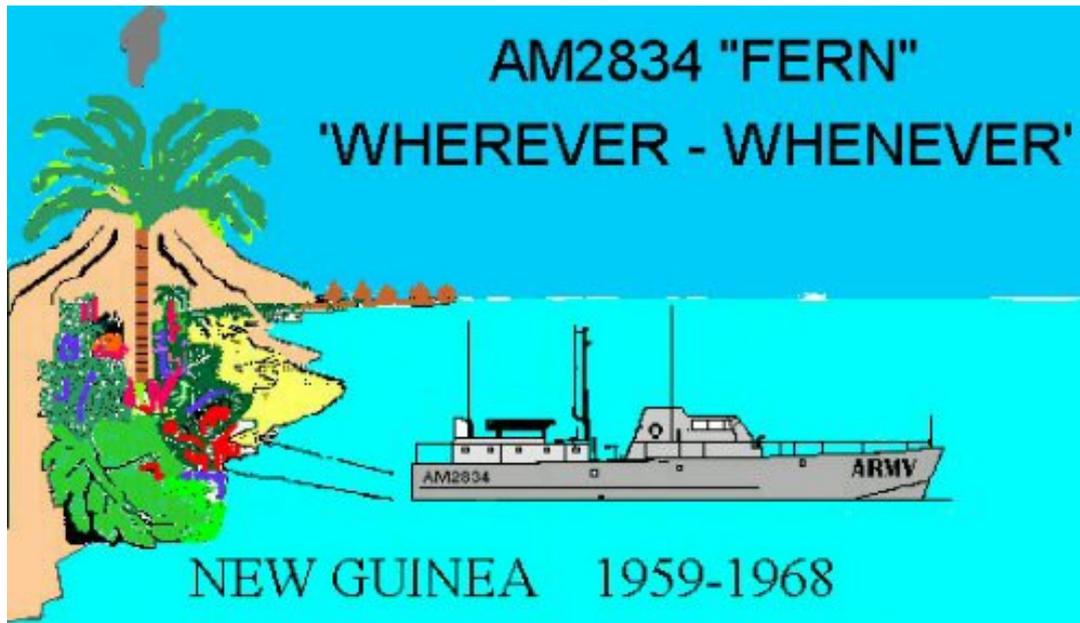


## INTERNAL BOATS OF NEW GUINEA



## A LITTLE HISTORY OF NEW GUINEA

In modern history, New Guinea would be considered as a late arrival. The people are a mixture of Polynesian, Negrito, Malay, Melanesian, Australian Aboriginal and even a strain of the Hairy Ainus (first inhabitants of Japan).

Europeans were very late arrivals with the first to land being the Portuguese in 1526. They named the land 'Ilhas dos Papuas' (Malay for Fuzzy haired man). In 1545 the Spanish called it 'Nueva Guinea' and this name appeared on the Mercator world map of 1559. Occasionally the land was mapped in various places but no territorial claims were made until 1828 when a



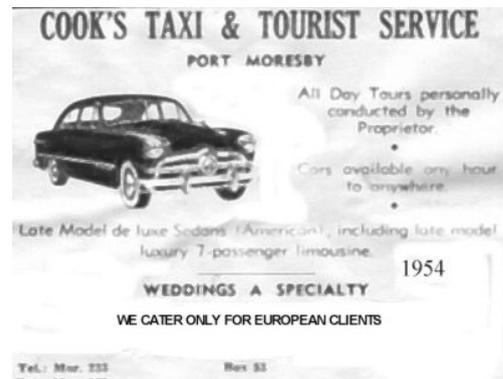
Dutch expedition and claimed all land west of 141 longitude. This part of New Guinea became Dutch New Guinea and remained so until 1963 when it became Irian Jaya (Indonesia). In 1884 the Germans took possession of the northern part of the remaining territory with the southern part becoming a British protectorate. The British regarded it as a 'great commercial failure' and in 1901, when Australia became independent from the British, it became Papua.

In 1914 when WW1 began, Australia occupied Rabaul which was the capital of German New Guinea. All of the islands and in particular the section of mainland New Guinea was also occupied. After Germany was defeated the Australian Military Occupation continued until 1921 when German New Guinea became Australian Mandated Territory via the League of Nations.

Not only was the Law different for both Territories, so was the Australian Government's attitude towards financial appropriations. New Guinea received nothing and Papua received \$A200,000 yearly. New Guinea had to become self sufficient. Salaries for Patrol Officers were gained by collecting taxes from the population. Australian New Guineans (ANG's) always looked down on Australian Papuans (AP's). With the discovery of very good paying gold at

Edie Creek, 7000 feet up on Mt. Kaindi - six days walk from Salamaua, a gold rush started, not only from Australia but from beyond. Fifty years after the first miners went goldmining from Port Moresby the 'big find' became a reality

With a major discovery of gold came the last two categories of what the White population of New Guinea was divided into - Missionaries, Money-makers and Misfits or Fools, freaks and failures. Not least among the Misfits was the one who became a Hollywood star - Errol Flynn. The Mandated Territory of New Guinea and Papua was changing and although it would remain a Frontier until the late 1950's it became known as "TAIM BILONG MASTA" (Time of the Master). During this period, until the late 1960's the indigenous New Guinean was relegated to menial labour. With the advent of the Pacific War and until it ended in 1945 there was an awakening among the local people. They met Australian soldiers who did not particularly like the "Masta/Boi" setup and treated them as ordinary people. The New Guineans also saw black American soldiers and began to think 'if they can do it so can we'. Without them realising it WW2 was the first step towards independence in 1975.



## ARMY SMALL SHIPS

The designation "Water Transport" reminds one of an Army Three ton truck with a water tank on it and doing deliveries to Army units. Since it is also a foreign designation it is appropriate that 'Army Small Ships' be used. Within Small Ships, LSM's and the John Monash were "Big Ships" - anything else was "Little Ships".

Although Small Ships had an official beginning in Tobruk Harbour in 1941 there was an earlier beginning of a "Defacto" type. In 1939 when the European side of WW2 started the White residents of New Guinea were afraid that Germany would use New Guinea, particularly the coast between Lae and Madang. At the time Guinea Airways operated a passenger shuttle service between Lae and Salamaua with a launch called "Gnair". The end result was that the New Guinea



Volunteer Rifles had the "Gnair" armed and it began patrol tasks and target towing duties

In May 1963 I was posted to PNG as Master AM2834 "FERN", a 19 metre (62') Command Craft\Fast Supply vessel. Based in Port Moresby the area of operations ranged from the Northern Border with Irian Jaya to the Southern border of Irian Jaya as well as the adjacent Islands to PNG. Tasks undertaken were VIP, beach and river reconnaissance, Civil authority tasks, Bomb Disposal tasks. During Confrontation with Indonesia patrolling the Southern border area with Irian Jaya as well as inserting/extracting PIR patrols in rivers close to the border were also carried out.

Suzanne was to join me later in Moresby when accommodation became available. I travelled to Moresby on a chartered QANTAS DC-4 and all other passengers were members of 17 Const. Sqn. RAE who were on their way to Wewak where the Squadron was building a road from Wewak to Passam and then to Maprik. Murray Barracks had changed little since my stay in 1955 although the old Plywood and Masonite married quarters near the highway had vanished and new houses were built further into the area and now all married quarters were concentrated. The old Mess had vanished but the old single men's quarters were still standing but were being used as an office. The HQ building was now the Library and the Area Commanders house was now divided into two parts and one part of the house was the Officers Mess and the other was the Sgts. Mess. A new single story block had been built to house the HQ. The TP & NG area now rated a full Colonel as Commander.

There were no European ranks below Sgt., the rank of Cpl. and below being filled by PIR soldiers. The W02 I was to replace was "Bluey" Richters and he was to remain for two weeks before going to his posting in Perth. A new modern accommodation block of eight individual rooms had been constructed and it really was "five star" compared to the quarters of 1955. It was not only possible to take a shower and not worry about falling through the side of the building but more importantly the shower had hot water. The rooms were mosquito wired and with ceiling fans and a packet of cigarettes left open overnight no longer was a mass of mould the following morning, nor were there any Snakes. The "FERN" was undergoing refit at Steamships Trading Co. and was on the slipway near the main Moresby wharf. Looking at her on the slip I thought that the 62' Fast Supply were the most majestic of all the Army craft built or purchased.

After meeting the Commander, Col. Pascoe, it was decided that as my crew were all members of the 1st. Battalion Pacific Islands Regiment then both the Engr. and myself would live at Taurama Barracks, so out to Taurama I went to live. This created problems, mainly in transport to and from downtown Moresby but in particular with the Sgts. Mess at Taurama. This was an Infantry Mess and with the expansion of PIR, discipline within the Battalion was very tight and in particular within the Sgts. Mess as the plan was to train NCO's to the same high standard of the mainstream Australian Army. The RSM did not really cherish the idea of Water Tpt. people in his mess as we were definitely not Infantry and I did not cherish the idea of being there mainly from the logistical point of view in that we could not move either singly or as a group about our business when we wanted to. AM 2834 FERN and its crew were like the ARALUEN in Darwin - it was a "one off" and 24 hours seven days a week. We dressed as PIR in full Juniper Green uniforms and observed the Mess etiquette to perfection - if we were able to be present in the Mess. Relations were never strained but I think the RSM heaved a sigh of relief when Married Quarters became available for us at Murray Barracks a couple of months later.

After Nine years Murray Barracks had not changed very much. A modern HQ building had been built and a conference could now be held in an office at one end of the building and not even be heard in the next office whereas in the old HQ a conversation held at one end of the building could be heard at the other end of the building. The old HQ was now the Library. All the old, temporary "Masonite" Married quarters near the entrance to Murray Barracks had disappeared. The old "All Ranks" Mess now housed the office of anybody who was not allocated space in the new HQ building. Every Corps was now represented either as a unit or sub unit except for Artillery and Armour. PNGVR were still in their original building although some of the offices now contained Signal Corps personnel. Survey and Provost Corps were now represented and Intelligence was now operating as it should as compared to 1954 when the only rep. was a S/Sgt who also doubled as Chief Clerk, Orderly Room Sgt., Librarian, Pay Rep., Mess Sgt. and any other duty that could be defined as being required. In

1954 the ARMY knew that there was a Command of sorts in TP & NG but didn't know its location. It was obvious that they had located it and finding that the old Stables had not contained horses for many years had actually allocated a Transport Platoon to the area. Personnel could now telephone the Transport people for a vehicle and a vehicle with driver would arrive shortly thereafter. In 1954 one would go to the Orderly Room write your name and the reason for needing the vehicle and sometime that day or the next the "Gopher" (me) would arrive and off you would go. The old character and atmosphere of Murray Barracks had disappeared - the ARMY had arrived. By now Suzanne and Karen had arrived and we were settled in at Murray Barracks. Overall the "FERN" was in good shape. The vessel maintenance left nothing to be desired and the crew were in a routine that would be lost if I came up with a "new broom" idea so what was in place previously was left as is.

Tasks for the "FERN" were varied and many but there were a few that are well remembered to this day.

### **KEREMA (Papuan Gulf area)**

In late 1963 we were given a task to carry a U.S. Army PFC on a run up to Kerema and stop at any place we desired. This fellow had been drafted and was a specialist in taking Gravity readings anywhere in the world. The USAF had a detachment based in Port Moresby (relatively small by their standards - they had three B-29's, two B-50's, two DC-4's, and two Helicopters). They were mapping PNG and to tie the whole lot together gravity readings had to be taken at numerous defined locations and any other place where a reading could be obtained. The PFC was young and did not have much knowledge about anything except Gravity and in that field he excelled. We never asked any questions about his work as many of the words he used, we had never heard of but rather than admit our ignorance we simply said "If you need any assistance just ask and it will be given" (This satisfied our ego more than his). The equipment he had with him was very small and it could not be bumped, dropped or handled the wrong way whatsoever.

We departed Port Moresby about 0200 and went to Yule Island by the inner route which was dangerous at night to the uninitiated but relatively safe after one has done it a few times. On the way he remarked that as there were no lights, how did I conduct the many turns and how did we know where we were? I replied, jokingly "We don't really know where we are and we turn when we think we should turn". He never went below for the trip to Yule Island. We stopped at Vari Vari Island for about one hour and put him ashore to take readings and arrived at Yule Island about 0830.

