



Armi Nius

NEWSLETTER OF THE PIB-NGIB-HQ-PIR ASSOCIATION

Patron: Major D. D. Graham (Ret'd)

4/2025

From the editors

Welcome to our fourth Newsletter for 2025. This edition, the last for the year, focuses on Remembrance Day: what it means today and what it might mean in the future. Like Anzac Day, Remembrance Day is now firmly established as an important event in Australia's cultural life.

We also bring the usual array of articles we hope will interest members of the Association, including two articles remembering Michael Jeffery, an amazing story of a patrol from David Wilkins, along with updates and other stories from those who have served in Papua New Guinea.

We hope you've enjoyed reading *Armi Nius* during the year, and we'll continue with our mission in 2026: keeping alive one of Australia's most important stories. As always, we welcome feedback from Association members.

Norm Hunter, Ian Ogston, Steve Beveridge

From the President

2025 has been a year of good progress for our Association. Not only did we participate in our regular events - Anzac Day, the AGM, Kokoda Day, Remembrance Day - we also went further. Some of us joined PIB & NGIB War Veteran Jock Wilkinson (aged 104) and his family for Anzac Day in Leeton, NSW.



We also accepted the invitation of the new PIR Veterans League of Papua New Guinea to attend their inaugural PIR-RPIR Anniversary Dinner in Port Moresby. There we enjoyed meeting current and former leaders of the PNGDF and welcomed their interest in our Association.

Sadly, several respected members of our Association passed away in 2025 while our unit also gained new members. The elected Committee members have all contributed at a high level as reflected in the pages of this popular newsletter.

We continued working cooperatively with other Second World War units and exchanging newsletters with comrade Battalions from the Kokoda campaign. In addition, the Executive is supporting PIB & NGIB recognition at major museums in New South Wales, including the Infantry Museum at Singleton barracks. Recognition of these wartime and post-war servicemen and women is our long-term objective - more than just awareness.

We thank PNG residents and diplomats in Australia for their friendship and co-operation during 2025. We congratulate the Oro Provincial Government and our High - Commission in Port Moresby on their joint recognition of the Papuan Infantry Battalion, seen at the new Memorial erected on the Kokoda Plateau in November. It was a great pleasure this year to be in PNG and to witness and to observe the enthusiastic celebrations for PNG's 50th Anniversary of Independence in Port Moresby and across all the Provinces.

I would like to thank all members and partners for their warm friendship and for actively supporting our Association mission in 2025. I wish everyone a safe, happy and restful Christmas as well as a healthy New Year.

Greg Ivey

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Remembrance Day 2025

Western Australia

A Service was conducted on 11 November by two members of the Cottesloe RSL Sub-Branch at the "Summer House" adjacent to the War Memorial Town Hall. This is located within the grounds of the Cottesloe Civic Centre, the site of the Town of Cottesloe administration.

It was held for the benefit of Town staff who are isolated from such an event due to work commitments at that time each year. Approximately forty staff attended and were handed a poppy to recognise the day.

A short address was given by the Sub-Branch Vice President, Owen Ashby, ex- 6RAR SVN, (second tour) and Sub-Branch Membership Officer Graeme Johnson recited the Ode.



Positive comments were received following the address and those available were then invited into the RSL Club room to see the various items of memorabilia. This



room, on the lower level of the building, was the former billiard room of the grand residence prior to the Town's ownership. Pictured above left is Owen standing in front of the War Memorial Town Hall; above right is the strikingly designed summer house which enhances the Civic Centre Grounds.

Graeme Johnson (Association WA rep)

Brisbane



As is customary, the Brisbane Remembrance Day ceremony was held at the Shrine of Remembrance in Anzac Square, where the eternal flame burns night and day. The Governor witnessed the Qld RSL President and other dignitaries delivering addresses, and wreaths were laid at the Shrine, including by our President Greg Ivey.

Prior to the ceremony, as is also customary, those who served in PNG gathered at the Kokoda memorial on the lawn to quietly acknowledge the courage and sacrifices made by those who served in the Kokoda campaign. That was followed by a visit to the military museum below the Shrine, where the Association President, Greg Ivey, placed a poppy on the wall plaque dedicated to the PIB and NGIB battalions.

Following these reflections, members enjoyed cold drinks and Lunch at a hotel nearby.

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Remembrance Day: What are we remembering?

If you visit the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, stand at the entrance and look back, your eyes follow the avenue down to Lake Burley Griffin, and then across the water to Parliament House: a direct visual line to the centre of our national government.



The architects who designed the planned city of Canberra, Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahoney Griffin, invited us to link who we are as Australians today with those who made great sacrifices in past wars, including many who made the ultimate sacrifice of their lives.

On Remembrance Day 2025, it's timely to ask: In what ways do we make that link today? What are the stories we tell that characterise Remembrance Day in Australia?

In November, as we have done since 1919 on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, people in cities and towns across Australia attended ceremonies, often at war memorials, or paused for a minute's silence wherever they were, to show respect and express their gratitude to those who have given their lives or sacrificed much while fighting to protect our freedom.

