

Booklet

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WAR ZONE SCRAMBLE
STORIES OF ESCAPE DURING WORLD WAR II

By Milton Hook



Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series

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Stories of escape during World War II

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SDA Heritage Series: Entry into the Australian Colonies
By Milton Hook

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Milton Hook is the author of "Flames Over Battle Creek", a brief history of the early days at the Review and Herald Publishing Association as seen through the eyes of George Amadon, printer's foreman at the institution. Dr Hook's doctoral dissertation researched the pioneering years of the Avondale School, 1894 to 1900, and he has published some of these findings.

He spent three years as a mission director in Papua New Guinea. His teaching years include primary, secondary and college level experience, especially in Bible subjects, in Australia, New Zealand and America. He is an ordained minister, married and the father of two sons.

He would welcome any information which may enhance the content of this series.

The Pacific was calm. It was an uneasy quiet, an air of foreboding. Prior to December 1941 the island mission field north-east of Australia was relatively "untouched" by the World War. But missionaries, especially in the region of Manus and Mussau Islands, grew apprehensive. They were the most vulnerable as the war machine threatened to speed across the waves from the north.

During Christmas 1940 a German raider had steamed by Emirau Island near Mussau and off-loaded nearly five hundred survivors from boats she had sunk, including the New Zealand ship RANGITANE. These survivors were hosted by plantation owners Mr and Mrs Cook, self-supporting missionaries Trevor and Olga Collett, and the native population, until a safe passage to their various homelands could be arranged.

Pastor Robert Tutty and wife, Emily, stationed on Lou Island near Manus, had taken furlough in September 1941 and were therefore safely in Australia. Pastor Malcolm ("Mac") Abbott and his wife, Frances, even though they also were due a furlough, decided to stay on in Rabaul until Tutty returned. Abbott was superintendent of the New Guinea Mission. He did not want to leave the area with insufficient European leadership. In November 1941 Abbott flew into the New Guinea highland mission stations to conduct baptisms. It was the last regular civilian flight into that area before war struck.

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the Philippine Islands and the American Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbour, Hawaii. The following day they landed on the Malayan coast. With impunity they swept all before them. Their intentions were obvious. They wished to command the entire South-East Asian and Pacific regions.

During the three weeks after Pearl Harbour there was a flurry of desperate evacuation plans by the governments in the South Pacific. First priority was given to expatriate woman and children from Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Those in the other Pacific Island groups were afforded only a little more time.

Most of these women and children in Papua congregated in Port Moresby. They were joined by those from mainland New Guinea who were flown in via Lae. A smaller group waited at Samarai. Those in New Ireland, New Britain, and Bougainville gathered in Rabaul.

Eventually the KATOOMBA steamed into Port Moresby to evacuate 342 women and 200 children from the mainland. Dorothy Gray remembers having to walk twenty kilometres through the bush from Mirigeda to the main road and then hitching a ride to Port Moresby on a truck in order to catch the boat. On the wharf hasty goodbyes were said in the pouring rain before the boat headed south for safety on December 20.

At the same time two smaller ships at Port Moresby, the NEPTUNA and MACDHUI, were ordered to steam to Guam Island. Everyone on board knew that radio message was given merely to baffle the enemy. In reality the boats were making a dash to Rabaul. It was no ordinary Christmas. In Rabaul women without children were swiftly bundled on board the NEPTUNA and under cover of darkness the boat steamed away to the Queensland coast via Samarai. "Fran" Abbot and Myrtle Sharpe were the only Seventh-day Adventists among those crowded on board. "Fran" recalls sleeping on the cabin floor and in the aisle of the train en route to Brisbane.

The MACDHUI, considered to be the faster ship, slipped away from Rabaul the following night. Among the fugitives on board were Seventh-day Adventists Eileen Thompson, Olga Collett, Phyllis Hiscox, Nancy Atkins, and their little children. The military could spare no escort vessels or protective air cover for any of the evacuation ships, but all arrived safely. Latecomers who missed the boats were air-lifted in emergency flights with civilian planes and flying boats. In a few days the mammoth operation was virtually completed. It was none too soon, for the Japanese began bombing Rabaul on January 4, 1942.

