

CHALKIE NEWSLETTER

1/2016

50

YEARS SINCE THE FIRST CHALKIES WENT TO TPNG

Yes, that's right – it is fifty years since the first Chalkies were sent to what was then known as the Territory of Papua and New Guinea in August 1966. Our

version of National Service began in 1965 and it is interesting that the Chalkie program began so soon after 1965. This says something about the significance of the program in the minds of the planners and the speed with which it was implemented. Quite impressive when you think about how the Army usually operates.

To recognise the efforts of the early 'pathfinder' Chalkies, we have included below, a couple of photos of their early accommodation. It is quite a contrast with the substantial concrete block Sergeants' accommodation of the later years of the Chalkie scheme.

They survived this (and the rest) then set the foundations for the rest of us.

Well done!!!!



Taurama accommodation for the 1966/67 Chalkies



Ken Hannaford outside his quarters at Goldie River in the early years.

REUNIONS

There are two Chalkie reunions in 2016 that we have information on as we prepare this Newsletter.

1. NATIONAL REUNION IN PERTH:

Our excellent contact with the Chalkies in Western Australia, Graeme Johnson, is putting together a team to organise the National Reunion in Perth.

Detailed information will be coming out in the near future but the important thing to note at this stage, are the dates.

THURSDAY 27TH OCTOBER TO SUNDAY 30TH OCTOBER.

Now is a good time to put these dates on the calendar.

2. QUEENSLAND REUNION:

The **Queensland Reunion** will take a different form this year. Over the last four or five years we have concentrated on telling the Chalkie story from each of the places where we served in PNG. With the conclusion of this cycle, we have decided to meet this year at a dinner at a central point in Brisbane.

The timing of our get together will also be changed from our usual October timing. This year, the Reunion will be held in either June or July. An appropriate venue is currently being investigated and information will be coming out shortly on this.

BELLBOWRIE LUNCH

In what has become something of an annual pilgrimage, a very convivial gathering of Queensland Chalkies took place in January at the far and distant western extremity of Brisbane at the Bellbowrie Tavern. This was very well organised by Peter Darmody – thanks, Peter.

As well, it was an opportunity to look at the coming year and plan the Chalkie events for the next 12 months.



Bellbowrie gathering



Bellbowrie Chalkie gathering

DARRYL DYMCK'S RESEARCH

Darryl's very substantial work on the Chalkie scheme has progressed well and is entering its final stages. Darryl is keen for an up-to-date report to be sent out so that all those who participated in the research (and everybody else) are fully aware of how things are going. This report is set out below.

Chalkies' history research update – Feb 2016

Darryl Dymock



It's been quite a task pulling together the responses to the 2015 Chalkies' survey, mainly because there was such a great response: 73 in total – and they all (thankfully) had a lot to say! I also sent out a later survey to wives who were mentioned on the returned questionnaires, and am grateful to the ten women who added their voices to the PNG experience. I've been fitting the analysis and writing around other commitments, but I've just about completed the write-up task, and am now exploring publication options for a book.

In the meantime, here's a brief overview of what came out of the survey and my other research, including from the Nashospng website:

BASIC STATISTICS

No. of ex-Chalkies on Terry Edwsmith's database: 180

No. of responses to survey: 73 (= 40% return rate)

Nasho years of respondents: 66/67: 6; 67/68: 11; 68/69: 5; 69/70: 16; 70/71: 16; 71/72: 7; 72/73: 6; other combinations: 6. Total: 73.

Age on entry to Nasho: 20yrs: 18; 21yrs: 21; 22yrs: 13; 23yrs: 10; 24yrs: 6; 25yrs: 2; 26yrs: 1; not shown: 2

State on entry to Nasho: Qld: 17; NSW: 20; Vic: 23; SA: 3; WA: 8; NT: 1.

Recruit training: 1RTB Kapooka: 15; 2RTB Puckapunyal: 35; 3TB Singleton: 22; not shown: 1 [Those selected for OTU Scheyville were at these bases only briefly]

Occupation on entry: High school teacher: 40; Primary school teacher: 25; other: 8 (includes Ag specialists, Tech/trade teachers, and two with degrees but no teaching qualification)

PNG posting: Murray Barracks: 20; Iduabada Tech: 2; Taurama Barracks: 13; Goldie River: 9; Moem Barracks: 11; Igam Barracks: 11; combinations: 7.

