



## PNG TRANSPORTATION SQUADRON

Rather than wait for the QANTAS 707 which arrived in Saigon on a Wednesday, arrangements were made with Movements to fly down to Vung Tau and fly home on a RAAF C-130 which would put me in Sydney on the Monday.

We flew to Butterworth in Malaya and stayed overnight, thence to Singapore and on to Darwin arriving at 2200. I had wanted to go out to Larrakeyah but our arrival time precluded that and we stayed at the RAAF Base. We were scheduled to arrive at Richmond AFB but this was changed to Mascot. On arrival at Mascot we were held on the ground for about 30 minutes as Customs had not been advised of our arrival and the aircraft was about to leave for Richmond when we were given the OK to disembark. This pleased the five of us passengers as NOK had been advised from Darwin of a Mascot arrival and the NOK had complained to the Mascot people and all of a sudden they "found" a couple of Customs people to process us.

I was on leave from the moment the C-130 landed but had to go to Canberra for debriefing. With Suzanne and the children we drove to Canberra and after the debrief we were to spend a week on the NSW South Coast. The debriefing was of the same standard as the briefing I received before I left Australia. My head was bursting with knowledge and information gained, but nobody asked me a thing except "Did I have a good time" and "I can be paid 10% of my travel expenses to Canberra immediately, but if I do not claim the remaining 90% within seven days then I will have to repay the 10%". I had no interest in either of the questions and left Canberra as quickly as possible. I did submit a written report but that was based mainly on what they would like to read.

I remembered Jim Fletcher who had gone to the States and was attached to the firm building LCM-8's in Illinois and had come back with details of relevant modifications which the US had made. Nobody listened and, his words "It doesn't matter a damn what you do", were well remembered by me .

Arriving at Chowder Bay I found that nothing had changed and the Seaman and Navigation Courses were still accented towards the LSM's. There was not a Gyro Compass platform (nor a Magnetic), no Radar Platforms and no Communications room which I had suggested some years before and had been received with some signs of a favourable decision. The "little ships" had been forgotten again.

The syllabus for the Navigation Course was good but the "Art" of Navigation was missing. I was forbidden to teach anything of what I had learnt and used over the years and it was "stick to the well tried and proven syllabus". The Navigation Courses were too short to adequately train Students in the present Syllabus let alone that which I wanted to add to it. Something was terribly wrong with the attitude towards the training of OR's in the field of Navigation and I did not know what was the problem. I did, however, produce a lengthy Précis on "Navigation of Smallcraft in the Tropics" which I gave to students who passed the courses, just in case they were posted to New Guinea or Darwin.

Our people were being trained in the fields of Navigation as applies to the "Big Ships" where the Command was held by a civil certificated Foreign Going Master. In PNG it was the Warrant Officer who had Command, but his training and experience would be very limited in this new "Ball Game". I wanted to give him that training. I was now convinced that "You noa playa da game then you noa makea da rules". Analogies to this would be posting a Troop Sgt. from RAE to a posting as a Gun Sgt. in Artillery or to an Infantry Platoon as a Platoon Sgt. In The case of Officers it was analogous to posting him from, as OC an RAE Field Squadron to an Infantry Coy. Commander - he had never commanded an Infantry Platoon. In PNG the "Platoons" would be up to 1000 miles from the Coy. Commander and the "Platoon" Commander would have full "Command responsibility". He deserved better training.

In April 1971 I had arrived at the conclusion that asking for a posting to Chowder Bay was not a good move. PNG Tn. Squadron in PNG was understaffed and could not get personnel posted to the two Landing Craft Master positions so I applied for a posting to PNG. Although I was fed up with the attitude regards Training at Chowder Bay, it would be fair to say that Chowder Bay was probably fed up with me, as a Posting Order arrived some five days after I applied. I was going "home" to a posting where I knew that I would be comfortable in, happy in and above all, to be involved again in Long Range Operations of Smallcraft.

I was also advised by letter from Victoria Barracks that I had again been selected to attend an Officers Qualifying Course at Canungra. Suzanne was for the move as she knew I was not happy at Chowder Bay and we put the house at Carlingford on the market. Before leaving for PNG I spent some time in packing odds and ends that I had collected over the years and one item that I had completely forgotten was a complete twin 12.7mm gun turret that I had removed from a 3ap "Betty" bomber at Alexishafen. I had "collected" it with AB2996 in 1965 and took it back home in 1966 while serving on the "CLIVE STEELE". The problem was what to do with it. I tried to get rid of it to some Army units but they did not want it and I then tried neighbours and friends and it appeared nobody wanted it. I finally took it to the Council dump at Castle hill. I then left for PNG, with Suzanne and the children to follow.

PNG Command was now a full Command in every respect with all Command departments being the same as they were in Australia. It was very different from the small beginnings I had left in 1965. The Commander of PNG Command was Brigadier T. Eldrige. PNG Tn. Squadron was commanded by Maj. Peter Morgan, a fine Officer and one that I knew I would be able to work with without any problems. The Workshops Troop was commanded by Dennis Collins who had a very efficient bunch of staff. Bill Smyley ran the Workshop Stores section and the RQMS was a S/Sgt from RAE. The yet to arrive Executive Officer was John Sainsbury, who was commissioned from WO1(Movements) and was both very proficient and a thorough gentleman.

I went direct to the unit after my arrival at Jacksons Airfield and was briefed by Maj. Morgan on what was going on. Things were rather bleak, particularly in regards to the other Landing Craft Master, and I was booked on an aircraft the following day to Daru where I was to bring

back to Moresby an LCM-8, AB1050, that was stranded without a Skipper. After returning to Moresby with the LCM-8 I was to go to Lae and relieve the Master of AB3000 (ALC-50). Complaints had been made by HQ Lae Area, to Command in Moresby although I was not privy to what the complaints were.

I was rather surprised to find that AB2996 "Crumbling Biscuit" had been disposed of, only to find that AB2996 was now AB3001 and it was AB3000 that had been disposed of. Les Dennis had taken her to Cairns some time previously and she was then sold. I had been at the beginning of her life at Devonport and although I believe that AB2996 and AB3000 should never have been designed let alone built but it was with a tinge of regret on learning of her demise. For all its faults and abominable design it had served well, particularly in PNG.

Daru "Gem of the Pacific" was exactly as I had last seen it and apart from the fact that modern aircraft could land on the Airstrip, it was probably the same as it was in 1939. I booked in at the Daru Hotel which was really working hard to become a half- star hotel and awaited the arrival of AB1050 which was coming down river. When it arrived the Engr., Cpl Barry Amos, came to see me and I went down to the wharf to determine when the LCM would be able to depart for Moresby. There was only a map of the Fly River on board and no charts at all, the compass had an error of 23 W and the radio antenna needed replacing. The compass error was reduced to an acceptable level by simply placing the internal corrector bars in their correct position and the antenna problem was fixed by rigging a temporary Dipole. The lack of charts was no great problem as I had been in this area before but it did preclude crossing the Papuan Gulf to Moresby direct so it would be coastal. We refuelled and left Daru as I wanted to go through Parama Passage on a rising tide. Passing across the mouth of the Fly we headed for Purutu Island, one of the many islands forming the Fly Delta, where we remained overnight. We moored alongside the bank next to a village but later anchored in the stream. This village had been here for probably a few thousand years but every Spring Tide there was nine to 12 inches of water throughout the village. The next morning we headed North for the Kikori Delta and anchored at Goaribari Island around 1500.

We were now in what could be considered the worst delta area in PNG. From Goaribari Island to Cape Blackwood was nothing but a mass of changing sand/mud banks. I had thought of leaving Goaribari by the same route as I came in but to keep Cape Blackwood in sight I would still have to encounter the sand banks and to go further South to deep water to avoid them would be counterproductive as I had no charts. There were many choices of exits to deep water and it was a case of "Eeny meeny miny mo" and it was the wrong choice. I wasted some three hours getting into deep water and instead of arriving at Kerema at 1600 the ETA would now be 1900 and that meant crossing the bar in near darkness. By 1500 the sea was now at a moderate state and we were being placed well behind schedule.

By the time we reached McLatchie Point, some 20 miles from Kerema, I knew that entry over the bar would be in complete darkness. There were no navigation lights on this part of the coast, the only one West of Moresby was at Yule Island and that was 90 miles South East of McLatchie Point and was a nine mile light. We were off Kerema at 2000 and although I could see the fires at Ipsi village and some of the lights of Kerema, which was above Ipsi I could not make out the bar or the hinterland behind, let alone the entrance. Rather than go out to sea and spend a miserable night I decided to find the entrance. To find the entrance I used a method that I used when I had the "FERN" years before and also in the Northern Territory when I had the "ARALUEN". We approached the breakers at slow speed with a sea anchor trailing about 100 feet astern. The tail of the Sea Anchor had a light line attached and this was hauled in until the Sea Anchor had a neutral effect. At slow speed approaching the line of breakers the chance of broaching was high and as we were picked up and the LCM began to

broach I had the light line let out and the Sea Anchor, now having full effect, pulled the LCM perpendicular to the breaker line and we would then either go on until we were close enough to determine if the entrance was there, or it was a solid sandbank and we would retire very quickly using full power.

We followed this procedure a few times until I was sure that we had found the entrance. I then retired out to sea a 100 yards or so and then came in again with the Sea Anchor in the neutral position and disposing engine oil off both quarters as I wanted to nullify the breakers behind us. I tried to keep the LCM just astern of the wave ahead and even with spotlight illumination it was difficult and we had to use the Sea Anchor once to prevent broaching. The PI Engr. was on deck and had, in his mind, the apparition of disaster and was moaning and groaning. Barry Amos told him to go below as he was making everybody nervous. As we crossed we "bellied" twice in quick succession and then we were in deep and still water. I figured that I was too close to the Western side of the entrance. We then made our way up channel to the wharf. We left Kerema early the next morning and crossing the bar on the way out was a piece of cake, but I was still not sure just where we had entered the night before. The sea was choppy, but we would be inside the reef West of Moresby well before the SE wind would pick up. We were alongside in Moresby at 1630.

John Sainsbury had arrived as 2IC of the Squadron and I became the Water Tpt. Tpt. Commander. Two days later I was on a plane to Lae and had the unpalatable task of relieving the Master of AB3001, if I thought it was necessary, and also to take the 40' W/Boat AM442 to Madang for refit. The Senior NCO who was the Skipper of AB3001 (AB2966) knew of the complaints made about him, but I did not relieve him as he was departing for Moresby anyway and to have relieved him in Lae would in my opinion be performing the duty of Judge, Jury and executioner without having any knowledge of the situation.

The ALC-50 was a mess and it was obvious that Alcohol was, or may have been, the problem. This Senior NCO was one of the best Bosun's to have ever served on an LSM and had spent quite a few years aboard LSM's. His progression in rank would mean attendance on a Ships Mate Course at Chowder Bay and he should have been returned to the LSM s, where he would have served admirably. The "system", however, sent him to the "Little Ships" in PNG and in this role he was miscast. He was one of the casualties of the "Big ship philosophy".

Lae had no craft repair facilities hence the reason for going to Madang. The Coxswain of the W/boat was Sgt. Suata who had been my Bosun on the "FERN" years before. The run to Madang would be leisurely as the W/boat was not in the best of health so I stopped in at Finschafen overnight. I moored at the little wharf and was met by Ted Foad who was living at the wharf area and was taken up to the house and I found out quite a bit more history. Ted had been a Gold miner at Kainantu before WW2 and also in the Bitoi Gap area where he looked for 'Black Cat' gold, which was richer than the gold found in the Edie Creek area. Ted had worked for US Army small ships during WW2 and after the war ended he took up residence at Finschafen. The US Army Air Force were the last of the US Forces to leave New Guinea and that occurred in 1947. Much of the US equipment left behind at the end of WW2 went to Chiang Kai Check in China, but much still remained and Ted acquired salvage rights to the Finschafen area. His 'junk' shed was a historical picture of the Finschafen area in WW2. There was still a Jap ship of 1500 tons in the harbour and lying on its side. At the time of my visit he and his 'trusty gang' were removing the cargo of ammunition that was in the hold. They were after the brass and the method of getting it I can no longer remember, but it involved drilling a hole in the shell casing and burning the cordite.

I had decided to call in at Sio and Wasu, which were about 12 miles apart but there was heavy rain falling as my approach was being made to Sio, so I opted for Wasu. I had, in the past, often gone between Lae and Madang, but always used the "normal" route i.e. deep water and the shortest distance, but I had never been close inshore between Sio and Madang. Wasu was a small Patrol Outpost and had an airfield, but what was more striking was the labyrinth of reefs and the many anchorages that could be found along the 'Rai' Coast. The coastal belt was relatively narrow, a couple of miles, before the Finisterre range began and these appeared to be vertical. The Mission influence in this area was Lutheran and a striking feature along the coast from Sio to Madang were the white Mission buildings on the high ground. When seen from seawards the coast seemed to rise immediately from the beach to a height of 6-8000 feet and halfway up would be a white building, standing like a beacon against a background of dark green.

