



George and Christina Engelbrecht with daughters Annie, Margaret and Janet
Photo courtesy of Milton Hook. From the collection of Janet (Engelbrecht) Mitchell, Melbourne, Victoria.

Engelbrecht, George Henry (1902–1989) and Christina Jane (Keith) (1903–1991)

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.

George and Christina Engelbrecht served in pastoral ministry in Australia, New Zealand, Papua, and the New Hebrides.

Early Years

George Henry Engelbrecht was born in Christchurch, New Zealand, on August 4, 1902. He and his parents attended the Anglican church. At one stage, his mother showed some interest in becoming a Mormon, but at the same time a German woman regularly left *Signs of the Times* with her. Subsequently, she and her three children became Seventh-

day Adventists in 1915.¹

Engelbrecht spent four years at the Oroua Missionary School (later renamed New Zealand Missionary College), Longburn, New Zealand, studying for the ministry. He graduated in 1921 from the Advanced Course (Ministerial) and then began church employment as a colporteur on the South Island of New Zealand.³ He was a tall and strong young man suited for the hardships of foreign mission service. In September 1926, church authorities appointed him to an assignment in Papua⁴ but suggested it would be ideal if he took a wife with him.⁵ While preparing for ministry at Longburn, he had befriended Christina Keith, a fellow graduate of the missionary course, and their courtship continued after graduation. Christina Keith—frequently known as Chrissie—was born on January 10, 1903, at Dannevirke, New Zealand, the daughter of Scottish immigrants.⁶ They wed in her home church at Dannevirke on February 9, 1927,⁷ and after a short honeymoon were on their way to Papua.

First Term in Melanesia

On April 12, 1927, the Engelbrechts boarded the *Morinda* at Sydney, bound for Port Moresby.⁸ They disembarked and trekked into the mountains to the established mission station at Bisiatabu, at the foot of what is known today as the Kokoda Trail.⁹ Time spent there was an orientation to foreign missions. George Engelbrecht became familiar with the Motuan language, translating many hymns. It was during this time that their first daughter, Margaret, was born.¹⁰

In 1929, the Engelbrechts pioneered a station on the Vailala River, west of Port Moresby. It was oppressively humid and mosquito-ridden. The station was comprised of five acres (two hectares) of rented land, three homes of native materials and a double canoe. George Engelbrecht treated many of the local people with injections for yaws. He established a school, the local policeman enforcing the attendance of about one hundred students.¹¹ A garden was a priority. George Engelbrecht grew bananas, yams, taro, corn, pumpkins, beans, tomatoes, and peanuts. Partway through the year, two assistants were sent from Bisiatabu, one a married man named Meanou with three children. They suffered badly with malaria.¹²

Vailala proved to be too taxing on the Engelbrechts' health, especially Christina Engelbrecht's, who at the end of 1929 had to be stretchered back to Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital, gravely ill with malarial fevers.¹³ George Engelbrecht helped with the door-to-door appeal for mission funds while his wife was nursed back to health.¹⁴ They spent the remainder of 1930 and all of 1931 in Christchurch and Greymouth, New Zealand, where Engelbrecht was engaged as a pastor. Their second daughter, Annie, was born at this time.¹⁵

Second Term in Melanesia

Having recovered their health, George and Christina Engelbrecht were pleased to accept another appointment to the Pacific Islands. On February 27, 1932, they sailed from Sydney, again on the *Morinda*, destined for the New Hebrides, a French/British condominium now called Vanuatu. Engelbrecht had charge of the Adventist training school on Aore Island and acted as mission secretary.¹⁶ It was a healthier environment than Papua, and other Europeans at the station provided good company. The mission center was set on more than one thousand acres (four hundred hectares) that provided food for missionaries and students. At the beginning of the school year Engelbrecht often took the mission boat, the *Lephare*, and gathered up all the students from Big Bay on Santo Island in the north to Port Resolution on Tanna Island in the south. Approximately one third of the students were young women. The young men were trained to be missionaries and leaders for the future.¹⁷ The Engelbrechts' third daughter, Janet, was born during this term of service.¹⁸

During the course of gathering and returning students to their various islands, George Engelbrecht would treat other islanders who were injured or ill and seek to break down any prejudice. The Big Nambus people on Malekula were the most resistant. In 1933, a young New Hebridean missionary named Masengnalo and his wife were working on the island when a Big Nambus chief came to talk. Engelbrecht happened to be there at the time and offered to take him to the training school with a view to extend his understanding of the Adventist mission. This proved to be a breakthrough, and the interest was nurtured with further visits to Malekula.¹⁹

In 1936, the Engelbrechts took their furlough and attended the Australasian Union Conference session in Melbourne.²⁰ At those meetings, on September 12, George Engelbrecht was ordained.²¹ He was also appointed superintendent of the New Hebrides mission field.²² On return to the mission, the Engelbrechts remained at the Aore headquarters while George Engelbrecht remained busy supervising the outlying stations. He dismantled a house on Ambrym and rebuilt it on Atchin for an incoming missionary.²³

In 1941, during their second furlough, George Engelbrecht reported more than five hundred baptized members in the island group.²⁴ Half were receiving lesson pamphlets in English, indicating the excellent level of schooling they had received at his training school.

Wartime Upheaval

With furlough completed, the Engelbrechts sailed back to the New Hebrides in mid-1941.²⁵ Three months later George Engelbrecht was appointed superintendent of the Papuan Mission.²⁶ German warships were threatening the Papua New Guinea area, so it was thought best for someone with a German name to present a friendlier face in the

event of invasion. The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in December and their rapid advance south only complicated the dilemma. Allied ships quickly evacuated the women and children from danger. Enemy aerial attacks reached Port Moresby by February 1942. Military officers then decided that all civilians were a liability and ordered them to find their own way to Australia. Engelbrecht, therefore, found himself in the unenviable position of promptly getting himself and his fellow missionaries to safety. The little mission boat *Diari* was stocked with supplies, and he added an accomplished marine engineer to his party, Fred Burke, a friend of the mission. Others on board were Bob Frame, Lester Lock, Tom Judd, Cyril Pascoe, Ward Nolan, Ken Gray, Charles Mitchell, and aboriginal missionaries William and Minnie Shepperd with their adopted Papuan girl.²⁷ The little motor broke down under the strain. At night Burke did major repairs, and after one thousand miles (1,600 kilometers) they reached the welcome haven of Cairns, Australia, via Thursday Island.²⁸

Ministry in Australia

World War II marked the end of Engelbrecht's international service. He first pastored the church at Footscray, Victoria,²⁹ and then, in 1944, transferred to North Queensland for a decade, most of the time working as secretary / treasurer of the mission and at times also leading the Sabbath School department.³⁰ He was a member of the 1957 Brisbane City evangelistic team and later cared for such churches as Maryborough, Warwick, Toowoomba, Nambour, and Gympie in southern Queensland until he retired in 1967. His later years were spent in Brisbane and Nambour. In Brisbane he did volunteer work in the Conference office, putting the church clerk records in order.³¹ George Engelbrecht died peacefully on July 9, 1989.³² Christina *Engelbrecht* passed away on May 27, 1991, and was interred beside *her husband* in the Nambour Cemetery.³³

Legacy

George and Christina Engelbrecht were fine examples of missionaries who learned to adapt to primitive conditions and the vagaries of ocean winds. They demonstrated pioneering qualities that carried them through perilous situations at times. With a visionary eye they saw the imperative of training the youth of the Pacific Islands to eventually hold positions of trust and leadership.

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