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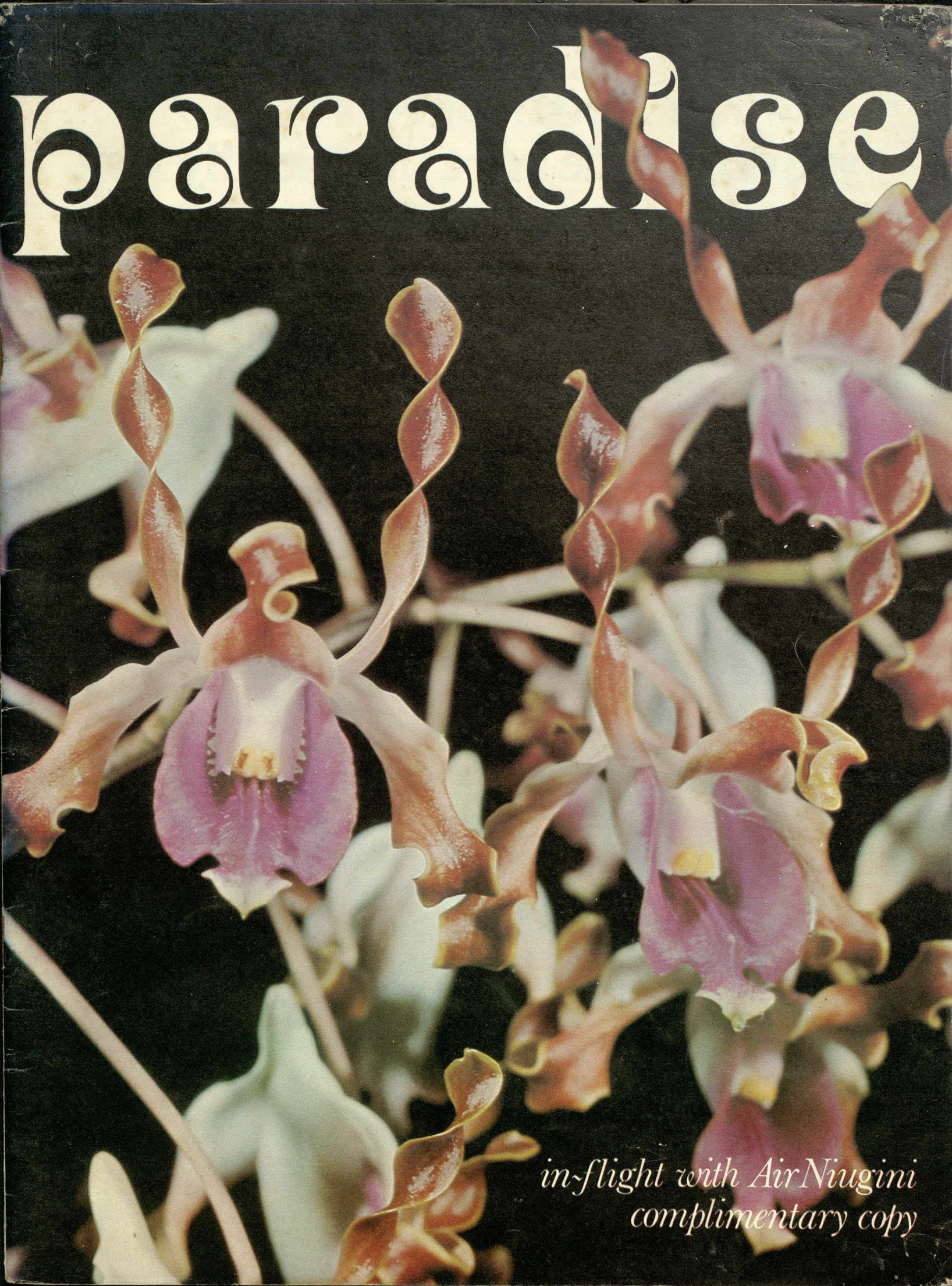

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No. 5 May 1977

In-flight magazine of Air Niugini, the national airline of Papua New Guinea. Published by Air Niugini's Public Relations Department, ANG House, Hunter Street, Port Moresby. Printed by Dai Nippon, Hong Hong, typeset by Air Niugini Printing Department. For advertising and editorial, contact the Public Relations Officer, PO Box 84, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.
Telephone 259000. Telex NE22177. NE22158.

