



Leonard Barnard

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre, Australia.

Barnard, Leonard Henry (1919–2015)  
and Mavis Catherine (Parker)  
(1917–2005); later Noela (Shinners)

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## LESTER DEVINE

Originally trained as a secondary history teacher, a career long Adventist educator, Lester Devine, Ed.D., has taught at elementary, secondary and higher education levels and spent more than three decades in elected educational leadership positions in two divisions of the world Church, NAD (1969-1982) and SPD (1982-2005). He completed his forty years of denominational service with a term as director of the Ellen G. White/Adventist Research Centre at Avondale University College in Australia where his life-long hobby of learning and presenting on Adventist heritage issues became his vocation.

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Pastor Len Barnard, an Australian national who began working for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1934, was best known for his three decades of pioneering missionary work, particularly in Papua New Guinea. In the 1960s he co-founded Adventist Aviation which operates a fleet of aircraft in the South Pacific Division to the present day.

## Early Years

Leonard Henry Barnard was born into a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) family in Wellington, New Zealand on November 11, 1919,<sup>1</sup> the youngest of four children born to Eustace and Maud Elizabeth Barnard (Crowther)<sup>2</sup> The other children were Dora, Bessie, and Eustace.<sup>3</sup> When he was just five days old his mother disappeared and he and his siblings were placed into an orphanage for the next five years until his father remarried and Len could be brought back into the family home. At this time the family moved to Christchurch in South New Zealand where Len's father worked as an engineer for the Sanitarium Health Food Company.<sup>4</sup>

During the 1930s Great Depression, money was in very short supply so Len terminated his secondary education at the Papanui Adventist School in Christchurch to take up employment as a shop assistant for the Sanitarium Health Food Company in New Zealand. He worked there from 1934 until he had saved enough to attend Longburn College in New Zealand during 1937 and 1938.<sup>5</sup> He then returned to work for the Sanitarium in New Zealand before a transfer to Australia a year later in 1940 until mid-1942. He then was sent to New Guinea to serve the wounded during World War II.<sup>6</sup>

## Marriage and Military Service

Len first experienced New Guinea during World War II when attached to the Australian Armed Forces Fifth Casualty Clearing Station treating wounded soldiers. He remained in active service until April 1946.<sup>7</sup> While on leave from military service, Len returned to New Zealand and married Mavis Catherine Parker at Hawera on December 28, 1943.<sup>8</sup> Mavis had been born in Taranaki, New Zealand on October 7, 1917.<sup>9</sup> Two children were later born into the family: Sharyn Mavis (Lang), born in Hawera, New Zealand, and Judith Kaye (Hawkes), born in Madang, New Guinea.<sup>10</sup> Kaye was dedicated to the Lord at the first Bena Bena camp meeting in the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea some 10 weeks after her birth. Another baby dedicated at the same time at that camp meeting was Kenneth Hawkes, son of Pastor Lester and Freda Hawkes. Providentially, Kaye and Ken would later

marry and themselves serve as missionaries in Papua New Guinea.<sup>11</sup>

Being a non-combatant, Len had been sent to the territories of Papua and New Guinea (PNG) and there treated the wounded and ill who were often evacuated by air back to Australia for better medical attention. While in PNG, he observed the impact of aircraft in that mountainous country where there were practically no roads and where the only way of getting around was by walking.<sup>12</sup>

When released from army service in April 1946, Len wanted to remain in PNG doing medical work for the Church, but the Church had at that time not re-established its presence in that country. Though it was suggested Len apply for denominational mission service before he left the army, there were still no mission job vacancies as it took much longer for the Church work in the Pacific to be re-established after World War II than the Church leaders had expected. So Len returned to New Zealand where he joined the Hawera Aero Club and within a few weeks had obtained his pilot's licence.<sup>13</sup>

The family did not remain in New Zealand for long, however. Len accepted a position with the Public Health Department in New Guinea and the family moved to Bogia, 144 kilometres west of Madang.<sup>14</sup>

