before a live audience of several hundred, and a television audience of many millions more, Able Seaman Damian Dowd performed jointly with a Chinese singer the beautiful traditional Chinese song, 'Azalea'. "It was an amazing cross-cultural experience", said Damian, who has sung in many venues around the world.

The band's involvement in the Tattoo provided opportunities not only to showcase our Australian and Naval cultures, but also to carry messages of friendship to the Chinese people and participants from other countries through the universal language of music.

A massed band comprised of all the participants, played for a wreath laying ceremony at the Monument to the Peoples' Heroes at Ba Yi Square in the centre of the city, before heading off on a parade through the city streets lined with hundred of thousands of Nanchang citizens cheering and applauding enthusiastically. Coloured daytime fireworks added an exotic touch not usually seen at such events.



COMMANDER ANDERSON 'HAND IN HAND' WITH THE LEADER OF THE PLA (NAVY) BAND, SENIOR COLONEL LI XING

The band presented three tattoo performances featuring a traditional marching display during, which a newly formed semaphore party spelt out the message 'Nanchang, Hero City'. This was followed by a 'Beat to Quarters' and a 'Cheer Ship' saluting the people of Nanchang, which drew an excited response from the audience. An extended version of *Waltzing Matilda* featured the band's fanfare team performing jazz solos, and the entire band singing Australia's unofficial national anthem.

The highlight was yet to come, however, and exceeded all expectations, when on the final evening the tattoo performance took place in Teng Wang Pavilion square. With the magnificent backdrop of the ancient four storey pavilion illuminated to bring out all the richness of its architecture and colour, every band presented its very best performance.

Our reward came in the form of a breathtaking fireworks display concluding the evening as only the inventors of fireworks could do. Among even the most experienced 'Bandies' many commented that this evening will long remain in their memories as a career highlight.

For a large number of the contingent this was their first experience of the hustle and bustle of an Asian city, and we found Nanchang to be full of amazing contrasts. From pedestrian crossings where motorists seem to have right of way, to a police escort to the performance venue which actually slowed us down because we had to stop at red lights, the traffic behaviour caused many hair-raising moments.

Poverty exists cheek by jowl with Western consumerism, and our complete lack of Mandarin contrasted with the local people's complete lack of English, making for some interesting exchanges. ("How long would it take to get to the mountains?" – "About four to five years.")



THE BAND PRESENTS A FINAL SALUTE TO THE AUDIENCE AT THE NANCHANG INTERNATIONAL SPORTS STADIUM

As with the band's deployments this year to the International Defence Exhibition in Abu Dhabi and the Brunei International Tattoo, the cost of international travel, accommodation and meals was met by the host country. It was therefore satisfying that the Nanchang Tattoo Organising Committee provided very positive feedback about the quality of the Navy Band's performances, and the way in which our people conducted themselves. The members of the band are extremely grateful for these opportunities to represent Australia on the international stage and to be able to experience new and exotic countries and cultures.

Contingent Commander and Director of Music – Navy, Commander Phillip Anderson OAM, RAN said, "These type of international deployments add significant value to Navy's reputation ashore and afloat at minimal cost to Navy. In between three international deployments this year the band has supported many hundreds of tasks within Australia, deployed members to sea, assigned personnel to *Operation Resolute* as members of a Transit Security Element, and conducted a major concert celebrating the Centenary of the Royal Australian Navy".