With the heat of battle so close in Rabaul, Abbott made plans with his staff to rendezvous further down the coast at Put Put Training School to effect escape if need be.

Arthur Atkins, the Seventh-day Adventist missionary stationed on Mussau Island, bravely decided to take his mission boat, the MALALU NGI, back north to his headquarters. There the boat was camouflaged and hidden upstream. Atkins instructed Pastor Rogapitu, his assistant from the Solomon Islands, to continue on should he himself have to leave. He also made escape plans with Collett who was still on Emirau Island.

Back in Rabaul the mission records and equipment were loaded onto Abbott's boat, the VEILOMANI, and together with Colin Sharpe, mission Secretary-Treasurer, were transferred to Put Put where Aubrey Hiscox was in charge of the school.

Len Thompson, a Seventh-day Adventist medical assistant with the New Guinea government, was under orders to remain in Rabaul to care for those injured in the bombing raids. When the mission records were transferred to Put Put Abbott told Hiscox and Sharpe he would go back to Rabaul in the VEILOMANI and join with Thompson in giving help to the community. As superintendent of the mission with staff still in the area and on mainland New Guinea he felt it was his duty to be the last one to leave. When Abbott arrived back in Rabaul he instructed his

ship's captain, Pam (pronounced Parm), to return to Put Put and ferry fugitives to safety.

Put Put rapidly became crowded with militia and civilians fleeing the Rabaul area. Japanese aircraft and warships grew more menacing. One midnight at Put Put all personnel were awakened and ordered to leave for a safer area further south along the coast. The captain of the VEILOMANI took Hiscox, Sharpe, and many others down to Tol Tol Bay. There they hid with a Chinese Christian family during the day. Late afternoon they gingerly moved a little further south to Sum Sum Bay--a prearranged rendezvous with the Australian Air Force. Two flying boats skimmed in, picked up nearly one hundred people and escaped into a leaden sky.

At dusk Hiscox sat on the bow of the VEILOMANI trying to decide whether to flee south on the next flying-boat or seek refuge in the Baining Mountains behind Sum Sum Bay. For three years he had evangelized that area and two villages had accepted his mission. However, a military officer convinced him he may be a liability to the natives if the Japanese overran the area. Hiscox wrote a note to Abbott, which was later relayed by the VEI LOMAN I crew, explaining that he and Sharpe would escape on the next flying-boat.

During the night the VEILOMANI took the group further south to Wide Bay, where the flying-boat had arranged to land the following evening. That day, Sabbath, they hid inshore. Some walked to a plantation on the other side of the bay. The flying-boat arrived on schedule at dusk. Hiscox and Sharpe bade a sad farewell to the intrepid crew of the VEILOMANI and quickly boarded the flying-boat. As it rose from the water a Japanese plane spotted it and circled. The flying-boat dropped down on the far side of the bay to pick up the second group and in the poor light fortunately lost the enemy. Hiscox remembers a European trader trying to board with a weighty calico bag of silver coins. The air force officer bellowed at the trader, "We're overloaded. We can

take you but not the money." The trader immediately dropped his wealth into the blue brine and scrambled aboard.

Landing safely at Samurai Hiscox and Sharpe met up with a small cargo vessel, the MATAFELI, escaping from Rabaul. They joined the crew and sailed without incident to Townsville.

While Hiscox and Sharpe were escaping from Put Put, Atkins and Collett were playing cat-and-mouse with the enemy further north. Atkins had stayed on Mussau right up until Japanese troops actually landed nearby.

He also spotted the fire lit as an emergency signal by Collett on Emirau Island. Atkins persuaded Sino, the Mussau captain of the MALALUNGI, to bring the boat from its hiding place and make a dash south for Put Put. With enemy boats cruising in the area they slipped away under cover of darkness, picking up Collett and his friend Cook on the way.

