Armi Nius

PIB-NGIB-HQ-PIR Association Newsletter No 3, 2021

Theme: Army aviation in TPNG

This newsletter, and the next one, provides our former Army aviation members with the chance to tell short stories and show some photos of their experiences in the Territory. Just as general aviation was, and remains, vital in PNG likewise the role of Defence aviation assets was a vital operational capability assisting in many tasks from reconnaissance, search and rescue, provision of mobility, logistical support, and aid to the civil community.

In recent years, our diverse Membership has been boosted by a substantial intake of former Servicemen with Army aviation experience in PNG (and elsewhere). These Servicemen, particularly from 183 (Independent) Recce Flight, have provided most of the articles and photos which follow. We also include other material for those Members with other interests. Defence aviation stories and photos are welcome for our future Newsletters.

Annual General Meeting, Sunday 25 July

Our AGM in **Brisbane** provides Members with a summary of projects & activities and an opportunity to join the elected Committee. The Committee is looking for **New Members** to promote our organisation and contribute to existing and new projects. In the 15 years since we adopted our inclusive name, our Assn has grown in vision and size thanks to the very talented and dedicated Members who have served on the Committee in the past.

This year's AGM will celebrate the 70th Birthday of the **Pacific Islands Regiment** which was re-formed in 1951 around Port Moresby. Keep an eye out for Email details of how we will celebrate this Birthday during the AGM and prepare to join us for the Lunch then the AGM.

25 July was chosen to coincide with the Special Military Event being held on that date in **Port Moresby**, organised by our brother organisation, **KARS** (Kumul Association of Retired Servicemen and Women Inc). KARS, with co-operation from the PNGDF, will promote several initiatives such as national recognition of Kokoda Day including the role of the PIB.

183 Recce Flight Anecdotes

by Russ Wade

Introduction to the Pacific Islands Regiment and TPNG

"*You'll like the PIR, it's good soldiering*." CO Lt. Col. Ron Lange's 1971 welcome to the PIR still rings in my ears. Being in the PIR was like living in a continuing episode of Michael Palin's "Ripping Yarns". No one would ever believe what an incredible adventure it was. Much of that adventure was made possible by the pilots and support crew of 183 Recce Flight.

It was custom in the PIR to be sent out into the bush with your soldiers so that you had to learn Pidgin (Tok Pisin) from them. The soldiers were instructed to only talk Pidgin to you. Sergeant Kirung came from Gasmata in West New Britain and spoke a very rapid dialect of Pidgin. He understood English, but refused to speak it, so I learnt Pidgin very quickly.

Within a couple of weeks, we were deployed to a Battalion exercise at Brown River, near Port Moresby, where we were pitted against a troop of SAS soldiers, led by a Lt Rob McBride. In support, the CO had a Sioux helicopter and I am fairly sure the pilot was the late Terry Hayes, as I remember hearing the story about how he crashed in Vietnam.

Also, in support were two Iroquois helicopters from 9 Squadron. I was based at Battalion HQ near the landing zone. The RAAF pilots were Vietnam-experienced and came into the landing zone doing their characteristic tail down landing manoeuvre, the lead chopper almost landing on top of the Sioux helicopter. The CO had words and it didn't happen again!

Recce for my first patrol

My first patrol was a Civic Action project, to do road blasting for a future road from Kagua to Erave in the Southern Highlands. To reconnoitre the site, I was accompanied by a Captain Dick Warren from the Chief Engineer's office in HQ TPNG Command and the pilot was Terry Hayes. We landed at the site on a small space near the Kiap's hut and examined the very metamorphic white limestone cliff.

When we went to leave, Terry could not get sufficient power for lift off, probably due to our all-up weight and the height above sea level. We were about 14 km along a perfectly good road to Kagua and about 5 km along bush track to Erave. So, what did we do? We decided to walk to Erave. Terry radioed back to base that we were "on the ground" between Kagua and Erave and walking through to Erave.

Somehow this was interpreted that we had crashed between Kagua and Erave and search planes began flying over us, but unable to see us under the canopy of the bush track. Terry was in an orange flying suit, Dick was in a green flying suit and I was in jungle greens, so we looked quite a sight.

As we met locals along the track, I told them in my best pidgin "*Helicopter balus i porn daun, na mipela i wokabout i go long hap long Erave*". The locals also interpreted that we had

crashed and lived and must have had some god-like powers to have survived. The village "singaut" man called out to the next village, in the local Kewa dialect, so I don't know what he said.

