
PNGDF LANDING CRAFT SQUADRON

In March 1973 there was need to escort an LCM-8 back from Lae to Port Moresby. We had left the LCM-8 there earlier to carry out some Local tasks for the Lae HQ. The crew were all PI and not trained in Long Range Operations.

The trip was a simple one - to Lae and return, but in no hurry. I used the "TAROOKI" for this task and Jim McMahan was Mate. The weather down to China Straits was as usual - Moderate to rough seas with a moderate SE swell

Approaching the straits I went out over the sunken barrier reef to get some fresh mackerel and we came upon a large Hammerhead shark who in turn had come across a very large school of small fish. The school of fish were darting in all directions, but when viewed as a whole it was just a very large circular mass with the shark in the middle. The shark was hardly moving and simply moving his head from side to side taking a large mouthful as he turned. We went close enough to upset the proceedings but all we had done was delay the inevitable.

We did not stop at Samarai and after passing through the small passage at Mei-Mei Mera (Northern head of Milne Bay) we began to have a few problems in the engine room. Continuing on to Cape Vogel, I decided to stop over at the Mission at Cape Vogel and let the Engr. (Cpl Hodges) sort out the problem. It had been some eight years since my last visit to the Mission and that was in AB2996. It was late afternoon when we arrived and going ashore to say "hello" to the Mission, the Engineers started to find out what the problem was. They could find nothing and we decided to stay overnight. The next morning we were to leave at 0530 but the starter motor would not engage. Cpl Hodges tried every trick in the book and replaced parts but to no avail. Pondering the problem there was only one answer and that was to get to Lae and get a new Starter Motor and bring it back on the LCM-8.

I advised Moresby of the problem and also requested that an aircraft of 181 Recce. flight come down to Cape Vogel and pick me up. This was arranged and at 1100 an Army Pilatus Porter aircraft arrived and I was off to Lae. Arriving in Lae and being a Sunday it was obvious that I would not get anything until Monday so I went around to Keith Bradfords place and he did have a Caterpillar starter motor in one of his earthmovers which was the same part as in "TAROOKI". We removed the starter motor and going back down to Voco Point, picked up the LCM-8 and departed Lae at 1500.

The LCM-8 had no navigating capability but the run down to Cape Vogel was no great drama but I was tired so we continued on until visibility precluded going any further and anchored in Mullins Harbour* near Cape Ward Hunt at 2200. Leaving the anchorage at 0500 we had a normal run down to the "TAROOKI" at Iasi-Iasi anchorage where the Starter Motor was installed and we left for Moresby. On the way we received a radio message that there was a requirement for us to do a pickup for the Govt. at Alotau, which was a new town being built at the head of Milne Bay and was to become the Administrative capital of Milne Bay district, as Samarai was considered to be too small and did not have an airfield. We arrived at Alotau about 1800 Hrs. in blinding rain and I went looking for the pickup which was a couple of Public Servants and a vehicle to go back to Moresby. When I found them they advised me that they were no longer interested in coming back to Moresby with us because of the weather situation. I was not very happy over the 'mucking around' we were receiving so I left Alotau immediately.

As we cleared China Straits we found ourselves in the middle of a SE Gale and it was very obvious that we were going to have a rough trip back to Moresby. A close watch was kept on

the LCM-8 which was about 200 metres astern of us as I did not relish the idea of being rammed in the stern during the night. After we passed Ava Point Light the rolling subsided somewhat and with the Radar on "TAROOKI" working perfectly it became a leisurely run into Moresby. The method of navigation used on this run was one that I had often used when taking an ALC-50 along the coast.

The coastline was difficult to pick up on Radar and get an accurate position so I would, if there was a moderate to heavy SE wind blowing, go in towards the Barrier reef and pick up the sea breaking on the reef. With the many Radar reflector beacons along the reef and the light at Rothery Passage it was a simple matter to remain no less than four miles off the reef and plot your position accurately.

John Sainsbury had returned to Australia (RTA) and I now became 2IC of the Squadron.

THE LOSS OF AS3052 "TAROOKI"



Also in 1973 in PNG we lost our first vessel in 28 years. Multiple Operations had been completed except for a "milk run" from Lae to Wewak and this task was allocated to the "TAROOKI" which had an Australian W02 as Skipper and an Australian Sgt. as Mate. I left PNG for two weeks leave in Australia. The Operation order, under Communications, stated that contact would be made, as was usual, to the unit Communications room and to Naval Operations at Murray Barracks. In the case of the Unit, the OC was to be advised of all communications during weekend hours by telephone in place of myself while I was on leave. The system worked quite well - apparently.

