



Anton and Bertha Weil and local teachers on Tanna.

From *Australasian Record*, July 16, 1934.

## Weil, Anton Hugo (c. 1884–1967)

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### 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.

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Anton Hugo Weil was an Australian missionary to the New Hebrides (Vanuatu).

## Church Career

Anton Hugo Weil was born in Frankfurt, Germany, about 1884.<sup>1</sup> Nothing could be found about his early history except that his father's name was George.<sup>2</sup>

As a senior student Anton spent some time at the Australasian Missionary College, New South Wales, improving his education but did not graduate from any particular program. He entered the canvassing work in late 1922, selling *Bible Readings for the Home Circle* in the South New South Wales Conference. He worked long hours that yielded good sales figures.<sup>3</sup>

In 1924 Anton was appointed to the South Australian Conference to assist Elder Edwin Roenfelt and Raimund Reye with an evangelistic crusade at Loxton, South Australia. It was a stronghold of Lutheran Germans who were chiefly wheat farmers.<sup>4</sup> In the course of his work he met Bertha Amelia Heise, a Tasmanian woman who was also assisting with evangelism and had been the Sabbath School secretary for the South Australian Conference. They married in Adelaide on September 30, 1925, and sailed on November 18 under appointment for the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) mission field.<sup>5</sup>

Anton and Bertha cared for an established mission station at Big Bay, Espiritu Santo Island, always seeking to expand the Adventist mission into surrounding areas.<sup>6</sup> Anton would take a few young men from his station and visit nearby villages, the youth singing hymns while Anton played his cornet. This novel approach to evangelism seemed to captivate the local people.<sup>7</sup> Bertha suffered with malarial fevers, necessitating treatment at the Sydney Sanitarium during their first furlough.<sup>8</sup> They returned to Big Bay for a second term. In mid-1932 they were assigned to pioneer Tanna Island in the isolated south of the New Hebrides group. They left Big Bay on July 9 and pitched a tent on the beach at Port Resolution while the jungle undergrowth was cleared for a rudimentary mission home.<sup>9</sup> The area was undeveloped and provided a safe anchorage in the bay for small craft. The local villagers were delighted to welcome them. Within two years Anton had gathered four hundred worshippers to his Sabbath services. At the same time he was exploring possibilities for expansion of the Adventist work to the neighbouring islands of Futuna, Erromanga, Aneityum and Aniwa.<sup>10</sup>

Another furlough was taken in 1933. While in Australia during this break Anton was ordained to the gospel ministry.<sup>11</sup> They returned to Tanna, opening further out-stations on the island and strengthening the home base. During the closing days of 1934 Anton conducted the first baptism among the believers, an initial class of twenty-three candidates. With that core group he organised them into a church at the same time. Some of the youth transferred from the elementary school that Anton had established and studied further at the Aore

School in order to become missionaries.<sup>12</sup>

In 1935 Bertha developed serious health problems which prompted a return to the Sydney Sanitarium. Towards the end of the year there were signs of improvement<sup>13</sup> but she relapsed. Sadly, on April 8, 1936, she passed away and was laid to rest in the Seventh-day Adventist section of the Macquarie Park Cemetery, North Ryde, suburban Sydney. Her obituary mentions the mixed-race boy and girl from the New Hebrides who were adopted by Anton and Bertha.<sup>14</sup>

Almost two years later Anton remarried. His new bride, Lilian Gertrude McMahon, was a government-trained school-teacher who had taught in various Adventist schools. They were married in the Wahroonga church, Sydney, on December 15, 1938,<sup>15</sup> and then sailed for the New Hebrides.<sup>16</sup> They were assigned to care for the already established mission stations on Ambrym Island. Across the waters lay Malekula Island where a small out-lying station existed that Anton also nurtured.<sup>17</sup> On one occasion his boat was wrecked in a fierce storm. Fortunately, he was near to shore and was dragged from the surf unconscious but he was revived. Lilian also experienced a near fatal episode, dengue fever taking hold and leaving her unconscious for ten days with only simple medical attention available.<sup>18</sup> Their work on Ambrym Island was cut short with the threat of invasion by the Japanese forces during World War . They escaped by boat to the relative safety of Australia in April 1942.<sup>19</sup>

## After Overseas Mission Service

Anton and Lilian retired to live in Upper Burringbar, New South Wales,<sup>20</sup> and later Stratford in Victoria and Bickley in Western Australia. Seeking a warmer climate they finally moved north to Carnarvon, Western Australia.<sup>21</sup> They continued their mission work there by conducting a Sabbath School for their neighbourhood children.

After a brief illness Anton passed away on September 4, 1967. He rests in an unmarked grave in the desolate Carnarvon Pioneer Cemetery.<sup>22</sup> Lilian withdrew to the Adventist community at Cooranbong, New South Wales. She lost her life in a tragic road accident on the campus of Avondale College on September 14, 1973. A motor bike ran into her as she was crossing the road opposite the dairy. She passed away in the Royal Newcastle Hospital soon after admission and was laid to rest in the Avondale Memorial Cemetery.<sup>23</sup>

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## NOTES

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