At that time Kavieng, and then Rabaul, fell into enemy control. The MALALUNGI was really behind the Japanese front line. Intimate knowledge of the weather, tides, and the southern coast of New Ireland enabled them to dodge the enemy. They hid the boat in the daytime and carefully hugged the coastline at night, zig-zagging their way through coral reefs, islets, and lagoons. Sneaking past the silent fingers of Japanese search lights playing on Rabaul harbour they slipped into Put Put early in the morning of January 26. The tense trip had taken four days. Just as they arrived they saw the VEILOMANI leaving with yet another load of men to rendezvous with flying-boats further south.

At Put Put Atkins and Collett learned that Hiscox and Sharpe had flown out just two days previously. Deni Mark and his wife, Ellen, Solomon Island teacher-missionaries, were still there trying to continue the school as normal. Deni handed over a letter from Abbott to Atkins. In it, Abbott explained his decision to stay behind in Rabaul. Atkins and Collett realised the best alternative was to

follow the VEILOMANI south in the MALALUNGI. By sea and air the enemy was prowling with increasing strength so both boats were heavily camouflaged to appear as miniature islands covered with shrubs. Nevertheless, near Adler Bay a Japanese patrol boat intercepted them, peppering both boats with bullets. All on board desperately swam to shore and watched helplessly as first the MALALUNGI was sunk and then the VEILOMANI was crippled and left ablaze before the enemy left.

Pam, the VEILOMANI captain, courageously swam back out to the boat and with the help of others who followed him they finally quenched the flames. All night they worked to revive the engine but it proved to be irreparable. The Japanese returned in the morning and sank it also.

The stranded fugitives decided to flee south on foot. A few, who were not robust, including Atkins who suffered from asthma, inched their way along the coast in a dinghy at night. Collett and Sino accompanied Atkins. However, after making some headway Atkins became ill. Collett and Sino decided to leave the fugitives and paddle Atkins in a native canoe back to Put Put where some basic medical supplies were available.

Tense times took their toll on Atkin's health and despite the loyal care Collett gave him he grew worse in the few weeks he was at Put Put. In desperation Sino was despatched to Kokopo to ask the Japanese if they would admit Atkins into their hospital. This they agreed to. Collett and Atkins were taken into custody and marched back to Kokopo, Atkins arriving at the hospital almost in a state of collapse. Despite the diligent efforts of Doctor Watch and nurses from the Roman Catholic mission, who had previously elected not to flee and were commandeered by the Japanese, Atkins died on March 13, 1942, two days after reaching the hospital. He was buried nearby in the Catholic mission cemetery at Vanupope.

Collett was thrust into the Japanese prisoner-of-war camp, having virtually surrendered in order to stay by Atkins for as long as possible. Abbott and Thompson had already spent about six weeks in the same camp, having been taken into custody. It is not known why these two men were not utilized by the Japanese, as other nurses were, unless perhaps they attempted an escape soon after the Japanese took control of Rabaul or they refused to work on Saturdays. The wives of Collett, Abbott, and Thompson each received a short letter written soon after the death of Atkins. This particular batch of mail was air-dropped by a Japanese plane over Port Moresby. The letters spoke of Atkin's death, adequate care and food in the P.O.W. camp, requests for Red Cross parcels, love for their relatives, and the wish for the war to be finished.

On one occasion the boat captains, Pam and Sino, walked from Put Put to Rabaul P.O.W. camp and spoke to Abbott through the wire fence. Abbott sent a message with them to Deni Mark advising the mission natives to retire from Put Put and operate gardens in the bush, and to help any allies who may need protection or directions. Obviously Abbott was recommending an attitude of non-cooperation with the invading forces.

Later the Japanese decided to transfer all the prisoners in Rabaul to Hainan Island off the South China coast. In the early hours of June 22, 1942, guards roused the prisoners, separated the officers who were later successfully transported to Japan, and readied the large remainder group for boarding the MONTEVIDEO MARU, a transport ship of over seven thousand tonnes. With a crew of eighty-eight and over one thousand civilian and military prisoners the boat departed Rabaul that same day. Two weeks later they were almost at their destination when tragedy struck off the west coast of the Philippines. In the early hours of July 1 the United States submarine STURGEON, on the lookout for any enemy shipping, spotted the unescorted vessel and sank her. Only seventeen of the crew survived. All the prisoners perished including Abbott, Collett, and Thompson,

together with three Roman Catholic and eleven Methodist missionaries.

