

ARMI WANTOKS JOURNAL

JOURNAL OF THE AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS WHO SERVED IN THE ARMY IN TPNG

1/14

Hello All,

Welcome to a new year for the Chalkies group. We trust you have had an excellent festive season and are looking forward to a happy New Year.

We have moved our thinking to looking at the various barracks in PNG to which we were posted and the more detailed stories that can emerge from this. In 2013 we based our Reunion around the story of Taurama Barracks and it was fascinating to see what detail emerged that we had been unaware of before.

In this Journal, our attention is focussed on Igam Barracks near Lae. There are a couple of reasons for this. The first is the account by Ron Inglis of the background organisation of this barracks. Igam was different because of its function of preparing selected PNG soldiers for the roles of officers and leaders in the PIR and Ron has detailed for us this role and the others that were performed by Igam.

The second was the discovery by Peter Darmody of the program for the opening of Igam in 1968. Selected pages of this are included in the following pages.

The finding of this 'artefact' by Peter has made us wonder just how many similar items are out there. For example, I have just uncovered the program for the March Out parade for the Third Training Battalion at Singleton for the 1/70 Intake. While this is not at the same level of significance as the Igam opening, it

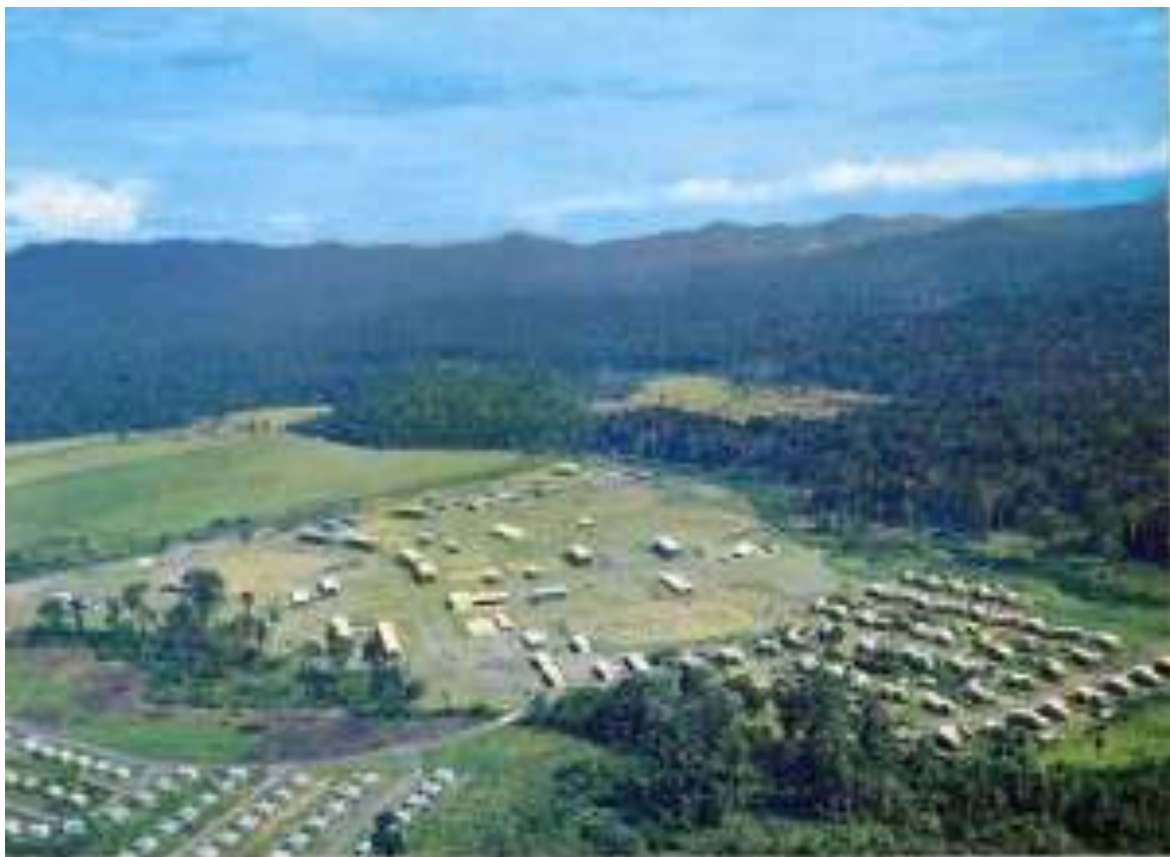
shows that the weirdest of items seemed to have survived the years and can now tell us important stories about the Chalkie experience. Therefore, do you have anything like this lying around at your place? If so, it would be great if you could copy it and forward it on to me or our webmaster, Frank Cordingley, who can then post it on our website. By doing this, you will be contributing in no small measure to the telling of our story.