On the Saturday afternoon before my arrival back in PNG on the Wednesday morning, the TAROOKI radioed in to both the Unit and Naval Operations that the ETA Moresby would be 0930 on the Sunday. At 0130 on the Sunday morning, 13th May, the TAROOKI hit a reef at full speed in bad weather. The duty NCO in our communications room did not query anyone when the TAROOKI failed to report at 0800(Sunday) nor did he take any action to advise the OC that the vessel had not arrived at the base.

Worst of all the OC did not ring the Unit to query the Duty NCO as to the status of the TAROOKI. On the Monday morning the OC did not take any action when he noticed that the

TAROOKI was not at the base. He assumed that weather had held it up and they had advised Navy of a delay in ETA. In the meantime the Navy Operations had not heard from TAROOKI since the Saturday afternoon and the Duty Officer there assumed that the TAROOKI had arrived in Port and their records showed the vessel as "IN". Navy Operations had not bothered to check that the last signal was on Saturday afternoon and no arrival signal was recorded. Nothing was done until early Wednesday morning when by accident somebody queried the TAROOKI and it became apparent it was missing. The RAAF was called in to do a search and they picked up the wreck in two hours. In the meantime I arrived back at Moresby at 1100 and while my family went through Customs I was advised that TAROOKI was missing and I was taken to the Maritime Operations Search centre.

I found it hard to believe that the TAROOKI or in fact any of our craft could have run onto a reef on a normal transit between Samarai and Moresby. It is a simple run inside the reef and simpler still using the outside route as local knowledge is not required - navigational knowledge is. The fact was that many ships have come to grief in situations that would be normally called "a piece of cake" situation.

Early the next morning I was aboard a RAAF Chopper with the OC and a RAN CPO Shipwright and was taken out to the wreck. There was nobody aboard the wreck and I went to the radios to check them out as I could not understand why nothing was heard after the vessel went aground as both the Unit radios and Navy Operations were on 24 hour watch. The antenna terminals had been shorted out by a crew members knife but whether this was caused by a crew member or had happened as a result of the grounding is not known. Removing the knife and cleaning the terminals I had immediate contact with Wewak some 300 miles to the North.



Looking over the wreck it was apparent that the crew had left in a hurry as the emergency radio was still aboard as well as personal effects. One thing that I could not understand and still do not understand is why they abandoned when the logical step was to hang off the anchor until help came which they must have realised would occur.

The search for the missing crew continued both out to sea and along the coast and late that afternoon a Neptune Recce. aircraft was called in to the search from Townsville. On it's way to the search area it sighted a flare and on investigation it was a liferaft with the TAROOKI crew aboard. A Norwegian ship was diverted to pick up the crew. The liferaft was some 100 miles from the search area. Had the Neptune missed sighting that flare it was highly probable

that the TAROOKI crew would have been lost as not only were they out of the shipping lanes but the Liferaft itself was in a sinking condition.



A bizarre event occurred at Port Moresby when the Norwegian ship arrived with the crew. The Captain had inspected the Liferaft and refused to hand it over until a full Inquiry was held.

The Liferaft when not in use is located in a rack where it can be accessed quickly. Two were carried on the TAROOKI and the first was destroyed before crew members could get into it at the grounding position. The raft is sealed and the only time it is opened is in the event of an emergency or at its periodic survey which in PNG was yearly. When the Norwegian ship picked up the crew the Captain had inspected the Liferaft and then questioned the crew.

The water cans were between 3-5 years out of date, the flare igniters were not in a sealed container and thus became sodden with water and the crew could only ignite two flares, food was out of date by some three years, the medical kit was very deficient including drugs and the attached nylon line which was used both to inflate the raft and as mooring line was normally some 60 feet in length was only about 12 feet and the Liferaft was taking water through leaks. The liferafts were surveyed in Port Moresby annually by a contractor and the Captain was adamant about an inquiry but he was overruled by PNG Command who had already begun to formulate the Terms of Reference to an Inquiry.

In the meantime, at the TAROOKI wreck we began to look at the various options regarding Salvage. At the time of our dropping onto the wreck from the Helicopter it was about three hours after high water and the Tarooki was laying on it's Port side, seawater was free flowing through the vessel with the Starboard side dry. the engineroom was flooded but we could find no hull damage ie. damaged planking.

