

PNGVR UNIVERSITY PLATOON

WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT

1. APRIL 1966 A MEETING WAS HELD WITH BRIGADIER MCDONALD MILITARY COMMANDER OF PNG, Dr GUNTHER, VICE CHACELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PNG, AND Mr CHENOWETH, PRINCIPAL OF PNG ADMINISTRATIVE COLLEGE, TO DISCUSS A PROPOSAL TO RAISE A UNIVERSITY REGIMENT SIMILAIR TO MAINLAND AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES. THE INITIAL UNIT WAS TO BE A PLATOON OF ONE OFFICER AND UP TO FORTY OTHER RANKS. THE UNIT HAD TO BE PART OF PNGVR, THE ONLY CMF UNIT IN PNG.
2. THE INITIAL PLATOON CONSISTED OF UNIVERSITY AND ADMINISTRATIVE COLLEGE STUDENTS. PROBLEMS AROSE WITH TRAINING SCHEDULES; NO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS COULD ATTEND THE PNGVR ANNUAL CAMP AND AFTER THEIR FINAL SEMISTER FOR THE YEAR THEY WERE PACKED OFF BACK TO THEIR HOME VILLAGES.
3. INITIALLY THE PLATOON OPERATED OUT OF PNGVR SUPPORT COMPANY DRILL HALLS AT MURRAY BARRACKS PORT MORESBY. LATER, LAND WAS ALLOCATED AT THE PNG UNIVERSITY AND A TRAINING DEPOT WAS COMPLETED IN SEPTEMBER 1969. THE MAIN UNIVERSITY HALL WAS A LARGE PYRAMID BUILDING AND THE PLATOON DEPOT LOOKED LIKE A SMALL PYRAMID.
4. THE UNIVERSITY VICE CHACELLOR WAS DESPERATE FOR A CHILD-MINDING CENTRE. AFTER MUCH DISCUSSION IT WAS AGREED THEY COULD USE THE PREMISIS ON WEEKDAYS ONLY. I THOUGHT IT WAS STRANGE TO HAVE YOUNG CHILDREN IN A BUILDING FULL OF MILITARY WEAPONS.
5. WHILE THE PLATOON WAS STILL BASED AT MURRAY BARRACKS, THERE WAS A VISIT BY THE CMF MEMBER OF THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY MILITARY BOARD, MAJOR GENERAL, JUDGE, NORMAN VICKERY. THE GENERAL WAS VERY TAKEN BY THE

ADMINISTRATIVE COLLEGE STUDENTS MOST OF WHICH WERE COMPLETING MAGISTRATE TRAINING. MANY OF THEM WERE FROM BRITISH SOLOMONS ISLANDS PROTECTORATE. I FOUND THEY WERE KEENER AND MADE BETTER SOLDIERS THAN THE UNI STUDENTS.

6. WHEN HE FINALLY GOT TO MEET A UNI STUDENT, PTE S KILANGIT, A BIG LUMP OF A LAD, THE GENERAL ASKED HIM WHAT HE ENJOYED MOST AT THE UNI. HE ANSWERED, **“PLAYING AUSSIE RULES FOOTBALL.”**
7. IN 1969, A DECISION WAS MADE BY PNGVR COMMANDER, LT COL HARRINGTON, TO HAVE ONLY UNIVERSITY GRADUATE OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF THE PLATOON, I WAS TRANSFERRED TO ADMIN COMPANY AT MURRAY BARRACKS. THE PLATOON REPLACEMENT WAS LT RICHARD SMITH, A VERY CAPABLE OFFICER AND IN CIVIL LIFE, HE WAS ROADS CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER FOR COMWORKS, FOR THE PORT MORESBY DISTRICT. HE WAS ALSO A CIVILIAN PILOT WHO SADLY ON A SATURDAY CHARTER FLIGHT CRASHED IN THE OWEN STANLEY RANGES WITH NO SURVIVORS. HE WAS BURIED IN THE CIVILIAN CEMENTRY AT BOMANA. ALL AVAILABLE PNGVR OFFICERS ATTENDED THE SERVICE IN UNIFORM.
8. EARLIER THAT YEAR, DURINGF THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY FOR THE DEPOT AT THE UNIVERSITY, I WAS GUARD COMMANDER AND MY WIFE MARGARET TOOK A MOVIE OF THE CEREMONY WHICH IS THE ONLY KNOWN RECORD OF THE EVENT, AND A COPY IS HELD AT THE MUSEUM.
9. BY MID 1973, I HAD RETURNED TO AUSTRALIA, THE PLATOON WOULD HAVE CEASED OPERATIONS ALONG WITH THE PNGVR. **WHO KNOWS, FINALLY THE VICE CHANCELLOR MAY HAVE GOT HIS FULL TIME CHILD MINDING CENTRE!**