When the news of Rabaul having been bombed reached government authorities in the Solomon Islands the order to evacuate women and children to Australia was given immediately. Missionary wives and children, together with nurse Evelyn Totenhofer, sailed shortly after in the steamship MALAITA. Then on Sunday, January 25, all our male missionaries were ordered to leave. Plans were already laid to make their escape aboard the mission ketch MELANESIA, but short notice caused frantic last-minute repairs and non-stop loading for over thirty hours before they could leave. On the wharf at 3 a.m. Tuesday morning a short prayer service was held, final farewells said to native friends, and in the pre-dawn darkness the semi-diesel engine began throbbing across the still waters out into the ocean. Under heavy protective cloud for a week the little vessel brought them all safely to Hervey Bay on the Queensland coast. Seven missionaries concluded the hazardous crossing with a prayer service of thanksgiving. They were Hamley Perry, Bob Barrett, John Howse, James Cormack, John Gosling, David Ferris and Charlie Tucker.

Those at Kieta, on Bougainville, left under a false alarm and in a general panic. It was falsely reported that Sohano and Buka Passage had fallen to the enemy. The residents of Kieta naturally assumed they would be attacked next. At that time the old ADVENT HERALD, then owned by Mr Wong You, was lying alongside the jetty with a cargo of sixty cases of fuel. Japanese warplanes had visited them three times beforehand. On Friday, January 23, an enemy fighter swooped in again at midday, circling behind Pok Pok Island at the entrance to the harbour. A local policeman, Abui, at the lookout post shouted, "Baloos i sindoun finis" (The plane has landed), wrongly assuming the plane had landed on Pok Pok. Quickly the locals relayed the false message, "Plenti solja i plantim flag bilong all" (Many [Japanese] soldiers have put up their flag). That stung everyone into a frenzy. Cyril Pascoe and Wong You ran to the ADVENT HERALD, lit the

blow-lamps to start the engine and waited for what seemed an eternity for it to heat up before ignition.

A heavy squall of rain then obscured the entire harbour and foreshore. Men came running. "They're coming! They're coming!", could be heard everywhere. Three boatmen swung the ship out into the squall, making south where it met Methodist missionary Pastor Luxton in his larger schooner, the BILUA. They transferred the ADVENT HERALD's load of cargo and people to the BILUA. Then they returned for a second group of fugitives. Pascoe and others stood on the back of Wong You's truck as he sped them through the rain to meet up with other expatriates before evening fell and to join the boats at a point further south.

At nightfall, with everyone safely on board, the two boats picked their way in the darkness through coastal reefs. Sabbath and Sunday they gingerly edged around to the western side of the island keeping a vigilant eye for enemy planes. One was sighted but it flew on. Mid-Sunday afternoon, January 25, they launched out into the open seas from Puruata for Woodlark Island, Samarai, and eventually Port Moresby. Their only navigation aids were a pocket compass and a tatty map of New Guinea held together with sticking plaster.

A week after fleeing Kieta they reached Samarai, just in time to see Jack Radley's company boat, the AMBON, begin its dash across the Coral Sea to Cairns. The little ADVENT HERALD chugged on hugging the Papuan coast towards Port Moresby. There Pascoe united with some of his fellow missionaries. They had all taken refuge with Ken Grayat his Mirigeda Training School because of the Japanese planes over Port Moresby. Pastor Charlie Mitchell had come in from his east coast station at Vilirupu. Nearby, Tom Judd was also forced to abandon his medical work at Aroma.