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Design: Tom Cooke

IN THIS ISSUE

Welcome aboard!

Air Niugini is proud to sponsor the inaugural Noumea-Port Moresby yacht race starting on May 28. Over 1300 nautical miles, it will follow the Sydney-Noumea race. The organisers, the Papua Yacht Club, are hoping that this race will become the middle leg in a South Pacific Ocean Racing Circuit ending in an Australian port.

We often talk of the South Pacific community. But because of the great distances involved we don't see enough of each other. This race is one way in which to bring these far-flung people together.

The Port Moresby yacht, *Vanessa*, pictured during the 1976 Sydney-Hobart race, will be one of several Sydney-Hobart veterans competing in our new sea adventure.

C.B. Grey
General Manager

PHOTO CREDITS

Roy D. Mackay
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Richard Bennett
Jim Fenwick
Brian Mennis
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COVER

The Sepik Gem, *Dendrobium lasianthera*, orchid is one of the Sepik Blue group and is expected to play a prominent role in Papua New Guinea's still small but growing orchid export industry.
Photograph by Roy D. Mackay.

Decisions. Decisions.

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and Anchor in cans and bottles.
They all taste so good it's difficult to decide
which one to try first.

Orchids Unlimited

By Terry Baudert

Orchids look a great deal better in cultivation than they do in their natural wild state. This sort of statement might raise the hackles of that rare species, the wild-orchid collector, who braves myriad discomforts to collect in swamp and jungle and chilly mountain forest. But to most orchid fanciers — which means practically anyone who has ever seen an orchid — the blooms are definitely better appreciated at ground level and, preferably, with a little notice nearby which says what they are.

Papua New Guinea is the most recent country to achieve recognised statehood in orchidology. Orchid collecting, cultivation, growing and export, is in a comparatively raw state.

Andree Millar, whose occasional postal address has been 'Number 1 Gardener, Papua New Guinea', writes succinctly in the May 1976 issue of the American Orchid Society Bulletin: 'We do not know the complete distribution of any one of the orchid species of this country. We know even less of the variation within the species. We do not even know the true number of species in Papua New Guinea. One thing I do know, we have not yet found all the orchids in this country.' Despite this, as she points out, the richness of Papua New Guinea's orchid flora so far found is such that it gives this land the 'largest number of orchid species of any country in the world.'

Papua New Guinea also has one of the most dramatic ranges of height at which orchid plants are found. Orchids have been collected from

Above left: Phalaenopsis amabilis *from the lowland regions of Papua New Guinea;* **left:** Spathoglottis spp *is a common orchid from a species whose colours vary from white to deep purple*

Below: Vanda hindsii *is found in hill forests and lowland rain forests;* **bottom:** Vandopsis waroqueana, *a common inhabitant of lowland hill forests and the dense gallery forests in savannah, has stems up to seven metres long;* **bottom right:** Dendrobium nindii *was recently discovered near the Orioma River in Western Province*

coral reefs at sea-level and at 4,000 metres up in the mountain ranges where dripping mist enshrouds the determined collector. Amongst Papua New Guinea's orchids is the largest orchid flower-spike in the world — *Grammatophyllum speciosum* var. *papuanum* — which grows to more than three metres. And then there are the minute *Bulbophyllums* which are only half a pin-head across.

Variation of species is constantly surprising orchidologists at work here, for some Papua New Guinea orchids have stranger shapes and more unlikely hues than their relatives in other parts of the world. In fact, it can be said that every rule that was ever formulated about the appearance and growing habits of orchids is broken by those of Papua New Guinea.

Papua New Guinea has three centres where orchids are cultivated and distributed. One is at the orchid research garden at the University of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby, one is Lae's famous botanic gardens and one is a fledgling orchid garden at Laiagam in the Western Highlands Province. The Laiagam venture is a pioneer effort to establish a Highlands collection.

