

ARMI WANTOKS JOURNAL

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The Journal of the Australian teachers who served in Papua New Guinea in the Royal Australian Educational Corps from 1966 to 1973.

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Hello All,

We have, in this volume of the Journal, a number of important items to communicate to you. Our main article was prepared by Frank Cordingley who was a Chalkie in PNG from 1967 to 1968. Frank has put together an excellent account of his experiences in the Army and his life since then. Many thanks to Frank for this and also the significant technical assistance in producing this journal.

Frank has also been able to unearth a most significant photo and this has been included in this volume as well. The photo was printed in the Brisbane Telegraph and shows three Chalkies with the man who probably instigated the Chalkies scheme, Brigadier I. M. Hunter. More on this later.

We trust you will enjoy this edition of Armi Wantoks Journal. As always, your feedback or contributions are welcome.

Ian and Greg.

NEWS

As we prepare this edition of the Journal, three of our group are making the journey to PNG to retrace their steps of more than 40 years ago. We send our best wishes with Terry Edwinsmith, Norm Hunter and Kev Horton and trust they will have the best of times and achieve all they set out to do.

As the end of the year approaches, it is time to start the planning for our annual get-together. The best day is **Sunday 2nd October**. In the past, it has always been held at one of our houses so if there is anybody who would like to host our annual gathering, could you let me know and we will get the wheels turning.

Finally, on a personal note, I would like to include later a most important piece of news. After 40 years, I have finally met up with my excellent Chalkie mate from Goldie River days, John Morris. Details and photos later.