My own view to the situation was that I fly to Lae and bring the LCM-8 there back to the wreck and have the other come down from Moresby and placing an LCM either side of TAROOKI with heavy anchor chain running under TAROOKI from one LCM to the other - Aft, Amidships and Forward and having the LCM on the Stb side ballasted heavily so that she floated after the LCM on the Port side did. I felt that we would have an 80% chance of refloating her. To prepare TAROOKI for the chain and have it in place would take about 12-15 hours at low water which meant two days - time to get the LCM from Lae and Fire Pumps and associated lift equipment onto the Moresby LCM. There were a few "if's" and the main

point was that the attempt would have to be made on the highest spring tide and the centre of gravity, both longitudinal and vertical of the LCM-8 's would have to be altered to allow as shallow a draft as possible. TAROOKI would also have to be "stripped" of all unnecessary weight. There was a chance and we had nothing to lose.

It was at this stage I learnt that the TAROOKI was no longer our responsibility - it was now Maritime Operations (RAN) responsibility. I could not believe my ears when my OC said that we do nothing until the chartered tug with the Maritime Ops Commander arrives. I remarked "that the TAROOKI was Army and that we were not under command of the RAN but it became apparent that a lot had happened from the time of TAROOKI' s ETA at Moresby on the Sunday and today (Thursday) that I did not know.

When the chartered Tug arrived we received instructions that a Helicopter would bring a quantity of 44 Gal drums across and an attempt would be made to refloat TAROOKI by fastening the drums to the Port side thereby increasing the buoyancy and hopefully she would float upright as the tide came in that evening. I doubted this would work as we neither had chain lashing or aircraft tie-downs to secure the drums fast to the TAROOKI . It seemed to me that an attempt to salvage TAROOKI must be "seen to be done ". We only had Cordage and some SWR from the TAROOKI's COL and securing the drums would still mean slack tension as the drums floated, and consequently, the amount of slack plus the high water would not be enough but the decision was made and that was that! At the same time a tow rope was bought across from the Tug and the idea was that as the buoyancy of the drums took effect the tug would tow the TAROOKI across the reef to deep water.

There were too many "ifs" in the equation and I did not like the plan but it appeared it was the only plan we could have. I mentioned to the OC that it might be prudent for us to hang off the bow in a Liferaft while all this towing was going on, as even if the plan worked and we were dragged across the reef to deep water, I felt sure that the TAROOKI would capsize once deep water and the breakers were reached. In the early evening about 2000 the tow commenced and the drums were popping out all over the place. We were in the Liferaft and the TAROOKI did not move from its position but the longitudinal axis did by about 30 degrees and as a result the sea crashed down on the port side smashing cabin windows. The tug kept trying to move the TAROOKI but it was to no avail. I had removed the Fl radio installation from TAROOKI and the transmitter unit was being held by the RAN CPO shipwright while we were in the Liferaft. The internal battery had not been removed from the unit and the unit fell to the floor of the Liferaft which already held a considerable amount of seawater, as a result of the sea breaking over the Liferaft. The unit began to smoke so the CPO threw it over the side. This was an automatic reaction but the CPO did not know that the battery could be quickly released from the Unit. I wanted to save something from the TAROOKI and I thought that at the next low tide I would get the Radar unit and stores from the vessel but in this I was very much mistaken. The night spent in the Liferaft was not what one could call pleasant but looked at from a survival point of view the Liferaft deserves great credit.

We were then lifted by Helicopter to the beach at Coutance Island, three miles W of the wreck, where the tug had anchored and here I was further astonished at the news that the wreck of TAROOKI was to be abandoned. I pleaded with the OC to oppose this decision and in fact asked the RAN Commander who was IC the salvage operation to get the LCM-8's down to the wreck. In fairness the cost of the operation so far had been enormous considering the Helicopter usage and the tug charter but my argument was to no avail. There was a very new Caterpillar engine on TAROOKI as well as the Radar unit and crew personal effects and vessel stores which we could have salvaged with no trouble at all. I remarked to the OC that "We have operated in areas that any other group would back away from and we have done

that with a minimum of resources and a lot of calculated risk and do you really believe that we could not get TAROOKI off that reef using our own people and our own resources?". By this time the OC was pondering his own future and nothing I could say or do was going to get us anywhere. We then transferred to the RAAF Helicopter and returned to Moresby. On the return flight I could not help but be bitter as to the outcome of the Salvage Operation . Over the next couple of days I questioned the Duty Watch as to the Saturday evening up to the time of grounding and received many contradictory answers. These answers were as follows:

1. "It was raining" and "The sky was clear with no rain"
2. "Visibility was bad" and "Good visibility"
3. "The Sgt. was at the Radar when we hit the reef" and "The Sgt was on top of the wheelhouse" and "The Sgt was on the Bow"
4. "We saw the light at Rothery Passage" and "We did not see any Lights"

There were too many inconsistencies and particularly in note (4) "We saw the light at Rothery Passage". The visibility of this light would have been lost some three hours before the grounding. It was obvious that questions to the PI crew were not going to produce much useful information to me.