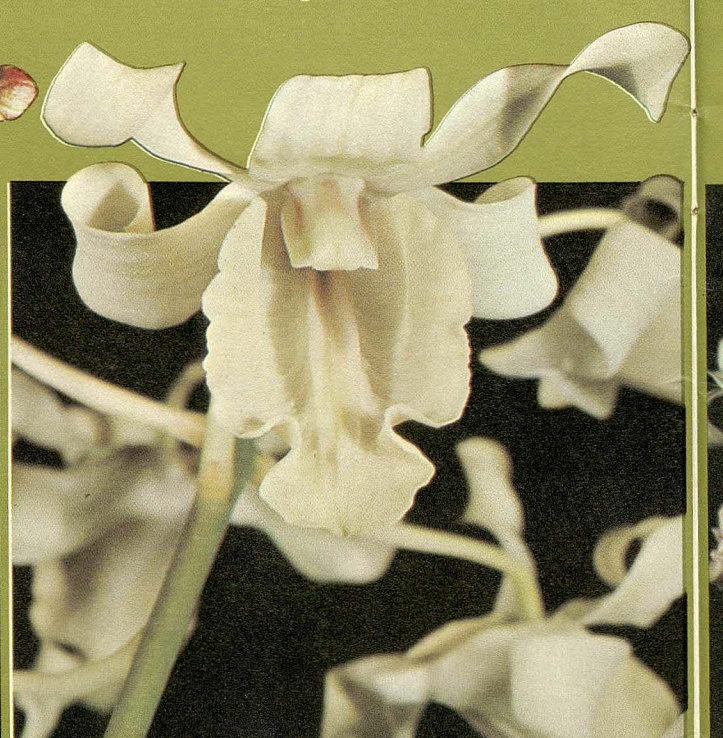
The addition of plants is a continuous process at all three centres. Some are brought in by botanical patrols, undertaken by the staff of the gardens. The aim is not just to bring in plants for the growing collections, and for the young export industry, but to give the country's young scientists first-hand experience in basic biology. Necessarily, such patrols are limited by time and finance, because 'bush travel' beyond the town environs is extraordinarily arduous.

The other source is the steady trickle of wild plants brought in by village people — and, of course, by visiting scientists. Of these, the former is a very exciting development, as it is bringing money into remote villages at the much-needed 'grass-root' level.

What usually happens now is that the resident government agricultural officer, or a group such as the Area Council Authority, contacts the University of Papua New Guinea's gardens, recently renamed the Botanic Gardens of Papua, and reports that the people of the area are willing to provide orchids for the gardens. Then, if possible, staff from the garden visit the area or, if this is too difficult, written or telephoned instructions are given advising what type of plants to collect, how to collect them and how best to preserve the ecology of the surrounding area.

In the wake of this development, small orchid-buying co-operatives have sprung up such as Gaaina Orchids and Paiella Orchids. These, assisted by interested agricultural officers, supply orchids on request to an orchid nursery, Anos Orchids, near Port Moresby. Highland orchids collected from between 1500 and 3000 metres can only be sent on receipt of definite orders as they cannot be held in the heat of the coastal plain for more than two or three days.

In this way, utilising their own resources and collecting with care so as not to jeopardise the survival of any species, such co-operatives can bring in as much as K2000 a year to an area which formerly had no income. And one small thing can lead to another. The Paiella Area Authority for instance is using some of its income to



help its people construct a new road.

There also are recognised collectors around Port Moresby. Some travel by truck, bringing their specimens wrapped in moss and bark. Their fares are paid and the export agency buys their plants, if in good condition, at a set rate.

Sometimes, a short-term collection programme brings in a large number of orchids at once, as for instance in 1971 just after the opening of the University gardens. An enterprising regional medical officer in the Sepik area raised funds for the local tuberculosis hospital by selling some 200 plants of the exquisite Sepik Blue *(Dendrobium lasianthera)* to the University Gardens.

On another occasion, also in 1971, boatloads of orchids were taken to the gardens after a hectic rescue operation on the Sogeri Plateau, above Port Moresby, where the flooding of a large valley to create the Sirinumu Dam had resulted in hundreds of huge forest trees being covered until only their uppermost branches, loaded with a fantastic epiphytic growth, remained above water.