The small wharf at Wasu was well protected by the many fringing reefs and once we had entered the beach area the water was like a millpond. The Patrol Officer was there to meet us and we went up to his house which overlooked the airstrip and he did have a problem. The airstrip was in daily use bringing natives down from the high ground of the Finisterre Range and there was always a problem with pigs and fowl cluttering the airstrip. The villagers had been told to keep the livestock off the airstrip which they did not so the Patrol Officer began to shoot them from his house when the livestock appeared on the strip. This, of course, was the beginning of a confrontation and was in full swing when we arrived. I could not reach Moresby on the radio due to the vertical antenna so I set the F1 radio up ashore and erected a Dipole antenna and had no trouble reaching Moresby and advising them of my position and departure time. I had Dinner with the Patrol Officer and was back aboard early as I intended to depart Wasu at 0200 in the morning for Madang.

Leaving Wasu I decided to follow the coast as close as possible as I wanted to pass Saidor and Bogadjim as close as possible, before heading into Madang. At daylight the view of the coast was one of delight compared to the more familiar view, 15-20 miles from the coast which I had been accustomed to. There was no wharf at Saidor and if you blinked when near to Bogadjim you would miss it, so it was onto Madang. On the way in we caught a kingfish and a Sea Pike which became breakfast immediately. We berthed at Madang Slipway and after booking in at the Coastwatchers Motel I returned to the Slipway to settle the two crew into what work they would carry out until we left by air the following day. I had not been to Madang since 1967 when I was on the LSM "Brudenell White" but it had not visibly changed. The only real change was that the new wharf was where the old hospital used to be. The wharf where we berthed the "TARRA" in 1954-55-57 was still there and if one closed one's eyes you could almost hear the bagpipes and the noise of a PIR platoon marching onto the wharf to board TARRA for the voyage to Vanimo as we so often did 20 years before.

Returning to Moresby by air another task awaited me. The ALC-50 was now equipped with Radar and after trying to get it for many years it now was, an anti-climax. The knowledge and experience gained over the years was far superior to sitting in front of a screen and navigating without leaving the seat, but it was a useful aid and I used it as such, particularly on long runs at night. It was not much use in some of the areas we worked, such as close inshore between Finschafen and Madang, as the coastline on the ground was not always the same as the chart.

There was a requirement for Government cargo (Bulldozer and Grader) to be uplifted from Lae to Cape Hoskins and then to Rabaul, Pomio, Misima before returning to Moresby. I did not have a Mate on this trip as there was none available, but two W02's were due in Moresby later from Australia. I cannot remember the name of the Engr but tend to think that it was one of the two PI Cpl's from Workshops. I had wanted to take Barry Amos but I think he was on

leave from the trip up the Fly River. On the way to Cape Hoskins we stopped over at Cape Gloucester and beached at the spot where the US 1st Marine Division had landed in 1943. There was no visible evidence that any landing had taken place as the jungle had reclaimed everything, but there was still the same massive surge crashing down on the beach and our stay was very short lived.

After discharging at Cape Hoskins we loaded a small amount of cargo for Rabaul. At Rabaul there were some vehicles to be taken to Pomio in Jacquinot Bay. We did not stay in Jacquinot Bay long enough to have a look around but it looked like it would have looked in 1939 - the jungle had reclaimed all. We then proceeded South about 190 miles to pick up the Trobriand Islands and then another 180 miles to Misima where we loaded a few Toyota Landcruisers to be taken back to Moresby. We called into Samarai to refuel and then proceeded to Moresby direct. Returning to Moresby I found that a house had been allocated to me and it was on top of Three Mile Hill where the view to the South and East was magnificent. The excellent visibility the view afforded began to play a part in the control of our craft as, if a vessel was returning from the North side of PNG, then I would see it at least four hours before it's ETA Moresby if the ETA was outside normal hours. If I did not see it then I would be on the radio to find out why it was late. The only time that a query as to a late ETA was required happened in 1973 and on that occasion my family and I were in Australia on leave. On that occasion we lost the AS3052 TAROOKI and very near lost the whole crew.

I returned to Australia in a C-130 and sold the house in Carlingford and we returned to Moresby by Ansett. We now had five children and the eldest, Karen, returned to Ipswich to attend boarding school. After settling into the house it was now time to have a good look at the unit. When I left the "FERN" in 1965 we were sharing facilities with the Dept. Civil Aviation Crash Boat at the old Seaplane ramp and this ramp was used by the TAA Catalina and TAA also had a maintenance workshop in the 'complex'.

A new Marine base had been built for the Army next to the Catalina ramp on the Konedobu side and it was impressive. The base had its own slipway and a very credible workshop, complete with a mobile crane. The Admin. building was two story with the Q Store taking up the lower floor. The top floor contained a large Orderly Room, OC's Office, XO's Office, Classrooms, Male/Female toilets/showers and General Purpose Room. The wharf was some 250 feet in length and could accommodate an LSM on either side. The Western side also had a ramp at the shore end but the effectiveness of the ramp was doubtful. The whole area could be floodlit from high lights. Compared to the small shed that "FERN" used as a shore facility, the new base was a paradise. Peter Morgan returned to Australia and the new OC was Maj. Tom Sawyer who was one of the direct entry officers from the UK but as yet had not served on the LSM's. My position in the Unit was Water Tpt. Tp. Comdr. and until two more W02's arrived I would be doing all the tasks. I began to look up old friends from 1954 and 1963 and quite a few of these were now in senior positions within the PNG Administration while some of the private enterprise people I had known many years before now had their own companies.

Over the next few years I was to acquire many tasks from the PNG Administration using the simple expedient of mentioning to these old friends that "if you have a cargo or task that cannot be carried out by normal contractors then put in a submission to Command and it will come down to me sooner or later."

At Murray Barracks the scene was very different from 1963-5 and it was now a full Command in its own right. When I first arrived at Murray Barracks nearly 20 years before the entire HQ was in an old building with Masonite walls. The building was now devoted entirely

to Recruiting. The old composite mess had disappeared and in its place was a very large Sgts. Mess. The old Commanders house of 1954 had been split into two in 1963 and became an Officers Mess and Sgts. Mess. It had been demolished and a new Officers Mess erected on the spot. An OR's Mess had also been constructed. In 1954 the number of Married Quarters was 12 - it was now close to 80 with flats being leased outside the Barracks. The whole of Murray Barracks was similar to Victoria Barracks in Sydney in that if you did not know exactly who you had to see and where they were could result in a maze from which it was damn near impossible to solve. Anyone who worked there knew where everybody and everything was but for some reason found it hard to explain to a visitor just how to find who to see or where to go. Times had certainly changed.

One task that we were given was to position Avgas at Kikori for the RAAF Caribou aircraft that were to operate on a separate task in the Erave area. There would be no problem transporting the Avgas to Kikori, but between the riverbank and positioning it on the airstrip, could be a problem. I flew to Kikori on a commercial aircraft to have a look at the situation and also to go upriver from Kikori on a 'recce' as we were scheduled later to do a Joint Intelligence Bureau operation in the Purari and Kikori area.

On arriving at Kikori it was obvious that a problem would be encountered as the Airstrip was by the river but was some 40 feet higher and separated by dense foliage. I went and saw the ADO in residence and told him of the impending operation and the matter was soon settled as he simply said that labour would be supplied by the inmates of the local "Calaboose". I booked in at the Kikori Tavern and not only was the Tavern the only hotel in Kikori, I was also the only guest. My room was a makeshift affair under the main building and I had dinner with the proprietors. The lights went out promptly at 2200 and I then wandered down to the riverbank and the sight was magnificent.

There was a mist rising from the river and millions of fireflies were intermingled with the mist and the effect was one of a dull silver sheen over the river and fading into the pitch black of night. There were no mosquitoes and, in the still of the night there were the sounds of insects and animals. The peace and solitude of Kikori that night was such that I have never seen anything like it before or after. I was picked up by a RAAF Caribou the following morning and flew to Erave before returning to Moresby.

In July 1971 the annual Rugby League game between Papua and New Guinea was held and it resulted in a riot. The rioters then marched en-masse through Boroko and down to Konedobu. A curfew was put in place and we watched from our house on top of Three Mile Hill as the rioters marched down the highway below us. By not using force to stop the rioters marching was a good idea as it allowed the "steam" to escape and reduce the tension and anger. The whole thing collapsed the following day.

Suzanne and I were invited to go to Salamaua for a weekend. A friend from Moresby in 1954 and Lae in 1964 had a house at the SW end of the Salamaua Isthmus where the Isthmus narrowed to about 150 metres, having the sea on the Eastern side and the sheltered waters of Salamaua harbour to the West. We flew over with all the children on the Friday morning and were met by Keith and Alma Bradford. Their home in Lae was on the coast at the end of Lae airstrip and the day was spent in preparing for the weekend.

Keith and Alma had a 30' Bertram cruiser and we left for Salamaua that afternoon. Salamaua is 19 miles south of Lae and in the Bertram it took 35 minutes. Salamaua was the commercial and Administrative centre for the Morobe district before WW2 but was virtually destroyed during WW2. It was never rebuilt, not because of the damage sustained but because of the

airstrip, which could only take light aircraft and the fact that Salamaua itself was small, whereas Lae had a huge area which could be developed into a large populated town.

The only remnants of pre-WW2 were the remains of the freezer plant and a large bank vault which were now difficult to see with all the undergrowth. There was also the wreck of a large Japanese ship on the Eastern side of the Salamaua headland. The main street of Salamaua which was, pre-WW2, named Lagui St. and was now nothing more than a track. As we walked along the "main street" I could not help but think of who were the inhabitants of Salamaua in 1941, where were they and what was their story. In TP & NG in 1971 we were all living in the "materiel age" where we could buy the same goods that were available in Australia, buy fresh food that could be kept for weeks, have instant communications from New Guinea to Australia or anywhere else, travel to anywhere in the country in hours instead of weeks, medicine that was undreamed of in the early days and were living in an environment that was hygienically clean. The early Australian inhabitants of Salamaua and Lae were a history that should have been preserved, but like the history of Army Water Transport in Australia, was erased and the memories lost forever but remained in the minds of those who survived WW2. I knew that there were people living in Lae that were in Lae and Salamaua before WW2. I had read one book on life in TP & NG prior to 1941 and that was written by G. Townsend who was in the Administration as a patrol officer, from 1923 to 1941 and with ANGAU during WW2.

I was delighted to see that the Ingersol Rand Scraper was still sitting in the bush and I was going to get it - sooner or later. In the early evening mosquitoes began a merciless attack that lasted for about 30 minutes and then a Katabatic wind came down the Wau valley and the mosquitoes disappeared. The wind dropped later and the night became cool.

On Saturday we went fishing for breakfast on the Eastern side of Salamaua and about two miles from the Francisco River mouth in a "secret" hole and in about 15 minutes had three large "Reds". Later that day we went out to a spot that I had completely forgotten since 1964. When I had the FERN and was in Lae, Keith had asked me if I knew where "Benalla Banks" were and, although I had seen them on the chart, had never actually crossed them. He said that most of the boat people in Lae were convinced that they were non-existent. I had said that I could find the Banks but I could not understand why the locals could never find them. One afternoon I took Keith, the manager of Ansett-MAL and the local bank manager out on the FERN to look for the "lost" banks. I simply went South from Lae until I picked up the correct bearing of Salamaua and then turned onto that bearing. Then on a time run until another point south of Salamaua was on the required bearing and then turned on the echo sounder. We were in five fathoms and I said "We are here - drop the anchor". They could not believe that it was so simple. They were just as amazed that I had found it as I was that they could not find it. Later they buoyed the centre of the Banks and the fishing there proved to be fantastic. It was another case of not telling anyone else about this secret, but it was not long before everybody in Lae knew about this "secret fishing spot".

We caught some Mackerel and Dolphin fish on the banks and were cooked for dinner that evening. Keith had a local caretaker of the house during the week and he in turn lived in a village across Samoa Harbour. He was present during the Japanese occupation and remembered the tunnels in the Salamaua headland. On the Sunday we went to where he said the entrances were and, as Keith also had Earthmoving plant I suggested that sometime in the future when we had nothing on in the area and were having a break, then I would bring some of that plant over and open the tunnels. We were to do just that two years later.