## Denominational Service

While in Bogia, Len was asked to pioneer the establishment of a leper colony at Hatzfeldthaven on the coast.<sup>15</sup> For various reasons, this did not occur at that time so he instead was asked to establish another such colony in the Highlands. He re-entered denominational service in October 1948.<sup>16</sup>

The Barnard's first denominational appointment in Papua New Guinea was to the Togoba Hansenide Colony, Western Highlands, where they remained for 6 years working among lepers.<sup>17</sup> The family lived for a time in a house made of Kunai grass. One evening the house burned to the ground. The family escaped but lost all of their personal belongings.<sup>18</sup> Their next appointment was to Omaura in the Eastern Highlands of PNG where Len was the district director for the Omaura district. There, he ran a small hospital and trained medical orderlies.<sup>19</sup> At the beginning of 1960 Len was appointed as the district director of the Homu district at Mt. Michael in the Eastern Highlands.<sup>20</sup> In 1962 the family transferred to Tetamanda, back in the Western Highlands where Len was again the district director. It was just after arriving at Tetamanda that Len was ordained at Sopas Hospital on February 3, 1962.<sup>21</sup>

Trekking through the difficult mountainous terrain while taking medical help to remote villages, Len was constantly reminded of how having an aircraft would greatly help in his work, especially as he saw planes belonging to other denominations on their way to his destinations. They were covering ground in minutes that took him days, even weeks to traverse.<sup>22</sup>

## A Vision for Aviation

Eventually, in 1963 Len shared his vision for aviation with the new Coral Sea Union Mission president, Pr. O. D. F. McCutcheon, and asked whether he would be willing to accept an aircraft if he, Len, could acquire one. Len was delighted when his new President responded positively to his request.

The Australasian Division Executive Committee noted that several physicians in America wished to donate a Cessna 180 aircraft for mission service in Papua New Guinea. The Coral Sea Union Mission not only endorsed this offer but had two qualified pilots in its employ. On November 7, 1963 the Committee took an action requesting the General Conference of the SDA Church to give authority for the operation of a denominationally owned aircraft in Papua New Guinea.<sup>23</sup> This was soon followed by a six part Australasian Division Committee action providing the General Conference with assurances that (1) the proposed aircraft would only be operated by qualified pilots with either a commercial license or a minimum of 200 hours flying time with an instrument rating, (2) the aircraft would receive periodic government inspection and be "officially approved for flight," (3) a commitment was made that adequate maintenance facilities would be provided in order to keep the aircraft in "safe flying condition,"<sup>24</sup> (4) use of the plane would be limited to approved routes, (5) no flights were to be taken in adverse weather conditions, and (6) proper insurance would be issued including waivers from the pilots and all passengers. The final action, taken on March 31, 1964, records the enabling action of the General Conference authorizing the operation of a denominationally owned aircraft in the Coral Sea Union Mission.<sup>25</sup>

This last action must have been considered a formality as it was preceded by an "anticipatory article" in the *Record*. The Coral Sea Union Mission President, O. D. F. McCutcheon, announced the "wonderful news" that his field was to have its own plane, "a brand new, gleaming Spanish red and cream 1964 Cessna 180, with the registration letters VH-SDA. Long has our mission waited, hoped, and prayed for this day."<sup>26</sup>

In anticipation of the procurement of an aircraft, the Barnard family was transferred to Laiagam in early 1964. Laiagam was a relatively short distance from Tetamanda and possessed an airstrip. Located at Laiagam in the Western Highlands, the Barnards spent the rest of their time in Papua New Guinea until the end of 1972.<sup>27</sup>

