

ARMI WANTOKS JOURNAL

1/2015

From the Editors:

Welcome to this first edition of the Armi Wantoks Journal for 2015.

In this Journal, we would like to draw your attention to the fact that some of us are celebrating this year as the 'Year of Goldie River'. The Queensland Chalkies have been designating one of our barracks in PNG each year to expand our knowledge and understanding of each of these locations. Goldie will be the focus of our Brisbane reunion on Saturday October 17th. (This will follow the Adelaide Reunion of Chalkies from 9 to 11 October.)

As well, we have a short article on the Chalkie involvement in the Iduabada Technical College during the Chalkie era. Some of us were completely unaware of this part of the Chalkie story. Through the efforts of Terry Edwinsmith, this story is included in this Journal.

Finally, there is a little piece at the end on some reflections on reading Mark Dapin's book, "The Nashos' War". This excellent book is very relevant to all Chalkies especially in the whole context of our National Service scheme.

We hope you enjoy this Journal and invite your response.

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THE YEAR OF GOLDIE RIVER

To set off your awareness of Goldie, I have included below a sequence of three photos of the entrance to the PNG Training Depot at Goldie River.

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The first shows the entrance to the old Goldie River barracks up till the mid-60's. The buildings were made of bush materials which made quite a contrast with the new concrete block structures of the later Goldie barracks. Note the sign at the entrance.



The second photo shows the entrance to the barracks in 1971. The picture shows the guardhouse with other buildings in the background.



The third photo was taken by Greg Ivey on a visit there last year. Still the Goldie entrance but leafier!!



To further examine the barracks where we served, a search using Google maps gives an interesting (and recent) birds-eye view of each of these places.

IDUABADA TECH

A little-known aspect of the Chalkie scheme was the contribution of Murray Barracks Chalkies to the running of the Iduabada Technical College. This story has been researched by Terry Edwsmith and what follows is based on the material that he has collected. The knowledge of this scheme is a significant addition to our story.

The Iduabada Technical College was set up to teach skills in building, auto mechanics, electrical trades and so on to Papua New Guineans. It was decided that soldiers should also attend this college to provide for the Army this same range of skills. The arrangement that emerged was that Chalkies from Murray Barracks be sent to the College to run various courses.

Chalkies left the barracks at 7.30 each day in civilian clothes for their day's work at the college. Apparently, the early Chalkies had trade qualifications but later the emphasis turned to the teaching of Science and Maths.

One of these Chalkies, Peter Shackelford, describes his time as an Iduabada teacher as follows:

'When I tell people about my National Service, I say that I wore civvies, taught science at a technical college and went to Murray Barracks to collect my mail and pay. That's not quite the full story but it is about 99% of it. From time to time, we took our turn at supervising the Army apprentices getting on the bus at the barracks and again at the college for the return journey. Sometimes, we took evening homework/tutoring sessions with the Army apprentices back at barracks. During college holidays, we attended the barracks and wore uniform but as far as I can recall, had no regular duties or responsibilities during those times. My wife and I rented a flat off barracks.'

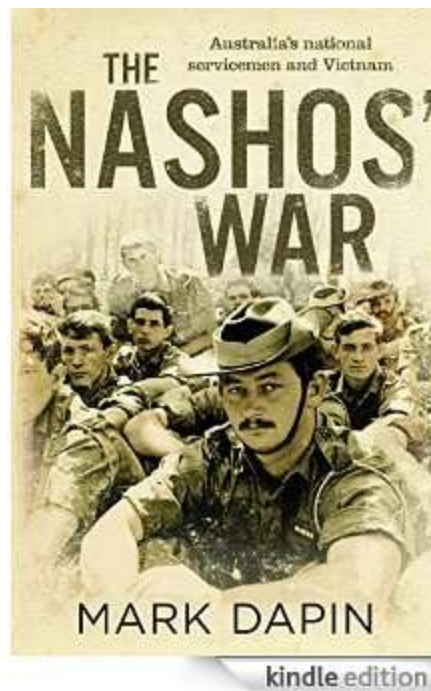
Another Chalkie, Dennis Jenkins, recounts how his time at Iduabada was spent:

