TAIM BILONG MISIS BILONG ARMI

Memories of Wives of Australian Servicemen
in Papua New Guinea 1951~1975

COMPILED BY STEPHANIE LLOYD, MARLENA JEFFERY AND JENNY HEARN
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compiled by Stephanie Lloyd, Marlena Jeffery and Jenny Hearn
with an introduction by Hank Nelson
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OFTEN WHEN I think about Papua New Guinea, a *pisin* phrase comes more readily to mind. So it is with me now.

*Halipim man bilong mi* (to help my husband) seems to introduce the real subject of this collection of memorabilia — stories, poems and images that describe the ‘days and ways’ of army wives whose husbands accepted a posting to PNG Command. (Of course most wives ‘help’ their husbands, but this phrase should be understood within a wider context.)

From 1951 on, very soon after the re-raising of the Pacific Islands Regiment, wives and children of servicemen began to arrive. They came at a very special time, during the two decades of a significant historical era when Papua New Guineans were acquiring the skills of self-government and moving rapidly towards independence. Willy-nilly we were caught up in the process, whether we joined the outside workforce, or stayed at home on the army base with the children.

Unusual demands were made upon all of us. We had to cope with extra responsibility while husbands were away, often for several months at a time, inadequate housing and *hausbois*, contribute to, sometimes be responsible for, schools, kindergartens, hospitals, church, charities. Nurse our children and endure tropical illness, the pervasive heat, insects, isolation, loneliness and years of separation from family, friends and even our children. Yes, there were sad and difficult times, but there was also affectionate support, laughter, fun and good times too, in these predominantly youthful communities.

There were weddings. Babies were born. No television, but the children loved the film nights at the Messes and the parties, picnics, boating trips and swimming. The huge pool at Taurama was one of the cherished
amenities. Many wives found friendship and enjoyment at Wives Club activities; others explored the art and craft, dances and festivals of this exotic culture; some became absorbed with the local flora and fauna.

Goldie River, Popondetta, Wewak, Lae, Murray Barracks, Taurama, all became new, large villages, as the soldiers’ wives and children arrived from ples bilong em (their home town/village) to join ‘the army tribe’. Hunters, gatherers and village farmers learned to shop at the store. Urban housewives sought fresh fruit and vegetables in local markets. There was the excitement of new arrivals, the sadness of departure, constant disruption, movement and change, but somehow, despite the difficulties, army wives retained the ability to adorn themselves, or at least to assume glamour sufficient to complement the white-coated, scarlet-sashed splendour of their husbands’ mess kit. Then to stand with them and share that magical moment as the vibrant sound of the pipes of the Regiment skirled around the candlelit table and echoed out into the warm, dark tropical night.

Taim bilong misis bilong armi (time of the Australian army wives) has gone, like the music, but its resonance remains in the words and pictures transcribed on the pages that follow.

Jenny Hearn
FOR OVER 120 years Australians have crossed the Coral Sea to live beyond their frontier, or in an Australian Territory, or a neighbouring nation. They have gone to Papua New Guinea as soldiers, missionaries, government officers, gold miners, planters and traders. More recently many on flights QF95 and PX4 have been consultants and aid workers. A few of the apprehensive first-time travellers might be Australian Volunteers, but they can travel with the assurance that Papua New Guinea is the country where Australian Volunteers Abroad are most likely to extend their term. Places, people and history assert an influence on those who visit.

Most of the Australians making that crossing have been male. The categories so often used — soldier, planter, trader, miner, *kiap* — imply men, and the statistics confirm the masculinity of the Australian presence. In World War II almost 400,000 Australians went to Papua New Guinea, close to one in twenty Australians, but there were always over 100 men to each woman. In August 1945, out of the 224,000 Australians in the South West Pacific less than 2000 were women. Even in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the largest number of civilian Australians were in Papua New Guinea, and when most of those Australians were living in the suburbs of Lae and Port Moresby, there were still ten men for every seven women.

But both the categories and the figures disguise the reality. There were always some women in those apparently masculine categories — Doris Booth, the miner; Elizabeth Mahony (the Queen of Sudest), a planter; and Flora Stewart, publican. Then there were the pioneering women scholars: Margaret Mead, Hortense Powdermaker, Camilla Wedgwood,
Evelyn Cheesman, Beatrice Blackwood, and Marie Reay. And they have written or been written about. Although these were exceptional women, they were not as unusual as was often thought — then and since. There were seventeen women who, in 1933, said that they were planters or plantation managers. But many of the women concealed in the statistics of occupational groups were wives. Even in 1933 when adult men outnumbered women by more than two to one, more women were classified as wives than there were men in any of the major occupations — miners, missionaries, government officers, planters and traders. On that Australian frontier of adventure and imagination that gave us books with titles such as *We Lived with Headhunters, Gold-Dust and Ashes*, and *Savages in Serge*, the most common task of Australians was — as the Commonwealth Statistician said, ‘Wife without gainful occupation’. A dominant reason why Australians went to Papua New Guinea, a dominant factor determining their experience in Papua New Guinea, was their status as wives.

The women who wrote these reminiscences were wives of members of the Pacific Islands Regiment. A few were already in Papua New Guinea, and married there. They and those wives who entered paid employment in Papua New Guinea often worked as nurses, teachers and secretaries — they joined other categories of women. Few of the 500 foreign-born female nurses, 1000 teachers and over 2000 clerical workers who were in Papua New Guinea in 1966 have published anything about their lives. Just why the teachers, who were giving the gift of literacy to many, have been so reticent is a mystery. So these autobiographical fragments combine to articulate the experiences of the most numerous and mute Australians to cross the Coral Sea.

The Pacific Islands Regiment (PIR) was different from most other colonial armies. It was a unit of the Australian, not the territory, Army: its controlling legislation, finance, policies, officers and many specialist personnel came direct from Australia. Australians serving in the PIR were conscious that they were distinct from other Australians in Papua New Guinea who worked for the administration and private enterprise, and that they were in the most unusual unit in the Australian Army.

In 1914 New Guinean police-troops had fought for the Germans against the Australians who captured Rabaul, and in the 1920s and
1930s the Australians had often praised the armed constabularies of both Papua and New Guinea. Experienced field officers acknowledged the resourcefulness and bravery of their Papua New Guinean non-commissioned officers and the seven or eight constables armed with .303 rifles that accompanied them on patrols — this was the force that effectively introduced and enforced Australian rule over thousands of people. As war threatened in the late 1930s Australians debated whether or not they should train Papua New Guineans as soldiers. Most of the old prejudices were restated: black troops could only be effective if led by white officers; they could not replace loyalties to family and tribe with loyalty to a greater unit such as a nation; they would simply be reduced to hysterical impotence by the engines of modern warfare; and the old and proper order of white masta and black servant could never be resurrected if the bois trained with modern weapons and mixed freely with other soldiers. Some Australians also opposed the recruitment of Papua New Guineans for what they thought were strong moral reasons. They argued that Australians had no right to involve Papua New Guineans in battles which were not theirs, and that in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea, where Australia held the area in trust, they certainly had no legal right to ask New Guineans to behave as though they were citizens. In 1940 the Australians raised the Papuan Infantry Battalion (PIB) in Port Moresby, but in New Guinea, where the division between the races was sharper and the status of New Guineans less certain, no men were recruited until later in the war. The PIB remained a small unit, did little training, and was exploited as cheap labour on the roads and wharves of Port Moresby until mid-1942 when the Japanese threatened to attack Port Moresby overland. In July 1942 the PIB went into action near Awala, the first battle of what was to be the Kokoda campaign. Soon New Guineans were also being recruited into the PIB, some them having arrived in Papua as carriers for the Japanese on the Kokoda trail. Then in 1944 two New Guinea Infantry Battalions were trained and all three battalions became part of the Pacific Islands Regiment with its distinctive red and green colour patch and troops in tropical green laplaps. By the end of the war a third New Guinea Infantry Battalion was being formed and over 3000 men had served in the Regiment. The PIR had been longer in action than almost all other Allied units, and long-term members of the PIB had
served on Kokoda, the north coast of New Guinea from Finschhafen to the Sepik, and on Bougainville. The men of the PIR had been much praised, several had been decorated for bravery in action, and their bushcraft and loyalty had made them favourites among the Diggers. But they had not always been compliant ‘natives’. On New Britain they had broken into the prison compound and released comrades held on minor charges, at Nadzab they had attacked officers that they thought had dealt with them unjustly, and when Sergeant Tapioli (Military Medal for ‘magnificent bravery’) was ordered to wear his stripes of rank on his laplap and not on his arm, he told his officers it was the same as telling him to wear his stripes on his arse. He would, he said, wear them like a soldier or not at all. The PIR was disbanded at the end of the war, the last of its soldiers going home in 1946.

When the Australians reactivated the PIR in 1950 Australians were at war in Korea and they were concerned about Indonesian claims for Dutch New Guinea. Some of the old soldiers returned to the red and green colours, all the officers and many with specialist skills were again Australians, the unit remained part of the Australian Army, and pay rates and conditions of Papua New Guinean soldiers were again related to local conditions. Through the next ten years the PIR remained a small force of less than 100 Australians and 700 Papua New Guineans. Its headquarters and main barracks were at Taurama just outside Port Moresby, and it had one outstation at Vanimo near the Dutch border, and another on Manus which was closed with the development of barracks at Moem near Wewak.

In 1963, after Indonesia led by a belligerent Sukarno had taken possession of West New Guinea, the Australian government expanded the PIR. The total number of Papua New Guineans was increased and new headquarters built: Igam Barracks near Lae, a Training Depot at Goldie River outside Port Moresby, Murray Barracks within the edge of suburban Port Moresby, and the barracks at Moem were extended. By 1972 there were nearly 3000 Papua New Guineans and 600 Australians in the Papua New Guinea army. But by then the old PIR had almost disappeared: what had been an Australian army unit responding to Australian defence needs was on its way to becoming part of the defence force of a neighbouring nation. From 1965 the PIR became 1PIR and 2PIR, and in 1973 and 1974 the army units became part of

Taim Bilong Misis Bilong Armi
the Papua New Guinea Defence Force, and a Papua New Guinea Department of Defence was established. In March 1975 the Papua New Guinea Defence Force came under the formal direction of the Papua New Guinea Minister for Defence, and Australia’s international obligations for the defence of New Guinea ended with Independence in September 1975. But the Australian involvement in the army of the new nation was still strong. In 1963 the first two Papua New Guineans had begun training at the Officer Cadet School, Portsea, Victoria, and from 1965 Papua New Guineans were in the officers’ mess as members and not just as servants. Although more Papua New Guinean officers were trained in Australia and at Goldie River and later at Lae, at Independence only one third of the 375 officers were local. Nearly another 300 Australians were serving in the Papua New Guinea army as specialist non-commissioned officers.

Australian men who served in the postwar PIR had an extraordinary professional experience. Early they might have trained village recruits who were often illiterate, and later they were helping to create a national defence force. They were immersed in another culture; they learnt the lingua franca of the army, tok pisin; in the field they lived and ate as the Papua New Guinean troops did; and they encountered the physical difficulties and rewards of long patrols through little-known mountainous rainforest, kunai grasslands and coastal swamps. The Australian officers, as one said, retained a ‘fanatical enthusiasm’ for their troops, but those soldiers were not always easy to command. The Papua New Guinean soldiers behaved with the same independent turbulence that they had displayed in war: infrequently but dramatically they rioted, battled the police, or fought other Papua New Guineans.

It is against this background that the misis bilong armi select their memories. The men in starched jungle greens, with careers to pursue, of long absences and sudden shifts determined by higher command, are important, but rightly they are left to play their parts off-stage. Wives and women — and sometimes children — are centre-stage. These are women who had the education and competence for independence, but who lived in times when it was expected that they would marry young and have their first child within two or three years of marriage. If they went back to paid employment, then even where their position and income might be superior to that of their husbands’,
their careers were still subordinate to the other needs of the family. What often dominates the reminiscences are those primary concerns of health, housing, feeding and clothing. Those women who arrived soon after the reactivation of the PIR went into a world of postwar shortages and makeshift. They lived in tar-paper houses, stampeded to the Freezer when word went around that frozen goods had arrived from ‘south’, and hustled children into the centre of the house while clouds of insecticide rose around the windows as the soldiers with the fogging machine made their regular visits. By the 1970s Port Moresby was a restless cosmopolitan city with jets connecting it to the rest of the world, shops displaying the latest in electronics, air-conditioned restaurants and a university, but still retaining the characteristics of frontier, masculinity, racial division, and where people straight from an isolated village could be seen wandering, apprehensive and astonished, in a mundane suburb. By the 1970s the differences between outpost and city had increased and so had the diversity of chosen and accidental experiences.

The women represented here were conscious of the inequities that went with race and nationality, but they do not presume to know what Papua New Guinean men or women thought about those issues. They write clearly, unpretentiously and evocatively about what they know. In doing so they illuminate the lives of those most numerous and unremarked Australians in Papua New Guinea: the wives and mothers. Their stories range across the ordinary, the absurd and the tragic. All are engaging: the simplicity of the prose disguising the craft and the art of the telling.

Hank Nelson
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January 2001
Maureen calls across the lawns
And displays a snake.
Not dead long
So that it still shone
Tarnished silver
In the slanting sunlight,
Silver cream
Metallic gleam
Of diamond-patterned grace.

Her voice sang over
Cool verdant space
Before the tropic sun
Could conjure a vaporous
Hot-house room
Redolent of hibiscus bloom,
Roasting kaukau, cooking fire,
Betel nut, banana palm,
And sweet, ripe papaya.

It was early morn
And the shadows were long
And the shadows stroked
Opal rose on concrete wall,
Striped the pile on suburban dreams,
Butter-knife blades
Of barbe red kikuyu
Moist with crystalline
Studs of dew.
'Bring your book' came the cry
Across mown mint green
Blonde, smiling Maureen,
With toddler at heel,
Beside scented wax petals
Framed in frangipani flower,
Standing serene
In a pearl and coral
Floral bower.

She hailed me, colours flying
In a Garden of Paradise
Sunfrock, A-line.
Orbs of gold merging
With heavenly blues
And interspersèd
Ruby stars
Poised above purple
Bougainvilleas.

The Sixties dissension
Is history now,
But that fashion's a symbol
Of protest and row.
Skirts: Short for Action!
Colours: Clamorous!
Fingernails glowing, red with rage.
Midst fading, fighting faction
Pigment does not age.

Bare-legged, sandalled,
We made preparation
With 'Reptiles North Australian'
For scientific investigation
Of scales.
To be undertaken
There on the grass
With our little daughters
Outside Maureen's house,
The Adamson army quarter.
Beehive buns bent over the book
To carefully count,
Compare and look
At scales Ophidian;
Mid-body and tail,
Mouth, nasal and neck,
Such concentration
Did not disdain
Feeling skin
Like textured cellophane.

For single anal scale
To inspect
We had to turn
The coiled length.
Sausage-supple
Heavy as sand
Alien encumbrance
On our land.
Clammy to the tips of
Fingers beneath,
Sheltering night’s dew
On squashed kikuyu.

TAIPAN! It must be!
Scale pattern verifies
Large head,
Prominent eyes,
Venom: Very
Dangerous to man.
‘Don’t touch’ we said
To the child. Dead,
But now, with that dread
Name appended,
Abhorrent.
I returned slowly
Across what seemed
An ominous green,
And suddenly stopped,
Afraid.
Shocked by the thought
Of threat implicit.

Was there malice
In the early dawn
That placed a serpent
On our lawn?
I WAS ALREADY a fully certificated and registered nurse when I celebrated my 25th birthday at the start of the war. Following my birthday, I was commissioned in the Australian Army Nursing Service and spent the rest of the war years as an army nursing sister. The Darwin army hospital where I worked was bombed by the Japanese and we nurses were strafed by machine guns from the bombers as we huddled in shallow trenches outside the hospital. Later on I served in the 2/4th Australian General Hospital on Labuan, near Timor.

When the Second World War ended, I was restless for more adventure overseas. I applied for nursing employment in South Africa, India and Papua New Guinea, and in the meantime I completed further midwifery nursing training. So, by early 1947 I found myself in Port Moresby.

I spent some years in Samarai, Lae, Kavieng, Rabaul and Wau. It was at the Wau pub one night in the early 1950s that I met Fred. He was part of the Australian Army staff, setting up the administration and recruiting for the future formation of the native regiment — the Pacific Islands Regiment.

Fred had served in the Middle East and was a Company Sergeant Major in the 2/28th Battalion during the siege of Tobruk in 1941. He had won a Distinguished Conduct Medal at El Alamein and was taken prisoner-of-war by Italian soldiers at the battle of Ruin Ridge. ‘In the bag’ was the colloquial term for being a prisoner-of-war.

We really liked each other right from the start. We were older than many couples are when they first meet. Like many young Australians, we had both been caught up in the demands of service to our country during the war.
After marrying in Seymour, Victoria, in 1952, we later returned to Papua New Guinea on a new posting and were allocated a married quarter in Murray Barracks.

I was not keen on devoting my time to charity work with the Red Cross, which seemed to interest a lot of the other Australian army wives. Some of them had jobs with Burns Philp (‘BP’), Steamships (‘Steamies’) or other businesses in Port Moresby. For a while I worked in the Post Office in Port Moresby sorting and sending out Morse code messages which came in from the many outstations in ‘the Territory’, as it was then known.

What really appealed to me though was lending a hand to the newly set-up Papua New Guinea Cheshire Home (part of a chain of such homes around the world, inspired by Group Captain Leonard Cheshire VC). The Cheshire Home was run by an Australian nun, Sister Annette, who was doing a wonderful job giving a loving home to abandoned or orphaned Papua New Guinean children. She herself was living in the poorest of conditions, sharing a room with a local girl. Helping out at the Cheshire Home, after my years of nursing experience, really gave me great satisfaction.

Our married quarter was one of the famous ‘tarred-paper’ houses — really just a kitchen, a bedroom and a sitting room alcove with walls of tarred paper and a tin roof over the top. The whole structure was raised up on stilts. The floors had been laid with ‘green’ timber which had subsequently shrunk, leaving large gaps between the boards down to the dirt underneath. Lots of people smoked in those days and they would drop their cigarette butts through the floorboards. The hausbois followed suit by sweeping the dust through the cracks. The houses were flimsy and stiflingly hot — a potential fire hazard if ever there was one. You could cut a hole in the walls with a pair of scissors if you wanted to. It was barely an adequate place to live, but we were quite content.

A major problem presented itself when a letter arrived from my adventurous sister, Pauline, saying that she’d like to come to Moresby to visit us. We were very close and I was really excited at the prospect of seeing her, but where in our tiny tarred-paper house could we accommodate her?
I suppose our past lives and experiences — Fred in the siege of Tobruk and as a POW, me nursing in all sorts of outlandish places and ‘making do’ in difficult and different situations — led to our solution of adding a guest wing to our house. ‘God helps those who help themselves,’ we thought.

We simply set about collecting timber wherever we could scrounge or salvage it. We picked up pieces of timber left over from the war or army projects, dragging or carrying them home whenever possible. There was lots of debris left lying around after the war and things were pretty casual. No one made any comment.

After a while we had salvaged, scrounged and foraged enough for a timber floor. Fred had dug holes with a big crowbar and the uprights were dug in. It was easy enough to get rolls of tarred paper for the walls from the ‘Q’ store. However, we could not work out how we would manage to put a roof over the new guestroom before Pauline’s arrival.

Fred and I could not believe our eyes when we arrived home one day to find three Chinese workmen nailing a tin roof over the new room. We never ever found out who had supplied the tin for our new roof and authorised those workmen. We did not ask but suspected that someone
Adding a ‘Guest Wing’ at Headquarters had done so, trying to help out and knowing full well that our tarred-paper houses were so completely substandard that none of us should ever have occupied them.

The guestroom was eventually quite satisfactory and my sister’s visit was a great success. During that time we took a sea trip together on one of the old coastal ships that called into every port all the way around to Rabaul. Pauline’s visit and sojourn in the ‘guest wing’ were highlights of our posting.
ON ‘CALL FORWARD’ to join my husband, Mal, in Port Moresby in October 1953, I took our son Paul to the army doctor for a check-up of his allergies. While there, I was introduced to the Resident Medical Officer, Pacific Islands Regiment, who was visiting Brisbane from Port Moresby. He queried my ‘call forward’ status, as my husband was on outstation duty at Vanimo, and he knew there was no accommodation available — my arrival would mean sharing with another family.

In view of the situation, the doctor phoned General Secombe and told him I was not to be sent to New Guinea until accommodation was available and my husband was on hand to get me settled.

When I did eventually arrive, it was to a tarred paper-lined wartime hut in Murray Barracks. It had an old wood stove and a thunderbox toilet in the backyard. There was no cover on the area to be used as a bathroom, so Mal made some window shutters from old packing cases and we scrounged some paint to cover the tarred paper and to ‘Solpah’ the concrete floors. He also reupholstered the old chairs that had been issued to us.

Another officer had been posted to outstation duty at Vanimo but he said his wife was too nervous to be left alone, so Mal was again sent there, this time at short notice. I had tried the same ruse but my alternatives were to accept the situation or return to Australia — Mal made it quite clear that a soldier had to accept the good and the bad.

He arranged a *wokmeri* for me (Kong, wife of Sergeant Daniel, Pioneer Sergeant, PIR) and a *hausboi* (Laman from Madang), who later became the cook at PIR Officers Mess — ‘Sergeant Cook’. Laman, as well as being a willing learner, proved to be very good with Paul.
To fill in my days, I got a job in the Shipping Department of Burns Philp in town. I could take Paul to school at Ela Beach School on the way to work. We used to have 90-minute breaks for lunch, which gave me enough time to return home to eat, shower and have a rest before going back to work.

When our husbands were away on outstation duty, communicating with them was fraught with difficulty. Apart from the infrequent mail service, we could go to Taurama Barracks on Sunday mornings to talk on the outstation radio network after the official business was finished. Some days the reception was so good it was like being in the same room but, more often than not, static made it almost impossible to communicate. The term ‘Say again, over’ was used many times.

There was a wonderful break in Mal’s outstation duties when he was selected to command the Services Contingent for the royal visit to Australia in 1954 and came back to Port Moresby to assemble and train the troops prior to being flown out for duties in Canberra and Brisbane.
As well as 100 rank-and-file troops plus the Pipes and Drums from PIR, there was a Naval Group from Manus and a further group from the Papua New Guinea Volunteer Rifles, the CMF unit in the Territory.

I recall getting Paul from school so we could listen to the radio broadcasts from Australia of the various parades. We were proud and thrilled when the announcers described the TPNG Contingent with Mal leading them. They also mentioned that he had a wife and small son in Port Moresby.

We were fortunate to have Mal with us again for a few days when he returned to Port Moresby to finalise his contingent duty prior to returning to Vanimo.

When Mal first went off to Vanimo, he had given me a small revolver for protection with instructions on its use. While I felt some comfort in having it, the gun really terrified me when I thought of the repercussions if I ever had to shoot someone. One incident in particular made me acutely aware of the possible consequences of living without a man in the house.

I was settling down to sleep one night when Paul (who slept in my bed, as we were both frightened) said, ‘Mum, there’s someone in the ceiling’. Sure enough, the tarred-paper ceiling was sagging and I could hear movement. I think I screamed and that caused much scuffling as the intruder beat a hasty exit. Arsi, a neighbour’s meri, came racing between the huts and chased the intruder down the road but failed to catch him.

The next day, a hausboi came to my hut selling bananas. He said to me, ‘Yu nogat man?’ (‘Don’t you have a husband?’) Just then Arsi appeared and identified him as the one who had been in my ceiling the previous night. I grabbed the revolver and ordered the man to stand still or I’d shoot him. Meanwhile I told Arsi to ring the police. They duly arrived and took the man away — I collapsed in relief.

We never fully understood the extent or cause of rivalry between local areas and tribes. My first experience of such rivalry occurred one morning when the ‘dunny man’, a Chimbu, came to collect the toilet pan. Kong, my wokmeri, must have upset him because he chased her through the hut trying to tip the contents over her.

Vivid experiences stay with me from those early days in Port Moresby. It was during my first visit that I got the bug for growing orchids.
Ian McDonald (Chairman of the Copra Marketing Board) was an avid grower and introduced me to the art of growing and caring for them. The soil and tropical conditions were conducive to the cultivation of an array of beautiful plants. Growing orchids has been a wonderful interest which I’ve retained over the intervening years.

Another unique experience was market shopping in Port Moresby. It was always a pleasant drive from Murray Barracks into Port Moresby. The view when one came over the hill and saw the foreshore and harbour was as good as one could ever wish for.

Koki Market mainly catered for the local population with foods like smoked fish, magani (wallaby) and kuskus (possum), but occasionally one could find some vegetables of rather doubtful quality in an area that seemed to suffer from a lack of fresh fruit and vegetables. Vegetables were normally flown in from the Highlands but there was always a shortfall between supply and demand. In spite of the dubious quality, vegetables at the market were substantially better than those on offer from the Port Moresby Freezer (PMF).

Mal finished his outstation duty and on return to Port Moresby was posted to Murray Barracks as Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quarter Master General (DAA & QMG), Area Command.
Meanwhile the first eight homes were finished and allocated on a points system. Imagine my joy when I was told that one of them was ours. We did not waste any time in saying farewell to the old tin shed that had been our home. Thus ended my first experience as the wife of an officer serving in PIR.

We were surprised on our next posting to TPNG, in January 1965, to be allocated the same house that we had occupied in 1955. While Mal had served during war years in TPNG, I lived there for eight years over three postings. I can say that one could never compare the trials of those early PIR years.

It is now over 45 years since my first introduction to TPNG in general, and PIR in particular. I often wonder what has become of the many people we knew in those early days. Memories come flooding back and suddenly it seems not so many years ago.
THE SANDRINGHAM flying boat lifted out of Rose Bay in Sydney Harbour en route for Port Moresby via Cairns. It was early in 1954 and I felt as if I was on an adventure, heading into the unknown. I’d waited months for a permit to enter Papua New Guinea, which was not forthcoming until the Army confirmed that there was a married quarter available. I was on my way at last.

On arrival at Port Moresby, along with the other passengers I was transhipped to shore in a small motor boat and entered a large tin shed which served as the Qantas passenger terminal. After a while all the other passengers had departed and I was left on my own except for the staff who began to close the building. I was stranded!

I phoned Taurama Barracks and, a short time later, my husband, John, arrived in a jeep. In 18 months of marriage I had seen him for only six weeks. He was completely surprised, as the letter I had sent advising him of my travel arrangements had not yet arrived. His bewilderment was reflected in his early comments, ‘What are you doing here? There’s nowhere for us to live’. Someone at AHQ had blundered — there was no married quarter available!

We went to Murray Barracks where the married quarters were located and found several people arguing politely as to who was going to put me up. Eventually, Mickie Bishon won the debate and I could not have dreamed of a warmer welcome. (At the time, Mickie’s husband, Major (later Colonel) Malcolm Bishop, was commanding his company on outstation duty at Vanimo on the north coast of New Guinea near the border with what is now Irian Jaya.) However, after a few minutes my husband was summoned to the phone to receive the following message
from the CO: ‘What do you think this is, Burns, a teddy bears’ picnic? Get back to your work at once!’ What a reception — I was stunned!

Several weeks passed and we were allocated a married quarter, or that was what they called it. In fact, it was a tin-roofed shack with steel mesh walls covered with tarred paper. The spaces in the mesh were about 20 centimetres wide and anyone outside could have quite easily punched a hole in the walls. The total area of this mansion was about 12 square metres — it was so small that if one wished to open the refrigerator door, one had first to make sure that the front door was closed. It was impossible to have them both open at the same time.

After about three months it was the turn of my husband’s company to take over in Vanimo and allow Mal Bishop and his company to return to Port Moresby and their families. As my husband sailed off on the Tara, a small army ship of about 300 tonnes, he was looking forward to an interesting trip and seemed rather chuffed about it all. Faced with the prospect of eight months on my own until he returned, I felt decidedly ‘left’.

Once again Mickie Bishop came to my rescue. She worked in the office at Burns Philp where she managed to get me a job as a typist. The manager of the office was a towering Scot by the name of Alec Mitchell, who had come to PNG in his youth as a deckhand — but fell in love with the tropics, and went back on the next ship to find a bride to share his life. The story was that his young wife arrived, was not impressed and returned alone on the next available ship.