After the women had been evacuated earlier on the KATOOMBA all the men left behind in Port Moresby were inducted into the

army with nothing more than a toothbrush as personal property. Pastor Gordon Engelbrecht, superintendent of the Papuan Mission, pled for exemption on the grounds he was an ordained minister. So, instead of handing him a gun the army gave him an axe and put him to work on the wood-pile in the heat of the day. Other mission staff successfully requested medical duties. This situation lasted only a few weeks. The Japanese were gathering strength. Inevitably they would assault mainland New Guinea and even Papua. Consequently army officers ordered the missionaries to evacuate post-haste and by whatever independent means they could muster.

Enemy planes bombed Port Moresby on February 4, 1942. Hastily the DIARI, the little twelve-metre boat belonging to the Papuan Mission, was readied. They would hug the coastline to Thursday Island, perhaps picking up Laurie Howell at Vailala River and Eric Boehm at his medical outpost, Orokolo.

The DIARI put to sea the following day amid the second enemy attack, one bomb exploding in the water and shaking the ship from stem to stern. On board were Pascoe, Engelbrecht, Mitchell, Judd, Gray, Ward Nolan, Lester Lock, Bob Frame, and aboriginal missionaries Willie and Minnie Shepperd with their little adopted Papuan girl. Fred Burke, a planter at Orokolo, ace engineer and friend of the mission, also joined them in the escape.

Arriving at Vailala River they found Howell and Boehm anxiously waiting nearby at Vaiviri plantation. However, these two men decided against jeopardising the chances of an already overloaded boat. The POTRERO, belonging to oil explorers working upstream, had just arrived in its dash for Daru and had offered to take Howell and Boehm. They accepted. Both boat crews decided to flee in tandem. At night the DIARI would follow the red light on the rear of the POTRERO.

The three-cylinder Gardiner diesel engine of the DIARI was no match for the six-cylinder POTRERO. The engine of the DIARI

overheated and a vital pin dropped out, causing it to stop. It was providential the pin had dropped out, for if the engine had continued to run overheated then irreparable damage would have occurred. While the boat wallowed in the waves the men dismantled the engine, finding one of the big-end bearings needing replacement. They were doubly fortunate to have Burke and a spare set of big-end bearings on board. By 3 a.m. the repairs were completed but they had lost their compass position. At dawn they recognized Cape Blackwood and decided not to stopover at Daru but instead to steer directly for Thursday Island via Bramble Cay, a reef marked with a beacon.

A sail was added to the mast to steady the DIARI and give extra speed. It took four days, with recurring engine trouble, to reach Thursday Island. When they arrived, the harbour officials flashed signals but no-one on board could read code. Nevertheless, they chose a channel and proceeded slowly. The harbour officials were amazed to learn no-one had read the code. "You responded correctly to every signal," they gasped. The fugitives marveled more when the officials added, "The channel you negotiated was mined"

The POTRERO came to Thursday Island two days later. They had pressed on during that first night out of Vailala, not realising the DIARI engine had broken down. Later that night, while crossing the infamous Papuan Gulf, they experienced a fearful storm and were blown off course (If engine trouble had not delayed the more vulnerable DIARI she may have gone down in the violent storm). While off-loading the Papuan workers at Daru, Howell and Boehm, together with the oil explorers, had to run for cover when the air-raid sirens sounded. Two Japanese planes swooped in on a bombing run. One terrified Papuan oil worker ran into the river mangroves and was taken by a lurking crocodile.

Another oil exploration boat, the MAROUBRA, and a Levers Brothers plantation ketch, the GILIGILI, also arrived safely at Thursday Island. The four crews agreed to leave for Cairns

together on February 15. No-one, however, owned a coastal chart of the eight-hundred kilometre trip the rough the top end of the treacherous Great Barrier Reef. The Admiralty had confiscated all maps lest the enemy use them to advantage. A desperate search found an old man on the island who once owned a store. The store itself was nothing more than a derelict shanty after being closed for years. In a back room cupboard a roll of cockroach-eaten charts was discovered. The inner chart, in reasonably good condition, was of the Cairns run!

