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Photo from the private collection of Rose-Marie Radley.

Mission Vessels of the South Pacific

GRAHAM WRIGHT

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The hundreds of boats of the South Pacific fleet, together with their crews and those associated with them (many of whom were Pacific Islanders) made an incredible contribution in support of the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the islands of the South Seas. The boats enabled tenacious early pioneer Seventh-day Adventists to open schools and training institutions, provide medical services, and plant church congregations widely throughout those islands.

The South Pacific Ocean, including the islands that are located within it, accounts for more than 20% of the surface area of the earth. As the Seventh-day Adventist Church began to grow in the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with little or no travel and communication infrastructure, it was necessary to depend on shipping services. However, with limited commercial shipping available, and reluctance by other mission groups to assist Adventist missionaries, the Church recognized that it needed to develop its own shipping infrastructure.

The early boats in the Adventist mission fleet in the South Pacific were sailing boats. The fleet included schooners, ketches, cutters, sloops, a lugger, and yawl-rigged boats. From the early years of the twentieth century most boats had some form of auxiliary motor. From the 1930s, new boats were not equipped with sail and relied on inboard

engines.

Pitcairn, the First Mission Boat

In October 1886, John I. Tay, an American Adventist ship's carpenter, reached the island of Pitcairn on a Royal Navy vessel and requested permission to stay until the arrival of the next boat. Within just five weeks, the islanders declared their allegiance to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. After leaving the island, Tay asked that an ordained minister be sent to Pitcairn in order to baptize the islanders. Elder Andrew Cudney of Nebraska agreed to go, and Tay was to accompany him.¹ Cudney chose to sail via Hawaii, but then found it impossible to connect with a boat going to Tahiti. Tay was waiting for him in Tahiti. A local Adventist purchased a vessel of forty-five tons for him to use and a crew of six were enlisted to take him to Tahiti and then to Pitcairn. They left Honolulu on July 31, 1888, but were never heard from again.² In 1891, what was thought to be wreckage of the boat was reported found on Tahitian shores.³

Meanwhile, the leaders of the General Conference had decided that an ocean-going vessel was required for missionary work in the South Pacific. In November 1887, the first decision was made which would, in 1890, lead to the construction and dedication of just such a boat. The action of the General Conference read:

"WHEREAS, The professed faith of Seventh-day Adventists requires them to carry the message of truth for this generation to all kindreds, tongues, and people; and

"WHEREAS, The islands of the Pacific Ocean are peopled with many thousands who have never heard the tidings of the soon-coming King and there are no regular means of transportation whereby missionaries may be sent to those islands; therefore it is

"RECOMMENDED by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Conference assembled—"That a vessel of suitable size and construction for missionary purposes be purchased or built and equipped for missionary work among the islands of the Pacific Ocean."⁴

When plans were eventually made, \$19,000 was allocated for the vessel.⁵ A total of \$16,000 was donated; \$11,871.58 was raised through Sabbath School offerings. The vessel was a two masted schooner, 100 feet long, and named *Pitcairn*. It was dedicated on September 25, 1890.⁶

The *Pitcairn* was the first vessel owned and operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It was built for the purpose of evangelizing the Polynesian and Melanesian island groups of the South Pacific. Its operation was administered by the General Conference. It made a total of six missionary voyages to the South Pacific, beginning on October 20, 1890.⁷ Its final trip commenced on January 23, 1899.⁸

Early Missionary Vessels of the Australasian Union Conference Until 1920

Fiji and Eastern Polynesia

Simultaneous to the trips of the *Pitcairn*, the Australasian Union Conference took increasing responsibility for fostering church development in Fiji and the Polynesian island groups to the east of Fiji. In the period from 1897 to 1913, seven boats were acquired for service in Fiji, and Pitcairn Island.

The first boat to be operated under the Australasian Union Conference was built in Suva, Fiji, in 1897 at a cost of eighty pounds. It was a six-ton cutter, named the *Cina* meaning "lamp." The boat was used around the Fiji Islands until it was wrecked on a reef late in 1901. John Fulton lamented the loss of the small boat and the resulting impairment to the work of the Church in Fiji. He appealed for donations so that a replacement vessel could be acquired without delay.⁹ He would have to wait many months before his request was granted.

Meanwhile, in 1902, a vessel was purchased for the people of Pitcairn by the British Consul in Tahiti. It was a fifteen-ton cutter. The vessel, which was aptly named *Pitcairn*, was not owned and operated as such by the Australasian Union Conference. However, it was used by the people of Pitcairn and the Church for produce trading and missionary work, and came under the command of Captain Griffiths (G. F.) Jones who was the resident Adventist minister on the island at the time.¹⁰ This boat was condemned as unseaworthy and replaced in 1908 at a cost of A£356 by a schooner named *Tiare* meaning "flower."¹¹

By the middle of 1903, John Fulton's desire for a replacement vessel for Fiji came to fruition. A new launch, replacing the *Cina*, was acquired in Fiji. Named the *Adi Suva*, meaning "Queen of Suva," the boat was largely paid for by Sabbath School offerings.¹² Then, in 1904, a small four-ton cutter was built in Suva at a cost of A£60. It was called *Ramona* after the daughter of C. H. Parker, and operated initially under the direction of C. H. Parker in the Lau group of islands in eastern Fiji, and later, for the Buresala Training School.¹³ In 1906, a ten-ton schooner was added to the fleet in Fiji. Although it was a replacement for the *Adi Suva*, it was given the name *Cina II*. In 1908, the Australasian Union Conference recommended that the boat be equipped with an oil engine to supplement the sails.¹⁴ Another boat, which was obtained in 1911, was also named *Cina*. This was a small launch of twenty-six feet used exclusively by the Buresala Training School to ferry students and school supplies. It served the school for sixteen years by which time it was deemed unseaworthy.¹⁵

In 1915, it was decided that a new boat would be provided for general use in Fiji. The plan was that it be built in Fiji and financed by Sabbath School offerings. In fact, a second-hand yawl was purchased from the H. M. Ford shipyards in Sydney and shipped to Fiji. The boat was named the *Cina Vou*, meaning “New Lamp.”¹⁶

Also in 1915 the people of Pitcairn Island decided to build a vessel for their exclusive use in order to “take . . . tithe produce to market . . . as a missionary enterprise.”¹⁷ Tools, building materials and timber were scarce on Pitcairn.¹⁸ In January 1917, after 13 months of work a schooner of forty-four feet was launched. It was aptly named *Messenger*.¹⁹ *Messenger* was to take a number of trips between Pitcairn and Tahiti until 1920.²⁰ In early 1920, following a visit to Mangareva the boat was strained in a big storm, began to leak badly, and then became becalmed. After more than three weeks the boat was miraculously located by a steamboat, evacuated and set adrift to sink.²¹

The last boat acquired by the Fiji Mission before 1920 was a small vessel which was used by the Navesau School on the upper reaches of the Wainibuka River on the island of Viti Levu. It was named *Rarama*.²²

The New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands

In 1914, the first two purpose-designed mission boats were ordered and built by H. M. Ford and Son at North Sydney. This ship builder was the major source of Sydney-built boats and design advice for the Australasian Union Conference until 1930. The boats were the *Eran*, a twenty-six-foot rigged yawl for the New Hebrides, and the *Advent Herald* a thirty-two-foot ketch for the Solomon Islands. The construction of the *Eran* was funded by Sabbath School offerings.²³ It capsized in a storm in 1923 and was wrecked at Big Bay, Santo.²⁴ It was rebuilt and eventually replaced by *Eran II* in 1935.

