



Ralph and Betty Murray

Photo courtesy of Milton Hook. From the collection of Betty (Hawken) (Murray) Stellmaker, Cooranbong, NSW.

Murray, Ralph Stewart (1929–1990) and Betty Ruth (Hawken)

MILTON HOOK

Milton Hook, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, the United States). Hook retired in 1997 as a minister in the Greater Sydney Conference, Australia. An Australian by birth Hook has served the Church as a teacher at the elementary, academy and college levels, a missionary in Papua New Guinea, and as a local church pastor. In retirement he is a conjoint senior lecturer at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored *Flames Over Battle Creek*,

Avondale: Experiment on the Dora, Desmond Ford: Reformist Theologian, Gospel Revivalist the *Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series*, and many magazine articles. He is married to Noeleen and has two sons and three grandchildren.

Ralph and Betty Murray gave 31 years of practical ministry, paid and voluntary constructing buildings for the Adventist mission work in Papua New Guinea and the South Sea Islands. He died in an accident in Samoa while in active service when 61 years of age.

Early Experience

Ralph Stewart Murray was born on May 9, 1929, at Kew, suburban Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, while his parents were wheat farmers on a soldier's settlement plot at Bannerton in the Wimmera district of Victoria, Australia. Their farm experienced very few productive seasons, and the depression years compounded their struggles. While Ralph was still quite young, the family sought better conditions at Narbethong, but bushfires in 1939 destroyed everything except their home. They built another home to the north of Narbethong. Warburton church members visited and found them to be Christians. An interest in Bible studies developed, which led to the Murray family's firm connection with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They learned of Avondale College at Cooranbong, New South Wales, and moved there to provide further education for their children.¹ Ralph completed his academy schooling and, in 1948, began the building construction course at Avondale. During that same year, he was baptized. He graduated with the 1949 class.²

After graduation, Ralph's first assignment was the renovation of Ellen White's former home, "Sunnyside." Then he went to work building wool sheds and shearer's huts in the midwest of New South Wales. One of his employers was Arthur Hawken at Cobbora. At Christmas 1950, Betty Hawken visited her relatives and met Ralph for the first time. She returned to Townsville General Hospital to begin her nursing course, but she and Ralph nurtured their romance with regular letters.³ When she completed her midwifery training, she and Ralph were married in the Ayr Seventh-day Adventist Church on April 21, 1955.⁴ Almost immediately, they received an invitation from Australian church headquarters to accept an overseas mission appointment.

Papua New Guinea

Ralph and Betty accepted the invitation without hesitation. By August 1955 they were settled in at the Hansenide (leper) Colony at Hatzfeldhaven on the north coast of New Guinea. It was relatively isolated, but a few European nurses were on site for company. During the three years of their first term of service, Ralph constructed an administration building, operating theaters, and a nurse's residence.⁵

After furlough, the Murrays briefly cared for the Bautama Mission School near Port Moresby while the headmaster was on holidays. Ralph was then appointed to teach woodwork at Kabiufa School in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. Out of the classroom, Ralph was heavily involved in the market gardens that

made the institution almost self-supporting.⁶

In October 1960, Ralph began the major project of developing the Sopas Hospital site at Wabag, a 45-bed enterprise with wards built on a herringbone design. Ralph used local timber from an Adventist saw miller and constructed the wards, an operating theater, x-ray department, out-patient clinic, residences for European and national staff, a kitchen, laundry, stores unit, and underground water tanks.⁷ On this project, Ralph worked according to a loosely arranged contract basis with the church.⁸ The official opening took place on September 18, 1963.⁹

After the Sopas project, Ralph returned to the Kabiufa School for another nine years, teaching woodwork and developing the market gardens that had grown into a significant supplier of fruit and vegetables for Port Moresby and other coastal towns. He also helped to pioneer evangelism in the nearby Kotuni Valley. Betty operated a clinic for students and local people.¹⁰

Appointments Elsewhere

With the coming of independence for Papua New Guinea in 1975, government officials pushed for nationals to be employed at government and mission stations. Ralph and Betty, therefore, returned to Australia and worked at the Warburton Sanitarium and Hospital, he in the maintenance department and she on the nursing staff!¹¹ During this interval, Betty became the first woman to join the Melbourne Advent Brass Band!¹² As a teenager, she had performed in the Ayr Citizen's Band.

