***John Radley Martin*** – Missionary to Papua New Guinea

*Warren Martin was born at the Sydney Sanitarium in 1940. In 1949 he went to Papua New Guinea with his parents and to Mussau until 1952 when he returned to Australia to begin High School at Avondale. During year-end holidays he went back to Papua New Guinea.  He worked in Madang for the Department of Civil Aviation in 1958 and Burns Philp in 1959, returning to Australia in 1960 and working at ESDA Sales & Service Sydney in 1960. After completing General, Psychiatric, and Mental Retardation Courses he worked for the NSW Health Department 1961-2000, mainly at Gladesville Hospital. On retirement, he worked at the Normanhurst Adventist retirement village until his wife's illness required him to resign and care for her.  Warren married Beverly Dorrington in 1969. Sadly she passed away in March 2006.*While John Martin tried to get a reluctant cow to leave his father’s garden he suffered a fatal heart attack. He was only 52 – much too young to die, especially for a man who had spent twelve years in mission service and three and a half years in the army in Papua New Guinea.

John was born in Parramatta, a suburb of Sydney, on October 24, 1912. He was the second of five sons of Fred and Alice (Radley) Martin . The family moved to Martinsville on the Central Coast of New South Wales, in 1914. After completion of high school, John commenced the ministerial and carpentry courses at Avondale College, Cooranbong, whilst working in the Sanitarium Health Food Company factory print shop and becoming a qualified printer. In 1931 he met Kathleen O’Connor from Warburton, Victoria, who was undertaking a course at the college prior to training as a nurse at the Sydney Sanitarium. On being advised by Pastor Reuben Hare, President of the South New South Wales Conference, that he would have no opportunity to serve as a minister unless he was married, John and Kathleen abandoned their final year of course plans and married in 1937. (George Fisher, the Factory Manager said he needed John to stay on in the Print Shop.)

A son, Warren was born in 1940. Then in 1941 John transferred to the Signs Publishing Company at Warburton on, Vic, only to be called up for military service a year later, leaving Kath to work at the Warburton Sanatarium. John requested a non-combatancy role and was sent to Heidelberg Military Hospital outside Melbourne for medical training. On completion of his course he camped on Brisbane Showground prior to embarkation for the Middle East, but the Japanese thrust south intervened and he was shipped out to Port Moresby.

As a medic John served in many Army units ending up at AGH Lae Base Sub area where he stayed until the end of the war. He always asked for Sabbaths off and refused to carry out nonessential duties on that day, bringing him often into conflict with his commanding officers. Several times he was reprimanded or disciplined and twice “busted” from Sergeant for going absent without leave on Sabbaths; each time however, he was reinstated. He often conducted Sabbath School for the Australian and American Adventist soldiers. He also attended Protestant services on Sundays when he was off duty.

After the war John retuned to Australia and served at the Signs Publishing Company in Victoria until 1949 (a daughter, Joan was born in 1946) when he accepted an invitation to serve as a missionary in the territory of the Bismarck Solomons Union Mission (BSUM) in New Guinea.  He was appointed District Director of an area including New Ireland, New Hanover (Lavongai) and the St Matthias Group, comprising Mussau, Emirau and Tench Island (Nusi), with use of the mission ship, Malalagi. We were based at Boliu, Mussau, 100 miles from the nearest store in Kavieng and only went there once every 6 months so we had to wait ages for our goods to arrive. Without a refrigerator, food deteriorated in the heat.  Tinned butter became rancid. Flour and Granose were riddled with weevils. Nevertheless, somehow we managed and learned how to cope with the trials of missionary life. Our house was built pre-war so the outer walls were full of white ants and in places would literally swing outwards if you leant on them. Once a huge 20ft python came into the kitchen after our dog. Fortunately John was home at the time and chopped the snake’s head off with an axe but the vibrations of that encounter nearly brought the whole house down.

Mussau Island measured about 15 by 9 miles in size and was mountainous and wooded, while Emirau Island was a largely flat coral atoll with little top soil. During World War II the American forces moved the Emirau people across to Mussau and militarized the island, building roads and runways. When they departed, they dumped their vehicles into the ocean and left equipment scattered all over the land. One diligent islander, who followed John’s instructions to bury all ammunition,hammered cartridges into the ground nose

first! The subsequent explosion almost killed him. John’s medical training and experience were invaluable. There was a small clinic at Boliu, usually restocked with supplies from Government Stores at Kavieng. When penicillin became available it proved a miracle drug quickly curing almost every infection including  yaws and tropical ulcers which were prevalent.

There was an Adventist school and a teacher for grades 1-4 in each village on the islands and pupils were able to continue classes to grade 6 at Boliu school. Some of the students went on to Kambubu, at Rugen Harbor, for higher education. Graduates then became missionaries throughout parts of the South Pacific.

According to the Australasian Record, 590 teachers and missionaries originated in Mussau and Emirau, but Pr Wilson Stephen from Emirau reckoned the number would be nearer 3000. I believe the contribution made by these people has yet to be adequately documented or acknowledged.