Needless to say, at the next village, they all came out to see us, with shock and awe on their faces. We slogged on and eventually came to the Erave River. There was a V-shaped cane bridge over a raging river. No one of us would have survived if we fell. Terry agreed to go last. Dick went first. When I crossed, I could hear vines starting to snap. When Terry crossed, the vines really started to snap and we thought he may not make it. He did and we walked onto Erave village, where the local Kiap welcomed us, much relieved as he had heard about the search. He radioed to Mendi that we were all alive and well. We stayed the night with the Kiap and were picked up the next day.
I dare say that recovery and restart of the helicopter would have been a challenge for the crews of 183 Recce Flight.

The patrol went ahead and lasted a month. Captain Warren ordered gelignite, which was great for cracking rock, but not lifting it. The drill breakers could drill holes, so my soldiers chipped away with crow bars, tied onto trees with toggle ropes. We blasted away for three weeks and the CO arrived and arranged for some ammonium nitrate, which helped move the rock. Very dangerous work, but no one fell or got hurt.

Reconnaissance in the Pilatus Porter

I remember doing a Border recce with my Company Commander, Major Glen Dennis, flying in a Porter out of Lae with the late Lyn Hummerston. Lyn was doing pre-flight checks around the aircraft and I decided to look into the air intake. I called Lyn around and showed him a socket, which I spotted in the air intake. He stayed calm and he thanked me for the observation.

I remember we flew past a Skyvan, that had just gone into the side of a mountain a few weeks before. A gripping reminder of the dangers of flying in PNG.

We went via Daru and then came back via Wabag, where we overnighted at a hotel. We didn't have much to drink, but Lyn decided to have a Cherry Swiss liqueur, as was custom to have a liqueur in those days.

Next morning, Lyn was sick under the wing of the aircraft and declared himself unfit to fly. Major Dennis happened to meet an honorary member of our Mess, who was doing a “milk run” back to Moresby in a Britten-Norman Islander aircraft. We left Lyn to get better and did the "milk run", including some hairy take offs at Minj and Banz.

Major Dennis was replaced by Major John "Drifty" Rayward, as OC Support Company. The nickname "Drifty" came from his atypical military way of being imprecise, for example, "The company will form up, oh…, around 7ish".

Major Rayward conducted another Border recce, with me, and again Lyn was our Porter pilot. We went to Kiunga in the Western District, where we met and stayed with the

Assistant District Commissioner. The photo depicts us at breakfast, where I was amazed at the cooked breakfast, so close to the border.

From left: Assistant District Commissioner-Kiunga, Major John “Drifty” Rayward, Lt Lyn Hummerston and Lt Russ Wade, 1973.

The recce was a success and Major Rayward planned a good month-long patrol, with a combination of foot patrols and riverine operations, since I had the assault boats, and civic action.

The Border patrol

The border patrol was conducted in August 1973. Support Company was squeezed into a Hercules, where the Signals Officer, Jim Yates and myself had to stand on the flight deck, as there were no seats. We were flying into Telefomin, when the C130 pilot called out "too high, too fast" over the end of the strip and aborted the landing. Being a one-way airstrip, the pilot banked left and we just missed the trees. The G forces made Jim and I sink to the floor, both looking like "Jabba the Hutt".

We were transferred to Ningerum and Kiunga by Caribou aircraft. I did a riverine leg to the Border and returned via Rumginae, walking through to Kiunga. We had a Sioux helicopter from 183 Recce Flight in support, piloted by Lt Dave Griffiths.

My platoon reached the Indonesian border where we needed a ration resupply. There was very low cloud and Dave found us by zeroing in on me, pressing the Pressel switch on the radio. We were in the only clearing, which was a landing pad on the Indonesian side of the border. The photo shows Dave landing in Indonesian territory.

Lt Dave Griffiths, 183 Recce Flight with ration resupply in Irian Jaya in August 1973.

When we returned to Kiunga, we had a few days to do some Civic Action tasks, such as a School house for the local Mission.

Late one afternoon, Major Rayward ordered me to take an Admin boat down the Fly River to rescue the riverine patrol that was struggling to get up the rapidly flooding Fly River. Assault Pioneer Private Aureke and I took turns at the Tiller, and we caught up with the assault boat just before dark. We started towing them, but the drag was too great, so we transferred the soldiers to the lead boat, emptying the fuel cans into the last can, which lasted until we could see the lights of Kiunga. We dragged ourselves along by the mangrove roots, finally reaching Kiunga about 9.00 pm. I was exhausted.