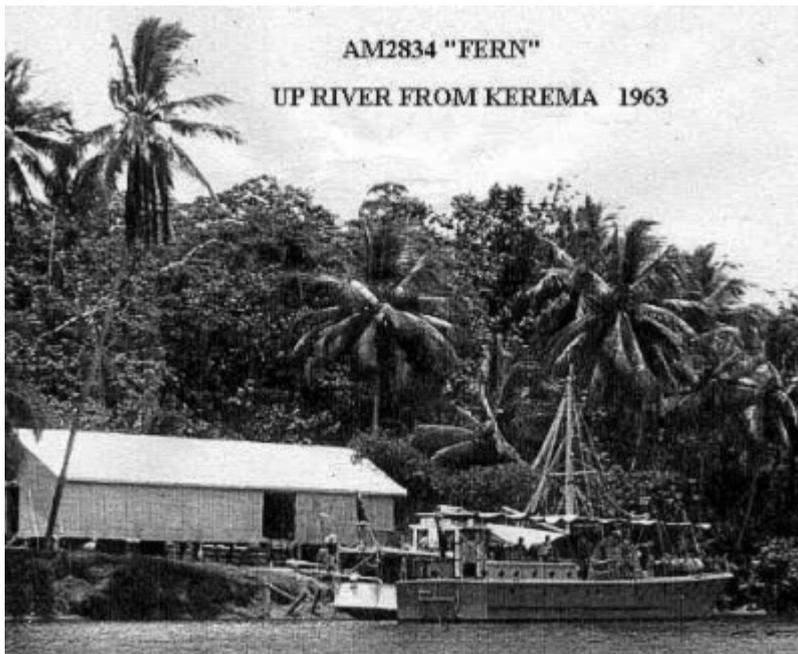
At Yule Island there is a small "T" wharf and at high tide there is a surge that comes in over the reef and even with many fenders the continual surging against the wharf is annoying so I told the Bosun to put a beam anchor out and I Expected him to get one of the dinghy's overboard and position the anchor. The dinghy was not removed from its cradle and the Next thing I heard was a splash and a crewman (Spr. Koliket) had set the anchor and line up and then dropped over the side and commenced walking along the bottom, every 20 feet or so he would rise to the surface, gasping for air, and the Bosun would give him directions and down he would go again. The anchor being positioned he swam back to the "FERN" and was told by the Bosun that the anchor should be over a little but I told him to forget it as Koliket was no longer a model of fitness. We were entertained by the Catholic Priests at Yule Island and this was by way of the Beer they brewed. It did not matter if you disliked beer - you said it was marvellous and the beer was just that but it was a very potent drop. The PFC walked all over Yule taking readings and we then moved up to the NW end of Yule Island and anchored in order to let the PFC take some more readings on the Northern point of Yule Island.

The anchorage was well protected and we spent a few hours on the bow of the "Fern" talking with the crew who were having a "sing-sing". One of the crew had joined us a couple of weeks earlier and he was the better educated of the whole crew but he was unusual in that he came from the Eastern highlands whereas all of our crew normally came from the coast. I was asking him the usual questions about his village and parents when I was astounded to hear him say "my real name is not the name that I joined the Army under". Sorcery and superstition may be myth and legend to Europeans but not too many of the people of PNG where it has installed fear. It transpired that a spirit being, the "Sanguma man" was very real and would appear at the village at odd times calling for the given birth names and he would take over the soul of any who answered. At the time of his birth his name was changed immediately by his Grandmother. The reason being that if his birth name was Makulu and the Grandmother changed it to Kumaki then when the "Sanguma man" arrived in the village and called out for Makulu then he did not have to answer as his name was Kumaki. Later that night we sailed for Kerema and now the wind had increased to about 20 knots and although the wind and sea was on our Port quarter the "FERN" rode rather well but it was the bar at Kerema that was nagging me.

The "FERN" had three unprotected screws and although I had timed it for a rising tide I did not relish the idea of crossing a bar with a SE sea breaking over it. . None of the Bars at river mouths have leads or lights and it is purely local knowledge so I asked the crew if they knew the correct way in but they could not remember but Edward, the Engine hand said that there was a Coconut Palm that stood out from the rest and was used as a lead. This information was very helpful and increased my confidence. On arrival off Kerema The backdrop to the Bar was a Copra Plantation and there were about 50 Coconut Palms that stood out over the rest. Fortunately the Seventh Day Adventist Mission Vessel had arrived a little earlier and I increased speed to get a bearing on his entry. As she crossed the bar the vessel was rolling heavily but being of deeper draft than "FERN", I reasoned that so long as I kept to the same track there would be no problem. The only electronics, apart from the radio, on "FERN" was a Bendix echo sounder and it was fascinating to watch the printout as we approached the bar. the sea bottom began a slow rise at the four fathom mark and as the bottom began to rise so the sea became shorter and higher. At the two fathom mark I was beginning to have second thoughts but the point of no return had been reached and it was in the trough as we crossed the bar that would be the greatest danger. As we crossed the bar the Echo Sounder trace showed about one foot clearance. I knew that I was out of position but we were over and into three fathoms. As we proceeded up the river I thought that in future the echo sounder should be turned off as the trauma associated with watching the bottom come up towards the hull was not conducive to my wellbeing. After berthing alongside the SDA vessel I went aboard and spoke to the native skipper and found that there was a second Palm tree to the rear of the first and these are kept in line until a tree line closes with a distant point and then course is changed to starboard with no more problems.



Our passenger went ashore and began taking readings much to the delight of the native kids. We paid our respects to the District Commissioner and naturally gravitated to the Club which was no more than a room with a rudimentary bar. Here we met every European in Kerema which was about 20 in total and were invited to everybody's house for Dinner, all at the same time. There was a Rubber Plantation Manager and his wife present and we were invited to go to the Plantation which was up river. Since this would be consistent with our passenger's policy of obtaining readings wherever he was able, I decided to take up the offer in a couple of days' time. In the meantime the hospitality flowed. If you as much asked "what's the time?" a beer was promptly put into your hand. I am not a very good drinker and keep away from it during the day completely so I would ask for Lemonade and always got what appeared to be Lemonade but Lemonade it was not.



We went up river to the Rubber Plantation a couple of days later and were given a tour of the Plantation. The rubber trees were placed in symmetrical order and were a very large operation. The workers, as in nearly all Plantations, were not locals but came from the NG Highlands. The operation was very efficient but even with the low labour costs it was very difficult to compete with the traditional foreign rubber plantations as their labour costs was lower than PNG, as well as world prices

being depressed. After the tour we naturally proceeded to the Residence for refreshments. The Manager and his wife were of the old school and the Residence reflected it. Cooking was done on wood stove, washing was done in a copper, the Iron was heated on the stove, refrigeration was kerosene, kerosene lamps were prevalent. Furniture was antique and would be worth a fortune today, floors were polished with coconut husks, the "outhouse" was a long way out and in this isolation the Manager and his wife were quite happy. "Down South" was "home" and one day they would go "home" but not in the near future.

After our passenger was satisfied with the readings he had taken in the Kerema area it was time to depart for Moresby. The plot was that we would transfer our passenger to an LSM, the "Vernon Sturdee" off Kerema and he would take readings during their travels. The weather was now typical SE Monsoon in the Papuan Gulf and we would be punching it all the way back to Moresby so it came as a surprise when we received a radio message to affect the transfer at Yule Island. Since the Master of "Vernon Sturdee" was known as "TUNA" (Chicken of the Sea), I could understand his hesitation in effecting a transfer in a seaway off Kerema so we departed Kerema and averaging a speed of seven knots reached Yule Island at midnight after a very bumpy voyage. We moored alongside and bade farewell to our passenger with the remark "you will have a very pleasant trip on the LSM as the skipper of the LSM will not depart from anywhere if there are clouds in the sky or waves are white capped and don't count on going to any place other than 'major ports'".

We departed Yule Island at 0400 and arrived Moresby at 0730. Father Ray Quirk, whom I had met earlier in Vanimo, was now a Chaplain in the Army and was based at 1st. Pacific Islands Regiment at Taurama Barracks. He dropped in to our house frequently "for Morning/Afternoon Tea and a chat" and he had not changed since the days at Vanimo 10 years before. He now, however, had no need to "Con" the Army for anything he wanted. he obtained it legally.

### **KUKIPI (Lakekamu river area)**

(Lakekamu river area) This was one of our "odd" tasks. There was a building program going on at various Army establishments in the Moresby area which called for buildings to be roofed using local materials i.e. Saksak Palm fronds (Sago Palm) and the District Officer at Kukipi was to provide the material. Our task was to bring it all back to Moresby. The idea was that the Army would obtain cheap roofing material and several villages would prosper from it.

We departed Moresby for Kukipi direct arriving off the bar about 1500. The weather was kind and the sea a millpond but the bar was still treacherous. The mouth of the Lakekamu had been blocked off and could not be entered. This was a natural phenomenon and sooner or later it would become navigable again. In 1963 the entry to the river system was at Kukipi. the depth of water began its gradual shallowing two miles from the bar and at low tide the depth over the bar was four feet. Once over the bar the depth was 15 feet. It would only be a matter of time before this bar became blocked and another entrance would become clear again. We moored at "Downtown Central Kukipi wharf" which was half a dozen stakes in the mud with a plank to the bank and held together with whatever was available at the time of construction. The District Officer at Kukipi was Frank Howard and as was the custom of the Patrol Officers everywhere in TP & NG we were invited to the Residence to partake of refreshments and discuss the "Modus Operandi" for the "saga of the Saksak". Frank's residence was also typical of the Patrol Officers who were stuck out in the "Boondocks". It was of local material construction which was good but the conveniences within were of poor or non-existent quality. Patrol Officers (Kiaps) have been, by many, generally regarded as misfits- which they were not, adventurers which they were and arrogant buffoons which a minority were (this term was one I often heard used by Port Moresby Public Servants who not only were ignorant of the dedication, workload and deprivation that was a Patrol Officer's lot but would never leave the false world of Port Moresby to find out.) Patrol Officers were very well educated and after a year or two as Cadet Patrol Officers would attend the Australian School of Pacific Administration (ASOPA) at Mosman (close to Chowder Bay) for two years. The "Modus Operandi" for our Saksak was simple - simply go to the designated villages on the river and the Saksak would be loaded by the villagers. Saksak, when used for roof thatching consists of doubling the leaves over the palm stalk and then held in place by thin vine. the finished article is about 24" wide and the length varies between five and eight feet. After fitting to a roof it provides for a cool interior. After ageing and with the assistance of borers, Saksak gives off very fine and dusty particles but can be considered a very effective yet economical roofing material. The Sago palm also is the source of the staple diet of many villagers.



The execution of the loading was a nightmare. Exuberant villagers tried to carry more than they could handle and loose Saksak was in the mud, in the river and all over the village. It was not uncommon for a carrier who had just deposited his load on the "FERN" to be knocked overboard by the fellow behind him which did tend to raise tempers. It was customary for the crew to assist any loading, myself

included, and this tended to make the villagers go faster which only compounded the mess aboard "FERN". Saksak was loaded everywhere there was space and so long as there was visibility from the Bridge it did not really affect our operational status. The "FERN" now had the appearance of a floating island and also all the insects that were normally resident in the village were now resident aboard "FERN". Mud was all over the place and it was obvious that fumigation was going to be necessary after completion of the mission. On the first loading a couple of snakes were found in the Saksak and were promptly disposed of and it became obvious that some sort of system must be introduced to rid the cargo of unwanted guests. The villagers were more terrified of the snakes than we were so I could not see a search being successful. When we left the river on the way back to Moresby I could not help but think how ridiculous we would look on arrival in Moresby.



We continued loading in Kukipi and unloading in Moresby for a couple of weeks without a break until one Saturday night in Kukipi we had a night off and had a formal dinner at the residence. The Residence was not as palatial as the one at Kerema but it was quite comfortable. We bought what fresh rations had not "gone off" from our refrigerator and this was

added to what had not "gone off" in Frank's kerosene Freezer. We drank the ice cream. The meal would normally be called "terrible" but Frank added Port, Sherry or Liqueur to everything and the meal was superb.

As the evening wore on we were entertained by Frank and the resident Patrol Officer firing their pistols at a coconut palm in order to knock down a coconut. Since not many Coconuts were evident on the ground I went aboard and bought one of the Bren Guns ashore and we not only had more Coconuts on the ground - we also had the top of the Palm tree on the ground also. After the entertainment we then went across the river to the beach and had a marvellous time cooling off.

Kukipi was a morbid place to spend time in as not only heat and humidity were oppressive but fine sand was over everything - you ate it and drank it. Continually running between Kukipi and Moresby without a break was beginning to take its toll on all of us and, these little interludes assisted in keeping us relatively sane. It was here in Kukipi that I picked up a "Wog" of unknown origin. It was introduced to my body by way of Tinea and a month after starting the Saksak mission my whole body broke out in a rash and was followed by blisters. The mission was called off and I was admitted to Port Moresby General Hospital. At this time I could run my fingernails along my arm and draw blood. I was covered with a Dermatitis cream called "Vioform" and my arms and legs wrapped in bandages. I was bathed in a warm/hot Potassium Permanganate solution three times daily with the solution a little stronger each time, a new layer of cream and bandages added after each bath. After 10 days the skin had hardened and began to fall off. After 14 days I was discharged from hospital but told that they had not isolated the "Wog" and that it may be with me for some time. At the time I thought that I had contracted "Girili", a rather unpleasant skin infection which was common among natives, in which the skin becomes very scaly and falls off. It too, covers the whole body if neglected. The Pidgin description for a native with Girili is "Pukpuk man" (Crocodile man). The "Wog" is still with me.