More recently, a young girl on Rossel Island, at the southeastern tip of Papua New Guinea, to raise money for sports equipment in her village, sent several plants of *Phalaenopsis amabilis*, the lovely white-flowering moth orchid, for sale to the gardens and to local collectors.

The principal work in the study of Papua New Guinea orchids — including cultivation, seed-classification, cross-pollenisation and disease control — is done under Andree Millar's direction at the Botanic Gardens of Papua.

The gardens were started in 1971 as a result of the determined efforts of the first Vice-Chancellor of the University of Papua New Guinea, Sir John Gunther. He wanted a garden created for the teaching of various sciences and the practice of horticulture as well as for the supply of plants to, and the landscaping of, the campus and Port Moresby.

The gardens now comprise three areas: the orchid collection, a native plants section, and a large nursery of seed beds, shade houses and workshops to cultivate, protect and study the established gardens. Since the gardens are intended for teaching, there is always a more than normal range of plant experiments in progress.

Andree Millar's 'right hand', and her probable successor, is 27-year-old Frank Ginata of Korobosea, a Port Moresby suburb. His interest in horticulture began when he was a 16-year old forestry student at the Bulolo Forestry College in the Morobe Province. Now it's his turn to take young Papua New Guinean science students around the gardens to show them the richness of their own land.

Much of the collection's original stock was brought from Lae by Andree Millar. As well as from Lae's Botanic Gardens, where she had been responsible for the orchid collection, Andree brought them from her own home garden at Lae where stood a frangipani tree literally covered with hundreds of orchid plants.

Once in Port Moresby — until then regarded generally as a horticultural horror-story — the plants went into a large shade house. But, as soon as possible, the successful system of the Lae gardens was adopted, and the plants were attached to three metre high teak posts, set either into the

Below: Bulbophyllum halianum *flowers all year;* **bottom:** *a better known species of* Dendrobium nindii.

Left: Dendrobium musciferum *is common in lowland forests up to 1000 metres;* **centre:** Bulbophyllum macranthum *is a spectacular orchid found on moss-covered branches in rain forests;* **right:** *the waxlike flowers of the* Vanda hindsii *are about 50mm across*

ground or into metal sockets above it.

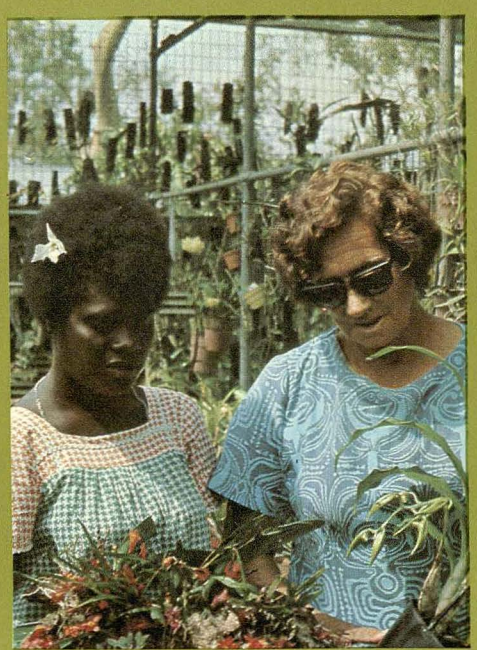
This system had its origins in Lae during a huge operation to save thousands of orchids from the Arawa Plantation in the North Solomons which was being cleared to make way for the town site of the same name. The sudden acquisition of about 20,000 plants needed a rush job in rehousing, and the thinnings of a teak plantation proved a quick and effective answer.

Other orchid plants in the gardens were attached eventually to calabash trees which have been planted among the natural eucalypts left standing in the area. It is always a surprise to visitors to the orchid collection to see the delicate sprays of multicoloured blooms alongside the huge coconut-like fruit of the calabash trees.

The orchid collection is now being reorganised into specific groups of native orchids from different regions of Papua New Guinea, as well as displays of orchids from other Pacific and Southeast Asian countries. Singapore, Australia and Thailand are among the countries already in the process of being represented.