Two weeks later, on the other side of the Pacific, people across the United States of America also paused on a special day to express respect and gratitude. The national holiday for Thanksgiving is held each year on the last Thursday of November. It's the day American families and communities come together to commemorate the landing of the pilgrim fathers (and mothers) at Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1621. It's the one day of the year Americans come together and express collective gratitude for what they have, not what they don't have.



Thanksgiving at Plymouth, (Jennie Brownscombe)

We don't celebrate Thanksgiving in Australia (except on Norfolk Island), though perhaps we celebrate similar sentiments together at Christmas. Our closest public holiday to Thanksgiving is probably Anzac Day, due to the theme of gratitude that pervades the spirit of the day. So here's a question that was sometimes asked by young people when I was a high school principal:

Why do we have the public Holiday on Anzac Day rather than on Kokoda Day? After all, the Anzacs fought a long way away from Australia and our country was never under threat in that war. It was in the Second World War, and those who fought the Kokoda campaign really were fighting to defend our country. Which should we be more grateful for?

When I was asked that question by a young person, I responded by saying that it shouldn't be a competition: Anzac Day is the day we pause and express our gratitude to every man and woman who died or suffered in all wars and made great sacrifices to defend our freedom. The Anzac campaign is just the catalyst for that.

It has been a long road through the 20th century to have Anzac Day established as the day Australians honour those who suffered and died in war. It came under strong criticism in the 60s, being branded by many as a day for glorifying war, but that was never the Anzac story, and it was young people in the 80s who recognised it as a day, like Thanksgiving, to express gratitude. That deeply human message is now firmly established as a cultural event in the Australian year.

Yet the young people who asked that question at high school have a point. How often do we hear the Kokoda story told in comparison to the Anzac story? Which campaign was more important to the freedoms and cultural values of today's Australia? Patrick Lindsay has published the responses from young people who have walked the Kokoda Track. Here's one:

Kokoda has given me my spirit. I can recognise it, and though I cannot yet describe it, I know it. Memories, photos and physical reminders are all that remain, yet I will forever hold a part of Kokoda inside me. I have the spirit now. It has shown me who I am, and for that I will never let it go. I now know what matters in life.

(Linda)

And another one:

I'm not known as an emotional person, but seeing the real-life effect World War 2 at Kokoda had on thousands of families proved too much for me. As I sat in front of the small memorial, reading about the battle on Brigade Hill, I wept. I cried for about 20 minutes, thanking the hundreds of soldiers who peacefully lay literally inches below my feet.

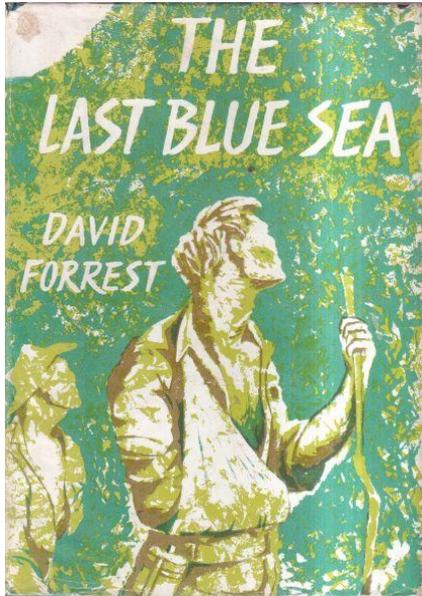
I couldn't help but think: How did they do this for a generation yet to be born? How could they sacrifice so much? How did they conjure up the courage to fight so completely?

These questions still plague me today.

(Alira)

These are the words of teenagers who have experienced the story of Kokoda. How can we not be moved by the sophisticated expressions of gratitude and spiritual nature of their words? That's what is possible if we can reach our young people through the power of that story. We need the Kokoda story to be told on Anzac Day, and it needs a place in our education system so young people can hear it and respond to it. It's an exceptional story of courage, persistence, pride in our country, and the resourcefulness that has come to characterise the Australian character. A larger and better equipped (and better supported)

enemy came to our doorstep, and it was turned around and defeated by people to whom we owe much.



The Anzac story has had plenty of attention from historians and film-makers, but less attention has been paid to the Kokoda/Milne Bay and other stories from our direct north. In my view, one of Australia's greatest novels is *The Last Blue Sea*, by David Forrest. It's set during the New Guinea campaigns; it's beautifully written and it hits the heart as hard as it hits the head. Yet it's not even currently in print. How can this be? It can only be because the story is not being told - or worse still, it's been forgotten.

Just as it was young people who picked up and revived Anzac Day, it's young people we need to look to, to raise the status of the New Guinea campaigns, especially Kokoda. We need to inspire them with stories like *The Last Blue Sea* - and isn't it time for a movie like 'Anzac' that launched Mel Gibson's career?

On Anzac Day and in our schools and communities, can the Kokoda story be raised the way we raised the Anzac story, and give it equal or greater status? Not in competition, but to complement the already established sense of gratitude to those who are responsible for defending and paving the way to what we have today on Anzac Day. The Kokoda campaign has a place on Anzac Day, but it needs a bigger place. Most Australians have heard of One Tree Hill, Lone Pine and the Dardanelles. What do they know about Awala, Isurava, or the Owen Stanleys?