I then casually asked the Sgt if he had the breakers on the Barrier Reef on Radar to which he replied that "There was nothing on Radar". I also asked if the Radar was functioning correctly and he replied that he "thought it was" and I then asked "how come you did not pick up Coutance Island which was three miles West from the grounding position or the Radar beacon which was six miles east of the grounding position".

The Sgt became agitated and told me that as there was an official Inquiry then he did not have to answer any questions except at the Inquiry. He was right of course but in my own mind I knew that he did not know how to use Radar and he knew very little about Navigation but I could not press the matter because of the Inquiry. I also had the "feeling" that his seagoing qualification was not worth the paper it was printed on but I was not sure and to bring it up at the Inquiry, would not only release a "can of worms" but would cause irreparable damage to the service.

The Skipper of the TAROOKI knew that he was responsible as he was in Command and did not give me any information as the Inquiry was about to start and, since the Chart was not available I could not go further. Something was very wrong and to me I felt that the "big ship philosophy" that prevailed at Chowder Bay and Canberra had a lot to do with it, but that would have to wait.

The inquiry is now history and nothing could have prevented the grounding but had I been present in Port Moresby at the time of the grounding then the fiasco that followed the grounding would never have occurred. Suzanne and I were living in a hose on top of 3 mile hill and our view over the sea to the east was for approx. 30 miles and to the west about 10 miles. Sometimes I had a radio set up so that I could talk to the boats but more importantly I could see one of our craft returning from the East some three hours before its ETA. If it wasn't in that "window" during that time I would want to know why.



I was very bitter over the whole episode and in particular the refusal to bring the LCM-8's to the wreck. The wreck had been on the reef for four days before we boarded it and another couple of days would make no difference. What worried me more than anything else were the repercussions that would affect our operations, to come from the Maritime Operations Branch, which was the RAN. I felt that the episode would turn out to be the only and final nail in the coffin of Army Water Transport in PNG.

Arriving back in Moresby, I notified a friend of mine, Jim Crockett, that the TAROOKI had been abandoned and it would be in his interest to get down to the wreck ASP before it became common knowledge and became a "below cost bargain sale". He had a boat that was in the final stages of "fitting out" before going off to Manus Island to start a Crayfishing industry. The whole thing became a "comedy of errors " in that they put the steering in reverse. i.e. When the wheel was put to Stb. the vessel moved to Port. After the skipper decided that it was a failure trying to steer in this manner and the whole thing would have to be done again, Jim decided to call it a day. What finally happened to the wreck and its fittings is not known.

A task came up that required a LCM-8 to operate out of Wewak on local tasks and I intended to take the LCM-8 around to Wewak and fly back but Maritime Operations had changed the rules and from now on Army craft would be escorted by a RAN Patrol boat. I decided that I was not going to be escorted anywhere by the RAN and told the OC that someone else would have to go. There was nobody else but after "consultation" a Local Naval Officer was 'slotted' for the task.

After a few weeks the OC departed for Australia as did the Skipper of TAROOKI and so did the Sgt and I took over as the OC of the Squadron until the arrival of a RAN Cmdr. as C0.

A visiting Yacht came into Moresby and I was asked by Maritime Operations if I would allow the Yacht to moor alongside our wharf for a few days. The Yacht owner was Capt. John

Robertson who was the Captain of HMAS "MELBOURNE" when it collided with the "VOYAGER" in 1964.

I have always been a keen advocate of Aircraft carriers and had read everything pertaining to the history of these ships since the beginning of WW2. I certainly did allow the Yacht to moor alongside our wharf as I had also followed the Voyager/Melbourne saga since the collision and I wanted to meet this man whom I admired very much. John was as I expected he would be - a thorough gentleman and another of those who get respect automatically. He stayed for about 10 days and Suzanne and I had dinner aboard the Yacht a couple of times as well as having John and his girlfriend home for dinner on a few occasions. I learnt more from him about the RAN than anyone else or any publication. He was very interested in where we went and how we operated as he was off to the Solomons to set up a Charter business. When I told him some of the places we had gone into he remarked that I would never have done it if I was Navy to which I replied "One will never know if the grass is green on the other side of the hill unless you go and have a look and every hill is different". At dinner one night I asked him how he felt about the ignominy that had followed after the inquiry and his transfer to a shore establishment thus not only suggesting guilt, but preventing him going to Flag rank and possibly Chief of Naval Staff. He replied that "I have no regrets and given my time again it would be the same. I never saw John again and he died some years ago in Sydney.

