

# ARMI WANTOKS JOURNAL

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

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In this second publication of "Armi Wantoks", we are printing the stories of Kev and Lindy Horton. Kev was in Papua New Guinea in 1970/71 and was fortunate to go on patrol with a company of soldiers from 1 PIR at Taurama Barracks near Port Moresby. We had all heard about the possibility going on patrol in PNG but few of us actually had the chance. Kev's story brings to life this wonderful experience.

As well, Kev's wife, Lindy, has written about her time in PNG and this perspective is a most interesting and instructive one.  
I trust you will enjoy these accounts.

## NEWS

As we roll on to October, it is time for our annual bar-b-que and get-together. This will be held at Terry Edwinsmith's place on Saturday 27 th of October. This year, Captain Shirley Crane will be the guest speaker. Captain Crane is compiling a history of the RAAEC and has most interesting insights into the story of our time in PNG and its place in the overall history of the Corps.

It will be great to see everyone and to catch up on how the year has gone.

## On Patrol in New Ireland

### Kev Horton (PNG 1970-71)

As I walked through the oppressive heat on the tarmac at Port Moresby Airport, M16 slung across my shoulder, I had no idea that I was about to experience a month that still ranks as one of the highlights of my life.

I also didn't realize that my bride of four months, left in a two room flat in Boroko, would have her most difficult time in PNG - but I'll let Lindy tell you that story.

It was February, 1971 and loaded with soldiers from C Company, 1 PIR Taurama Barracks, the Caribou began the slow and at times daunting ascent over the rugged mountain backbone of PNG and headed ever downwards towards Kavieng, capital of New Ireland. I remember flying in to Kavieng and marveling at the colours. A sprinkling of small, verdant green islands ringed in pale green by the fringe reefs and the many hues of blue in the water. Then the shock of the blinding white crushed coral surface of the airstrip looking like a proud scar on the landscape. As we landed we were greeted by the ever-present blast of hot air that seemed to welcome every exit from a plane in PNG. Some headquarters' tents were already set up near the strip and our platoons quickly established a neatly aligned tent town nearby.

Within a couple of days we were ready to leave 'on Patrol'. What that meant and my role 'on Patrol' had so far never been discussed with me.

The only other Australians were the Major in charge of 'C Company' and the Bell helicopter pilot, Flight Lt Johnson, who was to resupply our patrols every three days. An address by the Major gave a general indication of the aim of the exercise. One platoon was to remain at HQ while the other two were to split, heading along either side of the island travelling from Kavieng to Namatanai, a distance of about 300 km, in a time span of approximately three and a half weeks. By good fortune, I was attached to the Northern patrol where the terrain was easier, with most walking being along established two wheel drive tracks, some formed crushed coral road and narrow walking tracks joining the irregularly spaced coastal native villages.

The broad aim of the patrol was to do a census of the village buildings as well as being a quasi "wave the flag" and recruiting drive and PR exercise for the pre-independent PNG army. With my newly acquired Sergeant's stripes, I was given little formal responsibility. My main role was to maintain and help develop the speaking of English among the soldiers and assist the two PNG Lieutenants in charge of our patrol where necessary. My assistance was seldom required as the Lieutenants and PNG NCO's ran a well organized but relaxed operation and the soldiers were very happy to enlighten me with some tricks of the trade in 'Machete 101' and alternative uses for army



equipment. I never ceased to be amazed by the soldiers' bush craft. I mixed easily with all the men but quickly learned that if I was to have any idea of what was going on, my Pidgin would have to develop very quickly. Each soldier carried a full pack including a weapon, mostly SLRs, one magazine of live ammunition, a three day ration pack, hutchies, hexamine stove, dixies and two changes of clothes.

The soldiers were always greeted enthusiastically by the village people who often presented us with fruit, coconuts and refreshing slightly effervescent coconut milk (lemonade) straight from the green coconut. Villagers were keen to swap any items from our three day ration packs for their local food (kaikai.) After a few days of army rations I took little convincing to bargain and tried quite a few new culinary delights and some not so delightful. Two of the soldiers were Tolais from the New Ireland area and when we reached Private Meta's home village, word had gone ahead and we were treated to a large feast including Mu Mu pig and vegetables steamed in banana leaves. Meta introduced me to his grandparents, (Tumbuna man and Tumbuna meri - pictured). Tumbuna Man's lava-lava barely covered the ugly raised rope like spear wound in his stomach which I was told was a souvenir of an old battle. There were a number of speeches of which I understood almost nothing but the smiles and body language got the message across that the army was highly regarded. ('Armi, em i nambawan!') You can rest assured that with these sorts of welcomes, no live ammunition was expended in anger during the month.