That same day we all went over to the point on the Western extremity of Samoa Harbour to show Suzanne and the kids a P-40 Kittyhawk from WW2. I had first seen the P-40 in 1963 and it was still standing proudly above the high-water line and pointing towards Lae. The story as told by Olim, Keith's caretaker, was that the P-40 had crash landed on the reef after being damaged over Lae. The pilot, an Australian, was injured and pulled from the aircraft by villagers. They were trying to get him into the bush but the pilot told them to leave him as he needed medical assistance. The Japanese then arrived and he was taken back to Salamaua. He was subsequently executed on the beach at Salamaua.

Either the P-40 was pulled off the reef by the Japanese, or by the natives, or Australians, was not clear. The only Australian that I know of that was executed by the Japanese at Salamaua was a RAAF Pilot who, as the history records, was the Pilot of a "Boston" A-20 Bomber, however it could have been a Pilot listed as MIA or an American Pilot but the P-40 was and probably still is sitting proudly as a reminder of WW2. There were small trees growing through the wings and the paint work had completely deteriorated.

There were only two European residences at Salamaua at this time and apart from Keith and Alma the other "residence" was occupied by Ralph and Rhonda Phillips and Graham and Margaret Goudie. After a thoroughly pleasant weekend it was back to Lae on Sunday night and then on the aircraft back to Moresby on the Monday.

On return I found that the single operation to the Purari and Kikori suddenly grew to two tasks and then a third. As I was still the only Master on strength I asked the OC, Peter Morgan for another WO to be posted quickly but, in the interim W02 "Snow" Hider was sent up on detachment, to assist until full postings were arranged and Barry Amos would be our Engineer for the trip. Apart from the original Avgas delivery there was also a requirement for a Recce. of the Purari River. The Engineers were to build a wharf, across the river from the main wharf, at Kerema and wanted Landing Craft support.

I decided to take two LCM-8's (AB1051, AB1053) and leave Snow Hider with one at Kerema while I went on to the Purari River to do a series of depth soundings at the river mouth. Then I would pick Snow up at Kerema and leave AB1051 at Kerema with the PI Coxswain and then with AB1053 go up the Purari as far as possible, before swinging across the Delta to Baimuru and then Kikori.

## **PURARI RIVER - KIKORI RIVER - KIKORI DELTA**

Preparation for the tasks were simple. An operation order was compiled and all concerned knew what they were to do and how it would be done. The timetable for the mission allowed for one day break and one day reserve in every

eight days. The one day reserve allowed us to maintain our timings of arrivals and departures. Aerial photography of the Purari and Kikori Delta areas was obtained from the Lands Dept. and dating of the photography varied between 1954 and 1968. It was obvious from the photography, that what was present in 1954 was not necessarily present in 1968, and what we could expect in 1971 was not necessarily the same as in 1968. The main problem was that while the main river flow to the sea through the Delta would not change very significantly, the lesser tributaries would and it would be these tributaries that we would be poking into. We loaded equipment for the wharf construction at Kerema - timber used would be obtained from local sources, and we also fitted the Helipad. Two new Assault boats would also be carried

with five 40 HP Outboard motors. AB1051 carried 20 drums of Diesoleum and 10 drums of Avgas as well as five drums of Petrol while AB1053 carried 30 drums of Avgas and 10 drums of Diesoleum. Rations were of the 10 man ration pack variety and these would be utilised in the usual fashion - some of them would be swapped with villagers for vegetables and fruit as well as Mud Crabs. The permanent crew of each LCM would be accommodated in the stern pod

that each LCM carried and the Europeans would be accommodated on top of the fuel drums - the only time I ever entered the pod was to use the radios, as the heat inside the pod was very oppressive. Extra Foam extinguishers were also carried and of course smoking was prohibited forward of the wheelhouse on AB1053 until the Avgas was off loaded at Kikori. I also made sure that every person aboard knew how to operate every extinguisher we carried.

It was now the transition period from the Dry season to the Wet season (silly season) and the SE Trades had dropped with only variable winds and the sea was calm on our departure from Moresby at 0400 hrs. The run to Kerema was probably the best I have ever experienced in the Papuan Gulf area and we reached Kerema at 1630 the same day.

Kerema was the HQ of the Gulf District and I went up to let them know that we would be operating in the District for a month and gave them details of where we would be and could we be of any assistance in the Purari- Baimuru- Kikori area. In these isolated areas any vessel could be of assistance and we soon had a list of small tasks to carry out if we could find the time. These included taking some cargo to Ihu, a few passengers from Baimuru to Kikori, removal of some river snags outside Baimuru and some passengers from Kikori to Kerema on our return. The following morning a RAAF Caribou flew in the Engineer Detachment and we then went across the river and refuelled using the air pumps, and transferred drums so that AB1053 now carried all the Avgas forward and Diesoleum aft. The remainder was dumped on the beach at the Kerema wharf where we would refuel on our return.

Snow Hider stayed with AB1051 and I then departed for Ihu which was situated on a small river just West of McLatchie Point. Entering the river I moored alongside the bank next to a village. I spent the next two days doing a "Hydrographic survey" of the river mouth. The term "survey" is used very lightly as the only equipment I had was an Echo Sounder, Prismatic compass and a watch. We used an Assault boat for the "Survey" and while the results would never satisfy the RAN Hydrographic Branch, the "Survey" suited our requirements and, it was probable that the Navy would never conduct a Hydrographic survey of this river.

I then took the Assault boat back to Kerema to pick Snow Hider up. He had contacted me by radio and said that there was no longer a requirement for him to be present at the wharf site and the PI Coxswain could handle the simple task as a ferry across the river. I took one of the crew with me as, well as a radio, as in PNG and particularly in the Gulf and Western Districts "Murphy's Law" prevailed i.e. If "anything can go wrong then it assuredly will". The first thing that I learnt about using an open Assault boat on a coastal run where the sea was like a millpond with a glass like surface and no wind was that I was not a "sun bronzed Anzac" as much as I thought I was. I wore only shorts and a bush hat, but within 20 minutes into the trip I put my shirt on and that was not enough. My legs and arms were becoming very burnt so I pulled into the beach and literally covered myself with Banana Palm fronds. When we arrived at the wharf site at Kerema Snow Hider was beside himself with laughter as were the PIR Engr's. I told him to wear long trousers and a long sleeve shirt for the trip back and I got a loan of some trousers and a long sleeve shirt from the PIR fellows.

We arrived back to AB1053 OK, but not before we had trouble with the 40 HP Johnson Outboard motor which stopped frequently on the way back. Barry Amos was going to have quite a time maintaining these Outboards. We then went upriver to the village of Ihu and moored alongside their little wharf. The first visitor we had happened to be the local Member of the PNG Legislative Assembly, Bert Kouncil. Bert was an ex WW2 soldier who had "stayed on", married a local and then ran a successful trading business in the Gulf area. He had nine children and one of them, a 14 year old girl, enthralled us every morning by riding her bicycle past AB1053 and saying to us "Good morning and may God bless you all today". Like so many of the mixed race marriages she was a beautiful child and was home on holidays from school in Australia.

Bert invited Snow Hider, Barry Amos and myself to his house for dinner and on arriving he was already well on the way from booze and became very officious relative to his position in the community and PNG in general. Every sentence was "I am", "I have", "I will" and mostly "I am the only one who knows what is going on". He was becoming very tedious and I wondered whether we all should kiss his feet when all of a sudden he said "I was never advised as to your arrival here nor was I told of the reason for your visit so you can tell me now why you are in my area !". I had become so bored by his conversation that I replied "Our task is classified and we are not operating here at Ihu but going further West". At the mention of "classified" he went off his brain and demanded to know the full story and the more he demanded the more I used the word "classified". The evening ended up a shambles. The next day we went up river a few miles to see if it was worthwhile doing a Recce but it was a river of no great significance. The next day we had a message from the local member to come out to the airstrip as he wished to talk to me. Snow and I went out, mainly as we had "Johnson" parts arriving on the aircraft, and sat in the long grass with him drinking whisky from an "Esky". His mood was altogether different than it had been. He wanted to know if we had any "problems" that he could sort out for us in Moresby and "please call back in to Ihu when you are heading for Moresby". I fully expected him to get onto PNG Command and the Commander in Moresby and really put the screws into us, but I never heard a word.

After picking up our parts off the aircraft we departed Ihu and went west to the mouth of the Purari river delta. Entry into the river was simple and we anchored and had a look around. There was a village on the left as we entered the river and no villagers were evident so we went ashore to have a closer look at the village. The village was deserted and but from the looks of it, the village had only recently been lived in. Whether it was a camp for the main village further upstream or whether it was deserted for some other reason we never did find out. We caught a few Barramundi in the river and we were ever conscious of Crocodiles. That evening we saw several by using the spotlight and shot at a few but we had no intention of going into the water to get them, if in fact we had hit them.

The next day we departed for the upper Purari and by using Aerial photography we used a few shortcuts to get us into the main river. Once in the main river I went ahead in the "River Truck" to have a look at the villages along the river. Sometimes I stopped at a small village and waited for the LCM-8 to arrive and also at larger villages I would also wait. All villages are the same but as one goes further upriver the general health of the village seems to deteriorate slightly. As we progressed upriver against a three knot current the landscape began to change and as we began to approach the upper reaches the villages began to appear "sicker" by sight. Mountains were now very visible and hills were now very close to the river. I usually asked to have a look at the "Village Book" which was kept at the behest of the Administration and in it was a view to the harshness of life, as we know it, in villages that are outside the sphere of Mission Stations and are usually visited by a Patrol Officer once a year.

At the last village we pulled into before returning down river the realisation of life in an isolated village came home to us. We had berthed alongside the village and Snow, Barry and I went ashore to have a "looksee" and took a few of the crew with us and it proved to be one of the most depressing times I have had.

In Vietnam in the Mekong Delta, which could be described as the food bowl of Asia, I had been in rural peasant villages and had seen death and misery quite often but was bought about by war, corruption and a lust for power. There was no poverty in the Mekong Delta although the peasant usually had to give some or most of his harvest to either the VC or the government. Here, in a village on the upper reaches of the Purari River in PNG, there was no war, corruption and no power - just a village living as it has for the last ? thousand years. The death rate amongst adults would almost certainly be higher than that of a developed town but the death rate of the new-born to their first year was staggering. Although we were not qualified to make an educated assessment, we did have a look at the village book and ask questions, and we figured about a 70% death rate of infants. The village did have a "food garden" but nowhere as prolific as villages further downstream. Maybe their diet was a problem or the soil was weak but it seemed no different than anywhere else.

One of the village elders came up to us with a woman in tow and asked us to have a look at one of her children. The "woman" was about 17 years of age and was heavily pregnant, with a young baby on the breast and a toddler by her side. She looked 50 years of age but had to be in her teens because of her breast size. The child on the breast had an infection on its head and the head was a mass of pus. By using one of the crew and speaking a mixture of Police Motu and Pidgin language it was ascertained that she wanted medicine for the child.

We carried Antibiotics on board but one application was not going to be enough and the problem then became one of instruction in the use of Antibiotics which I did not think would be successful and I thought that the child was going to die in any event, but we had to do something. We bathed the child's head with an antiseptic solution and then applied an antibiotic cream to the infected area and bandaged the head. We left some bandages and some cream but I was very doubtful about the use of them by the villagers. I also contacted the DDMS at Murray Barracks for assistance and he agreed that it was the best we could do in the circumstances and he would also contact the District Office at Kikori to advise them of the problem but I felt sure that what was happening at this village was also happening at all the isolated villages.

They would do their very best but time, resources and personnel were not abundant in these areas. I wanted to take the child and mother to Baimuru but they would not budge. Looking at the village reminded me of the conversation I had with an Australian medical volunteer at the hospital in Long Xyuen in the Mekong Delta in 1968.

We anchored for the night in midstream and before we left in the morning I had a look at the child and although the child was alive it did not look very good. It was a case of arriving on the scene with too little, too late.

As we left the village for the down river run I was not so much angry as I was frustrated in that we could have done more had we had the right people aboard. I made an entry in the Log that a request be made to Command HQ that we carry a Medic on future operations of this nature. The run down river was uneventful and we made the correct turn to cross over into the Baimuru basin.

We arrived at Baimuru and on entry I saw what was left of one of our ships that I had served on many years before in Sydney. The ship was a 300 ton WCV and was called the "Elizabeth Helen" but we all knew her as the AV1351 "VASSE". It appeared that the operating company had "gone to the wall" while the ship was at Baimuru and Baimuru was her final resting place. The sight of her remains just before the Baimuru Tavern was almost disgusting and as I looked at her she seemed to be saying "I deserve better than this!". She had been stripped and hacked and anything that could be used ashore was missing as one would expect in an isolated place like Baimuru. Her anchor chain was now the front fence of the Tavern and many of her fittings could be seen around the place. It made me think of the many old age pensioners who die in a dingy room and all alone and the shame of the family, if any, when they learn of the tragedy.