Suzanne, since our arrival back in PNG, had become involved with the PNG Country Women's Association and was looking after women who had come in from the "bush" and then began counselling young PNG girls who had got caught up in the prostitution game. Her days were full and looking after the four youngest of our children kept her more than busy. She had become friendly with a Papuan family through Megan and her Papuan school friend and on school holidays she took the children with the Papuan girl down to the Gold Coast for a break at her parents' home.

I was advised from HQPNGDF that PNG Tn. Sqn would, in the near future cease to exist and that the unit would become PNGDF Support Squadron and that our unit funds would either be absorbed by HQPNGDF or be transferred to PNG Support Squadron. Since the funds amounted to \$700.00 and had been raised over the years within PNG Tn Sqn., I felt that the soldiers of Tn Squadron should have a say as many of the soldiers would be displaced by Sailors from the Maritime element. Approximately 60 of the PI soldiers who were on strength of the Squadron when it disbanded and became Support Squadron had been with the Squadron for years. Some had been the crew of the FERN and many had joined the unit in 1965 when we raised 821 Water Transport Troop.

They were very loyal and were certainly proficient as Army circumstances dictated but it was now a different ball game. Whereas we received soldiers from PIR and we had no part in the selection process, the Navy were selecting recruits based on education and giving them extensive training which we could not do. The crew I had on the FERN would hold their own with any seagoing element but most of them could barely write their name. I was very proud of them but also was saddened as I knew what their fate would be. Most of the new personnel would revert back to Land Operations within the PNGDF and the senior ones would only remain until they could be replaced by Maritime Operations personnel or until the three LCM-8's (AB1050, AB1051 and AB1053) would be returned to Australia.

The unit decided to have a family day and expend the funds and this was approved by Land Operations. We decided to not only put on a very good day but we would also see to it that everybody received a gift. We held the function on a Saturday and we had two Chocolate Wheels going with a difference - the only person who did not get a prize was the winning

ticket!. We had purchased all of the "goodies" from Steamships at discounted wholesale prices as well as buying a library of books which they wanted.

I was presiding over a unit whose lineage began with the TARRA in 1951, then the FERN, then 821 Water Transport Troop and finally PNG Tn. Sqn. It was the end of an era and the beginning of another. I was not on the first trip of the TARRA to PNG but I felt rather proud that I had served with and on all vessels of all the units concerned with Army Water Transport, including 32 Small Ships, in PNG since WW2.

I met the incoming CO, an RAN Cmdr., and we had a tour of the base and then I took an LCM-8 over to Daru for a week. When I returned to Moresby the name of the Squadron was PNGDF Support Squadron. No ceremony just oblivion. Finally the name was changed again to PNGDF Landing Craft Squadron with an RAN Commander in command and myself as Executive Officer. In the period up till our cessation as PNG Tn Sqn. we had carried out a few operations to the West of Moresby and on the Northern side of PNG using the LCM-8's and the Administrative task of "writing off" the TAROOKI and her Sub-account. With the arrival of the Naval CO things began to change. No longer would I write Operation Orders and Army Operations were being turned down as it was felt that "some of the areas were dicey". The RAN do not have the words "calculated risk" in their Manuals.

During 1974 Port Moresby had a Royal visit and the Marine Base became a focal point for many comings and goings. The Co. was the Liaison Officer to the "BRITANNIA" and I was the Liaison Officer to the other ships, the senior ship being RFA "TIDESURGE". Suzanne and I went out to the "TIDESURGE" for dinner on two occasions and it was a different world. There was ceremony for our arrival aboard and on our departure. The Captain of "TIDESURGE" was a very strong Royalist and in fact I was to find that everybody in the Royal Squadron was an ardent royalist with no exception. While Queen Elizabeth II made her departure from the main Moresby wharf to the various engagements the Marine Base was used as "quiet" departure point with barges coming and going from the "BRITANNIA" and the other ships, day and night. One evening I had stayed on to make sure "events" would go smoothly. We had sandwiches for a meal and I wandered down to the boat landing to have a word with the duty NCO when a barge from "BRITANNIA" appeared. Expecting an obscure RN Cmdr to pop ashore, I continued munching at my sandwich and got rather a shock when Lord Mountbatten appeared on the landing. I quickly saluted, with no headdress and then I began to laugh as did Lord Mountbatten when I discovered that I had saluted with the sandwich clutched in my right hand. He returned the salute and we had a good chat for about 10 minutes. He certainly did not remember me from Japan but he was interested in what we were doing and as when I had met him previously he was the sort of person to whom respect flowed immediately.