## LESSE

The Saksak mission continued in early 1964 but this time the pickup village was Lesse, about 20 miles to the East of Kukipi. Kukipi was a paradise compared to Lesse. Some years before, a couple of thousand or so, the village was built on the low ground just before the river mouth. It was hot and oppressive with more insects and mosquitoes than Kukipi. There were no resident



Patrol Officers and the villagers were a sullen, surly lot (so would I if I had to live there) who probably invented the no work ethic. The village was surrounded by a locally constructed fence about four feet high. Since Crocodiles were very prevalent here I assumed that the fence was to keep the Crocs. out or it may have been to keep the pigs in, or keep the villagers in. We moored alongside the river bank and began loading.

While we were loading out of Lesse village I had a look at the main use of the Sago Palm - the making of Sago. The men folk of the village would cut down a mature age Sago Palm - I never did find out what the difference was between an ordinary Sago Palm and a 'mature aged' Sago Palm. The trunk of the Palm is cut up into suitable lengths that can be then towed back to the village. The top of the 'log' is stripped of the outer bark so as to expose the fibrous pith and then the village women then hack out the pith and it is placed on a sloping trough which has a sieve at the end of the trough. The whole apparatus is set up on the river edge so that water can be easily applied to the trough. The pith is pounded heavily by the women in order to extract the starchy Sago from the pith and the fibrous material. The sago then settles on the bottom of a second trough where it is then removed and allowed to dry and harden. It can then be stored, for want of a better description, as pancakes but it looks nothing like the Sago that is made into Sago pudding in Australia. I did taste the village variety of Sago but either it had

no taste or I was not yet ready to rave about it as a food. Later, by adding vanilla and "long life milk" to the basic sago, it was quite edible but, by adding curry powder to it would also make it edible but whether it would be acceptable is another question.

Loading was very slow and the villagers displayed none of the exuberance that the Kukipi area villagers displayed. I wanted to complete a return trip to Moresby every day but it appeared that I was not going to achieve a return trip in two days. The crew did not mix with these people as they had elsewhere and the Bosun simply remarked that "These people are no good". Having nothing else to do but wait I set up one of the Bren Guns and had a practice shoot into the mangroves opposite. For some reason the villagers became excited and loading was accomplished rather quickly. When we returned for the next and succeeding loads loading was completed very quickly. This was one mission that I really wanted to complete as quick as possible and I did achieve a return trip daily.

## **EASTER 1964**

On Good Friday 1964 a family of Europeans and friends in a twin hulled Lakatoi went on a fishing expedition to Idihi Island, West of Moresby. The Lakatoi had no sails and was powered by motor. On Easter Sunday they had not returned to Moresby and a request was made to Army to use "FERN" as a search vessel. "FERN" was the fastest and only Patrol Boat in TP & NG during those years with long range capability and she was usually called for when speed and urgency demanded quick reaction time. We could normally move within 30 minutes of being advised of an emergency with a full crew. In order to get to Idihi Island as quickly as possible we followed the route which the Lakatoi had taken. This route had them inside the reef and crossing the reef to the West of Vari Vari Island. It was obvious that we could not duplicate that route as our draft would not permit it so we remained inside the reef and exited to the open sea at Liljeblad Passage and came onto Idihi Island to the Islands fringing reef we could not see anything or anybody. There were parts of the Island that were not visible to us (Western side) so we fired rifles in order to attract attention but the island was silent. We did a sweep seawards with no success and I then advised Moresby that no trace could be found of the Lakatoi and that a small craft search of the inside reef area should be conducted and that "FERN" would return to Moresby via Basilisk Passage on the chance that they may have either gone to Duago Island or were fishing on the outer reef.

We kept about two miles from the outer reef as we proceeded to Basilisk Passage but nothing was sighted. By this time small craft had begun searching on the inside reef and we were released from the search. The next day we were again requested as a small passenger aircraft had sighted what appeared to be a Lakatoi some 20 miles East of Marshall Lagoon and we set off once more at high speed only this time we had a Television team aboard. I did not like the Television team aboard. I did not like the idea of TV people being aboard but it was a case of "Do as you are told not as you would like". The sea was calm and the speed of "FERN" made for good TV, in fact the only part of "FERN" that was not put on film would have been the toilet whilst in use, however I felt sure that if I suggested that they do take film of the toilet in use then they would have done so. We were about halfway to the position when we were advised that the USAF had offered the use of a Kayman Search/Rescue Helicopter that had just come back to Moresby from a task in the Highlands and no sooner than we were advised when the chopper came over us and went straight to the position. I still continued on but was advised 30 minutes later that the Lakatoi had been found and to return to Moresby. It transpired that the fishing party had gone fishing on the outer barrier of Idihi Island on the Friday night and the motor failed and they did not have a radio. Either off Moresby, or a little to the SE, one of them went over the side and was never seen again and another inflated a li-lo mattress and attempted to paddle to the reef. I cannot remember what his fate was. The whole

episode was a case of "Fools go where Angels fear to tread" yet this same scenario would come up time and time again not only with the Native population but the Europeans as well.

In May 1964 I bought a 1949 MG "Y" sedan for 95 pounds. It was the only one in the Territory and allowed us to move around Moresby with Karen and Megan at our leisure

## **MILNE BAY & LOUISADE ARCHIPELAGO**

In July 1964 A multiple task was given to the "FERN". The first was to carry a Bomb Disposal NCO throughout the Milne Bay area to explode UXB's and to pick up Maj. General Brogan and his wife at Gili Gili wharf in Milne Bay and carry them on an inspection tour of the Milne Bay-Samarai area. General Brogan was GOC Northern Command and I had met him in 1962 as a result of my episode with the "drunk" Lt. Col. at Iron Range on Cape York. I hoped that our next meeting at Milne Bay would be under better circumstances than the previous meeting. His inspection tour was to be prior to his taking up his appointment as GOC Eastern Command. As well as these two tasks I had a third included in the Operation Order - to carry out a reconnaissance of the reef and islands to the East of Samarai.

My Engineer, Barry Shute, was to go on a survival course in Adelaide and my Engineer for the trip would be "Bluey" Buchannan, The WOIC RAEME Workshops. The Bomb Disposal NCO was Dick Green. The run down to Samarai was to be inside the reef with an overnight stop at Lopom Island, at the Western end of Orrangerie Bay near Margarida. We had one passenger for the trip, a public servant, who was to be dropped off at Abau. Departing Moresby at 0500 we made very good time on the run down to Hood Point (Hula) but the SE wind increased to a near gale as we approached Hood Point. Exiting the passage at Hood Point the seas were about 15 feet and our speed dropped to a crawl. After 2 hours we had just passed Hood Point and "FERN" was a mess. The canvas awning had torn and I was reluctant to send the crew out to the bow to either repair or cut away the damaged section. The dinghy had become loose in its cradle and the crew quarters were a shambles.

Discretion being the better part of valour, I turned around and returned to a safe anchorage at Hood Point. "FERN" was a well built vessel but it did not like head seas at Hood Point. We remained at the anchorage for two days until the gale subsided and then proceeded again. The weather conditions were still bad but nowhere near the ferocity of our last encounter. Our speed was down to six knots but quite manageable and we went inside the reef again at Aroma Passage Once inside speed was increased and the "FERN" made very good time although it was a very wet passage. Our passenger was dropped off at Abau and we were on our way before he had picked his luggage up from the wharf.

We anchored at Lopom Island and went ashore. There was a European Schoolteacher which constituted the European population and while having coffee the Village Elder appeared and wanted to know if we were "Army Bilong Queen" which we assured him we were and a sigh of relief came from him. It was at this time Australia was engaged in Confrontation with Indonesia and since the outlying villages had no other contact with the outside world except the "Pidgin" programs from 9PA in Moresby many felt that the Indos would come pouring across the border and he thought we might be the Indos. We were then invited to the monthly communal "barbecue" which was held every Full Moon. Every family bought along the food which was laid out along palm fronds and was in its entirety local food. There was seafood of all descriptions, Taro, Banana, melons etc. These people were as happy as anyone could wish to be. The evening was capped off by the dancing and "sing-sing". What impressed me most were three little girls about four or five years of age who performed a "belly dance" while the villagers sang "Esa Lei".

We arrived in Samarai the following day and I duly paid my respects to the District Commissioner, Mr. Elliot-Smith. We were given a berth alongside the swimming baths to use as our base whilst in the area and it suited us admirably. Samarai had not changed physically since my stay 10 years earlier and I doubt if it had changed much since the twenties. A. H. Buntings "Department Store", now owned by Steamships Trading Co. was the only visual change I could see. The Samarai club was still the small shed but with a new coat of paint and was still the social centre of Samarai.



Dick began collecting data on where the UXB's were in the District and found that there were too many to explode in one month. For a start the collected data did not specify what the UXB was i.e. it could have been a 500 pounder or a 3" mortar shell and there was always the probability that at least one of these locations was not a single bomb but a bomb dump. Also when the

word gets around that somebody is blowing up bombs then other locations are found as well as those bombs that villagers do not want anybody to know about. Dick did not have enough explosives Primacord and detonators to do the job, given the available data, let alone what extras would appear. The "FERN" would need extra equipment, namely Assault boats and outboard motors etc. As the magnitude of the task became more apparent I advised Dick that we could only remain on station for one month as the "FERN" was tasked to a priority mission to the border area on completion of this task and we needed as much time as possible before that mission to prepare. I also said that on completion of the mission he submit a report stating that the residue of UXB's be handled as soon as possible after our next mission.

we departed Samarai for Milne Bay early in the morning and China Straits was its usual scene from paradise. The Strait is a mass of small islands, each with its own character and beauty, with the passage between them and the mainland. The mainland is dotted with villages and the mountains come steeply down to the coast. At the Southern entrance to Milne Bay is a group of two islands and although they are on the charts, it is difficult to see the entrance to the very small harbour that the two islands encompass. The place is called Kana Kope and it was first on our list. There is a very small wharf there and there was a bomb on one of the two islands. With Dick I went over and had a look. It was a 250 pounder and it was not armed and according to Dick, had never been armed. What it was doing there and how it got there we will never know. After ensuring that no villagers were around and no shipping was in the Strait it was blown up. Kana Kope was, as of Dec 42, raised as a PT boat base of the US 7th Fleet and Three Squadrons operated out of that little harbour until Tufi became the advanced base and then Morobe. One of the Squadron Commanders who operated out of Kana Kope was Lt. Cmdr. Bulkeley who had bought MacArthur out of the Philippines earlier in 1942. There was a tap at the wharf which was connected to a pond up on the mountain about 3/4 mile away. It had been put there in 1942 and water was still flowing from it and as far as I know it will still be flowing at the end of the century. The water from it is as pure as water can be and we filled up. The only other place I was to see something similar was at Finschafen and Kairuru.

We then proceeded to the Northern side of Milne Bay and blew up two more bombs and a box of mortar shells. From there we went to Gili Gili at the head of the bay and moored at the wharf and then went to "see" a few more UXB's. We did not blow them as I was to receive Maj. Gen. Brogan the following day and it would be just my luck to have the explosions go off funny like and prevent his



plane from landing at Gurney Field. We ended up anchoring in a small bay for the night as Gili Gili was the homing beacon for all New Guinea Master Mosquitoes at night. Although we had cooking facilities aboard our rations for the month consisted of 10 man ration packs. These were very good for 10 men for one night but not for 28 days. Our crew then began trading with villagers for vegetables and fruit. The natives thought that they came out front on the deals but we knew better. We also carried a dozen cartons of Cashmere Bouquet soap but we were holding these in reserve to trade to Europeans for "edible luxuries". I had obtained the soap from the PIR Q store as they were expense items.

The following day we berthed at Gili Gili wharf and awaited the arrival of Gen. Brogan. The "FERN" was immaculate and even I had prepared for this occasion being dressed in Juniper green shirt and shorts suitably ironed and starched before leaving Moresby and even wore my beret correctly although I did not wear shoes and long socks - I wore sandals. He was picked up at Gurney field by the ADO and brought down to the wharf and on greeting him with all the formality he deserved, he surprised me by saying "I was told you were in command - We have met before haven't we ? ". I replied "Yes, Sir - the Operation Blowdown" affair in 1962". He looked me in the eye and said "Yes - I remember" and then introduced me to his wife. I had the crew except for one lined up on the wharf and said to the General "Would you like to inspect the crew, Sir". He did and the crew were immaculate both in their drill and dress - mainly because the Bosun had told them they were in big trouble if they weren't. As the General placed his foot aboard "FERN" the Watchman aboard gave a flick of his wrist and the GOC (Afloat) Standard unfurled from the Yardarm. This impressed the General but these flags have never impressed me as they only come in one size and that size is applicable to a 35000 ton Battleship, not a 62' Fast Supply.

