

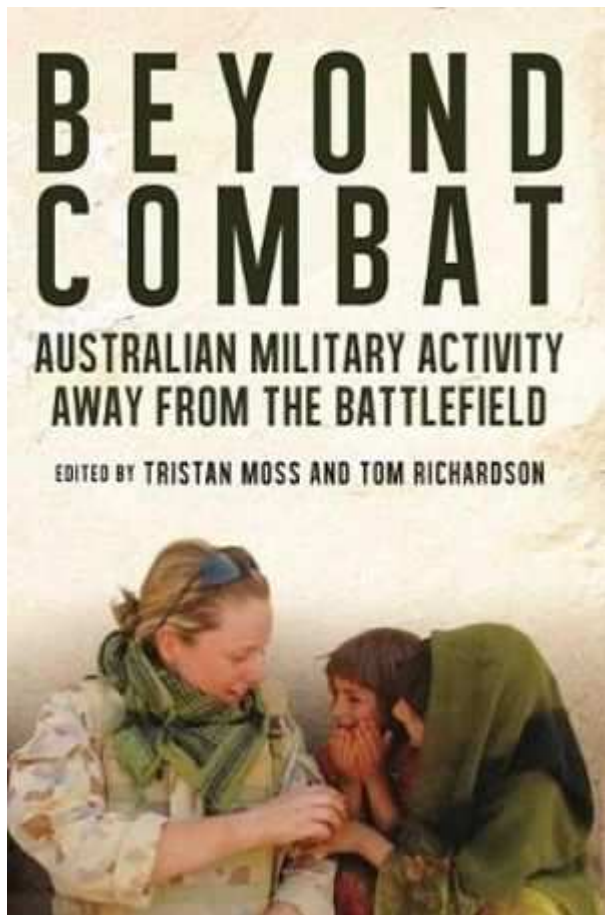
CHALKIE NEWSLETTER

VOL 1/2019

**NEWSLETTER OF THE NATIONAL SERVICEMEN WHO SERVED
IN THE RAAEC IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA 1966-1973**

HAS THE CHALKIE STORY GONE MAINSTREAM IN AUSTRALIAN MILITARY HISTORY??

This assertion was prompted by the publication of a new collection of military history essays edited by Tristan Moss and Tom Richardson. This book, entitled '**Beyond Combat**' includes a variety of accounts ranging from the role of Army nurses to looking after soldiers' welfare and various remembrance roles. The collection emphasises the rather more complex and diverse role of the Australian Army than would be the popular perception.



The chapter that I (and probably all of us) will be most interested in is the essay on the efforts of the Australian Army in education in Papua New Guinea. Written by Tristan Moss, this section covers the work of the Army with regard to the Pacific Island Regiment from the end of the Second World War to independence in 1975. We, of course, played a central role in this and this role has been carefully summarised by Tristan Moss.

When we set out on this Chalkie Reunion journey way back in 2003, we had a principal aim and this was to tell the hitherto unknown story of the National Service teachers in the Papua New Guinea defence force. Through the efforts of many of our group, academics such as Darryl Dymock and Tristan Moss, author and journalist, Mark Dapin and various serving members of the current RAAEC, the Chalkie story is well and truly out there in the community. In addition, this unusual and significant story is in the institutions (e.g. AWM and the RAAEC Archives) that need to know.

So what is this book about? – a book in which our story is included with those of many other non-front-line units. Set out below are the various themes that give an idea of the breadth of this work:

Managing Soldiers and Their Families (4 essays)

Military Education (3 essays)

Caring for the Soldier (4 essays)

Remembrance and the Dead (3 essays)

In the essay on military education in Papua New Guinea (entitled, ‘**Chalkies and Civics: Teaching the Military in Papua New Guinea**’), Tristan gives a very succinct (yet precise) account of what was done in TPNG by the RAAEC. It begins setting the scene by discussing the Corps’ role after the Second World War. The rather ‘thin’ earlier efforts of the Corps in the education of the PIR soldiers are clearly outlined. (This sets an interesting context for the arrival of the first Nasho Chalkies in the 1960s.)

This Education situation was identified as a major problem by the Commander of the Australian Army in TPNG, Brigadier Ian Hunter. The rather creative solution was to use the available National Servicemen who had been teachers in civilian life to not only raise the levels of literacy and numeracy but also to teach the soldiers essential civic concepts e.g. the role of the military in an independent democracy (which Hunter saw correctly as fast approaching).

The value for us of this account is the presentation of the detail and the context for the use of National Servicemen as Education Instructors. This, I believe, adds considerably to our understanding of our role in TPNG.

So, are we mainstream military history now? You would have to think so after reading this book.

PUBLISHING DETAILS

Title: ‘Beyond Combat: Australian Military Activity Away From the Battlefield’

Publisher: NewSouth Publishing, 2018

Length: 256 pages **Cost:** \$31 approx



ESSAY

***BROTHEL CREEPERS* AND OTHER STORIES**

FROM AN ARMY PAST

Just the other day, the old Army term, BROTHEL CREEPERS floated into my consciousness. Before your collective imaginations run wild, let me explain. I was trying to describe a fashionable, light pair of casual shoes that a friend of mine was wearing. Suddenly, out of the blue came '*brothel creepers*'.