The *Advent Herald* was built for G. F. Jones to pioneer the work of the Church in the Solomon Islands. Coming from a merchant shipping background, Jones’s first posting in the Australasian Union Conference territory had been in 1901 to the Society Islands (now Tahiti) in the South Pacific.²⁵ In 1903, after working in Pitcairn and the Gambier group (300 miles southwest of Pitcairn), Jones was ordained to the gospel ministry in Tahiti.²⁶ In 1904, he pioneered Adventist mission work in Singapore, and subsequently in the Dutch East Indies (Java, Sumatra, and Borneo) and the Malay States. At the time, these territories were attached to the Australasian Union Conference.²⁷

Prior to leaving for the Solomon Islands in 1914, Jones was engaged as chaplain at the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital in Wahroonga, Sydney. There he met a plantation owner from the Western Solomon Islands, Norman Wheatley, who was to be of enormous assistance in guiding Jones to a place where he could establish his work and provide a temporary crew.²⁸ The *Advent Herald* was sold in 1921.²⁹

One of the issues that Jones had to address was the lack of crew for his vessel. In the course of his mission work, he selected, trained, employed, and converted people from the communities in which he was engaged. As the mission developed so did the number of young Adventist crew members who were to take their place as engineers, navigators, and eventually captains of the Adventist fleet.³⁰

A second boat was made available for the Solomon Islands in 1916. It was called the *Minando* which meant “love.”³¹ It was a “motor dinghy,” designed so that it could “travel among the shoals of the [Maravo] lagoon where the *Advent Herald* could not go without risk.”³² It was built at a cost of A£127, and financed by Sabbath School offerings.³³ Also, in 1916, a second boat was made available for the New Hebrides. The boat a twenty-one -foot launch, was named *Tila*.³⁴

With the growth of the Church in the Solomon Islands, the Australasian Union Conference recognized in September 1916 the need for a larger vessel to support the work of mission stations being established. With a length of sixty feet eight inches, the 32-ton ketch *Melanesia* was the largest boat built for the Australasian Union until after World War II when three 65-foot boats were built.³⁵ It was seen as the flagship of the fleet for a quarter of a century (1917-1942).³⁶ Largely paid for by Missionary Volunteer Societies it was the first mission vessel owned by the Australasian Union to sail from Australia to the Pacific Islands.³⁷

The *Melanesia* was to all appearances a much-loved vessel. However, behind the scenes it presented many problems. The first issue was that on its maiden voyage, Captain Jones received a very attractive offer from the French Government in the New Hebrides to buy the vessel. He cabled the president of the Australasian Union Conference and advised him of the offer. His urgent advice was to sell the vessel as he considered it unsuitable for its work.³⁸ It was later reported that Jones was unhappy with the *Melanesia* because it rolled too much, and tended to take water in high seas—issues that became apparent on its maiden voyage, which was rough in parts.³⁹

By January 1918, a second problem had surfaced. Unexpected war-related issues were making it difficult to obtain fuel oil and deck space on steamers. Sale of the vessel to the French government in the New Hebrides at an offered price of three thousand pounds was agreed but the government did not proceed with the purchase.⁴⁰

Two further issues emerged in 1920. The financial position of the Union Conference was under strain.⁴¹ The matter of the sale of the *Melanesia* was raised again. It was considered that the Solomon Islands could be served by a smaller vessel. Further, Pastor and Mrs. Jones were unable to return to malarial fields on account of their health, and there was great difficulty and expense in securing a qualified navigator. The decision was taken to sell the *Melanesia* at the best possible price. An option was offered to the government of the British Solomon Islands.⁴² It was not taken up.

The fifth issue was the conversion of the *Melanesia* to steam power. There were different views on the advisability of using steam, including the sufficiency of coal-carrying space. In early 1923 a Lune Valley steam engine, was

installed. By January 1924, the boiler had burned out and the steam engine was removed and replaced by the original two-cylinder kerosene burning Kahlenberg engine.⁴³

In August 1924, questions were again raised on the high cost of operating such a large vessel to the disadvantage of smaller vessels in the fleet. In August 1925, it was decided that the *Melanesia* should be sold or tied up and that no provision was made in the 1926 budget for the vessel.⁴⁴

During this first seven years of operation, the procurement of an engineer for the boat had been a perpetual issue. On the maiden voyage of the *Melanesia*, D. Woolston had been recorded as the official engineer. He resigned after just a few months because he suffered severely from seasickness.⁴⁵ On that voyage, Jack C. Radley was recorded as being the mate. For a period of time he was left wholly responsible for engineering duties on the *Melanesia*.

Radley had no sailing experience prior to being asked to leave his studies at the Australasian Missionary College to assist Captain Jones with the *Melanesia*. He had no indication as to whether he would succumb to chronic seasickness, like so many others who were to follow. Further, he had no formal qualifications as an engineer. What he knew about engineering he had learned from private study. When Jones asked him to captain the *Advent Herald*, others were called to serve as engineer on the *Melanesia*. Several other individuals came and went because they were bad sailors or were affected by malaria. Because no replacement engineer could be found, Radley, who had just come home on his first furlough after his first four-year term of service, returned immediately to the *Melanesia*, despite having suffered from black water fever.⁴⁶

Insurance for the vessel had also been an issue. Rather than pay an external insurance company, it was thought that it might be better to pay money into a reserve fund and the Australasian Union carry the risk.⁴⁷ Initially, it was decided that the sum of A£300 would be paid into a reserve account against loss or damage to the *Melanesia*.⁴⁸ By 1924, all mission launches and cutters were self-insured.⁴⁹ This issue of insurance cover for the *Melanesia* and the other mission craft was the forerunner of the self-insurance arm of the Church in the South Pacific. Initially known as the *Melanesia* Ketch Reserve Account, the self-insurance arm was later known as the ACA Insurance Policy and Fund and then expanded into the Risk Management Service.⁵⁰

The Decade 1920 to 1929

Between 1920 and 1929, fifteen boats were brought into service across the mission territories of the Australasian Union Conference. In chronological sequence they were:

1. *Na Talai*, a 7-ton cutter, thirty-two feet long, was built in Fiji in 1920 for the island of Vanua Levu, Fiji⁵¹ It was used by the mission until it was replaced by *Ai Talai* II in 1976.⁵²
2. *Talafekau*, meaning “messenger,” was a small launch for use at Ha’apai, Tonga. It was built at a cost of A£60 and operated from 1921.⁵³
3. *Kaoriof*, meaning “tell out the light,” was a twenty-six-foot rigged cutter. Shipped from Australia to the New Hebrides in 1923, it was located on the island of Ambrym⁵⁴ and wrecked on rocks in a hurricane in 1940.⁵⁵
4. *Manandae*, meaning “love,” arrived in 1925. This twenty-foot cutter was initially operated by John D. Anderson on the island of Malaita.⁵⁶ It was the second of four such boats. The *Minando* in 1916 was the first.⁵⁷
5. *Ginetu*, meaning “love,” also arrived in 1925. This was the third of four 20-foot boats for the Solomon Islands⁵⁸ By 1928, it was stationed on Bougainville.⁵⁹
6. *Iendo* meaning “love,” was the fourth twenty-foot cutter and also arrived in 1925. This boat was located at Batuna, Western Solomon Islands.⁶⁰
7. *Advent* was a thirty-five-foot cutter brought into service in 1925. It was first located on the island of Malaita and later on the island of Choiseul, Solomon Islands. Its construction was funded by the thirteenth Sabbath School offering for the first quarter of 1925.⁶¹ It was sold to the people of Dovelleville, Western Solomons, in 1937 for A£300. It was replaced by the *G. F. Jones*.
8. *Herald* was also a thirty-five-foot cutter built in 1925. It was located first on the island of Choiseul and then on the island of Malaita, Solomon Islands. It was also built from the proceeds of the thirteenth Sabbath School offering for the first quarter of 1925.⁶²
9. *Kima* meaning ‘Love.’ This boat was located first in the Marovo Lagoon, Western Solomon Islands and then on the island of Guadalcanal. It was built as a result of the second quarter, 1925, Sabbath School offerings. It was also known as the *Messenger*. It was rebuilt in 1936 and renamed *Marara*. It was later used in Bougainville.⁶³
10. *Isar*, meaning “strong shining of the light,”⁶⁴ was a twenty-three-foot launch transported from Sydney in early 1928 for use in Big Bay, Espirito Santo, New Hebrides, and Malekula Island, New Hebrides. Its total cost was A£480, raised by the Missionary Volunteer Societies of the Australasian Union.⁶⁵ It ran aground in August 1928, but was pulled off the reef by Jack Radley and repaired.⁶⁶ It was sold for A£80 in 1933.⁶⁷
11. *Loloma*, meaning “love, was funded by the Sabbath Schools and, when built in 1927, was second in size only to the *Melanesia*. It was a forty-three-foot ketch.⁶⁸ Initially, it was taken from Fiji to the New Hebrides but returned to Fiji in 1930. In June 1933, the Fiji Mission recommended that the *Loloma* be sold and replaced by a smaller boat, about the size of the *Talai*. The reasons given were that smaller boats would be much less costly to run, and that it would be