Can we inspire the kind of gratitude that Americans express for what they have today on Thanksgiving, to those who gave everything against the odds to turn the tide of war back from the brink not far from our northern shores? We need to try, and our Association and fellow associations devoted to a similar cause are playing our part. The big challenge is to get that story beyond our associations and out into the mainstream of Australia's cultural history. What is the next step? Perhaps it's to find more ways to draw responses like those of Linda and Alira. Let's close with this from another teenager who walked the Track:

I have now realised that you don't have to glorify war to glorify the incredible human qualities exposed through the adversity of war. Walking the Kokoda Track provided an insight into the commitment, heroism and sacrifice of those who fought for Australia's freedom.

They were ordinary people who discovered the qualities of commitment, leadership, mateship and teamwork under the most challenging of circumstances. They discovered qualities in themselves and in others that they could never have imagined.

(Andrew)

The Association offers our very sincere thanks to Matt Lynch, the worker at Sims Metal in Nerang, who contacted our Association with the photo of the suspicious damaged plaque after it was handed in for sale as scrap metal. His public-minded act started the chain of events which will hopefully lead to a successful prosecution.

Kev Horton (Association Secretary)

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Kokoda Memorial honours Papuan Infantry Battalion

The Australian High Commission in Port Moresby has worked with the government of Oro Province to construct and unveil a new memorial on Kokoda Plateau to honour primarily the Papuan Infantry Battalion. The Australian Government Kokoda Initiative Partnership was the entity which initiated and funded this project.

This memorial was unveiled on 3 November 2025 because it was on **3 November 1942** that the Australian flag was formally raised at Kokoda in the presence of General Vasey, Australian troops and indigenous carriers, to signify the re-occupation of Kokoda Village. The Japanese Army had retreated from Kokoda as a result of sustained battle pressure from Australian ground forces pushing north along the Kokoda Track during October 1942.

The image used on this Plaque is of Warrant Officer Bengari MM (PIB) from Wuwu Village in the then-Morobe District. The caption below his image notes 'Military Medal awarded 21 February 1944 for outstanding courage, Salamaua to Komiatum'. Bengari's image may have been chosen here because he was both very brave and a skilled leader. Like Matpi and Tapioli, he was recommended for bravery awards and promoted in rank several times. The PIB Colour Patch is also displayed although the vertical strip colour differs from our records.



The text used on this plaque provides overdue recognition to the often-overlooked war-time indigenous Servicemen and their Australian officers. It states:

In recognition of the bravery and sacrifice of the men of the Papuan Infantry Battalion and other uniformed Papua New Guineans who served during World War 2.

The Papuan Infantry Battalion (PIB) was a unit of the Australian Army raised in the Territory of Papua in

1940. Upon the Japanese landings near Buna and Gona, a small PIB unit were the first Allied troops to engage the Japanese at Awala, 35 kilometres east of Kokoda. As part of Maroubra Force, the PIB fought alongside the Australian 39th Battalion at Kokoda, Deniki, and Isurava during the Kokoda Campaign (1942), and took part in pushing the Japanese westward along the north coast of New Guinea in 1943-44.

Four New Guinea Infantry Battalions (NGIB) were also raised, beginning in March 1944. The PIB and NGIB were reorganised into the Pacific Islands Regiment (PIR) in November 1944. The PIR served with distinction in Bougainville in 1945 until the end of the war.

The PIB were nicknamed the “Green Shadows” by the Japanese for their stealth in the bush and became known for their courage and tenacity in battle. Australian and American troops relied heavily on the local knowledge, wayfinding and bushcraft of the PIB, NGIB, PIR, as well as the Royal Papuan Constabulary (RPC), to operate in the difficult conditions of Papua and New Guinea. Many were decorated for bravery.

The Pacific Islands Regiment was re-formed in 1951, becoming the direct predecessor of today’s Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF).

The Australian High Commission and Oro Province Government deserve congratulations for this permanent recognition at Kokoda of the PIB’s war-time role.

Greg Ivey

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Mike Jeffery: “A Leader” by Garry Young, CSM

I usually meet once a week with a group of mates who all served in the Army. While we often discuss current events, there is rarely a time when we don’t discuss leadership and the good and bad leaders we experienced during our service.



In my case, I served in four regular infantry battalions for a total 9.5 years, serving under seven commanding officers (CO). Of those, there was only one I thought was a poor leader. However, when we discuss good leaders, Mike Jeffery is always one of the first to be recognised by the group.

It’s nearly five years since Mike passed away on 18 December 2020. So, it’s more than appropriate that I write a short piece on Mike and his leadership qualities for our newsletter. I do not doubt that virtually all who served in PNG knew or knew of Mike. I intend to comment on his leadership and why people like those in my coffee group rated him so highly.

Leadership

Mike initially served in 1PIR 1967-69 as a company commander, and then in 1974-75 he was the CO of 2PIR, where I first met him. In the previous two years, the Battalion was well served by Laurie Lewis as CO. I'm sure most of the junior officers were quite nervous about the incoming CO, as our knowledge was limited and we all thought very highly of Laurie. An added factor was that Mike had served in SASR and had won the Military Cross in Vietnam during his tour with 8 RAR: an impressive record.