On Sabbaths John tried to minister to all the villages on Mussau. Often we walked for several hours to reach a place, conduct meetings, have lunch and walk back home. We would take a fold up organ and Kath would accompany the singing. Sometimes we went by canoe to the other side of the island.

Due to the Solomon Island missionaries on the island, the Mussau people had learned how to build large canoes without outriggers from one tree trunk. These boats could hold 30-50 sailors. When meetings were held at Boliu, delegates would arrive in their canoes with a row of paddlers on each side who were kept in time by a person sitting up the back blowing a conch shell (‘wind him tau’.) When the meetings concluded all the canoes would line up together and race down the harbour.

John had to keep the teachers supplied with school materials, food, clothing, and medicines, and pay their wages. So as the work expanded he spent more and more time away from home on the Malalagi. The boat didn’t have a two way radio so Kath never knew exactly when he would return. But the islanders had a strange sixth sense and would say “he’ll be back tomorrow,” and sure enough, they were right.

New Hanover was a staunchly Catholic island containing a leper hospital operated by the Catholic Church. Many of the priests and nuns were German, having been there since before World War 1, when New Guinea was a German colony. On request we were able to place an Adventist teacher in one of the villages. The Government Medical Officer ("lik-lik dokta") on the island and his wife (Ray & Flo Carlaw) were Adventists whom we frequently visited.

They built a small open sided hut by their house where they performed emergency surgical operations with Ray acting as his own anaesthetist. One night Flo heard a disturbance in their poultry yard and took a torch to investigate only to find a snake trying to make off with a chicken. She grabbed the snake by the tail and the snake grabbed hold of the coop. In the struggle, she dropped her torch, which promptly went out. She couldn’t reach the torch without letting go of the snake but she figured out that as long as it was holding on, it wasn’t coming towards her, so she held on for hours -- actually 8 hours , until someone eventually heard her calling for help and brought a shovel to kill the snake. The local people were terrified of snakes and no one would come near her until they could assess the situation.

Like all who sailed the tropical seas we experienced our share of storms. Once we were caught on the edge of a hurricane that extensively damaged Fiji. Turning about in mountainous waves is exceptionally hazardous and has to be done accurately to avoid being swamped. We often climbed to the crest of a large wave, sat there for a moment with the propeller out of the water shaking the whole boat, then we plunged downwards into the trough which was like a giant slippery dip. This see-sawing activity could go on for hours! The Gardner diesel engines fitted onto these Halvorsen boats were extremely reliable and fortunately the only time we experienced problems was when fuel filter blockages occurred when the seas were comparatively calm.

We were the only Europeans on Mussau until 1951 when Keith Dickens and his wife came to teach at Boliu school.

One island we visited regularly was Tench Island (Nusi).   It was a tiny coral islet you could walk around in less than 10 minutes. About 40 people lived there, all Adventists, including a teacher from Mussau. Although they had protocols on marriage there was still some inbreeding. and I recall many were tone deaf though they loved to sing. Nusi was about 35 miles east of Emirau and 5 hours away. If we had not sighted it in 6 hours, we would turn back as currents had moved us north or south of our destination. With only a compass and sextant and no GPS in those times we could not afford to search for a tiny dot on the vast ocean.

The Tench Island people used the dried banana bark for material and fishing lines. They used a weaving loom they had made themselves. The loom was one of very few found in the whole Pacific. The islanders made bone hooks and baited them with a very sticky spider’s web and then hung the line from a kite over the reef. Fresh water came from a spring in the centre of the island, coming from deep in the ground, under the ocean. The people lived on a narrow, sandy strip of land. The land falls away steeply on all sides immediately past the coral reef which prevented the Malalagi from anchoring, so she had to lie-to while we went in to the shore in a dinghy.

While travelling off the coast of New Hanover on our way to Kavieng in the Malalagi, at high tide, we were driven on to a mushroom-headed coral, six feet wide, which wedged the keel in an immovable, locked position with the stern under water.  Nothing could shift the boat.  We shifted all movable objects to the stern, and at the next high tide, with the motor in full reverse and the crew pulling us with the dinghy, the Malalagi reluctantly slid off with a crunching sound. On inspection no water appeared to have come inside so we cautiously proceeded to Kavieng for repairs.

Each time we went to Rabaul we called in to Kambubu High School to see how our students were faring. Kambubu was our prestige self supporting educational institution and the grounds and buildings were kept immaculate. In addition to gardens, fishing and coconuts the college operated several successful industries including a large wood products division, which maintained buildings and produced furniture for sale in Rabaul. Pastor Lester Lock was the principal at that time.

At the beginning of 1952, John took Kath, my sister Joan and me to Rabaul. From there we travelled to Australia on the MV Bulolo. In January I had to start high school. John stayed on Mussau until May when furlough was due. In New South Wales we stayed with my grandfather in Beauty Point Road, Morisset. After furlough Mum and Dad returned to Port Moresby with Joan . Here John helped build the Ela Beach Church with Pr. Elwyn Martin and Pr.Martin Pascoe.

Three months later the family moved to Madang where John assisted Pr Tom Judd, President of Madang Mission, and became President when the Judds left in 1955. Pastor Sasa Rore was his 2nd in charge. Like most places in New Guinea most of the workers in Madang came from Mussau or Emirau.