We departed Gili Gili at high speed as we were not going direct to Samarai but rather from one side of Milne Bay to the other showing Gen. Brogan points of interest. Arriving in Samarai some three hours later we were met by the DC and the General was whisked away to do whatever Generals do on these visits. My instructions were to stand by as the DC would probably want to take the General and his wife on local tours during their stay. Now began a curious chain of events - twice a day a Police Sgt. would appear at the "FERN" with a note from the DC. He would salute and hand me the note in Military fashion far better than I would have done but it was the calling me "Sir" that got to me. I showed the Sgt. my rank which was Sgt. and told him not to call me "Sir". He immediately said "Yes Sir" and departed. Every time he came down to the "FERN" he still called me "Sir" so I reasoned that if you can't beat 'em then join 'em so I said no more. but I do believe that Sgt. was smiling to himself.

We did quite a few local tours with the General, the DC and guests and the crew performed magnificently. We went to Kwato Mission, Sidea Island, Bogeia Island and many of the small uninhabited islands. These islands were only about 60-100 acres and were typical of the whole Louisiade Archipelago - paradise. The visit finally ended and we took the General back to Gili Gili where he thanked us for a splendid job and was off in a plane back to Moresby.

It was now back to work and our first task became a return to WW2. There was a report of a couple of UXB's at Gamadodo which on the southern side at the head of Milne Bay and opposite to Gili Gili. We went across and the shoreline was simply the remains of a very large Oregon Pine wharf complex. Going ashore one of the local villagers took us to where the UXB's were and it was a large mound. The mound was a pile of UXB's complete with 25' trees growing up through them and covered with vines. Dick was not very impressed with this turn of events so Blue and I left him to sort it out and we went for a look around the shore. It had been part of the US base and after the war the place had been stripped of all heavy equipment by the Salvage people but other than that it was untouched. The land was given back to the Mission after the war and they, in 1964, had not done anything with it. The first item of interest was a twin slipway with two boats about 25' in length still on the slips. At the head of the Slip was a Dodge Weapons Carrier and a short distance away hidden in the undergrowth was a very large shed. Inside the shed was a complete Marine Workshop with lathes, milling machines, presses etc. Nearly all of the machinery was belt driven with the power being supplied by a GM diesel engine at the rear of the shed. Unit tactical signs were still tacked to the shed and various parts of marine equipment were still scattered over the area. About 100 metres along and completely overgrown were six LCM-6 landing Craft, each placed on 18" Oregon logs and rusting away. On each craft the cylinder heads of the Gray Marine engines had been removed and placed alongside the engines. On the rocky shore was another LCM with its bow door down and in the final stages of disintegration. One of the two craft on the slipway still had about two feet of Copper sheathing protruding past the bow, the task never being completed. We visualised the scene without the overgrowth. People working on the two craft and somebody from the Orderly Room driving up in the Weapons Carrier and saying "We are going home" and then hopping into the LCM and going out to a ship. This was of course a simplistic view and later on I could not find any reference to Gamadodo at all except a brief mention in Vol. IV "United States Naval Operations - Breaking the Bismarck's Barrier" and that it was a Logistic/Repair facility of the VII Amphibious Force, Seventh Fleet but I did know, however, that the US Army Air Force did not pull out of Finschafen until 1947 and there may well have been a US presence in Milne Bay at that time. I photographed everything there in colour and had those slides for 22 years. (In 1986 I went through the 2000 slides that I took during my career and sorted them out as many were becoming covered with mould. I selected 80 slides which I considered to be the best and sent them to Kodak for conversion to photographs. Not seen by me at the time was that the wrong name had been put on the receipt and the receipt was left at the agency. Two weeks later when I returned to pick them up there was no record of my name. The slides were there but under a different name. I lost the lot. The Gamadodo slides were in the set of 80)

My thirst for history did not arise until Vietnam and I wish that it had arisen in 1964 as Gamadodo was untouched History. As will be stated later I was to come across many things in PNG in places such as Salamaua, Morobe, Dreger Harbour, Finschafen, Sio, Saidor, Alexishafen, Wewak, Cape Womb, Manus, Cape Gloucester, Tufi, Oro Bay, Buna, Aitape, Goodenough Island, Umboi Island, Jaquinet Bay, Labu and Cape Hoskins but I never began collecting until 1966 and nobody wanted what I had collected.

We continued on our task of clearing Milne Bay of UXB's but never completed it. As far as I know there are still hundreds of UXB's still in the area. We also went to Waga Waga

Anchorage on the Southern side of Milne Bay where there was a couple of 250 pounders. There was a specialist type of barge scuttled there, with the bow and superstructure still protruding from the water. Going over it we found that it had been built in Australia as some of the Gantry equipment had "Port Kembla - 1944" embedded in the beams, The best guess that we came up with was that it was a barge used to either produce asphalt or crush coral to make "Coranous" for airfields/roads.

We had weekend breaks in Samarai and were often invited out to Copra Plantations on some of the Islands which we always accepted. One of the popular pastimes in Samarai was going down to the wharf to see the ships come in and mainly to see who was coming in and who was going out. TAA was running a Catalina Service between Moresby, Samarai and Deboyne Lagoon at the time and was a weekly service. Being a Catalina it did not carry many passengers but it was an event and had to be seen. The Simpson family who were Samarai residents from "Bipor Time" told me of the old days when a representative of the Burns Philp Store would always be present on the wharf with a list of people who still owed them money and if somebody was leaving who was on that list then they would be approached to "settle their account" before departure.

There were a few "remittance men" in the area at the time and one of these lived on the coast near the Southern entrance to China Straits. He had a trusty Native with him and he had a native hut and lived in Paradise. He also had a few Coconut Palms and once a month he would come into Samarai by canoe with his Copra to sell and pick up his "remittance" from home. After off loading his Copra and picking up his remittance he then proceeded to the Samarai Club where over the next two days he would drink himself silly and then the "man Friday" would carry him down to the canoe and they would return to their paradise and repeat the process a month later. On our way back to Moresby our departure coincided with their departure so we took them aboard and towed the canoe to the beach where they lived and "poured" the Remittance Man into his canoe and off they went. Like many of his kind they were very intelligent and knowledgeable people without booze but after an hour on the bottle they were utterly useless. During my time in Samarai I had become friendly with the Treasury Officer, Harley Trigg and his wife, Sheila. At the time of our departure Sheilas Father became quite ill in Moresby and she could not get out on the Catalina until the following week so we took her back to Moresby with us (having them sign the usual Indemnity Forms as was required). Our run back to Moresby was direct and outside the Reef and 18 hours after departing Samarai we were back in Moresby

### **LAE - CAPE GLOUCESTER - RABAU - KANDRIAN - MISIMA - SAMARAI**

This trip was originally a training run for some of our new seamen and was also to be in conjunction with a Recruiting drive for PIR. We departed Moresby and stopped at Samarai only for refuelling and thence direct to Lae taking 47 hours from Moresby. At Lae we were informed that the Recruiting drive had been cancelled and would take place at a future date. We departed Lae for Rabaul via Talasea. On the way to Talasea we stopped over at Cape Gloucester and it was my intention to anchor off the beach at the spot where the US 1st Marine Division had landed in 1943. There was very heavy surf running at the time so I gave it a miss as there was no visible evidence that any landing had taken place as the jungle had reclaimed everything. I had been advised that at Borgen Bay, a few miles to the East, were a few Landing Craft relics and I dropped in to have a look as the fellow who told me about them remembered them as being there just after the war had finished.

I was doubtful that there would be anything there but the spot where we anchored in Borgen Bay had no surge running so we anchored close to the beach. At the location given to me, it

was just like everywhere else, nothing could be seen but on going about 100 metres in from the beach I was astounded to see two lines of LCM-6's interspersed with LCVP's. All of these craft were on the usual 18" Oregon Logs and every one had the engine cylinder heads removed and placed on the deck. All told there were 12 craft. The last US unit in this area was the US 40th Division and these craft were not Army but US Navy. Had they been in storage since the departure of the 1st. Marine Division in early 1944? If so then why could they not have been used by the Australians, who were very short of any Landing craft, when they took over from the US 40th Division? I was to find a lot more of this useless destruction later at Finschafen and other places and at every location there were questions that will probably never be answered.

After departing Borgen Bay we went direct to Rabaul. At Rabaul there were some vehicles to be taken to Pomio in Jaquinet bay but of course we were not a Landing Craft although an ALC-50 would have been wonderful to have. We stayed in Rabaul three days and leave was given to the whole crew but a Security watch was maintained at all times.

Leaving Rabaul we then went down the East Coast of New Britain to Kandrian. It had been nine years since my last visit and it was exactly the same except the Patrol Officers were all new. Three of the crew came from this area and as a result the crew were given the "Key to Kandrian". Since the Three came back to the "FERN" with the Largest smile I have ever seen on their faces I assumed that "they came, they saw and they conquered". Leaving Kandrian we then proceeded South about 190 miles to pick up the Trobiand Islands where we anchored at Kitava Island for about three hours and then another 180 miles to Misima where they also thought we were a Landing Craft and had a few vehicles to be taken back to Moresby if we could fit them aboard. At this time the "Port" was Bwagaoia and like most of the outlying stations of this period were still in the planning stages for development. We called into Samarai to refuel and then proceeded to Moresby direct.

## **THE SHELL ROAD MAP EXERCISE**

One night in the Mess the conversation drifted around to navigating along the coast of TP & NG and the Transport Sgt. asked if the Charts were accurate and I replied "that they were - if one keeps to the recommended track but if you do that then all you need is a TP & NG road map". One of the Ordnance WO's asked if I could get to Lae using only a road map and at the same time he bet a carton of SP Lager that I could not. I took up the bet and said "If you can get leave when I have the next trip 'around the other side', then we'll do it."

The next day I was not too happy about opening my mouth the night before but had a look at the "SHELL ROAD MAP OF TP & NG". It could be done easily but I soon found out that the Transport Sgt and the W02 also had second thoughts about opening their mouths the night before and laid down a condition that the run was to be non-stop with only one anchorage allowed. I replied that I would have to take on fuel at Samarai (which was not really the truth as if I ran at reduced speed I could make Lae OK). Weather would play an important part in the exercise and I would opt for the inside route from Moresby to Samarai and hope for good weather in the Tufi area as there were many course changes and if heavy rain was falling on the approach to Tufi and having no Radar, would create difficulties:

A couple of weeks later a task was given to me that required the "FERN" to go to Madang and I informed the two "bettors" to take some leave as soon as we were ready to go and that the "FERN" would go to Madang with a refuelling stop at Samarai (in and out) and Lae with only one anchorage allowed. The only fellow that could get leave was the Transport Sgt, which was par for the course as the only time I ever saw RAASC people was when they were on

leave. He was horrified when I casually made the remark we don't drink at sea on the "FERN". The passage on the inside route to Samarai was a piece of cake and the Sgt was meticulous in seeing that I only used the road map.

The run to Samarai was not so good due to weather and we arrived in Samarai at 2300 hrs and the Sgt was rather smug knowing that I could not get fuel until the following morning- what he did not know was that I knew the Mobil manager and went to his house and explained to him that we were behind schedule for a task in Madang and could I get fuel now. He was very helpful and we were out of Samarai by 0100. The run across Milne Bay to the little passage at Mei-Meiara island, East Cape was uneventful but I had to slow down to a crawl to find the passage as it was a very dark night and time was lost. I now knew I had it made as the only danger was Veale Reef on the approach to Tufi and that would be now made in daylight. I felt rather relieved as I passed Veale Reef and passing Tufi and rounding Cape Nelson and passing Spear Island was no problem. I had intended to run in close to Oro Bay and turn to the NNW for the run to Cape Ward Hunt but we had no sooner left Spear Island astern at 1430 when it began to rain heavily and after an hour had not diminished and I was running blind with a turn coming up.



Discretion being the better part of Valour - I stopped and pondered the situation. The turn I was going to make allowed for a small margin of error but since I did not know where I was I opted for continuing at low speed to the WNW hoping that the rain would either stop altogether or would ease so that I could pick up the coast and then pick up Oro Bay. The rain eased to light rain and the

coastline appeared but with no background. we kept going until I was sure I had Oro Bay but just to be 100% sure I went in to the mouth and I now had a "firm fix". Going out to sea a few miles I then turned to the North passing clear of Cape Sudest and finally picked up Buna (Cape Killerton) just on Twilight and all was OK as the run to Mitre Rock (Cape Ward Hunt) was clear. I was fully prepared to anchor after the rain came down at Spear Island but I now had a "free anchorage" to play with. We arrived in Lae at 0700 the following morning after slowing down at various times due to heavy rain.