'Jim Bates and I travelled together by car to Iduabada for the 7.30 to 2.30 school day and each of us taught Maths (6 periods) and Science (5 periods) at about Form 3/Year 9 standard to three separate classes. This was a total of 33 periods in a 40 period week, a pretty hefty load, but the boys were co-operative and enthusiastic and we certainly preferred it to going back to 'Army life' at the barracks, though it is possible that some of our fellow Nashos may have coveted our 'cushy billet'.

A sad note to conclude is that one of the Iduabada Chalkies, John Martin, lost his life in a motorcycle accident while travelling around Port Moresby in 1969.

Terry Edwinsmith has written further on the connection between the Chalkies and the Iduabada Tech and much of this extra detail is available on our website nashospng.com and is well worth following up. Included in this writing is the list of Chalkies and their years of service at the College.

THOUGHTS ON READING MARK DAPIN'S BOOK 'THE NASHOS' WAR'



The reading of Dapin's book, 'The Nashos' War' was for me, a very moving experience. I should like to share with you some of my thoughts on this and encourage you to read the book – perhaps more than once!!

Undoubtedly, the overwhelming effect was that with every page turned, I was ever so thankful for having been selected to go to Papua New Guinea. The book outlines the many experiences of National Servicemen who went to Vietnam and who served in the line of fire and in the bases at Nui Dat and Vung Tau. All of this damaged the men who served there. The book only touches fairly briefly on the Army life of those Nashos who spent their two years languishing in some bases in Australia. Few of these experiences seemed to me to be particularly uplifting for these men.

One particular account I found particularly poignant and demonstrated the point made above. In the chapter on the Battle for FSB Coral, the appalling slaughter of Australian troops was graphically described. The following quote (of a National Service infantryman) especially should make every Chalkie appreciate very much their appointment to PNG.

'Another fella and myself moved a couple of the mortar blokes who'd been killed during the course of the evening. That was not an easy job to do. One bloke, particularly, I knew reasonably well, Errol Bailey. The teacher from the Hunter Valley was dead, all his education wasted.' P.250

Dapin gives a brief but nonetheless accurate account of the situation regarding teachers called up for National Service. On page 241 he says the following:

'Since teachers were permitted - and expected - to defer until they had completed their tertiary studies and served one year in the job, there were virtually no teachers in the first year of National Service, few in the second, and then, by 1967, a deluge. So not only did all the teachers arrive at the same years, the majority came in at the same time. The military in Vietnam could rarely use them as teachers, so they ended up scattered throughout the Army. Scores of 'chalkies' found themselves in New Guinea, training the Pacific Islands Regiment '

An impressive feature of this rather large book is the vast amount of detail the author has 'hoovered' up to provide a very complete account not only of National Service but also of the sociological and political context of it. Excellent reference is made to the Gallup Polls of the era that gauged public opinion on it and the war as well as wide reference to news reports and commentary.

He uses this information well to describe the changing character of National Servicemen coming into the Army as the years progressed. This, for me, had me thinking that maybe the Chalkies of the early period of National Service may have been different in their view of their Army life compared with those who came later. Food for thought!!

Finally, Dapin's vivid detail on the nature of recruit training brought back lots of memories to me of the "crappy" time it was. I am not sure that I really needed that again in my life but there it was.

He does describe it well!!!!

For those of us who lived through this time, this book is immensely meaningful and adds immeasurably to our understanding of all that was going on at the time. Best of all, it shoots down all of the revisionist myths that have emerged about National Service since that time.

You must read this book!

(I must acknowledge Dan Winkel's efforts here in making this book available to the Chalkies in the Brisbane area.)

Ian Ogston