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IGAM BARRACKS

Igam Barracks, situated near Lae on the north coast of Papua New Guinea, was one of the places that Chalkies were sent between the years 1966 and 1972. Igam was opened in 1968 by Phillip Lynch, the then Minister for the Army.



Aerial view of Igam barracks.

The program for the opening of these barracks has survived the years and recently came to light in a sorting exercise by Peter Darmody. Interestingly, Peter was the person who acted as the Minister in the practice parades leading up to the opening Ceremony. Below is a selection of pages from this program.

PAPUA AND NEW GUINEA COMMAND



Opening of
IGAM BARRACKS
by
The Minister of State
for the Army
The Honourable
Phillip Lynch, MP

IGAM BARRACKS
LAE

30TH SEPTEMBER 1968

History of Igam Barracks

Igam Barracks is located at the foothills of the Saruwaged Range and looks out across the Bitibum (Bumbu) River towards the Atzera Range. The Barracks occupies 704 acres and was originally purchased from the Tia and Kankunumla Clans by the Administration on behalf of the Department of Army.

The original suggestion for the name "Igam" meaning, 'Fertile land on which the jungle has been cleared but has grown again' was made by the then Acting District Commissioner for the Morabe District, Mr. D. Ashton, and was the title used by the original owners. The name was submitted to and officially approved by the Place Names Committee.

Construction commenced on the \$9 million building programme in April 1966 with the main contract undertaken by Barclay Bros. It is to the credit of the Contractor and the excellent supervision by the Commonwealth Department of Works that the project was completed on the due date with a marked absence of the problems normally encountered on a task of this nature which was necessarily rushed during the planning stages.

The Barracks have been constructed in long life, low maintenance materials to reduce future costs of upkeep to the Australian Government and later to any established Government of this country. It has been designed to accommodate the 3rd Battalion of the Pacific Islands Regiment and includes the following facilities within it's complex:

Primary School

Chapel

Education Centre

Medical and Dental Facilities

Recreational Facilities

Family Shopping Centre.

Where some 100 years ago, extensive subsistence farming had been carried on, now stands the complexity of Igam Barracks.

Troops taking part in Ceremony

Parade Commander:

Commander Lae Area, Lieutenant Colonel M.A. Bishop, MM

Parade Adjutant:

Captain B. J. Sullivan

Regimental Sergeant Major:

WO1 C.W. Lee, MBE

Bandmaster:

Warrant Officer Class 1 A. McLeod-Lee

HQ Lae Area: Captain A. D. Johnston, MBE

HQ Lae Area Staff

839 Signal Troop

853 Supply Depot Platoon

Detachment Papua/New Guinea Workshops

Detachment Papua/New Guinea Provost Company

Detachment Papua/New Guinea Command Education Section

B Company 1 PIR: Major G. W. Ghent

Papua/New Guinea Command Military Cadet School: Major J. Irvine

183 (Independent) Reconnaissance Flight and

183 (Independent) Reconnaissance Flight Workshops: Major G. Lilley

3 Squadron SAS Regiment: Major R. P. Beesley

Papua New Guinea Volunteer Rifles: Major W. R. Harvey-Hall, ED

35 Cadet Battalion: Captain J. Finn

Pipes and Drums Lae Area: Warrant Officer Class 1 A. McLeod-Lee

THE ROLE OF IGAM BARRACKS AT LAE, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Ron Inglis

1971 'Chalkie' at Moem and Igam Barracks, Ron Inglis, attended the opening of the Pacific Islands Regiment (PIR) Exhibition held at the Australian Army Infantry Museum, Singleton, on October 1, 2013. It was an opportunity to gather information on the establishment of Igam Barracks and to recall the role played by the 'Chalkies' in the various activities based at Igam.

The plan for the development of the Pacific Islands Regiment, set out in the early 1960s, was to have three battalions and three new barracks: 1 PIR at Taurama Barracks in Port Moresby, 2 PIR at Moem Barracks in Wewak and 3 PIR at Igam Barracks in Lae. As it turned out, three new barracks were constructed but only two battalions were raised.

Work commenced on the construction of Igam Barracks in 1966. The barracks was duly built, with all modern facilities including a squash court and swimming pool, at a total cost of nine million dollars. It was officially opened on 30 September 1968 by the then Minister for the Army, Mr Phillip Lynch. (See official programme elsewhere in this Journal.)

