



Talasea Mission Station, West New Britain, Papua New Guinea. The site of the first SDA Mission Station in West New Britain, 1980.

Photo courtesy of Barry Oliver.

# West New Britain Mission, South Pacific Division

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## BARRY OLIVER

Barry Oliver, Ph.D., retired in 2015 as president of the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Sydney, Australia. An Australian by birth Oliver has served the Church as a pastor, evangelist, college teacher, and administrator. In retirement, he is a conjoint associate professor at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored over 106 significant publications and 192 magazine articles. He is married to Julie with three adult sons and three grandchildren.

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The West New Britain Mission existed as an entity in its own right for eight years between 1964 and 1972.

## The Territory and Statistics of the West New Britain Mission

The territory of West New Britain Mission was “Southwestern New Britain and adjacent islands.” Its headquarters were at Silovuti, via Talasea, New Britain, Territory of New Guinea.<sup>2</sup> It was a part of the Bismarck Solomons Union Mission, which had headquarters at Palm Beach Rabaul.

In the *1971 Annual Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, the West New Britain Mission was listed as having five organized churches. Church membership at the end of 1971 was 478. The mission had 34 active employees. Its tithe receipts for 1971 totaled US\$2,062.66. Its tithe per capita was US\$5.26.<sup>3</sup>

## The Beginnings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in West New Britain

1953. A young minister was placed on the Talasea Peninsula of West New Britain. President Roy Harrison wrote that “we have now commenced work in the Talasea district and expect to place another worker further west in the very near future.”<sup>4</sup>

1953. Sikoivi from Bougainville commenced working on Vitu Island north west of the Talasea Peninsula<sup>5</sup>

1954. The first teachers were sent to the Kombe or Kove area, on the north coast of New Britain west of the Talasea Peninsula. Again, Roy Harrison wrote: “At the beginning of last year we had only one mission station in the whole of the north coast region of this large island. In February [1954], however, an entry was made on the western side of the peninsula at Talasea. . . about the middle of May calls started coming in from different islands along the coast. We started sending in teachers and found the demand greater than the supply, and today, despite great opposition and the persecution of our teachers who have suffered much for the Lord, we have a membership of nearly five hundred in the Sabbath Schools there, 12 workers in the area, a new missionary from the Solomon Islands leaving Rabaul this week, and more urgent calls for additional teachers.”<sup>6</sup>

1955. Roy Harrison made the first visit by an SDA to Bali or Unea Island, 74 miles (119 kilometers) southwest of Vitu Island.

1961. Cyril Pascoe established a new mission at Silovuti, 260 miles from Rabaul on the western side of Talasea. “It was started absolutely from scratch, with jungle right to the water's edge and swamp.”

During the existence of the West New Britain Mission the church grew from 6 churches and 235 members in 1964<sup>8</sup> to 5 churches and 478 members in 1971<sup>9</sup>.

## The Organizational History of the West New Britain Mission

In 1961 the Talasea Mission Station was separated from the New Britain Mission and attached as an entity of the Bismarck Solomons Union Mission.<sup>10</sup> The territory cared for by the Talasea station was southwestern New Britain and the adjacent islands. The headquarters were at Silovuti, in the Kombe area of West New Britain. Cyril Pascoe was the district director. The Silovuti School with four teachers was established at that time.<sup>11</sup>

In 1964 all of the SDA Church entities in New Britain and New Ireland were renamed and reorganized. The New Britain Mission was reorganized and renamed as the East New Britain Mission.<sup>12</sup> Its territory was designated as “the northeastern portion of New Britain and the southeastern portion of New Ireland.”<sup>13</sup> The president was Joseph Mave. It had 624 members meeting in nine organized churches. The headquarters were in Kamarere Street, Rabaul.<sup>14</sup> Also in 1964 the Talasea Station previously attached directly to the Bismarck Solomons Union Mission was organized as the West New Britain Mission.<sup>15</sup> Its territory was designated as “southwestern New Britain and adjacent islands.”<sup>16</sup> The president was Cyril Pascoe. It had 235 members meeting in six organized churches. The headquarters were at Silovuti.<sup>17</sup> The other major change that occurred in 1964 was the separation of the former North Bismarck Mission into a Manus Mission with headquarters at Lorengau, Manus, and a New Ireland Mission with headquarters in Kavieng.<sup>18</sup> The territory of the New Ireland Mission was “northern new Ireland and adjacent islands. The president was Roy Harrison. It had 1,758 members meeting in 28 churches. The headquarters were in Kavieng.<sup>19</sup>

In 1972 the East New Britain, West New Britain and New Ireland missions were combined and organized as the New Britain New Ireland Mission (NBNI). NBNI was one of 10 local missions in the Papua New Guinea Union Mission.<sup>20</sup> The membership of the mission was 4,393, meeting in 46 organized churches.<sup>21</sup> The first president was Rex Cobbin, and the first secretary-treasurer was Ivan Tutuo.<sup>22</sup>

## District Director and Presidents of West New Britain Since 1961

Talasea Mission Station (1961–1964): Cyril Pascoe (1961–1964).

West New Britain Mission (1964–1972): Cyril Pascoe (1964–1969); Sidney A. Stocken (1969–1970); Elisha Gorapava (1971–1972).

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## NOTES

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