With the aid of an Army History Research Grant, I was also able to travel to explore files held at the National Archives in Melbourne and Canberra, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, and also RAAEC Newsletters in the National Library, Canberra. From those sources, I've estimated that the **total number of Nasho Chalkies sent to TPNG was around 280**: 26 in the first cohort in 1966 and about 40 a year between 1967 and 1972.

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESPONSES – A SELECTION

Attitudes to conscription at the time of call-up

In favour: 18 (25%)

e.g. 'I was generally positive about conscription and the reasons for Australia's involvement in Vietnam.'

Opposed: 31 (42%)

e.g. 'I didn't agree with the validity of the rationale for conscription (i.e. the Vietnam War), nor did I agree with the modus operandi (i.e. a random chance of 1:12 of being conscripted).'

Neutral/Accepting: 24 (33%)

e.g. 'I had fairly neutral views on conscription at the time I had to register, although I believed that if a person was conscripted he was obliged to serve as required.'

Recollections of recruit training

26 (36%) described their reactions in primarily negative terms, e.g.: ‘bewilderment initially, and once reality set in it was tough’; ‘tough, cold, boring’; ‘wasn’t something to enjoy - in fact, I hated it!’.

17 (23%) saw their recruit training experience in mainly positive terms, e.g.: ‘very interesting and quite enjoyable’; ‘not too demanding’; ‘I loved it – I was not only involved in activities I enjoyed but now had the time without other responsibilities to be 100% involved.’

28 (38%) saw recruit training in neutral terms (‘I expected it to be what it was’) or as a balance of positive and negative features, e.g.: ‘The weather (very hot) made it physically very difficult and it took quite a time to adjust to the rules, expectations, shouted abuse, racism and seeming trivia of army discipline. Once you got this in perspective, it became easy to “roll with the punches”; ‘My family was conservative and I was totally unused to people yelling and abusing in the customary fashion at that time. By the end of the 10 weeks, however, I’d come to grips with it.

2 respondents remembered *only* the physical demands of recruit training; a lot more mentioned them as part of their recollections.

The PNG experience

The accounts of Chalkies’ PNG experiences – in the Educational Corps, in the Army, in the country – were detailed and varied, and far too much for me to summarise succinctly here. That will have to wait until the book comes out, whatever form that takes. Suffice it to say that all 73 who responded had very clear recollections of things that happened during their time in PNG – the humorous, the serious, and the almost unbelievable.

In order to give our experiences some context, in the book I’ve shaded in the background of Australian government policy in PNG between 1966 and 1973, as well as in relation to conscription. Apart from that, I’ve tried to use the words of Chalkies themselves as they remembered their experiences of that time.

Back to civvy street

After Nasho, the majority of Chalkies went back to the education systems they’d come from, and 44 (60%) of them stayed in school education. Most of these gained middle to senior management and admin/consultancy positions over their working life; some did part-time or casual work after retirement, not always in education.

A further 16 (22%) initially returned to schools and then went on to other occupations, which included squash club owner, computer scientist, ASIO intelligence, real estate, taxi industry, tourism, university academic, and dairy farmer.

The other 13 (18%) went straight into another occupation after Nasho, including four who signed on for an ARA commission, a church minister, engineer, psychologist, diplomat, and accountant.

One of the Chalkies who responded said that we are in a reflective period of our lives, and I think that shows in the nature of the assessments that the survey respondents made of their time in PNG and in the Army. I'm very grateful to those 73 and the ten wives, and the others who have provided input into the history, including the five members of the reference group that has been giving me guidance along the way: Terry Edwinsmith, Ian Ogston, Greg Ivey, Greg Farr and Norm Hunter.

I will keep readers informed of the final arrangements for publication when those are finalised. I know from experience as an author that unfortunately this can be a slow process.

There are lots of memorable quotes in the Chalkies' responses, and I've attributed them in the book (unless you requested otherwise), and I'll leave you with just one of them: 'Two years isn't a long time in your life, but at age 20 it can be significant.'

Darryl Dymock
Taurama Barracks 1969-70

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