As the only European out on patrol, I was often the centre of attention for the young children. One enduring memory is of a group of about a dozen kids with bright eyes, dark brown bodies with yellowish-white bleached curly hair, closely crowded around me watching intently and silently as I boiled my pannekin on the hexamine stove. The silence was shattered when I handed out some army ration pack chocolate with an excited squabbling and babbling erupting which only stopped when an angry head man arrived and sent them all scurrying into the bushes and down the beach. From his tone of voice and stare in my direction I'm still not sure whether I was in trouble or the likliks.

Each day followed the pattern of early breakfast, break camp, walk for 3 to 4 hours, sweat like hell, rest during the midday heat(usually near the beach), sweat, walk for 1 or 2 hours in the afternoon, sweat, keep walking through the regular afternoon rain storms, set up camp with beds up off the ground on sapling structures newly cut each night with machetes, do an occasional village census (accuracy didn't seem a high priority), sweat, swim, talk around the campfire, early bed with resupply each three days by the tiny Bell Helicopter and repeat. If we had specific daily objectives, I was certainly not aware of them but averaging 15 to 20 km a day with an occasional rest day thrown in was relatively easy walking. Blisters came and went!



Many thoughts and images still fill my mind – beautifully clean villages with the ground swept clean by the meri's hand sweepers – a village church with intricately woven patterned walls – smiling, happy, shy children – serious head men – large coconut plantations – Chimbos from the highlands living in compounds to separate them from the local Tolais and working for European plantation owners – villagers hand spearing crayfish (kindam) at night on the fringe reefs using lit palm fronds to attract them – feasting on the crayfish – Sgt Malwasi painstakingly fashioning fishing sinkers in hollow green reeds using melted lead from some of his live ammunition – red beetle juice smiles – WW 2 relics scattered in many places close to the tracks – two young bare chested native boys playing 'golf' with knotted sticks along the golf course beside Namatanai airstrip – tramping an extra three kilometres to see a two headed coconut palm which was the pride of one village – thinking of the untapped tourist potential of the area and at the same time hoping that tourism would never happen.

Two experiences stand out in my mind's eye – one on the Patrol and the other on returning to Kavieng. The first was when our patrol was met by a Roman Catholic Missionary Priest who happened to come from Toowoomba, not too far from my home town of Kingaroy. The soldiers decided he was from my local area ('wantok bilong yu') and insisted that I stay for a while and that they would walk on and set up camp further down the road. The priest took delight in having a fellow Queenslander's ear to chew and showed me around the small self sufficient village he was responsible for and then proceeded to get me absolutely pie eyed on Scotch. It became dark and when I expressed concerns about getting to our camp he proceeded to drive us along the two wheel track in his old jeep (neither of us was capable of walking). The Lieutenants had set up two sentries who met us and, among much laughter from everyone, including the priest, they helped me stumble to my hutchie which had already been erected by the soldiers. I approached the next morning with trepidation expecting a dressing down but it was as if my behavior was almost expected and that it was no big deal. ('samting natin, wantok bilong yu,') literally translated as ('something nothing, he was from your local language area'), as if that excused everything. In light of this I also said nothing about the occasional empty soldier's bed I noticed at times when we camped near a village, even though the native soldiers had been told by the Major that there was to be no visiting the local meris at night. None of this appeared on the Lieutenants' patrol report and I'm rather thankful for that.

Our patrol returned to Kavieng about three days ahead of schedule due to making up time by walking non-stop during some prolonged wet days. Corporal Bello obtained permission to visit his father who was Luluai of a village on nearby New Hanover Island. He invited Private Meta, Sgt Malwasi and myself to join him. We were given the use of a small outboard powered flat bottomed landing type barge to get there. The trip over to New Hanover, with only Bello's local knowledge and no specific navigational equipment, had

many hairy moments. Bello stood on the prow and directed us through many shallow reefs and shoals with numerous large fish and small sharks outlined on the bottom in crystal clear water. We collected a beautifully decorated and painted catamaran, which was a homecoming gift for Bello, from a very small island village and towed it to his father's village on New Hanover. After meeting Bello's father (who spoke passable English), I was entertained by a plantation owner of German extraction while the others remained at the village for a couple of hours.