The accountant in the office was a short red-headed Aussie who worked at a desk close to mine. He fooled no one when, each morning, he went downstairs to the retail area, purchased a can of tomato juice, drank half the contents on his way back up the stairs and then filled the can to the top from a bottle of Bundaberg rum, which he kept in the bottom drawer of his desk.

We sent large orders to outlying plantations and these were loaded onto small coastal boats with skippers who frequently came to the office to see Mr Mitchell in their full finery: grass skirts, spectacular headgear made from Bird of Paradise plumes, and not much more.

Occasionally Mickie and I would go to the movies in Moresby — we sat on deckchairs in the open air and spent the evening brushing off swarms of mosquitoes.
Every Sunday the families of those on outstation duty went to the PIR camp at Taurama to speak to their husbands by two-way radio. There were always army signallers watching in case we had difficulty with the sets, and countless others listening in to our conversations, which could be picked up on any good shortwave receiver. All of this left one feeling rather exposed and limited to matter-of-fact conversations. As there were no telephone communications to the outstations and mail deliveries were at best once a week, the radio link, with all its drawbacks, was still important to us.

While my husband was in Vanimo, I developed a kidney stone and was taken to hospital on the back seat of my doctor’s car. Later I was evacuated ‘south’ (as Australia was called) to Sydney where further tests revealed the problem had disappeared. I returned after some time, arranging my arrival to coincide with my husband’s return from Vanimo. This time things had vastly improved from my previous arrival almost a year before. We had a brand new, conventional three-bedroom house and, as luck would have it, our neighbours were our dear friends, the Bishops.
Shopping was not so much on a weekly basis as on the availability of items. For example, word would get around town that there were fresh lettuces from the Highlands and there would be a mad rush to Koki Market in the hope of getting a couple before they sold out. Similar stampedes occurred when freezer ships from ‘down south’ arrived with frozen goods.

One of the most popular spots in Moresby was Ela Beach — lovely sand and beautifully clear water. We would swim out to the ‘bomb-hole’, a huge crater in the reef created by the Japanese air force some years before, and thought nothing of the sea snakes that shared the hole with us. Snakes were a fact of life and on one occasion I killed a death adder on our front doorstep. Bats were also prevalent and I still remember quite vividly the night one became entangled in my long hair.

One night we were invited to a singsing by the troops of my husband’s company and I think I was probably one of the first Australian army wives to have been so honoured. It was a spectacular affair! The participants were from many different tribes and districts. The various masks and *bilas* (finery) they wore, combined with banging on drums and chanting, made it hard to realise that these were the soldiers who looked so neat and disciplined in their uniforms.

Halfway through our tour, John was promoted and became the Adjutant of the Papua New Guinea Volunteer Rifles, a CMF unit with its headquarters in Moresby and sub-units in a number of towns on the mainland and on some of the neighbouring islands.

On one occasion I accompanied my husband during a short visit to one of these sub-units at Samarai, a small island just off the south-eastern tip of Papua. We had enormous trouble boarding the flying boat in Moresby harbour, as the weather was nothing short of a gale. The sea swell was so great that jumping onto the motor boat, which took you from shore to plane, became an impossibility — we were either too high or too far below it. We managed, except for the fact that I became ill while the plane was still loading. My husband asked the busy steward for an airsickness bag and he replied, ‘Your wife can’t be airsick, we haven’t taken off yet.’ My husband responded, ‘She’s not airsick, she’s seasick’ — the required bag quickly appeared.

Samarai was a very pretty island, like a postcard, and we stayed at what was supposed to be the only hotel. Suffice to say, the bathroom was
outside — a timber cubicle with a bucket tied above your head with a long rope. I caught on very quickly — the procedure was to lather up, count to ten and pull the rope.

Eventually our two years’ tour of duty was over and we returned to Australia with little thought that we would be back in PNG with three young children in less than ten years.

This time we were posted to Wewak on the north coast of New Guinea. When we arrived in December 1964, it was a company outstation of the First Battalion of the Pacific Islands Regiment. We were the first of many new arrivals with the tasks of raising the Second Battalion, of which my husband was second in command, and of enlarging the base from company to battalion capacity. Initially we had a fairly small house but later moved into a larger one, which had been the Officers Mess and quarters when the base was only a company.

The Commanding Officer was single, so much of the entertainment fell on us. Fortunately, we had a good hausboi who helped enormously, especially when we were entertaining the large numbers of dignitaries who found it imperative to visit Wewak during the southern winter. They came for a first-hand briefing on the raising of the Second Battalion and the situation on the border between Indonesia and PNG. Unfortunately, my husband was not entitled to an entertainment allowance and the bank manager was not amused by our efforts to cater for our visitors.

One evening we had several to dinner and all went well until it was time for coffee. The rainy season was late and we were short of water. When I went to the kitchen to see where the coffee was, the hausboi told me there was no water. At that very moment a tropical downpour hit the area and the open louvre windows let in a deluge — but it would be some time before the water tank filled sufficiently, even though our lounge room floor was awash. ‘Sorry, there’s no coffee! Anyone for a liqueur?’ Some of our guests could not see the irony of the situation, but we had a good laugh later with our hausboi.

Unexpected blessings often relieved the boredom of living in such a tiny place when husbands were away. Some of the wives were elated one day when the Chief of the General Staff and his wife touched down at Wewak. Whilst the CGS and party inspected the camp, I invited his wife to join me and the other wives for coffee. This fine lady was
appalled to know how many wives were on their own and had not seen their husbands for months as they were on outstation duty at Vanimo. As their entourage was going to Vanimo for a couple of hours before returning to Wewak and then flying south, she said we should go too. It was a complete surprise to us all and we felt like VIPs as this generous break made a happy day for everyone.

The children went to school in Wewak about seven kilometres from the camp. They travelled with other army children in the back of an open army truck and, as the roads were made of crushed coral, they were covered in white dust on arrival home and needed to be ‘hosed down’. Our house, like all the others, was built on stilts and the children took great delight chasing the 12-inch (30 centimetres) long bush rats that frequented the area under the houses. They also enjoyed going to the beach, which was only about 300 metres from our house. To reach it you took a path through a patch of secondary scrub which was a haven for snakes. We used to see one or more on almost every other trip to the beach and, when we got to the beach, it was not unusual to come across the odd colourful, but very dangerous, coral snake.

Shopping for food was little different from what it had been in Moresby ten years earlier. We still looked forward to new and wider choices after the arrival of ‘freezer’ ships from down south. We did enjoy, however, a much better supply of fresh vegetables from the Highlands than on our earlier posting.

On both our tours of duty in PNG, we had never encountered any problems with the local people and I was very fond of the soldiers and their families, and trusted them implicitly. One night I woke to hear a sound like the tearing of the flywire screen on the bedroom window. I got out of bed several times to see if it was a rat or perhaps a flying fox caught in the wire, but I could see nothing. This went on for some time with my husband sleeping soundly beside me. As again I checked the noise, I was horrified to see a human face grinning at me and I let out a scream. The face quickly disappeared and I heard the sound of someone in boots running down the road, followed a little later by my husband who had to give up the race as his bare feet could not cope with the sharp pieces of coral on the road.

Later, with the help of Warrant Officer Lafe, the culprit was caught. He was a member of the guard and his duty had been to patrol the married
quarters area and prevent the entry of unauthorised persons. The soldier admitted his guilt and confessed to having been responsible for several earlier reports of a ‘peeping tom’. He was discharged and sent back to Buka Island. The shame suffered by WO Lafe and the other soldiers was unbearable to witness and we had a hard job convincing them that they were not to blame. (Lafe was a favourite of my husband — even though Lafe told him that I spoke better *pisin* than my husband did. The two of them had served in the same company on our first tour of duty and, when off-duty and no one else was around, they used to address each other as ‘wantok’.)

For a while I’d experienced increasingly severe headaches and a range of other symptoms, which led to my hospitalisation in Wewak for several days with suspected cerebral encephalitis. Once that possibility was raised, things moved very quickly. The next morning, all of us — husband and children plus me on a stretcher — left Wewak on a DC3 and reached Port Moresby after stops at Madang and Lae. At Jackson’s Airport in Moresby, we were transferred to a jet (I was still on the same stretcher) and, after a brief touchdown in Sydney, arrived in Melbourne. The Army gave me the red-carpet treatment throughout this ordeal. In Sydney, an ambulance was on hand in case I had to be taken off the plane. A doctor examined me to make sure I could continue the flight further south. On arrival in Melbourne, a waiting ambulance quickly took me to the Royal Melbourne Hospital. Shortly after, even though it was a Sunday night, I was being examined by a leading neurosurgeon. Fortunately, it was not cerebral encephalitis but an echo virus, a rather obscure tropical complaint which at that time had hardly ever been recorded in PNG.

After a week or so in hospital, relaxing in air-conditioned comfort after the heat of PNG, I was allowed home but was very weak for some time and continued to have regular check-ups over the next 18 months. John was given a posting at Victoria Barracks and we stayed in Melbourne for three years, which gave the children a taste of normal schooling before we again headed for the tropics — this time to spend a year attached to the Indonesian Army, but that’s another story.
WHAT EXTREMES! From the cold of the southern winter to the heat and humidity of the steamy tropics! Together with my sister Pauline, I left Adelaide in 1954 to join the Public Service of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea and live in Port Moresby. We had little notion of the different lifestyle we were about to encounter.

On arrival I was billeted in an hostel right in the centre of town, with meals provided at another hostel further up the hill. My hostel was irreverently dubbed ‘The Stables’ (for all the young fillies?) and consisted of single rooms and common bathroom areas. Just after moving into my room, I put my handbag on a ledge and a huge tarantula scurried out and almost ran over my hand. I ran screaming out of the room. The girl in the next room came in and calmly brushed it away exclaiming, ‘It won’t hurt you. I come from Queensland.’ I was reluctant to admit straight away that so did I originally!

The Paga Hostel, where we had all our meals, was managed by a very competent woman, Mrs Malone, with the help of indigenous staff whom she trained as cooks, stewards and domestics. She was a most interesting lady who, I think, grew up in the Territory. She had a fund of stories and always ‘lent an ear’ to the girls and gave helpful advice. She was meticulously clean, always immaculate in a fresh cotton dress, with a snow white, lace-edged handkerchief tucked into a gold bangle on her upper arm. At the first opportunity, Pauline and I moved into Paga Hostel. The accommodation and facilities were more agreeable than ‘The Stables’ and our move obviated the need to go elsewhere for meals.

A bus took us to the government offices at Konedobu and brought us back for lunch. Work normally finished around 4.15 pm. Our meals and...
accommodation were subsidised as part of our salary package. A condition of the Public Service was that we worked for 21 months and then we could return to Australia for three months leave. This was to prove a welcome relief and really necessary after living in such a debilitating climate.

Many of the girls living in hostels employed a *hausboi* to clean their quarters and to do the washing and ironing. A standard wage was paid. The *hausbois*, most of whom worked only in the mornings, lived in nearby villages.

Before taking up my duties, I, along with other new appointees, was briefed by the Public Service Commissioner who stipulated what was expected of us, as representatives of Australia, not only in our work but also in our behaviour and dress standards.

My appointment came through first. I was assigned as secretary to the newly appointed Assistant Administrator, Mr Rupert Wilson. Three months later Pauline arrived and went to the Education Department. After about a year she became secretary to the Director, Mr Groves.

As well as my secretarial work I was in the team of Hansard reporters for the Legislative Council, which met three times a year in the Red Cross Hall. Before each session we did shorthand training for two weeks after work, practising from copies of previous sessions. We worked in pairs for 20 minutes at a time, then one read while the other transcribed from her notes — a double-check. When the indigenous Members spoke in *pisin*, a clerk of the court took notes. The senior reporter worked out schedules, arranged transport, coped with Members' requests and filled in for anyone who perhaps fell ill. At the conclusion she collated the whole report. This was my task for two sessions.

On the occasion of a United Nations visit, I was called on to take the minutes at the closing session when the delegates interviewed heads of departments in the Administrator's conference room. I worked through the night typing the report before they departed next morning. Then I had the rest of the day off. It was quite an experience!

There were two separate societies in Port Moresby, the European (or expatriate), of whom most were Australian, and the indigenous people. This separation was maintained by law (such as the law that prevented the sale of alcohol to the native people), as well as by language, custom and culture. Fraternisation between the races was not encouraged.
Of the expatriate community many had been born in PNG, married and had children who pursued careers in both the private sector and government — a mix of fascinating people, with a greater number of ‘characters’ than one would normally expect to meet at home in Australia.

Working at the centre of government was rewarding. I shared an office with the Administrator’s secretary and life was never dull. I met some of the people who had explored the country pre-war as young patrol officers, including Keith (J.K.) McCarthy and the Champion brothers — Claude, Ivan and Alan. They were among the first Europeans to make contact with people in the unexplored interior. I was told that when some of the natives first saw the young J.K. McCarthy with his very white complexion and red hair, they vomited with shock.

We enjoyed an active social life. There was always something of interest, although the climate was, at times, trying. There was a picture theatre in town and there were dances at the clubs. Annual charity balls were held by various organisations such as the Red Cross.

I took part in concerts and a mannequin parade to raise funds for the Red Cross. I also belonged to a group that made weekly visits to the native hospital, which comprised two long wooden wards built out over the sea. Families often accompanied patients to hospital and would cook meals for them over open fires in the hospital grounds.

We distributed various items provided by the Red Cross. These included sheets of newspaper which were greatly prized as they were used to roll up the štik tabak (sticks of tobacco) into cigarettes. Once I noticed an old man looking puzzled at the paper I had given him and, in passing around the head of the bed, I noticed he was staring at a full-page advertisement of women clad only in corsets and brassieres. I hastily retrieved it and gave him some without such revealing pictures. I felt rather embarrassed.

There were picnics and drives to places of interest around Port Moresby. Favourite spots were Sogeri, on a plateau only a few kilometres away but 500 metres above Port Moresby, and Rouna Falls and the very popular ‘Woody’s’ Rouna hotel, near the start of the Kokoda Track.

Any expatriate with five years’ residence in Papua New Guinea was dubbed a ‘Territorian’. The local ABC radio station ran a program
called ‘Territorian Calls the Tune’ and in 1959 I was invited to be the presenter. This involved selecting and introducing music for half an hour. Recently, when going through some papers, I found my pay cheque for £10 — kept as a souvenir!

In 1955 I was invited to an afternoon tea at Government House with a group of girls from the Public Service. Mrs Rachel Cleland, wife of the Administrator, appealed for helpers with the Girl Guide Movement, which she was trying to build up. Along with several others (including Pauline), I agreed to participate. It proved a very rewarding experience then and also later in our lives — for me when I returned to PNG in 1967 as a married woman, and for Pauline when she went to Tanganyika with the British Colonial Service. She ran a Brownie Pack in Dar es Salaam. There, the owl was a bad omen, so Guide leaders were called ‘Wise Bird’ and ‘Little Wise Bird’.

After some training and passing the tests, I qualified as a Guide Lieutenant and assistant to Daphne Carpenter, Captain of the 1st Bomana Guide Company. Daphne was a Guide Trainer and a former State Secretary for Queensland Guiding. She was appointed to assist
Mrs Cleland at Government House and to help organise Guiding in the Territory. My sister Pauline as ‘Tawny Owl’ helped to run the Bomana Brownie Pack. Each Saturday afternoon the Guide, Brownie and Scout leaders travelled in a government bus to the Catholic mission school at Bomana, about 20 kilometres out of Port Moresby. The school boarded a number of mixed-race children — boys and girls. The children were delightful and very enthusiastic. Their singing was beautiful and they had great imagination. Scouting and Guiding were very popular in PNG.

As Guide leaders we were involved in many community activities: rallies, marches and fund-raising. We met and made many friends. Guide Trainers came from Australia and from overseas to assist us, and we were grateful for the additional training they offered. The Executive Committee attempted to adapt Guiding to suit conditions in PNG, but this was not always an easy task and involved much hard work for everyone. Even then, all innovations had to be approved by the Federal Executive of Guiding in Australia.

When Daphne Carpenter returned to Australia to take up university studies in 1957, I took over as Captain of the Guide Company, with a bright young Papuan woman, Tessie Lavau, as my Lieutenant. Daphne’s position at Government House also became vacant, and I went there on trial as personal staff. As the Government House receptionist, I helped in the running of the house and had to be present at most official functions. It was a fascinating job — widely varied, demanding and very interesting. It was a pleasure to work with (then) His Honour the Administrator, Brigadier Donald Cleland, and Mrs Rachel Cleland. Sir Donald was knighted in 1961. Mrs Cleland was awarded the MBE in 1959 for services to Guiding. In 1980 she became a Papua New Guinean ‘Dame’. I spent three and a half most rewarding years with the Clelands.
LIFE AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE was always full of activity and interest. My duties when first employed there were not clearly defined. I was to generally assist Mrs Cleland, the Administrator’s wife, fulfil secretarial duties and accompany her when required.

Rachel Cleland was a driving force in helping indigenous women cope with their changing society. She was always seeking volunteers to work in organisations, such as Red Cross, pre-schools, Guiding, women’s clubs — in each of which she was very active, either as Patron or President. She never asked anyone to do anything she herself was not prepared to do, frequently taking up a new cause as she became aware of a problem.

On taking up my appointment, I moved into the gatehouse at Government House. For my security, one of the police drivers, Bias, and his wife, Oahu, and family lived close by. One night I heard a disturbance from their house and Oahu appeared at my door, crying and frightened. She was pregnant and close to term. I comforted her as best I could and then Bias appeared, looking rather sheepish. I invited him in, then left to make a cup of tea. I peeped in at them and, there she was, just like any other aggrieved woman, turning over the pages of a magazine, studiously ignoring him! They left after their tea and some ‘amateur counselling’. They were a delightful pair and the baby was born soon afterwards.

I shared the cottage at various times with a range of visitors from England, Canada and Australia. My sister also stayed with me for a few months before she left for overseas. I had planned to join her in London the following year — but that was before I met my future husband!
Port Moresby, especially during the Australian winter, was a most popular place to visit, particularly for Australian politicians and government officials (on official business, of course). The program of visits was often quite hectic and involved some fascinating people. Most notable among them were an Indian princess who was a Treasury official in her country; Cardinal Von Furstenberg, a prince in his own right as well as a prince of the Church; Margaret Mead, the famous anthropologist; and my favourite, the Baroness Von Trapp with her Chaplain, Father Werner, who had fled Austria with the Von Trapp family for America.

During my time at Government House, there was also a succession of vice-regal visitors — first, Lady Slim and her entourage. She had been unable to come the previous year when her husband, Sir William Slim, was present for the visit of Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. Lord and Lady de L’Isle visited the following year and Lord and Lady Dunrossil the year after, always of course with their retinue of aides, secretaries and maids. Interspersed with these official visitors were family and friends of the Clelands.

The visit of the RAN flagship, HMAS Melbourne, and two other naval vessels stands out in my memory. (I was young and single, after all!) The whole of Moresby buzzed as official functions, parties, dances and outings were organised by the community, and hospitality extended to entertain the complement of several hundred sailors over their three-day stay.

On the first night a cocktail party was held on board Melbourne. The band played as the flag was lowered on the quarterdeck at sunset. I was fortunate to be included in the official party. We went out to the ship in the Admiral’s launch. After the function we were treated to a nightcap in the Admiral’s cabin.

Next evening was the official dinner at Government House and, afterwards, the garden party. There was added glamour with all the naval uniforms sprinkled among the guests. The sight of those warships in the harbour, festooned with lights, in that tropical setting was something to behold.

In 1959, the Clelands went on three months’ leave to Australia, as did the Official Secretary with his wife and children. I was left to ‘hold the fort’. Dr Gunther became Acting Administrator, but he and Mrs Gunther chose to remain in their own home.
There was much to be done — maintenance repairs to be carried out, the staff rotated on their holidays and a thorough spring-clean completed before the Clelands returned. I had a backlog of clerical work and the ever-present task of making out voluminous lists of Christmas greetings (official and private), amending and updating official lists to cover changes in appointments in the Administration and in private enterprise. One of my tasks was also to keep in touch with the Youth Club.

One of Mrs Cleland’s concerns was the plight of the mixed-race community in Port Moresby, especially the young people. Scholarships were granted for those children who passed their exams to go to high schools in Australia. At the time most scholarships were won by girls. The girls were popular and well received at their schools. They would come home to spend Christmas holidays with their families, all well dressed, sophisticated by local standards, and most attractive young women.

The boys in that age group worked mainly as labourers. There was a lot of fighting and drinking in the community, as there simply was nothing much for them to do. There were few opportunities and they really were between two worlds.

Mrs Cleland invited a group of boys to Government House to talk about their problems. The boys were unhappy and bitter about the girls because rival (and older) expatriates would seek their company,
especially those who came back for the school holidays. There were no social activities for these young people and the boys lacked confidence and social graces. They tended to drink to cover up their inadequacies.

It was decided to form a club and arrange some dances, so we had to teach them to dance. We held classes twice weekly. The boys were so enthusiastic and learned very quickly, with their natural musical and rhythmic abilities. They were also encouraged to participate in organising the club and while ideas were put to them, the boys made all the decisions.

In order to exercise some control, the dances were by invitation only and the boys decided that soft drinks only would be served. During the last dance before the girls returned to school in Australia, a few inebriated Europeans arrived and wanted to come in. I explained it was a private dance by invitation only and some of the boys stood by me. The gatecrashers wanted to know what I was doing there and some insinuations were made. The atmosphere was tense but, thank goodness, they left. Later, someone told the Commissioner of Police about the incident and the men concerned were called in and reprimanded. They didn’t bother us again!

After I left Moresby, the little club grew and another, for the married people of the mixed-race community, was started. Meetings were organised, others were co-opted to help, and the range of activities extended. In time, both clubs were integrated to form ‘The Islands Social Club’. This assisted the mixed-race community find dignity and confidence. In time, some from this community would rise to prominence in government and politics.

Just after the Clelands returned from leave in 1960, I awoke to a loud banging on the door in the early hours of the morning and opened up to see a very black, wild-looking Kerema man, eyes rolling, holding a lantern. ‘Come quickly, Sinabada, baby coming.’ After my initial shock I realised it was Aihe, one of the gardeners. I scrambled up the hill with him to his quarters and found Halau in a corner of the room behind a blanket curtain. The floor was packed with banana leaves and there was Halau with her newborn baby girl. I sent Aihe up to the house. Mrs Cleland, who was recovering from a broken wrist, came rushing down and cut the cord. She soon had Halau and baby, with Aihe, taken off to the maternity hospital. It was such a relief as Halau had a harrowing
experience with her first baby, a boy. She was a very shy young girl and there was no other Kerema woman from her village in the area. Thanks to Mrs Cleland, with her personal interest in the staff, and the ministrations of the wonderful Sister Camillus, who ran the Badilli maternity hospital, she overcame her fears of sorcery. (A blood transfusion at the hospital had frightened her.)

I met my future husband at an informal gathering in 1958 at the Pacific Islands Regiment Officers Mess at Taurama Barracks. Chris and I met only occasionally for some months. Following an ‘Hawaiian night’ at the Mess at Taurama Barracks, he proceeded to tell me he was going to marry me! The single officers had made the punch during the afternoon and Chris may have sampled a little too much. I thought it quite funny but he telephoned the following Monday asking to see me to ‘pursue his suit’. He was going on leave and wanted us to be married before he left. I declined to get married then, but he won out and we were married about ten months later in Brisbane. On our return to Port Moresby after our wedding, Chris was allowed to move into the gatehouse with me. (Being married during a posting, Chris was not entitled to a married quarter.)

Soon after our return from our honeymoon there was trouble at Taurama Barracks because of broken promises over pay for the soldiers. The alleged ringleaders were apprehended and delivered into the custody of the civil police. Witnessed by many soldiers at the barracks, the arrest was just too much — there was always bitter rivalry between the police and the army. The soldiers took off en masse to rescue their comrades but the Regimental Sergeant Major followed with trucks and they were brought back.

The subsequent Courts Martial were held at Bomana Gaol and Chris, a fluent *pisin* speaker, had to take down the summaries of evidence. I didn’t see him for about three weeks. After that, the battalion went on field exercises.

My life was busy. I was isolated from the normal circumstances of living in army married quarters but there were frequent Mess functions and I made some good friends. That period was one of the busiest and, as it was winter in Australia, there were many official visitors.

In November 1960 General Daly and Mrs Daly made a farewell tour of PNG. He was retiring as Commander, Northern Command. They
stayed at Government House. It was a hectic time as there were functions at Government House and a round of army farewells.

We left Port Moresby early in 1961 with many regrets, but with a new posting to Brisbane we looked forward to a different life and to being in closer contact with family again.

References

HOUSING FOR OFFICERS and their families was arranged on a points system based on such factors as years of service and number of children. We did not have enough points to immediately qualify for a house, so we had to take whatever accommodation was available.

It was 1960 and at that time it was customary for the military husband to go ahead unaccompanied so that his suitability for serving with indigenous people could be assessed. If all was well, and accommodation was available, the wife and family could then expect to follow about six weeks later.

In the time following Duncan’s departure for PNG, I had to organise to have our car put on a ship, to pack and arrange for our furniture and effects to go into storage, to schedule final inoculations for Wayne, our 18-month-old son, and myself, and to try to find homes for our German Shepherd and her nine puppies. As soon as Duncan advised me that he had found a flat for us, Wayne and I were ‘called forward’. I was terribly excited as it was my first time out of Australia. It was considered a remote area posting in those days — perhaps it still is.

I tried to picture what our new home would be like and imagined there would be lush tropical jungle and orchids everywhere. I was wrong!

There I was, armed with a stroller, two teddy bears, an overnight bag and Wayne. After leaving Melbourne around 5 pm, we had a three-hour wait at Sydney Airport before boarding the Moresby flight — an especially long time for a little boy to tolerate and not become irritable. Fortunately he slept the whole way to Port Moresby.

We arrived at Jackson’s Strip around 6 am. Where was the jungle I had imagined? It was more like outback Queensland, very dry and dusty, and
even at 6 am the glare was unbearable. We taxied to the terminal — a tin shed. I was glad to see Duncan there to meet us, especially after our six-week separation. He was accompanied by his army driver, Kundian, who was to drive us to our new home. Kundian was a very chatty fellow, although at that point I had no idea what he was saying as he spoke *pisin*. He had the longest earlobes I had ever seen, with big holes cut in them, in which he used to deposit his cigarettes or pencils and, on occasion, his rolled-up wages.

It was traditional then for a resident family to invite an incoming family to breakfast on arrival, and our hosts made us feel very welcome. We were able to do the same later on for another incoming family. After breakfast Duncan took us to our flat. I was speechless. There were three units, called the TAA flats on Paga Hill, all joined together in one straight line. Our flat consisted of two rooms. One room had a table and chairs at one end, with a tiny kitchen at the other end. It couldn’t have been more than about 3 metres wide by 6 metres long. The bedroom led off the first room and had a double bed and hanging space for clothing (no wardrobe). The shower space was all concrete and quite dark. We shared the toilet, which was outside, with the other two units. I had been told about bird-eating spiders and was terrified to go outside in the dark. There was nowhere for Wayne to sleep, so we had to go to a Badilli trade store and buy a cot for him. The only place to put it was in the kitchen, and there was little spare space even there. As you can imagine the situation was not entirely satisfactory but it was all that was available at the time. It was only 15 years since the end of the war and I don’t think married quarters were a priority. Nothing was said to prepare me for this housing problem, probably because Duncan knew I would have opted to wait longer had I known.

With our flat came our *hausboi*, Warbi. Nothing had prepared me for this situation, either. A *hausboi* who didn’t speak much English, and me who didn’t speak any *pisin*. I think we communicated by hand signs to begin with. I made it my first priority to learn the language — I became pretty tired of waving my arms around in the air, which also frustrated Warbi. At the time, nobody gave military wives an opportunity to learn how to interact with the indigenous people. We knew nothing of their culture and were just expected to cope. However, with a little patience on both sides, we were able to come to an understanding and we managed quite well. I began *pisin* lessons as soon as possible with Father
Ray Quirk, the Catholic priest from PIR, who taught us at night in one of the lecture rooms at Murray Barracks. Eventually I became quite proficient. Wayne was just starting to talk and he picked it up quickly too, much to my father’s horror when we went back to Melbourne and Wayne said that one of his toys was ‘bagarap tru’ (broken). My father did not swear and was quite shocked.