more easily handled by the local superintendent.⁶⁹ The *Loloma* was purchased by the Fiji government in March 1943.⁷⁰

12. *Veilomani*, meaning “love one another,” superseded the *Loloma* as the second largest boat in the fleet at forty-eight feet. It was funded by Sabbath School offerings. The boat was built in Fiji in 1927 and initially served in Fiji.⁷¹ Gilbert McLaren and crew sailed it from Fiji to Rabaul in 1930.⁷² In 1937, it was stationed in Rabaul and used on May 28 and thereafter to assist with evacuating people from Matupit Island, close to the erupting volcano Tavurvur.⁷³

13. *Cina*, built in Fiji for the Buresala Training School, was thirty-three feet long and replaced an aging boat of the same name.⁷⁴ Its construction was financed by the Week of Prayer offering from South New South Wales Conference in 1928.⁷⁵ Eight lives (missionary Fred Lang who was just thirty years of age, and seven advanced Fijian students, three of whom were married, leaving in all eight little children) and the boat were lost in a hurricane on November 23, 1930.⁷⁶ The Insurance Fund paid A£650 for the loss of the *Cina* and another A£783.15.1 was donated to the Buresala Disaster Fund.⁷⁷

14. *Matamata*, “the Beginning,” was a small launch built in Port Moresby in 1929 for Vilirupu Mission, Papua.⁷⁸

The Decade 1930 to 1939

Beginning in 1925, Lars Halvorsen and his five sons developed a business which would become the most famous boat building business in Sydney. The Adventist Church was to become a key customer of the business, particularly through two crucial times in its history—around the time of the Great Depression, as the sons were coming into the business, and after World War II.⁷⁹

The first boat built for the Church was the *Rani* (meaning light), a 26-foot auxiliary launch for the New Hebrides completed in May 1930.⁸⁰ Later that year, the *Rani* was followed to the New Hebrides by the 45-foot rigged ketch *Le Phare*. This was only the second boat to be sailed from Australia to the Pacific Islands and was captained by John (Jack) C. Radley, a first-time sailor on the maiden voyage of the *Melanesia*. He was assisted by a European mate and a New Hebridean crew of five.⁸¹ In February 1931, Radley, sailing the *Le Phare*, was involved in a significant relief mission which resulted in saving the life of Dr. Gaudiard at the Segond Hospital.⁸² This mission produced a letter of appreciation from the French commissioner in Vila, and further cemented a previously poor, but then improving relationship, between the Church and the French government authorities.⁸³ The vessel was purchased by the American forces in World War II.⁸⁴

In 1932, the 35-foot *Na Cina* went to Fiji (to replace the *Cina* lost in a hurricane).⁸⁵ In 1941, it was transferred to the Papuan Mission and later requisitioned by the army.⁸⁶ Also, in 1932 the 40-foot *Portal* went to the Malaita Mission in the Solomons. Known as “the boat that wouldn’t burn,” the *Portal* was ordered to be burned by retreating Allied Forces. The fire on the deck was extinguished, the boat hidden during the war, and later sold in 1954.⁸⁷ In 1933, the 41-foot *Diari* went to Papua and was later sold in 1959.⁸⁸

Then, in 1935 the 40-foot *Malalagi* was deployed in Mussau and Emira.⁸⁹ Together with the *Veilomani*, it was used to evacuate people from the scene of the volcanic eruption of Tavurvur and Vulcan at Rabaul in 1937.⁹⁰ Both of these vessels were destroyed by the Japanese when fleeing the war zone in January 1942.⁹¹ Also, in 1935 the 26-foot *Eran II* went to the New Hebrides to replace the first mission boat sent to this area in 1914.⁹²

The eighth boat built by the Halvorsens, a 30-foot double ender with an open cockpit, was completed for Manus in 1936 and named *Fidelis*.⁹³ In that same year, Lars Halvorsen, the owner of the Halvorsen shipyard, died in the Sydney Sanitarium. Pastor A. H. Piper wrote of him: “Mr. Halvorsen was always generously disposed toward the cause. Two years ago he visited our missions nearest to the ports in Papua, New Guinea, and the Solomons, and as a result altered the design of some of the later boats.”⁹⁴

Meanwhile, other boats were also brought into service in the 1930s:

1. *Vinaritokae*, meaning “everybody helped,” was built at Batuna by missionaries and the staff of the school, with the cost of the hull met by Solomon Island church members who raised A£700, and dedicated in early 1932.⁹⁵ It worked in the Western Solomons. It ran onto a reef near Ughela in 1934 and was refloated some days later.⁹⁶ It was destroyed by gunfire by Japanese forces in 1943.⁹⁷

2. *Mizpah* was built in 1934, the second to be built at Batuna.⁹⁸

3. *Marara*, formerly the *Kima*, was reconstructed at Batuna, Solomon Islands, in 1935 for Guadalcanal.⁹⁹

4. *Dadavata* was built in 1936, the third to be built at Batuna.¹⁰⁰ It was used in the Solomon Islands until sold in 1953.

5. *Valentis*, at forty-two feet nine inches, was a former pearling lugger, blown off course from the Caroline Islands to Mussau. The crew sold the boat to the mission in 1937 to raise funds for their return home.¹⁰¹ It was refitted at Put Put (later developed as Rugen Harbor) for use in Bougainville.¹⁰² However, it had a very short term of service due to its deteriorated condition.¹⁰³

6. *G. F. Jones* was built in 1940 at Batuna for the Amyes Memorial Hospital at Kukudu in the Western Solomon Islands. At thirty-six feet, it was later stationed at Choiseul and then Kapiu. It replaced the *Advent*.¹⁰⁴

Rabaul: A Central Base for Shipping Operations

Rabaul, located on the northeast coast of the island of New Britain, lies to the northeast of the main island of Papua New Guinea. The harbor, Simpson Harbor, and a large part of the town lie within the flooded Rabaul caldera, or volcano. The caldera has many subvents with Tavurvur being the most well-known for its devastating eruptions. In 1937, it erupted simultaneously with another subvent, Vulcan, and many people were killed.¹⁰⁵ In 1994, they both erupted again and devastated the township with 80% of the buildings collapsing under the weight of volcanic ash. After this eruption, the provincial capital was moved to Kokopo, about 20 kilometers to the southeast.