As a leader, Mike had a very inclusive style, and whether he was talking to his soldiers or the officers under his command, he seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself. After the handover parade between the two COs in December 1973, I recall going into the mess for drinks and to meet the new 'boss'. He was impressive both in his dress and bearing, and the way he spoke to each of us in turn; seeming to smile and laugh, and you felt that he was entirely focused on you when he spoke. The Officers' Mess quickly relaxed, and the 'subbies' very quickly gave the new boss our tick of approval.

Personal qualities

In part to get some background for this piece, I visited Marlina (happened to be her birthday) and I asked her what Mike was like from her perspective. The reply was unsurprising as I got to know Mike well over 50 years. Marlina said Mike was always enthusiastic about everything he did. While his mum wanted him to be a doctor, it was his father who encouraged him to go to RMC at age 16, where he did well and became a cadet CSM and excelled at boxing and Australian Rules. According to Marlina, when Mike was still a cadet and travelling to Sydney by train in a jacket and tie, he and a few other cadets were ambushed by local youths in Goulburn. Although covered in blood and wearing torn clothes, Mike remembered that he acquitted himself well!!

Getting a 'strip torn off' by Mike was not a pleasant experience. As a tall person with a penetrating stare, you definitely knew you were getting a rocket. At no stage did it feel like your career was at a crossroads, however. I think Mike used to deliver his kicks in the pants with the aim of both teaching and ensuring the same mistake was not repeated. Quite regularly in 2PIR, we had senior officers of the Battalion give lessons learnt from Vietnam, both good and bad, which were invaluable to young officers.



On the plus side, Mike was quick to reward good performance, as I recall happened to me on one occasion. After I returned from Lebanon in 1984, I was posted to 1Brigade in Holsworthy. I attended a company commander's course at Singleton, which was an important stepping stone in an infantry officer's career progression. I dropped into Brigade HQ after the course to see if there was any mail and ran into the RSM, who advised me that the Commander wished to see me. I knew I wasn't in trouble as I performed well on the course,

but I had no idea what the Commander wanted. On entering his office, he immediately said, 'Young Young' - always called me that – 'you are incorrectly dressed,' and produced major's crowns for my uniform. Apparently, Mike had followed my progress at Singleton and offered me an opportunity to be posted to 3RAR or 5/7 RAR as a company commander. I accepted the opportunity to serve with 5/7RAR and thoroughly enjoyed my time.

When Mike was appointed the Governor General, my son and I each received invitations to his swearing-in at Parliament House in Canberra. It was a wonderful example of Mike's style that he would include Grant (aged 12) in such an important occasion and spend time talking to him in the Great Hall after he was sworn in.

While I have written about Mike's ability to deliver a very firm but fair kick to others, it was the kicks he gave himself that made me laugh the most. He loved his golf and had a good swing, considering he had no time for practice, but that didn't stop him 'going off' after a poor shot. He would look at his driver and berate the club saying, 'You idiot, that is the second time today that has happened! Once more and I will sack you!'



Speaking of sacking, one of my coffee mates told me of the day Mike was 'removed' as Deputy Chief of Army. The reason is not important; however, he paraded all officers and announced: 'I have just been sacked from my current position, drinks are on me!'



Ironically, after he served time as Chief of Materiel, he went on to become Governor of Western Australia and then Governor General (the role including Commander in Chief of the Australian Defence Force). I asked him about his move to Materiel Branch, thinking he would be quite downhearted, but he was the opposite. He saw the move as an opportunity to improve the lives of soldiers by enhancing combat webbing, improving footwear/uniforms, and making the acquisition process more streamlined. Even a poor situation could be converted into a positive one according to his philosophy.

The final chapter

As a final comment and in Mike's last few months, I, along with a couple of other mates, used to visit him at home. Although Mike had lost the ability to talk, he understood everything and would often be in fits of laughter at the stories told; they were sad but special occasions. High on his priority list were stories about soldiering in PNG. He loved the soldiers of PNG and the experiences he had there.

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The Piper and the Governor-General

This is an edited version of an article by Max Uechtritz, Past President of the Papua New Guinea Association of Australia (PNGAA).

Few stories better illustrate the powerful and poignant connection between the two countries than the tale of the two Michaels.



Lance Corporal Michael Pissa piped the bride down the aisle when Michael and Marlena Jeffrey were married at the 'Haus Lotu' at Taurama Barracks in Port Moresby. Forty-one years later in September 2008 he was with them again – this time at Government House, Yarralumla in Canberra – reprising the wedding piece in surely the most emotional farewell ever given for an Australian Governor-General.

The moment was recorded beautifully by Fairfax writer Tony Wright:

As Major-General Michael Jeffery and his wife Marlena strolled from Government House, Yarralumla, a small man in the crowd of perhaps 500 well-wishers lining their path pumped his bagpipes and blew into the chill Canberra air the strains of that most haunting of farewells, Now is the Hour. He primed his pipes again, and that other great tune of endings and beginnings, Auld Lang Syne, floated into the afternoon.

As the Governor-General and his wife finally forced their way through the crowd, the little man – clearly a long way from home – stepped into their path and led them to their waiting limousine, this time playing the lilting Mairi's Wedding.

