

Atkins, Stanley Arthur (1900–1942) and Nancy Rose (Cornish) (1900–1979)



Stanley Arthur Atkins

Photo courtesy of Lester Devine.

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.

Stanley and Nancy Atkins were appointed to mission service in the Solomon Islands and New Guinea. As a consequence of the Japanese invasion of New Guinea, Stanley Atkins lost his life at Vunapope, East New Britain, New Guinea.

Early Life

Stanley Arthur Atkins was born in Double Bay, New South Wales (NSW), Australia, on March 29, 1900¹ Atkins became a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) when he was 20 years of age² He graduated from ministerial training at the Australasian Missionary College. He also spent two years in the nurses' course at the Sydney Sanitarium³ In the second half of 1927 he commenced evangelistic work in Newcastle, NSW⁴ On December 24, 1928, he married Nancy Rose Cornish at the Wahroonga SDA Church, NSW⁵ She had been employed at the Sydney

Sanitarium.⁶

Service in the Solomon Islands and New Guinea

At the time of their wedding, Stanley and Nancy Atkins were under appointment to the Solomon Islands. They remained there for only eight months in 1929 before they were transferred to New Guinea.⁷ While they working in Papua New Guinea, two children were born: Geoffrey Paul on November 27, 1933, in Rabaul, and Lois Merle on July 8, 1931, in Kavieng.⁸ In 1932 the Atkinses commenced service on Mussau Island, caring for the islands in the Saint Matthias group.⁹ The first Seventh-day Adventist missionaries on Mussau, Oti and Salau from the Solomon Islands, had been there for only a little over a year.¹⁰ Atkins was ordained to the gospel ministry in June 1940.¹¹

The Japanese Invasion

With the Japanese invasion imminent during World War II, the decision was made that Nancy Atkins and the children evacuate to Australia and New Zealand. In 1944 Nancy Atkins wrote describing the challenges of sailing a small mission vessel across the Coral Sea and then south to Sydney.¹²

Stationed on Mussau with Pastor and Mrs. Atkins had been Trevor Collett and his wife, Olga. Collett was managing a coconut plantation on Mussau and operating a timber mill on the nearby island of Emirau.¹³ Olga Collett and her daughter, Anthea, had been evacuated along with Nancy Atkins and her children.¹⁴ When it became necessary for the men to evacuate, they travelled on the *Malalangi* under cover of darkness down the coast of New Ireland toward Rabaul.¹⁵ All the time, they were sailing in enemy territory. By traveling at night and camouflaging the boat by day, it took them four days to reach the relative safety of Put Put Harbor and Jones Missionary College in East New Britain. They were just in time to see ahead of them another of their mission boats escaping with mission personnel. Both boats moved south, attempting to reach Sum Sum Bay, where allied pilots were flying in and out with seaplanes to rescue any escapees. But the enemy spotted the mission boats and eventually sunk them. Collett and Atkins began to travel by canoe, but Atkins became ill with asthma. Collett refused to leave him. The two decided to paddle back to Kambubu to find medication. They remained for a short time, and then Atkins deteriorated again. In desperation, Collett sent a national runner to Rabaul with a letter asking whether the enemy would accept Atkins into the Roman Catholic hospital at Vunapope near Kokopo. The Japanese agreed and sent a truck to pick him up. Atkins was near collapse when they arrived. He died three weeks later, on March 13, 1942. Collett was taken prisoner.¹⁶ Atkins was buried in the Vunapope Cemetery, a Roman Catholic cemetery near Kokopo, East New Britain.¹⁷

Collett, while a prisoner of war, was able to get a letter to his wife and there related the circumstances of Atkins's death, noting that the Japanese had been "very kind to him, and did all they could for his comfort on the

way in.”¹⁸ During World War II, the Japanese had a reputation for being very hard on prisoners of war. That they treated Pastor Atkins with the consideration they did suggests that the work of this compassionate humanitarian for his fellow men, during those very stressful times, had won their respect.

Legacy

Later the Union Conference Secretary in Australia received a letter from a former neighbor of the Atkins family during their time on Mussau. In part he wrote,

As a humble layman not connected in any way with your church, will you please permit me to say of Mr. Atkins that he was a MAN, and as such I greatly respected him. I found him a simple, kind, yet very courageous gentleman. I wish to express gratitude to your conference for the many kindnesses shown by Mr. Atkins personally and in the name of your Mission. . . .

As missionaries and friends Mr. Atkins and Mr. Collett, without intrusion whatsoever, introduced and led me to greatly respect and honour the great cause for which they stood in that far outpost.¹⁹

Several years later, reflecting on the contribution of Pastor Arthur Atkins, the following editorial comment was made, “As the Saviour Himself said, ‘The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.’ He has left a song in their hearts that they will continue to sing long after his life here closed.”²⁰

After her return to Australia, Nancy Atkins married Albert Driver on April 18, 1948.²¹ Theirs was a short marriage because he died at the Warburton Sanitarium on February 24, 1952.²² She died some 27 years later on Sabbath afternoon, June 2, 1979.²³

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Arthur Stanley Atkins Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "Atkins, Arthur Stanley," Document: "Atkins, Stanley Arthur."
2. Ibid.
3. N. H. Faulkner, "Atkins-Cornish," *Australasian Record*, January 7, 1929, 7.
4. Ibid.; Arthur Stanley Atkins Biographical Records, "Atkins, Stanley Arthur."
5. Faulkner, "Atkins-Cornish."
6. Ibid.
7. Arthur Stanley Atkins Biographical Records, "Atkins, Stanley Arthur."
8. Ibid.
9. S. V. Stratford, "Pastor A. S. Atkins obituary," *Australasian Record*, June 22, 1942, 7.
10. A. S. Atkins, "Later Word from New Guinea," *Australasian Record*, March 14, 1932, 8.
11. Arthur Stanley Atkins Biographical Records, "Atkins, Stanley Arthur."
12. Nancy Atkins, "Evacuation," unpublished manuscript, South Pacific Division Heritage Centre, Avondale College of Higher Education, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia, S. V. Stratford Collection, Box 757.
13. "We Will Remember Them," *Australasian Record*, January 7, 1946, 2.
14. Olga (Wiles) Collett, interview by Milton Hook, Kenthurst, New South Wales, June 29, 1986.
15. Constance M. Greive, "Smiling 'Seven Day' Boys from New Guinea," *Australasian Record*, October 28, 1946, 5.

16. Greive, "Smiling 'Seven Day' Boys."
 17. "We Will Remember Them."
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