I had brought explosives with me, as I was a great believer in Assault Pioneers carrying what they should carry. We received a request to do some quarry blasting at Oksapmin. Dave was tasked to fly me and my Batman, Private Bude, up to Oksapmin, with a satchel full of explosives in the bubble of the Sioux and I had a box of electric detonators in my thigh pocket.

We were nearly there, when Dave flew into a steep-sided valley that was just swirling with an electrical storm. Fortunately, the electric detonators were all tightly wound up, so I figured there'd be no induced current in the detonators. Nevertheless, it was too unsafe to fly and we returned to Kiunga.

The second tour

I returned to PNG in late 1982, to look after all the PNGDF facilities, including the Air Transport Squadron, which occupied the former 183 Recce Flight facilities at Lae. Once again, I flew with Lyn Hummerston on a few occasions.

I have great recollections of 183 Recce Flight's contributions to the development of PNG before Independence and until the formation of Air Transport Squadron. The full story of 183's contribution needs to be told, by all those who can contribute to the unit history.

Russ Wade, 2019
Assault Pioneer Platoon Commander, 1 PIR, 1971-1973
Facilities Engineer, HQ PNGDF, 1983-1984

(Lae about 1970, photo by Dave Williams)

Comedy corner

Military Leaders and their wives

Prime Minister Churchill and his wife, Clementine, invited General de Gaulle with his wife, Yvonne, to visit them at Chequers.

When the subject turned to de Gaulle's forthcoming retirement, Clementine asked Madame de Gaulle what she was mostly looking forward to in the quiet years ahead.

"A penis," the French woman replied without hesitation.

A stunned silence followed, for all of five seconds, until Charles de Gaulle coughed,

then said, "Actually, *ma cherie*, I think ze English call it '*appiness*'."

Closure of 183 (Independent) Recce Flt in Lae 1976

by Brig Ross Grant (Ret'd) AM

It is fair to say that serving in 183 Recce Flt was one of the least regimental experiences all members of the unit would have in their military lives. Apart from the morning and afternoon roll call parades, there were few OC's parades, no organised PT or military training. Indeed, after Independence was proclaimed on 16 Sep 1975, officers and senior ranks weren't required to do the normal duties associated with serving in the PNGDF. The only onerous duty was to be the unit duty officer and duty NCO, which meant one had to keep an eye on the soldiers' boozer, and ensure they kept out of trouble after hours. Not that there were many behavioural problems as it seemed the soldiers were able to sort out problems themselves with minimal intervention from senior ranks and officers. This is despite high levels of alcohol consumptions, some relatively immature young men and a great deal of 'all ranks' socialising.

Some of this may be credited to the usual strong characters in the unit. In the last few years of 183 Recce Flight's time in PNG, these characters included Cpl John McCully and Cpl Alan Wilcox, whose daily task in the operations centre was to maintain the aircraft records and manage the production schedule of the workshop; but in truth, they worked closely with the aviation operations staff in the form of Sgt 'Mustard' Keen and Cpl 'Sludge' Hanlon. Within the workshop the senior ranks, including the ASM Warrant Officer Class 1 Jim Jones (now deceased) the Hangar Artificer, SSgt John Crawford, Sgt Phil Watson, Sgt Dave Melandri, Sgt Fred Rues, Sgt Bob Fraser, Sgt Brian Reardon, Sgt Mick Corkery, Sgt Trevor Taylor, and CPL Barry Ahern RAAOC, all of whom provided excellent leadership and managerial skills. They used their strong personalities and experience to ensure that the unit remained happy and effective.

PNG gained its independence on the 16th September 1975. The event was celebrated all over the fledgling nation and Independence Day ceremonies were held on all major PNGDF bases. At Igam Barracks, these culminated in a large 'Sing Sing', where local villagers and indigenous members of the PNGDF and Police Force, combined to outdo one another dressing in traditional dress and representing the regions from where they came. It was a spectacular day of dancing, singing, feasting and excitement and for the expatriates serving in Lae, an opportunity to see a massive PNG cultural display. It was also a little intimidating as the thousands of local people, who flooded into Lae for these celebrations, far outnumbered the few white faces in the crowd by about 20 to 1. At the end of a very long, hot and tiring day, it was an emotional experience for all to see the Australian flag lowered for the last time and replaced with the colourful and very appropriate flag of PNG.