Among native orchids, one of the chief glories of the collection is in the Sepik group, where several posts display great arching sprays of the famous Sepik Blue. This is the *Dendrobium lasianthera*, the most beautiful of 400 plants collected during a botanical patrol in 1972. It has been named 'Veronica Somare' after the wife of Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister, Michael Somare. The colour of this orchid is not really a true blue. In fact, as Andree Millar points out, the colour was first described by a man. Its variation is from a rich purple bronze to a deep shining royal purple.

Andree Millar with an assistant, Claire Soou



The Veronica Somare was one of the highlights of the eighth World Orchid Conference in 1975 in Frankfurt, West Germany, where the Papua New Guinea exhibition won a gold and a bronze medal in the *Dendrobium* section. These conferences are held every three years and are attended by leading orchidologists. The next one will be held in Bankgok, Thailand, where Papua New Guinea is again to be represented by Andree Millar. She has been invited to present a paper — an international tribute to her work.

Papua New Guinea's official export industry in orchids is still very small compared to some of the giants in this field, such as Hawaii and Singapore. Currently, the value is about K7000 annually. The main market is America and Japan. However, exports are only limited by lack of organisation. With the practical help of the Development Bank of Papua New Guinea, the blessings of various government departments, and the advice and guidance of Andree Millar, a locally-run orchid nursery has been established outside Port Moresby.—*Terry Baudert is a freelance travel writer.*

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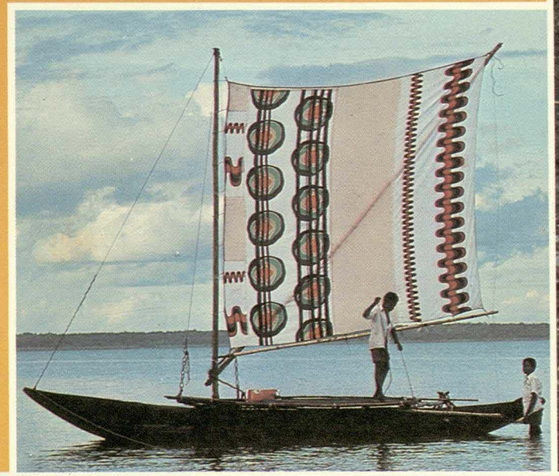
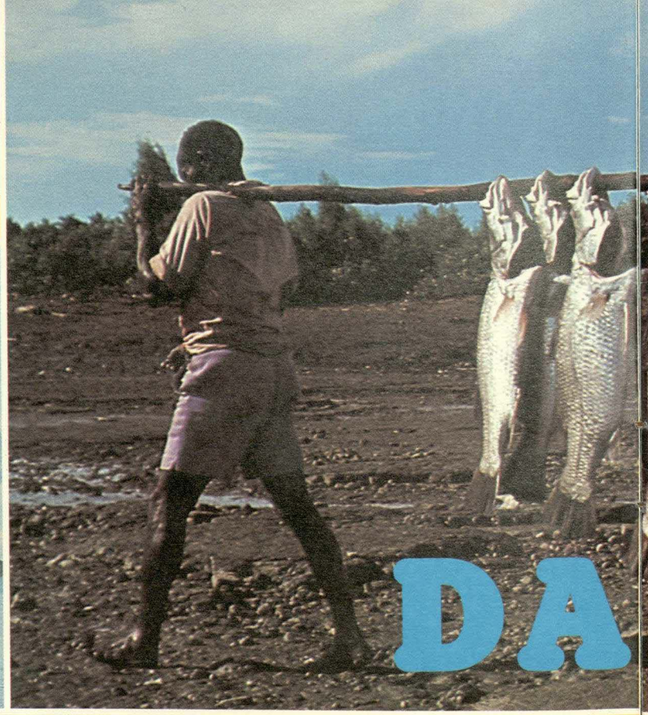




DARU

Pictures by Brian Mennis

Wherever there is a large tidal range it is usual to find at low tide mud flats, rock pools and a general air of desolation. True, at Daru, there are mud flats and rock pools. But desolation is not the word for the waterfront of the capital of Papua New Guinea's Western Province.

