

GUARDING THE PERIPHERY
THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY IN
PAPUA NEW GUINEA, 1951–75

Based around the Pacific Islands Regiment, the Australian Army's units in Papua New Guinea had a dual identity: integral to Australia's defence, but also part of its largest colony and viewed as a foreign people. With Papua New Guineans comprising the largest minority within the Australian armed forces, the Australian Army in PNG found itself commanding units of astonishing diversity, encompassing hundreds of languages and cultures. It did so to defend Australia from threats to its north and west, while also managing the force's place within Australian colonial rule in PNG, occasionally resulting in a tense relationship with the Australian colonial government during a period of significant change.

In *Guarding the Periphery: The Australian Army in Papua New Guinea, 1951–75*, Tristan Moss explores the operational, social and racial aspects of this unique force during the height of the colonial era in PNG and during the progression to independence.

Combining the rich detail of both archival material and oral histories, *Guarding the Periphery* recounts a part of Australian military history that is often overlooked by studies of Australia's colonial and military past.

Tristan Moss is a researcher on the Official Histories of Australian Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and Australian Peacekeeping Operations in East Timor at the Australian War Memorial. He is an Adjunct Lecturer at the University of New South Wales, Canberra, and is also the winner of the C.E.W. Bean Prize for Military History.

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PAPUA NEW GUINEA, 1951–75

TRISTAN MOSS



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To Meggie

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PREFACE

The Australian Army has a long and admirable record in fostering serious research and publication about its history. For more than a century the Army has seen the value of history to its future. From its outset ‘military history’ was part of the formal education of officers at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, and for a time officers’ promotion depended upon candidates being able to give a coherent analysis of ‘Stonewall’ Jackson’s Shenandoah Valley campaigns in promotion exams. An understanding of the Army’s history and traditions remains central to its *esprit de corps*, in its most literal meaning.

From the 1970s (as a consequence of educating officers at university level) the Army has produced several generations of educated soldiers, several of whom became historians of note, including Robert O’Neill, David Horner, Peter Pedersen, John Mordike, Bob Hall, Jean Bou, Bob Stevenson and Craig Stockings. The creation of an Army History Unit in the late 1990s demonstrated the Army’s commitment to encouraging and facilitating serious history. Under Dr Roger Lee it had a profound influence on managing the Army’s museums, in supporting research on army history and in publishing the Army’s history.

One of the most impressive demonstrations of the Army’s commitment to history has been its long association with several major publishers, and notably with Cambridge University Press. This has been a productive relationship, brokered by Roger Lee and the former long-serving general editor of the Army History Series, Professor David Horner.

The Cambridge Army History Series brings to an academic and popular readership historical work of importance across the range of the Army's interests and across the span of its history. The series, which I now have the honour to edit, seeks to publish research and writing of the highest quality relating to the Army's operational experience and to its existence as an organisation, as a part of its contribution to the national narrative.

The Army History Unit has created a community of writers and readers (including soldiers in both roles), the product of whose questions, research, debate and writing informs the Army's understanding of itself and its part in Australia's history. It is a history to be proud of in every sense.

Tristan Moss's *Guarding the Periphery: The Australian Army in Papua New Guinea, 1951–1975* reminds the Army, and indeed the Australian community, of Australia's long relationship with the people of Papua New Guinea. While the campaigns of 1942–45 represent the Army's most intensive encounter with Papua New Guinea, as Tristan shows, the Army played a vital part in the decades preceding independence. The Army's long and complex relationship with the territory demonstrates how it coped with the most ethnically diverse component it has ever included, and how it played a part in mentoring the defenders of Australia's closest neighbour. This is an unsung chapter of the Army's history that remains relevant to its continuing engagement with the defence forces of our region.

Professor Peter Stanley
General Editor, Australian Army History Series
UNSW Canberra

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is the result of the support of many people in Australia and Papua New Guinea. Based as it is on my doctoral research, this book had its genesis almost seven years ago, and I owe thanks to so many who have helped or encouraged me along the way. Dr Garth Pratten never failed to encourage me to greater efforts, and always cast an insightful and incisive eye over my work. His straightforward approach to my writing kept me on track and enthused throughout my candidature. Dr Peter Londey guided me through the difficult first years of my studies, and I am grateful for his continued interest in and support of my research. I owe a debt of gratitude to Professor Joan Beaumont for her astute advice and for the countless opportunities she has given me to grow as an historian. She is always generous with her time, and has shown by example on our research trips to the wilds of Burma and Thailand that historians can be adventurers both in the jungle and on the page.