It was the very tune he had played 41 years previously when Michael and Marlena Jeffery were married in a military barracks in Port Moresby. The piper then was simply a 19-year-old Papua New Guinean attached to the Pacific Island Regiment, where Michael Jeffery was a 30-year-old officer. That same piper, Sergeant-Major Michael Pissa, went on to be Musical Director of the PNG Defence Force.

At a function in 2005, General Jeffery had spoken warmly of Michael Pissa:

Some of you may be aware that Marlana and I were married in the Haus Lotu at Taurama Barracks over forty years ago, when I was posted here from 1966-69 with the 1st Battalion, The Pacific Islands Regiment.

Indeed in 2005 the Battalion piper Michael Pissa, who piped Marlana down the aisle of the Taurama Chapel some 41 years earlier, walked from his village for several days, bringing with him his pipes and old green juniper uniform and played the wedding march at a reception held in our honour, evoking many tears of happiness.

Michael Jeffrey had two postings to PNG. He served as a Company Commander of the 1st Pacific Islands Regiment at Taurama Barracks from 1966 to 1969, and then was the last Australian Commanding Officer of 2 PIR in Wewak in 1974-75.

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Chief of Army History Conference: *Mastering the Army Profession, 2025*

(Great Hall, Australian Parliament House, Wed 19 November 2025)

Afternoon Session: *Ethics and Moral Courage*

Paper heading: *Understanding to Educate: The Australian Army in Papua New Guinea*, presented by Dr Tristan Moss

Summary below by Dr Steve Beveridge, 1 PIR 1969-70:

Dr Moss introduced the topic with a brief history of the early days of the Australian Army in PNG, leading through to independence in 1975.

In summary, during the early days:

- The PIR soldiers were seen as a cheap way to defend Australia. Their pay and conditions were not up to Australian level, so the battalion was cheaper to maintain.
- Fewer officers were needed and their quality was not seen as important.
- In the 1950's there was a high turnover of Commanding Officers in PNG.

Incidents of 1957 and 1961 changed this, especially in 1961, where ill-discipline became an issue (based on failure to pay the PNG troops the rate approved 12 months earlier). At the same time Confrontation with Indonesia became a turning point in the defence of PNG.

It was around this time that the role of education for the PIR troops took on greater significance. The Army was seen as a desirable career in PNG, providing education and a career for young men.

The Army instituted a number of changes, especially in officers posted to PNG. A more rigorous selection process was implemented for officers. An interesting upshot of this was that during the period 1970 – 1990, some 43% of COs of Australian battalions had served in PNG.



Dr Moss emphasised the important role of Brigadier Hunter in raising the importance of education, with the introduction of Civics and the need to improve the overall educational standard of the PNG troops. Hunter stated that the army aimed first to mould a good citizen, and then a good soldier. Dr Moss referred to the role of the 'Chalkies', as National Servicemen teachers posted to PNG, in this context.

He reported that during the late 1960s and into the 1970s the Education Corps was second only to Infantry in total numbers in PNG Command. This increase was due to the presence of National Servicemen, most of whom who were qualified teachers before being conscripted. Other than that they were sent to PNG, the role of the 'Chalkies' was not elaborated on. I found this a little disappointing, as Hunter himself, along with contemporaries including (ranks at the time) Colonel Bruce Hearn, Major Michael Jeffery, and Captain George Kearney have affirmed that the role of the young National Servicemen was especially significant in preparing the PIR for its future role in a young democratic nation.

There were a number of studies reportedly undertaken during this time under the heading *Understanding the PNG Cohort*, designed to meet the expectations that were held of the PNG soldiers. This appeared as a table in a PowerPoint slide. I think the audience would have been interested to hear Dr Moss elaborate on the information on that table, but perhaps time restriction meant he had to be brief.

In concluding, Dr Moss identified four key points:

- (i) The importance of selecting the right servicemen to send to PNG.
- (ii) The need to look strategically at educational issues.
- (iii) The need for Australians to recognise our shared military and political history with PNG during World War 2 and in the lead-up to independence.
- (iv) PNG has been a defence buffer for Australia over many years.

Dr Moss summed up with a concluding statement: 'The Australian Army has a long and fruitful history in PNG.'

It was an interesting presentation, and I learned some things that I hadn't known before. From a personal perspective I know that research over the period 1966-1973, including that of Dr Moss, indicates that there was much vitality and innovation within the Education Corps over this time, all directed towards educating the PIR soldiers for their role in the fledgling nation that was about to be born. This involved not only classroom activities, but excursions and wider social and sporting relationships with the soldiers. It also included curriculum development for PNG Command.

With our rapidly expanding military ties with PNG, the nature of the topic and the importance of reaffirming our long relationship with PNG soldiers, perhaps the role of the National Servicemen could have been showcased as an example of what can be achieved co-operatively under enlightened leadership.

Dr Moss was restricted due to time in what he could cover in his presentation. For members of our Association, and with no disrespect to Dr Moss, I'd like to include here an excerpt from the foreword to Dr Darryl Dymock's 2016 book, *The Chalkies – Educating an Army for Independence*. The Foreword was written by the then Governor-General of Australia:

I would like to think that all we soldiers who served in Papua New Guinea would see that particular phase of our lives as a highlight of our military careers.

