VALE DAN WINKEL

On January 10 this year, the Chalkie Group lost a member who was known, liked and honoured by many of us. Dan Winkel passed away after battling a number of illnesses over the last few years.

Dan is remembered by us for a range of reasons. As administrative WO2 in Murray Barracks for the RAAEC, he had a critical role in many aspects of the Chalkie experience while he was there. This included the decisions on appointments to the various bases across PNG.

Many though, owe Dan a great deal for the variety of trips he organised to all parts of PNG. This enriched enormously the PNG
experience for many of us and formed an integral part of the many memories we have of our time there.

Dan’s casket leaves Our Lady of the Rosary Church at Kenmore.

For those who were posted to the Education Centre at Enoggera Barracks in Brisbane for corps training, it was Dan who coached us and prepared us for the coming year in this very unfamiliar environment.

Dan’s involvement in the Chalkie group gave him much pleasure in his final years. Our thanks must go to Terry Edwinsmith and Frank Cordingley for their particular attention to Dan in his last years.

It is time to reflect on and honour the contribution of Dan to the PNG Chalkies.
THE DAY WE JOINED THE ARMY

(or was it, ‘The Day the Army Joined Us?’)

It is 50 years, almost to the day, that I, along with the 1970/71 Chalkies, left civilian life for two years in the military. The majority of you have passed this milestone and we later Chalkies, trod the bumpy path you trod with the benefits that had come from your experience.

To mark this occasion, John Morris and I have written two small pieces on Day 1 of the experience that became a significant influence on our lives.

ENOGGERA ARMY BARRACKS – BRISBANE: JANUARY 1970  Ian Ogston

Over the span of fifty years, many things are forgotten. The day the Army decided it was time for me to learn to be a soldier, however, remains vividly lasered into my mind. It is strange to think of this event, part of the so-called National Service scheme that operated during the Vietnam War, in the context of our world today.

Today’s twenty year-olds are almost incredulous that such a visitation on the life of an individual could ever occur. Yet it did - in that very different world of January 1970.

My Army life had been coming for years. I had my call-up for the Army deferred from 1967 to allow me to finish my Arts degree and Diploma of Education at the University of Queensland. As well, I was allowed to complete a year of teaching before having to turn up for military training.

I taught for a year (1969) in Cairns in north Queensland and hints of what was ahead of me kept coming. Media reports from Vietnam, celebrity conscripts (e.g. Normie Rowe) and the anti-Vietnam involvement activists. An election
win in that year by the major war supporters in Parliament, the Liberal Party, confirmed that conscription was not going to go away and apparently, that the majority of people in Australia also supported this.

Half way through the year, I was required to attend a medical examination. It was a strange night. There we were, a bunch of wide-eyed young blokes, in some government offices in central Cairns, along with a few totally bored-out-their-brains doctors. I met a doctor later who told me how much the medical profession hated this job.

It was determined that I was fit to join the Army. The less-than-memorable letter has survived and is in Appendix A. (I only learned later about all of the tricks that could be applied to fail the medical. The one that I remember was pricking your finger and putting a drop of blood in your urine sample. Maybe it would have worked!!)

At the end of the school year, I returned to my home town of Toowoomba to await the day of reckoning. I do not recall being too concerned about it but then what do you know at that age? Perhaps I was more annoyed than worried.

I seem to recall having been told to make sure I had a decent haircut before I showed up to the Army and I did this. This was, of course, made even shorter by one of a team of barbers at Singleton once I had arrived there.

I had been sent my little brown booklet which told me ‘everything’ I needed to know about being in the Army. I still have it for some mad reason and it was a functional and somewhat intimidating document.

Armed with this and whatever else I was told to bring with me, I set off from the bus station in the middle of Toowoomba to link up with the rail motor service that ran to Brisbane from Helidon.
A vehicle met us at Roma Street Station and we were whisked out to Enoggera barracks in the northern suburbs of Brisbane. It had the rather prosaic name of NCPD (Northern Command Personnel Depot) and was well known to anybody from Queensland who joined the Army during and since World War 2. Here we were deposited in wooden huts and began another round of medical checks, this time done by Medical Corps members who seemed to take the view if you were there then you were probably fit to join the Army. The importance of this fairly slack medical came many years later when documentary evidence was needed to show any damage Army service did to you as it was compared to the medical given at the end of the period of service.

The next morning, we were bussed off to Brisbane Airport and ‘marched’ to the waiting commercial (Ansett or TAA – remember them!!) Viscount aircraft which was to take us to Williamtown Air Base en route to Singleton. I do recall a TV news team complete with camera recording this event. Whether it was shown that night on the news, I have no idea.
The plane trip to Williamtown was treated by the airline as a normal passenger flight and there was cabin crew (‘air hostesses’ in those days) doing the things cabin crew always do. I don’t think there was any alcohol, strangely enough. At one point on the trip, what appeared to be smoke started flowing out of the vents above us. This is the sort of thing you notice on an aircraft. After some time, we were told that it was only condensation and not to worry. It is no surprise that I remembered that.

From Williamtown (it was only a RAAF base in those days) we were taken by bus to our new home away from home, the 3rd Training Battalion located just outside of the town of Singleton.

APPENDIX A: THE LETTER

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[Image of a letter from the Commonwealth of Australia Department of Labour and National Service]

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HOW THE ARMY JOINED ME UP – THE FIFTY-YEARS-ON PERSPECTIVE  

John Morris

As I commenced my teaching career, as a nineteen (19) year old with the NSW Department of Education in 1969, my immediate focus was on how I was going to cope/survive in a one teacher school in a place I had never heard of – Monia Gap! My two years of training at Wagga Wagga Teachers College was really going to be tested during my baptism of fire in a school locality half way between Rankins Springs and Hillston (about eighty miles, in those days, north east of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area town of Griffiths).

