

WHERE DID THE PALMERSTON PISTOL CLUB COME FROM?

The long-term antecedents of the Palmerston Pistol Club are obscure but go back to at least the late 1950s – early 1960s.

It is known that a pistol club was formed at Humpty Doo when the town was a centre of uranium mining and that the club was disbanded when mining ceased at the site.

It is possible that assets of the Humpty Doo Club, including pistols, were then transferred to a pistol club formed at Larrakeyah barracks in Darwin. This was an Army Club but included both service and civilian members, and civilian members predominated in May 1965.

The club, then known as the Darwin Pistol Club (DPC) had Police Sergeant Primo Bonato as its President. The DPC conducted regular Sunday matches at the Army's miniature range at Emery Point, adjacent to the magazine closest to the lighthouse that dominates the point.

At this time, the NT Firearms Ordinance did not provide for memberships of a pistol club as being sufficient reason for owning a pistol. Nevertheless, the DPC had half-a-dozen or so club guns, including two very nice Smith & Wesson K22 revolvers, and two Smith & Wesson Model 41 semi-automatic pistols in .22 long rifle. These had certainly been the property of the Army club and perhaps had come from the former Humpty Doo club. Elected member of the Legislative Council Fred Drysdale was working to secure the passage of an amendment to the Firearms Ordinance to make membership of a pistol club sufficient reason for a pistol licence when he died in 1965. This endeavour was then taken up by Joe Fisher, MLC and his success in having the amendment passed assured the future of competitive pistol shooting in the Northern Territory.

As the Army range at Emery Point was limited in its facilities and had no turning targets, a search was undertaken to locate a more suitable location for a DPC range. Some thought was given to the area that is now the Marrara Shooting Complex and other localities, but the decision was made eventually for land in the vicinity of the Darwin Show Grounds, Berrimah accessed from Farrell Crescent.

The Northern Territory Government approved the DPC's occupancy of the land and the club progressed so well at its new location that it was able to conduct most successfully the Australian National Pistol Championships in 1980. However, IPSC disciplines were introduced into the club and a schism developed between ISU (now ISSF) and IPSC shooters. This resulted in the majority of ISU adherents leaving DPC to form the Arafura Pistol Club (APC) on Monday, 15 August, 1983.

Through the courtesy of the Darwin branch of Sports Shooters Association of Australia (SSAA), the APC was allowed to make use of the SSAA branch at Berrimah until a move was made to Palmerston in 1990. At Palmerston, the club undertook construction of ranges that became the principal component of what is now Palmerston Pistol Club. Despite previous experience, the APC embraced IPSC as a discipline and this was to have repercussions in the future.

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In 1997, the Top End Australia Pistol Club (TEAPC), which had been formed in September 1989 as the Top End Army Pistol Club shooting at the Holdfast Range at Larrakeyah Barracks, moved in to occupy vacant land within the APC complex at Palmerston. TEAPC, which had by this time become a civilian club, although retaining service members, constructed range facilities to APC standards.

The Arafura Pistol Club and the Top End Australia Pistol Club amalgamated with the effect from 1 July 2001 to form the Palmerston Pistol Club. While the amalgamation was undertaken with some misgivings, it was generally amicable and has proved to be a complete success. The only difficulty within the club came from the IPSC faction; which kept aloof from other disciplines, found constant fault with the club's administration and was a disruptive element. This problem was solved when a majority of the Club's membership resolved in a General meeting that the Palmerston Pistol Club would no longer accommodate IPSC Disciplines.

Recent years have seen a marked improvement in the club's facilities and there is every hope that this will continue in the future. The Palmerston range has been the venue of the Northern Territory Pistol Championships on several occasions and the PPC will again conduct the championships again on behalf of Pistol NT in 2011.

The PPC is the foremost venue for the ISSF and PA Disciplines in Darwin and there is the prospect of extending this to Metallic Silhouette.

This account has benefitted from access to records of the Arafura Pistol Club held by Frank Geddes.

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P.S. Palmerston Pistol Club has held the NT Titles for the years;
2006, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2015, 2016, 2018.