In 1977 Ralph volunteered to build a church at Neiafu on Vavau Island, Tonga. From there he transferred to the campus of Beulah College, Nukualofa, where he supervised a dairy and market gardens that were the means of making the institution self-supporting.¹³

Returning to Australia in 1981, Betty became the dean of girls the following year at Lilydale Adventist Academy, Melbourne, while Ralph built a home for them.¹⁴

Back in Papua New Guinea

Church officials called on Ralph's services again in 1984 to do maintenance work at Crosslands Youth Camp in Sydney, New South Wales, but he had barely begun before an urgent need arose for a woodwork teacher at Paglum High School near Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea. Once again, Betty conducted a small clinic. Unlike conditions prior to independence, law and order had deteriorated, and tribal warfare was common. There were times when they were caught in the middle of these situations, but no harm came to them. Ralph donated some money and used the help of a Fly-and-Build team from Tumbelgum church, New South Wales, Australia, to build a new boy's dormitory. His last assignment in Papua New Guinea was assisting the construction of a new church near Paglum School before returning to Australia early in 1990.¹⁵

Tragedy

When Cyclone Ofa devastated Western Samoa early in February 1990, Ralph had just begun work as the ranger at the Adventist Alpine Village in the Snowy Mountains. He learned that no one could be found to supervise repairs to damaged Adventist buildings, so he volunteered to go and see what he could do. He flew to Apia soon after his 61st birthday. In three weeks, he and some helpers restored a church and started work on a missionary's home. On Friday, June 8, he borrowed a motorcycle to drive over the mountains to Kosena College at Lalovaea on the south coast of Upolu to assess the damage.¹⁶ He began his return to Apia on Sunday afternoon, June 10. As he was traveling north on Tiavi Road near Siumu, a small truck collided with him, causing wrist, leg, and skull fractures. He was admitted to Apia Hospital but died two hours later.¹⁷

Appropriately, Ralph's body was brought back to Australia and interred at Avondale,¹⁸ the place of his baptism, where he started his journey with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

SOURCES

Greive, L. T. "Modern Hospital Opened in the Wilds of New Guinea." *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, October 28, 1963.

Hawken, W. J. and F. Slade. "Murray-Hawken." *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, June 13, 1955. *Jacaranda 1949*. Cooranbong, NSW: Avondale Press, 1949.

Parmenter, V. B. "Life Sketches: Ralph Stewart Murray." *Record*, August 18, 1990.

Ralph Stewart Murray Work Service Records. South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives. Folder: "Ralph Stewart Murray." Document: "Ralph Stewart Murray."

Stellmaker, Betty. *We Can't Just Sit Here and Do Nothing*. Self-published, 2010.

Vaoutumala, N. Commissioner of Police Report, Western Samoa Police and Prisons Service, Traffic Section. Unpublished document, June 12, 1990. Personal collection of Betty Stellmaker.

"Volunteer Killed." *Record*, July 21, 1990.

NOTES

1. Betty Stellmaker, *We Can't Just Sit Here and Do Nothing* (self-pub., 2010), 27–30.

2. *Jacaranda 1949* (Cooranbong, NSW: Avondale Press, 1949), [25].

3. Stellmaker, *We Can't Just Sit Here*, 31.
4. W. J. Hawken and F. Slade, "Murray-Hawken," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, June 13, 1955, 15.
5. Stellmaker, *We Can't Just Sit Here*, 16–19.
6. *Ibid.*, 56–60.
7. *Ibid.*, 67–80.
8. Betty Stellmaker, interview by Milton Hook, Cooranbong, NSW, December 12, 2016.
9. L. T. Greive, "Modern Hospital Opened in the Wilds of New Guinea," *Australasian Record and Advent World Survey*, October 28, 1963, 8–10.
10. Stellmaker, *We Can't Just Sit Here*, 85–96.
11. *Ibid.*, 109.
12. Photograph, Melbourne Advent Brass Band 1975, personal collection of Betty Stellmaker.
13. Stellmaker, *We Can't Just Sit Here*, 114–125.
14. *Ibid.*, 125.
15. *Ibid.*, 129–152.
16. V. B. Parmenter, "Life Sketches: Ralph Stewart Murray," *Record*, August 18, 1990, 12.
17. N. Vaoutumala, Commissioner of Police Report, Western Samoa Police and Prisons Service, Traffic Section, (unpublished document, June 12, 1990), personal collection of Betty Stellmaker.
18. "Volunteer Killed," *Record*, July 21, 1990, 9.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000