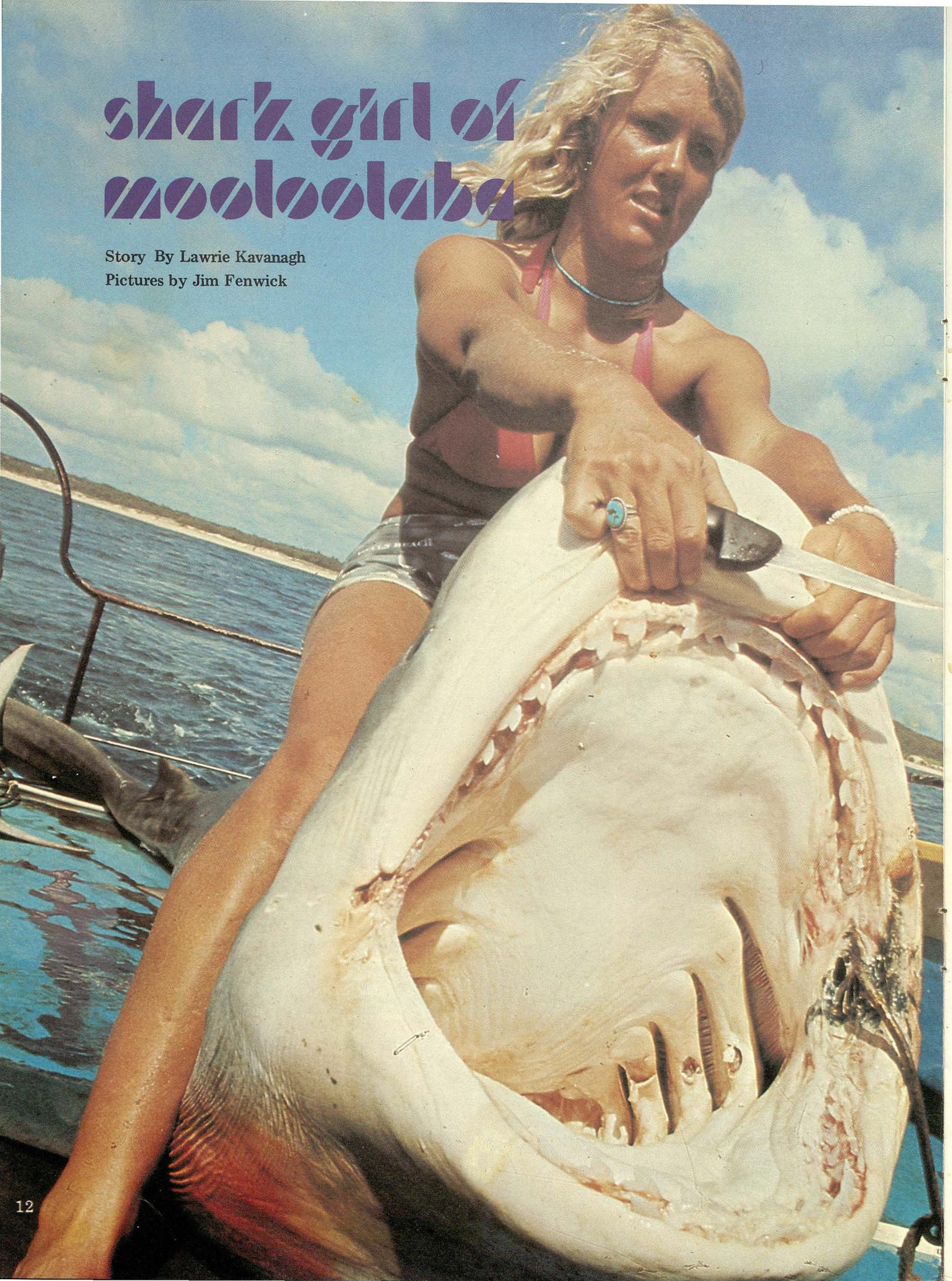
Every day, sailing canoes come in from outlying villages, some up to 15 metres long with three sails and two outriggers. But the small canoes or, more specifically, their gaily-coloured sails made from almost anything which will serve as a sail, are the ones which catch the eye. Used rice bags are popular, sugar or flour bags come next. One sail I saw comprised three lengths of cloth, each with a different pattern and colour scheme.