I arrived for the return journey to find a large live pig, with legs and muzzle bound securely, lying in the middle of the barge. It was a gift to 'C Company' from Bello's father. We headed back through a rainstorm using 'dead reckoning' and a lot of luck only to find that the pig had suffocated sometime during the trip. ('Pik, em i dai pinis' – the pig is dead.) This in no way affected the way the pig was welcomed on arrival or the way in which Meta, Bello and friends butchered the carcass using nothing but sharp machetes. I felt like an escapee from 'Lord of the Flies' as I posed with Pte Meta holding the boar's head. The pig was cut into small chunks and each piece was wrapped in banana leaves and cooked in a ground oven. Everyone, including the Major and helicopter pilot dug in to the cooked pork, which in spite of everything tasted delicious. It provided a fitting end to a terrific month.

I'm not sure whether the amoebic cysts I picked up came from the pigs or some of the village kaikai I'd swapped for army rations, but it took a couple of visits to the army hospital at Taurama to clear my system. Not the souvenir I intended bringing home but given the chance again, I wouldn't change a thing!

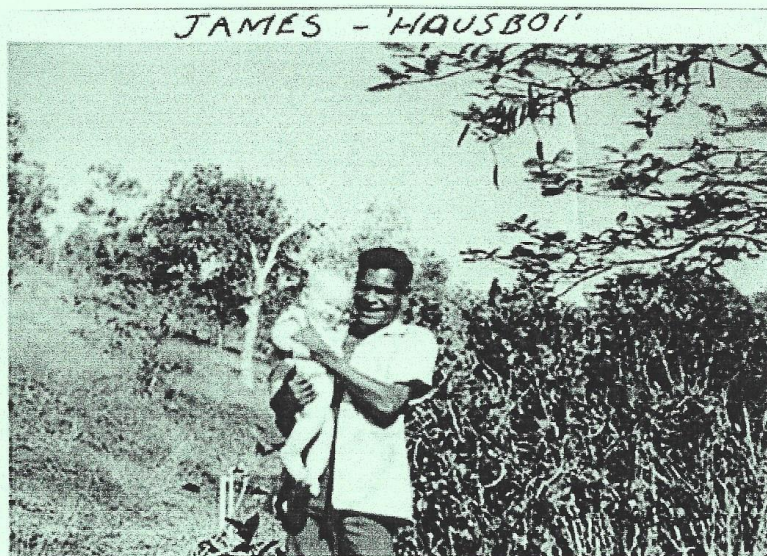
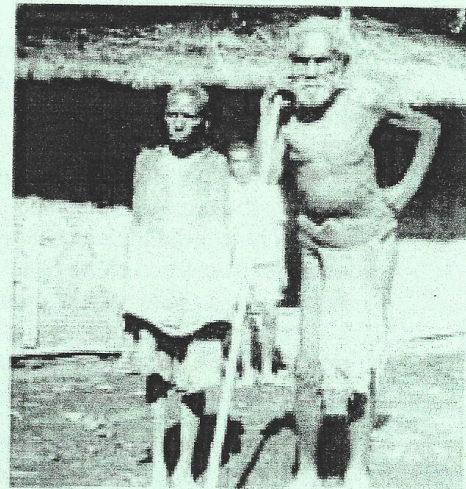
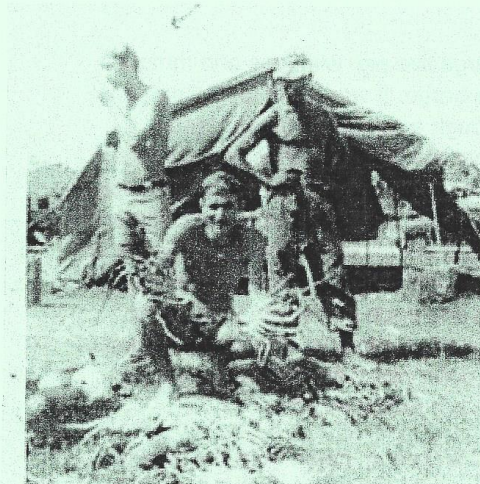


## PHOTOS

Left below: Lobsters caught at Kindam; Sgt. Malwasi, Sgt. Kev Horton and helicopter pilot (back).

Right below: Private Meta's grandparents

Bottom: James - Kev and Lindy's hausboi





## Life as an Army Wife in Papua New Guinea in 1970-71

Lindy Horton

As a 21 year old bride, I waited with much anticipation to the start of married life as the wife of a National Serviceman in Taurama Barracks in Papua New Guinea. It took five weeks for the 'call forward' to come through after suitable accommodation had been found in Boroko.