### \*\*\* TRIVIA \*\*\*

Thinking now (1991) about the "VASSE" as being part of Army history made me think that, over the years since WW2 that there were the odd members of WW2 Water Transport that may have asked the question "Why didn't we ever keep one of the 300 tonners, a "D" class vessel, an "E" class vessel, a 62' Command Craft, an 84' Hospital launch or an ALC-20 /ALC-40 for history". We, in Australia, are very naive about two things and they are Politics and History/Tradition. The last 300 tonner (seagoing) that I saw was in Saigon and flying a Singapore flag. HMAS WOOMERA" which burned and sank off Sydney on 11 Oct 1960 was originally AV1356 "ASHBURTON" although I do not think that she ever served under the Water Transport flag.

The last 62' C/Craft I saw was AM2833 "MIZAMA" Plying the Tourist/Charter trade when she called into Cooktown in 1978 when we were living there. She has since gone down. The last 84' Hospital launch, apart from the "KURANDA" I saw, was in Rabaul in 1955. The last ALC-20's, apart from the scuttled ones at Labu were in Japan. The last seagoing ALC-40 I saw was the "TAMONA", complete with bridge, n Darwin in 1960 although there were a few serving at Dampier some years later in their original shape although with diesel engines. It is interesting to note that one of our "E" class vessels, AV2073 "ELSA", was handed over to the RAN in 1946 and became HMAS "PALUMA" and was employed as a Survey ship and in 1984, the last time I saw her, she was a civilian ship and still named "PALUMA" serving as a "Mother Ship" to the Prawning fleet out of Cairns The former 45' tug, AV1536, was transferred to the RAN in 1957 and was, as of 1986, still active in Melbourne as TB1536 "CERBEROUS V".

The last ALC-120 I saw was the "WEWAK" and it was running Beef Cattle around Cape York in 1955. The two 112' Fairmiles we had, AV2769 "MAUREEN" and AV2770 "SANDRA" turned up here in Cairns in 1990 as the "REEF MAUREEN" and "REEF SANDRA" respectively. I went aboard the "SANDRA" and asked the Skipper if I could have a look around as I had been a member of the crew some 33 years before. The ship as I remembered her looked nothing like the AV2770 "SANDRA" except for the small brass plaque in the wheel house and the "AV2770" and "LARS HALVORSEN" could still be read up close. I was told that the two vessels were RAN and active as Patrol/Gunboats in the SW Pacific during WW2 which I gather was for the Tourist consumption as they were now in the Tourist Scuba diving trade, I told the Skipper that the "SANDRA" was not launched until 1946 and was built as a Target Towing Vessel, but his story was safe with me. I also knew she was a Fairmile as a rowing boat went past and the "REEF SANDRA" began to roll! AM2834 "FERN" went down, in the Bensbach River(Indo border) after it was sold, when she struck a submerged log.(The very thing I was fearful of every time I took her into a river)

**\*\*\*\* END TRIVIA \*\*\*\***

We berthed at the Steamships Trading Co. Sawmill at Baimuru and were graciously received by the Manager and his wife who promptly asked us to Dinner. They had been running the Mill for many years and were very hospitable to us. The Dinner was magnificent and the house was similar to many outstation houses in PNG. The occupants always made the house to their liking and always bought with them some of the comforts that they enjoyed in Australia. After Dinner we were surprised when asked if we played Tennis and when we replied that we had played when much younger we were instantly challenged to a Doubles match. In a very short time the manager and his wife appeared in Tennis dress complete with eye shade. Snow and I played in shorts and bare feet.

The Manager and his wife were in their 60's and their passion was Tennis although I felt sure they would not be able to beat us. At the back of the house was a Tennis court that would have been the envy of any court in Australia. The lights were turned on and there was a small stand for spectators and there were about 20 of them already in position.

They had an umpire as well as ball boys. This middle aged pair beat the daylights out of us and both the umpire and the spectators showed us no mercy. At the end of the game it was Snow and I who were very much out of condition!

The following day the Manager asked us if we could help out by removing a tree that was fouling the bypass that led to Kikori. It took us about two hours to remove and tow the tree to another area. The manager then presented me with a length of Black grained Walnut 25 feet x 2 feet x three inches. It was a magnificent piece of timber. We departed Baimuru for Kikori and stopped at "Crab Village", at the mouth of the Delta. This village was the home of Mud crabs and the price was 20 cents for two live crabs. The two crabs could be two small crabs, One large and one small or two very big crabs. We bought as many as we could handle and were thankful that cholesterol was not a dirty word in 1971.

I then went ahead in the Assault boat looking at every little tributary from the main route hoping that it went somewhere, but they invariably came to a halt a mile or so in and sometimes I ended up behind the LCM-8. It was also obvious that the latest Aerial photography I had was not as late as I would have liked. Where there were small islands on the photograph there were none to be seen, where there should have been nothing there was an island with small trees on it, what was a wide tributary was now a creek and what was a creek was a wide tributary. We anchored for the night midstream opposite the Aird Hills Mission. Some of the crew went ashore for a couple of hours and for about 2 hours we were hit by the usual hordes of mosquitoes and then they were gone. Looking at the mission I could not understand why they always built these small mission outposts on the low ground when there was perfectly good high ground in close proximity to the river.

We departed Aird Hills at 0700 and very heavy rain was falling. Visibility was down to 50-75 metres and our map and Aerial photos were of little use. We ran onto mud a few times so I went ahead in the Assault boat and by radio guided the LCM-8, keeping it just in sight. As soon as we reached the Kikori river and turned North the rain eased for about five minutes and then began again, much heavier, reducing visibility further. Keeping the LCM-8 about 20 metres from the left bank we finally reached Kikori, although the only things that greeted us was a house on the bank and then the Govt. wharf. Rain obscured everything else. Going up the steps to the Sub-District Office the rain stopped and Kikori unveiled itself.

The ADO was in the process of going on leave so we were handed over to his deputy and our load of AVGAS was duly unloaded by the incumbent prisoners from the Calaboose. We were to remain in Kikori for a week and during that time I wanted to take the LCM-8 upstream to have a look at some rock bars on the river. I had been warned that to be careful as to how far I went as if it stopped raining in the mountain ranges to the north for two days, then the river level would drop significantly and I could be either caught between the rock bars or worse still, could hit them. As we would be doing the JIB operation later I decided to have a look for the bars and also to have a look at the other route to Aird Hills, which also had a rock bar at the Kikori end.

Another area of interest was to have a closer look at the Kikori river mouth near Goaribari island where I had been caught at low water trying to get seawards. This I would do by using an assault boat. Another task that came up while we were at Kikori was to do two runs to Baimuru with road material.

When in Moresby in 1954 I did a lot of radio listening to the local station 9PA and like everyone else of that era listened to "Blue Hills", "Jason and the Argonauts" and "The Country Hour" which gave the local shipping news. One of the "ports" given on that program was Ogamobu and since it was just a little way up from Kikori I decided to have a look, but I was formally invited up there for morning tea by the manager and his wife. Ogamobu was not a "port" but simply a small wharf where the coastal ships delivered cargo and picked up Copra/Rubber. I had seen photographs of Ogamobu from the 1920's when it was managed by the Robinson family and I fully expected to see Ogamobu as it was then - for some reason. We went up in the LCM-8 and moored at the little wharf and the first impression I had was that it was different to the photographs I had seen. What were young plants each side of the path to the house were now established shade trees. The house had been added to, and other sections removed so that I could not reconcile what I was seeing with the photos -Time stops still for nobody. The morning tea was, as usual in isolated areas, a banquet.

While I wanted to find out more about life at Ogamobu, the Manager and his wife were just as eager to find out more about us and our lives. What was apparent was the sense of loneliness that came through particularly from the wife. It was the same wherever we went but they would never display their emotions openly.

We had our first accident on the river at Kikori. The PIR engineer (I cannot remember his name) had mounted a serviced Outboard on the Assault boat and had taken it for a trial run doing circles on the river. The motor stopped and it would not restart so he took the top cover off and after having a look tried to start it again. It started in gear and he went across the stern. The assault boat just kept going in circles at low speed. We went out in the LCM-8 and picked him up. He was bleeding profusely from the stomach and it appeared that as he went over the stern his stomach hit the fly wheel. We picked up the Assault boat by simply placing the LCM-8 in front of it and one of the crew jumped aboard.

The injured Engr. was then taken to the "Haus Sik" and the Med. Assistant bandaged him up. He was very fortunate in that the stomach wall had not been torn. While he was being attended to I went back to the LCM-8 to find out what had happened. The reason for the accident was not long in forthcoming. Johnson Outboards have a "fail safe" device to prevent the motor being started while the clutch is engaged. It failed to operate and Barry Amos started that motor with the clutch engaged two out of six attempts. The injured Engr. came back aboard and it was obvious that he could not carry out any duties for a week or so and, rather than have him on board with the high humidity and uncomfortable conditions, I

contacted Moresby and arranged to have him flown back to Moresby the following day and have the Hospital at PIR take a look at him.

The main medical problem which plagued most of the boats in PNG was that a simple scratch could go Septic or become a tropical ulcer. I had already had ulcers, caused by my leg, between knee and foot, hitting the step of the cabin hatchway on the ALC-50 and bleeding. Covering it with first Mercurochrome and a bandage did not stop it becoming an ulcer. I believed this to be because of the lack of forced ventilation into enclosed spaces and the mixture of salt spray and dieso that was forever present on craft when underway. My own method of dealing with tropical ulcers was to apply foot powder to them which dried them out quickly - if one detected the ulcer early enough. My own experience with the PIR crew was that they had a habit of not saying a word until things began to get out of hand. It was now apparent that we would not see much of Barry Amos as he was going to have a busy time with the Outboards.

We were invited to a Morning Tea and I cannot remember if the house was that of John Senior but it was another example of maintaining the culture one had at "Home". The Morning Tea was presented with full silverware and served with Pikelets. A few days before we left Kikori for Baimuru and Kerema Snow, Barry and I were invited up to the Acting DO's house for dinner. The wife was a University graduate and wasted no time in asking if we had been in Vietnam. We immediately sensed what was going to be the main agenda for the evening but replied in the affirmative. Both Snow and I were then subjected to why the war in Vietnam should be stopped and the reasons for the immediate conclusion of the war.

She was right of course but using the wrong reasons. I then casually remarked that "the reason I went to Vietnam was to purchase a Stereo Tape Recorder only to find out when I returned to Australia that new models were on sale in the PX, so I had to go back to get the new model and then the next model etc. and we were paid 50 cents a day extra why else would anybody go to Vietnam?". She must have sensed that we were neither going to agree or disagree with her and "toned" down a bit but I did say that the protest in the US was on moral grounds whereas Australian protests had a heavy Political shade but Australia would only withdraw from Vietnam when the US did and not before. we ended up having a another very pleasant evening in Kikori.

We had finished all tasks in the Kikori area and as Snow Hider was anxious to return to Australia I put him on a RAAF Caribou that came in and he returned to Moresby and then home. I then went to Baimuru and then to Kerema to pick up the other LCM- 8 and then returned to Moresby. On return to Moresby I found I was to attend another Officer Qualifying Course at Canungra in Jan 72. We now had two extra W02's in the Unit and they were Jim McMahan and Bob Modystack. We were now full strength with Skippers and the next task would be in Jan 72 and both Jim and Bob would be taking an LCM-8 up to finalise the JIB Recce North of Kikori.

Before I left for Australia there was an incident that meant very little at the time but compounded with a second incident that occurred while I was away would be, in my own opinion, the second of three mistakes I was to make during my career. The first mistake was in Darwin by my not putting forward the case for a larger craft than ARALUEN i.e. a 62' Command Craft, AM2833 that was not being used in Sydney. - A minor mistake but still a mistake.

A few days before I left for Australia, the LCM-8 with two Australian W02's on board left to carry out the final phase of the JIB mission in the Purari/Kikori area. They were to overnight

at Yule Island before continuing on to the Delta area. Two hours out from Moresby they called on the radio but I could not read them. They could not hear me and shortly after that I could hear only the carrier wave and then nothing.

I then realised that somehow, they had switched to AM transmissions instead of SSB transmission. I switched to AM but on AM the F1 radios were very short range, and I heard nothing. I then advised the OC that I felt sure that it was only a switch problem and unless the crew fix the problem then we would be bound to conduct a search and we would look silly if a search was mounted only to find it was a toggle switch. I requested that I charter a light aircraft and fly to Yule Island to rectify the problem since it was now three hours since their departure. The aircraft picked up the LCM just before the entrance to Hall Sound (behind Yule Island). I walked from the Airfield to where I could "bludge" a ride in a motorised Lakatoi and then went to the anchorage, about two miles from my pickup point. The crew were surprised to see me and had no idea that the radio was set to AM transmission. It was rather an expensive exercise to throw a switch. Contact was then made with Moresby immediately. I stayed with the craft until Kerema and then returned to Moresby by Civil Air.