After leaving Lae that same evening it was a milk run to Madang. The task at Madang was moving TP & NG Admin. personnel between Madang, Alexishafen, Cape Croiselles and Long Island and waiting for them to complete their tasks. We then returned to Madang and loading some of their equipment and personnel we took them back to Lae and then returned to Moresby. I received the carton of SP Lager but it was obvious that the feat of showing that Navigating the PNG coastline could be done with a Road Map was overshadowed by the two Bettors realising that they lost a carton of beer and the lesson learnt by me was never again to open my mouth on what I can do with the "FERN".

## THE BORDER WITH INDONESIA

Preparation for this mission began as soon as we had arrived back in Moresby. The normal Engr, Barry Shute was back and Blue had retired to his Workshop. This was the time when Australia, due to political and military events in Indonesia and Malaysia, despatched an Infantry battalion (with support) to the area. The Army also sent two of our LSM's. This crisis became known as "CONFRONTATION WITH INDONESIA".

The Border mission had multiple tasks. We were to spend as much time as possible on or near the Southern Border of TP & NG / West New Guinea as well as insert and extract PIR patrols in the upper reaches of the Moorehead River and carry out a reconnaissance of the coast and rivers between Daru and the border. I had to learn the use of the "One time letter pad" form of code in which I had a copy of the code and the receiving station had the other. The resultant code was unbreakable but it had one major drawback - it was time consuming to prepare. Not only was I the Master of "FERN" but also the Rations Officer, Medic, Navigator, Wireless operator, Gunnery, clerical (this was the easiest task I had - I did not do any paperwork while we were away) and now I was into the Cipher game. I realised that if we got into any real trouble any call for help would be in uncoded language but I was to send coded traffic as the case warranted i.e. tactical traffic was to be in the "clear" mode and intelligence traffic would be coded.

We did not carry any extra personnel for the mission, which was in our favour as since nobody in Murray Barracks knew anything about the Coast of TP & PNG let alone the coast between Daru and the border, as it usually causes a shock to the system when there is somebody aboard who knows nothing but is sincere in his desire to let you know that he does know something and he comes up on the bridge while you are occupied going at full speed in a dicey area and all of a sudden he says "is that a sandbar dead ahead". - you very near have a heart attack and just in time realise that it is a gust of wind shimmering the surface.

At the time the preparations were going on, the news was officially released that as of January 1965 the Military Administration of TP & NG would no longer be controlled by Northern Command in Brisbane but would have full Command status and be known as PNG Command. At the same time I was advised by HQ that as a result of the new Command status a new Marine unit was to be formed and known as 821 Water Tpt. Tp. which I was to raise. I was literally given the establishment and told to raise it. Not knowing how to raise a unit I thought I would ask around and was helped greatly by my next door neighbour who was the RQMS at Murray Barracks. It was all a matter of paperwork and indenting for stores so during the evening hours most of my time was spent in completing Indents on Ordnance requesting the stores necessary as per the strength of personnel and equipment on the proposed establishment. The Northern Command Bureaucracy then raised its off the shelf answer. Until January 1965 we were still administered by Northern Command and Northern Command had no record of 821 Water Tpt. Tp. and since the unit was not in existence then there was no requirement for the stores to be issued at this time. I decided to let the matter rest where it was and let someone else worry about it as I had this next mission to start.

We left Moresby on Saturday evening at 2000 and by 2400 had Yule Island astern for the crossing of the Gulf of Papua. The sea was calm with a long SE swell which was not normal for the Pap Gulf at this time of the year. I had two hours sleep in the wheel house between 0100 and 0300 and then sat in my chair just gazing over the side. The crewman who was on the wheel, Aros, was notorious for falling asleep standing up so every 10 minutes I would speak to him just to be sure. I continued gazing and was quite happy when at about 0400 a black shape went past and then another. On closer inspection it appeared we were in the

middle of the outflow from the Fly River and the shapes were Nipa palms that had been uprooted from the river bank and swept out to sea. I then put another crew member at the bow to keep an eye on them as I did not want to hit one of them or go over them because of our unprotected screws. At 0500 on Sunday the swell had subsided and the sea was flat so at twilight I took a set of three stars and got a very reasonable fix. We did not carry a chronometer so I used a stopwatch and started it when I got the time signal for GMT from WWVH in Honolulu on the radio. At 1030 I took a Sun sight but was not expecting anything great from that sight as the horizon was very difficult to determine.

We picked up Bramble Cay (the Northern most extremity of the Great Barrier Reef) at 1200 and we were a mile out of position. The run into Daru was perfect weatherwise and we caught a 15lb Mackerel off Bramble Cay as we passed. We never caught fish at sea unless we slowed our speed and when we did it was always over a sunken reef or going close to the fringing reef on Cays like Bramble and we never missed out on fresh fish. When approaching Daru from seawards it gives one the impression of a swampland full of frustration and despair. When we berthed at the Daru wharf (we took up the whole length of it) and had a look ashore it was a swampland full of frustration and despair with a few buildings on it.

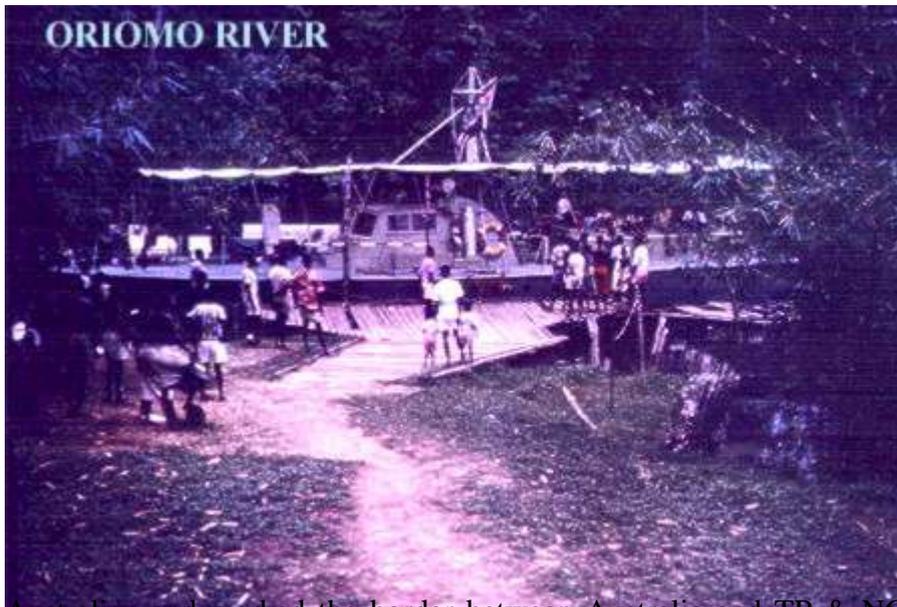
Barry and I went up to the Western Districts Club to have a drink and watch a 16mm movie. We were sitting out on the veranda having a drink when one of the locals arrived with his family. He was Australian with a local wife and the three kids, like all mixed race children were both good looking, healthy and very courteous. What happened next was something that made my blood boil. He settled the family on the veranda and then called the native "bar-boi" over and gave him an amount of money with the instructions to make sure that they were well supplied with drinks and eats. He then went into the inside of the club with his friends leaving the family on the veranda. Probably many locals were critical of him for marrying local in the first place but my criticism was that if he was proud enough to marry a local then he should have been proud enough to take his family inside the club and not expose his family to the hypocrisy that his marriage represented.

Another innovation for this mission was that we were on a ration account which meant that we could buy our rations from Daru stores and all that entailed was preparing a shopping list based on four ounces of steak per man per day plus 25% as we were seagoing. This of course was ridiculous when considering the fact that we were only 11 in strength and we could not hold fresh food over 48 hours and there were no department stores where we were going. Before I had left Moresby my next door neighbour had completed the necessary forms for me to assist but I was to find a way to use it to our advantage. I did not bother to learn Ration Accounting as I considered it low on the list of priorities which if the Supply depot knew at the time - there would have been an unholy row and I would, naturally, lose the fight.

I went to see the DC on the Monday and found out who the patrol Officers were in the border area and where they were I also asked if there was a Native Guide available as apart from a very sketchy survey done by B.P. for the Australian Petroleum Co. of the run up to Boigu Island there was nothing on the charts except "reefs and sandbars reported". He said there was but could we feed him and I agreed, realising of course that he was going to throw our ration account out by some 4 ounces per day. If I put him in the Logbook as a European I could probably get six extra ounces of Rump steak. The mind boggled at such opportunity.

The DC asked us to do a run up the Oriomo river which was opposite Daru and since it would be part of our recce. there was no problem. I went up to BP's and saw the manager and we discussed our purchasing of rations. What we ended up doing was working out the value of our entitlement and having the invoice made out to that amount and then the Bosun and I

walked around the store selecting the food the crew wanted. The crew were not real keen on European rations. Since we could not hold fresh meat over two days we took two days fresh and the remainder in vegetables and rice plus copious quantities of Long Life Milk and packaged meat such as Ham.



Completing the Oriomo River task we again refuelled and set off for Boigu Island with our smiling but toothless "pilot". The run up to Boigu was as the APC survey suggested - it was very shallow and sandbanks were everywhere. Before reaching Boigu we passed Saibai Island. Both of these islands were

Australian and marked the border between Australia and TP & NG. We anchored at Boigu and watched the Islanders skin a Dugong and it brought back memories of Darwin when anchored close to the fringing reef between Escape Cliff and Cape Hotham. I had positioned myself midway between two groups of Surveyors, who had set up "shop" on exposed reef, in order to give quick assistance if they run out of time with the incoming tide. I must have anchored on a patch of Seagrass which these large ugly, but harmless, mammals consume as their diet. There would have been at least 30 of them as they would break the surface with a snort then inhale to replenish their air supply and then quietly submerge again. They may have sensed the "FERN" but were not in the least disturbed by our presence. We did get some Dugong steak and cooked it as steak and the flavour was similar to Pork but we did carry many types of meat flavouring agents and I do believe that we could have made it taste like chicken if we desired. Watching the Boigu Islanders handle their version of a Trimaran was a delight as they did so with great skill and although they were quite serious in their handling they also enjoyed every moment.

The next morning we departed for the border area and our "pilot" was up on the bow. We could only just see the coast of Papua and every now and then he would indicate that we were to go to Port or to Starboard and I thought this odd as he had no reference points but he was so right. These sandbanks were like icebergs in that you could be in two fathoms of water and see the sandbank a mile away yet 50 feet



towards it would have a depth of two feet. I still could not figure out how he knew but I began to listen to every word he said. We arrived off the Moorehead river late afternoon and this was going to be a tricky entry.

I had a chart of the Moorehead mouth given to me by the Manager of A.P.C. and while the primary lead was a very conspicuous tree the final entry was first, not so much a bar but very shallow water for about a mile and then a semi-circular route steering NW and veering to the North East. At the time of the Survey beacon stakes had been placed to the Stb. side of the channel which marked the very foul ground at distances of 150 yards. None of these were now evident but there was still one marker in position. We had been advised to mark the channel with saplings as we went in so that exiting would be easier which was carried out. Once into the river the water was about 3-4 fathoms and it was Crocodile country. There was a village called Bula which had a few refugees from West Irian hiding there but as we passed the village it was deserted. It had been a long day so I anchored about a mile past the village and the only pastime carried out that night was shooting at Crocs but nobody wanted to go into the water to get them.

The next morning we departed and went off rather slow at first as I was wary of snags in the river. The river was tidal for about 30 miles and I began to increase speed as it became evident that this river was exceptional in that it was 3 fathoms from bank to bank and so long as the "FERN" was kept in the centre of the river at the turns we could maintain 14 knots with no problem. There were a few cases where trees had fallen across the river and we had to go very close to the opposite bank but they were spotted long before and speed was reduced to a crawl to get past. The river was full of Crocs. They were all sunning themselves but they would hear the roar of the GM's long before we got to them but the size of the tracks in the mud were enough to ensure that nobody went over the side. The banks of the river were lined with the usual Sac-Sac Palm and Nipa Palm but all of a sudden the countryside changed and it opened up into normal forest with grass replacing the Sac-Sac and Hyacinth growing profusely along the banks.