It was in the middle of July of that year that I received a letter from the Department of Labour and National Service informing me that I would be required to serve in the Australian Army as a National Serviceman. Being in a small farming community the Vietnam War was never spoken about. The ABC 7.00pm news did carry spinets about the war but it was the half-hour program before the news, Bellbird that was the focus of our attention each night.

The school’s Parents and Citizens Association met once a term, by kerosene light, and it was here that I delivered the news to all in attendance that my tenure at their school would probably be short lived. One farmer indicated that he knew the local MHR and would ‘petition’ him to see if I could remain in my teaching post until the end of the 1969 school year. Directly, he received a response that I would see out my first year of teaching in this close-knit community.

I informed by District Inspector of this ‘news’ and indicated I was required to attend a medical examination in Griffith towards the end of the term. He agreed that I could close the school early on a Friday afternoon (no casual teachers in my area) and I subsequently made a 2.45pm appointment with the Army’s ‘preferred’ medical practitioner in the town.

Having played sport all of my life I thought it would be interesting to see what the doctor would find. During the examination he noticed a slight bone protrusion under my left knee, a result of an accident I had incurred as an eight (8) year old whilst holidaying with my family at Cronulla in 1958. He indicated
that this ‘lump’ would restrict me from crawling whilst stationed in the military forces. I didn’t realise at the time that this was an ‘out’ for me. Innocently I shared with the male doctor that this wouldn’t stop me and as a result I was passed fit.

It was somewhat with mixed feelings that on the last day of the school year I said farewell to my students and their families who had taught me about rural life and the requirements of their teacher and headed back to Cooma North to spend time with my family before returning to Wagga Wagga, only this time it would be to 1RTB situated at Kapooka.

Unaware of what was ahead I had been offered advice from a number of locals who obviously knew more about the Army than me. The most useful comment was, ‘Don’t argue, don’t resist, just follow instructions and there is a good chance you could be allocated the corps (what’s that!) of your choice’. My dad, having served in the RAF in North Africa and Egypt during World War II, offered no words of encouragement whilst my mother was terrified I would be sent to Vietnam.

It was a two and a half hour trip to Yass Junction where I said goodbye to my parents in late January 1970 before stepping aboard the Inter Capital Daylight Express for the trip back to Wagga Wagga. Accompanying me was my roommate during my second year of college, from Goulburn, who had also been sent to a one teacher school about thirty (30) miles north of Deniliquin. Neither of us knew what Army life was like and we were mainly silent during the three (3) hour trip.

It was obvious there were other passengers on the train heading in the same direction and this became more apparent when we were ‘herded’ onto an Army bus to where we would spend the next ten (10) weeks.

That first afternoon and night was just continuous movement. Visiting the Regimental Aid Post for inoculations, a trip to the Q Store for equipment and finally to the second storey level of what was to be called ‘our lines.’ Supervising us through all this was Corporal Des Fontain. It soon became apparent that we would be treated like sheep, belittled and trained the Army way.
The second platoon comprised young men gathered from all parts of the southern half of country NSW. The thirty (30) of us stood to attention, in rooms of four, to be told how to make our beds. During the process every second word used by the corporal was a derogatory term, most commonly the four letter ‘f’ word. During the bed making I asked the uniformed soldier why he spoke like that. His curt response was ‘so the New Australians would understand what I am saying.’ In asking the question, I called him sir. ‘Don’t call me sir; I’m not a pig (meaning he wasn’t an officer.). We were placed in our rooms alphabetically. At least my college mate and I took up half of the room. Prior to marching us down to the Mess Hall, Des Fontain mentioned that the top cover of our beds needed to be tight when they were made in the morning. ‘If I can’t bounce a two bob bit (no decimal currency for him) off the cover I’ll throw your bed out of the window!’ At least two of us slept on the floor during that first night terrified where our beds may end up in the morning!

The Mess housed about eight hundred (800) recruits as we were called. The evening meal reminded me of our meals that were served up at my residential teachers’ college. Whilst on the floor back in our room, I reflected on my first day in the Army. I really felt sorry for the person in front of me when receiving our needles earlier in the afternoon. The medic approached him with a giant needle and he fainted into my arms!

The following day, it was haircuts all round and meeting the other instructors who wore their green and gold armband (lolly wrappers we called them). One was a sergeant, two more hooks than Des Fontain, whilst the other was our platoon commander, second lieutenant Kevin Byrne. Kapooka was Byrne’s first posting having won the ‘silver sword’ as the top officer during his year-long training at Portsea. Through playing cricket for Kapooka in the Wagga Wagga division two cricket competition, I saw the other side of Lieutenant Byrne. He treated me as an equal on the playing field but it was back to ‘tors’ once back in uniform.

Over the next ten weeks I met people from all walks of life. By far those who grated on us the most were the drill personnel. These were mainly poorly educated Nashos who signed on after their term as civvy street didn’t offer
them anything once they were discharged. The Army provided security and ‘power’ over we vulnerable recruits!

Welcome to the Army!

NEW CHALKIE FACEBOOK PAGE

‘PNG CHALKIES – EDUCATING AN ARMY FOR INDEPENDENCE’

Most of you will already know about the new Facebook page put together by Peter Darmody and Rod Cassidy. I would encourage you to check this out and contribute if you can. You will need to be on Facebook and go through the requirements to be part of this private page.

An extremely large number of movies and images that have not surfaced before have been loaded on to the page and will be of interest to us all.

As well, it is important to keep checking it as more and more material keeps being presented.

This is a terrific initiative of Peter and Rod.

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Many thanks go to Greg who has taken over co-editing the Newsletter. Our thanks go to Greg Ivey who has had to relinquish this position after many years of exemplary editing work.