Rabaul was a central location for the Solomon Islands, Bougainville, and the north coast of Papua New Guinea. It was the headquarters of German New Guinea until it was captured by the British Commonwealth in World War I, when it became the capital of the Australian mandated territory of New Guinea. Following the 1937 volcanic eruption, the seat of government was transferred to Lae on the New Guinea mainland.

It was not until the late 1920s that Seventh-day Adventist missionaries established a permanent presence in the area with the arrival of Captain G. F. Jones at Matupit. With the purchase of land for a training school at Put Put, just to the southeast of Rabaul in 1937, the possibility of shipping repair and maintenance operations in Rugen Harbor, a part of the property, became a reality when the *Valentis* was repaired and refitted at the new site.¹⁰⁶ Rugen Harbor became the Adventist headquarters for shipping maintenance after the war.

World War II: 1939–1945

In January 1941, expatriate women and children in areas deemed dangerous began to be evacuated as a matter of priority. From the end of 1941, remaining expatriate mission personnel were evacuated on mission or other boats. The *Melanesia* left the Solomon Islands for Sydney with seven missionaries.¹⁰⁷

In January 1942, Stanley Atkins who had been pastoring for the islands in the St. Mathias group, New Ireland, and Trevor Collett, who was managing a coconut plantation on Mussau and operating a timber mill on the nearby island of Emirau, decided to evacuate on the *Malalangi*. They travelled under cover of darkness down the coast of New Ireland towards Rabaul. It took them four days to reach the relative safety of Put Put Harbor and the new training school in East New Britain. The *Veilomani* had just left Put Put. It was carrying a number of evacuees. The *Malalangi* caught up and the boats sailed together. They were attacked by a Japanese destroyer and reefed before being demolished.¹⁰⁸ There was no immediately loss of life, although Atkins later succumb to injuries in Vunapope Hospital on March 13, 1942, and Collett was taken prisoner and died at the hands of the Japanese forces.¹⁰⁹

Also, in early 1942, a group of twelve mission personnel, boarded the *Diari* in Vilirupu in the Papuan Gulf and made their way across the Torres Strait to Cairns, Australia.¹¹⁰

Mission Boats and the Armed Forces

Some Mission boats were requisitioned and/or utilized by allied armed forces during the war. After its arrival in Cairns, Jack Radley sailed the *Diari* south to Dora Creek, near Avondale College, New South Wales.¹¹¹ The Australasian Union Committee decided to renovate the vessel and lend it to the Australian forces for medical relief purposes in the South Pacific. Radley worked on the boat and was then engaged on August 11, 1943, by the army as master of the vessel (renamed *AM400*). He was discharged with the rank of first lieutenant on March 4, 1946. In this role, Radley, although under the full direction of the army, was able to support Adventist mission personnel, initially in the Papuan Gulf, but later in the north of the territory of New Guinea.¹¹²

A letter from the Australian Military Forces headquarters conveyed the very great thanks and appreciation for the offer of the auxiliary ketch *Diari* for work in operational areas and that the gift had been accepted by the Department of the Army on the understanding that, subject to the vessel still being afloat at the termination of hostilities and, further, subject to the possibility of being able to return the vessel to some acceptable location, it would be returned. No specific undertaking was given that it would be available for full time medical duties. The role allocated to the vessel would be as directed in the area of operations.¹¹³

Jack Radley sailed the *AM400* from Newcastle to Port Moresby, arriving on January 1, 1944. In February 1944, the Australasian Union committee recorded that a letter had been received from the army noting its safe arrival, expressing delight at the way it was fitted out, and that it was immediately put into use to relieve sickness in an area where an epidemic was being fought.¹¹⁴ At the same meeting, the committee also recorded a letter of thanks from the Department of the Army to the secretary for a donation by the Church of A£1000 to be applied towards the cost of medical services among the villagers of Papua.¹¹⁵

The *Diari* was returned to the Church at the conclusion of the war. However, in January 1947 a report was received from the superintendent of the Papua-New Guinea Mission which indicated that the condition of the *Diari*, the one vessel then serving that field, was such that it must be thoroughly overhauled in the near future.¹¹⁶ It continued to serve in Papua until replaced by the *Uraheni* in 1960.¹¹⁷

In 1942, the *Melanesia* was offered for sale and purchased by the Australian government. It was used during the war by American forces, along the north coast of New Guinea and Papua. Damaged by Japanese planes, it was run

aground at Douglas Harbor in the Milne Bay Province, but later repaired and refloated.¹¹⁸

Although the Japanese never invaded the New Hebrides, Allied Forces were stationed in the group. The *Le Phare* was purchased by the British resident commissioner stationed at Vila, New Hebrides, for A£1,500.¹¹⁹ It was not returned after the war.

The *G. F. Jones* was requisitioned, effective from October 1, 1942, by the Officer in Charge in Australia, British Solomon Islands Protectorate, at the rate of A£12 per month.¹²⁰ It was returned to the Church at the end of the war.

The *Na Cina* was transferred from Fiji to Papua in 1941.¹²¹ It was requisitioned by the Australian army for a settlement of A£300.¹²²

The *Davadata* was requisitioned by the Australian government in June 1942 and a monthly fee of A£5 was offered.¹²³ It was returned to the Church after the war.

A number of boats were cared for by the people of the Solomon Islands. Pastor Kata Ragoso wrote:

The mission ships were all in good care after the missionaries left. The *Dadavata* was sent to Choiseul, and Viva and Liligeto cared for it. The *Mizpah* was cared for by Rini and Jimuru at Kukudu. The *Marara* was taken on May 5, and the *Mizpah* on July 25 [1942]. The two boats, *Portal* and *Vinaritokae*, which had no engines in them, were left with me. They were hidden in a river under two great trees. We built covers over them, and the boys kept putting green branches and green leaves on these, so that they would not be seen by the aeroplanes. It was not until May of 1943 that the Japanese discovered one of these boats, and they came in and fired on the *Vinaritokae*, and she was sunk. But the *Portal* was not seen by them, and we still have her. Apart from the *Vinaritokae*, our boats and our effects were all cared for.¹²⁴

Those ships lost through enemy action were the *Malalagi*, *Veilomani*, *Fidelis*, *Mizpah*, *Vinaritokae*, *Inedo* and *Marara*. The boats which survived the war were the *Eran*, *Melanesia*, *Rani*, *Diari*, *Portal*, *Dadavata*, *Silae*, *G. F. Jones*, and *Minando*.¹²⁵

The Post-war Years: 1945-1950

During the war years, the Australasian Union Conference executive committee had been planning for the eventual return of missionaries to the mission stations in the South Pacific and the replacement of the infrastructure destroyed or damaged during the war. In August 1944, the first major planning action was taken. Reports at the time indicated that it may be opportune to place orders for engines required for mission vessels in view of the improvement in world conditions, and the expected long waiting times for new engines to be manufactured and shipped once the war was over. Orders were placed for eight full diesel Gardner Marine engines. It was expected that these engines would be shipped from England about October or November 1945. The first was not shipped until mid-February 1946. Because of the delay in the delivery of the engines, it was not expected that the vessels then under construction would be ready before June 1946. Twelve additional engines were ordered in 1945 and 1946.¹²⁶

In July 1945, the executive committee made its first decision to rebuild the mission fleet by acquisition rather than wait for the arrival of new engines and the construction of new vessels. Although it was not of a suitable type for mission work generally, the *Endeavour* was purchased at a cost of A£3000 and freighted to Tonga.¹²⁷ Its tenure was short as it was wrecked on a coral reef in the southern Ha'apai Group of Tonga on December 11, 1949. As it was breaking up, it was revealed to have been in poor condition. The *Endeavour* was replaced in Tonga by the transfer of the *Lao Heni* from the Papuan Gulf.¹²⁸