The canoes' passengers were coming to town for a variety of reasons: those from nearby villages may have been coming to work — an idyllic way to travel provided there is a favourable breeze and no rain squalls; others may have been bringing their produce to market. Not that they are likely to do a booming trade — but it gives them a good chance to chinwag with their friends while waiting for a sale. And then there is the entrepreneurial class: fishermen with barramundi catches, for sale to the local co-operative, or live dugongs and turtles for cutting up and sale at the water's edge; farmers with pigs, again for sale on the beach or in the meat section of the market.

Several canoes are anchored semi-permanently on the mudflats, floating homes at high tide. There are no elaborate cabins on them, just a sail thrown tent fashion over the boom. More permanent boat homes have sago palm roofs. No one worries about privacy on the mudflats of Daru.

shark girl of mooloolaba

Story By Lawrie Kavanagh
Pictures by Jim Fenwick



The jaws of a thousand sharks have flashed — in the death throes of their owners — before the eyes of Kim McKenzie, Shark Woman of Mooloolaba, on Queensland's Sunshine Coast.

To Kim, 24, netting, hooking or shooting sharks is all in a day's work — she's official Queensland State Government shark catcher, responsible for nearly 100 kilometres of coastline north of Brisbane.

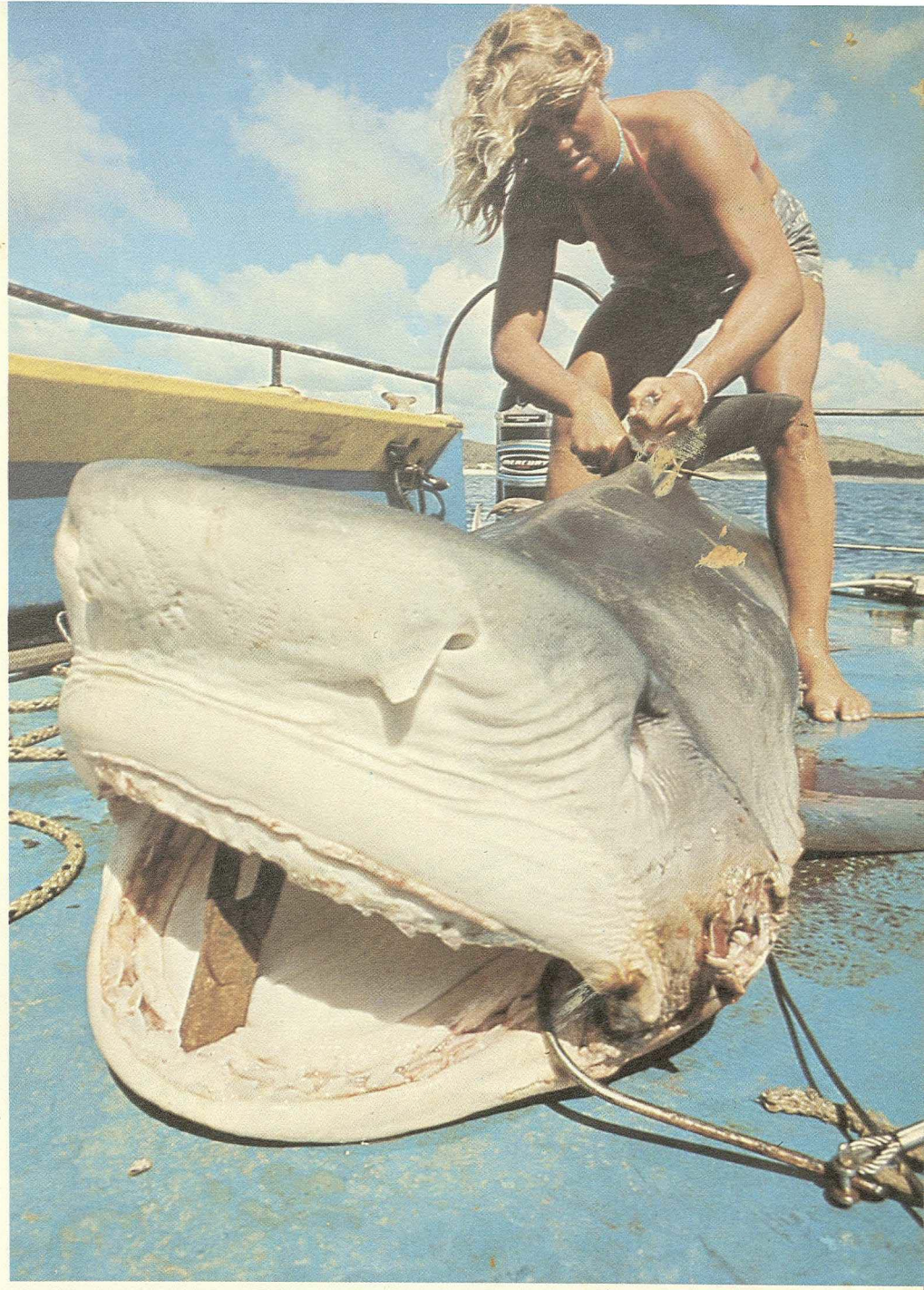
She has had the government contract job for more than three years now. Whatever she may have thought when she first took it on, Kim today doesn't find the job dangerous. It was in a matter-of-fact fashion that she set about her chores the day we were invited to do the rounds in her seven metre open-deck catamaran.