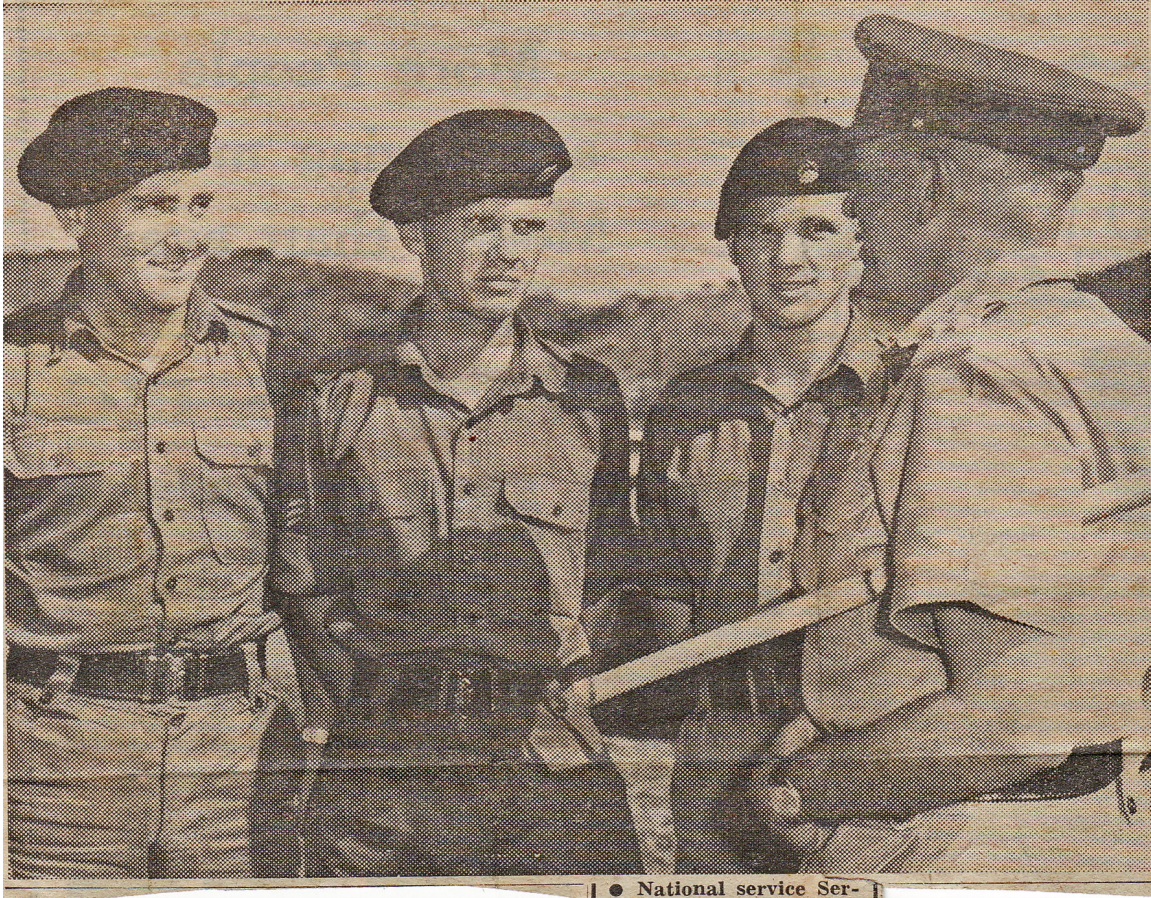
IMPORTANT HISTORICAL PHOTO

On the next page you will see a photo that is of massive importance to those interested in the history of the Chalkies scheme. This is the only photo we have of Brigadier Ian Murray Hunter with Chalkies. All are Queensland Chalkies and in our contact group.

As far as we can tell, Brigadier Hunter was the driver of the scheme that made excellent use of the significant numbers of teachers being called up for National Service. We have all benefited enormously from the insight and efforts of this man. We all owe him a great debt.

The picture was found and sent to me by Frank Cordingley. It was published in the Brisbane Telegraph in July, 1967.

Many thanks to Frank for providing this for us.



● National service Sergeants, from left, John Gibson, of Dutton Park, Frank Cordingley of Currumbin Beach, and Kevin Smith, of Red Hill, speak with Brigadier I. M. Hunter, Commander of Papua-New Guinea Command, after having arrived in Port Moresby. They are in New Guinea as education instructors to assist in the program to advance the standard of education of the Pacific Island soldiers.

Tues, July 1967

FRANK CORDINGLEY'S PNG EXPERIENCE (June 67 - Nov 68)

(We were delighted to contact Frank in 2010 and he has brought to the group new knowledge of the PNG Chalkies scheme as well as important material such as the photo above. This is his account of his time in PNG.)

I was in the 7th national service intake in February 1967, having turned 20 the previous October. I had been teaching Junior maths and science for one year at Clermont

Secondary Department. Another first year teacher at Clermont was also called up. His name was Neil Weekes who became an officer, won the MC in the Battle of Coral and I believe finally retired from the army as a Brigadier. After 10 weeks recruit training at Singleton, I began my Medical Corps training at Healesville near Melbourne. That was fun living in tents in winter having to fold up the tent flaps each morning after cracking the ice off the canvas. This was my first experience with PNG soldiers as there were a number doing the same course. I vividly remember them on parade only in their jungle greens shivering violently as they had left any winter gear at home as they did not understand what they were in for.

It was only about 5 weeks into Corps training that I, along with quite a few others, were summoned to Watsonia Barracks in Melbourne for an interview to transfer to the Education Corps. I waited all day while everyone else had their interview. I remember being called in about 5pm to a room where there were 4 men in civilian clothes who asked me one question – 'How would I feel if I had to sleep in barracks full of native soldiers?' I remember saying I couldn't see a problem and that was it. To my surprise, I was the only one chosen. What surprised me most was that I was an 8 stone whipstick with only partial first year university studies and not a great athlete whereas others had degrees and were great footballers etc. I was transferred to Melbourne, told it would be a week before the paperwork was finished so I went home to the Gold Coast for that week. I asked if I could get the plane from Brisbane but had to fly back to Melbourne before going to Port Moresby – typical army.

I flew over Brisbane the same day (14th June 1967) the 6th battalion (Battle of Long Tan fame) arrived home in Brisbane on HMAS Sydney (my cousin who was in the 1st national service intake and in D Company 6 RAR, fortunately survived the battle and the rest of the family were gathering in Brisbane to welcome him home). I remember walking out of the plane at Jackson Field and being hit by the heat, having come from a Melbourne winter.

Fortunately Army Movements met every plane from Australia because no one was expecting me. I was the first of 4 new sergeants - (Myself (Gold Coast), Peter Darmody (Canberra), Brian Davies (Melbourne) and Ken Morcom (Adelaide) - sent to Murray Barracks to reinforce the ones already there (who went home in November 1967). I don't remember how many were in the original 1966-67 group but two of the originals were Neil Gibson and Mick Turnbull - I think both from NSW. At the time, our teaching facilities were in LEP (locally enlisted personnel) huts – we had 2 or 3 of these in which to teach. It was some months later that we moved into the new purpose built 2-storey training centre. I remember sitting in the doorway of the LEP that first afternoon facing the western sun and it took just minutes before my jungle greens were a ball of sweat – it took some time to acclimatise.