The "TIDESURGE" had asked me to arrange two pallets of soft drink to come out to the ship on one of our LCM-8's. This was arranged through Steamships Trading Coy. but on arrival at the ships side they were knocked back as the price was unacceptable. They could not have them Duty Free according to Steamships. We unloaded the two pallets and notified Steamships to have them picked up but they never appeared. The two pallets remained in our Bond store for two months so, in the end, every time one of the craft went on a task they took ample supplies of soft drink with them. Up until my departure a year later Steamships never came down to pick up those two pallets.

The sale of the last ALC-50 and the loss of the TAROOKI had reduced our craft strength to three LCM-8's and two workboats. Our multiple long range operations had been reduced to nil since Maritime Operations were now the "resident authority" and the fact that if a craft

was required on the North side of PNG it would be escorted by one of the Patrol Boats at a time when it was appropriate for Maritime Operations. Since I would not be escorted by anyone this left me to carry out the functions of my posting - Administration and as OC of the Army element of the Squadron which was still the larger of the two elements.

Army requests for Sea Logistic support began to drop off as there was no longer a guarantee that timings would suit or the area was a "no-no". We did receive two more NCO's from Australia to bring the Warrant Officer strength to the normal. They were two National Service Cpl's and before being called up, were Apprentices with the Australian National Line. They were a little horrified at what they were getting into but in the short time they were with us, performed admirably. I generally had them take the LCM-8's on tasks to the West of Moresby and into areas that the Patrol Boats would not go but finally these civil tasks were curtailed.

After they left we did get a Sgt. from Chowder Bay but his stay was short due to his "behaviour" resulting in a Courts Martial for which I had to do the Summary of Evidence. There was one good aspect of my finally carrying out the function of my posting in that I was home more often.

We were advised that Transportation(RAE) would be taken over by a new Army Corps - Royal Australian Corps of Transport. This event was not particularly "mind shattering" to me as we were already a very poor relation of the Royal Australian Engineer Corps and now we would be the very poor relation of some other Corps. What did annoy me was the fact that once again we followed British Army traditions. When will this country ever learn that since 1901 we have not been British, are not British now and will never be British in the future.

I was approached by a member of the Port Moresby Yacht Club who wanted to ascertain if I would be interested in conducting a Celestial Navigation course for members of the Yacht club. All of the interested members had their own boats and yachts and were determined to sail to Australia when the time came for their departure("going south finish"). One of the students had an ex-RAAF 56' "Boong Boat" which would be made available for practical work.

All of the students, three of whom were women, had varying knowledge of Navigation. I set up a syllabus which entailed three nights a week for a period of three months. The course was confined to three segments - The Navigational chart, Chartwork and Celestial Navigation. There were 18 students and after giving them a list of books etc. to purchase, expected some to give it a miss but they were all in attendance. I had asked the CO for permission to use one of our classrooms for the course and we began the course. I had, at first, contemplated teaching Celestial Navigation using rapid sight reduction tables but decided to teach the formula method and expected some difficulties in this area but the students were all mature age and in most cases their grasp of the mathematics involved was better than mine. Everybody was happy with the course and two weeks after the completion one of them took off for Australia, direct to Cairns, in his yacht. He was back in Moresby some three days later. I was horrified that he may have got lost but he was very satisfied with his navigation. One of his crew was a diabetic and had not carried enough Insulin with him and they returned. He said he took sights all the time and his navigation was "spot on" .

Three Army Captains at Murray Barracks had purchased a Trimaran and asked me to install a radio for them as the annual Yule Island race was due. While setting up the radio and two antennas I was then asked if I would do the pre-race inspection of all Yachts to determine if they were capable of meeting the race standards. The only time I had ever been on Yachts was one in Darwin when Suzanne and I had dinner aboard an American yacht which was anchored

and aboard John Robertson's yacht alongside the wharf at the Marine Base. With an "interpreter" I carried out the inspection and everybody was happy. (The first time that I actually went sailing was at Hamilton Island in 1986)

We had a system in use at the Marine Base whereby any Defence Force personnel using their private craft would hand in a "Trip sheet" to the duty NCO. The sheet would contain the same information that is in use worldwide and would be retrieved from the duty NCO on return. We had a time delay of 30 minutes before instituting a search if the craft was not at the Base at the stipulated time. The system worked well and we only had one search instituted. A Major had left early one morning and was to be back at the Marine Base at 1900. When he had not arrived the Duty NCO waited the 30 minutes and then notified Maritime Operations. I was notified and went down to the Base to arrange for an LCM-8 to be used in the search as well as other civil craft. A friend of mine, Ross Logan, had a speedboat and while the other craft went to various locations to do the search, Ross and I took off for the Island the Major had gone to (Daugo). We carried a F1 radio with us and came in on the extreme Western side of the island. It was pitch black and as we came onto the beach there was a group of native women on the beach. As we came out of the darkness they screamed and all took off towards the centre of the Island. It was obvious they did not have their menfolk with them as they were all out on the outer reef fishing. As Ross got out of the boat his glasses fell and he could not find them. We then began walking along the beach on the Southern side and towards the East and after about 30 minutes came across the Major and his family in a tent just above the high water line. After a few "words" to the Major and letting him know that there were quite a number of people out searching we called the Marine Base and had the duty NCO advise Maritime Operations that the Major and his family had been found. Ross was very upset about losing his glasses and the Major promised a couple of cartons of beer to Ross but Ross never did get those cartons. The Major was very embarrassed over the incident.

