

THE ADVENTURE OF A LIFETIME IN PNG by Don Taylor

With the support of a group of Commonwealth Department of Works mates, who were mostly returned service men from the Pacific War, I applied for a transfer from the Adelaide Office to Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea in 1953. Following acceptance of my application, I had the wonderful experience in this country of the indigenous people's unspoilt sense of body decoration and customs.

Once settled into this country's different lifestyle, I got to know some of the inhabitants by first attending the local St John's Church and by joining the choir. One of the young Aussie men who attended the church was returning home and he invited me to replace him in the missionary work at the local Koki Mission, pictured below (the two mission buildings are near the foreshore behind the trees).



Because I thought this would help me to get to know the local people more, I agreed to become a volunteer tutor at the mission.

A great friendship developed between me and the mission CEBS (Church of England Boys Society) group, such that there was great sorrow from both sides when I left to return to Adelaide in 1955. To show their appreciation of my time with them, they presented me with a carved walking stick to use in my old age and to remember them.

The "Boys", about 30 in all and all older than my 21 years, were very keen to learn administrative skills, in keeping with the eventuality of PNG's independence. To help them with this need, we conducted a night class once a week at the mission.

Because of their interest in marching and parades and my recent training in National Service, with some training, we developed to such a good standard that we were invited to join in the National Day Parade. The group was most proud to march in the parade, resplendent in their CEBS uniforms. In the photo below, I am at the end on the right in long white trousers.



To help bond the members more, I arranged some camps. One of the members of St John's Church had a farm close to Moresby and he agreed with me to allow our group to camp on his property for a weekend and escape from the urban area. Another church member ran the town garbage truck fleet and following some cleaning out, we were able to use a truck to transport us to the camp site. We also had some cruises in the local "Lakatoi" dugout sailing canoes and the "Boys" showed good sailing ability.

A young Adelaide priest, who I first met during the Young Anglican Youth Year event, had taken up a position as priest in charge at the Oro Bay Mission and Hospital and following our correspondence, he invited me to spend my Christmas vacation at the mission.

A lady friend of one of the hospital nurses and I hired a little Cessna aircraft to fly us over to the North Coast. We flew via the Mt. Lamington volcano and viewed the disaster area of 90 square miles (233 square km) caused by the eruption in 1951 and the rebuilt Sangara Mission which had been devastated and many missionaries killed. We landed on a war time concrete jungle air strip. A party from the mission came to collect us in the old mission truck, after they had splashed through many fast-flowing streams, in spite of the truck's nonoperational brakes!

The hospital design fascinated me because it consisted of hospital ward blocks duplicated alongside by rows of family accommodation buildings. This arrangement provided for the procedure of the hospital to give medical treatment, but the adjacent family members prepared the food.



The Christmas Eve service, conducted in the native built timber framed (no nails used) and palm leaf thatched church, was so wonderful that I remember it vividly today. Except for some 20 or so candles in the Sanctuary, the building was in darkness. The photo above shows the church altar area, with me in the foreground. One of the nurses had a friend visiting from Aussie and she had brought her violin with her. For the service hymns, this solitary little instrument played the beginning of the hymn tune, in a wonderful, hushed silence but then to be broken by the thunder of a hundred indigenous voices, in glorious harmony. My neck hairs stood on end.

I was so fortunate to have experienced the unspoilt natural beauty of this country and people of PNG in the mid 1950's. The final photo is of me with a Papuan man ceremonially dressed for a SING SING festival and holding his Kundu drum.