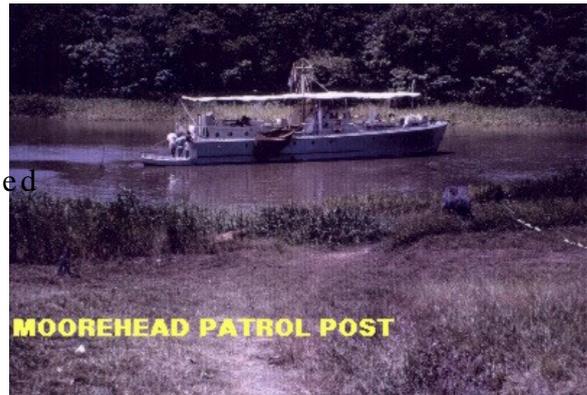
The only incidents worthy of note on the way up to Rouku and Moorehead was about 20 miles short of Moorehead we came up to a bend which arced to starboard and on the bend was a magnificent tree, either a Rain tree or close relative and under that tree was a massive Deer. He must have heard us coming but made no effort to run - he just stood there. I had visions of a Venison stew and told Barry to shoot it. He got the Bren gun and fired at it as we were coming into the bend but missed and the Deer did not move. I said "put it on automatic" which he did and the Deer dropped. I slowed down and put the bow into the Hyacinth and a few of the crew went over the bow onto the bank and raced through the grass to get the Deer. Barry had followed them with the Bren but I did not see him come up the bank so I raced up to the bow and all I saw was a pair of hands holding a Bren Gun poking through the hyacinth. One of the crew was already pulling him up. We went ashore and the Deer was badly wounded and looking at it I wished we had never shot it. I said to Barry "finish it". The crew did the butchering but I had lost the desire for Venison stew. Barry got the Antlers which, I think, he still has.

As we got closer to our destination we began to see evidence of habitation but never seen anyone ahead of us at all. It appeared that the natives in canoes heard us coming and shot into the river banks amongst the high reeds and we did not see them until we were abeam and travelling at 14 knots our wash sort of upset not only the occupants but the canoe as well. As we approached Moorehead on a relatively straight run, the presence of the oil exploration 10 years before was quite evident. All trees on both sides of the river had been lopped so their

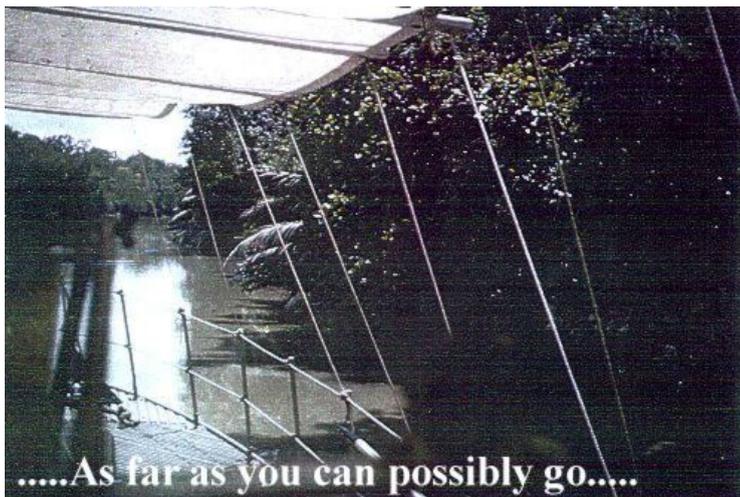
height would have been no more than 20 feet and it was obvious that this was the landing area for the seaplanes used for re supply.

On arrival at Moorehead we were met by a very nervous Cadet Patrol Officer. The resident Patrol Officer was out near the border and nobody had advised him of our arrival and he thought that we were Indos as did the villagers. He had heard us coming and was on the radio trying to get Daru when we anchored. I could not resist asking him if there were many Deer around to which he replied "Heaps of them" and I then asked how he shot them and he replied that it was easy - "you have a torch, whistle and target Pistol or .22 rifle. At night you blow the whistle, the female answers, you turn the torch on and shoot." I did not have the heart to tell him how we shot Deer.

At Moorehead we were about 150 miles from the mouth and I was to wait until a PIR Platoon arrived by air and take them up river as far as we could get and insert them as they were to keep an eye on the border area. I advised Moresby of our location by the one time letter pad and requested permission to enter the Bensbach River which was on the border but the reply the following day refused permission to do so.

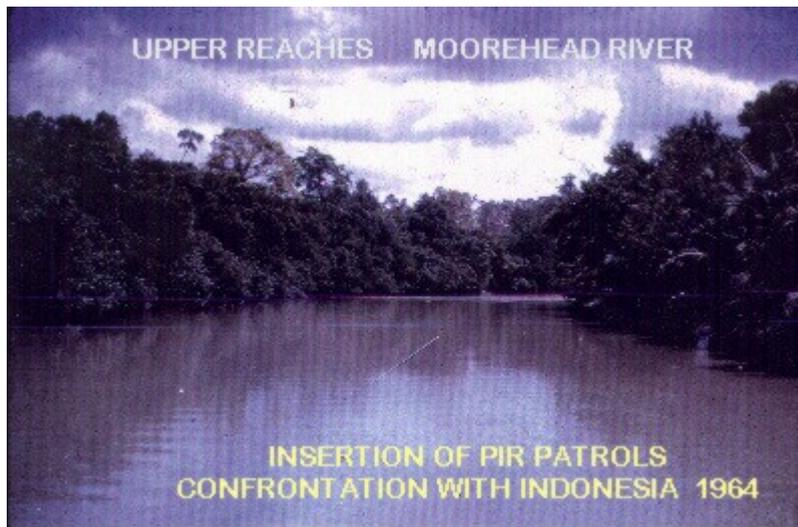


The border is a geographical co-ordinate namely 141.0E. This Longitude cuts through the mouth of the Bensbach. The river entrance was such that I would have to cross the border to enter. I was hoping that Murray Barracks would not realise that I would have to cross the border (possibly 100 yards) but they were a lot smarter than I thought though the probable reason for refusing permission was that I was now a Ration Account holder and would have to be audited. Maintenance of "Q" discipline will be maintained at all times.



The following day the PIR Patrol arrived and were commanded by a Major who was on the ball and anxious to move so we put them all aboard and began to move up stream slowly as the river was now beginning to narrow. At Moorehead it was only 100 feet in width. We went past the village of Sentavi and reached a point where the river had narrowed to a width about 10 feet more than the length of the "FERN" and I nosed into the

overhanging banks and our passengers quietly and quickly went ashore. They melted into the Jungle and disappeared. We returned to Moorehead and cleaned the "FERN" as we had leaves, branches and vines all over from turning at the disembarkation point. I was then advised that another Patrol was to be inserted but this time it was to be downriver.



We waited at Moorehead for the patrol to arrive by air and it was larger than the first Patrol - 30 men. They slept ashore until we were ready to leave. The "FERN" was now crowded with people but we only had 20 miles to go before the insertion point was reached. We left Moorehead early in the morning and we could not maintain any great degree of speed due to our load. At the insertion point the off

loading was done very quickly and we were on our way again but now began to pay the price for coming up river at a high speed. On our incoming journey we had dislodged the Hyacinth and now it blocked the river. We could have gone straight through the Hyacinth as it looked harmless, but I did not know how far down the roots were and I did not relish the idea of myself or anybody else going under to free the screws so I cut the STB. and centre engines and very slowly went through on the Port engine with the crew pushing the Hyacinth out of the way from the bow using boathouse. It worked but made for very slow progress down river.



**The Pacific Islands Regiment patrols were inserted by placing the bow of "FERN" as far as possible into the dense foliage so that the patrol could have a dry landing. Sometimes it was not a dry landing at all.**

We left the Hyacinth and increased speed reaching Bula at the mouth about 1800. The village appeared deserted but we knew they were there somewhere. We went ashore but nobody came out. We spent the night anchored off Bula and cleared the river at 0800 the following morning. We had been in the river six days and the build-up of mud at the stakes we had placed on our entry had moved about five feet. We moved to the West and went as close to the border as could be considered prudent but saw nobody on our side of the coast but there were numerous smallcraft on the other side but appeared to be native craft and not Military. On our way back to Daru there was a humorous incident when as we were approaching Boigu at a distance of 12 miles I received a message to keep a lookout for a vessel approaching from the West. It did not take long to realise that we were being asked to search for ourselves. We had probably been spotted by a light aircraft from Thursday Island and the word had been

passed to Moresby. The border area was also being overflowed by the USAF daily out of either Guam or the Philippines and being mapped at the same time.



By Xmas 1964 I was eager to get away from all drama of raising a unit and received the OK to do a trip around to Madang and Wewak in early 1965. We had been advised that Laurie Graham would be arriving in the area after Xmas and I knew Laurie would love all of this Administration work. One of our main problems in Moresby was transport and it was now becoming serious

and I had applied previously for authority to use a hire car as we could not get a Land Rover when we wanted to. I was finally given a hire car which was a new Chevrolet "Chevelle" but I did not have it long as somebody higher in rank than me woke up to the fact that they were running around in a Land Rover and I had a Chevrolet. I was then given a Mini-Moke.

Laurie was a W02 and by the time he arrived many of our entitlements had arrived and things were settling down. Area Command became PNG Command on the 19th Jan 65 and my promotion was submitted to Canberra that day. Our new Seamen were progressing Ok at Nappa Nappa so we closed shop and took off for the "other side" taking Laurie with us. We pulled into any place that looked interesting North of Samarai - Tufi-Oro Bay-Cape Killerton-Mullins Harbour and Morobe before heading for Lae.

At Lae we berthed at the little commercial wharf at Voco Point before proceeding around to Finschafen, Madang and Wewak. I wanted also to have a look at Labu as a possible base and was going to go over to have a look when I was approached by the Lae President of the Rotary Club. It turned out to be an old friend from my time in Moresby in 1955. It transpired that they were raising funds for the Churchill Foundation and were going to hold a function at Salamaua and could we assist by taking over some of the dignitaries and equipment. I could see no problem as we intended to look at Salamaua on the way back to Moresby so I said yes. As we talked over old times I mentioned Labu as to road access etc. and it was soon arranged for me to fly over Labu as another member of Rotary had a little Cessna.

As we flew over Labu Lagoon I could not but think of the utter waste of Landing Craft that had been Scuttled there. There were ALC-20's and ALC-40's as well as the remains of many timber built craft that had all belonged to Water Transport during WW2. The place was a natural but the local people were not averse to another invasion which was not on the cards as I was only doing a Recce. After the flight over Labu we went across in "FERN" and on entering and looking at what were not only reasonably new craft when scuttled but I thought of all the useless equipment that was currently being held in Ordnance stores throughout Australia and being auctioned off regularly as they were deteriorating and these craft were left to rot as is - where is.

We took the "official guests" over to Salamaua and the crew assisted with the setting up for the function. I had asked Keith and Alma Bradford to ensure that no coverage was given to us in the Press as the Army may not like it. The day was a complete success and our crew were

thanked for their efforts. One item of interest that I noted at Salamaua was an Ingersol Rand Scraper with steel wheels. What was significant about it was that it would have been bought to Salamaua in 1941 as it had Army numbers still quite readable on it. After our people were tossed out by the Japs they then put their version of Unit serial numbers on it. When the Japs were tossed out it was fitted with a very early version of the Commonwealth Number Plates (red on white background) only instead of C of A it was AWC (Allied Works Council). I thought that the Museum at the School of Military Engineering would like it and since it was too heavy and cumbersome to load aboard the "FERN" I thought to myself that I would get it one day. I did get it in 1974 and the outcome is covered in the section dealing with 1974.

We then proceeded up to Dreger Harbour, Finschafen, Scarlet Beach and points North. On our return to Lae we berthed at the "NAMASU" wharf and on berthing Spr. Aros made a mistake by putting his foot between the rubbing strake and the wharf. His foot was crushed and although he was yelling and jumping around on one foot it was not until we sat him down that he bothered to have a look at his foot. The sight of the blood disturbed him somewhat and he passed out. We had him admitted to Lae Hospital.

While in Lae I was guest speaker at a Rotary Dinner on Water Transport and it went over quite well. After the address we had a few drinks and one fellow who was obviously a "bipor taim" type began telling me of the 1930's when he was recruiting native labour and he only had a 35' craft with a crew of three and his only navigational aid was a small compass and a chart that was "bloody useless" close to the coast. He remarked that over the war years navigational aids had advanced beyond imagination. I replied that some five years earlier I was working the Northern Territory coast in a 40' craft with a crew of one and a 4" compass and a chart that was "bloody useless" close to the coast. We then had a few more drinks.