In part this was due to the grandeur and beauty of the country, but also to the loyalty, discipline and cultural magnificence of the many tribes comprising the Pacific Islands regiment, and its supporting headquarters, training and logistical agencies.

An important contribution to this very positive state of affairs was the role played by over 300 Australian National Service teachers who were posted to PNG to help educate its soldiers. And this, 'the Chalkies', as they were colloquially known, did magnificently.

In the dedication and professional teaching skills they displayed from 1966 to 1973, the Chalkies helped educate a substantial number of young Papua New Guineans to take on the heavy responsibility of Independence granted in 1975.

(Michael Jeffery, Canberra, August 2016)

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Stories from the Past: A Watery Patrol

In April 1965, C Company 1 PIR flew to the island of Daru on the south coast of Papua just south-west of the mouth of the massive Fly River. The Fly has its fountain in the

Star Mountains and travels south for 1,000 km, becoming the border with West Irian at one point and finally emptying through its huge estuary into the Gulf of Papua.



This particular patrol was significant because of water - the extent of it and its different types. It was the wet season, which meant that much of this mainland basin area was inundated, with the only means of travel between the villages by water. I hired some canoes for the first phase of the patrol and, as this was mainly uncharted territory, I also used some local guides. Indeed, my map was a patchwork, with graph paper glued to those parts that were blank as unsurveyed.

From Daru, the thirty members of my platoon,

plus a local policeman and an SAS Sergeant accompanying us, the latter to gain experience in long-range patrolling, were ferried by a single-engine Army Cessna 180 aircraft, a few soldiers at a time, to the village of Balimo on the Aramia River.

Right: Balimo village on the Aramia River, the starting point of this patrol in 1965.



As Balimo was part leper colony, the first issue to be confronted was to convince my men that they would not catch leprosy in the village, providing they did not wrap themselves in the clothes or bedding of a leper or become too physically close. In any event, we were there for only a short while before moving on, providing hardly enough time for such personal relationships to develop.



After flying from Daru to Balimo, the patrol followed the line of the Aramia River initially in a westerly direction, then north-west to beyond the top of this map, then south to the Fly River where we floated on an improvised raft to Wasua Mission, just to the west of Kaviepu. We then trekked north back to Balimo. In all, we had walked and floated over 320 km.

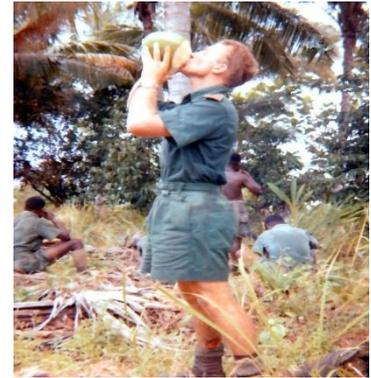
Left: Rifle inspection at Ali Village

The canoes were often enormous, hollowed-out tree trunks about 10 metres long (we saw a few twice that length), enabling my whole platoon plus the guides to fit into just four or five. We were surrounded by hundreds of kilometres of grass swamp similar to the Australian Kakadu with thousands of birds, and wildlife abounding. It was quite magnificent. With all this beauty, however, came some dangers. Not only was this crocodile country (there were plenty watching) but there were also leeches, snakes, particularly the Taipan and 'Black Pap', and malarial and dengue mosquitoes. During one overnight stop on some dry land at Ali village we erected our one-man hutchie (tents) with the small mosquito net hung up inside each. When I woke the next morning after a restful sleep, I noticed the inside surface of my hutchie was completely black. It was shoulder-to-shoulder mosquitoes just waiting for this juicy morsel of white flesh to emerge from the protection of his net.

To combat deadly malaria, we each took a daily tablet of Paludrine but during my three years in TPNG, despite being most conscientious in taking the medication, I was still hospitalised three times, twice with malaria and once with dengue fever. The first of these episodes in fact occurred a few weeks after this patrol was completed.

After 130 kilometres of travel in these canoes, propelled by ad hoc paddles and rough sails improvised from our hutchie, we finally came to an area of high land and thick rain forest. We farewelled our guides and struck out overland for the mighty Fly River some 55 kilometres to our south. Ironically now there was initially no water anywhere just thick jungle and bamboo forests that had to be penetrated in the extreme tropical heat of the day. At times we had to cut our way through the bamboo which slowed our progress to just 1½ km in two hours. This meant being careful not to drink ourselves dry before we could replenish. Water "discipline" is a topic that seems to be derided these days because modern doctrine says the body should be fed as much water as it craves. What this theory fails to address is the situation where the only available water is the few litres carried by each man.