Starting almost immediately the DIARI led the boats south. After passing Cape York the POTRERO crankshaft broke so the two smaller boats, GILIGILI and MAROUBRA, attached towlines and brought it all the way to Cairns. The DIARI was not without its problems either. Stopping at an island en route the engine cooled and couldn't be started again. Carbon deposits had solidified around the pistons and rings. Once again the engine was dismantled and cleaned before it would run. Later, during a sudden squall, a blow-lamp fell and broke a glass bowl in the lubricating-oil system. After picking out the broken glass one of the crew had to hand-feed the yellow-green oil for the remainder of the trip.

All were thankful to reach the safety of Cairns, board trains, and rejoin their families further south. Radley sold the AMBON in Cairns. He repaired and brought the DIARI down the coast, mooring it at Cooranbong on Dora Creek until the end of the war.

The safe return of missionaries from the Papuan Gulf region still left three Seventh-day Adventist expatriates in the highlands-- Dave Brennan at Omaura Training School, Alex Campbell at the highland's headquarters called Ramu (Kainantu), and Start Gander further west at Bena Bena. Earlier, the rapid deterioration of affairs at Rabaul had prevented any news from reaching the highland men. They were unaware of permission toffee. For that reason they stayed on, keeping two or three escape routes in

mental reserve should the emergency arise. Then military regulations closed those routes.

Hundreds of civilians had been flown to Port Moresby from Wewak, Lae, Salamaua, Bulolo, and Wau. Veteran miner, Norman Wilde, tells how he evacuated eleven Chinese from Salamaua in a Tiger Moth. "It took me a mile and a half to take off, and then I scraped the tree tops near the 'drome!", he claimed. Others walked out. Some made an epic journey across the mountains taking five months to walk from the May River to Daru. Many others walked from Madang to the highlands centre of Ramu.

The Japanese landed at Lae and Salamaua on March 8, 1942, and began moving up the Markham Valley towards Ramu. They penetrated within eighty kilometres of Omaura but then a record flood temporarily drove them back to Lae.

In the meantime, Campbell's friend, Father John Glover, was making daring evacuation flights from the highlands. With only about twenty hours flying experience he took scores of people to Port Moresby via Wau in a tiny Simmonds Spartan plane. As enemy planes grew more frequent the route became too dangerous. He needed a faster and larger plane. He knew of a DH 60 Moth hidden at Roman Catholic headquarters behind enemy lines on Sek Island near Madang.

Glover secreted his Spartan in Campbell's banana grove and, together with an engineer, took nine days to walk behind the enemy lines from Ramu to Madang. Miraculously he flew the Moth out from under the noses of the Japanese and up into the highlands.

With two baby aeroplanes at his disposal Glover then decided to first ferry sick civilians to Mount Hagan for evacuation. Using the Spartan on the first trip he found it was not powerful enough to climb over the Purari Divide so he returned to Ramu airstrip,

running into the trip-wire put across the aerodrome to thwart enemy planes, and smashing his propeller. Hence, with only the Moth left, the plight of the fifty Europeans at Ramu was critical.

Glover proposed a plan that seemed suicidal. He and his engineer friend, Karl Nagy, would fly to Mount Hagen, then across the central ranges to Thursday Island and alert the Australian authorities. Under cover at Ramu they worked on the Moth for a week.

Campbell provided flat-iron to build an auxiliary petrol tank. Copper tubing was needed to connect the new tank to the existing one. This vital insignificant scrap was found in Campbell's workshop too, salvaged by him from a plane which crashed there in 1937.

Of course, Glover would sit in the front cockpit. Nagy sat in the rear nursing a lavatory pan full of extra petrol. As fuel was consumed he squirted more petrol from the pan into the tank with the aid of a large enema syringe Campbell donated from his store of medical supplies. Glover knew nothing about long-range navigation and had only a map torn from a school atlas. Their first attempt to fly the Moth to Mount Hagen failed even though they jettisoned supplies. After dickering further with the engine the second attempt succeeded.