## A Vision Realized

Len Barnard flew down from Papua New Guinea for the dedication of VH-SDA on June 27, 1964, when the aircraft was named *Andrew Stewart* at a well-attended ceremony at Bankstown Airport in Sydney.<sup>28</sup> In his dedicatory address, Division President, Pastor L. C. Naden, reviewed the history of the mission work of the Church in the South Pacific, starting with the work of John I. Tay on Pitcairn Island through to the contribution of the mission sailing vessel *Pitcairn* and down to the 22 mission vessels operated by the Church at the time of the dedication of VH-SDA.<sup>29</sup> Pastor Naden provided statistics of the island membership growth over those years from 159 in 1903 to 33,639 in 1963. He then commented on the population density of Adventists across the South Pacific; some places were as high as one in 29 or 30 yet with many thousands still unreached. Next followed a short history of the work of the Church in Papua New Guinea noting that the first missionaries

arrived in 1908 and that the work commenced in "New Guinea proper" in 1928 with the first Adventist missionaries to Kainantu flown there commercially in the year 1935. He further noted that air travel had become the accepted mode of transport in Papua New Guinea and then went on to comment that Len Barnard and others had pioneered "a noble work" for the people there, especially the lepers. Pastor Naden then went on to say that it was largely a result of Len's enthusiasm that the new plane had been donated for mission service "to be used co-jointly with missionary Colin Winch in the territory of New Guinea."

These comments led to a review of the contribution of Pastor A. J. Stewart and to "the establishment and progress of our mission work in the South Sea Islands" beginning in 1907. Pastor Naden concluded his remarks honouring this aged missionary, "whose life had blessed so many, by naming our first denominationally owned plane, *Andrew Stewart*" and calling upon him to "dedicate it to the service of God and the people he loves so much within the territory of New Guinea." He said, "We would ask him to remember especially missionary pilots Len Barnard and Colin Winch who will share this plane, and all those who will travel with them on their flights in the service of the Master."<sup>30</sup>

The two day, 3,200 kilometer ferry trip from Sydney, Australia, to Papua New Guinea included some challenging flying. The first day ended with the plane arriving in Townsville after nightfall. The next day it took off for Cairns and then Thursday Island where it refuelled, cleared customs, and then began "the final leg into the heart of Papua New Guinea."<sup>31</sup> Barnard described the final leg into Goroka:

Majestic storms were scattered along the dreary coast of the Papua Gulf as we approached, and the mighty Fly River, which is thirty five miles wide at its mouth, was emptying the water and soil it had brought down from the shrouded hinterland. We were now only six degrees from the equator... Climbing to nine thousand feet, we managed to keep clear of the cloud near the coast, but as the mountains guarding the highlands reached up to meet us, so did the clouds. Mammoth cumulus cloud build-ups challenged our advance, so we climbed higher and higher, but in our small plane we could never hope to top the hats of these giants of the heavens:<sup>32</sup>

Then, at 14,000 feet a gap was found in the clouds and the descent into Goroka was made. On landing, June 30, 1964, the plane was greeted by Union President, Pastor O. D. F. McCutcheon. The Seventh-day Adventist Church members were excited. Adventist Aviation on the South Pacific was now a reality.<sup>33</sup>

Barnard was joined in flying the *Andrew Stewart* by Colin Winch who also had his pilot's licence and about 300 hours flying experience.<sup>34</sup> Years later Winch reflected,

I remember very well the thrill when a few days after his arrival in Papua New Guinea Len flew the aircraft down to the Hayfields airfield near Maprik in the Sepik District where I was stationed. It was a wonderful thrill for me to take the controls and to fly the aircraft through to the Maprik airstrip. Len and I shared this aircraft (VH-SDA) for two years opening up work throughout the Western Highlands and the Sepik District.<sup>35</sup>

Barnard himself reflected on the difference that an aviation capability made to the mission of the Church.