After the shock of the searing heat as I exited the plane at Port Moresby airport, the next shock was the 'boi wire' across the windows of our flat. I soon found it was necessary as we were broken into on one occasion while we slept. We woke to find the thief left the front door open and my handbag's contents strewn along the path. But, fortunately, the thief missed the wallet containing money we had withdrawn to buy a car! After that I was always a little on edge if I was at home at night by myself. Lying awake at night listening to the native house boys talking Pidgin around a fire on a vacant block outside was quite un-nerving.

I had been a teacher in Australia but was unable to get a teaching position in PNG at the time. Not long after arriving however, I obtained a job as the office manager for an American Survey company called Papua Nickel. There was a hut on the premises where the native groundsman and his wife lived. While there was the language barrier a friendly wave to the wife each day seemed to suffice. I was quite amazed when I had waved goodbye to a very pregnant lady one afternoon and was eagerly beckoned to the hut next morning to see a new-born baby lying on some leaves on the dirt floor of the hut.

Shortly after we arrived in Papua New Guinea, my mother passed away and my father and teenage sister flew up to spend Christmas together as my brother was already working there. Not long after they left my husband Kev was sent on Patrol for a month in Kavieng. While this proved to be one of the best times for him it was by far the worst for me. As I had spent most of the preceding weeks with my family, I had not built up any local support network and the other army wives were about sixteen kilometres away at Taurama Barracks. Our newly introduced neighbours had invited me to the movies with them. Because of the rain, you sat in the car during downpours with cut potato wiped across the windscreen to keep it clear. You kept cool on deck chairs beside the car for the rest of the evening. We arrived home to find our flats had been flooded. On opening the door, the first things to float out were our Wedding Album and the last photos of my mother. Luckily another tenant was a photographer and rushed these to his studio for drying.

The next morning I decided to drive out to the barracks to see if I could get in contact with Kev in New Ireland. I arrived at Colonel Lange's office calm and collected but then burst into hysterical weeping and scared the poor man half to death. Like all good men in a crisis - he called his wife! A group of soldiers was sent to clean up the flat and, much to my amusement and dismay, I found everything washed in the washing machine - including my leather shoes and bags!! Every cloud has a silver lining and on Kev's return we were given an Army House in the barracks.

Our 'House Boi' was James. His set wage was a grand total of \$14 a fortnight to clean our house, wash and iron and look after the yard. It didn't seem right to us at the time but it was an expectation that all married couples would employ a 'houseboi' to assist in providing employment. He lived in a small two room 'boihaus' behind our house. James spoke no English, was about twenty-eight years old, was Mission trained and washed, starched and ironed everything. He was most offended when I said I'd wash my own underwear. (I just couldn't stand the starched bras any longer!)

My sister arrived from Scotland with her six month old son and James was delighted to have a baby to look after. It was quite a contrast of black and white. I remember our first big party in our new army house. I cooked all day with James cleaning up after me. Each time a spoon was put down I would turn around to use it again to find it had been washed up and put back in the drawer. James sat on the back steps looking in during the night and enjoyed the party food we took out to him. Kev explained that we would be sleeping in and that the house cleaning would have to wait until we were awake. I woke to clinking bottles and was a little cross until I realized it was 11 am!. When I walked out into the kitchen, not only was all the washing up done but the lounge room was stripped of furniture. It had been carried out into the yard and the floor was washed and fresh polish applied with James impatiently waiting to start the polishing machine when we woke up. There were certainly benefits to having a houseboi!!

I don't think I ever got used to the nights alone when Kev was Duty Sergeant. On one particular night there had been a major problem with the 'Labour Line' men involving 'payback' for an axe murder near the Boroko Hotel. I knew Kev would have to assist in checking the Labour Line accommodation area outside the army compound during the night. I guess there had to be some drawbacks for a fairly idyllic existence.

We spent many lazy weekends at the beach lolling about on rubber mats until someone pointed out that there were deadly sea snakes all around. There were many parties and movie nights at the Mess and it was interesting to see the interpretations put on some themes by the native soldiers. The native wives never entered the mess proper and only viewed things from the outskirts while the men partied on.

On a picnic to Brown River Kev nearly opted for an early divorce by telling a group of natives who were selling sets of spears that "Missus laik baiem spias" and I was instantly surrounded!!

Kev seriously considered staying on after National Service was cancelled but I was getting a bit homesick. I had only one trip home during our time up there.

Most of my memories are positive and I consider it was an incredible way to start married life.