I was a little concerned about leaving Spr. Aros behind as there was no Army presence in Lae but on the Morning of our departure I learnt that Brig. A.L. Macdonald was passing through the airport on his way back to Moresby so I went out to the airport and asked him if he could authorise air travel for Aros back to Moresby. This he did and I radioed Moresby to have him picked up and taken to the hospital at 1 PIR. Aros went back to Moresby in style on the Ansett-ANA DC-6

We then began the return to Moresby once again looking at beaches and harbours along the way, overnighing at some of the wonderful harbours along the way. On our return to Moresby I was surprised to see the Duty Officer, Terry Southwell, waiting at our berth - surprised as nobody ever saw us off or saw us arrive. He advised me that I was to "front" Brig. MacDonald the following morning.

I did not have a clue as to what it was so I was rather nervous when I reported to the Chief of Staff, Lt. Col Wilton the following morning. He smiled (we had been great adversaries in the past, in seeing who could dive over the largest pile of Lounge cushions in the Mess without breaking our backs) and said "The Commander will see you now -- and you are in big trouble!". That was all I needed as by the time we got to the Commanders Office my legs were like Jelly and for a moment I thought that the "Operation Blowdown" affair had come back to haunt me. The Commander began by asking about our trip and specifically Salamaua. The Vice President of the Lae Rotary Club, I think he was also the Secretary for Agriculture, had been so impressed with our efforts in assisting the Salamaua function that, not known to anybody else, had written to the Commander and thanked him very much for making the "FERN" available!. The Commander wanted to know if I had been pressured into it but I assured him that it was by my own volition and realised the consequences. He said he did not mind at all as it was good public relations but If I ever did it again, send a signal to Command

as he did not want to get another letter thanking him for something he had no knowledge of. I walked out of that office very relieved!

Rob Vickery had arrived as the Movements Officer and being from Transportation (RAE) we had a lot in common. He assisted me greatly in Unit matters of which I had no experience. He travelled around the Territory on an inspection tour of the various freight facilities and I accompanied him. We flew to Lae, Madang and Wewak. At Wewak we flew to Vanimo in a Piaggio push aircraft and also to Yangoru in the Sepik District. At Yangoru there were four passengers to take to Wewak and some freight. The pilot said that he would get a Cessna to pick up two of the passengers as he could not carry us all so Rob and I offered to stay until the Cessna arrived. The Piaggio with a full load went to the end of the strip and began her take off run with a vengeance (the noise from a Piaggio is deafening at any time). While this was going on Rob and I were talking to the resident Patrol Officer and we were facing the strip and the Patrol Officer had his back to the strip. As the Piaggio came screaming down the strip and passed us, the Patrol Officer turned and immediately said "Jeeeesus Christ - - - He's still on the ground-- He's not going to make it!!". At the end of the strip was a small drop and a couple of mountain peaks and the normal was that by the time an aircraft had reached where we were standing it would be in the air. We watched and just before the end of the strip the pilot pulled back and came off the strip and flew between the peaks as he was climbing. I think that the weight of the passengers and freight had been a loose guess rather than a calculation. About two hours later the pilot was back in a Cessna to pick us up and said that some luggage of the passengers had been added after the weigh in and was not calculated. He also said that there was no problem as since he did not get off the ground at the normal spot he simply kept it on the ground until he was well past the takeoff speed.

We stayed the night at the Wewak hotel and on a walk around the front of the hotel I came across a monument to Harry Eve. I knew something of PNG history and on the plaque it referred to Harry Eve as "explorer and pioneer". Harry Eve was a Surveyor with the Oil Search Company in the 30's and what struck me was that it was the only memorial to a civilian that I had seen in PNG except the one at Samarai.

As I looked at that memorial it made me think that there were a lot of people all from different backgrounds who came to PNG in the early days and who arrived with nothing but their bare hands and strived so that someone like me could, stand in front of a memorial with an ice cold beer in my hand on a balmy evening. I also thought about those early days when people like myself would have been "messing' around in boats".

There would have been a few Govt. boats, Mission Boats and the labour recruiters (not to be confused with the Queensland Blackbirders). I had also been to many of the "way out" places they had went to and the latest charts that I used would have been as useless to them as they were to me. The one big advantage I had over them was instant communications and on board equipment although I feel sure that if an ALC-50 would have been offered to them in 1925 they surely would have rejected the offer!

We flew back from Wewak to Lae in a DC-3 which gave us a scare landing at Lae as the undercarriage would not lock down, but it turned out to be faulty warning lights.

## **NORTHERN NEW GUINEA**

An ALC-50 was required to operate on the North side of New Guinea running cargo between Madang-Wewak-Vanimo and I had advised Command HQ that my family would be returning

to Australia shortly and I would be prepared to take the ALC-50 around and carry out the tasks until my own return to Australia in June.

Suzanne, Karen and Megan returned to Australia the day the ALC-50's arrived with the rest of the Australian personnel. Looking at AB 2996 (Crumbling Biscuit), I was amazed at the conversion that had been carried out at Garden Island Dockyard. The original Army dream of these craft carrying a Centurion Tanks had been shattered for ever. Their capacity was now 22 tons. The cost of these two "blunders" must now be astronomical and where better than to put them out of sight and mind than TP & NG. The rust was getting much worse under the paint and the ballast tanks were coated with bituminous paint that could be removed by hand and removing strips of rust at the same time. They were no longer Landing Craft but could be called "Scows". They were all we were going to get so AB2996 was mine again - for better or worse.

821 Water Transport was now commanded by a Second Lt., John Boot, and I faded from the picture, wanting only to get around to Wewak. I was given "Pappy" Doig to assist in going around to Wewak. We departed Moresby and sailed for Samarai direct reaching there 36 hours later: We then travelled up to Cape Vogel and remained there overnight. After mooring at the Mission wharf in Lasi-Asi anchorage I went up to the Mission just to let them know who we were and how long we would be staying. There was a young female Lay worker there who accompanied me back down to the "Crumbling Biscuit" and remained with us till well after midnight. It was the same old story of being a "One off" young person-in an older environment and to talk with people who had arrived from "other parts" was an opportunity not to be missed.

The following morning we departed and went up the coast to Cape Ward Hunt and across the Bismark Sea direct to Madang where we loaded for Wewak. Although the cargo capacity of the ALC was now restricted it did have a good fuel capacity. The Engineer was happy with the performance of the ALC but I knew that sooner or later we were going to have problems. We beached at Cape Moem and unloaded. "Pappy" returned to Moresby to take command of AB3000. My promotion came through as we began loading for Vanimo.

We were to run non-stop between Wewak-Vanimo-Madang for six weeks with only the briefest of "Lay-days". We would depart Wewak with about 25 tons of cargo and go to Vanimo (19 hour trip) direct usually arriving at about 0200-0300 depending on weather. The only problem at Vanimo was that they did not like having to get out of bed and unload at that hour. On some occasions we simply unloaded ourselves and would depart for Madang to get another load and take it to Wewak where we would unload and then load again for Vanimo.

We did carry a lot of Government cargo from Madang to Wewak and Vanimo and this caused a furore-with one of the local skippers who had a 66' Trawler. He complained about us and when we would meet we would argue. Any cargo I carried was Army and if some of it was cargo that should go by civil craft then the argument was not with me but Army at Wewak.

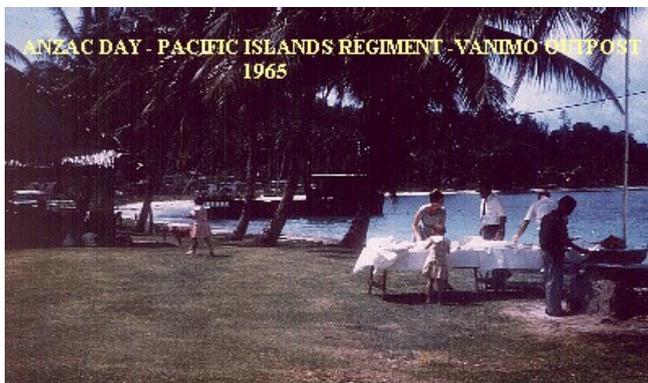
On a couple of runs we took cargo into Aitape and it had not changed since my "TARRA" days 10 years before except that this time, instead of putting the cargo into "Surf" boats and hoping that the boat would get to the beach OK, we simply put the ALC-50 onto the beach and held it in position with the engines until the cargo was off loaded and then depart. It was all over in 15 minutes.

Since my arrivals at Vanimo were in the early hours of the morning, the one thing that bugged me was that I would miss Vanimo altogether and sail into Hollandia (West Irian) and repeat

the performance of the "TARRA" 10 years before when Norm Stark overshot and we very nearly became embarrassed in the wrong port.

We still did not have Radar but the ALC-50's now had a single Steering/Standard compass set up that at least was far in advance of the system that I had when on "Operation Blowdown". we also began to have what I was expecting to happen sooner or later - breakdowns at sea. The Fuel, Ballast and Void tanks, although coated with bituminous paint covering the rust now began to flake and now primary filters were becoming blocked. Injectors were failing and on quite a few occasions we were stopped in the middle of nowhere for an hour or so while the mess was sorted out.

We had our first break when PIR at Vanimo asked us to stay over for ANZAC day which we did and it was a good break for the crew. We picked up all of our water at Kairuru Island near Wewak and refuelled at Madang. Madang was becoming our "Home Port" but we never stayed long enough to enjoy it. That was to come later.

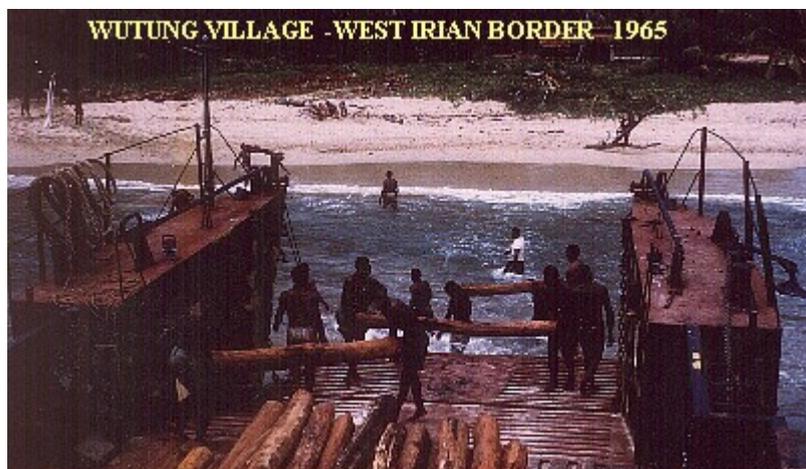


I was asked at Vanimo, by PIR, could I do a task to Wutung which was right on the border with West Irian. The government was building up a Border Control Post there and they had a large load of Pilings and Stumps that were required for the buildings. We loaded about 30 tons of timber and as the sea was calm and Wutung was only 18 miles West the slight overloading would not present a problem. The beach at Wutung

was not the "idyllic beach" that I had been told it would be. It was only about 200 yards long but it was just like Aitape. A heavy surge becoming surf as the water shallowed and then breaking on the beach. I went in, dropping the stern anchor about 150 feet out and as the tide was rising I kept power on to hold us in position while unloading. The local "wharfies" must have been trained in Australia as they moved with the speed of a Gallapagos Tortoise so I had the crew unload the pilings and stumps across the Bow ramp and the locals could then do whatever they liked. It took about 2 hours to offload all the timber onto the beach and it was apparent that the "wharfies" expected the crew to help put the timber above the High Water mark but we had news for them. We still had a backlog of cargo at Madang to pick up

Listening to Radio Australia while in Wutung I heard that the 1st Battalion RAR was to go to a "little war" in South Vietnam. Would Small Ships go - I doubted that we would.

At Wutung we were now operating 1600 miles from our base in Port Moresby. The wind had changed to the North and quite a surf was now running and AB2996

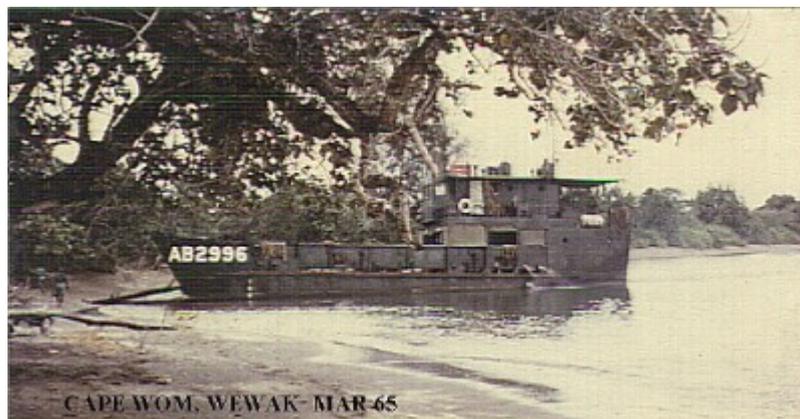


was doing its best to broach to Starboard so I told the Bosun that when we extracted from the

beach that we would be coming off rather fast and that the crew were to bring the stern cable in by hand (with gloves) as the Stern Winch was still not the "fastest winch in the West "It had been worked on - instead of having lunch while it made one revolution, you could only have coffee and sandwiches). We came off that beach very fast and the crewman who was pulling it was doing a superb job as was L/Cpl Suata, the Bosun) who was laying the cable neatly on the winch drum. The only event that upset the procedure was that the crewman pulling it in would pause so that he did not get too far ahead of L/Cpl Suata. Consequently there was a shudder and we had the cable around the screws. Very quickly the bow anchor was dropped and I went over the side hearing Suata berate the crewman. The cable was around the Port Prop a few times as well as around the shaft a few turns.

