

70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FORMATION OF PIB: 20TH JUNE 2015, GOLD COAST-PAA's speech

Major General the Honourable Michael Jeffrey and Mrs Jeffrey, Keith Payne VC and Mrs Payne, distinguished guests and friends, Good Morning,

I am privileged to participate in the commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the formation of the Papuan Infantry Battalion on behalf of the NGVR & PNGVR Association. PIB was one of several unique military units formed in PNG in the early days of the Pacific war. Today we not only commemorate the 75th Anniversary of PIB's formation, it is also a tribute to all who served in PNG's disciplinary forces throughout the Pacific war.

From 1940 to 1975 Papuans and New Guineans went from living under two orderly Australian administrations through invasion and war to development and independence. A small part of the community, the police and soldiers, Papuan New Guinean and Australian, influenced this outcome, particularly during the first turbulent years of invasion and war.

In 1940 the population of PNG was about 1.1million, 300,000 in Papua and 800,000 in NG. Indispensable to the administrative structures was the Papua and New Guinean Constabulary or police force which numbered about 350 in Papua and 1,000 in NG. Members of this force were the right hand of every patrol officer as contact person, interpreter, enforcer of the law, bushman, recruiter and supervisor of carrier lines. It was because of the loyalty of these men Australia succeeded in PNG. These men from the police force served the civil and military exceptionally well by their presence and capacity.

The links between the PNG police force, PIB, NGVR, ANGAU, AIB, the battalions of NGIB and the PIR are many and strong. To speak of one, one should have an understanding of the others and to speak of an Australian contribution, civil or military, in the prosecution of the war in PNG, one must include the PNG contribution, without which there may have been no victory in PNG.

The PIB was formed in Papua in April 1940 with its first soldiers, many of whom were from the Papuan police, were enlisted in March 1941. By 1942 it consisted of only three under strength and poorly equipped companies. In June 1942 PIB was sent forward to patrol the northern coast of Papua. Led by Australian officers and NCOs, small parties were dispersed over a wide area. They were the first to make contact with the enemy on 23 July 1943 (now, PNG Commemoration Day) when the Japanese invaded Papua. PIB served in many NG campaigns with its soldiers becoming noted for their ferocity and tenacity during the Kokoda, Salamaua -Lae, Ramu Valley - Finisterre Range , Bougainville and Aitape - Wewak campaigns.

PIB had an establishment of about 77 Australians and 550 Papuan soldiers. Commanding officers were Maj Logan, Maj Watson, Lt Col Stanfield and Lt Col Elliott- Smith, all militia officers.

The PIB along with 1 NGIB and 2 NGIB formed the PIR in November 1944 with 3 NGIB and 4 NGIB joining in 1945. PIR was disbanded in August 1946 later reforming in 1951.

NGVR was established in September 1939 under the command of NG Superintendent of Police, Lt Col Walstab, with an establishment of 23 officers and 482 other ranks. Sub units were established in the NG islands at Rabaul and Kokopo, the NG Goldfields at Wau and Bulolo and on the NG mainland at Lae, Salamaua and Madang, with HQ in Rabaul. NGVR was issued with police arms which were guarded by the police. With war imminent, HQ shifted to Lae late 1941 when WW1 veteran Major MW Edwards assumed command.

NGVR fought in Rabaul at the time of the Japanese invasion. Despite the loss of 80 men in Rabaul, NGVR remained the only operational Military unit facing the enemy in NG. This it did in the Lae/ Salamaua/ Wau/ Bulolo /Markham area and Madang from the start of the Pacific war until relieved.

From July 1942 when the focus shifted to Milne Bay and Kokoda battles, NGVR continued to man its posts overlooking the Japanese: however, it was an exhausted unit by September 1942. Although some troops remained in place until early 1943, there were too few to be effective and was disbanded. The fit NGVR soldiers were attached to either ANGAU or other units which required their particular knowledge and experience. Many never served again because of the deprivations suffered during their prolonged period in the bush without adequate medical attention and other supplies. NGVR was reformed as the PNGVR in 1950.

NGVR's CO, Major Edwards transferred to ANGAU and was in charge of carriers with the American troops in their drive along the Morobe Coast towards Salamaua after which in late 1943 he was appointed founding CO of 1 NGIB. In 1944 Lt Col Edwards was promoted to command the newly formed PIR.

At the time of the Rabaul invasion in January 1942, the 8th Military District , the PNG command , comprised about 5,000 men, 3,000 in Port Moresby, 1,400 in Rabaul , 400 in the Wau/Lae area and 270 spread across the islands north of Rabaul.

Civil administration in PNG was handed to NGVR in Lae when Japan invaded Rabaul and civil administration ceased in Papua on 14th February 1942. The military commander, Maj Gen Morris established the Papua Administrative Unit (PAU) under S Elliott-Smith (later to become CO of PIB) and the New Guinea Administrative Unit (NGAU) under Kassa Townsend in Wau. Townsend arranged the "Harris Navy" to rescue the men who were escaping from the aftermath of the Japanese invasion in New Britain using NGVR and NGAU. On 10th April 1942, PAU and NGAU combined into ANGAU under KC McMullen. ANGAU administered PNG until mid 1946 when it was replaced by the Government of Papua and Australian NG.

Throughout arguably the most turbulent four years in PNG's history, ANGAU carried out the functions of the pre-war civilian administrations as well as marshal and lead the native peoples in support of the Allied armed forces during the Pacific War. The Allies relied on the PNG people for its success - their carrier lines fed and armed the Australian and American soldiers and carried their wounded ; labour lines constructed roads, bridges, bases and air fields; ANGAU's scouts and networks of informants in operations areas were the eyes, ears and often the spearhead of clashes with the enemy ; and ANGAU brought rehabilitation from the chaos of war in reconquered areas . ANGAU's place in Australia and PNG's history is deserving of far more recognition than it receives. It was a major influence in the victory in PNG.

In December 1942, ANGAU comprised 550 men including 140 officers. By mid 1945 ANGAU numbered just over 2,000 Australians including 360 officers. During ANGAU's existence 2,476 men including 935 Papuans and 1,541 New Guineans served in the Police of which 28 were killed in action, 63 died on duty of other causes and won more than 60 medals for valour and distinguished service.

Our recently departed comrade Ben Moide shared these links between organisations: he was an ANGAU carrier during the Kokoda campaign and a soldier in PIB. After the war Ben joined PNGVR and later played an influential role in PNG ex-servicemen's affairs. He was also a good Rugby League footballer.

The Police and soldiers were an important influence in the outcome of the war in PNG. After the war many of these men held high leadership positions up to Independence and beyond. The PIB, Police, NGVR, ANGAU, NGIB battalions and PIR hold unheralded but envious military histories.

Seventy five years ago PIB was formed, the first Military unit comprising Papua and New Guinean troops. It served with distinction. May the loyalty and steadfastness of PIB be retained in the fabric of today's PIR.

Thank you.

**Phil Ainsworth,
President, NGVR & PNGVR Association**

20th June, 2015