In 1959 I led a medical mission patrol into the notorious Karamui cannibal country. It took forty days of footslogging to reach these remote and appallingly needy people and return. We gave injections and medicine, and treated ghastly wounds and ulcers. This was the first medical aid given these people. Leprosy was rife and evidence of their cannibalism was all around. After meeting their physical needs, these people were ready to hear news of a loving saviour and God who cared for them. Subsequently a government airstrip was built, and it is now possible to fly there in twenty-eight minutes, and in comfort. What a contrast.<sup>36</sup>

After two years of flying in Papua New Guinea, Len Barnard had a serious accident when his left leg was almost severed by the propeller while testing its compression. Four doctors said it must be amputated but Len insisted it be sewed together and the Lord would heal it. This was done and much to the surprise of the surgeon, Len returned to continue flying for the mission for several more years.<sup>37</sup> The massive wound which circled his thigh had healed very quickly but the bone took a lot longer. While Len had a limp for a while it was only eight months after the accident that he was back flying mission aircraft again.<sup>38</sup>

Experience, along with Len's vision, had shown Adventist Aviation in the South Pacific to be an invaluable part of the program. Eventually larger and more capable aircraft were added to the fleet with the Quiet Hour radio broadcast in the United States funding several of them.<sup>39</sup>

After four years as an army medic and another 23 years as a medical missionary and pilot in Papua New Guinea, 55 year old Len Barnard, together with his wife Mavis, returned to Australia at the beginning of 1972 for health reasons and was invited to be the church pastor at Hillview Church, Morisset where a new church building was in the process of construction. They then transferred to Kanwal on the New South Wales Central Coast.<sup>40</sup> He then pastored the Hamilton Church in Newcastle, New South Wales from 1979 – 1980. He spent 1981 engaged by that conference to contact members who had not attended church for some time. He concluded his years of active service at the Swansea Church, New South Wales until his retirement on December 29, 1984.<sup>41</sup>

## Retirement and Later Years

When Len Barnard retired from his work as pastor-pilot for the North New South Wales Conference he did not retire from flying. He could be seen and heard on most Sundays flying his own ultra-light plane above the Avondale College community and beyond for almost another two decades.<sup>42</sup> At the age of 90, he was the oldest recreational pilot in Australia.<sup>43</sup> He also was the inspiration behind the Adventist Aviation Associations (AAA) which operate in a number of conferences in Australia. In 1978 he was seconded to the Western Australia Conference to set up the AAA in that conference after his experience in North New South Wales Conference.

About 12 years before his death, staff at the Ellen G White Adventist Research Centre scanned all Len's mission and aviation slides. After some restoration, they printed and stored them in several folders. In his later years Len carried copies of these folders when visiting churches recounting the stories of God's leading in the aviation

program in the South Pacific.<sup>44</sup>

Mavis died on October 15, 2005. She was buried in Avondale Adventist Cemetery. Pastors Russell Stanley, Lester Hawkes, and Lyndon Schick conducted the service.<sup>45</sup>

On April 2, 2006, Len married Noela Shinnars.<sup>46</sup> Noela was born on May 19, 1940.<sup>47</sup>

In 2014, just 7 months before he died, Len made a nostalgic final trip back to Papua New Guinea accompanied by his daughters Sharyn and Kaye. The occasion was the 50th anniversary of the commencement of Adventist Aviation in Papua New Guinea and the South Pacific Division. Full of gratitude, he was able to observe first-hand the enormous development of Adventist mission aviation in that country and was amazed at the load carrying and short field capability of the new turbine powered aircraft in service there.<sup>48</sup> A special celebration had been held earlier in the Memorial SDA Church, Cooranbong, New South Wales.<sup>49</sup>

Leonard Barnard died on January 14, 2015.<sup>50</sup> His funeral was conducted on January 27, 2015 at Avondale Cemetery by Pastor Adrian Craig and Pastor Roger Nixon.<sup>51</sup> Just an hour before he died, he was visited by his close friend and colleague of 50 years, Pastor Colin Winch, who had shared flying duties with him in the *Andrew Stewart* back in those early years. Pastor Winch, decades later as the Chief Pilot of the South Pacific Division, had used the plane many times for the annual check rides of those pilots regularly flying it.<sup>52</sup>

Some years before his death, Pastor Len Barnard expressed his commitment to the Lord and to mission aviation in the South Pacific Division:

If men's eyes were opened, maybe we would see mission planes flying in formation with the Three Angels of the apocalypse and together proclaiming the gospel to the "uttermost" parts of planet earth.<sup>53</sup>

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