



Jugha and Vela (left) on their wedding day with two other wedding couples.

Photo courtesy of Milton Hook. From the collection of Harold B. P. Wicks held by Jennifer (Wicks) Steley, Sydney, NSW.

Jugha (c. 1897–1976)

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Some reports depict Jugha as a slave boy, even a candidate for human sacrifice in the pre-Christian society of the Solomon Islands. His peers deny this melodramatic portrayal, claiming he was simply adopted into the

family of Chief Tatagu.¹ His mother was identified as living at Vuvuruana on the eastern edge of Vagunu Island, within the precincts of Marovo Lagoon.² He was a stocky lad with an infectious smile, born about 1897.³

When Griffiths Jones first sailed the *Advent Herald* into the Marovo Lagoon in 1914, Pana and his adopted brother, Jugha, were the first to speak to Jones and direct him to their chief.⁴ When Jones established a little school at Sasaghana the first class included Jugha. He was also among the first group to be baptised, January 1, 1918.⁵

Mission service

Jones acquired a new vessel christened *Melanesia*, and Jugha was recruited as one of the four crewmembers.⁶ In the meantime, Pana was making remarkable progress establishing a mission station at Mondo on Ranonnga Island in the New Georgia Group. In 1921 Jugha was appointed to assist him.⁷ It proved to be a relatively brief assignment of approximately eight months but Pana instructed Jugha in the conventions of a model mission station. Later, he employed the Mondo model wherever he pioneered throughout the Solomons.

Some villagers on Choiseul made repeated requests for a Seventh-day Adventist missionary to be sent to their island. Late in 1921, Jugha was chosen to pioneer the area. The Choiseul people were traditional enemies of the Marovo tribes in the head hunting days, but they promised they would care for Jugha.⁸ Jugha won their hearts, learned their language, and soon established a thriving station at Ghoghombe. In a short time other tribespeople further along the coast asked for missionaries and Nangaha and Kioto were engaged to work under Jugha's guidance.⁹ Later, Gorupava and Manovaki joined his team, opening the east coast of Choiseul Island.¹⁰

For five years Jugha served on Choiseul without a break and was then granted a furlough back at Marovo Lagoon. One report says this was the time he was ordained at Batuna,¹¹ but it was not acknowledged in denominational magazines until 1939¹² and in the *SDA Year Books* in 1941.¹³ During this four months furlough at home in 1926 he married Vela Vido. Together they transferred to pioneer the island of Guadalcanal, first at Kopiu and later at Bokokimbo.¹⁴ Once again his efforts met with outstanding success. Some of his Choiseul converts went to assist him and train as missionaries themselves. It was during this term, in 1929, when Jugha was delighted to have a visit from his spiritual father, Griffiths Jones.¹⁵ In 1939 he completed his term of service on Guadalcanal.

The Second World War was underway when Jugha was appointed to open the first Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) mission station on the island of Santa Isabel.¹⁶ He established a base at Bugotu and remained there throughout the difficult years of military occupation until about 1950.¹⁷ After the War he pioneered yet another island, San Christobal at Maru Bay.¹⁸ About 1953 he returned home to minister at Buini church in the Marovo Lagoon¹⁹ and in 1954 retired to Sasaghana where his Christian journey had begun. Occasionally he would lead the worship

services but in the last decade of his life he increasingly suffered with heart disease. He died at Manabusu village on December 30, 1976. Vela's passing is variously reported as October 1987, January 20, 1988, and November 20, 1988.²⁰

Retrospect

Jugha's forte was evangelising new regions in the Solomon Islands. He pioneered Choiseul, Guadalcanal, Santa Isabel and San Christobel. Small in stature, he stood tall in the eyes of his own people and the expatriate missionaries.

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