Madang was the pearl of Papua New Guinea with sandy beaches on small uninhabited islands near the harbor. It had an all-weather wharf for large ships, a fully-enclosed inner bay and a busy airport supplying the Highlands. Like other centres under Australian administration there was virtually no crime, houses were never locked and keys were left in cars. The situation today is so different.

While other churches operated commercial enterprises to help pay for their operations, Adventist policy was not to take money from local people. This meant we were always struggling with our budgets.

At Madang we had another Halvorsen 45ft boat like the Malalagi called the Light. The only difference was we actually had a radio now! While I was there I remember seeing other mission boats like the Devari, the Diari, the Durua and the Lelaman come in for slipping.

The Madang Mission extended as far north as the Ramu river and included the Adventist Hatzfeld Haven leper colony where Allen and Mona Page-Dhu were stationed. South of Madang it included Saidor on the Rai Coast where another Adventist  "lik-lik dokta", Graeme Radford was stationed. Off Hatzfeldt Haven was the active volcanic island of  Manum which erupted frequently, spewing lava and rocks which sometimes reached the ocean. Each time there was an eruption, the government moved the people to the mainland to encourage them to settle there, but they wanted to return home and would become sick if they did not. We assisted in two of these evacuations with the Light.

When the work opened up in the Ramu area we placed teachers in several villages where the river banks were so steep you could tie the boat up on them. At a tributary, long grass obscured the entrance to one Adventist village but clear water coming in to the muddy Ramu gave us our bearings. Crocodiles posed a real threat to people and domestic animals.  At night we would see the monsters everywhere and sometimes they would even bang their tails against the hull of the Light.

Everywhere villages were transformed when the people became Adventists. First, land was cleared. Then a church was built and a new village erected around it with the huts all laid out in neat rows. Crocus and hibiscus shrubs were planted. Patrol officers said they could always tell which villages belonged to the Seventh-day Adventists for they were clean, neat and tidy, with no pigs!

Two “European” houses had been built at Madang, as well as a Quonset hut for visitors - and there were plenty of them. In one year 136 people stayed with us for 213 days and my mother provided 1,000 meals for them.

An ex–army single cylinder diesel engine powered a generator provided us with electricity from 6-9pm. It had no compression and one had to wind two big flywheels with a pull out handle, which you had to work for ages before the engine gradually started. Later town power was supplied.

The Madang Mission was part of the Coral Sea Union Mission located in Lae.

Where a point of land juts out into the ocean about 40 miles north of Madang, the seas are always rough with strong winds. On one occasion on returning from Ramu, there was no wind and the water was like oily glass with a gentle swell rolling into shore. Suddenly the boat shuddered from stem to stern and lost way. We shut down the motor and got the crew to get the mainsail out then go overboard to see what had gone wrong. The propeller had fallen off the shaft and was resting on the 4 inch false keel! The locking pin and nut were missing but the vital shaft key was still in place. As quickly as we could we secured the propeller with some rope then replaced it on the shaft, wrapped some fencing wire behind it and hammered a nutmeat tin over the wire and found a bolt to put through the locking pin hole. Meanwhile we were drifting closer to shore. When we eventually put the boat into gear we started to move forward. What a relief!  We proceeded very slowly, stopping frequently and checking, tightening and replacing the wire holding the propeller. The nutmeat tin kept getting shorter. We felt we had witnessed a miracle and held a special prayer service when we returned to our wharf.

We were gaining many converts in the Madang area and John felt we needed an Adventist school. One of the local leaders, Bato Bultin, who became one of the first Provincial Governors in PNG, gave us some land at Panim where, with the approval of the CSUM a large boarding school was constructed and opened. It was one of the last projects in which John was involved.

In the 1950s my father was told he would be ordained if he signed a letter promising to stay in the islands indefinitely. Although he dearly wanted ordination he felt he could not accept the conditions and he did not want it as a reward for services rendered. It was a time of considerable stress for him. He was not ordained until 1958.

Unbeknown to anyone else, John had been experiencing severe chest pains in 1960, but he continued working. After one bout, worse than the rest, he went and had an Electro Cardiograph. The scan had to go south to be read and was returned via telegram, with the message, ‘Keep the patient in bed, don’t allow him to do anything, and return him to Australia on the next flight out’. Tests showed more than a third of his heart muscle was dead and that he had already had three heart attacks. John was flown back to Sydney as soon as it could be arranged while Kath stayed and sorted out all business affairs.  She also packed up their personal effects and arranged shipping to Australia while all the time desiring to be with John as soon as possible. Two months later she arrived in Australia and as a family, they moved in with John’s father at Beauty Point in Morisset. Pr. Syd Stocken replaced John at Madang

My father gradually regained enough strength to commence part time work at the Sanitarium Health Food Company. He also started taking some church services and eventually became minister of Dora Creek Church. Then on April 11 1965 that tragic encounter with a reluctant cow caused one last, fatal heart attack   At 52 John was too young to die - far too young for such a devout and intrepid missionary.