We spent just over six weeks in the flat and had our first PNG Christmas Day there. We got up early Christmas morning, gave Wayne his present, then had a whole day looming in front of us. Oh, how I missed my family! It was so hot. It was light quite early, so Duncan and I decided to take Wayne down to Port Moresby wharf to watch a container ship from New Zealand come in around 6 am. I think Duncan must have been expecting some stores for the Depot and he wanted to make sure the ship docked on time. The sea was calm in the harbour and the surrounding hills were bare and dry. I think the wet season must have been late that year. There were few people around at that hour of the morning but one got the sense of a busy harbour. We were to watch many more ships come in during our 18 months there. After lunch, we took Warbi and Wayne for a drive. Duncan was able to use an army vehicle and he wanted to show me that there was some jungle around, even though the road we went along was very dry and dusty. Although it was quite close to Port Moresby, the road was not sealed with bitumen. Our Christmas gift to Warbi was a white shirt, which he was wearing, and somehow Wayne had managed to smear it with a dusty handprint.

Our car still hadn’t arrived and there wasn’t much for me to do in this two-roomed flat. I was able to cook and look after Wayne, but that was all. Warbi became a little ‘put out’ if I tried to do more. ‘I’ll do it, misis!’ he would say if I tried to do some work.

After six weeks at Paga Hill, we heard of a leave house at Boroko becoming available for 12 months. A family was heading south for a year’s leave and they agreed to have us move in while they were away. What a relief to have a home with more than two rooms. We moved a few weeks after Christmas. The house was in Huala Place, Boroko (huala is the Papuan word for crocodile). It was an Administration house built on stilts in the Queensland style, for white-ant protection and also for coolness. It was built in a T-shape with three bedrooms, bathroom and toilet at one end and a dining/lounge and kitchen in the
other section. There were stairs from the kitchen to the backyard and underneath was the laundry with an old-fashioned copper. The garage was also under the kitchen. The family had closed off one of the bedrooms to store a lot of their goods, but at least we now had a separate bedroom for Wayne. It was quite a relief to know we had this house for at least a year. We could settle for a while. The ‘tiefer’ truck came around to spray for mosquitoes once a week. Mosquitoes were quite a problem and, although there was flywire at every window, we had to open the louvres wide so that the spray could come into the house. I can’t imagine what inhaling all those chemicals did to us, but it certainly kept the mozzies at bay.

I really enjoyed being at Boroko. Right behind us a few streets away was a small shopping area — a couple of trade stores, a chemist and a fire station, and on the road to Murray Barracks were a couple of Chinese stores. I could take Wayne in his stroller and walk to them. Unfortunately Warbi could not come with us out to Boroko. His wantoks lived in the Port Moresby area and he didn’t want to leave them. Our new hausboi was Korkoi. His living quarters were at the end of a little path in the back garden. There were usually six or more other boys out there and we often came home to see one of them doing the garden or sweeping the paths. Our house was opposite the Boroko football oval. Behind us was a single man’s donga (house). The gentleman who lived there must have been quite lonely because often late at night he used to play his music rather loudly and sit and cry, and as the houses had louvre windows the sound carried too well. Despite this, we were very happy with our accommodation and, although there were no fences around the houses, I felt reasonably secure. The furniture was adequate and quite comfortable. I was still quite bored and Duncan and I decided that if I could find a babysitter for Wayne, I would try to find a job. A captain’s pay was not all that much and a job for me would help financially.

At last we were informed that our car had arrived. The delivery time had been six weeks — three spent on the wharf in Port Melbourne due to a ‘wharfies’ strike, and three on the ship. It was, to say the least, pretty rusty by the time it arrived, despite a protective coating of grease. It had to be moved along the wharf at Port Moresby by forklift because it wouldn’t start.
I managed to find a babysitter for Wayne, a very nice lady called Mrs Caughey, and I was successful in finding a job in the office at Burns Philp in Port Moresby. The Burns Philp building was in the main part of town opposite the picture theatre and was fairly old. The store section had a huge canvas *punkah* which was electrically operated and had to be switched on first thing every morning. Here was this enormous green canvas thing waving backwards and forwards. Not very stylish, but certainly effective in cooling us down.

Duncan had to visit the London Missionary Society to buy fresh vegetables to supply PIR and Murray Barracks, which meant that he was at outstations for approximately three weeks and then home for one. When he was away I used to take Wayne down to Taurama Beach. There was still quite a lot of rusting war debris around at the end of the little bay and lots of oysters on the rocks. I used to take a screwdriver and a jar and pick them off. We would also gather shells. It was such fun for a little boy, and for me too. And it filled in the weekends when Duncan was away. Alternatively we would go to Ela Beach and have a swim, but we had to pick a time when the water was free of stingers.
We had been in the house approximately four months when one night I was sitting at the dining room table and I felt an intense pain in my chest. I thought I was having a heart attack. Fortunately Duncan happened to be at home and called the army doctor at PIR, who came to the house, examined me and diagnosed a gall bladder attack. He organised for me to go to Taurama Hospital the next morning to have an X-ray to confirm his diagnosis. I had to be up early to be at the hospital before I had eaten breakfast. The doctor wanted me to be examined after fasting for 12 hours, but when I got there, I was made to sit down to a very greasy breakfast. Fried eggs, bacon, buttered toast and a glass of milk — none of which improved my disposition. The nursing staff prepared me for the X-rays, but before they had a chance to take any, the electricity went off in the hospital and I was sent home. I had to return the next morning and go through the whole procedure again. I was told I would have to have my gall bladder removed but that there were no qualified surgeons in Port Moresby and I would need to go south. It was arranged for me to attend a surgeon who operated at St Francis Xavier Cabrini Hospital in Caulfield, Melbourne.

So at the end of April 1961, Wayne and I went off to stay with my parents for a few weeks. How nice to feel cool and to have fresh milk. (We could get fresh milk in Moresby but it came from non-TB tested herds and it was too risky, so we drank tinned or powdered milk.) The operation was scheduled for early May and Duncan was allowed some emergency leave. He stayed only long enough to see that I was in no danger and then returned to Port Moresby, taking Wayne back with him. Mrs Caughey was able to look after Wayne during the day and Duncan would have him after work. I had eight days in hospital and returned a week after that, minus a gall bladder and an appendix.

I had given up my job with Burns Philp when I knew I would have to ‘go south’. I had recovered well from my surgery and was anxious to find another job as soon as possible. Within two weeks of my return I was back at work, this time at the Department of Civil Aviation. My new job was secretary to the stores manager at Konedobu.

We had been having a few prowlers around this time. One young man used to sit under the house. Duncan thought that, as I was on my own so much, it would be a good idea to have some sort of protection in the house. He gave me a small .25 calibre Browning pistol. It was quite legal to own a gun.
and, although I didn't like the idea much, I could see the sense in it. Duncan used to take me out to the rifle range at the back of Murray Barracks to practise firing it. When the gun was in the house, I used to separate the magazine from the handpiece and hide it, as I couldn't risk Wayne finding it. Just having the gun there made me feel a lot more secure.

While we were in Boroko, the PIR soldiers rioted. I was phoned and told to sit on the floor of the lounge with Wayne and not to show ourselves above the windows. I felt quite scared knowing the rioters were headed our way. Fortunately, the officers at Taurama managed to restrain the soldiers before they actually reached Boroko, so we were not in any real danger.

One Friday afternoon after work, I picked up Wayne from the babysitter. She was concerned because he had a high temperature. I called the civilian doctor in Port Moresby and was told to take him to the Taurama hospital. The doctor arranged for him to be admitted and then promptly took off for a weekend to one of the islands without even seeing him. I left Wayne overnight and, when I arrived early on Saturday morning, I found him sopping wet. No one had changed his nappy or his bed linen and he hadn't been fed. I cleaned him up and gave him his breakfast and, as he seemed to be a lot better and his temperature had gone down, I discharged him and took him home. I was totally disgusted — for all the attention he received, I might as well have kept him at home.

In November 1961 my mother and youngest sister decided to visit us. Rosalea, my sister, had come with the intention of staying on and working. She had been sharing a flat in Sydney with a friend, who was being sent to Port Moresby to take up a teaching post. Rosalea decided to come too, staying with us until she found a job.

Around this time we had word that the family whose home we were occupying would be returning to Port Moresby in January 1962. We would at least be able to spend Christmas in the Boroko house. We had also been informed that a married quarter at Murray Barracks would become available in mid-February, which meant that we would have to find alternative accommodation in the interim.

We managed to find a place at Badilli on the hillside above Koki Market. It was a very old house with push-out shutters and arc mesh at the windows but no flywire. There was one flat downstairs with access inside to our part of the house. In our section, there were no interior
walls, except between the kitchen and the living area. A door in this wall was the only one with a lock, apart from the front door, which actually led to the kitchen and bathroom area. It was certainly pre-World War II, very mouldy, dank and dark. The only redeeming feature of this place was a huge poinciana tree at the foot of the stairs from the driveway — it was really glorious. Smells from Koki Market wafted up to us. It was not particularly pleasant but we simply didn’t have much choice. It was all that was available and we knew that it would only be for a short time. Imagine, three houses within a fortnight and, to top it off, I had discovered just before we moved into this house that I was two months’ pregnant. Duncan was able only to drop Wayne and myself at the house before departing for outstation duty. My *hausboi* wouldn’t come with us, so once again I had to find another. His name was Tom and he was a Papuan and quite different from my previous *hausbois*.

By this time my sister was living in the single women’s *dongas* at Konedobu but said she would come and stay with me while Duncan was away. She had her little Lambretta scooter and was quite mobile. I had been in the house just one week, with Rosalea as my guest, when she was invited to a party after work. I had given her a key to the front door so that she would be free to come home whenever she wanted. There was quite a steep staircase from the street below, with a small landing at the front door. I thought that I would hear her when she came home and had left the light on as a precaution. At about 1.30 am I heard noises in the kitchen and, thinking it must be Rosalea, I got up to let her into the living room area, as the door was locked from my side. However, the noise continued so I went back to the bedroom to get my small pistol. By now I was shaking so hard I couldn’t piece the magazine and the gun together. I had called through the door to make sure it wasn’t my sister and when no one answered, I yelled that I would *‘kilim i dai pinis!’* (I will kill you!). The noises then stopped.

Rosalea came home about half an hour later to find me shaking like a leaf. Next morning I found that Tom had disappeared with most of the food from the kitchen. It was the only time I had a problem with any of the *hausbois*. A week later, I was able to move into our married quarter in Murray Barracks. Duncan was still visiting the outstations but I didn’t have a lot to move — just Wayne’s cot, our personal clothing and a camphor wood chest that I had purchased from a Chinese tailor, Mr Luk Poi Woy. Remarkably, I still have the camphor
wood chest. Mr Luk Poi Woy, as well as selling furniture, used to make military uniforms and supply mufti outfits, which generally were white shirts and shorts, long white socks and black shoes. He was widely known as ‘Luke Warm Pie’.

After I realised that I was pregnant, I gave up my job with DCA and my sister took it on. She, by this time, had met her husband-to-be, who was with the Fire Brigade.

In Murray Barracks we had a two-bedroom house with a lounge/dining room and a kitchen that ran the width of the house at one end. The front door and the back door were alongside each other. The lounge room faced the barracks swimming pool and because there were floor-to-ceiling louvres, I had quite a good view of the area. There was no pool at Taurama Barracks at the time and the wives from PIR frequently came over to swim — not that we were able to use it much, as there was always a problem with the chlorine balance.

The married quarters were quite comfortably furnished with a cane lounge, a coffee table, a bookcase, a standard lamp and rattan squares on the floor. In the dining area, we had a table and chairs and a sideboard. With this house came a new hausboi — the best we had. His name was Hari and he always wore a Queensland private school boater and navy blue shorts and smoked a pipe. He was an older man who spoke excellent English. He loved Wayne, now approaching three years old, and was also a good babysitter. Hari had a couple of funny habits. When he swept the floor, he used to lift the rattan carpet and push the dust underneath, although I managed to cure him of that. The other one concerned a Sepik River mask that Duncan had brought back from one of his trips. Hari was scared of this mask, saying it was an evil spirit. It hung above the buffet and he would always dust with his head averted, so that he didn’t have to look at it.

There were only three or four captains on staff living in Murray Barracks and the wives got on well together, all having children of a similar age. I learned to play mah-jong and canasta. We used to go down to Ela Beach as a group on a Sunday afternoon (when Duncan was home) for a swim and buy fish and chips from the ‘Groper Hole’, a little stall on the beach — a favourite outing with the kids. Sometimes we would go to the movies at the drive-in theatre at Jackson’s Strip. I remember one Saturday wanting to see a movie there and, because it was not pay week, we were a bit short of money. It cost
five shillings (50 cents) each to get in and we didn’t have the ready cash. No ATMs in those days! Deciding to clean the car, I put my hand down the back of the front seat only to find a two shilling (20 cent) coin. I kept probing and finally came up with ten shillings ($1) — just enough, provided we took our own refreshments. What a find!

There was plenty to do as far as entertainment was concerned and we made our own fun. Mess life was quite active and we were sometimes invited to PIR at Taurama Barracks for a Mess function, or to watch a ‘Beating the Retreat’ by the PIR Pipe Band. Sometimes we would go to Rouna Falls for a picnic, or out to the airport to watch a military aircraft come in. We used to do our grocery shopping at the Canteen or at cold storage in Port Moresby. It was not the best quality and meat was frozen solid, and all quite expensive. Fruit was not readily available, except bananas and pawpaw. If I was lucky, I was able to buy Wayne three oranges a week. Duncan sometimes ordered a side of lamb for us from ‘down south’ and we shared this with our friends. What a treat to have a lamb roast. Variety shopping was terrific. For example, Steamships in Moresby sold everything from underwear to Chanel No. 5. I sent my family lots of Chanel soap and talc — it was all duty-free. Mikimoto pearls were another great buy and, if you wanted to buy a book, there was a bookshop on Lawes Road. This was the only three-storey building in town. Toys were imported from Japan and, of course, were very expensive. The only things I could not buy were shoes. I had to get my mother to send them to me from Melbourne.

As I progressed with my pregnancy, I thought I had better start doing some knitting as we had decided that I would return to Melbourne to have the baby. I had lost my first baby at eight days old due to a dirty hospital and there was no way I was going to have this one there after our hospital experience with Wayne. I was not able to travel after seven and a half months, so in May 1962 Wayne and I returned to Melbourne. Duncan had been told his next posting would be to the RAASC School at Puckapunyal in Victoria — a posting he would take up in mid-August, exactly when our daughter, Fiona, arrived.

I returned to Port Moresby in 1970 when my sister and her husband were living over the Fire Station at Boroko. By then, laws were changing and the indigenous population had been given permission to drink alcohol. As the hotel was at the back of the Fire Station, we were concerned at what harm that decision might cause. Despite some difficulties, I loved being in Port Moresby and will always treasure the experience.
‘My dear young woman, do you really want to go? I advise you to stay where you are and await your husband’s return to Australia. You won’t ever be able to put your bare feet to the floor, and you will never be able to put your baby on the floor; she will get worms and there are diseases of many kinds that she will pick up. And of course, regardless of the malaria tablets you will be taking, you will still get malaria.’

Six weeks after the birth of our daughter Jane, my husband, Ron, departed for PIR, Taurama Barracks. Under ‘normal’ circumstances, I anticipated receiving my ‘call forward’ in February 1961. However, when Ron arrived in PNG in December 1960, it was decided that he would join C Company midway through their outstation duties at Vanimo. Ron would then be back in Moresby in time for the football season!

Although it seemed like an eternity, there was plenty to keep me occupied during the extended separation of four months. Inventories and inoculations had to be arranged, with much difficulty experienced in finding out where I could have the injections ‘at army expense’. Eventually, I was directed to Concord Repatriation Hospital and to a doctor who naturally asked why I needed these injections.

Then he asked if Ron ‘had a drink’. His response: ‘My dear, you should really stay here. I am sorry to have to tell you this, but he will be a raving alcoholic. It happens all the time.’

I have often wondered if that doctor ever realised the effect his comments may have had on me.

We had been told that we would need to pay rent on any items of furniture that we did not have in store. So we purchased most of our furniture.
As the value or condition of the items did not matter, I went to the local Norman Ross store to buy a second-hand washing machine and fridge from ‘traded in’ stock. I was given the choice of the backyard storeroom — and the only payment: ‘You will have to arrange delivery, lady’.

About a month prior to my departure, Ron advised me that he was going out on a six-week patrol immediately he returned from Vanimo and thus would not be back in Taurama by the time I was due to arrive. ‘Don’t change your arrangements, someone will meet you at Jackson’s. Arrangements are being made up here, and you will be staying with someone till I get back!’

A week before departure, I received a phone call from one of the officers at PIR — a voice that was to become so familiar, a man who was to become so close to our hearts, Father Ray Quirk. He rang to tell me that he and some of the ladies would be at Jackson’s Airport to meet Jane and me and that we were to stay with one of the wives until Ron returned to Taurama.

I eventually flew out of Sydney on 26 May 1961, armed with the doctor’s advice and Father Quirk’s attestation that everything would be okay. Arriving at 6 am after a ten-hour flight with our six-month-old baby, and walking through the door of the aircraft into that unbelievably oppressive humidity, was something I could never forget. But oh, the joy! Ron was there to meet us.

Our home for the next four months was a flat in Lawes Road in town and consisted of a bedroom, living room/kitchen, a very small bathroom, geckoes and black beetles, which used to get in through the top of the ill-fitting door. We paid £25 per week for this two-room ‘palace’ and were reimbursed £7 by the Army. Accordingly, the bulk of Ron’s pay was committed to providing a roof over our heads, as these were early days and allowances for service in Papua New Guinea were paltry. On the lowest pay scale for an officer, the financial penalty for being a married Second Lieutenant with a wife unable to work was severe. As one visiting senior officer explained, ‘lieutenants are not meant to be married’.

Terry and Marie Holland were in the same situation as us. As I remember, Terry and Ron were the only lieutenants at that time whose wives had babies and thus were unable to work. Marie became a whiz with variations of potato dishes, while I madly collected recipes for mince.
A Heavenly Bird of Paradise

Father Ray (Chaplain Raymond Quirk, OFM)
Colonel Norrie, the Commanding Officer, had entered a team in the local rugby league competition and of course it became a very 'important' part of PIR life. Training was vital and I was about to discover what a major part football would play in our lives in those early days. We virtually had only the mornings together each weekend and, when one takes into account the Battalion and Company exercises, we really spent very little time together in that first year. Ron left in September for his next outstation — Manus Island. I returned to Sydney and remained there until April 1962.

On my return to Moresby, we spent six weeks in the Lawes Road flat prior to moving into our allocated married quarter in Murray Barracks. We would eventually move out to Taurama when the houses under construction were completed. Although Lawes Road was a pleasant spot and reasonably handy to town for shopping and we could walk along Ela Beach Road up to Burns Philp or to the Port Moresby Freezer, I felt isolated living there. It was a great thrill to be able to move into the Murray Barracks house with the canteen and swimming pool so close.

A couple of months later we moved into our brand new home on the hill at Taurama, with every item of equipment on issue needing to be unwrapped. What a feeling! Life had taken a great turn for the better. I was able to mix more freely with the wives, to get to know them all and to feel 'part of the family'. For the first time, I was also able to go to Wives Club meetings. I took part in sewing, craft, morning games and many other activities with the same enthusiasm as the local soldiers' wives.

We landscaped and planted the garden of our lovely new home on the hill. We discovered how noise travelled as we listened to the marching music from our neighbours’ house one night. They, in turn, 'shared' the thrill of Gretel's win in our first tilt at the America's Cup at 3.30 or 4.00 one morning.

It was during this period that the Governor-General, Viscount de L'Isle, visited New Guinea. A vice-regal visit to Taurama, with a parade and morning tea in the Mess — what excitement! We were instructed on where we would sit, how we would address the Viscount and Viscountess, how the children should behave, etc. And so, dressed in our best outfits, with hats and gloves, we sat ourselves in the designated areas and waited for the Official Party to arrive and for the parade to begin.
Everything was going according to plan and, as always, the parade was going well when I looked toward the Official Party only to behold OUR Jane, arms outstretched with hands full of feathers in the process of removing the plumed pith helmet from the head of the Guest of Honour. I whispered a frantic appeal to Horrie Howard to rescue the Governor-General’s hat and remove one ‘slightly unloved’ child.

A look of horror came over Ron’s face — he was carrying the Queen’s Colour — as RSM Osi, without moving a muscle, said through clenched teeth, ‘pikinini bilong yu em i laik bagarapim hat bilong bikpela nambawan’ (your child is destroying the Governor-General’s hat).

Needless to say, at the morning tea, on meeting Viscount de L’Isle, our apologies were well accepted and we were most decidedly put at ease over the ‘incident’.

During this time at Taurama, Ron’s Company Commander, Eric Phillip, decided that the Company officers and their wives would accompany him and Marmie into the Red Cross hall at Koki to teach soldiers and their wives European dancing. The first dance was to be ‘The Twist’. Considering that most of us had barely seen it, let alone danced it, it was a fun night learning and teaching our partners at the same time. It was particularly interesting for me because I couldn’t refuse any requests for a dance and had only just discovered I was 10 to 12 weeks pregnant with our second child, Michael.

Ron’s first tour came to an end in July 1963 when we returned to Sydney. After postings to Vietnam and London, his second tour was six years later when the family all travelled together. Quite a novelty! By then, we had four children — Jane 8, Michael 6, Greg 4, and Peter 5 weeks old. We renewed friendships, made new ones and saw the changes that had occurred in the country in our absence. A considerable amount of building had taken place. The education system had improved and there were the beginnings of a university at Wards Strip and the Lae Institute of Technology was in the process of changing to a university. The latter had its first four graduates in surveying that year.

One of our first visitors, needless to say, was Father Ray Quirk whom we had seen regularly when he was on leave in Australia. As with other families, we saw a great deal of Father Ray. Peter was only weeks old and, invariably when leaving the house, Father Ray would ask the other children if he could take Peter home for company. He would say, ‘I will
feed him, I will give him a pie; is that okay?” They would let Father Ray take Peter as far as the stairs but never any further. We were all so very privileged to have Father Ray as our friend. Everyone adored him.

After nine months in Taurama, the decision was made at the end of 1969 that Ron’s company would swap with Horrie Howard’s in Lae. Within days of Christmas, having had to do all our own packing, we left on an old DC3 for Lae.

At Igam Barracks, there were several other units, an officer training unit and the company of PIR. We had not previously met any of the people in Lae, so new friendships were about to be made. We were most fortunate that there were quite a few children of much the same age as our own. This was indeed a great blessing in the months that were to follow.

In the first week of January 1970, along with all of C Company, Ron left for a six-week patrol at Dogura, over 500 kilometres away. Just one week later, our baby Peter, then 10 months old, developed septicaemia and sadly died within 18 hours of the first symptoms — a slight temperature at 4.30 am. Initially it was thought Peter had meningitis, but by 3 pm at Lae Hospital, the correct diagnosis had been made and I was told Peter was seriously ill. Ron had to be contacted by radio. The reception was not good and Ron could hear only that one of the children was gravely ill. It was not until the following morning when the aircraft arrived with our doctor that Ron discovered not only which child had taken ill but that Peter had died at 7.30 pm the previous evening.

Just prior to our departure for Lae, Father Ray had gone on leave for an extended overseas trip. In his place, a priest from Brisbane, Father Pat O’Connell, arrived. At the time of being told of Peter’s death, I was asked if I wanted a priest. I so vividly remember my reply, ‘No, thank you. The one I want is in Rome’.

Father Pat arrived on the first flight from Port Moresby, together with my sister-in-law, Robyn. My brother, Peter Morgan, was at Murray Barracks. Without doubt, Father Pat was absolutely wonderful. His words of explanation and consolation for the children were so comforting, likening Peter to a beautiful Bird of Paradise, the kumul, who would be watching over them, sitting high on the trees above, forever more. He too had had a much younger sister die at an early age. The children were old enough to know that he understood what they were feeling.
At the subsequent funeral in the haus tambaran (church) in Igam Barracks, Ron carried Peter in his lead-lined coffin out to the waiting staff car for transportation to a TAA aircraft bound for Sydney. As the children and I waved goodbye to Peter at the church door, we were quietly surrounded by the wives and children of Ron’s soldiers. Their tears, murmurings of sorrow and their gentle touch conveyed to me their compassion, which was to become a source of power for me in the time that followed.

Days passed, Ron returned to his company, still out on patrol. The children returned to school and life began again. Only now I was surrounded by friendship, companionship and so much warmth. Throughout the subsequent year, we were to be acutely aware of the consideration of senior personnel. The Commanding Officer, PIR, made frequent trips to Lae to see us and find out if we wanted to return either to Port Moresby or indeed to Australia. I felt at the time that, although the army was a huge organisation, it was certainly one with a heart and we could not have received more consideration. Ron had left the decision to me and I could see no gain in leaving earlier than scheduled. Learning to live without Peter would be made that little bit easier, surrounded by families who had been with us through those dreadful days.

During the months that followed, we felt that if I could find employment in Lae, it would be of help. I was fortunate to find a secretarial position with the Lae Institute of Technology. The work was enjoyable and interesting; I was ‘sharpening up’ my skills after ten years and therapeutically it was good for me.

After rambling down the PIR ‘trail’, I wonder if many of the ‘girls’ who spent time in PIR and PNG feel as I do that, in retrospect, their lives were enriched by that experience. I know I matured in that time and believe the hardships of those early days merely gave me strength.

I am reminded of an evening in Taurama Mess during our first tour when I was sitting on one of those lovely cane chairs, with Horrie Howard sitting on the arm, and we were discussing whether PIR was a single or married man’s posting. David Butler interrupted, ‘I’ve been listening to you two. Just remember that many years from now, whenever you meet one another, or any of the people you have met here in PIR, you will always be able to “pick up the threads”, as though
it were yesterday. The bonds you are making now will always be very strong ones.’

Two years ago, our son-in-law, Tom Douch, invited us to a Mess function at the Joint Services Staff College in Canberra. We were introduced to students from many countries, and among them was a Papua New Guinean student, Lieutenant Colonel Dan Kip. Dan’s wife is the daughter of RSM and Mrs Osi — the little girl in the bright pink dress with whom Jane used to play when we went to Wives Club at Taurama. Unfortunately the RSM passed away a few years ago, but it was a great thrill to think Dan would go back and tell his wife and Mrs Osi of our meeting. The chain of friendship continues, and our kumul still watches over us!

*Blessing of the Colours, PIR, Taurama Barracks*
A VERY STRONG rumour arrived by letter in April or May 1961 from army friends in 1RAR Malaya telling us that we were to be posted there. Somehow, the news failed to reach the powers that be in Canberra and, in August that year, my husband, Chic, was posted to PIR Port Moresby — without his family of course, no available quarter, etc. We (Phillip 8, and Sue-Anne 6) followed four months later — arriving at the airport on a wild stormy night to catch the good old DC6 to Moresby.

I was not a bit happy with this storm as the plane was being severely buffeted and we hadn’t even left the ground. As the world’s original devout coward when it comes to flying, I was not impressed. I was even less impressed when one of the engines burst into flames as we taxied out onto the runway! Some two hours later, by now 11 pm, we took off, arriving safely in Moresby at 8.30 the next morning.

Chic was there in his smart juniper green shirt and shorts, dripping with perspiration. I felt like a wilting lily, having been awake all night watching all four engines just in case of you-know-what! When we reached our quarter, he asked me what I would like to drink, thinking of course of tea or coffee. My immediate reply was A BEER! ‘What at 9 am?’ he replied in amazement. Welcome to Taurama!

We had a Buka *hausboi* named Namuki. He was great with the children and a big help to me in the house, although we did have our moments. Our kitchen shelves were all lined with newspaper and this really didn’t appeal to me, especially with all those free-range cockroaches running around everywhere, so I decided to put Contact (adhesive shelving paper) down on all the shelves. It took me a whole day of measuring and cutting but the finished effect was quite outstanding. Well, I thought so
anyway. We explained to Namuki in our very best *pisin* that ‘*i stap pisin — yu no rausim*’ (this must stay, please don’t remove it), or words to that effect. The shelves looked wonderful and I was proud of my day’s work. The following morning I went into Moresby and, on my return, discovered to my horror I had newspaper back on all my shelves. Namuki had ripped all the Contact off. Quite obviously our *tok pisin* wasn’t as good as we thought.