In September 1945, the Church sought the return of the *Melanesia* from the Department of the Navy. The agreed price was A£1500. A second appropriation of A£1500 was authorized for repairing and refitting the vessel with all funds to be sourced from the Missions' Rehabilitation Fund.¹²⁹ However, the funds set aside were inadequate. At the end of October 1945, the committee accepted the estimate of A£2,950 from Reg Adams of Clayton & Co., for the refitting of the vessel according to the general plans submitted and approved by the meeting.¹³⁰

However, on January 24, 1947, after the work was completed, the *Melanesia* sank at its moorings overnight, in Berrys Bay, Sydney.¹³¹ As the vessel was almost completely renovated the resulting damage was considerable. Masonite and floorboards had to be removed and replaced; locks and windows made workable; engine, auxiliaries, and generators dismantled and overhauled; rope and tackle to be removed; and all accommodations repainted.¹³² It was dedicated and left for Fiji on May 7, 1947.¹³³ It was sold in 1948 and replaced by the *Viking Ahoy*.¹³⁴

In April 1946, the Church voted to purchase the *Ambon*.¹³⁵ Following the war, there was an acute shortage of shipping in the South Pacific. This resulted in considerable difficulty in transporting missionaries and supplies to the Solomon Islands and parts of New Guinea. W. R. Carpenter & Co Pty. Ltd. had offered to sell the *Ambon*, a seventy-six-foot supply vessel, for an approximate price of A£8500, on the understanding that they would be given opportunity to repurchase the boat when the needs of the Church had been met. The *Ambon* was noted to have been built in 1940, to be of very solid structure, and to be quite suitable for taking missionaries and supplies to island mission fields. At the time, the *Ambon* was being reconstructed after use by the navy and was to be powered with either a 120-hp or 160-hp Vivian diesel engine.¹³⁶

In July 1946, the committee named the crew to take the *Ambon* to the Solomons. Jack Radley was to captain the

vessel, with his wife as stewardess and a crew of five returning missionaries with very limited sailing experience.¹³⁷ Ten months after it sailed, the engine of the *Ambon* broke down completely. Repairs in England were out of the question. A new replacement engine was available in Sydney and installed. Compensation from the manufacturers was sought. After extensive negotiations, the parties came to an agreement, but at significant cost to the Church.¹³⁸ In early 1949, the ship was chartered to W. R. Carpenter & Co. and finally sold to another party for A£10,000 in February 1950.¹³⁹

On August 2, 1946, a former naval launch of unknown name, which was being used by Vatuvonu School on the island of Vanua Levu, Fiji, exploded and all on board were forced to abandon ship. Jack Rowe, a minister and director of Vanua Levu district drowned. All others on board made it safely to shore.¹⁴⁰

By September 1946, a major ship-building program was voted by the Australasian Union Conference executive committee. Authorization was given and appropriations provided from the Mission Vessels Rebuilding Programme for:

Three sixty-five-foot vessels, with twin engines, one each for the Solomon Islands, Bismarck Archipelago, and Gilbert & Ellice Islands;

Four fifty-three-foot vessels, with twin engines, one each for the New Hebrides, Papua, Fiji, and the Madang Coast, New Guinea;

Nine forty-five foot-vessels, with single engines, one each for Mussau, Manus, Atchin, Bougainville, Aoba, Gizo, Amyes Memorial Hospital, Eastern Papua, and the Papuan Delta.

Including the reconstruction of the *Melanesia*, the refitting of the *Diari*, engine replacements for the *Portal*, *G. F. Jones*, and *Eran*, navigation equipment and contingencies, the total amount to be provided through the Mission Vessels Replacement Fund was A£136,778.¹⁴¹ The General Conference was a major source of the funds provided for the upgrading of the post-war mission fleet. In October 1946, a grant of US\$200,000 (approx. A£60,000), was made for rehabilitation purposes. A further US\$50,000 (A£15,150) was received from the General Conference in 1948.¹⁴²

On Sunday, February 2, 1947, two vessels were dedicated at the Rozelle Bay Wharf in Sydney. The first was a forty-five-foot boat, which had been purchased from the Australian navy.¹⁴³ The second quarter Thirteenth Sabbath offering was allocated to provide the funds for this vessel with an objective of A£1,750. The cost of the vessel was A£3,500. The Sabbath School offering raised a total of A£2,756, which was A£1,006 more than the goal.¹⁴⁴

The vessel was named the *Dabarere*, meaning “dawning of the light.”¹⁴⁵ It was not part of the mission fleet for very long. By late 1949, deterioration was apparent. Steamships Trading Company quoted a sum of A£250 for repairing the portion of the planks which showed evidence of dry rot. However, as they began their work, the maintenance crew found that the damage was much more extensive than at first indicated. A thorough investigation showed evidence of dry rot right through the ship. The engines were removed for later sale and the hull and fittings transferred to Steamships Trading Company in full settlement of the work already done.¹⁴⁶

Beginning in early 1947, Halvorsen shipbuilders in Sydney had been contracted to build a total of eleven new launches for the Adventist mission fleet. Three of these were 65-foot vessels and eight were 45-foot vessels. They were progressively delivered from 1947 through 1950. *Veilomani II* was the first boat delivered.¹⁴⁷ The contract was the largest boat building contract the Church had ever entered. Including the eight boats built in the 1930s, Halvorsens built a total of nineteen boats for the Church. They were outstanding vessels and enabled the Church to provide exceptional maritime support service for its mission operations in the islands of the South Pacific.

The other vessel dedicated on February 2, 1947, was the *Veilomani II*,¹⁴⁸ named after the boat destroyed by the Japanese. It was sailed to New Guinea and stationed at Rabaul until the need for large boats to provide support to renew infrastructure destroyed during the war concluded. It was sold to a Chinese trader in 1952 for A£10,000 and was lost in a storm near Cape St. George, overloaded with copra bags.¹⁴⁹

The second sixty-five-foot Halvorsen craft was dedicated on Sunday March 23, 1947, also at the Rozelle Wharf. It was named the *Fetu Ao*, meaning “dawning of the day.” It was sailed to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands to be used to begin church work in those two island groups by Pastor and Mrs. John Howse.¹⁵⁰ In 1955, it was turned over on a reef at Nunamea in the Ellice Islands. It suffered damage, but was able to continue sailing after some running repairs.¹⁵¹ It was refitted in 1969 and sold in 1970 to the French government of the New Hebrides.

Silae, meaning “helper, was a small launch of twenty feet which operated for some time at Aore School, New Hebrides, was dedicated in May 1947 at Aore.¹⁵² It had previously been unnamed and was sold in 1950.¹⁵³

Two fifty-three-foot boats also came into service in 1947. One was the *Lao Heni*, meaning “messenger.” It was built in Sydney, dedicated on June 23, 1947, and sailed to Papua by Captain H. W. Reece.¹⁵⁴ In 1950, it was transferred to Tonga to replace the *Endeavour*.¹⁵⁵ In 1959, it sailed to Honiara to be stationed in the Solomon Islands.¹⁵⁶ The other ship was the *Nakalagi*. It was sailed to the New Hebrides, also with W. H. Reece as captain. It was reported that at the time of the dedication of the *Nakalagi* on October 1, 1947, there were thirteen vessels operating in the island missions and another ten boats were on order.¹⁵⁷ Both the *Lao Heni* and the *Nakalagi* had difficulties with their deep draft, which made them unsuitable for sailing through shallow coral reefs. A decision was made in 1958 to sell the *Lao Heni*.¹⁵⁸ However, it was not sold until 1974. The *Nakalagi* was lost in a storm at Aoba in 1964.¹⁵⁹

On Wednesday, January 14, 1948, the first of the new forty-five-foot boats built at the Halvorsen shipyards was

dedicated. The boat was given the name *Malalagi II*, for Mussau and Emira, replacing the vessel of the same name sunk during the war.¹⁶⁰ It remained in the service of the Church until 1972. The second of the forty-five-foot boats was named *Light*. It was used in Manus, then Madang, and finally in Papua from 1966 until 1972 when it was sold.¹⁶¹

The third sixty-five-foot vessel was dedicated on March 18, 1948. It was named Batuna and was for the Solomon Islands. On its maiden voyage, under Captain Jack Radley, the ship encountered a severe hurricane off Brisbane and had to shelter for five days behind Moreton Island, eventually arriving safely in Honiara.¹⁶² After five years of service, it was sold in 1953 when the demand for large mission operated vessels had passed.