I then left PNG to attend the Officer Qualifying Course at the Jungle Warfare School at Canungra. The Course was different from the previous Course I had attended in that the Infantry Tactics segment was reduced to a minimum, the physical segment was still strenuous but the mental pressure was much heavier. I had a lot of trouble with my back on this course but nowhere near as bad as when I attended in 1967. I enjoyed the Course and graduated as a Lt. Going back to Moresby I was still Water Tpt. Tp. Commander, the only difference being that I was now a Lt., but I soon found that many doors were now open. One example is that when I had the FERN in 1963-65 the only thing that I could do without referring to HQ was that I could refuel. On both the FERN and the ALC-50 in that period I would have to bludge a "Half-car" (Utility) from friends in various Ports so that we could move administratively. A few months prior to my being commissioned I would stand "grudgingly" by and watch "those who wear white uniforms" when they arrived in their toy Patrol Boats and RAAF Aircrew in Lae drive around in Hire cars while we still had to depend on civilian friends for Administrative transport. Now I had authority to hire vehicles at any Port that had Hire cars and I also had a repair vote of \$50.00. The Repair vote was ridiculous in that I could purchase \$50,000.00 of dieso fuel and it would be written off when I signed for it but I could only spend \$50.00 on repairs. In PNG in the 70's it cost that much just to get someone down to the vessel, let alone effect any repairs to the craft.

## RELATIONS WITH MARITIME OPERATIONS

Although the doors were open there were still problem areas of a "grey shade". One of these "grey shade areas" was that it became expedient on occasions to cut corners. By this time many of the Command Staff were becoming aware that Small craft Long Range Operations were not "exotic cruises in the South West Pacific" but were Operations which involved the crews living like animals and up to 1000 miles from Base. They also began to realise that when we left on one of these Long Range Operations that there would be only two people on the five craft who had any knowledge of the Navigation and Administration involved during the Operation and in some cases there would be only one person. The European Engr. also had a tremendous work load. It was day and night, sleeping for an hour or so depending on weather and location. If there was a failure on any craft that would impede the Operation then I would "cut corners" to ensure that the momentum was not lost. It was "cutting corners" that aroused Maritime Operations to our procedures. I was taking an ALC-50 to Madang from Moresby when off Morobe we had an engine failure, which was not uncommon on an ALC-50. I advised Moresby of the failure and on arrival at Lae soon found out that the parts were

available. I then telephoned the Trade Repair Officer in Moresby and advised him that the parts were available and that I could get them on 'trust' and I could depart from Lae the following morning and, could he expedite the Purchase Order to Lae. He agreed to this.

The Branch manager in Lae took me to the store and gave me the parts about 2000 hours. I had also sent a signal to the Trade Repair people in Moresby advising them of the part numbers and cost and would they despatch the Purchase Order ASP. We left Lae the following morning with the two Engineers somewhat sleepy by this time. I also sent Maritime Operations in Moresby a departure signal. The signal I had sent to the Trade Repair people, although Priority, had not yet been sent to them from the Maritime Operations people. When I finally arrived back in Moresby I was queried as to how repairs had been effected and I had departed Lae before a Purchase Order had been sent to me. When I told them how it was done, they were not amused and I was told that ALL traffic must come through Maritime Operations.

At this time I always passed a PCS (Position, Course, Speed) to Maritime Operations as we had been requested to. This was done as in a Search \Rescue situation it would be Maritime Operations that would get the request and it was only logical that they know which location we were in. Control of our vessels remained with Land Operations (Which it always must) through the OC of PNG Tn Squadron. I continued to send to Maritime Operations only PCS reports.

There was no animosity or "us against them" as the two senior RAN Officers involved were well respected by all, including myself.

In PNG during 1972-75 there were fundamental differences in the system of operating vessels between the Army and the Navy, or more importantly, differences in the assigned roles of both Navy and Army. It was known by all that there would be three Arms of the PNGDF when it was formed. There would be the Maritime Operations, Land Operations and Air Operations. When that occurred the Land Operations(Army) would lose control of all Watercraft that were held except those that were not a PNGDF asset i.e. the three LCM-8's which were Australian Army. The Maritime Operations people wanted the arrangement to be in place well before the formal replacement of PNG Command by the PNGDF.

The basic differences between Navy and Army were .

1. The Navy had a well tried and proven system of Operational Control which was consistent with their assigned role within the Australian Defence Forces. Each mission or task given to a Naval vessel is well researched before the Operation Order is issued. While on that Operation the Captain of the vessel may deviate from the requirements of the Operation Order by means of an "Intend To" Signal. That signal is sent to Naval Operations in Canberra if an Australian vessel or to Maritime Operations if the vessel is a PNGDF vessel. The staff of the relevant Operations Centre can either veto the signal or give permission for the change to go ahead. It seemed to me that if there was some degree of risk involved in that "Intend To" signal, then the concurrence to the signal would depend upon the knowledge and experience of the Operations Staff and their knowledge of the Ship's Captain, which they would have. If the Operations people felt that the degree of risk outweighed the knowledge and experience of the Ship's Captain then permission would be denied.
2. The Army has a similar system which operates from Section Commander - Platoon Commander - Company Commander - Battalion Commander etc. In each case the next higher authority has the power of veto and concurrence. In the case of Water craft

Operations, and in particular PNG, the system, which was considered archaic by the RAN, we used was because there was no one member of the Land Operations staff who was proficient in Water craft Operations. The only system I have ever seen work was in Japan where all of our tasking was from Movements but PNG was not like Japan and very few of the Movements people in Moresby had any depth of knowledge of Water craft.

## COMMUNICATIONS

Communications was one field that I always took seriously. This came from my experiences in Darwin some 12 Years earlier when my radio was a Five watt "AUSTRALPHONE" and frequencies issued were in the five MHz range and lower. The result was that 100 miles East or West of Darwin I could hear nobody and nobody could hear me so I began to learn the principles of Antenna construction. I constructed my own Dipole antennas on the FERN in PNG in 1963 when a modern PYE Transmitter was installed and I could reach anywhere in PNG. The radios fitted to the ALC- 50's and AS3052 TAROOKI in PNG in 1971 were the latest state of the art F1's, a small but powerful military radio. The LCM-8's were fitted with AN/GRC-125's, VHF radios, but if I took an LCM-8 around the coast on an independent task then I also fitted an F1.

On the first operation I carried out in PNG in 1971 the communications were primarily between the ALC-50 and our own radio room in Port Moresby. At this time the RAN were running Maritime Operations at Murray Barracks and had a 24 hour watch for Patrol Boats and other Naval vessels in the PNG area, but I would only use them for Position, Course and Speed reports.

In PNG there was no clear directive on Communications and possibly the reason for this was the difference in Command/Control between Army/RAN. In the RAN set-up the Patrol Boats came from a defined unit but once they departed on a task, Operational Command/Control passed to Maritime Operations at Murray Barracks and the parent unit only had Administrative Command/Control. With our boats Operational Command/Control and Administrative Control always remained with the parent unit i.e. PNG Tn Squadron. The reason for Unit control of Army Smallcraft was that Maritime expertise was not available within any Army HQ outside the Water Transport unit. The operational control of AV1379 TARRA on the Brisbane - PNG run from 1951 to 1960 was virtually confined to the Master of the TARRA. TARRA was an AHQ vessel with the crew coming from an AHQ unit (Tn. Centre - Chowder bay) and was "under Command" of HQ Northern Command. Northern Command would arrange cargo for PNG and the destination and the only query from Northern Command to TARRA was "When will you leave Brisbane ?".

When I was wireless operator on TARRA and en-route to PNG positions were passed to civil coast radio stations three times daily, as well as any Administrative traffic. At no time did I either send or receive traffic of a control nature to either HQ Northern Command or AHQ. On arrival in PNG further cargo would be accepted for ports not on the original list supplied in Brisbane. We were, in effect, a "Tramp ship - A voyage to somewhere calling in at monotony, boredom and drama on the way.

In Darwin on the ARALUEN the only form of operational control was when I carried Natives back to Bathurst Island. On those occasions a formal Operation Order was produced but it mainly was in reference to the movement of the natives to the boat and their payment at Bathurst Island. In amongst all the administrative instructions was a one line sentence stating

I was the Coxswain. I usually worked out a communication schedule with the Signal Squadron but apart from that I was left to my own devices.

When, as Skipper of AB2996 on Operation Blowdown(Cape York) the word given to me when I left Sydney was "You should be back here in November!". On the FERN in TP & NG from 1963 to 1965 it was a little different in that HQ Area Command would give me a list of tasks to determine if they could be carried out and I then began writing my own Operation Orders. I would send the draft to HQ and I would then have it back the next day with the HQ heading and signature block. This was an expedient as nobody else apart from myself had any idea of Small Craft operations. At no time in my career with Water Transport did I move unless I had good communications and I would use both Military and Civil frequencies for the passing of traffic.

In 1971 onwards PNG Tn. Sqn. would be requested from Command HQ as to whether or not a mission to a Port/Area could be carried out. In a very short time we would answer "Yes" or "NO" with a short statement clarifying our answer and, if "No", that statement would include alternatives and usually referred to a time frame. If the answer was "yes" then we would then have the task passed down as being confirmed. I would then begin planning and prepare the Operation Order. The Operation Order, once completed, would then go to Command and be returned to PNG Tn. Sqn. as a Command Operation Order and it was this that the RAN people of Maritime Op's did not like.

Wherever we went we had very good Communications and if there was a problem anywhere I would set up a shore station if necessary. We had Moresby, Lae Wewak and Vanimo to "talk" to as well as Small Ships Radio. I could never understand the Maritime Operations dislike of our system and until PNG Tn. Sqn. ceased to exist and became a renamed unit of the Maritime Arm I was determined to use Png.Tn. Sqn. as my "Control". The prospect of having to send all traffic through Maritime Operations was no real drama but it was a foot in the door and what worried me was that there may be a move to transfer Command/Control to Maritime Operations before the scheduled time.

## **PATROL OFFICERS IN REMOTE AREAS**

The relationship between Water Transport and Patrol Officers in outlying districts was always very good. They would give us every assistance they could and often gave assistance that, had it been known to their superiors in Port Moresby, would have been denied. We, on the other hand, would give them assistance by way of transporting freight or personal cargo that they would otherwise have to wait for up to two months for delivery. We would always check with Patrol outposts, before we departed a main port, to determine if there was anything we could bring out for them.

## **CIVILIAN AND GOVERNMENT CARGO**

We never carried civilian cargo between main ports nor to ports that were frequently serviced by civilian small ships.

We did carry cargo for Govt. agencies, mainly hazardous, dangerous or 'difficult' cargo that civilian craft could not transport as, they would either not accept, charge an outrageous rate, did not have a craft available or would not go to some of the required destinations. Although most of our relations with civil shipping were very good, there were a few independent owners who saw us as a threat to their livelihood and one at Wewak even wanted to carry all Army cargo with a 66' trawler.

He was running a scheduled service between Madang, Wewak and Vanimo and he always had Military cargo as well as civil cargo. He always had a backlog which ensured a full load between ports and any bulky cargo would remain at the departure port until general cargo became slack and then the bulky cargo would be loaded and, of course, the cargo rate would increase. If we were in the area we would divert and shift all Army cargo from Lae to Wewak, Madang to Wewak, Wewak to Vanimo and vice versa. The Army was no different to the civil population in that they wanted their cargo as quickly as possible and could not understand why it was left sitting in a warehouse at Madang or Lae.

This fellow wanted not only a good slice of the cake, but the whole cake and all icing as well as the box. We could not even satisfy the Army demand for Logistic resupply on the Northern side of PNG as we also had commitments on the South side of PNG as well as the adjacent islands. We simply did not have the craft or personnel but, if we were in an area where there was Army cargo to be shifted then we shifted it and we shifted it much faster than our civil counterpart. It was not that we were faster on the voyage but we were not hindered by the constraint of "normal business hours" of Stevedores at the departure port and destination port. The departure port was advised from Wewak that we would be arriving in Lae or Madang and requested that such and such consignments were to be loaded as the need was urgent.

