



Band marches down main street of Auckland, New Zealand, last week in its first trip performance. Bud O'Brien

Aussies give band warm welcome

By BUD O'BRIEN
STAFF WRITER

A disappointing Fourth of July behind them, the Watsonville Band and its 500-member entourage, losing none of their zest, have moved on to further adventures and misadventures Down Under.

A soaking rain on the Fourth marred what was to have been the band's big day at Expo '88 in Brisbane, Australia, but any lingering disappointment was certainly erased by the all-American, or perhaps all-Australian, welcome they received at the resort community of Port

Macquarie, an overnight stop for the band entourage on its way from the Gold Coast to Sydney.

The 563 people on the tour filed onto 13 buses at Surfer's Paradise near Brisbane, where they had spent their first four days in Australia, and headed south. It was still raining, and it never stopped, as the buses rolled along Australia's Pacific Highway, past huge tracts of sugarcane, past the Banana Coast, through dairy country, and into Port Macquarie early on the evening of the 5th.

Like the Gold Coast, Port Macquarie is a tourist community, famous for its sea-

food. And like most of the communities along that vast stretch between Brisbane and Sydney, it has a new look to it, not to mention assorted McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chickens and Pizza Huts (there appear to be more McDonald's outlets per capita in Australia than in the United States). Obviously growth in this region is both recent and strongly spiced with an American flavor.

In fact, the Aussies' fondness for Americans and open friendliness has been the most striking aspect of the trip for most of the participants. Nowhere was this more evident than at Port Mac-

quarie. A local community band and its supporters threw a real 4th of July party for the people from California.

They provided a sit-down dinner at the local Veterans Building for the 563 visiting Americans and an uncounted number of locals, and they did it with class. The women who served the meals wore red-and-white striped hats, and a huge cake in the form of an American flag provided the dessert.

Naturally, in a setting like that, the Watsonville Band responded with a program that had the house whooping

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it up. The finale saw the Watsonville Band joined onstage by the local community band and a visiting band from New Zealand for a couple of rousing John Philip Sousa marches.

They won't top that one for a long time.

There's no way, of course, that 563 people can be herded halfway around the world, in and out of planes, buses and hotels, without a problem occurring here and there, and sometimes everywhere. It's virtually inevitable, for instance, that a virus or two will make the rounds in such an inviting atmosphere, and lots of hacking, sneezing and nose-blowing has been the result. Many of the girls in the color guard, who performed so valiantly in the rainy 4th of July program, were struck by illness on the way to Sydney, but they seem to have fought it off with the resilience of youth.

Naturally, the buses didn't always get started on time, and when they did, didn't always function perfectly.

One was struck by a car on the streets of Brisbane, but nobody was hurt. The battery of another went dead, forcing the passengers to get out and push it to get it started. The next day, on the road to Sydney, that same bus twice was forced to stop to repair an oil leak, resulting in its arrival in Sydney nearly three hours late.

But those setbacks were handled with good cheer by the victims, and the sight of Sydney, a beautiful and lively city of nearly 4 million people, revitalized their tourist instincts.

Comfortably ensconced in the Menzies Holiday Inn in the heart of the city, they began the final three days of their trip Down Under.

On Thursday morning, all took an hour's cruise around the harbor, taking in the often breathtaking sights of Australia's largest and most cosmopolitan city. And that was about the final structured group activity they had on the schedule before leaving the land of wombats, kangaroos, dingos and incurably friendly people on Saturday — today in California.

The band had two perform-

ances in Sydney, one an evening concert that was part of a musical show that included Dixieland and rock bands. The other was scheduled for Thursday, in the form of a short march and concert performance in the Darling Harbor complex of Sydney.

Saturday, they will board their plane (some, in fact, have already left), most of them headed for Honolulu and a three-day rest and recreation period. Others are headed for Fiji and a few for other destinations to continue their vacations.

Among the latter are band director Bert Viales and his wife, Louise (she plays the clarinet in the band), who are heading back to New Zealand for a leisurely tour of that lovely land. It was a landmark trip for the man who directed the band for a total of 24 years. He retired this year as principal of North Salinas High School and celebrated his 63rd birthday on the very evening his band performed so zestily on the stage at Port Macquarie.

Next stop for most of us: La Moana Hotel on Waikiki Beach.