After only two months settling in at Taurama, Chic’s company was sent to Wewak to establish a new outstation at Moem, following the closure of Manus Island. In mid-April, the new barracks were opened by the Minister for the Army and I was invited to fly to Wewak with CO Jim Norrie and his wife, Helen. The trip by Piaggio was very interesting — given my in-built fear of normal aircraft. This plane was very small, very noisy and, to top it off, the propellers were at the back of the aircraft, so there was no way I could supervise their performance.

Apart from the official opening of the barracks, one of the highlights of my stay at Wewak was a visit to the Sepik Club on Anzac Day. I was aghast when I arrived to find a great number of expatriate members wearing their best thongs and singlets of various shades of grey with very interesting shorts to match! Everyone played ‘two-up’ and, before too long, so did I. And what’s more, I made quite a handsome profit on the day. My first and only game of ‘two-up’.

In those early days a major feature of Moem, prior to grass, was MUD! Each morning one of the soldiers would bring my breakfast over to the quarter where I was staying. In order to do this, he had to walk some distance on thick red mud which oozed up between the toes of his dinnerplate-sized feet. All this, dressed in a white *laplap* with the tray held aloft. Prior to climbing the steps to the front door, he would bash his feet against the rail to dislodge the mud — in great lumps!

Back to Taurama, life dripped away and with the help of so many special friends we had a lot of fun, all putting up with the same little treasures associated with living in the tropics — snakes, spiders, mozzies, and cockroaches the size of racehorses. Actually we were rather unique in our quarter — we had cockroaches INSIDE our fridge! There was a hole in the bottom of our fridge and the little darlings obviously found the cool air refreshing!
Life was good at Taurama. We made our own fun with parties at home — keeping the rest of Taurama awake — and going to the drive-in and eating chicken-in-the-basket, surrounded by mosquito coils, watching the movie through pouring rain while we sat under cover of the restaurant/café!!

Pat Hollings and I had our big day out each Thursday when we went into Moresby to shop, always ending with a tasty toasted cheese and onion sandwich at the 'Pap' Hotel with a little bottle of South Pacific lager. Funny how you remember these little things after so many years, but they were special times with special friends.

The friendships we made at PIR are lasting ones. There were happy days and there were sad days too, but I’m sure we all benefited in so many ways through the experience of being part of the Pacific Islands Regiment.
UNLIKE MOST of the army wives living in Papua New Guinea in the 1960s, I called Port Moresby ‘home’ and my married years spent there were some of the happiest.

I was born on the island of Samarai just as war broke out in the Pacific and our family home was on Hagita Plantation at Milne Bay. As was the case with all women and children at the time, my mother, sister and I were evacuated for the period of the war and were not to return until 1945. My father’s connections with PIR commenced when he joined the Papuan Infantry Battalion at the start of the war and he continued this association when the PIR was formed in the 1950s. It was therefore one of his great joys when his daughter married an Officer and Gentleman of the Regiment!

Jim and I were married by Father Ray Quirk in the haus lotu (chapel) at Taurama Barracks in 1961. So began the first of our three postings to Papua New Guinea, which were not to come to an end until Jim resigned from the Army in 1974 to take up a civilian position in PNG. Our children and grandchildren to this day still look in wonder at our wedding photographs — me in my beautiful white wedding gown and Jim in juniper green shorts standing at the entrance to a grass hut!

Life in ‘the compound’, as I used to refer to the married quarters at Taurama Barracks, was a fun time. There was very little organised entertainment in those days, so we made our own, including dinner parties in each other’s homes, great fun in the Officers Mess, and who could forget sitting out under the stars at Murray Barracks or Goldie River while we watched a movie? Weekends were spent cheering on PIR at cricket matches or rugby league competitions. If I remember correctly, Jim had to be flagged in from a cricket match by one of his
Marriage to an Officer and a Gentleman

teammates waving a blue nappy when our son Cameron was born! Every now and then the local Turf Club held picnic races. It was my first and last introduction to betting when Jim and Bill Henderson (who was best man at our wedding) suggested I back one of the horses. Being a novice at such things, I was shown the horses so that I could select the best-looking one. Needless to say, when I chose the one ridden by the Clerk of the Course, I was regarded as a hopeless case and I don’t think they took me to the races again.

Married life in the quarters could be most trying at times due to the closeness of the houses. I remember, after an animated discussion one evening in our lounge room, being told the next morning by our next-door neighbour that she and her husband, who had both retired for the night, spent considerable time arguing over what they had heard us discussing! On the other hand, as well as seemingly knowing everyone else’s business, we also knew each other’s children and usually where they were — even if their mothers didn’t! The area of the married quarters became a communal playground, so any child found at the end of the day was always delivered safely to the front door of their own home.

Friend and mentor to anyone who had children in those days was Father Ray Quirk. When he wasn’t off with the kids on some wild adventure, he was leading our husbands astray (his ‘dewy-eyed subalterns’, he used to call them). Despite this, he was greatly loved by everyone. It was a great sadness to us that, having officiated at our wedding and christened both our children, he became too ill to conduct our daughter Belinda’s wedding, and in fact he died soon afterwards.

Those early years with PIR were hard on the families as all the men were sent on ‘outstation’ for six months every year. Pat Hollings (her husband Geoff was Jim’s OC) and I were extremely fortunate to be able to visit Vanimo, on the Irian Jaya border, when our husbands were there — thanks to the efforts of Maurie Pears who, at the time, was OC of the outstation at Moem. My arrival, together with our son Cameron, who was only nine months old at the time, was arranged by Maurie per kind favour of the Catholic Mission and their aircraft. The schoolteacher was on leave at the time so we stayed in his house, perched high on the side of a hill with a wondrous view. It was a crime that all wives could not have enjoyed time with their husbands in such a beautiful location. The camp was built beside a beach with crystal clear water, white sands and coconut palms leaning to the water’s edge. It was primitive in terms
of modern conveniences but beautiful in the extreme. One could enter or leave only by sea or light aircraft. Because of its isolation, sporting facilities were non-existent. One afternoon I recall there was great activity in the camp. The *balus* (plane) had just made three passes over the airstrip when someone remembered that the golf course was still set up and no one had removed the tee markers or flags from the ‘putting greens’. Unfortunately the visits were brought to a swift end when General Daly heard of them!

By April 1964 and soon after the birth of our daughter Belinda, our first posting to Papua New Guinea ended. Little did we know that we would return on our second posting only a few years later. This time, Jim took up his position as OC of the Training Depot at Goldie River, some 27 kilometres from Port Moresby. When we arrived, Goldie River Barracks still consisted of a number of grass huts in a jungle clearing by a beautiful, crocodile-infested river. Over the next two years it was to become a state-of-the-art training depot with 24 new married quarters. These were still in the jungle and surrounded by snakes! I remember on one occasion I found myself pulling a snake from behind a trough under our house for fear that it would end up inside the house. Meanwhile the *hausboi* had taken off for the safety of his *boihaus*!
We had to be more organised with our lives, as we were so far from Port Moresby over a mostly corrugated dirt road. This was hard to explain to our son who was five at the time. He was picked up one day by the duty officer some distance from the depot pedalling his way into town to visit his Pop! Although we were isolated at ‘Goldie’, I loved the peace and solitude of the surrounding jungle at night. We made our own fun and many an Officers Mess party was conducted on the lawns out under the stars. They were the days when we were enriched by the presence of young officers who had stayed on with the Army after having been called up for a tour of duty in Vietnam and who weren’t as conscious of their positions as Officers and Gentlemen! I recall, to my horror, one evening when a couple of wags rode a motorbike through a group of us sitting talking on the lawn outside the Mess during a visit by a brigadier from Murray Barracks. To say the least he wasn’t amused, but just quietly we thought it a great hoot!

The Minister for Defence at the time was Malcolm Fraser and he came to officially open the new depot at Goldie River. We wives were most excited when we learned that we would be entertaining Mrs Fraser at afternoon tea after the opening ceremony. To add a little tropical flavour to the afternoon, it was decided that the venue would be at the ‘old’ Officers Mess, which was by the banks of the Goldie River and had a hauswin (open-sided, thatched building) attached to it. I wonder to this day what Mrs Fraser must have thought when she was offered the plate of scones, only to be beaten to one by a kokomo bird (hornbill) which flew down from a tree and snapped it off the plate!

The end of 1968 again saw us packing up to leave ‘the islands’, this time for Jim to attend Staff College at Queenscliff in Victoria and eventually to go to the Australian Embassy in Washington DC, after which, once again, we were to return to Goldie River. It was now the end of 1973.

Our posting this time wasn’t to be for very long as Jim had made the decision to retire from the Army when the opportunity arose. It was with a tinge of regret on my part, as I was getting back into the ‘swing of things’ again. I know there was something special about our connections with the Pacific Islands Regiment. The friends we made and the time we shared will always remain in my memory and have a special place in my heart.
THE CARD ARRIVED in the afternoon mail. It was from one of the medical orderlies, a shy young man with calm features and a ready smile, a New Irelander who had been part of the Regimental Aid Post (RAP) team ever since dokta and I had come to Taurama several years beforehand.

The medical orderlies at the Taurama Barracks RAP were a keen bunch of young men who had been recruited to the Pacific Islands Regiment from all over Papua New Guinea. Most had received a fair amount of schooling and all seemed to possess beautiful handwriting, which was the trademark of a mission school.

To become a medical orderly, they needed to be able to read and write in English, although the day-to-day communication was in pisin. The brightest ones were taught to work in the small on-site laboratory where slides were prepared (blood, sputum, urine or faeces) for analysis under the microscope to aid in the diagnosis of the gamut of tropical diseases that were rife at the time. Other duties involved being first in line to receive new patients each day where complaints, signs and symptoms were noted before consultation with dokta. Dokta was on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and relied on the orderlies for assistance. He had a heavy workload. Not only was he responsible for all the regular army soldiers in TPNG (which included both PIR and Australian Regular Army soldiers), but he looked after the wives, children and families as well. The small 12-bed ward was often full and the orderlies were the nursing staff. Some orderlies were kept busy in the area of camp hygiene, attending to the water supply and sewerage system and battling the mosquitoes. Who could ever forget the dreaded swing fog machine coming up the road and into our homes, terrifying
our *hausbois* and our children! Others became stretcher-bearers and many belonged to the Pipe Band and the *dokta*’s hockey team.

From my observations, it appeared that the orderlies were not only capable, but keen to learn and willing to work hard, and there seemed to be a pleasant sense of cooperation amongst the staff. The newly arrived doctor unintentionally broke with protocol one evening by inviting the entire RAP staff to dinner at our place. This was the first of many such evenings and may have contributed to the relaxed atmosphere at work.

Our then two-year-old son, Kim, was a great favourite at the RAP. All the orderlies knew him and were waiting to say hello each afternoon when the children and I walked down the dusty road to collect *dokta* after work. They called Kim *waitpela gras bilong pikinini bilong dokta* (the doctor’s white-haired child).

In September 1963 I had just arrived home from Taurama General Hospital in Boroko with our newborn second son, Dirk, when that carefully chosen card arrived. In addition to words of good wishes, there was a message which went something like this: ‘On Saturday morning I would like to help you by minding your children because I think *dokta* would like to take you shopping.’

Realising that this was something quite special, I readily agreed and arrangements were made for an 8 am start. Dressed in our best, we all set off over the bumpy road, our little car filled to overflowing with extras wanting a lift to either Boroko or Port Moresby, our toddler and the new baby held firmly on the lap of our friend.

On arrival in town, the children and their carer were settled under one of those huge shady trees — was it a poinciana with its scarlet flowers and fern-like leaves, or a frangipani, a flame tree, or possibly a mango? I don’t remember now, but what I do remember is that I knew our sons were in excellent hands. With that in mind, *dokta* and I went off and paid a visit to the local jeweller where, to my complete surprise, a beautiful pearl ring was chosen. To this day, apart from my wedding ring, that is the only ring I ever wear.

Returning to the shade tree a short time later, we noticed that quite a crowd had gathered around our PIR soldier and his charges. That distinctive green uniform stood out as clearly as our son’s white hair. Everyone seemed happy and the baby was fast asleep. There seemed to
be much chatter and laughter in various languages — Motu, *pisin* and English, and there was no doubt that our friend was being offered some good advice in addition to some gentle teasing. I have always regretted that a photograph was not taken to capture the moment. However, wearing that treasured ring always vividly rekindles the memory.

Looking back over all those years I realise the value of the friendships made at that time. We were young and far away from our families and had to rely on those around us for support. The community certainly rallied around in times of crisis and need. When babies were born or mothers or children ill, someone always cared for the older children or cooked meals for the family.

I have never forgotten the kindness and support I received from so many people. Nor could I ever forget the thoughtful gift of Private Anthony Lakau Sali.
Medical orderlies from the Taurama Barracks RAP
A RUSHED ARRIVAL

Stephanie Lloyd

A POSTING to the Pacific Islands Regiment, which we received in December 1963, was exactly what we wanted. The prospect of living in Papua New Guinea was really exciting for both of us.

My husband, Russ, had been promoted to the rank of Major two years earlier and he wanted to serve his time as a company commander in a really active, hands-on role. He felt that the Pacific Islands Regiment in Papua New Guinea would be a good place to do that. He had grown up in a family where there was a lot of talk about New Guinea. There were New Guinean artefacts in his home as a boy. His father had commanded the successful 16th Brigade just 20 years earlier in the fierce battles over the Kokoda Track in the Second World War. Towards the end of the war his father had also conducted a comprehensive survey of native labour in Papua New Guinea on behalf of the Australian Government. It was a country his father knew well and from both Russ's and his family's viewpoint it would be a great posting.

I too was a bit adventurous and very keen to go somewhere different. I had travelled in Europe for three years before our marriage and was keen to travel overseas again.

We had been married for eight years, and this was to be our sixth move in the army. We had three little boys and I was four months pregnant with our fourth son. We knew there was to be a major battalion exercise, conducted on the Kokoda Track in the Owen Stanley Ranges, just three weeks after our arrival in Port Moresby, so there would be little time to settle in as a family. Shortly after that, Russ was scheduled to go with his company to Vanimo, in the West Sepik District near the border on the north coast of New Guinea, for six months — A Company’s outstation duty.
The prospect of having our fourth baby with Russ away did not strike me as particularly challenging. There were two good Australian general practitioners in Moresby at the time. Taurama General Hospital was not too bad (by Territory standards, it was good), with mainly European professional staff. Despite having severe arthritis, my mother promised to come from Perth to help with the children. As well as that, we had an excellent *hausboi* who was competent and cheerful. Sawa was a Lae man who quickly became my good friend and helper. I knew too that army friends would help me, and of course they did so in the best army tradition.

Russ went off to Vanimo for his outstation duty fairly much at ease about the domestic scene he was leaving for six months. ‘*Yu lukaut gut long misis plis Sawa*’ (Look after my wife, please, Sawa), Russ said as he left — and to the two older boys, aged seven and six, ‘Look after Mummy, you two boys’.

On one side of our married quarter lived Lieutenant Colonel Ken McKenzie and his wife, Lynette. Ken was the Commanding Officer of the Pacific Islands Regiment. On the other side were Major Geoff Hollings and his wife, Pat. Geoff was the Second in Command of the Battalion. I was certainly lucky to be so well situated. Both these families could not have been more caring or solicitous of my situation in Russ’s absence.

As my pregnancy progressed into the last month, Geoff rigged up an army field telephone, the World War II type, from our bedroom to theirs. (We had no proper telephone — only the CO, the 2IC and the doctor had phones.) There was no phone link to Vanimo at that time. Wives could not communicate on the army radio in the headquarters as they had done in earlier times. This could have been because of the unsettled situation with Indonesia on the West Irian border near Vanimo and concern about security on the army radio network. So I was really cut off from contact with my husband, except for the slow and unreliable delivery of letters.

In the late afternoon while all the children played together in the open gardens around the married quarter patch, I often had a drink and a chat with our neighbours, Ken and Lynette or Pat and Geoff. If Geoff hadn’t seen me, he would ring me from the field phone in their bedroom to ours, only a few yards away, just to check that I was all right.
The phone was a cumbersome khaki metal machine with a handle on the top, which you wound before you spoke. It could only be used one way at a time, with each party finishing by saying 'over' before the reply could be given. Using it was lots of fun really.

Labour pains began one evening when Captain Mike Morrison and his young wife, Helen, were having a meal with me. We’d known Michael as a staff cadet at Duntroon in earlier times. They kindly stayed till about 11 pm when we all decided that I should ring Geoff next door, because he was the one who had volunteered to take me to hospital. Pat agreed to look after the other children until my mother arrived some days later. By the time we left home, my labour was well advanced.

We drove the rough nine miles (14 kilometres) from the barracks to the hospital in Geoff’s car, through the dark scrubby bush along that winding unsealed road we all knew so well. Each time I made some sound as another contraction began, Geoff would jam his foot down on the accelerator, so we seemed to advance in uneven lurches to the hospital.

The Australian nurse on night duty in the maternity ward began a long and extensive session of questioning me about previous births before admitting me. This I found absolutely exasperating. The birth felt most imminent!
'Perhaps your husband could answer these questions,' she said. ‘He’s not my husband, he’s just a friend,’ I replied sharply. Poor Geoff — he was kindness itself and I probably sounded most ungrateful to him. The nurse sent him home saying that he could check 'how things were going' in the morning.

She then bedded me down in a ward of ten or so sleeping young mothers and returned to her cup of coffee at the desk. I knew I would not be there long. She’d told me to just try to sleep, but the birth was much closer than she realised. I rang my bell very soon after and was led by her along the dark unlit verandah on the second floor towards the labour ward. Once there she found the labour ward door securely locked and she had no key nor was she sure where to find it, it seemed.

She panicked, telling me ‘not to dare to have that baby’ until she returned and went off to find the key. There had been what she called ‘a prowler’ the previous night and that’s why the labour ward door was locked. What odd thinking was this? I really disliked her for saying that. By ‘prowler’, she meant a local man. We didn’t think or talk like that out at Taurama Barracks.

I was left alone standing there in the dark on the verandah in my little cotton nightgown, abandoned by the one person whose job it was to give me a helping hand. I found real solace thinking of Papua New Guinean girls in their villages giving birth alone in the most natural of surroundings.

Fortunately, the key was found. The doctor arrived, but well after the birth, which was so rushed that John suffered some damage through lack of oxygen in the moments of birth. Later he had some learning difficulties, diagnosed as related to his rushed arrival, but fortunately managed to overcome them during his school years. There was also trouble with his birth certificate because the birth had barely been witnessed by one witness, let alone two as the certificate required. (Quite recently John again had problems with his passport because of some difficulty with the original PNG birth certificate.)

For the days after John’s birth, I was back in the ward of ten women and I enviously watched the twice-daily visits of their husbands — hugging, kissing, whispering and encouraging their wives. I was not without visitors — the officers and wives from PIR were just wonderful. But I was really longing to see Russ and so wanted him to see our fourth son, who was such a beautiful little boy.
When I was due to go home, our good CO, Ken McKenzie, made some arrangements that unexpectedly brought Russ home for a day from Vanimo. It was not normal at all to return during the six months’ outstation duty.

I dreamt of being tenderly helped by him as I carried our new baby down the flights of open wooden stairs on the side of the hospital to our car below. He arrived looking so thin and soldierly in his juniper greens. It wasn’t always easy with a company of PIR on outstation. He was in a military frame of mind. He admired our new baby and then said, ‘I’ll go downstairs and pay the bill. See you at the cash office on the ground floor’. Oh well — I’d never been cosseted, so I managed and of course everything was just fine when we arrived home. The next day he flew back to Vanimo.

About two weeks later I was invited to visit Vanimo for a few days and to stay in the home of the District Officer and his wife. They lived on a hill overlooking the old grass airstrip in beautiful Vanimo. My mother assured me she was well enough to stay a few extra days to mind our older boys while I went on this marvellous trip with baby John.

I booked my flight on what the airline, Trans-Australia Airlines, called the ‘Golden Orchid’ flight to Vanimo. I could have flown to Sydney for the price of the airfare. The flight was delayed by nearly two hours from 10 am till almost noon and, when we boarded the plane, it was a DC3 with canvas seats, side-saddle, for about 28 passengers facing each other along both sides. Baby John’s basket was just placed, unanchored, at my feet. To add insult to injury, the air hostess’s stockings were badly laddered.

High over the Owen Stanley Mountains, we realised the consequences of the late departure out of Port Moresby. Drafts of hot noonday air rose from the mountains, causing air pockets in which we rose, then dropped dramatically. The Buka basket suddenly fell away from below our baby, frightening both him and me. I could only console him by holding and breastfeeding him. All the other passengers were men and I just had to get over my inhibition about breastfeeding in public. So it was that we progressed on our ‘Golden Orchid’ flight, which I quickly re-christened the ‘Wilting Orchid’ flight.
We made it only as far as Wewak by nightfall and I was in tears when told we could not go on to Vanimo until the next day. There were no night landing facilities at the northern airports in those days. Friends at Moem Barracks very kindly offered me and our tiny baby a bed for the night. We flew on to Vanimo the next day.

I had lost one of my five precious days with Russ, thanks to TAA. However, the other four days were just idyllic, lazing on that perfect beach under the coconut palms in front of the PIR camp and just being together with our new baby whenever Russ was able to be away from work.

When Russ finally returned from outstation duty in Vanimo, the PIR chaplain Father Ray Quirk baptised our baby over the giant clam shell which served as the baptismal font in our much-loved Taurama haus lotu — the chapel where so many couples were married, Christmases celebrated and babies christened before and after ours.
OUR DRIVER, Corporal Inawa from Buin in Bougainville, helped me to learn tok pisin. He was jet black and not the most handsome of men, but he was most likeable. One day he told me that he had a meri (girlfriend) and was thinking of getting married. Being interested in the romance, I asked him the following week how his meri was. ‘In hospital,’ he replied, but ‘i orait, gat pikinini tasol!’ (It’s alright, she’s got a new baby.) I was somewhat lost for words, English or pisin! So began my involvement in one of the most unusual weddings I have ever attended.

Joan, the bride-to-be, had trained as a nurse and was well educated. When she became pregnant to a European orderly, no one was unduly upset. The elders of her tribe and Corporal Inawa’s father and brothers arranged for Joan and Corporal Inawa to be married. In response to questioning, they were both rather vague about when the marriage was to take place, as there were tribal formalities to go through.

Imagine my shock one Saturday morning at 6.30 am to have a call from my husband from the airport where Corporal Inawa had driven him. ‘Plane about to take off, so can’t talk, but do you think you could find a wedding dress for Joan by 10 o’clock?’ Of course it couldn’t be true, but it was! Corporal Inawa appeared on my doorstep soon after with a big grin: ‘i orait misis, yu ken painim dress long YWCA’ (It’s alright, missus, you can find a wedding dress at the YWCA).

The next few hours were rather nightmarish. I couldn’t do anything until after 9 am when the ‘Y’ opened. There was only one wedding dress available because the other five or six they had hired out had not been returned. The remaining white taffeta creation was too tight and unironed, but I took it, the baby and Joan back to my house. The dress needed ironing, and the baby needed feeding, but the bride was quite
unperturbed. I was in a lather of perspiration. It must have been the hottest day ever, but there was just going to be time for me to shower and put on a clean dress…

Suddenly I thought of our beautiful little army chapel where the flowers were done each Saturday afternoon. ‘Joan, do you think that any of your friends who are coming will have thought to put some fresh flowers in the church?’ ‘No, misis’ (with another happy grin).

I left her to finish ironing the dress and feeding the baby, rushed out, grabbed lots of hibiscus and frangipani from the garden, galloped down to the chapel and threw out the dead flowers from the previous Sunday. The Chaplain came in, but didn’t know if the wedding was on or off, as he’d been called during the night to settle a fight between the betrothed. It was then that I learnt why there had been no wedding dress. Joan had spent her savings — $20 — buying one, but Inawa in his rage had torn it to shreds!

The wedding guests started to arrive. I rushed home to finish ironing the dress, feeding the baby, dressing the bride — with no time to even wash my face, let alone change and shower. I gathered up the hausboi who, because he was a wantok (same tribe), could give the bride away. We all crowded into the Volkswagen with Joan holding her baby until we got to the church, where I relieved her.

The service was a very moving one in pisin and included a little lecture by Father Ray Quirk about how they mustn’t fight any more and how they must look after the pikinini. However, I didn’t really enjoy the service because I suddenly realised how flat everyone would feel without a party to follow. As no one else had thought of it, we adjourned to our house for the reception stopping off at the canteen to buy beer, lemonade and packets of biscuits — there wasn’t time to organise a wedding cake!

Marriage of Corporal Inawa to his bride, Joan
‘HOW WOULD you like to organise the telephone system in Port Moresby?’ I was asked. Whatever that meant, it didn’t sound good and I declined.

I had turned up in Konedobu, Port Moresby, at the office of the Public Service Commissioner seeking employment. I was fortunate to have a degree in Social Work from the University of Queensland and had also completed an Arts degree, as I had initially been too young to gain entrance to the Social Work course. That put me up a few notches, as the Territory administration was desperate for anyone with skills.

In fact, over the next week I declined a few other increasingly bizarre if slightly more lucrative offers. But I had the germ of an idea. I had worked for a while in England and for some years at the Royal Brisbane Hospital as a social worker. It would have been presumptuous to launch into social work immediately in that unknown culture, but perhaps one day...

I was sent to see the Director of Public Health, Dr Roy Scragg, a very nice man, and I started work the next day as a Project Officer. My first job was to edit and compile the Health Department’s Annual Report 1964–1965. Its publication deadline for tabling in the House of Assembly had expired three weeks prior to my employment. It was a huge project which in desperation I took home with me over a weekend — ‘home’ being a one-room converted garage with no running water, the only accommodation we newly-weds had been able to locate. Douglas, my husband, had just come home from hospital after surgery and was temporarily confined to bed. We sat up in bed together (there was nowhere else to sit anyway) and he worked with me — wielding a red pen to scratch out huge slabs of text and muttering ‘too
verbose’. Later I received an official letter from Dr Scragg thanking me ‘and my family’ for a job well done!

After that I edited a variety of departmental publications with titles like How to Build a Village Well and Stores in a Medical Aid Post. On one occasion I was required to attend a departmental medical officers’ conference with a brief to covertly score young PNG medicos (all Suva graduates) on the quality of their participation. I was interested to see in the Australian press some years later that a high scorer had just been appointed Director of Public Health.

Despite my repeated warnings to Dr Scragg that my three years’ study of statistics at university still rendered me pretty useless in this area, he soon had me working as assistant to him and to Mr Lon Tomlinson (Assistant Director Administration) on a five-year plan for student intake at Papuan Medical College and Health Department staffing in preparation for Independence. There was at that time huge pressure from the Third World bloc in the United Nations to speed up Independence and much concern amongst the powers that be for the welfare of the country if this came too soon.

I had been going to pisin lessons and using every opportunity to find out about the people and their culture — our presence in PIR, where friendly cross-cultural contact was the norm, helped me greatly. During this period I had many opportunities to talk with senior medical and administrative personnel in the Health Department and to learn how things worked in health and welfare around the Territory. There was only one qualified social work position in the entire country as far as I could discern. This was a psychiatric position in the Health Department at the Bomana psychiatric facility. The Department of District Administration employed welfare officers in communities throughout the Territory who did excellent work at the grass-roots level. Most were not professionally qualified in social work.

We were to be in the Territory for only three years and I began to think after seven or eight months that it was time to start talking about establishing a Social Work Department within Port Moresby Hospital. Dr Scragg listened to me and suggested I draft a job description for the first position to submit to the hierarchy and eventually to Treasury. What a thrill when it finally passed through the bureaucratic hoops and the first professional social work position in the PNG general hospital
service was written into the establishment. They laughed at me when I said it should be advertised — who else would possibly be available? After much debate, it was agreed that I would work in the Paediatric Unit with Dr David Bowler, a consultant paediatrician at the hospital and also an Assistant Director of Public Health (Paediatrics). He was familiar with the social work role and his ready acceptance, encouragement and professional support were invaluable. I was given a cavernous basement in Douglas Street in the old town centre in which to establish my office. It was opposite the Maternal and Child Health Centre where I also spent some time and I commutted the few kilometres to the hospital in Taurama Road in Boroko where I did most of my work.