The third of the forty-five-foot Halvorsen boats was the *Vari Va To* for the Amyes Memorial Hospital on Kolombangara Island in the Western Solomons. On its maiden voyage, the engineer, Sam, had severe appendicitis off the New South Wales coast and the ship had to put into Brisbane where surgery could be performed. While Sam recovered, the ship continued onto Cairns where it waited for Sam to arrive by air.¹⁶³ The ship was stationed at Kukudu. It was in this area that John F. Kennedy, a future president of the United States and the crew of his patrol boat were rescued by Adventist villagers. The ongoing local mission ownership of the boat, partly financed from the United States, has been maintained. It was rebuilt and refitted by Cyril Vavoso in 2004.¹⁶⁴ As of mid-2019 it continues to be operated by the Solomon Islands Mission and is based at Kukudu.

The fourth 45-foot Halvorsen boat was the *Devare*, meaning "light." It was dedicated in September 1948 and sailed under Captain Reece to the Solomon Islands and then to Bougainville. In a severe electrical storm on its maiden voyage, it ran onto a beach about twenty miles north of Port Macquarie, New South Wales. It was refloated two days later with some slight damage.¹⁶⁵ It served for twenty-five years until sold in 1973.

The fifth forty-five-foot vessel was the *Vinaritokae II*, meaning "helping one another." It sailed out of Sydney harbour on January 6, 1949 bound for the Solomon Islands.¹⁶⁶ The *Vinaritokae* was transferred to Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea in 1959, and was sold in 1985.

Ka Seli, meaning "spreading of the light," was the sixth of the forty-five-foot boats. In April 1949, it was sailed to the New Hebrides by Captain Reece and crew.¹⁶⁷ It was blown ashore on at Port Sandwich, Malekula, in a hurricane in 1951, but was not too seriously damaged. It was transferred to West New Britain in 1959¹⁶⁸ and then to the Madang Manus Mission in 1974. It was sold in 1984.

The next forty-five-foot boat to be built was the *Lelaman*, also meaning "light."¹⁶⁹ It sailed under Captain Reece from Sydney to Madang in early June 1949 and worked along the north coast of New Guinea.¹⁷⁰ It ran about 150 yards aground on a reef near New Hanover Island on the way back from Mussau to Madang in January 1951. It was not badly damaged and was salvaged by Captain Jack Radley and towed to Rabaul for repairs.¹⁷¹

The last of eight forty-five-foot boats built by the Halvorsens was the *Leleo*, again meaning "light." After sailing for the New Hebrides under Captain Reece on August 23, 1949, it ran onto the beach at Crescent Head on August 26 after turning back for shelter from a storm.¹⁷² It was beached for six weeks, then refloated and towed to Port Macquarie for repairs.¹⁷³ After preliminary work, it sailed back to Sydney for a thorough overhaul and sailed again on January 3, 1950 with Captain Jack Radley in command and R. E. Hare assisting. It had to shelter from storms on two occasions as it traversed the Australian coastline, arriving in Rabaul on January 22.¹⁷⁴ From there it went on to the New Hebrides. After 23 years of service it was sold in Fiji in 1973.¹⁷⁵

At the same time as the Halvorsen boats were being built between 1947 and 1950, a number of other boats were acquired.

1. The Central Pacific Union Mission acquired a boat to replace the aging *Melanesia*. The *Viking Ahoy* came to Suva from Brisbane early in 1948 on charter to the J. Arthur Rank's organization for making the film *The Blue Lagoon*. It had been built in Brisbane by Watts and Wright Ltd. to the order of a Mr. Griffith, owner of the Toowoomba Foundry, which built Southern Cross diesel engines. Two of these were installed in the ship, each generating 45-hp. In addition to the diesel engines, the vessel was ketch rigged with four sails. It had a length of fifty-nine feet and a beam of fifteen feet. It had been taken over by the Australian navy and used on anti-submarine service between Darwin and Timor. In 1946, it was purchased, refitted, and commissioned for the tourist trade on the Great Barrier Reef. It was purchased by the Central Pacific Union Mission, partially funded from the proceeds of the sale of the *Melanesia* in early 1949.¹⁷⁶ It was grounded in a hurricane in 1952.¹⁷⁷ It was again grounded, holed, and refloated in 1958 before being sold.¹⁷⁸

2. *Kima II*, a small launch, was built at Batuna and brought into service about 1947. It was based in the Marovo Lagoon of the Western Solomon Islands.¹⁷⁹ It was replaced by the *Valarane* in 1966.¹⁸⁰

3. *Maino II*, a small whale boat of twenty feet, was dedicated for use at Korela in the Papuan Gulf around March 1948.¹⁸¹

4. *Taurana*, a small cabin cruiser of twenty-five feet, was brought into service around 1948. It operated in the Bismarck Solomons Union Mission territory.¹⁸²

5. *Noutran*, a small boat that operated in the New Hebrides from about 1948, was sold in 1969 and replaced by the *Rani II*.¹⁸³

6. *Kambubu*, was a ship purchased in the second half of 1948 for the use of Kambubu Training School.¹⁸⁴ It was wrecked on Gazelle Point, East New Britain in April 1964 and replaced by the *Wongawill* which had its name changed to *Kambubu II*.¹⁸⁵

The Development of Rugen Harbor and the Pinnacle of the Fleet 1950-1972

In 1951, the Coral Sea Union Mission decided to centralize its ship maintenance facilities at Rugen Harbor, in place of Rabaul and Batuna. Rugen as an ideal harbor located on the Put Put property to the southeast of Rabaul. It was the site of Jones Missionary College, which later became Kambubu Adventist Secondary College. Jack Radley was given responsibility for the relocation. The job required clearing land, and the construction of a slipway, wharf, workshop, two European-style houses, and several other houses for boats' crews. While the building project was going on, Radley continued to have full responsibility for maintaining all of the boats that were using the Rabaul slipway facilities owned by W. R. Carpenter and Company.¹⁸⁶

Rugen Harbor had a double slipway. This had a formed rock foundation, cemented over to provide a smoother finish for safety and ease of working. Boats were moved onto hardwood cradles, which were pulled clear of the water on steel rails.