Leaving Mount Hagen on March 28 Glover and Nagy negotiated the mountains, found the southern coastline and followed it south and west, only to run headlong into rain. With barely a cupful of petrol left they were forced to land on the Papuan beach west of Daru. There they persuaded local natives to row them to Thursday Island. En route they transferred to a passing ship and reached help. Qantas Empire Airways agreed to try and sneak into the highlands and bring the trapped civilians out.

Those back at Ramu knew nothing of Glover's success. Groups had already walked to Mount Hagen. The Ramu mission station

was taken over by Australian forces and was being used as a hospital. Campbell was undecided whether or not to walk to Mount Hagen with the remaining few evacuees. Then one evening he learned by radio that some American priests were imprisoned by the Japanese on Bougainville. He then realised the enemy were not going to regard missionaries as neutral.

On April 10 the army asked Campbell if he wished to evacuate and warned that if he remained he could not expect any support from allied forces. Enemy planes were in the skies all around. They had scored direct hits on the mission property doing minor damage. He decided to leave, sending word for Brennan and Gander to join him. Brennan walked in from Omaura six days later and together they began the 320 kilometre trek on foot to Mount Hagen via Bena Bena, where Gander awaited them.

Crossing the Gafuka Valley, towering mountains, and into the Mairi Gorge, then across the swift Chimbu River and up the Whagi Valley they finally arrived at Mount Hagen after nine days journeying through territory untouched by the gospel. There they waited in hope with nearly eighty others. Over two weeks later, on May 13, the first of several rescue missions flew in from Horn Island and began to bring them all to safety. Courage, skill, and prayer brought success to the whole endeavour.

While those at Mount Hagen had waited for help the indecisive Battle of the Coral Sea was fought, May 4-8, 1942. Just after their rescue, on June 3-5, the Battle of Midway occurred in the Northern Pacific in which four Japanese aircraft carriers were sunk. That was the turning point of the war in the Pacific. Japan never won another major battle. In August the Allies mounted the Guadalcanal offensive, driving the enemy gradually north out of the Solomon Islands. By September they were also retreating from the Kokoda Trail in Papua. Not until early 1944 were they entirely repulsed from all Melanesian islands previously evangelized by Seventh-day Adventist missionaries.

Naturally, the southern and eastern Pacific island groups returned to peace-time conditions sooner than the north-western groups. Late in 1942 expatriate missionaries began to return to the Society Islands, Cook Islands, Fiji, and Vanuatu. However, missionaries had to wait until 1944 before normal conditions returned to Papua New Guinea.

Returning missionaries found the spread of the gospel had not suffered any serious reverses. Property was intact, except for mission homes on New Britain and at Mirigeda and the loss of some mission boats. Warrant-Officer Rod Fowler, a 1940 graduate of the Sydney Sanitarium and Seventh-day Adventist medic, had used Campbell's mission station as his headquarters, at the same time keeping a paternal eye on the property. In Port Moresby also the army had commandeered mission headquarters. The officer-in-charge issued instructions for the gardens to be cultivated and the church to be off-limits to preserve its sanctity. The rubber trees were tapped and funds credited to the mission from the sale of latex.

Solomon Island missionaries, such as Oti and Salau, were left in charge at various places in Papua New Guinea. Ngara stayed at Mirigeda Training School and also superintended the work at Aroma and Vilirupu where Songavare and Gnava were stationed. Tauku and his wife, Jesi, were left by Howell to continue at Vailala. Pascoe had appointed Tati to care for Bougainville.

Rogapitu, the appointee on Mussau, tells how the Japanese came to his area and their commanding officer quizzed him about his responsibilities and religion. Rogapitu told him Seventh-day Adventism was practised in Japan. The officer was sceptical. Rogapitu then showed him a "Review and Herald" magazine which Atkins had left behind with personal belongings. In it were pictures and an article on Seventh-day Adventist work in Japan. From that point onwards Rogapitu was allowed to continue his mission work unhindered.