It also meant decisions on the future of 183 Recce Flt were close at hand. With this in mind in November 1975, I sought permission to have my first leave in 14 months. The unit OC, Major Rowan Monteith agreed to my Xmas leave despite no word being received on the unit's short-term future. I had only been on leave in Victoria for a week in late December, when I received a phone call summoning me back to the unit and in the words of Maj Monteith, 'we are to have the unit packed and out of PNG by 1 April 76'.

So, the 'die was cast'. In the remaining three months several operational tasks had to be completed (including the recovery of a crashed aircraft Pilatus Porter A14-690 in Vanimo), the remaining aircraft had to be flown back to Oakey, the unit packed up and shipped home, together with the removal of all the families and single soldiers – it was to be completed as soon as possible.

183 Recce Flt Workshop. Workshop members in early 1976 posing for one of their last photos. From left to right starting from the back row, the names are listed below:

Back Row: *Cpl John McCully (seated) MCS NCO, Sgt Mick Corkery NCO B1 Store, Cfn Steve Smith Airframe Fitter, Cpl Terry Martin EIR (Deceased), Sgt Phil Watson Engine NCO, L/Cpl John Addison Armament Fitter, Cfn Brett Danvers B1 Storeman, Sgt Dave Melandri Airframe NCO, Cfn Graham MacDonald, Unit Driver, Cfn Denis Miles Unit Recovery Mechanic.*

Middle Row: *Cpl Kev Kenefick Airframe Fitter, Cpl John 'Obie" O'Brien Airframe Fitter, Cpl Bruce Ryan RAAOC B2 Store, Cfn P W Smith Airframe Fitter, Cpl Allen Wilcox MCS Clerk, WO1 Jimmy Jones ASM (Deceased), Cfn Tony Hart Airframe Fitter, SSGT John Crawford, Hangar Artificer, Cfn 'Bull' Long Airframe Fitter, Cpl Barry Ahern, RAAOC the Corkery's, Cpl Alan Wilcox MCS NCO, Cfn George Zyla Airframe Fitter, Cpl Dave Clodd Radio Mechanic NCO.*

Front Row: *Pte Peter Baldrey RAAOC (Deceased) B2 Store, Cfn Darcy Wilson Engine Fitter – and the unit mascot 'Croc', Capt Ross Grant OC, Cfn 'Benny' Hill (Deceased) EIR, Cpl Rod Smith Airframe Fitter.*

Most of the closing down and packing went smoothly and, on the 1st April 1976, the last four families - the Matheson's, the Grant's, the Reardon's and the Corkery's - arrived back in Toowoomba to the first flush of a cold winter. The unit was home on Australian soil for the first time since 1967, and what remained of the unit was in an untidy pile of boxes stored in the tin sheds in 'Temporary Oakey', belonging to the 1st Aviation Regiment, on the Army Airfield, Oakey, Queensland. The final act of disbandment of 183 (Indep) Recce Flt was completed later in the year with the despatch of all remaining stores to 11 Sup Bn at

Meeandah, and a modest reunion of the returnees, held in what is now the Oakey Base Gym.

Lae Airfield prior to the departure of the remaining Aircraft to Australia

Four Sioux and two remaining Porters were flown home as a composite flight in an interesting island-hopping exercise to Oakey some weeks prior to closing of the facilities at Lae airport. Amongst the military stores brought home was a considerable amount of memorabilia including a Beaufort Bomber propeller now mounted in the Frank McNamara VC club at Oakey, containing the names of all those who served at 183 (Indep) Recce Flt; a fully refurbished Japanese Mountain Gun, now displayed in front of the HQ of 161 Recce Sqn, Darwin, but soon to be re-located to Oakey; and a Totem board, which is still displayed at the Army Aviation Officers' Mess Oakey.

A Workshop in Boxes!

The unit members dispersed to other aviation units at Oakey and elsewhere. Several low-key reunions have been held since disbandment, but for those who served in the unit in the early days, or much later, the PNG experience remains locked in their hearts. The workshop was a proud part of a well-respected unit. It had a wonderful record of service and, although it doesn't have the wartime experiences and record of 161 Recce Flight, it still has

something to be remembered for – good, honest and worthwhile service to the Australian Defence Force and the PNG nation.

"Bang"
by Roger Dundas

In August 1973, the 183rd (183 Recce Flight, Lae PNG) had been carrying out support of the Pacific Islands Regiment at Cape Gloucester on the western tip of New Britain. I was despatched on the morning of the 15th to take Army Sioux 673 back to Lae for servicing. Maintenance duties completed, I set out in the late afternoon for Cape Gloucester, a distance of 125 nm, 60 of which was over the Vitiaz Strait, a lumpy bit of water that divided New Britain and mainland Papua New Guinea.

