

DRUG GRANNIES

In 1977, two American ladies, Vera Todd-Hays and Florice Bessire, were living a dream adventure. Vera's nephew had funded their journey in a Mercedes Benz Campervan overland from Germany to India and finally their trip to Australia. The van was transported separately and was to be collected in Sydney. In Australia, Customs Officers discovered that 1.9 tons of hashish with a street value at \$12.5 million (Australian) was concealed under a false floor of the van.

Wal Fife, then Minister for Business and Consumer Affairs, gave permission for Customs Officers to allow the ladies to collect the van. They planned to keep the van under surveillance, hoping that it would lead to those responsible. A listening device installed in the van revealed that the ladies had been hired by Vera's nephew to transport the drugs and that they were to be paid a total of \$225,000. After they were followed through Victoria and country New South Wales, they were eventually arrested in Gosford in February 1978. They were dubbed the 'Drug Grannies' by the Australian press.

Details of the Drug Grannies' journey and eventual arrest, trial and sentence can be found in a file in Wal Fife's papers held in the Wal Fife Room.....

*Right: The Drug Grannies being
Deported to the US, March 1983*

Canberra Times, 24 March 1983



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