Most of the cargo we lifted were vehicles or Plant but some of it was of the bulk type or what was labelled as 'Dangerous Cargo'. All of this cargo was delivered to the front door of Moem Barracks at Wewak or to the PIR front door at Vanimo. The fact was that we and civil shipping lived in different worlds in relation to cargo as follows . -

1. Most civil Small Ships were used on scheduled Coastal operations whereas Army craft were used in the "Tramp" fashion - operations were conducted anywhere and anytime and craft could be diverted from one operation to another which carried a higher priority and then return to the finish the original operation and
2. We did not use Port Labour to discharge cargo and we did not use Port facilities apart from berth requirements. It was normal for the consignee to provide labour and if that was not forthcoming then we unloaded the cargo ourselves. It was not normal for us to carry General Cargo for the Government except to areas which were not catered for by civil shipping. On many of these non-military tasks we would be required to shift something from one location to another while maintaining the aim of the military task. In this case we expected the cargo to be waiting on a wharf/beach to be loaded and we did not linger once loaded. At the delivery end we would expect reception and unloading, irrespective of our arrival time and if this was not forthcoming we would discharge the cargo on a wharf or beach and depart. (This happened on many occasions and one in particular was the shifting of a Bulldozer from the Anglican Mission at Wanigela to the Uniting Church Mission at Salamo on Fergusson Island. We arrived at Salamo about 0200 and the Mission were informed that we wanted to discharge and depart immediately. The Mission staff were somewhat upset about the arrival time and wanted to delay unloading until the morning. We discharged the Bulldozer and the mission were then going to write a letter of complaint to HQ PNGDF in Moresby about our "lack of consultation". They must have realised that to do so would mean that they would never again receive a "FREEBY" so they wrote a letter praising us for reaching Salamo in shocking weather conditions at 2 AM in the morning.)

## HOLIDAY INTERLUDE AT SALAMAUA

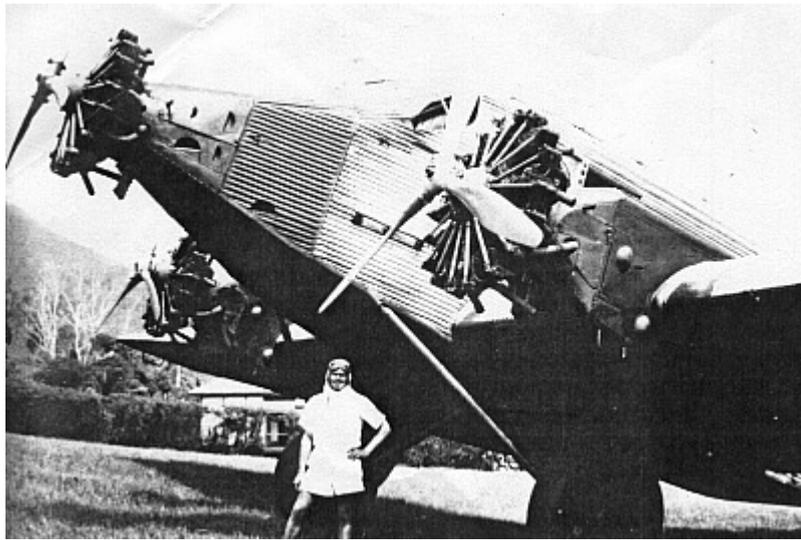


In August 1972 Suzanne and I with the children went over to Salamaua for a weeks holiday. We had use of Keith Bradfords house at Lae and his "Haus Rest" at Salamaua while Keith and his family were down South. Also accompanying us was the Director of Medical Services HQPNGDF, Lt. Col. Bill Rodgers, his wife Faye and their two children. We also had use of Keith's Bertram Cruiser and speedboat while in the Lae/Salamaua area. Although I had been to Salamaua a few times previously I had not looked around much. This time however was to be another step back to WW2 and beyond.

The nights here were wonderful with the cool katabatic breeze coming down the Wau valley - once the half hour of twilight mosquitoes disappeared. The next morning we did what one normally does on a holiday - fishing on the reef, diving on the reef, water skiing and going around the Salamaua headland looking at every nook and cranny. We did much the same every day but during the seven days Bill and I found time to have a look at more interesting things. I took Bill to the spot where the tunnel entrance was alleged to be and told him that when the opportunity arises we were going to open the tunnel - if in fact the entrance was there. "My" Ingersol Rand Scraper was still there and I was going to get it when the opportunity presented itself.

Before WW2 Salamaua was the Administrative centre for the Morobe District and although the Isthmus was utterly destroyed by Allied bombing in WW2 and never rebuilt there was still evidence of it's pre-WW2 existence and the overpowering feeling of history. At Salamaua's peak(1936) there was one main street which was called Lagui St., with buildings on both sides.

The Isthmus has a width of 300 metres at it's widest point. There was a hard tennis court and as well as the Government Administrative centre there was a rather large private enterprise content. The main players of private enterprise were Burns Philp and Co., commonly called ?Bloody Pirates?, and W.R. Carpenters. Both of these organisations had large freezers and the condensing coils of BP's freezer is still visible. The Bank of NSW also had a branch in Salamaua. Guinea Airways also had a store and an office at Salamaua but their main effort was at Lae as the Lae airfield was more dependable than Logie airstrip at Salamaua.



Chinatown was across the bay from "front beach" at Kela point. Out near Logie airstrip was the Lutheran church. Ships called frequently and one could travel to Singapore, Hongkong, San Francisco or London without changing ships. There was even a tourist industry which catered for tourists who wished to visit the Goldfields at Wau and Bulolo and view the very large suction dredges. These Dredges weighed some 1000 tonnes and were air freighted into Bulolo and Wau from Lae in pieces and then assembled.



The aircraft that carried the parts was, in the main, the G31 Junkers tri-motor and assisted by two Ford tri-motor aircraft. In all, eight dredges were operating in the Bulolo goldfields. In 1934 Lae and Wau were the busiest airfields in the world and it was ironic that New Guinea, a few years before, was still in the stone age yet in the period from 1930 to possibly the beginning of WW2 it led the world in civil air transport. In 1934/35 Guinea Airways, with headquarters at Lae carried more air freight than the rest of the world's airlines, combined.



Salamaua in the 1930's

We also went, along the coast towards Lae, about 10 miles to one of the villages and Olim then took us for a "walk" along the trail that was used pre-WW2 as the trail to Lae. At one point on the trail was a line of heavy guns, the smallest of which was 3" and the largest was 5". All were Japanese except for the 3" which was British. During the Australian push for Salamaua the Japanese apparently saw the writing on the wall and decided to shift their heavy Artillery to Lae. Things must have been scarce then as the quickest way would be by Landing Craft. They were caught on the trail and decimated by Allied Aircraft and that is where, as far as I know, they still are.

Keith Bradford, sometime previously, while "mucking around" on Samoa Harbour (Samoa Harbour was the pre WW2 name for the bay/harbour on the Northern side of the Salamaua Isthmus and has been called many names since, but I still refer to it as Samoa Harbour) in his boat, picked up an unusual trace on his Echo Sounder at about 200 feet and after a few runs over it a very low speed figured that it was a ship. Graham Goudie, Rhonda Phillips and a fellow called Burt dived on the suspected ship and a ship it was. They only had six minutes on the wreck during each dive but began to bring up some artefacts from the wreck. The ship was the "YOKOHAMA MARU" of the Japanese NYK Line.

They subsequently bought up the steering compass and a sextant from the bridge. So far as I remember none of the divers were formally trained in Scuba Diving let alone diving to 200 feet and their experiences diving on the wreck would be well worth documenting but I have lost touch with them over the years.

The wreck was not charted nor was any record found of the ship being sunk by Allied Air Forces but some years later in the "Breaking the Bismarks Barrier" Volume of the "History of US Naval Operations in the Pacific" I did find reference to a raid on Salamaua by aircraft from the USS "YORKTOWN" and USS "LEXINGTON" on 10 Mar 42 during which "a large Cargo Ship was sunk". The "YOKOHAMA MARU" was of 4545 tons displacement. Suzanne was given two of the Soup spoons bought up from the Saloon on the wreck which had the NYK line crest and ship's name on the handle but they "disappeared" while we were living in Cooktown. The ship had settled on the coral bottom on an even keel and still had deck cargo. From what we found later at Salamaua it was a good bet that she was loaded with British equipment and arms that were captured at Singapore.

Bill and I then went by boat to the old Pre WW2 Cemetery and although in a state of disrepair we were still able to read the names of those interred there and in every one of them was a story and of course, History. There is a trail from where the Isthmus neck meets the headland and this leads up to the peaks on the headland. It was used in 1963-4 by Japanese War Graves people to find and return to Japan many remains of Japanese soldiers, some say 80000, that did not return to Japan from New Guinea.

Since we were at the old Cemetery Bill and I decided to "walk" up the side of the headland instead of following the normal trail that followed the ridge line. It was very hard going up the side but it paid off as when we began to get close to the peaks there were quite a few gun barrels lying in the undergrowth, which were there as a result of a shell burst in the barrel. There were also numerous gun pits and trenches as well as rusting equipment scattered everywhere. There were even steel poles with wires still attached. I would have liked to burn the whole headland as I was sure that there was a great deal of history here but the rainforest was so prolific that a fire would not burn.

There had been a large Japanese ship, the "TENYO MARU" beached and rusting on the Eastern side of the headland and we had boarded her the year before when we had a weekend here but it had disappeared. It appeared that the section that had held her on the reef had given way and she succumbed to the deep water as did the Jap ship that used to be a marker at the edge of the Lae airfield. Also on the Eastern side and just off the surf beach opposite the house we were staying in there was a 500lb bomb laying on the bottom. We often took the children out to it and dived down to show them. To find a UXB was not uncommon but this one was of particular interest in that it looked as though it had been dropped the week before. It had no growth on it and there was no build up of sand around it. It just sat there in 12 feet of water. Keith Bradford had not wanted it reported as it was too close to the house.



We did a lot of reef diving and exploring with the kids and some of the small live reefs around Salamaua are as good and the water just as clear as the best reefs on the Queensland coast, namely the outer reefs between Bramble Cay and Lizard Island. Suzanne was sitting in the boat over the reef which had a depth of 6-8 feet when one of the kids came up from the reef

and dropped a piece of Coral over the side hitting Suzanne's foot. The wound was treated immediately but by the next morning it was evident that she needed more treatment so we raced her over to Lae for medical attention.

We berthed at Voco Point alongside a 30' boat that was being converted to a fishing boat and they were in the process of fibre glassing the small hold as a freezer box. We remained alongside until Suzanne turned up from the hospital and departed for Salamaua. Inside 20 minutes of our departure the two people in the hold doing the fibre glassing must have stood back to admire their work and one of them lit a cigarette. The resultant explosion killed them both as well as destroying the boat. We were very lucky.

The two weeks came to an end and it was back to Moresby.



Operations between 1972 and 1975 were many and varied. They ranged from the odd picnic at Haidana Island near Moresby, the laying of a submarine cable across Moresby Harbour to the multiple missions on the North side of PNG using all craft. Many of our tasks were mundane and repetitious but some were with drama, excitement and well worth doing. Some of the more worthy operations and events are as follows and may be, chronologically, out of order.

### **PNG NAVAL OFFICERS ATTACHED TO PNG TN. SQUADRON**

In mid 1972 we began to get attached to us, PNG Naval Officers (Those who wear white uniforms) from the PNG Patrol Boat Squadron based at Manus. The first of the Officers was Jack Menyana who came from the Milne Bay District. Jack was a "happy go lucky fellow" who was a breath of fresh air to all of us. The idea was to familiarise the Officers with our Operations and in that regard they were to get the shock of their lives. We were not a "Show Pony" outfit as was the Patrol Boat Squadron and we went where they would/could not go, using craft that had none of the design features of the Attack class Patrol Boat. Jack was a pleasure to have with us and he gained a lot of respect from our local Seamen. Shortly after, Jack left us to go to Maritime Operations at Murray Barracks we received another Naval Officer by the name of Kerri Franks, who came from the Manus District. Kerri was a fine officer and in later years would become Chief of PNGDF Maritime Operations.

On one occasion he was Mate on a trip around the North Side of PNG and he had the 12-6 watch. We were approaching Cape Vogel about 0300 from the South when he woke me and said "Peter - We should have raised Vogel light and there is nothing on Radar - I think we are lost - you better have a look". My immediate thoughts were that if we should have Vogel in sight and we have nothing on Radar then we must be too far over to Stb. towards Goodenough Island and that meant that we were in the vicinity of Dart Reefs. I asked Kerri to order the Helmsman to steer 270 and head directly for the PNG coast. About 3/4 hour later he came in to the cabin and said "I've found it - I have Baniara on Radar" which was welcome news to me as if he could not find it - then we did have a problem .

There was another Lt. who joined us, Frances Molean, towards the end of my time, and he also was a fine officer. A couple did not fit in well and that was apparent from the manner in which they treated the Army Seamen and one of them, when sent around to Wewak in an LCM- 8, escorted by a Patrol Boat, ended up walking around Wewak wearing a black cape and becoming rather radical. All things considered they performed well but I think that they were all happy to leave us and go back to the Patrol Boats.