Sadly, the hospital was divided into two parts, known as the European Section and the Native Section. I opted to work in the latter but agreed to take occasional referrals from the other part. The Native Hospital was very basic with bare cement floors but it did have adequate hospital beds and cots for the babies. During rounds with the specialists, we would frequently find the wrong child in the bed — perhaps another child of the family — while the patient was running around the ward. It was a communal affair, as families would camp in the hospital grounds for weeks on end, perhaps not quite trusting us with their beloved relatives. Special shower and lavatory blocks had been built for their use.

During the lead-up period I had spent about four weeks with two welfare officers in the Port Moresby area. Miss Paul Fairhall was based at Hohola, a planned village/suburb not far west of Boroko where basic administration housing had been built for a mainly indigenous but also mixed-race population. Paul was a wonderful person. Previously a missionary with the London Missionary Society and a registered nurse, she had for many years been Matron of the Gemo Island Hospital for Hansen’s Disease (leprosy). She had a charming young Papuan assistant, Poukari, who later spent some time with me at the hospital. Mrs Thelma Price, also remarkable, was a Territorian of long standing and wife of a well-known retired doctor. She was based at Kaugere and worked around that community. Some of her work was with the wives of young indigenous professional men who had come from the villages and wanted to learn about the European way; for example, so that they could entertain their husbands’ colleagues. One day I saw her teaching
them how to set a table and arrange the flowers. I tried to soak up as much about the cultural issues as possible from these three wise and knowledgeable women who were so generous with their time.

The first thing I discovered was that I had learnt the wrong language! *Pisin* was the lingua franca of New Guinea, and of PIR, but not of Papua where Port Moresby was situated. There were over 750 languages in Papua New Guinea. Pure Motu was the language of the coastal people around Moresby — the purest being spoken in the villages of Hanabada and Poreporena. A somewhat simpler version, Police Motu, was the lingua franca in Papua but some people spoke only their local language (*ples tok*), especially the women who were generally not in the workforce. I then went to Police Motu lessons, but it was more complex grammatically than *pisin*. Sometimes I could get an interpreter, especially when families did not speak Police Motu. Sometimes I needed two to ‘tanimtok’ (translate), but interpreters could be a mixed blessing! Mostly I just had to manage on my own.

Social workers in hospital are engaged in exploring with the patient and family any issues of concern related to the illness, either causatively or consequentially, and helping people work through these problems either through counselling or by changing the environment, or both. When a social worker is operating in another culture from her own and where that culture is changing with the introduction of European influence, the complexities multiply infinitely.

This was the case with one of the first patients referred to me — a two-year-old Papuan boy desperately ill with Kwashiorkor Disease. Kwashiorkor is a potentially fatal illness of malnutrition in children — more specifically caused by protein deficiency. Typically these little children have pathetically thin legs and grossly enlarged abdomens — the images we see of starving children in third world countries on our television screens. We were interested to learn what social factors were operating in Port Moresby at that time that were allowing this to happen, because this was not the only case. Why had this particular child been at risk? Were others in the family at risk also? And, if this child survived, how could we build in some safeguards for his future?

After a few home visits I began to establish some trust with both his parents. Fathers were usually the authority in the household and visits had to be arranged when they were home, at least at first, to gain their
approval, but most of my work was with the mothers. This family was not living in a traditional coastal village — they came from further inland and had established themselves in rented housing in a ‘new’ urban village. Some but not all of their traditional ways had been lost in the transplanting; for example, they had no garden to grow food anymore. They had a constant stream of relatives from the distant village who had no work in the town, and by custom they were obliged to feed and shelter them. While this worked in the village, their resources were stretched in Port Moresby where they could not grow their own food. Powerful pressures were at work to observe the old ways with the ever-present threat that failure to do so may result in the village people casting puri puri (a magic spell) on a family member. Tradition dictated that the best food went to the visitors — the hosts’ children, especially the youngest, being low in the pecking order. This child had been rapidly weaned with the advent of a new baby, and had been living on a diet of kaukau (sweet potato) over an extended period.

After many months in hospital, he was gaining weight and growing stronger. We started to plan for his discharge home. I had spent a lot of time with his mother talking about the family’s circumstances and the Infant Welfare nurses had introduced a dietary education program, but what about the relatives? The mother understood what we were saying and wanted to feed her family properly but could not risk the displeasure of the wantoks. Really they had to go, and this was a dilemma. Not even the words could be spoken because the family may have magical means of knowing, but I saw the pleading in her eyes. Desperate situations called for unorthodox remedies and, without a word to the family, I called in the police who managed to evict the visitors on the grounds of overcrowding. I think she knew what I had done. We monitored the household over a long period to avoid a repetition and felt we had achieved something. All Kwashiorkor patients became automatic social work referrals thereafter.

Transport was an issue at times. Occasionally the Department would provide a Land Rover with a driver who could also interpret, and in some cases both were essential. One home visit involved a Land Rover, a canoe trip and a long hike up the beach to the village. I would regularly go on patrol with the Infant Welfare nurses who ran clinics in outlying areas and provided preventive health education. Gradually we learnt about each other’s roles and how we could work as a team. This
afforded a chance for us to follow up with the families of children in hospital or recently discharged. Sometimes we would just drive along looking for nappies on bush clotheslines, which we called flags. Mostly I used my own transport — a noisy little blue Volkswagen whose muffler was constantly being knocked out of service on the rough roads. I think I beat the living daylights out of the poor little car and when we eventually ‘went finish’ to Australia, we had to accept $100 for it from a dealer.

Traditional coastal villages were often built out over the water on high stilts with access up vertical steps and along rickety communal walkways. I wore high-heeled sandals only on the first visit! It would have been an intrusion and maybe even unsafe for a white person to go into most of the areas I visited — the traditional villages, the little settlements, the administration suburbs and, sadly, the urban slums. There were no phones for a visit to be arranged in advance and, sometimes, on arrival, I needed all the communication skills I could muster. I wore a white uniform to denote my association with the hospital and this literally and metaphorically helped open doors. On occasions, breaking down the barriers of language, colour, culture, fear and suspicion took a while. One day I was driven to a coastal village by a driver who had been quizzing me about my mission. I told him a little
of the case so that he could interpret for me sensitively. He pelted up on the beach and, with a screech of brakes, sounded the horn and shouted in Motu, ‘Okay, this sinabada wants to know which is the wicked family who took their child out of the hospital?’ It didn’t help! There were times when I felt that what I was doing was a drop in the ocean, and I would become discouraged. I missed professional contact and having professional colleagues around me, peer reviews, journal clubs and just the opportunity to talk over a difficult case. I think I would have hugged another social worker if one had turned up. Through all this I had marvellous support from Douglas, and this carried me through.

One memorable case was a little five-year-old girl, Porpori, who had been diagnosed with rheumatic fever. Her parents were known to be non-compliant with the hospital team — failing to turn up for appointments, irregularly providing prescribed medications, not reporting infections as requested, and so on. On this occasion they had ‘absconded’ with her from the hospital when she was an in-patient and quite sick. I needed to do a home visit to try to bring the child back with parental consent — a delicate situation. I assessed that these were loving parents. They had taken Porpori from the hospital so that they could take her to a puri puri man, who they genuinely believed might cure her. Their non-compliance was due to their belief that the European medical approach was irrelevant, maybe even harmful. It was important not to challenge their own cultural beliefs, but to establish trust and somehow to communicate that perhaps they could try both approaches — in other words, hedge their bets. Eventually, days later we got her back and a long process of supportive counselling ensued to maintain adequate medical management.

Pani was a bright-eyed, curly-haired, four-year-old boy who had just been diagnosed by the visiting Commonwealth Acoustics Laboratory as profoundly deaf. He had no language at all because he could hear nothing. A hearing aid was prescribed and eventually arrived from Australia. We knew that this would help, but his hearing would still be limited. He had to learn to speak and have an education, but there were no facilities in TPNG — no speech therapists and certainly no deaf school. The day he was fitted with the aid, I took out a big old wind-up alarm clock and will never forget the expression of beatific joy when
he heard it tick — the first sound he had ever heard. Deaf school in Australia was considered and rejected because of the horrific social and cultural uprooting. As a compromise, I decided I would try teaching him to lip read — not really social work, but why not? I enlisted help from the Deaf School in Sydney who regularly sent correspondence lessons, which I altered to be culturally understandable, cutting out pictures of pigs and crocodiles and coconut trees from old magazines. Pani’s father could speak and write English, but his mother was a Motu speaker, so the lessons had to be in Motu. Later I managed to obtain a place for Pani in one of the limited number of government pre-schools and I hoped he would be on his way.

Over a period of time I had become quite unwell and began having to take sick leave more often than I would have liked. This went on for quite a while and although I was found to have an enlarged liver and spleen, there was never a diagnosis, and so no treatment. This sort of situation was not uncommon in the tropics and I didn’t really recover until we left. I continued to work as best I could, but eventually common sense prevailed and I was forced to resign. Feeling like a deserter, I left all my notes, case records and the systems I had set up, and walked away, comforted only by the knowledge that there was now an established position — and a precedent. About a year later and after we had left, a young Australian couple, both qualified social workers and volunteers, picked up where I had left off.

A quarter of a century later, out of curiosity, I picked up the phone and rang the Senior Social Worker at the Port Moresby Hospital, telling her I used to work there. She, of course, knew nothing of this story, but in answer to my queries was able to tell me that there were now well-staffed, established social work departments in all the major regional hospitals.

I would like to express my gratitude to all the staff and colleagues who helped me over that time, and my appreciation to those who put their trust in me, especially the children and their parents. Without that, nothing could have been achieved.

(Patients’ names and some details have been altered to protect confidentiality.)
WIVES CLUB — before we arrived in Papua New Guinea I had heard about the important role it played in the Pacific Islands Regiment. A weekly meeting of soldiers’ wives who lived in the barracks, Wives Club was designed to assist them to settle into army life, so different from life in the remote villages from which many of them had come to join their husbands. Wives Club also gave Australian army wives a unique opportunity to become closely involved, to lend support and give real friendship to the local women as they adjusted to leaving behind their families and friends. Not only were they leaving relatives, but also their homes, their gardens, their way of cooking and familiar patterns of everyday life. Part of their adjustment occasionally involved learning to live side by side with families who may have come from a formerly hostile tribe. They all had to learn to co-exist peacefully in the barracks, according to army rules, to use money to buy supplies at the store, and to care for their families in a totally different environment.

Wives Clubs were part of a wide network of groups fostered by the Australian Administration to assist local indigenous women to adapt to the rapidly changing society into which they were moving. By the mid-1960s there were Police Wives Clubs, Plantation Wives Clubs, Mission Wives Clubs and Army Wives Clubs. Health, hygiene, nutrition, budgeting, sewing were all subjects taught and discussed during Wives Club meetings.

One of the means by which soldiers’ wives from many different language groups bonded together and settled into a cohesive group was the quick mastery of tok pisin — the lingua franca in Taurama Barracks. Most of the women were fluent within a very short time, no matter what their own ples tok (local language) was.
Languages were my special interest. I determined to try hard to become fluent in *tok pisin* so that I could participate adequately in Wives Club. I began by having Sawa, our *hausboi*, correct all my mistakes and by trying to talk *pisin* whenever and wherever possible. Sawa would double-up with laughter at my mistakes — it seemed so easy to make drastic, often rude or vulgar mistakes. He would let out loud whoops of mirth that echoed through the house, sometimes waking baby John, but then he’d correct me solemnly and without embarrassment in his open and sunny way. Sometimes he would praise me when I got it right — ‘*gutpela misis,*’ he’d say.

Being from Lae where, it was said, the best *pisin* was spoken, Sawa proved to be an excellent teacher. Little by little my *pisin* improved. Two soldiers’ wives who became my babysitters and dear friends — Mrs Watuna and Mrs Tobesa — also helped to develop my language skills. With them I could chat about things in general and feel at ease in speaking the language.

Later I attended an adult education course in town, one night a week over six months, run by an older Australian man who’d been in the Territory for years as an agricultural adviser. (*Didiman* was the *pisin* word for his earlier occupation.) This was a serious study of the language — both oral and written. The spelling of the language was not fully standardised then. We used Father Mihalic’s *The Jacaranda Dictionary and Grammar of Melanesian Pidgin* as a reference tool and had written exercises to complete at home. Father Ray Quirk, former Franciscan missionary and fluent speaker, also gave lessons for officers, which some wives were lucky enough to attend. All this helped enormously and stood me in good stead for our two postings in Papua New Guinea.

One activity that really helped the soldiers’ wives to settle into the life of the barracks was the good, old-fashioned game of basketball (or ‘seven a side’, now called ‘netball’). This game was quickly mastered by the local wives. They loved it and seemed to have a natural skill at the game. Through basketball, friendships were made outside the tribal groupings and *tok pisin* was the language in which they communicated. Our PIR teams were highly competitive and very skilful.

Women’s basketball had begun in Papua New Guinea in the 1950s with help and encouragement from Lady Cleland, the Administrator’s wife, who became Patron of the PNG Women’s Basketball Association. She
writes of this early beginning and the establishment of the Association and the organised competitions in her book *Grass Roots to Independence and Beyond: The Contribution by Women in Papua New Guinea, 1951–1991*.

Army fielded a couple of teams in the local competition. The women concluded each of the weekly Wives Club meetings with an energetic practice game. They often played further games during the week when their teenage daughters came home after school. The basketball courts, provided by the army, were well placed in the barracks near the Pacific Islander married quarters, so the army teams had every advantage to do well compared with many village teams in the competition.

Naomi Bell and I decided we could really help in the local association games by qualifying as basketball umpires. I had played in school and at university and the same rules applied in PNG as in Australia. We submitted our request to sit for the umpires’ exam and, in reply, received our little book of rules to study. Some of the soldiers’ wives were also preparing to become umpires, so when the big day arrived, we requested an army truck and driver to take us into Ela Beach Primary School ‘in town’ and to collect us again when the exam was over.

At the school we were shown to a classroom looking out over the beautiful Moresby harbour. We were seated in rows at school desks, similar to the ones I had known in my early Western Australian childhood — narrow bench seats and long hinged desks with a hole for the inkwell. They were screwed to the floor with elaborate brass clawed feet and were terribly uncomfortable. They were cast-offs from some early, outback school in Australia, no doubt.

When the exam began, I realised what I had not fully recognised before, that some of our PIR wives could neither read nor write, yet there they were bravely fronting up for a written exam. Other wives, who could read, had apparently drilled them in the rules, and special arrangements had been made for them to whisper their answers to individual examiners, who recorded them, then put the women’s thumbprints on their completed exam papers. As far as I can remember, we all passed and received our cards to say we were qualified basketball umpires of the PNG Women’s Basketball Association.

From then on, Naomi and I were able to go with our PIR teams when required and to umpire the competition games at various village
locations all around Port Moresby — Bomana, Tatana, Hanuabada, Ela Beach, Hohola, as well as at home in Taurama.

One of my early umpiring tasks was at the Taurama Barracks courts. It was a match between the PIR women and Hanuabada. I knew there’d been enmity and ‘bad blood’ between PIR soldiers and the Hanuabada men over a football match and other incidents that had happened around Koki Market, but I did not dream of the ‘bad blood’ extending to women’s basketball. The atmosphere between the two teams was
frosty right from the beginning and there were lots of muttered 
comments throughout the first quarter of the game. Suddenly to my 
total surprise, many of the players left the court and were down in a big 
ditch nearby, shouting abuse and throwing stones at each other. I blew 
my whistle but to no avail. As umpire, I’d lost all control of the game. 

Warrant Officer Osi’s wife — a natural leader and the oldest and most 
senior of the women because of her husband’s position as Regimental 
Sergeant Major, the most senior rank held by a PNG soldier at the time — asked whether she should run to get her husband. That seemed like 
great idea and, being Saturday, Mr Osi would be working in his garden 
in their nearby married quarter. Mrs Osi was fleet of foot. 

Her husband’s stern manner and loud authoritative voice quickly 
restored order, where my whistle blowing had been quite futile. He 
stayed, scowling at the women till the game was over, but it took me 
quite a few weeks to regain my confidence as an umpire. 

One terribly hot Saturday afternoon we arrived for a match at the Ela 
Beach courts. The weather was at Port Moresby’s most oppressive. To 
the local women’s shame, someone had forgotten to renew the lines on 
the courts following recent heavy rains. There, on the courts, we saw 
the distinguished patron of the Association, Lady Cleland, in a floppy 
sun hat, marking out the lines with a wobbly old cylinder that 
haphazardly dribbled a white mixture out of a vent at the back. Her 
secretary hovered nearby. ‘Mipela sem tumas’ (we are all very ashamed), 
the players said, overcome with guilt to see the nambawan misis bilong gavman (the Administrator’s wife) doing the job that one of their 
women had failed to do. 

At one other game that same season, the PIR wives themselves had 
requested their army transport for a game in an outlying village. The 
truck arrived in good time, delivered the team to their destination and 
departed for other duties and deliveries. However, no one had thought 
to request a truck to collect them after the game, as army routine would 
require. They all waited nervously till it was almost dark. Again Mrs 
Osi was the heroine of the day. She walked nearly half an hour to the 
only phone in the village to request the army truck to return to collect 
them for the trip back to Taurama. 

It was dark when the worried players arrived back home and most of the 
husbands were angry at the late return — dinner was not ready and
they’d been left with the children far too long. There were many domestic incidents that night in the Pacific Islanders married quarters. There were men shouting, women crying and one innocent wife received a black eye from her irate husband. It was agreed that women's basketball was at the heart of the matter.

One corporal’s wife thought she had the solution to the women’s troubles. She went out in the dark with her axe and chopped down the goal posts on the basketball courts. The posts were army property, supplied and maintained by the army, so when the culprit was finally detected, her husband, the corporal, was asked to explain the damage to army property. My husband, Russ, had by then become the Battalion Second in Command and had to deal with such domestic matters. He ordered the corporal to replace the posts. The soldier was greatly shamed by his wife's action. I hate to think of the domestic upheaval that probably followed his return home that evening.

At the end of the season, Lady Cleland, the much-loved patron, invited all the Association players to lunch at Government House — a most generous invitation as there must have been several hundred in the Port Moresby area. We explained to our players how special this would be — the big house, the beautiful gardens, the delicious feast we would all share. We emphasised the need for best clothes and thongs (if available) for the feet. Mrs Osi always felt that the army must show the others how to behave! ‘Up armi,’ she would call in her deep strong voice, husky with pride.

Our instructions and enthusiasm must have really turned our players off. When the truck did the rounds of the married quarters, none of the wives was ready. Some were gardening, or lazily boiling clothes in outside coppers. No one was smiling, waiting in excitement as we expected. Lots of cajoling finally got the players into the truck but, silent and sultry on arrival at the gates of Government House, they refused to budge from the lawns at the bottom level of the garden. It was all a bit intimidating for them. I explained the dilemma to Lady Cleland who kindly said she quite understood. She sent our meal down to the lawns below while the others hob-nobbed in the ‘big house’. There we stayed till the truck returned in the late afternoon to take us home to Taurama. This was just another of the unpredictable turn of events in our close involvement with Pacific Islander wives.
I was paid a lovely compliment when Mrs Elau came to our backdoor one day. She was a very good basketballer and active in Wives Club and I had come to know her well through these activities. She told me she was expecting her sixth child and, if it was a girl, she would like to name her after me. I was very touched by this gesture.

When the time came for the tiny baby to be christened, it was arranged to be part of the regular Sunday church service. The dear old thatched, open-sided church, which we all shared at Taurama, was packed with soldiers and their wives, Australian officers and families and — a very special event — Brigadier Ian Hunter and his wife, Rosemary, from Murray Barracks were also in attendance, as they were from time to time.

The time came for the christening. Corporal Elau and family were called forward to stand close to the baptismal font, an enormous pink clam shell from Bootless Bay, mounted on a stand. When it came to the part of the service when the minister asked the parents ‘and what name do you give this child?’, it suddenly dawned on Mrs Elau that she didn’t actually know the name she had decided should be given to her daughter. It was the custom then simply to call an Australian women ‘misis’, or at best ‘Misis Lloyd’, and she did not know my first name at all! Not one to be backward — ever — Mrs Elau turned to those assembled and called very loudly ‘eh misis, what’s your name?’ I absolutely cringed as I almost whispered ‘Stephanie’ from the body of the congregation.

As we were preparing to return to Australia, to a posting in Canberra, Mrs Elau again came to the backdoor of our quarter. This time she suggested that I might like to take my little namesake with us back to Australia and that I could send her back when she’d finished her schooling. I told her this wasn’t possible and that Stephanie Elau must stay with her family in her own country. I’m not sure if this request had always been the sub-plot of naming her after me, but even if it were, I took no exception — albeit I was a bit taken aback at the time.

A close involvement with Wives Club and basketball during this posting helped give an insight into and some understanding of the huge difficulties the PIR wives faced in stepping into a life in the twentieth century. It underlined the gulf between our Australian expectations of them and their ability to adapt to new ways. Close ties and genuine affection were developed by everyone associated with Wives Club.
When we returned in 1971 to another posting in Papua New Guinea in Wewak, I found great advances in Wives Club, a new sophistication and a lot more independence of thought. I started a book club to discuss works written by PNG authors and regularly took a group to a meeting of Penguin Club, promoting public speaking for women in Wewak — an unfamiliar role for many of them. Independence for the country was just around the corner.
1965. I was returning late from shopping in Port Moresby and got caught in the afternoon rush hour — about 4 pm. It was sweltering hot and the cars were moving slowly with impatient expatriate workers longing to arrive home at their dongas, settle under the cool stir of air from the fan and hear the cold chink of ice in a drink.

PNG workers and families were homeward bound too — a confluence of colourful, crowding streams of people on the Ela Beach Road. Bikes, pedestrians and cars all so close together that the accident, when it happened, seemed inevitable.

The scene comes back to me in vivid colour. White coral sand, greenneedled branches of casuarinas, bright red oozing blood on the scraped black skin of his leg and the crumpled wheel of a blue bicycle.

I was sitting in the passenger seat of our car and, as we approached and slowly passed the site of the accident, I saw the reproach in the eyes of the injured man and suffered the angry stares of wantoks who had come to his assistance.

1967. Shopping again, but this time in Boroko. I was alone until one of the older Warrant Officers from the Regiment asked for a lift back to the barracks. There was a torrid dust-laden wind blowing across the wide grassed space between the concrete trade stores. Not many people were around, but as I turned the ignition key, I saw a Papuan woman burdened with baby and coloured bilum bag walking across the grass and calling shrilly to her daughter who was dancing ahead, near the verge of the road. I drove slowly, cautiously, towards them as the laughing, excited child turned back in response to her mother’s voice.
I had decided to stop and wait for them to cross the road but when the mother signalled me impatiently with her free hand, I accelerated forward. At this point, the child, released, ran straight in front of the car and disappeared. I stopped. The soldier got out to investigate and then he and the mother indicated I should reverse. My hands were trembling on the steering wheel, but I changed gear, reversed and got out of the car dreading what I should see. Fortunately no harm had been done. They showed me the dusty imprint of the tyre on her little brown foot. Though tears had replaced the mischievous laughter, she was fortunately not hurt.

By now people started appearing, running up the road and across the grass, calling to each other. They gathered around, but angry accusing voices were silenced by the loud authoritative voice of my green-uniformed passenger. He and I got back in the car and were permitted to drive away.

Safe on the familiar curves of the sandy road that led to Taurama between the dry stretches of tussocky kunai grass and scattered clumps of trees, warm tears trickled down my cheeks. Lost in a haze of misery and self-reproach, I became aware of some irritation in the back seat and an admonitory voice suddenly said: ‘No good you cry, missus. It was not your fault!’ That pronouncement comforted me.

1973. By now local people were driving cars too. Traffic problems had increased and accidents, inevitably, were becoming more frequent. Shirley Allen and her son Johnnie (aged about 14), having driven out of Murray Barracks on their way to the post office, were stopped for several minutes when two cars ahead of them collided. However much Shirley’s nursing training inclined her to give aid to the injured, she knew that it was ill-advised for her to become involved. When she could, she drove on towards the post office and was just parking when she heard another car speeding up behind and then pulling alongside with a grind of brakes and squeal of tyres. Car doors opened, men leapt out and angry voices and hands assaulted her. She was actually dragged out of the car by her hair.

Fortunately, two soldiers from Murray Barracks standing nearby came running to her rescue. When Shirley was released, Johnnie was able to explain (he spoke fluent Motu) that his mother had had nothing to
do with the accident. It was a case of mistaken vehicle identity. The Allens’ car was similar in size and colouring to the car that had been involved. Indeed, they could point to the damaged vehicle, parked outside the police station. The European driver had obeyed the local traffic rules and driven straight to the nearest police station to report the accident and request medical assistance for the injured.
CHRIS DROPPED the ‘bombshell’, ‘I have been posted again. I will be leaving for New Guinea in a few weeks!’

It was December 1966 and for the past year Chris’s battalion had been building up prior to service in Vietnam. After leaving Port Moresby in February 1961, we had moved to Brisbane and later to Malaya, where our two sons Jonathan and Christopher were born in 1963 and 1965. We had been back in Brisbane for a year when, with very little notice, Chris received the posting to Second Battalion, Pacific Islands Regiment (2PIR), at Wewak. By this time he had been promoted to Major and was to take command of B Company.

We unpacked his PIR uniforms, which had lain untouched in the trunks in which they were packed in 1961. Great accolades to Chris’s PIR batman — we simply hung his uniforms on the line to air. They were so stiff they would have stood up unaided, and not a wrinkle to mar their perfect pressing!

Before the children and I could follow Chris, we had to wait until a married quarter at Wewak became available. It was a long wait — until April the next year. Fortunately, Chris was given leave to return to Brisbane to help us move.

On our way to Wewak, we broke the journey at Port Moresby, where Chris had to report to Headquarters, PNG Command. There we visited our good friends Mary and Peter Lalor. At that time, Mary was Territory Commissioner for Guiding. Her husband, Peter, was a solicitor with the Crown Law Department. She encouraged me to raise a Brownie Pack at the 2PIR base in Moem Barracks where there were few sporting or social activities for the children of primary school age. (High
school–aged children of Australian personnel at the base attended schools in Australia.) Mary favoured a combined Brownie Pack catering for all girls in the camp, both indigenous and expatriate.

A few days later we flew on to Wewak and took over our married quarter. We were fortunate to be allotted a house which, though older than most, was equipped with a small rainwater tank, unlike the majority of homes which were relatively new. These new homes were entirely reliant on the mains water supply, which unfortunately had a major defect. The water source was heavily contaminated with salt. It was virtually seawater! A year passed before this problem was fixed. In the interim, water for drinking and washing clothes was supplied daily by truck. In such a humid climate this was a real difficulty, especially for families with young children.

It was a joy to meet up with many friends from previous postings, some with new additions to their families, in particular Colin and Delphia Brewer and their children — our third posting together. It helped me to settle in, as Chris returned to the outstation at Vanimo a few days after we arrived.
A tragic turn of events some months later spurred me to start the Brownie Pack in Wewak. In June, after Chris’s company returned from Vanimo and we were once more together as a family, my dear friend Mary Lalor came on a trip to the East Sepik district in her role as Territory Commissioner for Guiding. On arrival, she stayed with the District Commissioner, Ted Hicks, and his wife. Mary had a busy schedule on her first day in Wewak. On the second and last day of her visit she was to fly to a Catholic Mission just out of Wewak to visit the Guides and Brownies and, on her return, to spend the night with us at Moem Barracks. I had organised a dinner party and had invited some friends from town and the Barracks to meet her. I hoped for some support for the establishment of the Brownies.

Early in the afternoon of her second day, Pat Campbell whose husband, Wally, was Acting CO, came to inform me that Mary’s plane had gone down and a search party had been sent out. At first, I was so shocked I tried desperately to cling to the hope that all would be well. Pat very patiently and gently warned me of the probable outcome. A few hours later we heard the very worst news, that all three were dead: Mary and two priests — the pilot and a New Zealand priest who had come to serve at the Mission on his sabbatical. Of course, now I had to carry out her wishes and form a Brownie Pack (though I felt quite inexperienced as I had never been a Guide or a Brownie as a child).

Guide Headquarters in Port Moresby helped to start us off with books, badges, et cetera and the Brownies were asked to contribute five cents to help pay for these items, although this was not obligatory. The children were enthusiastic and the Sergeants Mess donated a cheque for $30 to get us started.

Delphia and I drove into Wewak to open the bank account for the 1st Moem Brownie Pack. The young teller said we needed two signatories and asked, ‘Are you the Treasurer?’ I replied, ‘No, I am Brown Owl’. His mouth dropped, ‘You can’t put that!’ ‘And she,’ I said, indicating Delphia, ‘she is Tawny Owl.’ He shrugged resignedly and wrote ‘Brown Owl’ and ‘Tawny Owl’.