About 40 miles into the overwater section, at about 1500' and travelling at a phenomenal 60 knots, the much feared "loud bang" was heard from the engine behind me, and my puckering parts did just that. Eyes wide, heart pumping and all my functioning bits on full alert, I quickly determined that the engine was still running. Phew, good start. Oil temperature rising - must be the cooling fan belts blown. Probably means I've got about ten minutes until the engine gets so overheated that it stops. The major problem with that scenario was that I still had twenty minutes to run until landfall and the prospect of ditching into Vitiaz Strait in the late afternoon with a big swell rolling was far from inviting.

"Pan" to the power of three, then watch the oil temp needle track slowly toward the red. Try to resurrect the ditching brief from all the other thoughts crowding the frontal lobe.

The temp needle stabilised at the bottom of the red. Against all the anecdotal evidence it appeared the second of the two cooling fan belts had held together and not been thrown by the departure of the first. You bloody beauty!

Ten minutes more of tension at 60 knots, all senses alert to impending failure, I reached the beach at Aisega Village on the south-western tip of New Britain, landed on the sand and confirmed my diagnosis. One cooling belt turning happily. Cancel the "Pan" and track coastal, with the far more inviting beach below, to land at the base camp at Cape Gloucester. Puckering parts put back on standby.

Lt Roger Dundas, 183 (Independent) Recce Flight, Lae 1972-74. Returned to PNG 1975-77.

REST IN PEACE

(first in a series honouring ADF Servicemen who flew in PNG)

From the 161 Website:

Thomas William Guivarra MID

161 (Indep.) Recce Flt, 23 Sep 66 - 27 Sep 67

Second Lieutenant Guivarra joined the Australian Regular Army on 16 January 1964. He completed his flying training and was commissioned into the Royal Australian Artillery on 24 March 1965. He served in Papua New Guinea Command with 16 Army Light Aircraft Squadron [October to December 1965] and joined 161st (Independent) Reconnaissance Flight in Vietnam on 23 September 1966.

As a fixed wing pilot, he displayed a remarkable skill on visual reconnaissance missions. He was responsible for many new sightings of enemy locations and constantly showed great determination in following up small indications of the presence of the enemy. His ability to note minute detail invariably led to more significant findings.

In most instances, he would not have been able to secure such detail information when observing from a safe height. With a complete disregard for his personal safety, he constantly flew low over target areas and was fired upon on numerous occasions.

During a tour of duty in which he flew over 800 hours, his personal skill and cool daring enabled him to secure the information he sought. His reports were of such value that immediate artillery or airstrikes were normally directed against the enemy locations.

By his aggressive flying and determination to seek the enemy by day and night without regard to his own safety. Second Lieutenant Guivarra has set a high standard as an Army Pilot. By his personal efforts, he has contributed significantly to the success of operations of his unit and the 1st Australian Task Force in Vietnam.

** Text of citation has been copied from an Australian Army Aviation Newsletter, Vol 2 No 7 dated April 1968.*

[Records held by Dave Williams indicate that T/Capt Guivarra served in 183 (Indep.) Recce Flight from 10/7/68 (other records state 30/10/67) until 14/1/70. Capt Guivarra died on 8 May 2004.]

BOOK REVIEWS

R. L. Lawrence, *A Short History of the 'Pacific Islands Monthly' Magazine,* 2019, Chatswood Press, Chatswood NSW

ISNI: 0000 0000 6765 7158 (68 pages, B & W photos, appendices) Cost: $25.95 approx

The *Pacific Islands Monthly* was a magazine, published from 1930 to 2000, informing the peoples of the Pacific, including PNG, about their uncommon cultures and their common issues. Australian journalist Bob Lawrence was introduced to the magazine (by Sean Dorney) while working in Rabaul for the PNG Broadcasting Commission during 1975. Now Bob has self-published a booklet dealing with the varied contents of the magazine during its life span, its early editors and other writers, and the social lunches which drew guests from overseas to the magazine's publishing base in Sydney.