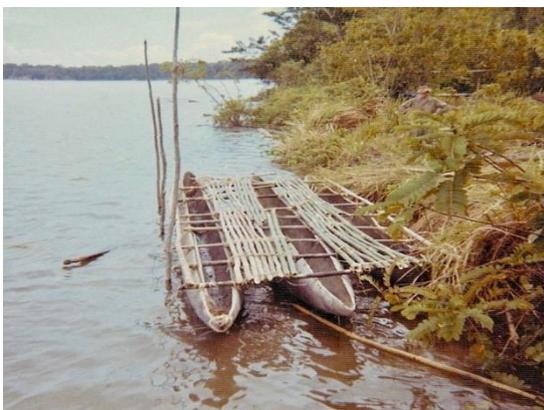
Two days later we came out at the Fly River, quite exhausted from the trek including having to wade waist-deep through a huge sago swamp as we neared the river. We were particularly observant for crocs but as each man had 60 rounds of live ammunition, we felt reasonably secure.



Right: A refreshing drink of coconut water upon reaching the Fly River.

Although we were well over 160 kilometres from the estuary, the river was at least a thousand metres wide in this remote location. The nearest inhabited village was about 80 kilometres downriver from our position, the riverbanks were near impenetrable from vines, bamboo and forest swamps and the crocodiles were eager. The only feasible way to reach our destination was on the water but in what?

One of my reconnaissance patrols provided an answer when it located the old, deserted village of Muga Muga shown on my map. There was nothing there but a few dilapidated grass huts and some coconut trees on the riverbank but, more importantly, there were three derelict canoes. We patched the holes with mud, grass and leaves to make them waterproof again, and then constructed a bamboo platform on top, lashing them together with vines, to create one large raft. During this work we killed an aggressive 2.5 metre Coastal Taipan, the biggest any of us had ever encountered.



On the left is our mode of transport for 80 km down the mighty Fly River. I christened her *HMAS Muga Muga*. She was big enough and buoyant enough to take all thirty of us and our equipment but was very unwieldy. Again, we used improvised paddles and sails to manoeuvre its bulk, but mostly we moved with the ebb tides of the river. As we slowly made our way downstream, I closely monitored a tidal schedule I had with me. The Fly has a funnel-like estuary about 100 kilometres wide, which means

that as the river narrowed to say, five kilometres in width, the water mass from the incoming flood tide is constricted as it moves upriver. This creates a dangerous tidal bore the full width of the river up to four metres high, depending on the tide.

After making calculations from my tides chart, we found a side creek in which to shelter when the wall of water rushed past. As it turned out I did not really need the schedule as we could hear the roar of the tidal bore half an hour before it arrived at our location. It was a sight to behold: a huge brown broken wave, a thousand metres wide and about two metres high rushing upriver at 10-15 knots, pushing logs and debris in its path. In the sanctuary of the muddy side creek, we waited about three hours until the tide was about to turn. This way we could utilise the ebb tide to propel our progress downriver. Then, as the ebb became stronger, the reverse effect of the flood tidal bore occurred. The withdrawing water was now being sucked out towards the estuary, causing large

whirlpools up to 2½ metres deep and 10-15 metres wide, worsening on bends of the river.

Following an aerial resupply drop on the 20-metre river mud 'beach' during low tide, we had to build another raft to carry the extra weight and towed it behind us.

Finally, after four days and without mishap from encounters with whirlpools, several crocodiles and a curious shark, we reached our destination at Wasua missionary station. We rested, cleaned up as best we could and attended the Easter services there the next day. On Easter Monday we patrolled to local villages and river islands to continue our demographic data gathering, took another airdrop resupply, and the following day set off overland for the final 50-kilometre two-day trek back to Balimo where the Cessna would collect us. The patrol of this remote region was at an end after fifteen days and 320 kilometres, of which about 210 were travelled on water.

Throughout these patrols, we maintained long distance communications with Company HQ using morse code (CW) on an A510 High Frequency (HF) radio with a dipole aerial erected between the trees.

(Capt) David Wilkins 1 PIR 1965-67

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The Mystery of the Missing Aircraft: Finally solved after 80 years

(This article is condensed from an ABC article by Marian Faa, posted 14 December 2025.)

When Robert Burrowes got a phone call asking if he was related to Australian Air Force (RAAF) crew member Thomas Burrowes, he had no idea an 82-year-old mystery had just been solved. He assumed the genealogist from the Australian Defence Force was just ringing to do some research.

"I thought, 'Well they're just being thorough,'" he tells the ABC in an exclusive interview from his home in Melbourne.

"She hadn't given any hint at all."

After more than eight decades, Mr Burrowes had just about given up hope of ever knowing what truly happened to his uncle Tom, who disappeared in World War II. Tom was just 16 when he joined the RAAF cadets but couldn't become a pilot because he'd had rheumatic fever as a child.

Tom Burrowes was serving as an RAAF gunner when he went missing. When the Pacific War broke out, Tom was called up to fight as a wireless air gunner in Papua New Guinea. About 10pm on December 14, 1943, Tom took off on his first bombing mission in a Beaufort Bomber A9-211, one of nine Squadron 100 planes involved in an air attack.



The mission was to fly over and bomb Rabaul, which at that point was a well-held Japanese base, but the weather was terrible that night and the mission did not go to plan. Only three [planes] made the target - two bombed alternate targets, while four returned to base without completing the mission.