One of the crew, Koliket, then carried out the same act he had done at Yule Island - he found the stern anchor and then walked it along the bottom to the ALC where it was retrieved. In the meantime we set up relays of two who would go over the side and try and remove the cable by hand. That was not successful and the cable had to be cut. The depth was only 25 feet and the water was reasonably clear. The same relays worked on the entangled cable. On one of the periods I was under at the props the other crewman would cut and I would try pulling. At one stage he put the Hacksaw in his mouth and he looked so funny with blue lips and a hacksaw in his mouth and I smiled at him - he promptly smiled back and dropped the Hacksaw from his mouth and then disappeared chasing the Hacksaw to the bottom.

Finally the cable was cleared and checking the underwater gear, the engines were started and we departed back to Vanimo. The backlog out of Wewak and Madang was cleared and we could now take on any local tasks that Area Command Wewak had for us. One of these was out to the Schouten Islands (Vokeo Island) and a much longer one to Wyvulu Island, some 100 mile to the NNW of Wewak. We also took time to go over to Cape Wom to have a look around and see the memorial plaque erected on the airfield to commemorate the Japanese surrender in 1945.



**Beached at Cape Wom - the site of the Japanese 18th Army surrender in 1945**

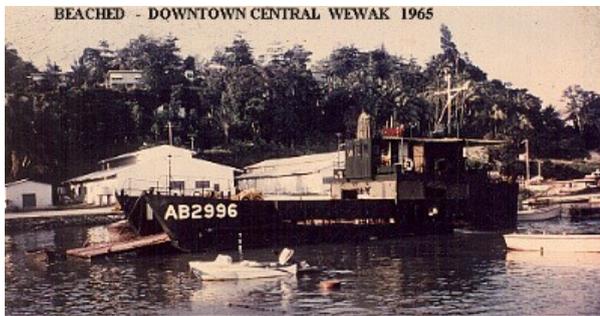
One non-designed feature of the ALC-50 was a built in swimming pool. The incline from the cargo deck to the ramp would fill with seawater when under way. This water would cascade over the cargo deck so a barrier was put across the point where the cargo deck met the downwards incline. At sea on a calm and hot day it was a pleasant break to just lay in our swimming pool.

We did not have much communication with 821 Water Transport in Moresby but I would send a signal daily just to let them know where we were. I did get a lengthy signal from them referring to carrying civilian cargo. Apparently "Pappy" Doig had requested to carry a car out of Lae (or he had already carried it and requested after) and some sort of "flap" had occurred and hence we received a lengthy signal telling us what



we would do if we were ever approached to carry civil cargo. I don't know why they bothered to send it to us as we would never do anything like that. We finalised most tasks and now remained on station at Wewak until required. The berthing facilities at Cape Moem were non-existent and to sit on the beach with no transport was not on and laying at anchor was worse so I went and had a look at the fringing reef around the Wewak headland and there was a shallow channel which was used by Emil Glaus to bring unloaded cargo to the Customs shed. We then waited for a reasonable tide and entered the channel to beach opposite the main street of Wewak. It gave me great relish to send a signal to Moresby stating that AB2996 was now beached in "Downtown Central Wewak"

Emil Glaus was a German who ran the Stevedoring business at Wewak and the craft he used

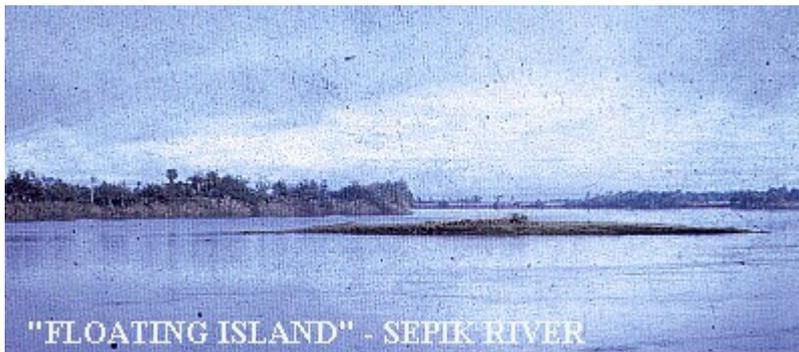


to unload ships were ex-Japanese barges. The PIR base at Cape Moem was being enlarged as was the Boram Airfield and, an Australian company, Barclay Bros., had won the contract for the construction. The heavy earthmoving equipment to be used arrived on a Bank Line ship but there was no way of unloading it. Emil approached me to see if the ALC-50 could be used.

I asked the Wewak Area Commander if it would be OK for us to do the job and sent a signal to Moresby requesting permission to do so. I was given the go ahead and we spent three days unloading the heavy equipment. The run to the beach was only 300 yards and apart from waiting for a D8 dozer to crash through the deck as it was being lowered there was no drama although as all ships roll when anchored at Wewak it was a bit dicey as at times we would be 12-15 feet away from the ship's side during a roll but the operators of the "Jumbo" derrick were on the ball.

Our time had come for departure from Wewak as I was advised by signal earlier that once all tasks had been completed AB2966 would be going to Madang for refit and I was to remain in Madang, until a replacement was sent and then I would return to Australia. We departed Wewak at midnight for Madang via the Sepik River on our last task. - We took a load of Cattle up to Ambunti.

Overnight, even before we cleared Cape Moem, AB2996 became a stinking, dirty and noisy ALC-50. The Sepik is a great river and as such is the easiest river I have ever entered and penetrated and, depending on visibility is good for night travel without Radar. At Ambunti everybody and their dog was at the riverbank to see the "Moo-cows" being unloaded but pandemonium raged as a couple got loose coming off the ramp and charged the crowd. It was here that we did a lot of trading with the locals by swapping excess ration packs for Sepik artefacts and as was usual the villagers believed that they had made some profit on the exchange. We knew otherwise of course but after arriving in Madang for refit and having stripped the ALC-50 for cleaning and maintenance we ended up with large amount of artefacts and nowhere to put them so we gave them to Merv Bennett who was manager of the Madang Picture Theatre and there was some satisfaction later on to see the foyer decked out with our artefacts.



The river was full of floating Islands and drifting with one going downstream it was incredulous to see the plant life that the islands contained. On one we even saw a snake sunning itself. It was going to get a rude shock once it cleared the Sepik. We beached at Manam Island to hose and

clean down AB2996 and went to dinner at the local American Missionaries house before proceeding to Madang. Berthing at Madang was the end of my operations in TP & PNG but I still had another month here on the refit before going back to Australia

We went direct to the Slipway and onto the Slip. We carried out obvious maintenance but did not get "stuck" into the areas which needed heavy repair as the Trade Repair (RAEME) people had not yet arrived from Moresby. The Army tradition of Hurry Up and Wait was certainly not dead. After Preventive Maintenance had been carried out I gave the crew a week off. They had certainly earned it as no fixed leave had been taken since leaving Moresby.



Merv Bennet, who had been the Movements NCO in Moresby had left the Army and was now Manager of the Madang Picture Theatre invited me to live ashore at the Picture Theatre. The Trade repair People arrived and the repair & modifications were allocated to the Slipway and we would now carry on with our own program.

The fuel tanks were my greatest concern and they would be first on the list. We carried two .50 Browning Machine Guns which were not normally mounted but about a month before I had them mounted as by being in their boxes led to deterioration so they were mounted and now received daily maintenance. The one thing we needed for them was a canvas cover that was about two sizes larger. We also were going to get a high powered spotlight instead of the "lowest tender" one that had been fitted. The timber battens that had been laid on the Tank deck in Devonport and reported by me at that time as being ludicrous were now to be removed and the deck underneath to be treated properly and hopefully the deck underneath would have a few more years of life left. I also wanted the exhaust to be vertical as the side exhausts simply made the upper accommodation dank with a mixture of diesel and salt spray but I lost out due to "Cost considerations". As in most cases of Army watercraft the people who said "Yes" or "No" had no experience or knowledge of Long range operations and could not comprehend that the Master of these craft would go for anything up to 48 hours on the bridge with sleep being obtained by laying on the wheelhouse deck for an hour, with an alarm clock alongside, as there was no other Watchkeeper aboard or having one of the watch wake me up. Sleep at sea was very difficult at night and one would simply doze and any movement out of the normal would be enough to wake up. Many were of the opinion that we should be more humble as we were fortunate enough to be able to move around the Pacific Islands at our leisure while they were desk bound. I would have liked to take some of these people on one of our repulsive type of missions such as a full cattle load up the Sepik River or to be aboard for 48 hours in a rough following sea when Diesel fumes and spray cover everything and the diesel fumes are throughout the accommodation spaces.

The main problem that I have always encountered in relation to our living conditions at sea and our repeated requests for the latest technical equipment i.e. Radar and long range radios was not so much "cost considerations" but my rank. A reality of being a "one off" was that I had total responsibility for the vessel and crew but very little else. I did have direct access to the Commander but I never used that access to by-pass one of the branches At the Command as retribution would follow sooner or later. I did use that access, however, in relation to my "command status". Being a "one off" was fine but there were many paradoxes attached. I had learnt from the "Operation Blowdown" affair how far I could go in following the "Command of a vessel" function to a climax.

One day at the slipway I was approached a couple of Warders from Madang prison. It appeared that they had a few European prisoners and wanted to place them out in the community for work, which was the practice in PNG. I suggested that the only person we could use aboard was somebody with Marine engine background, thinking that they would have nobody. The next morning they turned up with a European prisoner and just to prove it was a small world, it turned out to be one of the RAEME Cpls that I used as Engineer in Darwin seven years earlier. I was advised that he was "in" for two years for passing a string of "dud" cheques. He had taken his discharge a few years earlier and had wound up in PNG. He worked with us until my departure from Madang. It was distressing to see him in this position but we carried on as though nothing had happened between my last seeing him seven years before and the present.

One day the LSM AV1353 "HARRY CHAUVEL" (commonly called "shovel") arrived and it was a surprise to see Norm Holdsworth again. I had not seen Norm since Japan and a good few days were had aboard the LSM. I also had a good look around at the makeup of the ship as I had been posted to 32 Small Ship Squadron on my return to Australia. This was mainstream Transportation and I wondered how I was going to fit in. Maybe I had spent too much time "mucking around on the little ships/boats" but I had done a lot of reading on Logistics and Amphibious Warfare and looking at the "HARRY CHAUVEL" I had quite a

few complex thoughts which at the time I had no idea of what they meant nor indeed did I know if they meant anything at all. I remember most of them as after I left the Army I began to put "two and two" together. Most of the time I would come up with 3 1/2 to 4 1/2 and I don't know if I ever got close.

It seemed to me that here, in TP & NG, the ALC-50 was carrying the same tonnage between ports as the LSM. We had a crew of nine as opposed to the LSM crew of 48. We consumed 400 gallons of fuel per 24 hours as opposed to the LSM's 2000. Were they now trying to justify the purchase of the LSM's?

I only remained in Madang a week after the "HARRY CHAUVEL" departed as John Kerr, who had changed over to Small Ships/Water transport after the RAAF Air-Sea Rescue unit had been disbanded, (John was one of the Skippers of the RAAF Air Sea Rescue launches who ran rings around me in Darwin some six years before) arrived to relieve me and now I was anxious to get home.

I was only in Moresby long enough to pick up my personal belongings and a "talk" with the Commander, Brig. A.L. Macdonald and I was off to Cairns and there picked up an Electra and on to Sydney. My departure from TP & NG was with mixed feelings as on the one hand I was the one of only four persons who had been Master of AM2834 "FERN" and had operated as a "one off" vessel. I hoped that I had completed that mission with the same dedication as Jack Swan, Doug Iffla and 'Blue' Richters. On the other hand the mission was now to be continued with a full unit and more craft and assets than I could imagine. I was not part of that unit as I was the last of an era but I knew that they would now get much of the equipment I had wanted and they would use it to great effect.

I also realised what my ambition was within Water Transport and that was to become involved in Long Range Operations using Smallcraft in support of the Army. I was too far down the list at this time for anyone to listen and my posting to 32 Small Ship was not going to help. By the time I was in a position to be heard and listened to, Small Ships/Water Transport would be finished as we know it.