The staff at the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University provided a wonderful environment in which to complete my research. Associate Professor Peter Dean, Professor John Blaxland, Professor David Horner, Professor Dan Marston, Dr Joanne Wallis, Dr Jean Bou, Dr Rhys Crawley and Mike Gisick all gave me invaluable advice and assistance, for which I am profoundly grateful. More broadly, Professor Timothy Parsons and Professor Ted Wolfers gave helpful guidance for turning my thesis into this book. My current colleagues on the Official Histories of Australian Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Australian Peacekeeping Operations in East Timor provided me the encouragement necessary to finish the final stages of this book, while the historians at the Australian Defence Force Academy were always available for a chat about Australia's military past and were a wonderful source of inspiration. I am deeply saddened that Professor Jeffrey Grey will not see this book's production. Jeff was always generous in his support of my work, as he has been for so many young scholars, and his sudden death is a profound loss to the history community.

In researching this book I was ably and kindly assisted by many librarians and archivists in Australia and PNG. I would like to thank the staff at the National Archives of Australia, Canberra, Brisbane and Melbourne. I am grateful to the staff in the reading room at the Australian War Memorial, who were always friendly to an often-harried researcher. Dr Roger Lee, Bill Houston and the staff at the Australian Army History Unit allowed me to access their rich archival material, and supported my research through an Army History Unit Research Grant. At the Australian Army Psychology Corps, I would like to thank Nicole Steele and Geoff Gallas for allowing me access to the incredible series of research reports on Papua New Guineans produced by the Army. In PNG, the staff at the Papua New Guinea National Archives and the archives of the University of Papua New Guinea were extremely helpful. Finally, I am grateful to the United Services Institute of the Australian Capital Territory for awarding me a scholarship in support of my research.

Professor Peter Stanley deserves my thanks as editor of the Australian Army History Series for so enthusiastically accepting my book into this series. The team at Cambridge University Press have also been of great help along the way: in particular Vilija Stephens and Cathryn Game. The maps were produced by CartoGIS at the Australian National University, while the pictures that grace this book's pages have been generously provided by the Australian Army Infantry Museum, the Chalkies Association and Veronica Peek.

I would like to express my immense gratitude to those who agreed to be interviewed for this project. Although too numerous to list here, all invited me into their homes, shared their stories and encouraged me in my research. However, a handful of people deserve particular mention. In Australia: Frank Cordingley, Terry Edwinsmith, Major General Hori Howard, Greg Ivey, Major General Michael Jeffery, Ian Ogston, Lieutenant Colonel Maurie Pears and Kevin Smith. My two research trips to PNG were made possible by the assistance of a number of generous people: the staff at the National Research Institute, the officers of PNGDF Headquarters, Dr Karl Claxton and Lachlan McGovern at the Australian High Commission, John Gibson, Thomas Hukahu, Clarence Hukahu, Major Frank Moripi, Colonel Reg Renagi, Dr Jon Ritchie, Alan Robinson and Major General Jerry Singirok.

My friends and family made the process of research and writing this book possible. In Melbourne, my grandfather has always been a source of cheer, while my friends, in particular Sam, Amanda, Settle, Burnett, Liley and Laura, were a font of diversion during my research. My father has

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always provided patient encouragement during my academic endeavours, and I owe a great deal to his years of support.

Finally, it is no exaggeration to say that this book would never have been completed without Meggie. Her wonderful patience, vital assistance, kind ear, welcome distraction and gentle cajoling were the *sine qua non* of my research and writing, even as she worked on her own research. I will never cease to be grateful for her friendship, love and support, and this book is dedicated to her.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