The recovered Beaufort bomber was similar to these aircraft, pictured flying over jungle country in New Guinea in 1943. (Supplied: Australian War Memorial)

Tragically, one plane did not return to base. That was the aircraft Tom was on, alongside Flight Sergeants John Kenny, Arthur John Davies and Murray Fairbairn. The aircraft was never located, and from that night, the whereabouts of Tom and his crew remained a mystery.

Almost eight decades after their aircraft crashed in waters south of Papua New Guinea, Australian crew members have been identified. It was particularly painful for Robert's father, Jim Burrowes, who was Tom's twin brother. Jim also served in Rabaul during World War II as a Coastwatcher, whose role was to gather intelligence and alert the Australian military of possible threats. Their older brother, Bob, died as a captured soldier on the Japanese prisoner-of-war ship *Montevideo Maru*, which sank in 1942 and was finally discovered in 2023. But when Jim passed away last year, aged 101, Tom's whereabouts was still unknown.

'He was resigned to the fact he'd probably never find out,' Robert Burrowes says.



'Well, as it turned out, if he'd lived one more year, he would've.' In October, about a week after chatting with the ADF genealogist, Robert Burrowes received another call — this time from Group Captain Grant Kelly.

Left: A propeller from Beaufort A9-211 erected on the site by local villagers as a memorial to the crew. (Supplied: Australian Defence Force)

The voice at the end of the line explained that he had led a special RAAF unit focused on locating missing war casualties.

This time, the penny dropped. 'He was halfway through the third sentence, and I thought, Bloody hell, they've found the plane! I started bawling immediately,' Mr Burrowes says. Group Captain Kelly recounted how he and a small team had led an expedition into the remote mountains of Rabaul, in Papua New Guinea, after teenager Willie Flinn discovered the wreck while trekking through the bush in 2022.

It wasn't an easy mission; it took years of planning and a couple of false starts. 'PNG is a complex place. And with the considerations of that remote site, it took us 'til October

this year before we could complete that investigation," Group Captain Kelly says. But even once they reached the plane, success was far from certain. "It's 80 years old. It's been subject to damage, disturbance, deterioration. The tropical jungle is not a friendly site or not friendly to wreckage ... this was extremely torn apart."



But in less than an hour of being on site, they had a breakthrough. "We were very lucky that within half an hour ... we were able to discover a component plate, a modification plate that identified the aircraft as A9-211," Group Captain Kelly says. For him, it's a discovery that helps families, veterans and the Air Force piece together the past.

This Beaufort bomber is the same design as those flying the mission of 14-15 December

1943. (Supplied: Australian War Memorial)

For Robert Burrowes, discovering his uncle Tom's final resting place has stirred up a complex blend of feelings. "They call it closure. I'm not sure that that's quite the right word," he says. Sitting in a living room surrounded by pictures of his relatives, he gently wipes a tear from his eyes. "I feel very emotional. Yeah, it's pretty upsetting, but it's also good to know."

Some of the details of the plane crash have been difficult to process, but some are clear. "It was in a nosedive, basically, and it burned on impact," he says. Mr Burrowes also feels a deep sadness that his father Jim didn't live to find out where his twin brother came to rest.

"He only missed it by a year," he says.

[Editors' note: see our tribute to Coastwatcher Jim Burrowes in our Newsletter of April 2025 on our Website: www.soldierspng.com]

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Christmas is almost here, and on the left is an historical photo of an event that took place on Christmas Eve 1914 on the Western Front during the First World War. The photo is of British and German soldiers gathered together doing something highly unusual.

A mini-quiz:

- (i) What were they doing?
- (ii) What was the focus of what they were doing?
- (iii) They also played soccer. According to the diaries of the British soldiers, who won?
- (iv) According to the diaries of the German soldiers, who won?

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Epilogue

It would be neglectful of all that our Association stands for and honours if we were to conclude this newsletter without some mention of the event that took place at Bondi Beach, Sydney, on Sunday 14 December. For the great majority of us, the idea that here in Australia a group of people could be singled out and subjected to a mass shooting because of their religion is horrific. It's a nightmare no-one thought could happen today in our country.

Much has been written about what happened that day and many views have been expressed. The *Armi Nius* editors would simply add this: We are either Australians or we are not. Australian values of inclusion, a 'fair go' for everyone, acceptance of different religions or of no religion, the rule of law and democratic government have been fought for and defended over many years by the people our Association is devoted to honouring.

On the eve of Christmas 2025, we stand shoulder to shoulder with those who died that Sunday, and we share the grief of their families and friends as they come to grips with the tragic loss of their loved ones at Australia's beautiful Bondi Beach.

We cannot recover from this without a coming together of every identity group in Australia to affirm those values and reject the ugly, ancient hatreds that reared up at Bondi on that terrible day.

As Australians we must do it together. We cannot do it with division and conflict about our values. With that in mind, we conclude this final edition of *Armi Nius* for 2025 with the words of Maya Angelou from her poem 'Alone'.



Maya Angelou (1928-2014)

Alone

Now if you listen closely

I'll tell you what I know

Storm clouds are gathering

The wind is gonna blow

The race of man is suffering

And I can hear the moan,

'Cause nobody,

But nobody

Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone

Nobody, but nobody

Can make it out here alone.

*



(Bomana War Cemetery)

'Lest we forget'