As I recall, Army instructors at Singleton rather contemptuously described the sandshoes that we were issued with for physical training in this way. I have not heard this expression since this basic training in 1970. So, can anybody explain how this emerged unexpectedly out of nowhere? Perhaps it is such an evocative and hilarious expression, who could forget it!!!!

This started me thinking. How much of our vocabulary was affected by our rather brief stay in the Army or in other words, how would our speech have been different if we had missed out on the 'cultural' experience of the military?

I shall get to the Papua New Guinea bit in a moment but let me continue with the early Army language that might have stayed with us. I have compiled a list that has come quickly to mind and this is set out below:

Gooks

God botherers

Tail-end Charlie

Dixie bashing

The Deep J

Hootchies

Sausage bags

*Swan (as in 'go for a...')**

Trained killers (i.e. us!!!) This is my favourite – what is yours?

I don't doubt that you would be able to come up with many more expressions that have remained with you and exist even in your day-to-day vocabulary.

I would be delighted to hear from you because this is an obvious way in which we have been set apart from our contemporaries who missed out on the Conscription Ballot.

While reflecting on the language of the military, another fascinating piece of writing from Singleton has stayed with me all through the years. Each platoon had a lecture room and at the front of these rooms there was a blackboard. On one of these blackboards, an instructor had written in large chalk letters:

POLITICAL POWER COMES OUT OF THE BARREL OF A GUN.

I can only assume that this was meant to inspire us and let us know the Army was the real power in any society. A rather scary and frightening assertion, I have to say.

It was only much later that I found out that this is a direct quote from the counter-cultural 'Little Red Book' written by Chairman Mao!!!! I would bet money that the instructor who wrote it did not know its source!!!!

I was highly amused.

THEN THERE WAS PAPUA NEW GUINEA

For the majority, this was, of course, yet another hugely unfamiliar culture that intersected and altered our lives. To really come slightly close to getting a small insight into this new world, many of us were required to learn Pidgin English. (I do believe it is more correct to call the language Neo-Melanesian, now.) This certainly was a major learning experience for us all and the impact lasted many years after our time in PNG. Again, I have compiled a list of Pidgin words that live on in my vocabulary. I have been capably assisted by John Morris in this. *Sori tumas* if the spelling is incorrect but I think you will recognise these:

Wantoks

Meri

Buggerup

Go pinis

Kai kai

Up im more more yet (A piece of commentary from a PI Sergeant who was watching me play tennis and commented on my need to hit the ball over the net!!!)

Gutpela

Olgetta

Yupela

*Go pinis olgetta**

*Olgetta samting**

*Gonbus (as in gone bush)**

*Lik lik tasol**

*Jet balus**

*Sweet kai**

*Kai kai maus (kiss)**

*Samting bilong yu**

*Mi tasol**

*Dai pinis**

*Pek pek bilong Goldie (Epaulettes)**

*Lik Lik Retpela Hat and Tri Lik Lik Piks** (who could forget these!!!!!!!!!!)

(* These extra words and expressions wonderfully supplied by John Morris - Goldie River, 1970-71)

So, I believe the depth, richness and sheer novelty of our experiences in PNG (and maybe basic training) shaped quite profoundly our language and perhaps much more than this.

I do wonder if we could explore this a little more fully. I would be interested if a really good sample of you could get back to me with your experience with the remnant PNG and Army language that have stayed with you. If you could send me your experiences and words, they will form an integral part of the next **Chalkie Newsletter**.

This is something that really sets us apart and signifies a profound experience that we were lucky enough to live through.

Ian Ogston

Footnote: I thought I would check around a few people to see what others were thinking on this topic and I received this email from Greg Farr (Murray Barracks, 1970-71) in response to my request. See how you go at translating the Tok Pisin below from Greg:

Mi no savvi

Mi pinem pinem tasol mi no lookim

Yu tok wanem?

Tok I dai pinis.

BRISBANE SOCIAL NEWS

Queensland Chalkies will be meeting in **Brisbane** on 8 March at 10 am and the future of the group will be an important theme within the topics that Terry Edwinsmith has prepared. All Chalkies are welcome so please let Terry know now so sufficient seats are reserved (tedwinsmith@yahoo.com.au)

EDITORS' NOTE:

It has become increasingly difficult to prepare *The Chalkie Newsletter* more frequently over the last few years. There are probably many reasons for this. Some that come to mind are: we have, to a large degree, told the Chalkie story and recounted the personal stories of our time in the Army and PNG; our Army experience is retreating too far into the past; we are all busy with grandchildren or sitting in doctors' surgeries.

It is our intention to keep the Chalkie story alive with this Newsletter but the frequency of it will depend on what is available and much of this depends on what contributions that can be made by our Chalkies group. So, if the whim and fancy takes you, send new material in and it could be published. The greater the variety of contributions, the better the Newsletter experience will be. Give it a go and you may well be surprised at the positive response.

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