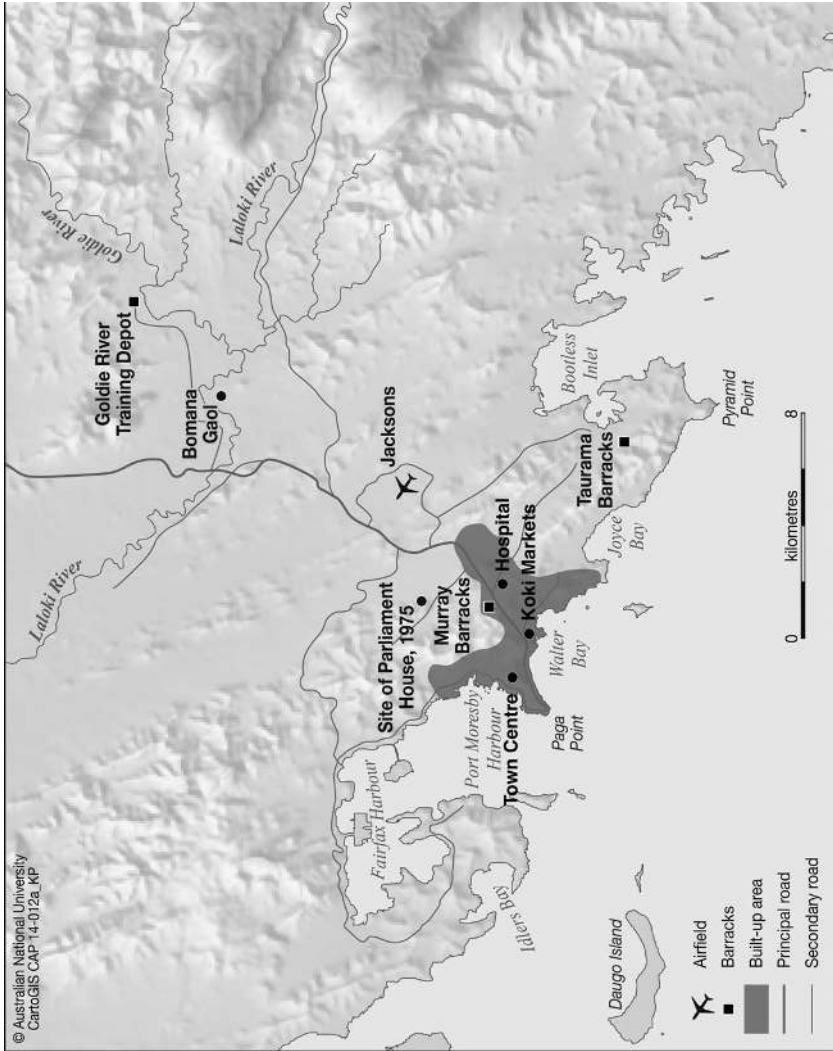
The nation known today as Papua New Guinea (PNG) has been referred to by a number of formal and informal names over the course of its history, including Papua/New Guinea, Papua and New Guinea, the Territory of Papua New Guinea (TPNG), Nuigini or simply New Guinea (a term that also describes the whole island, including the now Indonesian province of Irian Jaya). In official documents during Australian rule there was little consistency. In the interests of simplicity, the term ‘Papua New Guinea’ and its acronym are used throughout the book to describe the area contained within the modern country’s borders, while recognising that no such country existed for either Australians or indigenous people for most of the period discussed. Similarly, the book uses the term ‘Papua New Guinean’ to describe the indigenous people of this region, despite the great variety of languages, ethnicities and identifications of these millions of people, then as now.

The terms used for the armed forces in PNG are equally confusing. Many sources refer to the Pacific Islands Regiment when they mean both the regiment and the host of ancillary units and subunits in PNG at the time, even after all Australian Army units were placed under a single, cohesive formation, PNG Command. Where appropriate, the book refers to the highest formation with operational command in PNG. Before 1965 this was the PIR, as Area Command PNG was an administrative organisation only. After 1965 the Australian Army’s Papua New Guinean units in PNG were part of first PNG Command, then Joint Force PNG and finally the PNG Defence Force. These terms are used interchangeably with ‘the Australian Army in PNG’ to refer to units that included Papua New Guineans, particularly in cases where the book discusses more than one of these organisations.