3 PIR was never raised due to constraints on the Australian defence budget at a time when Australia was heavily involved in the war in Vietnam.

At the time of the official opening, Igam Barracks provided accommodation for a number of Army units including Headquarters Lae Area Command, Headquarters Papua and New Guinea Volunteer Rifles, a Company of the 1st Battalion, Pacific Islands Regiment, the PNG Military Cadet School and Headquarters 35 Cadet Battalion. Also on parade for the Official Opening was the 3rd Squadron Special Air Service Regiment, which was undertaking tropical training in Papua New Guinea.

During the years that the 'Nasho Chalkies' were sent to Igam, 1968 to 1972, the Barracks was home to seven military units.

- **Headquarters, Lae Area Command** including a regimental pipe and drum band.
- A **company of 1 PIR** from Taurama Barracks, was based at Igam on a 12-month rotation. The posting to Lae was keenly anticipated by companies of 1 PIR for soldiers' families also moved to Igam for the year and Lae was considered to be a much more pleasant environment than Port Moresby.

The **Pacific Islands Regiment** had been formed in 1944, as the headquarters for the **Papuan Infantry Battalion (PIB)** and the 1st and 2nd **New Guinea Infantry Battalions (NGIB)**. By the time it was disbanded in 1946, some 3,500 Papuans and New Guineans had served in ranks of the PIR.

In March 1951 the PIR was reformed as an Australian regiment and it remained under direct Australian command until Papua New Guinea independence in 1975.

During the period of National Service in Australia, a number of platoon commanders in both 1 PIR and 2 PIR were National Servicemen, commissioned as officers after training at Scheyville in New South Wales.

- 183 Recce Flight operated both helicopters and Pilatus Porter fixed wing aircraft. Their main task was to support exercises and civic action patrols of the PIR. They also supported survey operations being undertaken by the Australian Survey Corps.
- Headquarters of the **Papua New Guinea Volunteer Rifles (PNGVR)**. This reservist unit, was established in 1952 as an Australian **Citizens Military Force (CMF)** unit. Unlike PIR, PNGVR was always English speaking and, in the early years, was entirely European. In 1964 it

became a multi-racial unit allowing Chinese, mixed race and indigenous members to join. By about 1966 PNGVR was around 70% indigenous.

Once Igam Barracks became available, the PNGVR camp was held there each year with RAAF Hercules and Caribou bringing reservist soldiers from all parts of PNG. PNGVR was disbanded in 1973 at the time of the granting of Self Government, ahead of the granting of Independence in 1975.

- Headquarters of the **Cadet Units** found in many schools across PNG. These cadet units mirrored the school cadet units found in many Australian high schools at the time. The Cadets also had an annual camp at Igam. On 28 August 1972, a Caribou returning to Port Moresby with 24 cadets and two Army officers, crashed in the vicinity of Wau. Only four cadets survived the crash and they were only located after they walked out to a riverbed where they could be seen from the air.
- The **Military Cadet School (MCS)** prepared indigenous soldiers for officership in the PIR. In 1971 MCS was under the command of Lt Colonel Harry Bell. Some four or five 'Chalkies' were appointed to MCS each year and they had military as well as educational duties. A bonus for the 1971 'MCS Chalkies' was to accompany the cadets on an orientation excursion to Sydney.
- **Lae Area Education** provided courses in English, Maths, Social Sciences and Civics for indigenous soldiers, and Australian Army Certificate of Education Courses for Igam-based Australian soldiers who wished to upgrade their education qualifications. Around four or five 'Chalkies' were appointed to Lae Area Education each year. The OIC of **Lae Area Education** in 1971 was Captain (later Major) Trevor McQuinn who interviewed many PNG Second World War soldiers about their war and post-war service. His research and documentation produced highly valuable historical material.

Acknowledgements

www.nashospng.com

Major General Brian Howard was a Company Commander, 1 PIR, stationed at Igam Barracks, Lae in 1969. Brian Howard played a key role in the documenting and display of PIR history at the Singleton Museum.

Lt Colonel Laurie Kelly, was a Markham Valley farmer and later an employee of the Commonwealth Department of Works when Igam Barracks was under construction. Laurie Kelly served in the PNGVR for 17 years. He was Officer Commanding, A Coy PNGVR. Laurie Kelly lived in the Lae area from 1953 to 1983.

Australian Army Infantry Museum, Singleton, Upper Hunter, New South Wales.



Igam Military Cadet School cadets with Chalkie Sergeant Andrew Dalziel (1971/72)