Reading the pages will stir memories of names from the past:

- from the Pacific (Queen Salote, Jimmy Stevens, Colonel Rabuka, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Michael Somare, Gibbes Sepik Airways, Kon Tiki, Papuan Air Lines)

- from the USA (Michael Rockefeller, James A. Michener, Margaret Mead)

- from Australia (Errol Flynn, Colonel John Kerr, Eddie Ward)

- from elsewhere (President Soekarno, Dr Milan Brych, President Francois Mitterand)

As well, there are stories reported which may <u>not</u> ring a bell:

- After the end of the Second World War, Japanese troops were still active in West New Guinea (now Irian Jaya) in **1946** because the Dutch Government had not attempted to remove them

- The Princess Elizabeth **Wedding Gift Fund** raising 1,533 Pounds from the people of Fiji

- The Whitlam Government unilaterally **withdrawing $50 million** from the PNG Budget on the eve of Independence

- Tonga selling 2,000 passports to **Hong Kong residents** seeking an alternative home after the 1997 handover to China

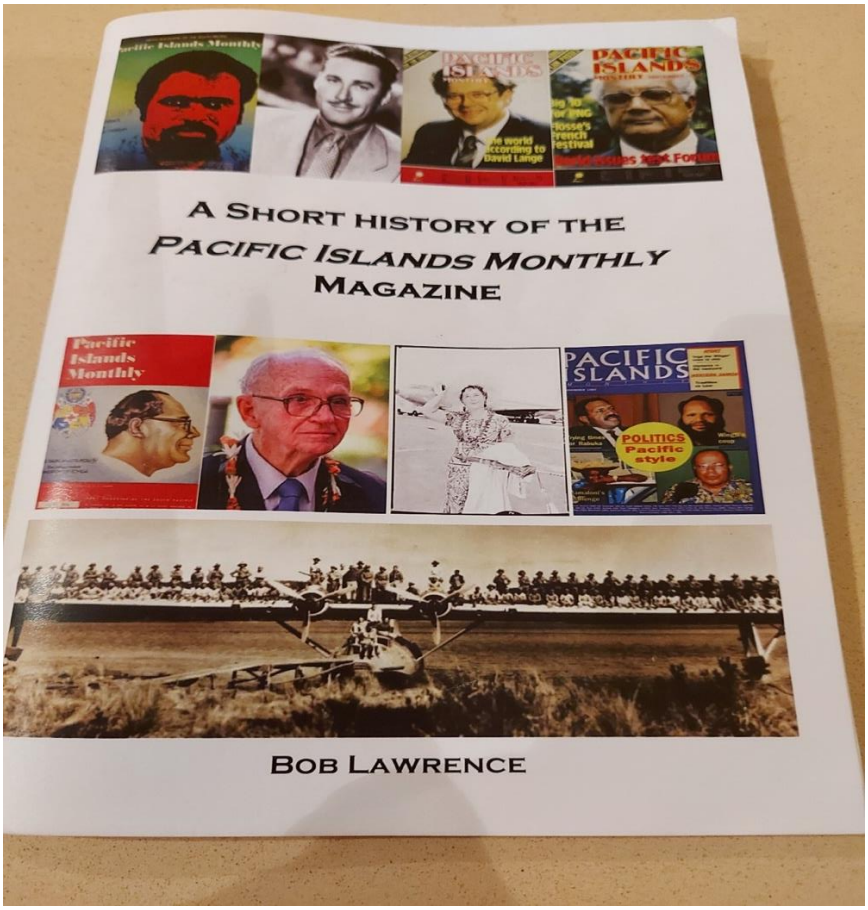
The booklet includes a chapter with short biographies of the key staff behind the publication such as Stuart Inder and appendices about frequent contributors such as Keith Jackson. The founder and long-time editor of the magazine was the politically-conservative Robbie Robson who led the publication for 25 years. Robson wrote stories about shipping services,

the search for oil and gas, and the vastly-different War years. He would have turned over in his grave when former Navy Serviceman and Communist, Malcolm Salmon, became Associate Editor of the magazine in the 1980s. Salmon had controversially interviewed President Ho Chi Minh (in Hanoi, in French)!

While each chapter contains references to surprising political events and humorous European adventures, perhaps the most interesting chapters for former Army Servicemen might be chapter 2 (Second World War) or chapter 4 (Post-War reconstruction and political independence). For example, in chapter 4 the magazine reported on new democratic institutions in PNG and the Solomons where elected representatives out-numbered government appointees for the first time. Also covered in that chapter were Fiji's independence celebrations in 1970, talk of independence for Bougainville, the good fortune for PNG coffee bean producers when world prices sky-rocketed for a few years, and much more.

Very limited copies of the booklet are available for sale from the author, Bob Lawrence - (boblaw@bigpond.net.au)

by Gregory J. Ivey



Newsletter editors: Greg Ivey IVEYGJ@GMAIL.COM

Ian Ogston ozoggies2@gmail.com