## EXPLOSION OF CIVIL CRAFT

During 1973 HMAS "SYDNEY" arrived in Port Moresby with a load of vehicles for the PNGDF and our LCM-8's were used in a LOTS role to bring the offloaded vehicles to our ramp. I had taken the children with me to our base to check the area and was engaged in conversation with some of the personnel when there was a loud explosion. Looking towards the sound we saw bits and pieces flying through the air and a pleasure cruiser ablaze. The pleasure cruiser had exploded as it was coming in to it's mooring. quickly organising a "scratch" crew which included Bob Modystack, "Mick" Bulakowski, an RAN PO and two PI soldiers we immediately got AS "TAROOKI" underway and proceeded to the stricken craft. The water was very shallow and there were children in the water and they were screaming.

As I manoeuvred the "TAROOKI" the prop wash brought a body to the surface. Very quickly Bob, the RAN PO and the two PI soldiers were over the side and got the body to the side of the "TAROOKI" As we got the body aboard the two PI soldiers went immediately to the aid of the children. At this stage another small launch had appeared on the scene and was assisting.

On board "TAROOKI" Bob Modystack applied mouth-to-mouth, trying to resuscitate the stricken adult. Some of the children were brought back to the "TAROOKI" and were a sad sight. They were badly burnt and their skin was hanging in tatters from their arms and legs.

Ashore, Capt. J. Lancaster RAN, the PNGDF Chief of Personnel, had foreseen the requirements and was organising as much transport as was needed to get the injured to Hospital. As soon as "TAROOKI" was alongside there were many hands to assist getting the injured ashore and to hospital. Also assisting ashore was Elizabeth Amos, wife of Barry Amos.

Mouth to mouth was continually applied to the adult we had picked up but he was DOA at the hospital. Another adult, the District Health Officer from Vanimo was badly injured while another adult was in a satisfactory condition.

The dead adult, a Papuan, was the Scout Commissioner for Manuabada. His four children were badly burnt and two subsequently died. I was required to give evidence at the Coronial

inquest. It appeared that there was a fuel line leak and the bilge was contaminated with petrol and a cigarette was thrown into the bilge by accident which resulted in the explosion.

## **MORESBY-WEWAK-MADANG-S AidOR-WANIGELA-SALAMO-MORESBY**

We had a full load of cargo to take to Wewak and I decided to go direct using AB3001. We had a portable coolroom aboard which was used to keep fresh food. This was powered by a Volkswagen APU and although the coolroom did enable us to hold food longer it would have been more sensible to have the same room as a Freezer, but none were available. With me for the voyage was Bob Modystack and I think the Engr. was Barry Amos. The crew were organised to carry out six hour watches with myself on the 6 to 12 and Bob on the 12 to 6. We departed Moresby at 2200. The run down to China Straits was by the outside route and the sea outside the reef for a change was only Slight to Moderate.

We did a Radar approach to the small passage at East Cape which facilitated a quick entry to Goodenough Bay from Milne Bay, otherwise it meant using Goschen Strait. The passage was entered at 0200 and once through it would be a quiet run up to Mitre Rock (Cape Ward Hunt). We had a following breeze and unfortunately the breeze was approximating the speed of the ALC-50 and consequently the diesel exhaust was filtering through the whole Aft section of the ALC making life aboard miserable. Just to the North of Mitre Rock the course was altered to the North, crossing Huon Gulf so as to make landfall again at Tami Islands near Finschafen and then on to Sio at the NW end of Vitiaz Strait. From Sio it was a run to Cape Gorudon, passing Long Island and Karkar Island on the way. From Cape Gorudon it was coastal to Wewak where we arrived at 1700 in the afternoon, four days and 19 hours after leaving Moresby.

We berthed at the new wharf which is between Cape Boram and the Wewak headland. The wreck of the "BUSAMA" (ex AV2056 "EVYLYN") is still there and the surge still comes in. We were unloaded by PIR and then requested to take a load of WW2 steel power poles to Madang. These were loaded by people from the Electricity Commission. We had a night off and intended to depart Wewak the following morning. The next morning we found that we had a 10 degree list to Stb. The Engr. was adamant that he had not "fouled up" by transferring fuel or had been "playing around" with the Ballast tanks. The only explanation was that we had a split in the hull somewhere. Bob and a couple of the crew went over the side and could find no evidence of a split. We advised the Electricity people that some of the load would have to come off as we needed access to the Ballast tanks. This was done and the Ballast tanks on the Stb. side were opened. Two of the tanks were about 1/2 full with seawater. The Engr. pumped them out and the tank bottom were covered with flake rust and particles. Clearing this mess out of the tank we could see water seepage in many places. It was obvious that the corrosion was from the inside to the outside. Memories of 1961 came back to me when at Devonport during the construction of the ALC-50's, myself and Gordon Cridge had bought up the question of no treatment to the bare steel except that they painted one coat of Red Oxide over the already surface rusted metal. I now had three choices .-

1. Yell "HELP" and sit here in Wewak until the Trade Repair people arrived, but there was no slipway or Marine Workshop in Wewak.
2. Go to Madang where there was a slipway and Workshops and yell "HELP" from there  
or
3. Head for Moresby where we had all facilities necessary within the unit.

The first option was out of the question and the third was a good idea but I decided on the second option, mainly that a final decision could be made in Madang. I advised Moresby of the split/leaks in the hull and told them I was heading for Madang with the cargo. We sealed the "breather" pipes to the Ballast Tanks and told the Electricity people that I would need about 3 tons of the cargo removed as I intended to counter ballast. This was done and we waited to see what list we would have and how long it took to acquire that list. It took 13 hours to acquire an 8 degree list. I then counter ballasted the Port Tanks and departed Wewak.

The weather to Madang was a calm sea with "airs" until we reached radar range of Karkar Island where the sea is either very good or very bad. It was very bad. We reduced speed to a crawl in order to stop the pounding just in case it caused more "little holes" to appear in the bottom. At Cape Croiselles a 45 course change is necessary for the run to Madang and as the wind and sea were coming from the East it meant that I would have the wind and sea on the Port beam and when the alteration was made the ALC-50 rode a lot better. On reaching Madang the cargo was unloaded and the Port tanks emptied. The Stb. tanks were opened and emptied, inspected and allowed to fill by way of the skin "pitting fractures". There appeared to be no further deterioration. I advised Moresby by radio that we would be returning to Moresby and apart from a bulldozer that was to be picked up at Wanigela, and taken to Salamo and a local task from Madang to Saidor, it would be advisable not to accept any other tasks. The breather vents of all tanks were then sealed just in case.

The run to Saidor was only 50 miles and we beached on one of the three beaches that the US 126th RCT of the 32nd division had landed on in Jan 1944. We only had a vehicle to be landed here but we took the opportunity to have a look at the place. When the US Forces left Saidor the Divisional base was stripped of all that was needed for Morotai and the rest was bulldozed into small mounds. Anything that was of use by the local villagers was taken. We saw a few of these "mounds" and although overgrown with vines and trees there was a lot of history just rotting away.

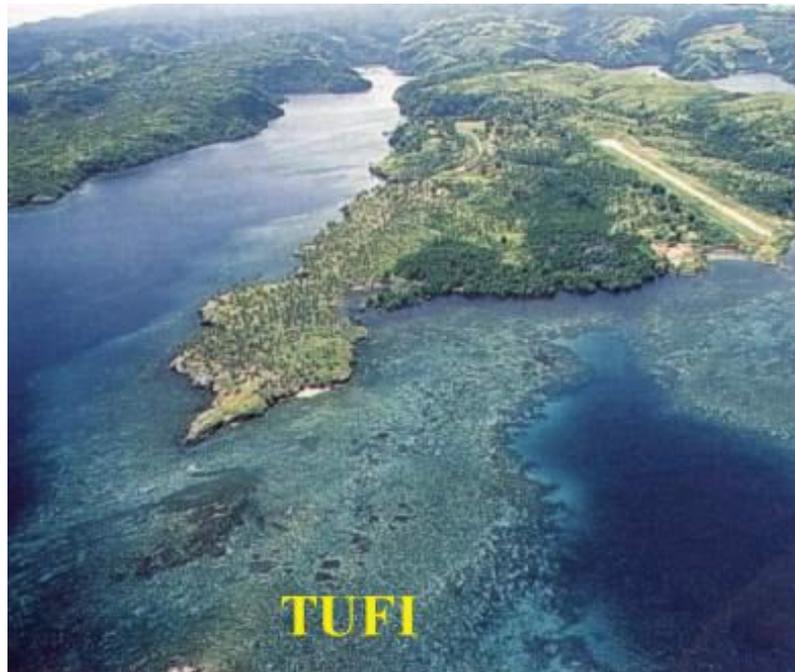
Damaged Jeeps and trucks still carried the Tactical signs of the 126th RCT and "street signs" were still in evidence. I did get a couple of the Tactical signs and had them for many years but lost them during the move from Cooktown to Cairns. Another more interesting place was a couple of miles into the valley. After the US Forces refurbished the Jap Airstrip a couple of Squadrons of B-26 bombers were based here. So the story goes that the USAAF went off to bomb Bogia and at the same time a group of "Betty" bombers came down from Wewak to bomb Saidor. Both groups apparently, were successful. However, when the B-26's arrived back at Saidor to land, there was not much left of Saidor Airstrip. The B-26's circled as long as they could while temporary repairs were made but eight B-26's and one B-25 could wait no longer and put down in the valley and it was this spectacle that we were now looking at. The engines and guns had been removed but the aircraft looked as though they had been put down the day before. All of them were a bright silver except the B-25 which was "Olive Drab" and all had "bellied in". I had an immediate thought that it would be nice to arrive back in Moresby with a B-26 on the Cargo Deck but it would have taken a lot of labour to move one and there was of course a large creek to be crossed, so they were left alone to become part of history that nobody will ever know about.

We returned to Madang, refuelled and departed for Wanigela the following morning. Wanigela is an Anglican Mission in Collingwood Bay, just to the South of Tufi. We were to pick up a bulldozer and take it to Salamo on Fergusson Island, next to Goodenough Island. AB3001 was running OK with no further problems with the hull. We had passed Finschafen and then altered to run down to Cape Ward Hunt and it was early morning when we spotted a rather large launch about 50' length off to the Port side at a range of five miles. It appeared to

be stopped. We altered and went across to it and it was a boat from Gasmata en-route to Lae when the engine failed the day before and they had been drifting ever since.

The route we had taken from Finschafen was not a regular route as large vessels always run down to the Trobriands or into Lae and the smaller coastal vessels are on scheduled services and have no need to be in this area of Huon Gulf.

The people aboard had no water and wanted us to tow them back to Lae. This I would not do, but I would tow them to Morobe which was to the West, about 30 miles. I called Lae Radio to report that we had come across the craft and would be towing them to Morobe and could they advise Morobe Sub-District office of our ETA which they did. There was no radio aboard the Village craft and the people were very thirsty as they had no more water. We 'fixed them up' as best we could and then towed them into Morobe where they were handed over to the ADO in residence there. We then proceeded to Wanigela. When we were within range of Wanigela we were advised by radio that the Mission was not ready for the TD 18 dozer to be brought down to the beach. As we passed Tufi the weather was from the SE and I did not relish sitting on the beach at Wanigela for some unknown time so we pulled into one of the 'Fiords' at Tufi to wait. Here we simply moored to a bank as the water depth at the bank was too deep for our sounding line to measure.



We stayed here for two days and then received word that all was ready. We picked up the TD-18 and departed Wanigela with the SE wind increasing. By the time we had started the run down to Cape Vogel it was also raining heavily. From this point on to Salamo the rain did not cease and navigation was entirely by Radar without seeing anything at all except that for about five minutes we had glimpses of the Western edge of Fergusson Island. Dawson Strait between Fergusson and Normanby Islands, was entered using Radar as the rain had not subsided and this strait was full of reef outcrops and required quite a few course changes. At about 0130 we figured we had arrived off Salamo and the question was 'What do we do now?'. The rain was now a drizzle and the wind had dropped. We stopped to ponder the situation as the entry track inside the reef to Salamo was unknown to us. We drifted onto a coral outcrop and we backed off. We could now see the lights of the Mission and about five minutes later a canoe turned up alongside and we now had a pilot. About 20 minutes later we were berthed alongside the Salamo wharf. Bob Modystack then went to the Mission and woke

up the Manager and advised him we were in Salamo and wanted to offload and depart immediately.

As stated earlier this did not go down to well and we eventually of loaded the TD-18 and departed for Moresby about 0300. By the time we cleared Dawson Strait the rain and wind were finished but the sea was still lumpy for the run down to the small passage between Meime-ara Island and East Cape. From here it was direct to Moresby via China Straits and outside the reef. Bob Modystack had the idea that he would like to sail a Lakatoi back to Australia when he RTA'd so we entered the reef at Aroma Passage and anchored off the village of Aroma and Bob went ashore to see if he could purchase one. Nobody wanted to sell one so we departed and arrived Moresby five minutes inside our ETA.