During 1974 Murray Barracks became centre stage for another riot. This time it arose over differences between PNGDF personnel and the PNG Police. It started on a Thursday evening (pay day) and began across the road from Murray Barracks, at a Service station. The original altercation started between two or three soldiers and Police. Before long soldiers were streaming from the Barracks to join in the fray and police reinforcements were bought in, namely the Riot Police. The Police succeeded in getting the soldiers back behind the fence of Murray Barracks and from here the soldiers began abusing and throwing rocks at the police.

The police responded by driving along the fence and firing tear gas into the soldiers midst, which promptly bought the riot to a stop. Soldiers from PNGDF Landing Craft Sqn were involved and I along with other OC's were called out to calm things down, but on arrival at the OR Quarters things were already quiet as not only had the quintessence of the riot dissipated but the effect of Alcohol had taken over and they were asleep. Much of the disagreements between Army and Police were based on Uniforms and rate of pay but I believed, at the time that we were seeing the beginning of a power struggle, as to who, not only were the more important in the emerging nation, but who was the more elite.

Life at Landing Craft Squadron now became routine Administration and therefore boring. There were quite a few visits from visiting units of the Australian Fleet and Suzanne and I attended many cocktail parties. The cocktail parties ended, when at one, aboard one of the "Ton" class Minesweepers, a RAN Lt. asked me where I fitted in within the Squadron. When I told him I was the XO of the Squadron he remarked "Ah! Getting firsthand knowledge on how we support Army", to which I replied "I already know how to support Army using Landing Craft, the RAN doesn't". We never received any more invitations after that exchange.

I had been asked if I would "skipper" a Game Fishing craft down to the Louisiade Archipelago. The theory was that the renowned Gamefish the Black Marlin, skirted the Southern reef of the Louisiade Archipelago before crossing the Coral Sea to the Great Barrier Reef. I had plenty of leave due so I consented. The owner of the Game Boat was Jim Crockett who owned a Port Moresby Refrigeration Company. Of the other two fishermen, John Costelloe was Chairman of the PNG Harbours Board and Harry Moxham, worked with Steamships Trading Co. Jim's wife Betty was also to accompany us.

At this time South Pacific Brewery was releasing a new Beer on the market called "Anchor". This meant, of course, that the new beer was no different to any other beer that was produced by the Brewery and they were, to a point, sponsoring the trip by supplying the beer for promotional purposes. The departure from Moresby at 0600 had a "carnival flavour" and a smell of publicity behind it as there were people running around just before departure with sailor hats on and the word "Anchor Beer" emblazoned all over "T" shirts. I kept well out of the picture. What did amaze me was the amount of beer that was loaded on board. It seemed similar to an LSM carrying 100 tons of beer in Vietnam except the Game Boat was only 35' in length. The craft carried the name of "Cool" and normally had a top speed of 20 knots but with the amount of beer on board it was not going to 'plane'. The COOL was powered by a Mercruiser V8, formerly out of a Sydney Harbour Water Police craft, which had been sent up from Sydney a month before.

We departed Moresby at 0530 and the route I was to take was inside the reef, overnighing at Lopom Island, thence to Samarai and then to the Jomard entrance area of the Louisiades. We were slower than expected which was no surprise considering the amount of beer aboard.. Off Marshall Lagoon the engine began to misfire so we put into Marshall Lagoon to determine the problem. All of the sparkplugs were very dirty and two were of no use at all. Jim carried two spares only. The remaining plugs were cleaned and the two new ones fitted but in the haste to depart the last plug was shattered by over-tightening with the wrench slipping. After much thought it was decided to "Araldite" the ceramic casing. The whole lot worked so we took off again. Off Abau disaster struck, a very loud thump coming from the engine. We could make way only at idling speed so we crept into the small island of Abau to determine what the problem was. Mooring at the wharf it did not take long to find the problem. The crankshaft had broken at the forward end just behind the Harmonic balancer. The "Cool" was not going any further.