Outside the LEP hut at Murray Barracks

It was just weeks before I was the Orderly Sergeant for an entire weekend – the scariest prospect for someone who hadn't even finished corps training. Tasks I found difficult as a new sergeant were drilling soldiers who had been placed on charge (especially while the adjutant was watching), lowering and raising the flag in front of the Brigadier's house (making sure it wasn't upside down), and trying to stay awake all night patrolling the barracks given that major roads cut through the centre of the barracks.

It also wasn't long before I went on the first of many flights around the Territory. These were organised by WO2 Dan Winkel (a regular Education Corps soldier). These trips included the Mt Hagen Show (possibly the greatest experience I had in PNG), Popondetta, Tapini hill station and weekends to Rabaul and Goroka. We would usually hire a DC3 and then on-sell the tickets to whoever wanted to come – I don't think there was ever a spare seat. The trip to Tapini had to be in a small high winged plane as the airport was on the side of a mountain with a massive drop to the river below (I understand a Caribou had misjudged the landing and was still in the river below). These trips were the highlight of my time in PNG. I did miss one trip - to the Trobriand Islands. I had bought a 50cc Honda motor cycle the previous week and was returning to the barracks when I fell off going up the hill from Port Moresby to Boroko. (I had never ridden a bike before and didn't know how to go round a corner). I ended up in the hospital at Taurama Barracks totally concussed and don't remember anything till the next day.

I am not sure whether it was three or all four of us new sergeants who had bought the Hondas and we spent many weekends going in all directions to the ends of the all the

roads leading out of Port Moresby.

Our official duties as teachers were not onerous. We would have a block of soldiers for 6 weeks with each week broken into 45 periods. I think my workload was to teach only 6 to 10 of those periods per week. Probably the funniest experience was to march the soldiers along the public road to and from their barracks (My marching instructions were quite poor). We would then have a week off before the next block. During that week our Captain would organise something for us. One trip was to walk a short distance down the Kokoda Trail while another was a fishing trip in a landing craft out to the reef off Port Moresby. One official trip was in a Caribou along the north coast of New Guinea to Wewak, overnight in Vanimo (an army outpost on the north coast near the Indonesian border) then to Green River in the highlands, also near the Indonesian border, before returning to Port Moresby.

One issue that disturbed me greatly was the fines imposed on the PNG soldiers for minor misdemeanours such as twisted bootlaces. The fines were the same as those imposed on Australian soldiers even though the PNG soldier received only a fraction of the European pay. This meant a silly fine might take almost a week's wages and they were still expected to feed their families. In the end, I was asked to draw up the schedule of fines based on their wages. I don't remember if this was put into effect.

One of the privileges of being in PNG as a sergeant was sharing a 'wash iron boy' to wash and starch our uniforms. I remember talking to him about PNG independence. He pointed out one of the European houses on the hills overlooking the barracks saying that house would be his after independence. That also included the white woman in the house. Fortunately, events after independence did not descend to that sort of chaos.

Because of my light workload, during 1968, I studied Applied Math 1 externally from the University of Queensland to finish my first year degree studies. This was helpful in that I took advantage of the post national service scholarship and then a subsequent Commonwealth scholarship to finish my Science degree and also to point me on my new path to becoming a computer programmer.

Because I took no leave during my time in PNG, I left Port Moresby in late November 1968 and was discharged from Gallipoli Barracks, Enoggera the following day. I used 1969 to re-acquaint myself with civilian life and taught at Miami State High School before continuing my university studies the following year.

I am still working part time after a very exciting career as a computer professional, working for the Department of Air (Airforce) in Canberra for 1 year, 5 years with the Department of Main Roads and finally with Queensland Health from 1977 till now mainly in the Pathology and Forensic laboratories (chiefly at Princess Alexandra Hospital), rising to the position of Chief Scientist. That part of my career is another story that is worth telling another time.

I married Judy in 1976 and we have a son who is a Mechanical Engineer. We have one grandson.



Frank Cordingley today.

CHALKIES REUNITED

John Morris and I were posted to the PNG Training Depot at Goldie River in 1970-71. At the time we were the only unmarried Chalkies at Goldie and as a consequence, spent a very large amount of our 12 months in PNG together.

At the end of the year, we walked out of each other's life and set about getting on with our lives and careers. When the Chalkie group set up eight years ago, I was most keen to contact John but was unable to do so. Some months ago, through the work of Greg Ivey and Trevor Pryor (a mutual acquaintance), the link was able to be made.

We met up on the Gold Coast earlier this month and what a very great pleasure it was.

I have included some photos on the next page.



Above, Ian Ogston and John Morris at Goldie River 1970 and (below) Gold Coast 2011. Maybe changed just a little!!