The construction program at Rugen Harbor began in late 1951.¹⁸⁷ In April 1952, the slipway was trialed for the first time when the *Portal* being pulled up first, followed immediately by the *Kambubu*, which needed repair work. Finishing work on the new facilities, the move from Rabaul to Rugen Harbor was completed in the second half of 1952. The mission fleet in the western Pacific was serviced by the maintenance crew at Rugen Harbor. Ship engineers and crew were trained.¹⁸⁸ The slipway operated initially under the leadership of Jack Radley and later, Ray Masters.¹⁸⁹

In 1958, Masters described the facilities at Rugen Harbor as follows:

We have a store-room 20 by 20 feet, of necessity built on the water's edge with the slipway alongside. In the workshop we have lathes, drills, and most of the heavy equipment necessary for mechanical repairs. In an open shed between the slipway and the workshop we have a 12-inch circular saw, a 9-inch pedestal jointer, and a bandsaw for woodwork on the boats... The regulations call for the engines to be entirely stripped, the boat to be placed on the slip and inspected by government surveyors, under water, inside and outside of the hull, before a certificate for the next year's operations is issued. Ships from other areas come in as deemed necessary, and once a year we take tools and go to them. So far we have avoided breakdowns... Sunday to Thursday, we work from 7.30 till 4.30, with an hour for lunch. Friday morning is usually reserved for cleaning the compound, and the afternoon for Sabbath preparation... It is only five or six years since Brother J. Radley literally cut the station out of the bush, and we are grateful for the facilities we now have for the servicing of our little fleet.¹⁹⁰

With the beginning of the decline of the mission fleet towards the end of the 1960s, the marine service operation was closed in 1972 after twenty years of service.¹⁹¹

New Boats between 1951 and 1972

Twenty-two additional boats were added to the fleet between 1951 and 1972.

1. *Sea Mark*, a thirty-eight-foot launch built by Norman R Wright & Sons Shipyards, was bought in Brisbane, possibly second-hand, and sailed to Port Moresby under the command of Jack Radley, arriving in Port Moresby in early April 1951.¹⁹²

2. *Laurel*, a sister launch, was acquired with the *Sea Mark*. It was sailed to Port Moresby by Glen Radley, brother of Jack, together with the *Sea Mark* to serve in Papuan waters.¹⁹³

3. *Durua*, a thirty-five-foot launch, was obtained around 1951 for use initially at Vaimuru in the Papuan Delta.¹⁹⁴ In 1954, it was transferred to the Sepik River region.¹⁹⁵ It was voted to sell the vessel in July 1965.¹⁹⁶

4. *Colleen* was donated by a California doctor, Lyndon Taylor and his wife. The boat was sailed from Los Angeles, arriving in Tahiti in early August 1951, under the command of Pastor Walter G. Ferris.¹⁹⁷ It was later renamed *Maranatha* and sold in 1956.¹⁹⁸

5. *Lao Heni II* was brought into service by July 1951 in Papua (and was purchased as either the *Seamark* or the *Laurel*). On December 29, 1952, an explosion on the boat in the Turama River in Papua caused the death of the wife of missionary Pastor Ernest Lemke and two of their children, David and Wayne. The boat was destroyed in the explosion.¹⁹⁹

6-8. *Diari II*, *Dabarere II*, and *Dani* were each twenty-eight feet. Dedicated in Brisbane on April 23, 1954, they had been built by Norman Wright in Brisbane. The first two were used in Papua and the third in the Solomon Islands. They were sailed in convoy from Brisbane to their respective home ports by Jack Radley, Glen Radley, and George Rusa.²⁰⁰

9. *Day Star* and *Day Dawn*, both twenty-eight-foot launches, were also built in Brisbane and then shipped to Rabaul in mid-1955. They served in the New Guinea islands.²⁰¹ *Day Star* was sold to the New Ireland people in 1973. *Day Dawn*

was sold in 1971.²⁰²

10. *Kukudu* was a small launch used in the late 1950s and early 1960s by the staff at Amyes Memorial Hospital and the Kukudu School, Kukudu, Western Solomon Islands.²⁰³

11. *Itili* was a work boat of thirty feet purchased in Suva for use in the Fiji Islands. The *Viking Ahoy* was offered for sale at the same time.²⁰⁴

12. *Kasi* was a launch of thirty feet operating in the New Hebrides from 1958.²⁰⁵ Authority for sale was given in 1972.²⁰⁶

13. *Uraheni*, meaning “love” in Motu, was built by Mill Kraft in Brisbane at a cost of A£22,325.²⁰⁷ It was dedicated on October 15, 1960, and sailed from Brisbane on October 20.²⁰⁸ It was the last large purpose-built mission boat to be built in Australia and its acquisition and operation coincided with the impending end of the era of mission boats in the South Pacific. Forty-eight feet in length, it replaced the *Diari II* and operated in the Papuan Gulf until it was sold in 1983.²⁰⁹

14. *Batuna II* was a launch of forty-four feet, acquired locally in the Solomon Islands around 1960. It operated in the Marovo Lagoon area of the Western Solomons for a short time before it was deemed unsatisfactory and sold.²¹⁰

15. *Kambubu II* was acquired in 1965 as the *Wongawill* and renamed.²¹¹ Initially, it was based at Rugen Harbor for the use of Jones Missionary College, and later transferred to the New Britain New Ireland Mission and used around New Britain, New Ireland, Mussau, Emirau and neighboring islands until it was sold in 1984.²¹²

16. *Valarane* was a launch of twenty-eight feet built at Kukudu in the Western Solomons by George Rusa, completed in 1965.²¹³ It replaced the *Kima II* and operated primarily in the Marovo Lagoon. The ship was reefed and damaged in 1974 during a storm, but refloated.²¹⁴ It was sold in 1983.²¹⁵

17. *Pathfinder* was launched in 1965 as a floating clinic on the Sepik River.²¹⁶

18. *Raratalau*, a launch of forty-two feet, was built by Henry Chow at Toboi shipyard in Rabaul for the Malaita Mission. It was dedicated on June 20, 1966,²¹⁷ later used by Atoifi Hospital, and sold in April 1983.²¹⁸

19. *Pacifique*, a forty-eight-foot former pleasure cabin cruiser approximately ten years old, was dedicated in Brisbane on Sunday, October 9, 1966. After a fitout, it was valued at A\$22,000. It replaced the *Nakalag,i* which had been wrecked in 1964. It was sailed to the New Hebrides by Captain W. G. Ferris and a new Hebridean crew to be located at Aore.²¹⁹ Due to rapidly escalating operating costs, a replacement fiberglass vessel was approved in 1971, but the *Pacifique* was not sold until 1983.²²⁰

20. *Pathfinder II*, a second fifty-two-foot floating clinic with twin aluminium pontoons, replaced the first *Pathfinder*, whose hull had rusted out, in 1971.²²¹

21. *Rani II*, a twenty-nine-foot boat, was constructed in Suva by George and Ashton for the New Hebrides, particularly Aore School and Hospital. It was made of fiberglass; the first boat constructed of materials other than wood built for the South Pacific fleet. The dedication service was held in Suva Harbor on October 4, 1971. It replaced the *Noutran*, which had been sold two years earlier.²²²

22. *Ahiana*, a twenty-nine-foot sister ship to the *Rani II*, was also built in Suva for the Aoba District of New Hebrides.²²³

The Fleet Diminishes: 1972 Onwards

In December 1967, A. E. Jones, the secretary-treasurer of the Bismarck-Solomons Union Mission, called the mission ships the lifeline of the union mission. The fleet of ships was continually on the move around the various island groups. Trips of up to eighty hours each way were not uncommon. The Bismarck-Solomons Union Mission had thirteen certificated captains and seventeen men with engineer's certificates.²²⁴

But even in his glowing report, Jones acknowledged that “ships are expensive to maintain.”²²⁵ On the mainland of Papua and New Guinea, E. R. Piez, the Secretary-Treasurer of the Coral Sea Union Mission reported that throughout his union there were three forty-five-foot ships, one forty-eight-foot, and two twenty-eight-foot vessels now in use along the coasts of New Guinea. He added that these vessels were one of the big expenses for the union.²²⁶

Cost was becoming a significant issue. But it was not the only thing that saw the use of boats beginning to decline throughout the Pacific Islands. Other factors that influenced the size of the fleet were improving government, trading, and commercial shipping services; the introduction of air services; the escalating costs of health care and higher education, which diverted funds previously available for operating boats; and increasingly, stringent requirements and qualifications for captains and crews.