As suggested by Mary, our Brownie Pack was open to all girls of the appropriate ages. We held our meetings on open ground near the old atap schoolhouse and it was a most successful venture. Unfortunately it was just opposite Battalion Headquarters, so we came under scrutiny.
and were often subject to whistles of appreciation as we danced around the Fairy Ring. Occasionally we were ‘shown off’ to visiting VIPs — good public relations but a bit embarrassing nonetheless.

Sometimes it was a struggle. The Brownies were aged from 7 to 11 years, so our own daughters, Jacinta and Kelly Anne, were too young. Our lovely neighbours, Mark and Marea Cox, had two sons at school in Australia and three girls, Valerie, Cathy and Mary — 10, 6 and 2. Marea and her girls kept an eye on our five children. We would take off to our meetings, leaving wailing children (some) with admonishments of ‘Now, be good children!’ Of course, the tears dried up as soon as we turned the corner.

Wewak was a small town. In 1967, when we arrived, shopping for groceries was limited. There were only two small general stores in the town. There were also some small Chinese trade stores, but these catered primarily for the needs of the indigenous people. Fortunately, we had an Army Canteen Services store at the Barracks. It carried a good stock of groceries and flew in fresh vegetables weekly.

In those days few ships called at Wewak and frequently the town stores would run out of some supplies. I had a civilian friend with three small children who told me she had at times been reduced to gathering grasses and plants in order to get greens for her children. She said there was quite a bit of bad feeling about army families shopping in town when supplies were so low. Fortunately a large modern supermarket opened up the following year and the shipping improved.

The climate in Wewak was very humid and really enervating. Malaria was a constant threat, requiring good hygiene and strict adherence to a daily dose of anti-malarial tablets. We had a worrying first six months with Christopher, then aged two, who seemed to be adversely affected by the climate, but he suddenly recovered his good health.

One of the ‘delights’ of living in Wewak was its dependence on shipping. There was no sheltered harbour or wharf. Ships would anchor offshore and unload their cargo onto rafts or lighters. These would be brought in through the surf and the cargo landed onto the beach and dumped above the highwater mark.

The army quarters were equipped with furniture and a standard issue of crockery, cutlery, pots and pans until one’s personal effects arrived. Ours seemed to be a long time coming. One day Chris was told crates marked
'Mayhew' had been on the beach for several days. Our effects were eventually delivered and unpacking provided great excitement. Our house was built high on reinforced stumps, forming a great breezeway underneath. Our boxes were opened down there. We had quite a band of children on hand to observe what things of interest would turn up, and scooters and little cars were tried out immediately.

In Wewak, few days passed without rain! Unfortunately, water had run down through the middle of the largest crate and some of the contents were ruined.

We were encouraged to employ a domestic servant for whom single accommodation was provided adjacent to the army married quarters. Tom, our hausboi, was such a pleasant person. He was quiet and reliable and had a young wife and baby back in his village near Maprik. He assessed our tok pisin ability as 'Masta nambawan' (number one — excellent) and 'Misis — liklik' (little — poor). He did the cleaning and, incidentally, blew up the motor when he vacuumed a pool of water! He washed the dishes, did the laundry and some ironing, which was great in that oppressive climate. Relatives and friends in Australia envied our lifestyle — living in the tropics, and with servants — imagining we had nothing to do but enjoy ourselves. In fact, though we acknowledged how fortunate we were to have the menial work done for us, the family troubles of our staff became ours too. Apart from his weekends, there were sometimes urgent recalls to Tom’s village — often when we were entertaining, and so causing a mild crisis.

Some months before we were to leave Wewak we noticed that Tom had a persistent cough. Eventually Chris insisted he see the doctor who found, to our horror, that poor Tom had tuberculosis and was highly infectious. He had resisted seeking attention as he was worried about how his young wife and baby would cope if he was hospitalised. Chris made all the arrangements for him and he went off happily with a swag of clothing and goodies, including a radio and a generous bonus. We later lost contact with Tom but hoped that he made a full recovery. Our exposure meant TB check-ups for the family for the next several years.

The culinary expectations for our first Christmas in Wewak looked pretty grim. We had heard the supply ship would not arrive in time, so we just had to make do. As the families shared out the single officers, we had a large group coming to Christmas dinner and all I had was some Moem’s Brown Owl.
rather old frozen beef. We also had another group coming to afternoon drinks (I must have been mad!). Of course lunch was a wipe-out, what with the army tradition of the officers serving the troops, then the traditional visit to the Sergeants Mess for drinks. Chris heard, a few days before Christmas, that a Chinese trade store just outside Wewak had a supply of small chickens. He was able to purchase eight. That made our Christmas dinner.

Soon after Christmas there occurred one of those tragedies that ‘hit’ so personally. Chris had in his Company a young PNG officer (one of the first to be commissioned) — a very popular Papuan man named Ray Mau, with a bright future ahead. He left for home leave just after Christmas. Tragically Ray was killed on the way to his village when the truck in which he was travelling overturned. Only a few days before, he was at our home enjoying the Christmas festivities. He was sorely missed — such a tragic waste of life.

The traditional New Year’s Eve party was held at the Officers Mess. The Sergeants Mess also celebrated the New Year. (The troops had their party at Christmas.) Just before midnight a band of Chimbus, dressed in traditional costume, appeared in the courtyard and treated us to a performance of ceremonial dancing. They were being given a few cartons of soft drinks when we heard loud noises and yells — it seemed some of the other soldiers had gone berserk.

They had massed together and had raced up through the married quarters, brandishing sticks and machetes. They flattened the metal rubbish bins and cut a swathe through the gardens, slashing ornamental trees and shrubbery along the verges, as they flowed from one side of the road to the other. Some NCOs were running alongside, attempting to gain control. A few rushed into our midst but the NCOs managed to divert them past the Mess and out of the camp down to the beach, where eventually they cooled off. They made a mess of the streets but no one was hurt.

Our children were at home, just a few doors away. Chris had asked his company clerk, who brought his pregnant wife and her sister, to babysit the children. Chris was Duty Officer and so had to take off at once. All was well eventually but we heard later that when our babysitters heard the noise, they thought it was part of New Year’s Eve festivities and had taken the children out on the steps to see the ‘celebrants’ go past!
Mail services could be a prickly issue in Wewak. When B Company went on outstation duty to Vanimo, we could write to each other and the mail would arrive ‘in due course’. The postal clerk was in the habit of sending all mail (including letters for wives, bills, whatever) on to the husband at the outstation. So Chris particularly checked, before leaving for Vanimo, to ensure that all mail came to me while he was away.

Father’s Day was looming so we had a big project and spent days making cards for Daddy, each child pasting, colouring and painting. Then we took them to HQ to be put with the mail for Vanimo. There was much speculation — what a surprise for Daddy! Next week my mail was delivered — there were all the Father’s Day cards, faithfully sent back to me by the postal clerk, following orders!

One unexpected surprise left us with wonderful memories! A small, self-contained flat was built at Vanimo for the Company Commander. Officers’ families could go there for a week’s visit. We had only to take our own food. What great excitement! When our turn came, we flew up and were given very special treatment on arrival. Vanimo was a small town and the army was a big presence.

It was wonderful to be together again for a week and relax in such a beautiful setting. We were invited to lunch on the Sunday with the Bishop at the nearby Catholic Mission. This was built at the top of a steep hill overlooking the harbour. We set off in a Land Rover, Chris in front with the driver while I sat in the back with the children. The track to the mission was slippery, rutted and narrow, with sharp bends, often flanked by a cliff on one side and a sheer drop on the other. The driver at times had difficulty with the gears and Chris encouraged him all the way. I prayed all the way!

We dined one night with the Australian Intelligence Officer and his wife. They lived on top of a hill and were surrounded by jungle. We sat on the balcony for drinks, looking down onto the bay. With the view of beach, coconut palms, exotic flowers and a magnificent sunset, it was easy to imagine oneself in a Somerset Maugham setting. On arriving home, we were relaxing after putting the children to bed, when a torch started rolling back and forth on the bureau. Suddenly we realised the camp generator was silent. There was a gentle swaying. Had we come this far to be caught in an earthquake? We were comforted by the fact that at least we were all together. We spent a tense night, as Vanimo is
on a low flat peninsula. I hoped and prayed that there would not be a tidal wave. However the night passed uneventfully, and next day the children went fishing on the beach, blissfully unaware of our concern. Our holiday came to an end all too quickly.

Chris had been away at the Green River outpost for a few weeks and had patrols out visiting remote villages. A young, newly arrived lieutenant called on me one afternoon to enquire if I had a letter for Chris. He had to accompany two visiting colonels from Canberra who were flying up to Green River. He said he would call for the letter at six o’clock the next morning. I had just received a letter from Chris and he had mentioned that his officers, then on patrol, were coming back to Green River for a briefing and staying overnight. When on patrol they would, whenever possible, purchase vegetables and fruit from local villages to supplement their rations of rice and bully beef. However, it had been a bad season and the local people had little food to spare.

I had the bright idea of sending them a meal which they could share when they came in for the briefing. I stayed up all night making meat patties, which I put into the freezer. I packed a carton with tins of vegetables, fruits, biscuits and other goodies and, with supreme effort, I baked a fruit cake. I bundled together a few magazines and papers, then sat down and wrote an eight-page letter. It was about 5 am when I finished. I waited in a lounge chair for my courier to call.

At 7 am I awoke with a start to hear a plane flying overhead. I cannot describe just how shattered I felt. I coped with most things as best I could, but I felt so let down. I made the children’s breakfasts and sent Jacinta off to school, then sat down and brooded.

In the afternoon, Margaret McCormick, wife of the CO and my neighbour, knocked to see if all was well as she had not noticed any movement around the house. I unloaded by tale of woe. After dinner our wonderful chaplain, Father Austen, called in. He always kept an eye on families when husbands were away. I said, ‘Did Margaret send you?’ ‘No. Why?’ He looked surprised. So I told him my sad story. He commiserated with me of course, then after about 15 minutes (I can still see his face), ‘Did you say there was a fruit cake?’ He thoroughly enjoyed some and took the remainder to the Mess. At least it was not wasted!
MY HUSBAND, Russ, had seen quite a bit of Papua New Guinea — both on foot, patrolling out of Vanimo, and by air, on various army exercises.

Knowing how keen I was to see the country too, he generously suggested that he could manage our four little boys — the youngest not quite four months old — to allow me to go on day or weekend trips to interesting parts of Papua New Guinea.

My chance came in August 1965 with the Western Highlands District Agricultural Show in Mount Hagen in the New Guinea Highlands. The first Mount Hagen Show had been held in 1961 and I’d seen the ABC television coverage in Australia. The Governor-General, Lord de L’Isle, had opened the first show. I remember the fluttering white plumes of his ceremonial headdress, so apt it seemed among the thousands of magnificent plumed headdresses of the Highland people who swarmed around him on the Hagen showground.

I’d heard of a day-trip to the Hagen Show on a charter flight and, leaving Russ to cope at home, I booked to join 25 other passengers. His only instruction to me was not to come home with any more artefacts, an instruction I found very hard to follow.

We flew out from Jackson’s Airport on a DC3 charter plane and arrived about 9 am at Kakamuga Airport, just outside Mount Hagen. The new airport had recently been opened by Earl Mountbatten.

High in the Western Highlands, the morning air was deliciously cool and bracing, after Moresby’s oppressive and enervating heat. Even at 9 am, however, the directness of the tropical sun’s rays gave a hint of the sunburn we would all suffer by late afternoon.
We travelled the nine kilometres to the showground by a truck organised by the charter company. Along the roads to the showground, we had our first glimpse of Highland people in their show finery. They were hurrying along the roadside, heads down, intent only on arriving at the great show. There were groups of bare-breasted women, net cloaks over their heads, bedecked with bead necklaces, their babies carried on their backs in *bilmus* (net bags) slung from across their foreheads.

With the women, but striding ahead, were fierce-looking warriors with a bustle of brilliantly coloured croton leaves sprouting from the back of their wide bark belts. Toddlers were there, too, clad only in brightly beaded belts with small stringy bows on their plump little bottoms.

The most astounding and wonderful sights were the headdresses of the men. Our gasps of admiration and amazement grew louder and louder as our truck passed each group on the roadside.

The plumes of white cockatoo, red parrot, eagle, owl and glorious Bird of Paradise seemed to be decked higher and higher on each successive warrior we sighted.

These early scenes proved to be quite ordinary and unspectacular beside the massed tribes of magnificently decorated warriors and women we were to see all day among the 70,000 tribesmen gathered at the show. They were people from Porgera, Banz, Minj, Tari, Wabag, Lake Kopiaga, Jimi River, Kainantu and many other areas of the Western Highlands. Some had come from as far away as ‘five days walk’, through rugged mountains to be at the show.

At the showground there were two main show rings encircled by giant copies of barbed ceremonial spears. These towered above the exhibit buildings where we saw district, departmental and commercial exhibits. In one show ring the Royal Papua and New Guinea Constabulary brass band played. In the other were the Pipes and Drums of our own Pacific Islands Regiment, playing music I always loved.

Among the competitive exhibits we saw farm produce, livestock, handicrafts, horticulture, art and native artefacts. Of very special interest to me were four categories of artefacts (not restored): ancient implements, ancient weapons, ancient shields and ancient accessories. In the non-competitive exhibits, I remember three prominent products — coffee, tea and pyrethrum. The coffee exhibit was an important one, because coffee had been mainly responsible for the initial economic
A Highlands man and woman at the Mount Hagen Show, August 1965
development of the district. Tea-growing in the Wahgi Valley was a new venture of great potential, as was pyrethrum — a new source of insecticide at the time.

I found the district exhibits fascinating. Each exhibit received points in the judging for the portrayal of native life in their area, the display of crops, activities of economic potential, and the significance of native development. In this section we saw tree-climbing kangaroos, enclosures of many species of Birds of Paradise, a display of how bodies are smoked in some mountain areas (not the real thing), how food is cooked in ground ovens with hot stones and steam, and how women make thread from the leaves of the ground orchid and weave it into net cloth.

Out in the ring, there were woodchopping, archery, sawing, spear throwing (in full native dress), javelin and discus events taking place. What dazzling scenes were all around us.

Mount Hagen won one of the district exhibits but Madang, down on the coast, stole the show, as far as the Highlanders themselves were concerned, by exhibiting a giant sea turtle. When the turtle escaped from the Madang Pavilion and headed off across the showground at a slow lumbering pace, the Highlanders’ astonishment was profound. A packed circle of tribesmen crowded around it laughing in amazement at this — to them — unknown creature. One dear old white-haired man on the outskirts of the crowd, peered through the legs of the others in the crowd hoping to glimpse such a wonderful sight. He’d never seen the sea, let alone a sea turtle, nor had many of the others.

The singsings that afternoon by many different tribal groups were quite unforgettable. We saw hundreds of Jimi River men, all painted and decorated with similar plumes, dancing and singing, softly beating on their lizard-skinned drums. Their wives and children were grouped in the centre of a huge circle beating the rhythm with the men. Around the men's necks were half-moon necklaces of pearl shell. Atop their heads were dark beehive-shaped bark headdresses. On top of these, on a long stick, fluttered the white and yellow plumes of one type of Bird of Paradise. Seen from a distance, the hundreds of identical plumes were like a parade of flaming torches.

Then there were the strange men of Wabag — hundred upon hundred of them, advancing in their singing in great rows. They wore a swinging net covering to the ankle at the front only, and on their heads, above
the painted faces, were enormous black wigs of human hair, saved from
generations of relatives — a sort of wide-sweeping, elegant black hat.

Nothing could have been more beautiful, however, than the dress and
decorations of the people of Mendi, their faces completely blackened
except for white or blue outlines to the eyes. Their headdresses were
made from the pale blue bodies and plumes of a rare type of Bird of
Paradise — iridescent in its blueness. The bird's breast shield was worn
on the forehead with a high-standing pattern of alternatively coloured
feathers above that, topped by the pale blue plumes. The beauty and
intricacy are difficult to describe. The spectacle of massed thousands of
such warriors in drum-beating dance, spears held high, male voices
united in song, was absolutely thrilling.

Another very interesting and beautiful singing group was the women of
Minj — heavy statuesque beauties, their skin gleaming with pig fat and
wonderful feathers rising from tightly beaded bandeaux on their
foreheads. They danced and sang, arms interlocked, in a small circle in
front of the Minj district exhibit.

To me the most exciting — among so many fascinating people at the
Hagen Show — were the Kukukuku men, who came four or five days
walk across the mountains to be at the show. They were not like the tall
muscular men of Hagen, nor was their ceremonial dress colourful and
picturesque like so many others. They are the ferocious little men, so
notorious in PNG for their aggressiveness, who in the early days greeted
early Australian explorers and gold miners with a hail of spears and
arrows and allegedly were cannibals during the 1930s goldrush days.
There were only about 20 of these Kukukuku at the show, accompanied
by local policemen to make sure they didn't provoke any fights. They
wore black cassowary plumes on their heads, pig bones through their
noses and bark cloaks over their shoulders. As they passed by, I noticed
the rustling sound of their grass skirts and the rattle of the white cowrie
shells round their necks. The crowd stepped back when the vicious
assortment of bows, arrows and spears was glimpsed and a low murmur
of apprehension at this dangerous-looking tribe was quite audible. We
had to follow them at a near running pace before we could take our
sought-after photographs of them.

I came home to Taurama, to Russ and our boys, sunburnt and exhausted
that evening. My dress was covered in pig grease from the hours
mingling with so many bedaubed tribespeople. I was now the proud owner of a most wonderful ceremonial Hagen stone axe and had bamboo pipes for each of our children. What an unforgettable day it had been!

The magic of the sights and the sounds of that day inspired me to write a script for ABC Radio. This was accepted — to my delight — and I recorded it with Pauline Handley at the Moresby ABC Studios. Quite a few more scripts were accepted and recorded after later visits to other interesting places. Each time I was paid £10 ($20) — a princely sum. They were then broadcast in both PNG and Australia. One of my scripts had the title ‘Ma Lumley of the Trobriand Islands’ after a short stay in her great house in Losuia. Among the others were ‘Doris Booth OBE of Wau’, ‘Anzac Day at the Bomana War Cemetery’, ‘Constance Fairhall of Gemo Island’ and ‘The Mission in the Mud’. Later I gave a talk on the significant women of Papua New Guinea — ‘Veronica Somare, Maria Osi and Christina Watuna’. All this began with that wonderful day trip to the Mount Hagen Show.
IN THE MARRIED quarters next to us at Taurama Barracks lived the Bell family. Harry Bell was particularly interested in the native wildlife and, on patrol in the rainforest with his Company, he captured and brought home a tree-climbing kangaroo (or *kuskus* in *pisin*). The marsupial, I remember, was about the size of an Australian wallaby, but heavier, with bulging possum eyes and a rounder snout tipped with a bulbous nose, and had a long flexible tail. It also had longer forelimbs and claws than a kangaroo, developed no doubt when the species adapted to arboreal activities. The species was commonly known as MacGregor’s Bear but the Bells called him ‘Paddington’.

Paddington was ‘confined to quarters’ under the Bells’ house in a large roomy cage. All the quarters stood on concrete posts six to eight feet (2–3 metres) above the ground so there was plenty of room for a car and a tree-climbing kangaroo. Every now and then it would escape and hop around the ivy-green lawns of the residential area in a harmless way, rather like a wombat foraging. Sometimes I would see a black silhouette high above me in the rain trees that fringed the area with blessed shade. It would crouch on a branch holding a bunch of leaves and nibble and lick like a child with an ice cream.

My kids and I were intrigued by this lovely, black-brownish furred creature. One day Clive found that if he ran away immediately after attracting its attention, Paddington would start hopping after him. By trial and error he also discovered that, once set into forward-hopping motion, the *kuskus* found it hard to slow down and was not able to turn quickly.

So this became Clive’s game. He would sight Paddington from the small back verandah, call to Katie (three years old), who became very
excited, and me, then bound down the back steps to attract the little animal’s attention and run off as fast as his sturdy seven-year-old legs could carry him, with the marsupial in rhythmic pursuit. It could hop faster than he could run, so he always just reached the end of the house in time to turn as Paddington was catching up. Unable to negotiate the corner, but undeterred, the *kuskus* would now make a wide U-turn which brought it round the side of the house and back into fast-forward hop motion with Clive, now also round the side of the house, running as hard as he could for the steps up to the front door.

Of course, Katie and I were waiting with the door wide open as he sprang breathless inside, his blue eyes alight with triumph, dew drops of perspiration on his nose.

I wonder now at my connivance in this risky daredevil race, but I suppose I could rely on the presence of the laughing *hausbois* and I didn’t think of possible consequences. But there were consequences …

A few months later, the Warlands arrived by ship from Malaysia and settled in on the other side of us. In the interim, Paddington had been caged more securely and the game forgotten. The Warlands’ arrival coincided with the Bells’ departure. During the packing-up, Paddington got out and hopped past our house towards the Warlands’ married quarter where two-year-old, flaxen-haired Greg was playing near the back steps.

Terrified by the approach of what must have seemed like a monster to his baby brown eyes, the little fellow yelled and started to run away. Inside the house, Big Greg was alerted by his son’s screams. He charged out to find Little Greg caught up in a mating embrace and held against a tree by the sexual activity of the marsupial. He grabbed his son and Paddington went into very fast-forward motion, propelled by a mighty rugby punt kick.

Paddington left Taurama Barracks with the Bell family soon afterwards.
I had visited Papua New Guinea a number of times as an air hostess with Ansett-ANA, crewing DC6B flights from Brisbane to Lae. My knowledge was limited to sightseeing around Lae when time permitted on flight stopovers (plus a week spent in Lae hospital after crashing a jeep on the road to Nadzab airport). So when Michael and I married in the haus lotu at Taurama Barracks in 1967, I knew enough about the country to make me excited about living there.

To add to our good fortune, unlike the experience of many other newly married couples, a three-bedroom married quarter was immediately available for us.

Michael was a newly promoted Major in command of C Company, First Battalion of the Pacific Islands Regiment (1PIR).

Other officers’ wives were great mentors for a yangpela misis bilong armi — in particular, Jenny Hearn, Norah Albrecht, Sally Burrows and Judy Pears. They had a wide range of interests and, as well as encouraging both expatriate and indigenous wives to meet and learn about each other’s cultures at the Wives Club, they involved our young community in a variety of activities. I’m sure at times Jenny despaired at the little talent she found amongst us, but it didn’t deter her from staging occasional amateur productions. Sally was an enthusiastic art collector and, with the walls of her married quarter covered with works by Pro Hart, Lawrence Dawes, Ray Crooke and Robert Juniper, she enthusiastically encouraged us to share her interest in contemporary Australian art.

One way or another, we were all encouraged to share each other’s interests. Caroline Guild and I were asked by Judy Pears to run tennis lessons for the children at the barracks. Perhaps parents saw it as a way
to occupy their children while they slept in on Saturday mornings. Needless to say, our tennis lessons proved quite popular. However, the tennis court was right alongside the Officers Mess and the living-in members complained about the noise on Saturday mornings when they were trying to sleep in after Friday night ‘happy hours’. The subalterns’ desire for a little peace and quiet prevailed, and we novice coaches had to abandon our squad.

Our Taurama community was largely made up of married couples in their twenties and thirties with a sprinkling of older members and an ever-changing procession of young subalterns who lived in the Mess. The Mess was the social centre of our lives — the setting for gracious dinners, ‘happy hours’, film evenings and parties. On dining-in nights, immaculate pipers of the Pipes and Drums of the Pacific Islands Regiment would lead guests into dinner to rousing Scottish tunes that, paradoxically, seemed totally appropriate in the tropical setting.

Although you could buy a great variety of things, including liquor and Dutch silver duty-free at ‘Steamies’, finding something to wear to the Mess wasn’t always easy. Necessity drove most of the wives to attempt making their own clothes. Fashionable during the sixties were long, colourful caftans or ‘muu-muus’, which we would make out of the great variety of psychedelic floral cottons available at the Chinese trade stores in Boroko. Long and loose, worn with sandals with no need for petticoats or stockings, caftans were perfect for the tropics.

In those days, companies from 1PIR went on ‘patrols’ of 120 men, sometimes with police and carriers, into areas that were still unmapped. Michael with his young officers and soldiers would be away for up to two months at a time, often making contact with tribes who had never seen Europeans. Everyone in the Barracks would know who was away by the telltale absence of stiffly starched ‘juniper greens’ on the clotheslines. On more than one occasion when they were patrolling miles from civilisation, a soldier who had no way of knowing would announce that he had to get back to his village because a relative was dying. The patrol would radio through to the local district kiap to check and invariably the soldier’s premonition would be confirmed.

In the first six months I worked for the Registrar of the University of Papua New Guinea, but even when I gave up work with Michael often away, I don’t remember the days being boring or lonely. During our first
year, Michael’s father and my mother came to visit and I returned to Sydney for my brother’s 21st birthday. Michael was on a lengthy patrol at the time and I stayed with my family in Manly for the birth of our first son, Craig. The news of Craig’s arrival was relayed from Manly District Hospital by telephone to Port Moresby and then by radio to C Company high on Mount Bosavi.
Once I’d given up work, everyday life revolved around Company activities and picnics, the Wives Club, the swimming pool and tennis court, Mess functions, dinner parties, film nights and visits to 1PIR by politicians and dignitaries from ‘the south’. There were battalion parades, functions at Murray Barracks, charity morning tea parties at Government House and the occasional horse race meeting at Goldie River.

Some Saturdays we’d sail out to picnic on Fisherman’s Island on the army boat and, mindful of the brightly striped coral snakes that never failed to appear, brave a swim in the beautiful clear water around the island. On balmy evenings, we’d gather in force at the drive-in cinema with baskets of food and drink to sit in deckchairs in front of our cars to watch a couple of movies. The air would be thick with the smell of mosquito coils and ‘Aeroguard’.

As well as the joys and challenges of becoming a mother with the birth of our first son, I discovered tropical gardening — especially rewarding for new gardeners, as even old tree stakes and fence pailings would sprout leaves. And with dried mushrooms, lemongrass and lots of exotic herbs and spices available in the Chinese trade stores in Boroko, I skipped ‘basic cooking’ classes and went straight to ‘advanced curries’. We’d been married for 12 months before Michael found courage enough to ask me to cook something ‘plain’.

We worked and played together and absorbed each other’s cultures. In the same inexplicable way that Mike’s soldiers on patrol knew when someone they loved had died, hours before we were summonsed to the Mess to take a telephone call from Australia, I knew my brother had had an accident. Had it not been for Robert’s death, our first two years of married life would have held nothing but the best of memories. Being a part of the very special community of the Pacific Islands Regiment was a wonderful introduction to army life and a great way to start a marriage.
WEWAK WAS SHAKEN by a powerful earthquake. It struck suddenly at about five o’clock one morning. I was jerked awake with a terrible noise in my head. The house rocked violently and then there was a strange, eerie silence. The whole area was in darkness. The quake lasted only about 20 seconds.

I scrambled out of bed and ran into the boys’ room. Our daughter was sleeping next door that night. Our neighbours called out, flashing a torch, to see if we were all right.

I cannot describe the sense of shock to the system, though I do not think the boys even woke up. I thought, ‘As usual, everything happens when my husband is away!’

In Wewak there were frequent small tremors called ‘gurias’. It was a pleasant sensation to be lying in bed and experience a gentle rocking for a few seconds. This had lulled me into a false sense of security. However, the severity of this earthquake made me apprehensive. I was aware of the prediction by an American clairvoyant that an extremely violent earthquake would occur in New Guinea about this time.

Thank goodness B Company was due back in a few days!

My husband Chris had contracted a severe type of dermatitis during his patrols in the jungle on his first tour with PIR. It would erupt on his hands and feet, causing him to be hospitalised about every three years. It had broken out again and the doctor wanted to send him to hospital in Brisbane. Chris resisted this advice, as we were soon to leave on a reposting. Instead he stayed in bed for a few days at home. His hands and feet were smeared with a foul-smelling, tar-based ointment and swathed in bandages.
A few mornings after his Company returned home, another violent quake occurred in the early hours. I raced the children outside. Chris had to stumble around in the dark from the far side of the room, with his hands and feet still bandaged. He was hit by every one of the five swinging cupboard doors as he made his way out in the dark. Again, though intense, the quake did not last for very long.