The conduct of both Japanese and Australian officers towards our national leaders was not always friendly. Indeed, on occasion they became quite brutal. Deni Mark at Put Put, following Abbott's instructions, assisted Australian soldiers to escape. He and his helpers also rescued and hid Gordon Manuel, a downed American pilot. Intelligence was also relayed by him to an Australian spy in the Baining Mountains. This he did at the risk of his own life. Japanese officers brought him to court eight times but each time failed to prove anything conclusively against him. Nevertheless, the floggings and torture used in their efforts to squeeze information and confessions from him precipitated his death on September 15, 1944.

Kata Rangaso at Batuna received similar treatment from a lone Australian government officer, but it was not fatal. Rangaso had been left in charge of Seventh-day Adventist work in the Solomon Islands. He organised the construction of small buildings hidden deep in the jungle where he secreted mission equipment. He also supervised the camouflage-mooring of two tiny mission boats, one the PORTAL, upstream under overhanging trees and safe from enemy aircraft.

In May 1943, as the Japanese drew closer, the jittery government officer became suspicious of Rangaso because he had declined jury service, refused to act as an interpreter on Saturdays, and upheld a non-combatancy stance for all Seventh-day Adventists. The officer confiscated Rangaso's mission boat, the DANDAVATA, mounted a gun on the fore deck, arrested Rangaso and imprisoned him below deck, then used the boat to destroy the Japanese vanguard.

Rangaso was taken back to government headquarters, summoned to a so-called court and there assaulted and rifle-whipped until he lay in a pool of blood on the floor. Twice the raging officer gave the order for a soldier to shoot Rangaso on the spot. Both times the trigger was pulled but the rifle would not fire. The officer, as if possessed or demented, could only stammer the

command a third time and gave up in a confused state of mind. Gathering himself together he ordered Rangaso to be stretched across an oil drum and his back lashed with jungle cane. No medical assistance was given for his wounds as he languished for days in his barbed-wire prison. His friends prayed earnestly for his release. These prayers were answered one night with the prison gates being unlocked and Rangaso walking away a free man again.

The whole sorry episode aroused no spirit of revenge in the heart of Rangaso. He organised look-out posts along the length of his shores with the express purpose of watching for and rescuing allied war casualties. When a warship was torpedoed nearby his rescue team rowed out in their canoes to bring in 187 Australian and New Zealand soldiers. Twenty-seven American pilots, downed in dog-fights, were also rescued, hidden from the enemy, fed, and returned to the allies. Later, these same pilots arranged for a Citation of Merit to be granted to Rangaso.

The three-year absence of white missionaries tested the loyalty of the nationals - loyalty to their Saviour and church, as well as loyalty to Europeans. One wonders what road history might have taken if European government and mission influence had not established itself beforehand. The period also forced leadership upon promising nationals, demonstrating their ability.

National teachers continued to operate mission schools although under adverse circumstances, subsistence-level income, and very few teaching supplies. Evangelism and baptisms continued in areas where an ordained pastor lived. If there was no available pastor the mission workers simply reserved their candidates for baptism until the war was over.

Wartime was a time for ingenuity. Natonga, a convert on Rennell Island, wanted to marry Naeh in a Christian service. There being no prospect of a visiting pastor he decided to conduct his own marriage^o. Gathering the islanders into the grass-thatch church he

walked Naeh down the earthen aisle, knelt in front of the pulpit and prayed for a blessing on their united lives. The witnesses then made a great celebration feast (kai-kai), demonstrating their pleasure and acceptance of the sanctity of Christian marriage. It was in sharp contrast to their former ways of bartering for women as common chattels.

The war years were times for daring, fresh courage, and added devotion to duty. It was never imagined, when missionaries entered the supernal Pacific isles, that Western warfare would marr the beaches. Most missionaries were mentally prepared to enter a society of malarial fever, primitive arrows, and cannibalism, but not of fighter planes, torpedoes, or torture. In retrospect, evacuation could be judged the best alternative. Nevertheless, the memory of those who paid the supreme sacrifice must always be remembered.

Major sources for this booklet are the "Australasian Record", documents in the Returned Servicemen's League (Victorian Branch) archives, James Sinclair's 1978 book entitled "Wings of Gold", and the author's personal collection of pioneer data.

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