Thus, in the space of just six months in 1972, the Australiasian Division executive committee approved the sale of five boats, *Light*, *Leleo*, *Malalagi II*, *Lao Heni*, and *Kasi*.²²⁷ In 1974, the *Dani* was sold, albeit with the approval of the purchase of a thirty-six-foot ferro-cement boat, the *Famouri* for *Atoifi Hospital*.²²⁸ It was only in service from 1976 to 1982, did not handle well, and sank at its moorings after being approved for sale.

Between 1980 and 1984, twelve more ships were authorized for sale. Cost was now becoming a major factor. In a 1982 article, Pastor Rex Moe, president of the Western Pacific Union Mission, instanced the prohibitive cost of operating just one boat in Vanuatu. The *Pacifique* ran for just 141 hours in 1981 at a total cost of \$12,126 (excluding

the cost of free labor) or \$86 per hour. Comparative commercial air and sea travel alternatives varied from 1% to 4% of the cost of boat operation.²²⁹

Following the article by Pastor Moe, there was a further sale of a number of vessels. In November 1982, the sale of five vessels for the “best available price,” was authorized. They were the *Ahiana* from Aore, Vanuatu; the *Pacifique*, also from Aore, Vanuatu; the *Famouri* from Batuna in the Solomon Islands, the *Uraheni* from Kikori, Papua, and the *Ai Talai II*, from Suva, Fiji. *Ai Talai II* had only been in service for six years. *Ahiana* was not sold. After a gradual but complete remake between 2012 and 2017, it serves the transportation needs of Aore Adventist Academy.²³⁰

Other approvals for the sale of boats were the *Raratalau* in March 1983; the *Valarane* in April 1983; the *Uraheni* again approved for sale in September 1983; and the *Ka seli*, *Vinaritokae*, and *Kambubu II* in April 1984.²³¹

There were just a few ships acquired during the period. The *Ai Talai II* was built in Suva and launched in 1976. It was a large steel boat of fifty feet.²³² *Famouri* also arrived in 1976.²³³ Three seven-meter “banana boats” were purchased in 1991 for Papua New Guinea. They were located at Alotau, Daru, and Kikori, all in Papua.²³⁴ The *Kamala* and the *Stirling* were acquired for Papua New Guinea in 2000. The *Kamala* was a forty-two-foot steel-hulled vessel used as a sea ambulance in the Sepik Province. The thirty-three-foot *Stirling* was a former Australian navy fiberglass vessel.²³⁵

A number of vessels were donated or supplied by supportive independent ministries. In 1979, *Silivia*, a jet boat for the Ha’apai Group, Tonga was donated by Adventist members in the United States through Pastor Jim Harris who was the Australasian Division youth director. It was built at Mount Maunganui, New Zealand, at a cost of A\$35,000.²³⁶ The *Rubie*, an eight-meter sloop for the Kiribati Mission, was donated by Search for One of Oregon, and manned by volunteer expatriates.²³⁷ *Lavinia* and *Windago* were two vessels operated for periods by Pacific Yacht Ministries in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Others, including two sailing catamarans, *Another Angel* and *McDive*, were involved in other areas of South Pacific at other times.²³⁸

L’Oiseau, a refitted Adelaide-built steel boat was provided in 2005 for the Eastern Solomon Islands by donations and supported by volunteer medical personnel. The cost was A\$100,000.²³⁹ And in 2008, the first of a fleet of *Medisonships* began serving as floating clinics from a base in Kukudu. They were supported by Sonship, a recognized and supportive independent ministry in the South Pacific Division.²⁴⁰

Smaller Boats

Apart from the larger boats over twenty feet that have been listed, there were many smaller boats used. Some were named and their names have been recorded, others were either unnamed or their names have been lost. They were referred to as “my little boat” or “our little launch” or a similar reference. Sometimes they were mentioned in terms of the name of the user, or by their location. This was particularly true in the case of union conference budget papers where appropriations were made for launch expense at different locations with only a few boats actually being called by name.

There were many examples of smaller boats. Examples include:

In 1927, there was a boat for the Society Islands costing A£100 purchased from the 1927 Week of Prayer offering from Tasmania.²⁴¹

In 1930, the *Bertha Douglas*, a sixteen-foot launch built by Pastor Ross James in Port Moresby was used by C. J. Howell at Vailala in the Papuan Gulf.²⁴²

In 1932, the Fiji Mission took action to replace the students’ boat, *Tovata*, using a A£65 hurricane grant from the Insurance Fund.²⁴³

In 1946, the Australasian Union Conference Committee took action to endorse the action of the Fiji Mission to purchase a twenty-four-foot ex-naval launch for the Vatuvonu District at a cost of A£220. This action was taken two weeks after the old launch exploded and killed Jack Rowe, director of the Vanua Levu District.²⁴⁴

In 1967, a fifteen-foot Caribbean fiber-glass hull runabout, with canopy, powered by a 75-horsepower Evinrude outboard motor, was donated for the use of Dr. Lyn McMahon at Atoifi Hospital, Malaita.²⁴⁵

In Retrospect

At the launch in Suva of the *Ai Talai II* in 1976, Pastor L. L. Butler, treasurer of the Australasian Division, reported that the division at one time had as many as twenty mission ships in island service. A number had been replaced by planes, but twelve were still operating.²⁴⁶ In the earlier years of mission work in the South Pacific and in the years following the war, the Church's own fleet was essential. The first mission sites were generally in isolated outposts, not desired or previously vacated by other mission organizations. There were either very limited or no commercial transport alternatives. The Adventist fleet was vital to the establishment and growth of the Church. But after 1976, the South Pacific Division added only two boats, both second-hand, of more than thirty-feet to the South Pacific fleet. The introduction of planes, and the financial demands of institutions such as the Sydney Adventist Hospital, Avondale College, and Pacific Adventist University, led to a rapid and then ongoing decline in the mission fleet.

In retrospect, the relationship that the Church in Australia developed with the Halvorsen family and ship-building operation in Sydney, was an inspired move. Although other denominations had a limited relationship with the family business, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was a key customer of the firm at two crucial times in their history—around the time of the Great Depression as the sons were coming into the business, and after World War II. In return, the church received practically designed and beautifully crafted vessels, with a history of longevity in service unmatched by boats provided from any other source.

The early years of the twentieth century Adventist church members in Australia and New Zealand were intensely interested in the growing impact of the message of the Church in the South Pacific Islands. This can be seen in the pages of *The Australasian Record*, and the use of Adventist mission boats as a proxy for financial involvement with this rewarding aspect of Christian witness and service. From the *Pitcairn* (largely funded by worldwide Sabbath School offerings), to the *Melanesia* (funded by Missionary Volunteer Societies), to the *Cina* (funded by Week of Prayer Offerings), and to a wide variety of boats e.g. *Eran*, *Veilomani*, *Diari*, and *Dabarere*, funded by Thirteenth Sabbath School Offerings, there were consistent and persistent appeals for sacrificial giving for boats. These appeals were regularly and wildly successful, both in terms of the amounts donated and the impact—direct and indirect—of the mission fleet on those it supported. The boats certainly contributed to the remarkable growth of the church in the Pacific Islands.

The many boats of the South Pacific fleet, together with their crews and those associated with them (many of whom were Pacific Islanders) made an incredible contribution in support of the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the islands of the South Seas. Without these boats, it is difficult to imagine how the work of the gospel would have progressed in the remarkable way that it did. Although other Christian groups were established earlier in the Pacific islands, gained an apparently strong foothold and exclusive access to selected and defined areas, the boats enabled tenacious early pioneer Seventh-day Adventists to open schools and training institutions, provide medical services, and plant church congregations widely throughout those islands.

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