A third quake occurred a few days later. This time it was more severe and lasted longer. It struck at about 7 am as I was preparing Jacinta for school. I rushed outside with the children but my husband was caught in the shower and ‘rocked and rolled’ back down the hall to get his trousers — such modesty! The CO dashed out of his house with only a towel wrapped about him.

It was a tense and worrying week. During the next weekend alone more than 300 aftershocks were registered. After the first earthquake, I had prepared a pile of things and placed them near the front door. Important papers, plastic raincoats for the children, a torch and other items were added as time went on. Not once, subsequently, did I think of our ‘survival kit’. It was just, out of the house as quickly as possible and onto open ground.

There were plenty of amusing ‘earthquake stories’.

In such a hot climate, many slept with little covering. A very ‘correct’ couple rushed outside during one quake. When they tried to return inside, they found their door had jammed shut. They were completely ‘starkers’ — and they were not the only ones.

When one sharp tremor hit, the Battalion was lined up on the level parade ground, companies in line (about 30 files of three men to each company). The ground rippled like a wave and each file, in succession, rose about 30 centimetres as the ground lifted beneath them. The coconut palms, some 15 metres high, whipped back and forth. It was over quickly. There was no panic. The men remained standing to attention. ‘A most unusual battalion drill,’ Chris remarked.

Another amazing story was of a priest celebrating Mass in a church in the Maprik area. There the ground opened up under the altar swallowing it up in front of him.

There were very few casualties overall and no serious widespread damage. Within the camp a few soldiers were injured when they
panicked and jumped from the upper floor of their barracks. A new, two-storey concrete and steel company barrack block had just been completed and was about to be handed over. It was so badly damaged that it had to be condemned. Other buildings suffered cracks but we were all very fortunate to have escaped so lightly. The doctor was kept busy with some whose nerves got the better of them. A few people did go back to Australia for a while but we all survived and life went on.

In December 1968 Chris was posted to Staff College at Queenscliff in Victoria and so the packing-up routine started once more. From that remote part of the world we had to plan our leave and make all our arrangements and bookings for accommodation for two months until the start of the Staff College year in February.

Schools had to be booked — third grade for Jacinta, first grade for Jonathan, and kindergarten for Christopher. (Jonathan has frequently reminded me that he was disadvantaged because he did not ever attend kindergarten. I am sure he had a wider education though and he never lacked for playmates.) It was also necessary to arrange our accommodation for the year. We received good advice from others who had been to Staff College, for which we were thankful.

Our farewells were over. Our personal effects were packed and taken off a few weeks before our departure. I remember, late afternoon, seeing some paintings being thrown up to the man in the uncovered truck — of course it was raining — and hoping everything would arrive safely. Amazingly most did but there were always a few breakages and a few items ‘gone missing’ — usually realised only after the insurance period had lapsed.

We said goodbye to our house and left for the airport where friends had gathered to farewell us. Lo and behold, there was all of B Company lined up to bid us goodbye. We were very touched and felt very special. Chris shook every man by the hand, followed by me, followed by each of our three children, all shaking each soldier by the hand, some of whom shed a tear. It must have looked hilarious. Chris was presented with a beautifully carved walking stick. And we were piped onto the plane!

We were treated as VIPs on the plane and, though elated, felt very sad to be leaving. On arrival in Lae, Chris was paged and told that the plane was overbooked. He was asked whether he would mind holding
our youngest, Christopher, aged four, on his lap — all the way to Brisbane! Our ‘rosy glow’ quickly faded! Chris was furious and refused. This had happened to several families previously when the airline overbooked and it was a practice to be discouraged. The children’s seats had been reserved and paid for. Father Austen, travelling on the same plane, kindly gave up his seat. He decided to stay overnight in Lae to visit some Mission friends.

‘Fasten seat belts’. The plane commenced its descent into Brisbane and we landed smoothly. A feeling of excitement gripped us. After gathering together our cabin luggage, we sat through the ritual spraying by quarantine officers. What now? Chris was having a desperate struggle with his seatbelt, which somehow had got caught up with the zipper on his pants. A strong tug — ‘blast’ and expletive deleted — the zipper broke open all the way down the fly of his best suit, tailor-made in Singapore. We lined up to disembark and looked out across the tarmac. There, behind the barrier, were all my family — the children’s aunts, uncles and cousins!

After securing our luggage — another disaster! One large suitcase was missing Oh, no! Of course it had to be the one containing all Chris’s uniforms for Staff College. There was Chris, arguing with the airport staff. They went back across the tarmac to the plane. We waited, with all the family gathered in the next room wondering what was going on. Next minute the doors burst open and Chris exploded through the door, followed by the airline manager. Chris was flourishing his precious carved stick in one hand and clutching his coat over his damaged fly with the other! I drew the children away and pretended we were not with him.

It was an impressive performance but the case was not found until several days later.

Papua New Guinea will always hold a special place in my heart. I spent six and a half years in Port Moresby and, though I lived the privileged life of an expatriate, through my employment I witnessed the workings of government at an intensely interesting period of development.

I met many interesting and wonderful people, both native and expatriate. I learned of the plight of the mixed-race community — caught between two cultures. I heard the fascinating experiences of people who had lived in the Territory for many years.
It was said that when new arrivals stepped off the plane at Port Moresby to be greeted by the hot blast of air, full of the wondrous mix of tropical odours, they either loved or hated the place. If I had not married and entered a new life, I would have found it very hard to leave.

Wewak was a small, remote, frontier town. Life there was very different from Port Moresby, but it had its compensations. I experienced again the wonderful camaraderie always found within ‘the army family’, especially in remote postings where everyone looks out for one another. Friendships forged in such places last a lifetime.
TWINS! A New Guinean woman had come from her village to the small coastal town of Vanimo so that her twins could be born in the haus sik (hospital). As a newly graduated registered nurse I occasionally helped out there. I had never delivered twins before. But there I was, wearing only a bikini, facing a woman in heavy labour who was squatting on the delivery table. I had been called from the beach to help with this birth. I put on a gown. I certainly needed to be more appropriately dressed. There were no gloves. My colleague and I poured over a huge medical textbook describing sophisticated delivery techniques and equipment used for breech births. We had a stethoscope, some cotton swabs and a plastic straw — a sparse collection that did little to boost our confidence.

Luckily, the twins arrived safely without much assistance from us. First came a tiny boy and then an even tinier girl. We made use of all our equipment — even the straw came in handy. We used it to clear out the small mouths of these infants to help them breathe more easily. Hardly the accepted practice in the sterile hospitals of our training in Australia. Of course we had no humidicribs, intravenous drips or monitors which would have been standard at home for these one-pound miniatures. As they were too small for their mother to suckle, we wrapped them in cotton wool and placed them in a shoe box — our makeshift humidicrib.

My husband, Peter, and I were living in a house with the liklik dokta (medical assistant), who was my colleague at the delivery. As a psychiatric nurse he provided the only European-style medical help for the administrative centre of Vanimo on the remote north coast of New Guinea in the late 1960s. He and his family generously shared
their accommodation with us for a few weeks so we could be together for part of Peter’s four months’ duty at this Pacific Islands Regiment outpost. Their stilted house nestled against a stony hill covered in jungle. It was a wooden and fibro-sheet building with whole walls of louvres and the slow whirl of the ceiling fans kept the house comfortable in the tropical humidity.

We wrapped our newborn charges in cotton wool and took them to this house in their shoe box, while their mother returned to the village. We were novices at caring for premature babies. They were too small to survive without constant nursing. Feeding them provided us with a challenge. The strengths recommended on the tin of powdered milk were for full-term babies, so we had to estimate the correct mixture for these little ones. The teats for the bottles were far too big, so we fed the babies with an eye-dropper. As they needed to be fed frequently we devised a routine whereby one of us would feed and clean the twins, then pop them back into their shoe box with an alarm set for the next feed. We then passed the box on and shared the babies’ care. This communal system lasted until the twins were old enough to suckle and be returned to their mother.

Time in Vanimo was not only spent at the hospital where I worked voluntarily; it was dedicated to a myriad of other experiences — walking along the brilliant white beaches, lazing in the warm and gentle sea, watching the women from the local village diving for crayfish on the coral reef, and driving through the thick tropical jungle. The physical beauty of this jungle paradise was breathtaking. The forests ran down to the grassy foreshores which were dotted with gently swaying coconut palms. The bright white coral sands were lapped by a crystal blue sea met by an azure sky. But this idyll would be shattered when the dark heavy clouds of the wet season brought torrential downfalls.

The lack of variation in the routine of life at the outpost bore heavily on the tiny European community who longed for anything that reminded them of their lives ‘at home’. Contact with the outside world came regularly each week by the scheduled Fokker Friendship. This arrived from Wewak, the nearest large town, where we had our ‘proper’ house — a married quarter at Moem Barracks. As soon as the impending arrival of the plane was apparent from the faint buzz of its engines, a restless whisper would start around the town. ‘Balus i kam’
(the plane is coming). The news spread quickly between the houses and the army camp, which were set on opposite sides of a disused grass airstrip and people rushed down to the main *ples balus* (airstrip) by whatever means they could.

The landing, taxiing, stopping and unloading of the aircraft were scrutinised by the sensation-starved community. The roaring of the engines drowned out excited chatter but somehow every passenger could be accounted for before they reached the bottom of the short stairs leading from the aircraft. Strangers were quickly singled out and there was great speculation as to the purpose of their visit. Not only were there people to see but also, even more important, were the mailbags. How everyone wanted that letter from home! Of course the bags had to be officially collected and sorted, but that would take place at the airstrip. This was the survival link — the umbilical cord to the outside world, proof that it still existed and that we were still part of it. After all, we were only visitors to this isolated heaven.

Despite the abundance of wonderful tropical fruit, fish and vegetables, many people had a desperate longing for their own foods. Old potatoes and stale bread were prized, along with the grey tasteless fibres that were reminders of frozen steak that had been defrosted several times. Along with others, I became expert at turning the meat and checking
the underside for the quantity of frozen blood. More blood meant more defrosting. This made the meat less appetising and less hygienic. I can’t imagine why we thought meat was good when fresh lobsters could be purchased for a few shillings. Fortunately the men were able to catch fresh fish to supplement our diet.

Most people shopped at the market and ate local food. What an abundance of varied produce there was. Villagers brought in their crops to be sold. The most popular staple was kaukau, the sweet potato. There were different kinds and qualities piled into small mounds which sold for one shilling each. Other vegetables such as taro and yams were grown, but they were less pleasing to our taste. There were large runner beans and broad beans, varieties of leafy spinach, tomatoes, bananas, pineapples, pawpaw, oranges, limes and avocado. Fresh and smoked fish lay alongside live chickens and barbecued flying fox. A diverse diet was certainly available at reasonable cost. About that time a report appeared on the nutritional value of some of these vegetables. This proposed that, despite the high colour of these foods, some of them lacked essential minerals as the torrential downfalls leached the volcanic soil of trace elements. There was no guarantee that any of us would remain as healthy as we wished.

Health was important as many of us started, or added to, our families while we lived in New Guinea. We were a young community and, as was typical in the 1960s and 1970s, we had our children soon after marriage. All three of our children were born in New Guinea.

We returned to Vanimo the following year. Again we shared a house, as accommodation was scarce. We had no running water, and every day the hausboi pumped tank water from the roof into buckets for use in the house. We were keen to ensure that the house we lived in was insect-free. The interior walls were made of woven matting with a gap between them. When DDT insecticide was pumped throughout the house by the army ‘fogging’ machine, the most amazing assortment of extremely large centipedes, scorpions and unidentifiable creatures emerged from the wall cavities or plopped around the house as the poison took its toll. They certainly looked rather dangerous but, on reflection, were probably less so than the insecticide. There were other hazards including snakes that we didn’t feel comfortable with, although I don’t recall anyone being bitten.
Life before independence in New Guinea was an adventure that we will always treasure. We loved the warmth and friendliness of the local people. They were inquisitive, with a highly developed understanding of human nature. A reasonable knowledge of *pisin* with its descriptive story-telling approach to communication helped us to better understand these gentle people whom modern living had largely bypassed. We were privileged to live through the transition of a culturally diverse country to a unified nation. Our fellow expatriates formed a close-knit community and we became friend and family to each other through the sharing of a remote and exotic experience.

The twins? Yes, they thrived after we returned them to their mother when they were big enough for her to breastfeed. She was very proud of them as they were unusual. In fact, twins were almost non-existent throughout Papua New Guinea at that time. In traditional communities the survival of twins was not compatible with the survival of the people as a whole. Two mouths instead of one compromised the food resources of a subsistence economy. For thousands of years the second-born, or the weaker twin, had been allowed to die by starvation or was killed outright at birth. Myths had been created which supported this practice. For instance, in some areas it was thought that if a woman had two babies at the same time then she must have had two men. The implication was that she had been unfaithful to her husband. In other areas, the dilemma was thought to be the result of an encounter with a spirit. Whatever the local legend, it was advantageous for the survival of all to have only one baby at a time. This did not place too high a demand on resources. It was not a cruel act against an individual. It was a private sacrifice for the public good. To us, however, it was a crime against the sanctity of life and the laws of our land.

It emphasised to me the impact our own history has on who we are in relation to others. We could not stop the relentless march of ‘progress’ in Papua New Guinea nor the impact of our culture on theirs. But those of us fortunate enough to live through those innocent times will have been touched and changed forever by the magic of the people who, when we knew them, still lived much as their ancestors had done in the *taim bilong tumbuna* (ancient times).
MY TRUSTY sewing machine was one of the first items packed when we headed for Papua New Guinea a second time in late 1971, this time to Moem Barracks in Wewak. Our first posting in the mid-1960s, when I had the opportunity to utilise my training and teach at Taurama Barracks School, convinced me that, now with three young children, a sewing machine was a necessity.

A challenge was innocently placed in my lap by my husband, Michael, and one of his young Papua New Guinean officers, Bill Maule. They both felt that I should be the one to make the wedding outfit for his fiancee, Rose, who taught at the Seventh Day Adventist mission school, as well as dresses for her three bridesmaids. Rose really wanted a ‘white’ wedding. How could I refuse?

Wewak is very isolated and is linked to the outside world only by air and sea. First, a decision had to be made on a pattern and fabric. Once these were chosen, they had to be ordered from Brisbane through the general store, Tang Mows, or ‘Tangs’ as we knew it. Luckily we had time to spare as no guarantee can ever be given of shipping arrivals — such is the style of life in a remote area. The ship eventually arrived with the precious cargo. As I opened out the fabric and began to cut, you can imagine how tense I was to ensure the right cut to the pattern. Where would I go if I needed more material? I couldn’t just go out and buy more. I was very relieved when all the fabric matched the pattern.

With the bride’s dress finished, it was time to make those for the bridesmaids. One bridesmaid lived nearby, so hers was easily made. The others presented a bit of a challenge, as they weren’t arriving in Wewak until just before the wedding. I was told that they were of similar size and I started to make the other two dresses and to allow for last-minute
adjustments. The week of the wedding arrived and I met the other bridesmaids. One tall and thin, the other short and broad! The former’s dress was simpler to adjust than the latter’s, which needed a gusset to be shaped to fit under each arm.

The big day arrived and Rose had her wish — a white wedding attended by elegantly dressed bridesmaids. I was so pleased for her and also, I must admit, more than a little relieved!

My sewing machine was put to good use on another public occasion, once more at my husband’s suggestion. Wewak was buzzing with excitement about National Day, to be celebrated on 11 September 1972. This time a platform, mounted on the back of a large truck, had to be ‘dressed’ for Michael Somare’s homecoming to the East Sepik — his first visit since being elected as Chief Minister following the 1972 elections.

My task was to bilas (decorate) the dais for such an auspicious event. At the local trade store, I bought 50 metres each of black, yellow and red laplap, the national colours of Papua New Guinea. These had to be sewn together, and for a while our house looked like the beginnings of Christmas with material festooned from one end of the house to the other.

On the day the dais looked terrific. All the schoolchildren from town and the hinterland, including our own, were drawn up on the oval in a large formation that spelt out 'PAPUA NEW GUINEA'. A nice touch! I was so happy that everything went so well for the local MP’s homecoming. The people of Wewak were very proud of him. And of course, Michael Somare went on to become the country’s first Prime Minister.

According to those who happened to be on the dais on the back of the truck, a problem occurred at the conclusion of the proceedings when everyone stood up to leave the ‘platform’ at much the same time. Needless to say, the truck had a problem maintaining its equilibrium and the official guests slipped ‘ungraciously’ to the ground!

A treadle sewing machine was purchased for the Moem Barracks Wives Club. The ones they already had at the Club were hand-operated and the wives wanted to learn how to use the new one and to make their own clothes. Usually the first item they wanted to make was a meri dress. I asked for a pattern and one of the wives brought along a few
plates of various sizes and a saucer! The neckline was cut out, traced around one sized plate, the other edge of the yoke needing a larger sized plate and so on. It was so logical and those who wanted to sew for their children chose the saucer. Everyone was pleased with their accomplishments on their new acquisition. Necessity is surely the mother of invention!

My recollections of life in PNG would not be complete without a comment on the birth of our youngest, Simon. He was born just as our posting was due to end in December 1973. The birth was fine, the aftermath a little unusual. Can you imagine having your most precious possession, at that time, stored in something that looked like an Australian country meatsafe, complete with flywire netting, mounted on four wooden legs, instead of a nice-looking crib by your bedside? C'est la vie in PNG!
BEING A new wife in an isolated place like Wewak had its drawbacks. My husband, Colin, left for a patrol within a few days of our arrival. We had been allocated a married quarter, but none of our belongings had arrived from Australia. We had also been told that we would probably move fairly soon. Colin was away for two weeks and I had lots of unnecessary visits to the ASCO Store just to have someone to speak to each day. That situation soon changed though, as the support and friendships of the other families living at Moem Barracks were a very important factor in enjoying life in Wewak. However, I was still keen to get work as a teacher if possible, mainly to keep myself occupied.

I was offered a position at the Moem Barracks School in late 1971. This was a dual curriculum school of about 130 pupils with an ‘A’ stream for the Australian children and a ‘T’ stream for the Territory (PNG) children. I taught a combined class of 31 pre-primary and Grades 1, 2 and 3 children. Ray Wines, our headmaster, was responsible for the Australian children in Grades 4, 5 and 6 as well as having the overall responsibility for both ‘A’ and ‘T’ streams. There were three ‘T’ stream teachers.

Initially I had doubts about living and working so closely with my students and their parents but it never seemed to create a problem. If it did, Ray, as headmaster, dealt with it without my knowledge. I had a delightful group of children in my class, although I was warned about one of the boys in Grade 3. I could understand why when I saw him, a real little terror, clinging to the roof rack of his family car as his mother drove past our house! He had refused to get off. He was no problem in the classroom and my husband found him to be a very willing helper when he wandered over to our house one day and stayed to help with clearing some undergrowth away.
The school was set in the middle of Moem Barracks. It consisted of double high-set classrooms of a similar style to the married quarters and not unlike Queensland schools today. We followed the New South Wales curriculum and kept the same hours as schools in Australia. It was hot of course but that never really worried us, although we did get permission while I was there to allow the younger children, from Grade 2 down, to go home a little earlier. Midday was often a difficult time for my class. It was almost lunchtime and they were hot and tired. I usually read them stories but another favourite activity was to go for a walk — unbelievable now with our awareness of the dangers of skin cancers, especially in the tropics at the hottest time of the day.

Our Australian students came from many different educational backgrounds. Most of them settled very well into our set-up, although we had the normal range of educational problems. The ‘A’ and ‘T’ streams had very little contact in daily schoolwork, although we operated as one school for outings and other activities. I had just three local children in my class. I was told this was an experiment to see if they could manage the Australian curriculum. We had a boy in Grade 1 whose father was not a soldier but was employed on the work line around the barracks. The year before he had been difficult to get to school and was repeating Grade 1. He became a regular and did well at school. It was quite something to see him at the local singings when he and his father would dress elaborately in their wonderful feathers, body paint and grass skirts. In Grade 2, there was a little Buka girl. She was a beautiful-looking child with shiny coal-black skin and tightly curled hair. Once, as I walked behind her, I went to touch her head. Then I noticed the thickest mass of head lice I had ever seen. I quickly pulled my hand back and made sure my own long hair was kept out of the way. Head lice love schoolchildren, especially in the warmth of PNG, but miraculously none were passed onto me. Our other local student was a girl in Grade 3. She was the most outgoing and missed her local friends in the ‘T’ stream — at the end of the year, she chose to return to them.

As you can imagine, some areas such as Social Studies were introducing quite foreign concepts. Even many of our Australian students found it hard to picture life and places in Australia from the remoteness of a hot verandah in Wewak, Papua New Guinea. All three students coped quite well, with their main difficulty being in oral language. They were generally too shy to speak out. In the ‘T’ stream, the teachers were
required to teach in English. They did slip back into *pisin* very easily and used a great deal of rote learning.

Our classroom equipment was fairly limited but we were rich in local resources. We had a magnificent beach for swimming, kite flying and fishing afternoons. The local children were the stars at these times, as many of them were skilled with spears. They were all confident in the water using their own swimming styles. We had the use of some army facilities such as the swimming pool and film shows, which were very popular. As well, we were able to use army trucks for outings around the local area.

Moem Primary was a happy school. We operated fairly independently and were flexible enough to make changes easily. One of the changes that Ray Wines introduced was cooking classes for the older girls, both Australian and local. The main purpose was to give the girls, especially the local girls, some idea about healthy eating and most of the recipes centred on fruit and vegetables. These were readily available in the markets and each cooking group would have certain ingredients to supply. I took this class one afternoon each week and, with lots of help from the Australian families, managed to scrounge enough kitchen implements and adapt recipes to keep us happily cooking (and later eating the results).

One thing that did upset our local students was snakes. We had a harmless green tree snake brought to school one day. The whole school population had bravely crept over for a closer look but when the branch, around which it was still curled, was waved in front of them, they turned as one and ran screaming, only really stopping when they got to the school boundary fence.

An equally exciting event occurred when a huge old leatherback turtle was caught by some soldiers out on night patrol. They brought it back to Wewak, turned upside down on the back of an army truck. It was so large its flippers hung over the sides of the truck. Its size kept it alive, as it was too big for the hospital to handle as food. It was brought back to Moem beach for release. Ray Wines gathered as many mothers and other community members as he could to join the children to see this great event. Everyone watched as the army crane lifted the turtle to the water's edge. It had a few small cuts on its back but swam away strongly. We all cheered as this ancient creature circled, then set off for the open ocean.
Another animal to cause a stir at school one day was a small crocodile brought along by an Australian child. It had been living in his cupboard at home but it just fitted in a tissue box for its trip to school. Everyone wanted to have a look even if it did mean getting your fingers nipped. I don’t know how much longer it survived in its cupboard home.

Many of the Australian wives became involved in sports, everything from tennis, scuba diving and fishing to yoga. We had a beautiful tropical home with a lifestyle to match. The main drawback was the isolation but this was more than compensated by the good friends we made who shared so many happy times and now so many wonderful memories.

*Primary grades at Moem Primary School, 1971*
1975 WAS a significant year in the history of Papua New Guinea and, with the transfer of defence powers to take place on 6 March that year, being the last Australian to command a Pacific Islands Regiment was one of the best jobs in the army. We had been back in Port Moresby for just ten months when Michael was told of his posting to Wewak as CO, 2PIR. He was over the moon but, after five postings in five years and with four little children happily settled and enjoying life in Murray Barracks, I was less than enthusiastic about moving again.

In the five years that we had been away from PNG, many things had changed. Gone were the mandatory hemlines below the knees and standard ‘Mother Hubbard’ smocks that many of the local women wore in the sixties. Graduates from the University of Papua New Guinea and Australian universities had returned to PNG after working overseas and Moresby had taken on a new sophistication. Fantastic ‘Afro’ hairdos and mini-skirts were the fashion of the day. On 1 December 1973 the National Coalition Government had declared self-government and Michael Somare was Chief Minister. There was a sense of excitement coupled with tension in the lead-up to Independence, which the Australian Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, had announced his government’s wish to see in place before the end of 1975.

Once we arrived in Wewak, it didn’t take me long to share Michael’s sense of history and excitement about the year ahead. Close to the Equator, Wewak is a small town built on a high headland poking out from the coast. It is surrounded by the turquoise waters of the Bismarck Sea which lap onto sparkling white beaches ribboned with coconut palms. The town was badly bombed during the Second World War and the first thing I remember noticing as we came into land at Boram
Airport was the enormous number of bomb craters that pockmarked the area. Just a few kilometres north-west of Wewak is Cape Wom where the Japanese General Adachi surrendered to the Allied Forces.

A nine-kilometre ride from the airport along a coral road brought us to the home of the Second Battalion of the Pacific Islands Regiment and the incredibly beautiful Moem Barracks. Situated between Boram Bay and Dove Bay, Cape Moem was a tropical paradise. Our married quarter at one time had been the Officers Mess. It was large and airy with huge living and dining rooms. The fragrance of an enormous frangipani tree, whose canopy formed a carpet of flowers beneath the louvred windows at the front of the house, wafted into every room. The breeze off the sea drifted over the nine-hole golf course just across the road. The gardens in the married quarters were ablaze with the colours of crotons, hibiscus, alamanda, bougainvillea and frangipani trees. It was heavenly.

Perhaps because the ‘Chief’, Mr Michael Somare, was Member for the East Sepik, visits by overseas delegates to Wewak in the lead-up to Independence were common. The Governor-General of Australia, Sir John Kerr, the Australian High Commissioner to Papua New Guinea, Mr Tom Critchley, with his wife, Susan, and the Russian Ambassador were among many visitors to 2PIR.

It is hard to say what event excited me most that year. The biggest surprise was being asked to accompany the ‘Chief’ and Mrs Somare on a tour of villages on the Middle Sepik River with some of Mr Somare’s parliamentary colleagues and the Australian High Commissioner. The lessons from our previous hausboi, Akus, in tok pisin had paid dividends and I was to act as an interpreter for Mrs Critchley. I can’t remember having to do very much translating during the three-day trip between Angoram and Ambunti, but I certainly remember with awe the muddy waters of the mighty Sepik River stretching in parts as far as the eye could see.

Angoram was established by the Germans before the First World War and is the oldest station along the river. The 110-kilometre drive from Wewak took about two hours. Before joining the houseboat to begin our meander up the Sepik to Ambunti, we visited the tourist centre at Angoram. Styled as a large haus tambaran (spirit house), it was filled with yam fertility masks and carvings and gave us a taste of the sights in store.
On the first day of our journey, the Sepik looped back and forth forming lagoons and huge swampy expanses. The only vegetation in these lower reaches seemed to be wild sugar cane, called *pit pit*. We anchored near a couple of small villages where the people lived in fragile bamboo and palm-frond houses set on stilts in the mud flats. Pigs were penned on platforms under the homes just above water level. Women threshed sago palm in roughly dug-out canoes and most of the people we saw were covered in *grile* (a skin disease). Life on this stretch of the Sepik was obviously very difficult.

*Singsings* and *mumus* to mark the visit by the ‘Chief’ and his party greeted us at many of the villages en route to Ambunti. Because as a general rule in those days women were not permitted inside the *haus tambaran*, it was a great thrill to be invited on one occasion into the smoke-blackened interior of a spirit house. I have vivid memories of ancestral carvings undisturbed in quiet corners, draped with ancient webs and guarded by huge hairy spiders.

On the second or third day, we deviated from the main river to follow a tributary south to the massive area of the Chambri Lake. The village of Kirimbit seemed to be built on great drifts of lotus flowers and we saw the first of the many distinctive artistic styles that make the carvings of the Middle Sepik world-famous.

The banks of the river got higher as we travelled further west. Vegetation and food were obviously more abundant and life more pleasant than in the lower reaches. This was reflected in the elaborate *bilas* (finery) that adorned the people and their intricately decorated buildings and carvings. Even the long low canoes with their outboard motors were beautifully carved with great crocodile heads looking uncomfortably like the real thing.

Between villages aboard the houseboat we lived very comfortably. We feasted daily on huge lobster-sized freshwater prawns, which the crew caught in fishing baskets hanging from the stern. We talked, read and played cards. A favourite game with the ladies on board was called ‘Cheat’ and the greatest challenge I faced during my short career as a translator was to lie convincingly in *pisin* about the cards dealt to Mrs Critchley.