It was decided that John Costello and Harry Moxham would call in a charter aircraft and on down to Dauini Island East of Samarai, to continue their holiday and Jim, Betty and I would return to Moresby by the same aircraft on it's return from Dauini. We went over to the ADO's office to use his radio telephone to raise Moresby but was advised by the ADO, a local officer, that the batteries were flat. He did however, tell us that there was a radio telephone at the Robinson River Plantation, a 'mile or so' up-river.

We then proceeded up-river at idling speed. The charts of Cloudy Bay are not what one would call perfect and up-river from Abau they were non-existent. There were many large creeks going off from the main river and we were not sure if we had overshot the turn. While pondering the situation a native in a canoe shot out from the mangroves about 300 metres ahead and we hailed him. Harry Moxham, in perfect pidgin English, asked him the whereabouts of Robinson River Plantation. He replied, in perfect English, "Take the next turn to the right and the Plantation shed and wharf are about two miles up". Of all people to meet in the middle of nowhere was a Solomon Is. Priest doing his Sunday thing. He also told us that the Plantation house was about 1/2 mile "up the track" from the wharf .

We arrived at the wharf and Jim and I began to walk "up the track". It was about 5:30 PM when we left. When we had walked about an hour we fell in with a few Plantation labourers and they began to walk with us. Everyone of them was carrying a machete and there was a lot of gesticulating going on between two of them so Jim kept his eye on one and I kept my eye on the other. Just as darkness fell we came across a few sheds and then a "street" about 50 metres in length.

Opposite each other on this street were two houses and both were occupied. I went up to the door of one and knocked on the door. When the door was opened I casually said "We were just passing by and thought we would say hello". The occupant was rather startled by this statement but recovered and, like most outstations, welcomed us to Robinson River Plantation. There were two Europeans in residence, the Manager and a Mechanic. They had some sort of argument previously and had not spoken to each other for about five weeks. A truck was despatched down to the wharf to pick up the others. Although the two residents were all charm they were careful not to talk to each other.

One factor that stood out in all modern Plantations was that the Manager was not the most important person on the Plantation - the Mechanic was!. We had the usual party that evening and for a few hours Robinson River Plantation was alive and well. The Manager and the Mechanic were talking to one another but it was very obvious that each of them was doing so under heavy duress.

An aircraft was arranged the following morning to take John Costello and Harry Moxham down to Douini island. On its return from Douini it picked up Jim, Betty and myself and we went back to Moresby where Jim arranged to have the "Cool" towed back to Moresby by one of BP's Copra boats. The only thing that could be said about that trip is "Hell is a BP's Plantation".

In March 1975 I was advised that I was posted to Tn. Centre at Chowder Bay. This posed a quandary for me for the following reasons:

1. Australia, by this time, was regarded by Suzanne and I as a foreign posting that I did not particularly want.
2. We were now part of a new Corps (RACT) and was there a future for people like myself
3. The Army itself was also changing with new ideas, concepts and a new defence posture. So far as I knew there were only four people left out of all those personnel who were in Transportation(RAE) when I arrived at Chowder Bay in 1953. Apart from myself there was Lt. Col. Ken Duncan who was now Commanding at Chowder Bay, John Sainsbury who was a Major with Movements at Victoria Barracks and, I think Major Jim McFarlane. Of the people who had spent their entire career as "Boat people", I was the last.
4. It seemed to me that in any occupation the career curve starts from zero and begins a climb (the steeper the curve determines either ones' ambition or competency) to a point where it flattens out and then begins a time of a sense of fulfilment and is a flat curve until two factors, age and/or the era changes, and the curve begins a downward trend. I have seen it over the years with many people who remained in the Army after the two factors appeared. They then began to have postings that were far removed from their career curve. ie. CMF, Quartermaster and Administrative positions. I did not want that and
5. The era of Water Transport in PNG was over and to think that PNGDF Maritime Operations ie. RAN would carry out operations in a similar fashion the way our

people had carried them out over the years would be rather naive. In fact, the only thing that Maritime Operations wanted from the Land Operations people was the Marine Base.

I had heard that the position of Admin. Officer at Igam Barracks in Lae was becoming vacant and I casually "tested the waters" so to speak but HQPNGDF was far ahead of me. While they were more than satisfied with what I was and what I was doing, though some of it was 'quite unorthodox', they knew that I would not make a good Admin. Officer and they also knew that I knew that I would not make a good Admin. Officer. In the words of Lt. Col. Dave Allen (Personnel) "You have been out of Australia far too long and you are going home". That ended that little foray into the world of conniving. The times were certainly changing.

We finally left PNG in May 75.