GLOSSARY

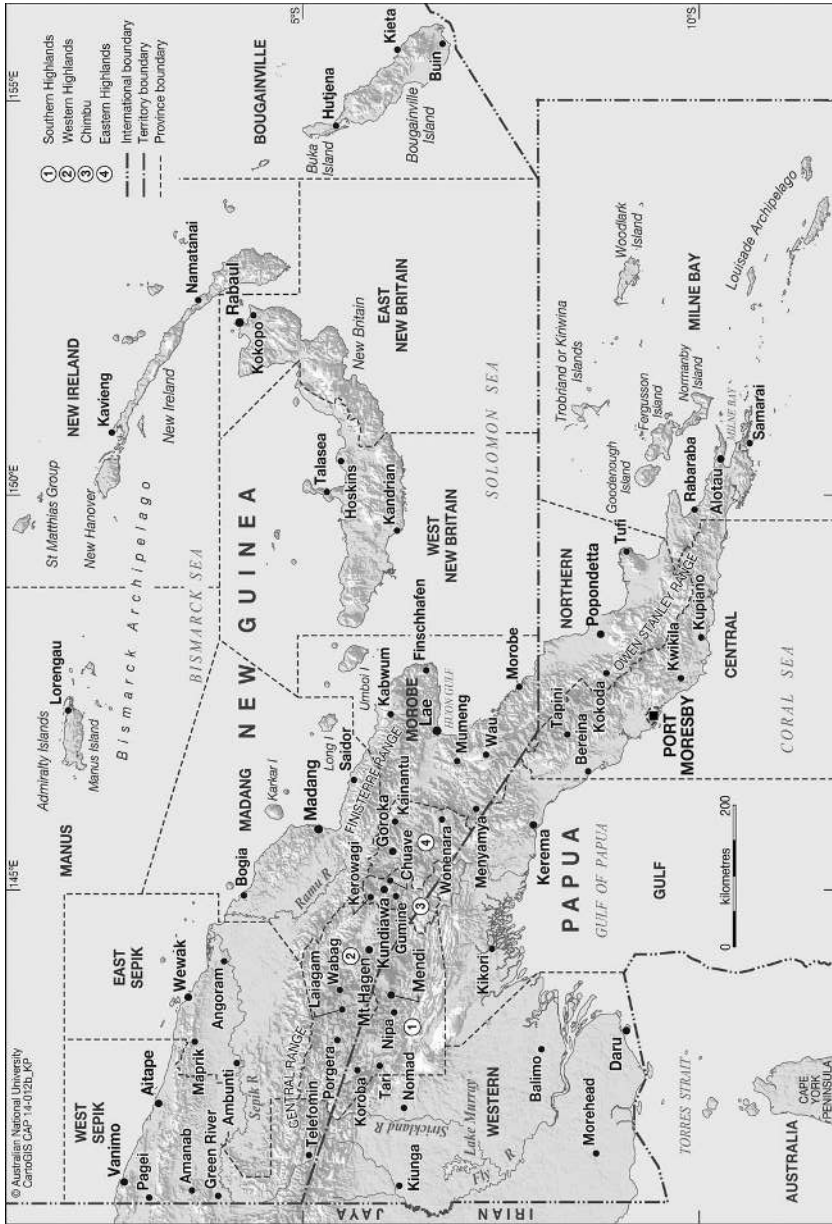
1ATF	1st Australian Task Force, Vietnam
AACE	Australian Army Certificate of Education
AAHU	Australian Army History Unit
AAPSYCH	Australian Army Psychology Corps
AATTV	Australian Army Training Team, Vietnam
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ADAG	Australian Defence Assistance Group
AGPS	Australian Government Publishing Service
AHQ	Army Headquarters
ARA	Australian Regular Army
AUSTEO	Australian Eyes Only
AWM	Australian War Memorial
BHQ	Battalion Headquarters
CGS	Chief of the General Staff
CMF	Citizen Military Forces
CO	Commanding Officer
CPC	Constitutional Planning Committee
CUP	Cambridge University Press
DCGS	Deputy Chief of the General Staff
DMO&P	Directorate of Military Operations and Plans
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FESR	Far East Strategic Reserve
GOC	General Officer Commanding
HQ	Headquarters
JFHQ	Joint Force Headquarters
JPC	Joint Planning Committee
KAR	King's African Rifles
L/Cpl	Lance Corporal
MUP	Melbourne University Press

NAA	National Archives of Australia
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NG	New Guinea
NGIB	New Guinea Infantry Battalion
NGVR	New Guinea Volunteer Rifles
NS	National Service
OC	Officer Commanding
OCS	Officer Cadet School
OUP	Oxford University Press
PI	Pacific Islander
PIB	Papuan Infantry Battalion
PIR	Pacific Islands Regiment
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PNGDCC	Papua New Guinea Defence Coordination Committee
PNGDF	Papua New Guinea Defence Force
PNGMD	Papua New Guinea Military District
PNGNA	Papua New Guinea National Archives
PNGVR	Papua New Guinea Volunteer Rifles
RAAEC	Royal Australian Army Education Corps
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAE	Royal Australian Engineers
RAEME	Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RAR	Royal Australian Regiment
RMC	Royal Military College
RPNGC	Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary
RSL	Returned and Services League
RSM	Regimental Sergeant Major
RSSAILA	Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia
SAS	Special Air Service
SMH	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>
SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement
TPNG	Territory of Papua New Guinea
UN	United Nations
UPNG	University of Papua New Guinea



Map 1 Port Moresby and surrounds

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Map 2 Papua New Guinea, 1975