A postscript to the "holes" in the hull bottom of AB3001 was that she was slipped after arrival in Moresby and there was, as well as the "holes", a weld fracture about a metre in length on the Stb. tunnel. Skin thickness tests were carried out on the complete hull and the results were astounding to say the least. I remembered those days in 1961 at the shipyard in Devonport where the hulls of both AB2996 and AB3001 were rusting as they were being built. I was asked by the PNGDF Marine Engineer, if I would take the ALC-50 to sea again. I jokingly replied that "I would not even take it on a harbour cruise". We had already brought AB3001 some 1000 miles to Moresby in sinking condition and I knew that if we lost AB3001 then it would not be replaced and therefore it was necessary to keep AB3001 as long as possible. A few months later AB3001 was put up for disposal and sold for \$24,000.

## SIASSI ISLANDS AND MALARIAL SPRAYING

This task was one of a multiple task Operation and the Contact port was Lae. The PNG Health Dept. had requested our help in Malarial Spraying Operations in the Umboi and Siassi Islands area. We went over to Lae with the ALC-50 and the two LCM-8's AB1050 (rigged for Helicopter operations) and AB1053. The route taken to Lae was the normal route but instead of going direct to Lae from Mitre Rock I closed in to the coast at Mambare bay and proceeded following the coast line to Morobe. Between Morobe and Salamaua there are a continuing group of islands which are the Luard Islands, the Stragglings Islands and the Longuerue Islands. We overnighed at one of the small islands. The fishing in this area was superb and although we were 'trolling', the three craft were continually pulling in fish. It got to a stage when we had no more storage space but we ate well for many days afterward as well as leaving some for the villagers at Salamaua.

Arriving at Lae and berthing at the main wharf I went up to the Harbourmasters office and requested berthing. The Harbourmaster was both officious and arrogant and told me that berthing would be OK at the normal rates but as we "were not productive to the Port of Lae" we would be required to move at a moment's notice. This sort of upset me a little and then he wanted a list of all locations that we would be travelling to, and that was the last straw. I told him that we had come from the South and were going North and that our destinations were on a "need to know" basis and he was not required to know. He then said that it was essential for him to know just in case we got into "trouble" I then told him that I had instant communications with every Army unit between Vanimo and Moresby as well as Small Ships Radio, thanked him very much and walked out.

I then moved all the craft to Voco Point to the small commercial wharf, notified the Health Dept. and began loading personnel and equipment. The voyage to Siassi was uneventful and we all beached at one of the villages in the group and the Health dept. people spent a couple

of days spraying everything in the surrounding villages. The Malaria rate in this area was high with a corresponding death rate.

The European heading the Malarial team then found that it was probably a waste of time as the island villages all had gardens on Umboi Island and families would spend a couple of days a week tending their gardens on Umboi and that meant spraying in the gardens on Umboi which if taken a little further meant spraying the whole of Umboi Island, but the gardens were eventually sprayed .

We then departed for a small island near the coast of New Britain and the sea became a cauldron mainly because of the interaction of currents from Vitiaz strait and the West New Britain coast meeting. There were "heaps" of uncharted reefs as well as charted reefs in this area and there was no need to look for them as all of them had breakers over them. The beach we were to put the team ashore on was very small and of course had a nasty approach. It was going in to this beach that an incident occurred that I had not experienced since the trials of the ALC-50 in Devonport some 11 years before. Going in I had to use the engines quite frequently with bursts of power ahead and astern on both units. Just short of the beach I gave the Port engine a short burst of power and the port unit then locked astern and would not come out to either neutral or ahead. We were about an ALC length from the beach in breakers and the port unit was astern with about 1000 RPM and would not budge. I then slammed the Stb unit ahead at full power and rammed the beach with the wheel well to Stb. to counteract the Port unit being astern.

We hit the beach hard and stopped dead. Unfortunately a lot of the Malarial team did not realise what was happening since it all took place in seconds and, before we could call out "hold on to something", the ALC had stopped and the team members kept going and there was a pile of them up near the bow entangled in themselves and equipment. There were no serious injuries. At this time I believed that some Engr had been playing with the Bowden cables but was assured this was not the case. I sent a signal to Moresby saying that I had beached in the Eastern Siassi group with "heavenly help from above to counteract the enemy from below". John Sainsbury loved getting these cryptic signals from me.

I suspect that a dump valve had been left open somewhere along the line, possibly at our last location but that did not explain why the throttle would not respond. The Port unit was then stopped and position held on the beach by the Stb. unit. After checking the system the Port unit was re-started and everything functioned perfectly.

After the village had been sprayed we then departed, not without a little excitement as it was now difficult to determine where the exit channel was due to the whole area now being a mass of Breakers. We then went to ?Siassi true? or Tuam Island. The area where we beached was completely sheltered and the sea surface was like a millpond. A team went ashore to begin spraying. The LCM-8's with Bob Modystack aboard then went on a separate mission to spray the villages on the South East coast of Umboi and I took the ALC-50 around to the main "port" on Umboi Island. Umboi Island is a rather large island being some 25 miles long by 30 miles wide. Umboi was within the Mission sphere of the Lutheran Church and as such and apart from the religious aspects of the Island they also had a High School and Training centre. The "port" was a little wharf on the Western side of Umboi and as was usual had a multiple "dog leg" entry but at least there was no rough weather, only rain.

We moored and simply sat until the LCM-8's arrived from their task. When they arrived the "port" was full with no more room. We were invited up to the "high ground" by one of the Lay workers and his wife for dinner one evening. He was a carpenter and she was the Science

teacher at the High School. We then moved all craft to the NW corner of Umboi where there was a delightful bay well protected from all quadrants except the NW. We anchored here and maintenance was carried out on all craft prior to the next stage.

It was here that the "wog" I picked up in 1963 at Lesse village in Papua decided to appear again. I'd had earlier outbreaks in Vietnam which were controlled and only lasted a week. I also carried "Vioform" and Potassium Permanganate on this trip but it went all over the lower part of my body. Whether it was the humidity that was the trigger or whether it was triggered by the Chemicals used in spraying I don't know but it was the worst outbreak since 1963. My usual method of immersing hands and feet in a hot Potassium solution could not be used as the blisters had already formed. It took 5 days to get rid of the blisters and another 5 days to get rid of the rash and itch. Tinea it was definitely not.

The bay had a fringing reef that was out of this world and we spent many an hour in the undersea world, as well as catching Lobster. The LCM-8's went off again to do the North to the Eastern side of Umboi while I went to Madang on another task. Returning to the bay on Umboi we collected the LCM-8's and departed for Lae calling at Finschafen on the way.

We berthed at Ted Foads' wharf at Finschafen and he took us on a tour of the area ending up at what was once the site of a WW2 US Army hospital. There was a swimming pool carved out of the rock and fed by a 4" water pipe from the mountains. It was similar to the water supply at Kana Kope, Milne Bay, but on a much larger scale. The water had been flowing, unimpeded for 30 years. Departing Finschafen and unloading at Lae it was then off to Salamaua for an R&C break before the next operation. During the R&C break we all spent many an hour water skiing on the still waters of the lagoon using the Assault boats. It was on this break at Salamaua that we finally loaded the Ingersoll Rand Scraper to take back to Moresby.

On return to Port Moresby Bob Modystack was posted to the US and departed for Australia. I notified the RAE people that the Scraper was now in Moresby and they came down to the Base to have a look and were delighted with it. They were then going to have it picked up, cleaned and sent back to the RAE Museum at Casula. I rang them every week as to when they would pick it up. Four months later, using the unit mobile crane I had the scraper dumped under the wharf where it probably still is today. So much for History.

## **OPENING OF THE CAVES AT SALAMAUA**

During Nov 73 we had finished a task in Madang and returning to Moresby we had a weekend off in Lae. At this time Keith Bradford had a Front end loader and two dump trucks available so we loaded them onto the ALC-50 and LCM-8 and went across to Salamaua. To have a weekend off in Lae simply meant that it was a weekend of alternating between the RSL, Lae club and the Lae Yacht Club. A weekend at Salamaua is always more inviting. On the Saturday morning with Olim's help we began to move trees and soil from the approximate position where Olim indicated. After three hours we broke through to the tunnel. Olim was about six feet out. The Japanese must have worked hard to build this complex for long time residency but they were not in occupation very long. The tunnel was about nine feet in width and seven feet high. there was a small gauge rail line going into the mountain. On the rail line were a couple of small rail trolleys. All of the wheels and bearings were made in USA.

Gurias (Earth tremors) over the years had collapsed the ceiling of the tunnel. We went in about 40 yards and came to a collapsed section with a gap of about two feet. We had powerful hand torches and poking the torches through the gap we could not see the far side. This must

have been the cavern we heard so much about. We were not game to go any further as I for one, did not relish the thought of getting caught inside. The amazing thing was that there was a draft flowing from the tunnel entrance to the inside, which suggested that there were outlets somewhere on the outside. We eventually sealed the entrance again. We then moved to the western side of the harbour where there was another tunnel complex which had been bombed shut. Although we found the entrance we could go no further as the whole tunnel had collapsed due to sandy soil. It was an interesting exercise and the tunnel was history, untouched as it happened some 30 years earlier.

The Commander PNG Command, Brig. J. Norrie, had asked me some time earlier that if we ever got the chance, could we bring back a reasonable fish for him. We bought back a Dolphin fish (Chicken of the Sea) and he was quite pleased about it. Sometime later he wanted to know if we could bring back a large Barramundi as he had a large function coming up. Since our time in rivers was in excess of two weeks we usually ate any seafood we caught as it would not last because we did not have a freezing capacity aboard. I rang Keith Bradford in Lae and put the question to him.

As well as having a Transport and Earthmoving Co., he also had a company that exported seafood to Japan with the processing plant in Lae and the freezing complex in Daru. He said that it should be OK and he would get a Barramundi sent across to Moresby from Daru. About a week later a Barramundi arrived and it was not a large Barramundi but a

huge Barramundi. I took it down to the Commanders house the same evening and we could not get the tail of the fish in the freezer. Father "Ray" arrived during this period for one of his frequent visits to the Commanders house and said very little. The following Friday I went to the Mess for a drink before going home and the Mess was crowded. In the course of having a drink I was astounded to hear Father Ray's voice over everybody else say, "Did you all know that, no names to be mentioned, one of our seagoing Captains from our Landing Craft Squadron has been supplying the Commander with large fresh frozen fish while the rest of us have to accept the lowest tendered variety of fish!". I took quite a pounding over that and it lasted for a couple of weeks

In January 73, using an LCM-8, I went over to Daugo Island with a Picnic Party from the Officers Mess. The Workshops Tp. Cmdr. at this time was 2Lt. Neal Mathers and he accompanied us as Engr. Daugo Island is only eight miles from Moresby and is a popular spot for weekend picnics. There were a total of 45 people aboard including children. I beached the LCM on the Western Point of the Island and tables were set up on the LCM under the canopy. The tide was Neap and the LCM sat hard on the beach about an hour after beaching. The children were all playing in the water at the Ramp. Neal Mathers decided to take a few of the passengers out to the outer reef and went aboard the River Truck that we had towed out with us for this purpose. Neal let the stern line on the River Truck go and started the outboard. We thought the problems that we had at Kikori had been eliminated

The Outboard started in gear and as it went forward Neal Mathers went over the stern. The Truck ran up the side of the LCM until the headline took the strain and the River Truck pivoted and spun across the bow into a group of children playing in the water at the Ramp. There was pandemonium as parents raced to the bow ramp. I jumped onto the River Truck and stopped the engine and somebody said there was a child underneath the Truck. Very quickly we pulled the River Truck aside and out popped our eldest daughter, Karen. The River Truck when it pivoted had hit her and the screw of the Outboard had sliced a cut between her big toe and the next toe. Luckily we had Bill Rodgers on board and he tended First aid while I was on the radio to Murray Barracks. I could not raise Murray Barracks but

Wewak responded and I asked them to either raise Murray Barracks on the radio or telephone the Duty Officer to get an Ambulance down to The Marine Base as there had been an accident.

Bill Rodgers had his own boat, but there was a civil craft that was much faster and Karen was put aboard and Bill Rodgers followed in his boat. We left Daugo Island about 45 minutes later. By the time we reached the Marine Base Karen was already being attended to at the Army Hospital at Taurama Barracks (PIR). We were extremely lucky as there was not a scratch to anyone else. Karen recovered completely. Once again the spectre of the 40 HP Outboard's was with us. We grounded the lot, but by the time I left in 1975 there was still no clear answer to the "failsafe" mechanism.