This fantastic trip ended in Ambunti and I flew home to Michael and the children carrying a carving purchased in the Chambri Lake region.
A laughing mother holding a child with outstretched arms, this carving reminds me of the humour of the women, the laughter of the mobs of children that followed us everywhere and the rich culture and generosity of the people we met along the Sepik.

At 2PIR, we worked and played together and were saved from becoming insular by lots of socialising with members of the wider Wewak community. The Wives Club enjoyed a healthy membership and, as well as our regular meetings, interest in the club was enhanced when we decided to include golf as an activity.

The course at the Moem Barracks Golf Club had been slashed out of thick tropical vegetation and was challenging to say the least. Once a week, Eileen Tang and a couple of lady golfers from town would join the 2PIR wives for a nine-hole competition. We had some very athletic and competitive women playing on our team and many a powerful drive would ricochet off a coconut palm and end up 30 metres behind the tee. The ‘booby’ prize for the most shots was hotly contested and scores of 120 for nine holes were not unusual.

The most ambitious of our Wives Club activities was a weekend in Jayapura, the capital of neighbouring Irian Jaya. Our motivation was not exactly cerebral. Shopping in Wewak was interesting, but limited. While you could buy great sound systems from Eric Tang at Tang Mows extensive store, artefacts from a number of outlets around town and dresses from Carmel Thompson’s spare bedroom boutique at Moem Barracks, suitable women’s shoes were hard to find. I can’t remember who told us about the possibilities across the border, but we decided to apply for visas, charter a TAL Cessna and go shopping.

Between 1828 and 1962, West New Guinea was a colony of the Netherlands. The Dutch relinquished it to the United Nations in 1962 and the Indonesian Government administered it until 1969. In that year, the people voted to unite with Indonesia and the country was renamed West Irian. Considering the tensions that existed between Indonesia and Australia over incursions by the Free Papua Movement across the border into Papua New Guinea, it was perhaps predictable that a visit by a group of army wives would be of some interest to the authorities. Members of the PNG Defence Force were not allowed into Irian Jaya but, having been granted entry, as spouses we didn’t expect to be under any suspicion.
Landing at the airport some kilometres out of Jayapura was the first surprise. Unlike the small strip at Boram Airport, it was a huge affair with large military transport planes and armed soldiers everywhere. Uniformed officials wearing holstered revolvers greeted us the moment the aircraft door opened. They took our passports and luggage and confiscated our precious apples. The only reason I remember such a petty detail is that we rarely had shipments of apples to Wewak. With great courtesy but little explanation, they locked us into a small room. It seemed a long time before customs officials arrived to interrogate us and even longer before we could assure them that we were there only for the shopping.

The second surprise on the fairly long trip by bus from the airport to the capital was not seeing a single person of indigenous origin. As we descended the long road through lush jungle down into the port city, our third surprise was the beauty of Jayapura. Its charming Dutch colonial architecture and the shining cupolas of its Moslem mosques made Wewak look like a frontier town. We were amazed by the hustle and bustle of this foreign city just across our border. It was instant Asia.

We had pre-booked a modest two-storey private hotel which our party of ten filled to capacity. With its spotlessly clean monastic accommodation and an effusively welcoming proprietor, it didn’t take us long to shake off any uncertainty about the wisdom of our visit. The authorities had assured us that, as long as we reported to Customs House on each morning of our stay, we were welcome tourists.

Our hosts went overboard to feed us the most delectable and exotic dishes. The only meal we had any trouble with was our first breakfast when a platter of two dozen featherless parrots, their eyes and beaks closed and little curled claws pointing upwards, was placed with great ceremony before us. We made a valiant attempt to do this generous gesture and the poor creatures justice but managed only a little drumstick or two each. The sauce was delicious.

The markets were vastly different from the indigenous food market at home. Live Birds of Paradise, bats, tree wallabies, possums, crocodiles, fish, crabs and snakes were all on sale for the table. Mindful of a bargain, pirated cassettes were a big attraction and Helen McAuley and I returned to Wewak laden with tapes — mainly Neil Diamond. With our large European feet, the footwear didn’t quite meet
expectation but some of the more delicately boned managed to buy the fashion shoes that we had optimistically come seeking.

And back in Wewak, anticipating our Independence celebrations and the visit of the Prince of Wales, we were particularly mindful of our wardrobes.

On the eve of Independence, the Australian flag was lowered throughout Papua New Guinea, signifying the end of Australian control of the country. Everyone in Wewak gathered outside the Post Office to hear the speeches, listen to a bugler from 2PIR play the ‘Last Post’ and watch the familiar blue flag come down. Soldiers of 2PIR ceremoniously folded the flag and marched it away. Among the great mix of people who made up our community — Papua New Guineans, Chinese, Europeans, British, Americans and Australians — there were few with dry eyes. We quietly dispersed at the end of the ceremony to await the dawn.

Independence Day, Tuesday, 16 September 1975. Again we gathered at the flagpole outside the Post Office. As the sun came up, with all the dignity and ceremony of the evening before, the proud and beautiful black, red and yellow flag of an independent Papua New Guinea was raised. We were overwhelmed and a little surprised by our spontaneous joy. We hugged each other, shook hands with strangers, slapped each other on the back and shared the pride of this young nation’s coming of age.
In one way or another, all year we had been celebrating in the lead-up to this momentous day. Earlier in the year, 16 soldiers from 2PIR went on a 1000-mile (1600 kilometres) marathon, Exercise Antap Long Ol, from Wewak to Port Moresby. Living off the land, their 40-day walk took them through some of the roughest terrain in Papua New Guinea, crossing the Sepik, Ramu and Markham rivers. Their triumphant return to Moem Barracks was cause for great celebration, as was the tenth birthday of the Second Battalion of the Pacific Islands Regiment. We held parades, sporting competitions and a singsing which we felt rivalled the Mount Hagen Show in its glory. Soldiers from the many districts represented in the Pacific Islands Regiment put on their tribal bilas and the party went on well into the night.

It fell on Michael, as Commanding Officer, to judge the best mumu and, with pigs on offer from a dozen different tribes, it was not a job for a weak constitution. The tasting was going well with quite palatable offerings especially from the coastal tribes who wrapped their pigs in banana leaves and cooked them for many hours on hot stones in deep earth pits. It was only when Michael came to the last of the competitors, that integral part of barracks life, the ‘labour line’, that his courage nearly failed him. Looking decidedly underdone, their pig had been stewed in a 44-gallon drum and the thick residue of black oil that floated on top left Michael in no doubt as to what to expect. To his credit, he made all the right noises and left their novice chefs beaming with pride.

The culmination of our year of celebration was the visit to Wewak of Prince Charles accompanied by the Prime Minister, Mr Michael Somare, and the Prime Minister of Fiji, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara. Prince Charles had represented the Queen at Independence Day ceremonies in Port Moresby and was touring many parts of the country in the following week. A full day of activities was planned for his visit to Wewak.

The District Commissioner, Mr Tony Bais, had carefully programmed the visit to include almost everyone. Starting with an inspection of a Guard of Honour and speeches to greet the royal party at the airport, festivities would then include a sailing race and morning tea at the yacht club. Luncheon on the lawns of the Residence would precede a singsing at Independence Oval and the day would end with a mumu in the evening at the hauswin (open-sided, thatched building) at Moem Barracks. As 2PIR was providing accommodation for the Ratu, soldiers
for the Guard of Honour and the band for the singsing, and was hosting the evening function, along with being invited to the luncheon, Michael and I were involved in nearly all the functions.

Everything had been optimistically planned around fine weather but by early morning the skies were looking ominous. By the time the soldiers had assembled on the tarmac for the arrival of the Air Niugini flight carrying the Royal party, the heavens had dumped a huge amount of rain and we were feeling a little nervous about the day’s prospects. Watching from behind the barriers with the rest of Wewak, I was feeling quite excited as the plane approached. The red carpet was rolled out, the aircraft stairs were positioned, but as the plane taxied slowly down the airstrip, it was obvious that there were no officials to welcome His Highness.

Michael, as Guard Commander, raced from his position in front of the immaculate 2PIR guard to pull me from the crowd saying, ‘Come on, Marl, it looks like we’re it!’ Before I could think about it, I was standing by the steps with Michael telling me not to forget to curtsey. Minutes before the plane came to a complete halt, we were joined by the District Commissioner, Tony Bais, and his wife, Rose, along with the former District Commissioner, Ted Hicks. They scrambled into position beside us as the door of the Fokker Friendship opened and a young and very handsome Prince Charles stepped out. Until that point, I had felt quite
calm but as the Prince worked his way along our reception line, my heart started to pound. I managed to curtsey but found I couldn’t stop grinning inanely and when he spoke to me, I lost all power of speech. ‘And who are you?’ Princes Charles said to me. Flustered, and having totally forgotten my own name, I said, ‘I belong to him,’ pointing to Michael. ‘Ah,’ he said, ‘the wife of the Guard Commander.’

Prince Charles inspected the Guard of Honour and, as he and his party were being whisked away to the yacht club, Rose explained the reason for their late arrival. The Residence was awash and, because of the rain, the District Commissioner had been forced to change the venue for his lunch to the clubhouse of the local lawn bowling club. We raced home to Moem Barracks to deposit the children and for Michael to change out of uniform before driving back into town in time for the lunch.

The clubhouse was a concrete bunker of a building and, with the heavy rain, the bowling greens had been turned into mud. To our surprise behind the bar were the Tangs, the local bank manager and a number of other businessmen and their wives whom Rose had enlisted to help clean and decorate the improvised venue. Sepik masks and woven baskets, banana leaves, ginger plants, hibiscus and frangipani flowers brightened the usually drab decor and, after their frantic efforts, the ‘workers’ rewarded themselves by staying on to ‘staff’ the function.

Although we arrived at the appointed time, we were the only guests and we were surmising what had happened to the other 50 or so, including chiefs from a number of villages in the East Sepik district, when we looked out the window to see the royal entourage arriving. ‘Looks like we’re it, again,’ Michael said as he opened the door to His Royal Highness, the Fijian Prime Minister and Mr Somare. Our hosts arrived soon after but, unaware of the change in venue, it was more than an hour before the other guests found their way to the bowling club. However, with so many of our town leaders behind the bar to help us entertain the important visitors, we were saved from embarrassment and had quite a good party.

Warriors and performers had been gathering at Independence Oval all day for the afternoon singsing arranged in honour of the royal visit. As part of the ceremony, Prince Charles was to present medals for the Queen’s Birthday awards. Because the program was over two hours late, by the time
Prince Charles arrived, many of the groups who had been standing in the rain since early morning were talking about packing up and going home. The oval was a sea of mud and the difficulties of putting on a good show were apparent. However, the Prime Minister was determined that the show would go on and, looking towards the 2PIR bandsmen, he turned to Michael and said, ‘Can’t you do something, Mike?’ A word to the Pipe Major and the ever-impressive Pipes and Drums of the Second Battalion, Pacific Islands Regiment, started to march up and down in front of the dais in slow time. Somehow they managed to keep their composure and play a number of items while slipping, sliding and falling over in the ankle-deep mud. Their hilarious display jollied up the other performers no end and the members of the royal party were treated to a wonderful, albeit wet and slightly bedraggled, show of local talent.

The rain stopped in time for our *mumu* at the *hauswin* on the beach at Moem Barracks. Apart from some confusion when Ted Hicks was held at bayonet point and refused entry to the barracks by security-minded soldiers instructed to let nobody in without an invitation, the evening went extremely well. Throughout the day, Prince Charles was great company and enthralled us with stories of his adventures diving under the icecap of the North Pole. It was only when he was besieged by young ladies wanting to dance with him that his equerry diplomatically announced the Prince’s departure and the great day came to an end.

Writing this account of a few of the many events that happened when we were there has brought wonderful memories flooding back and I shall always be glad that I was among the many Australians privileged to spend some of my life in Papua New Guinea.
First I see her in floral
through dawn mist at Jacksons
the DC6 comes to a consumptive halt
morning air is cottonwool
and we are together again
among laplap and chocolate skin
then high on a hill above Ela Beach
she takes photographs of sunrise
towards Rigo and over the reef
that frames the entrails of the Pruth
next she scoots along Taurama Road
dodges potholes in a beat-up Fiat
pristine in white on her way to work
hits a whopper corrugation
seven years of dust is dislodged
from the ceiling of the car and coats her
from head to toe
by God we laughed about that
did she tell you?

She dances at the Kone Club
swims at Fishermans
picnics at Goldie by a kapok tree
buys Saturday pies at Arthurs
writes long letters to outstations
eats Rijs Tafel on Tuaguba Hill
trades in crocodile skins
sells airline tickets at Global
crews Piaggios to Tapini
graces mess receptions
speaks to her husband at Christmas
on a crackling airwave
in a radio shack

and last I see her
through a lacework of frangipani
she watches the pipes and drums
march along Manus Crescent
_Papua O’i Natuna_ echoes through rain trees
and the children follow
white and brown.

Do you see her too?
and so you should
she is one and all of you!

_Farewelling Bruce and Jenny Hearn, March 1968_
(from left: Sally Burrows, Betty Riedel, Jeeny Hearn, Lorraine Devitt, Marlena Jeffery, Betty Trevarthen and Caroline Guild)
1PIR  First Battalion, Pacific Islands Regiment  
2IC   Second in Command  
2PIR  Second Battalion, Pacific Islands Regiment  
ABC   Australian Broadcasting Commission  
      (later Australian Broadcasting Corporation)  
AHQ   Army Headquarters  
ANA   Australian National Airways  
ASCO  Army Services Canteen Organisation (Store)  
       atap kunai grass thatching  
       ATM automated teller machine  
       bagarap tru broken, ruined  
       balus plane, aircraft  
       balus i kam the plane is coming  
       bikpela big  
       bikpela nambawan leader, boss  
       bilas decoration, finery  
       bilum net string bag  
       boihaus house for male domestic servant  
       CGS Chief of the General Staff  
       CMF Citizen Military Forces  
       CO Commanding Officer  
       DAA Deputy Assistant Adjutant  
       DCA Department of Civil Aviation  
       DDT dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (insecticide)  
       didiman agricultural adviser, agronomist
dokta  doctor
donga  house
em i laik  s/he wants to/likes to
grile  tinea, dermatitis
guria  tremor, earthquake
   (also a crowned pigeon)
gutpela misis  well done, missus (to a white woman)
halipim man bilong mi  help my husband
hausboi  male domestic worker
haus lotu  church, chapel
haus sik  hospital
haus tambaran  spirit house
hauswin  open-sided thatched house or building
HMAS  Her Majesty's Australian Ship
HQ  headquarters
i orait  it's all right
i stap pinis  it stays or it remains
kaukau  sweet potato
kilim i dai pinis  anglicised version of a threat to kill
kokomo  hornbill (bird)
kumul  bird of paradise
kuskus  tree-climbing kangaroo
   (also clerk or secretary)
laplap  fabric, material; loin cloth
liklik  small, little
liklik dokta  medical assistant
lukaut gut long misis plis  look after my wife, please
magani  wallaby, small kangaroo
masta  mister (to a white man)
MBE  Member of the Order of the British Empire
meri  girl, woman, wife, girlfriend
meri dress  loose dress worn by local women
mipela sem tumas  we are all very ashamed
misis  term of address for white woman
misits bilong mi
misits bilong nambawan
bilong gavman

mumu
nambawan
NCO
OBE
OC
orait
pikinini
pikinini bilong dokta
pikinini bilong yu
pikinini tasol
PIR
pisin
pit pit
ples balus
ples bilong em
ples tok
PMF
PNGVR
POW
puri puri
QMG
Q store
RAASC
RAN
RAP
rausim
RSM
sinabada (Motu)
singsing
stap

my wife
the Administrator's wife
food steamed in a pit on hot rocks
number one
non-commissioned officer
Officer of the Order of the British Empire
Officer Commanding, Officer in Charge
all right
child
the doctor's child
your child
young child
Pacific Islands Regiment
pidgin language
wild sugar cane
airstrip
home town, village
village or regional language
Port Moresby Freezer
Papua New Guinea Volunteer Rifles (Army Reserve Group)
prisoner of war
sorcery, magic
Quarter Master General
Quarter Master's store
Royal Australian Army Service Corps
Royal Australian Navy
Regimental Aid Post
take away, get rid of
Regimental Sergeant Major
term of address for a white woman
festival of food and dance
stop
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>stap pinis</td>
<td>finished, permanent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stik tabac</td>
<td>sticks of tobacco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SVD</td>
<td>Catholic Order of Missionaries of the Divine Word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAA</td>
<td>Trans-Australia Airlines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taim bilong misis bilong armi</td>
<td>time of the Australian army wives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taim bilong tumbuna</td>
<td>early days, ancient times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taim bipo tasol</td>
<td>in earlier times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tanimtork</td>
<td>translate, interpret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TB</td>
<td>tuberculosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tok I go pas</td>
<td>foreword</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tok pisin</td>
<td>pidgin, neo-melanesian language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPNG</td>
<td>Territory of Papua New Guinea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>up armi</td>
<td>come on, army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VC</td>
<td>Victoria Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIP</td>
<td>very important person; dignitary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>waitpela gras bilong</td>
<td>the doctor’s white-haired child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pikinini bilong dokta</td>
<td>person of same tribe, same language group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wantok</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WO</td>
<td>Warrant Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wokmeri</td>
<td>female domestic worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yangpela misis</td>
<td>young wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yangpela misis bilong armi</td>
<td>young army wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yu ken painim</td>
<td>you can find one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yu lukaut gut long misis plis</td>
<td>look after my wife, please</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yu nogat man?</td>
<td>don’t you have a husband?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yu no rausim</td>
<td>don’t take it off/away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YWCA (the ‘Y’)</td>
<td>Young Women’s Christian Association</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shirley Allen, an experienced nursing sister, was commissioned into the Australian Army as a nursing officer in 1951. While in army service, Shirley met her husband, Dave. With three young children, they were posted to Papua New Guinea, their second overseas posting, in 1964 where Dave served as Battalion 2IC at Wewak in 1966–1967. A second PNG posting took them to PNG Defence Force HQ in 1973–1977. Shirley’s capable nursing and her concern for the welfare of PNG soldiers and their families were commended by PNG Prime Minister Michael Somare at the time of awarding Dave an OBE for his military service. The Allens later started a real estate business on the Gold Coast where Shirley specialised in property management. Shirley died suddenly in October 2000.

Mickie Bishop joined the Armed Services as a transport driver in 1942. A year later she met her husband, Mal, who had just returned from Papua New Guinea. They married in 1944 when Mal returned from further service in PNG. But he was soon off again — this time to Borneo — and Mickie was left to plan for the birth of their son. With the war over and Mal’s transfer to the Regular Army, they were sent to Papua New Guinea (three times totalling eight years), Malaya, America and many postings throughout Australia. The Bishops have retired to the Gold Coast and enjoy visiting family in South Australia, as well as being involved with Legacy, playing bridge and undertaking an annual overseas trip.
Heather Burns, after leaving school, began work as a typist with the largest photographic studio in Melbourne where she became proficient in all aspects of photography, including hand-colouring portraits in oils. She also modelled commercially but heeded her parents' warning: 'Don’t give up your day job!' In 1952 she married John, who left for service in Korea one week later. Subsequent postings took them to Papua New Guinea (twice), Singapore and Indonesia. They retired to the Mornington Peninsula where their three children live. Heather’s early interest in painting has resurfaced with a successful venture into working in watercolours — she can spend hours ‘lost’ in a bowl of roses.

Bettie Charlesworth started her working life as a receptionist with a large Sydney municipal council. Married only two weeks, she and her husband, Chic, were posted to Korea for 12 months. Subsequent postings took them to the UK, Victoria, New South Wales and Canberra, before Chic was appointed Company Commander and 2IC, PIR, in 1961. They were later posted back to Canberra and to Townsville, the UK (a second time), Washington DC and finally Sydney, where they have retired. Enjoying the company of her son and daughter and grandchildren, Bettie also plays bridge, is involved with Sydney Legacy and assists people suffering from multiple sclerosis.

Jenny Ducie began her working life as a secretary in Sydney, after schooling in Wollongong. She was introduced to Officer Cadet Ron Ducie by her brother, and married Ron in 1959. Sandwiched between two postings to Papua New Guinea were postings to Sydney, Vietnam and London; and later postings took the Ducies to Townsville, Queenscliff, Portsea, Canberra and Wagga Wagga, where they now live. Jenny's working days were spent in real estate, engineering and, finally, a most challenging and enjoyable position as secretary to a gynaecologist in Wagga Wagga. Now retired, Ron and Jenny are heavily involved in community service work and enjoy time with their children and grandchildren.
Leith Fussell graduated in Arts and Social Work from the University of Queensland and, before her marriage in 1965, worked briefly in a London hospital and then at Brisbane General Hospital. Her husband, Douglas, was posted to 1PIR as a platoon commander and also served as acting company commander until 1968. The Fussells later joined a family business in Brisbane, opening a boutique educational toyshop, and subsequently expanding into educational supplies. Leith fitted in locums and lecturing around the business. She continues to work in geriatric and rehabilitation care at a Brisbane private hospital. The Fussells have two daughters and are doting grandparents.

Maureen Glendenning chose her home state of Western Australia to return to when her husband, Duncan, retired from the army. After Duncan’s term as OC Supply Depot, Murray Barracks, various postings took them up and down the eastern seaboard, including Staff College at Queenscliff, Victoria, and the Jungle Training Centre at Canungra, Queensland. Since settling in Perth, Maureen has travelled extensively throughout Southeast Asia, England, Europe and America. She now lives happily near her mother, two children and ten grandchildren.

Jenny Hearn met her husband in Port Moresby. Bruce had spent several years in Papua New Guinea, originally during the Second World War, and returning in 1955 as Company Commander. He was Commanding Officer of PIR in 1965–68, and died 18 months after leaving PNG. While working for Radio Australia in the 1950s, Jenny acquired speech and drama qualifications and had considerable acting experience. With three children to support, she resumed
her acting career after Bruce’s death and appeared in many television commercials and dramas such as *Bellbird* and *Prisoner*, before joining the staff of Hawthorn Institute as a lecturer in language and communication studies. More recently Jenny has turned to rural pursuits, running a small fine-wool sheep property with a partner in northern Victoria. She also enjoys visiting her family and spending time with her seven grandchildren.

**Kathleen Holding** trained as a nurse in the early 1930s at St Vincents Hospital, Sydney. During the Second World War, she joined the Army Nursing Service and was posted to Darwin and later to Labuan, near Timor. She continued to nurse in Papua New Guinea after the war. Kath and her husband, Fred (DCM), were married in 1952 and stayed in PNG for a few years before moving to Perth. On Fred’s retirement they indulged their love of travel with many trips to different parts of Australia and overseas. Now widowed, Kath lives in Mount Pleasant, WA.

**Rosemary Hunter** served in the AAMWS during the Second World War. Subsequently she studied Arts at Sydney University and married in 1947. Five children and many postings later, the Hunters went to Papua New Guinea where Rosemary’s husband, Ian, served as Commanding Officer for three years. Ian retired from the army on their return to Australia so that they could enjoy family life before their children all left home. Ian is now Chairman and Managing Director of Allied Rubber Products (Qld) Ltd. Ian and Rosemary enjoy time with family, especially their 11 grandchildren, their mountain ‘retreat’ in the NSW Blue Mountains, and playing bridge, tennis and golf. Rosemary also serves on the Support Committee of the Children’s Hospital in Brisbane, and is involved in other voluntary work including Meals on Wheels.
Marlena Jeffery trained as a secretary and worked in advertising and as an air hostess before marrying in 1967 when Michael was Officer Commanding, C Company, 1PIR. During numerous postings around Australia, to England and back to Papua New Guinea, she lobbied for better housing and conditions for army families and established pre-school centres at Holsworthy and Enoggera barracks. Marlena was made a ‘Citizen of Western Australia’ for her work as patron of over 50 organisations during the years 1993–2000 when Michael was Governor of Western Australia. Now establishing their new home in Canberra, Marlena and Michael are enjoying the prospect of being settled in one place with time to pursue their interests and to see more of children, grandchildren and friends.

Stephanie Lloyd worked as a librarian, and wrote and recorded radio scripts whenever family commitments with her four sons and husband Russ’s army postings would allow. During four Canberra postings, Stephanie worked as a librarian in the Prime Minister’s Department and in the Parliamentary Library; in Wagga Wagga, NSW, she worked at what is now Charles Sturt University. Stephanie retired from library work in 1994, but is kept busy with book club, gardening and voluntary archivist activities at the Karrakatta Club. The Lloyds now live by the Swan River in East Fremantle, WA.

Sherie McGuinness initially trained as a nurse, but her life has been significantly influenced by her husband’s career in the army and by being a mother. She and husband, Peter, moved house 23 times in 30 years, from places as remote as Vanimo in Papua New Guinea to the sophistication of Kensington in central London. Along the way Sherie has been employed in various positions related to reproductive health. In addition, she managed to transport
her academic studies around the world before successfully completing her PhD in medical sociology. Sherie also worked voluntarily in many capacities, including supporting army communities. She and Peter have now settled in Sydney where they run a plant nursery, write and enjoy being hands-on grandparents.

Norma Mayhew joined the Papua New Guinea Public Service in 1954, after working as a secretary in her home town of Brisbane, as well as in Sydney and Adelaide. Her marriage to Chris in 1960 led to joining him on postings in Australia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea (twice) and the United States — with one of their four children born in Malacca. When Chris retired from the army, they settled in Fremantle, WA, where Norma worked with the Commonwealth Public Service for 11 years. She now enjoys retirement with time for family, travel, further education, reading, writing, music and voluntary work.

Helen Morrison, a trained teacher, took the opportunity to teach at Taurama Barracks School when posted to Port Moresby with her husband, Michael. Later postings took them to Adelaide, Malacca, Brisbane, Canberra, PNG again — this time to Wewak — and finally, Victoria Barracks in Sydney. They settled in nearby Woollahra. Helen has studied nutrition and occasionally lectures on ‘Living Well’. She also trained as a tourist guide and tour manager and started her own business, Footloose Walking Tours, conducting heritage walks in the Sydney CBD and Eastern Suburbs. Helen recently thoroughly enjoyed the ‘Olympic experience’ by acting as a volunteer protocol assistant. With four children (all born in different postings) and two grandchildren, the Morrisons are kept busy, and occasionally visit Port Moresby (now very different from their early recollections) to spend time with their eldest daughter and family.
Margaret Purcell met her husband, Colin, while she was teaching in Townsville. Shortly afterwards, Colin was sent to Vietnam. On his return they married and received their first posting to Wewak at the end of 1971. A posting to Canberra in 1974 gave Margaret the chance to continue her teaching career. Subsequent postings to England, Canberra and Perth plus three children meant little opportunity for her to return to full-time teaching, until a move to Bunbury, WA, 14 years ago allowed Margaret to resume her career. Colin and Margaret’s lives will take a different turn in 2001 with a move to Kalgoorlie to pursue new career opportunities.

Alison Ritman, a music graduate from the University of Melbourne, accompanied her husband, Teun, to Papua New Guinea when he served as Regimental Medical Officer, PIR, in 1961–1964. After some years of study and travel the Ritmans settled in Canberra where, for several decades, they each pursued their respective professions — Alison as a musician and teacher of piano, flute and piccolo, and Teun as a medical practitioner. In retirement, they enjoy travelling, good music, their children and grandchildren, and a variety of interests and hobbies. Alison pursues a particular interest in Southeast Asian culture and history, especially the plight of women in the late and post-colonial era.
Ray Stuart served in PIR between 1961 and 1964 with 9 Platoon C Company and as Adjutant, with tours of duty at Manus Island and Vanimo and patrolling experience on Manus, in the Sepik, and north of Kerema in Papua. With his wife, Patricia, Ray returned to 1PIR as 2IC between 1971 and 1973. Widowed since 1983, Ray now lives at Kersbrook in the Adelaide Hills where he fits in poetry between helping to manage an equestrian centre with his daughters and practising as a horticultural consultant and garden designer.

Danaë Tattam was born in Papua New Guinea and brought up on a plantation at Milne Bay. After training as a registered nurse at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney, Danaë worked with the Department of Health and the Red Cross blood transfusion service in Papua New Guinea in the early 1960s and mid-1970s. With her husband, Jim, she retired to the Gold Coast in 1980. When not visiting family in the United States and Victoria, the Tattams ‘struggle’ to maintain their golf handicaps.