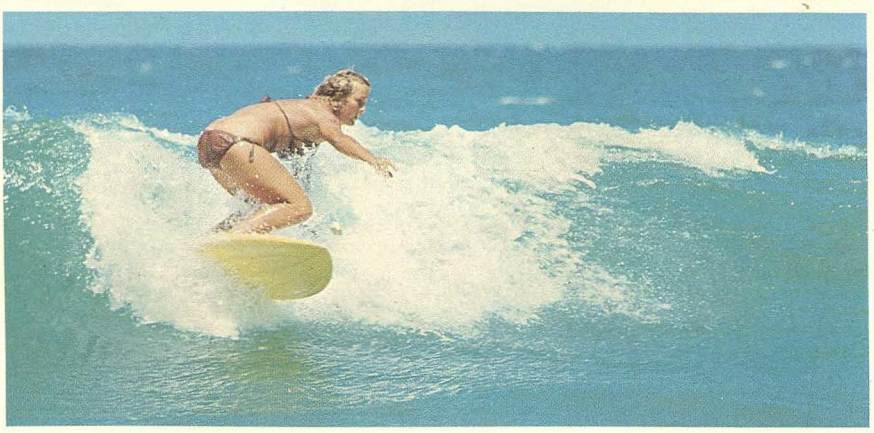
First catch of the day was a tiger shark, just under four metres, which had taken the bait on a heavy line attached to an anchored drum buoy. Her contract requires Kim to measure, disembowel and then dump at sea all sharks that she catches. The dorsal fins are kept for the record. The disembowelling is necessary, says Kim, to check for pups (young sharks) or human remains. So far Kim has found none of the latter.

Disembowelling sounds messy. It is — and not easy when you have to do it hanging over the side of a vessel. First the shark was lashed to the boat at water level. Then Kim swung over the side, hanging almost upside down, and slit the white belly. Displaying a fine balance and sure hands, Kim soon had the job done — and we were on our way to the next bait.

On one of the baits we found only about half of what had once been a white pointer of about 3½ metres. Two hundred metres away we found a very bloated tiger shark, just under four metres. 'It's either got a belly full of pups,' said Kim 'or it has attacked the last shark.' Balancing over the rail in that easy pose, Kim slit the shark from the lower belly forward. Out first came a metre long tail section of a white pointer. Next came another metre long section, neatly chopped off in one bite.

'You find some strange things in some sharks,' said Kim as she cut away the tiger and let it drift off into the clear ocean, soon, probably, to become a meal for another of its savage kind. 'Recently I caught a five metre shark — the biggest I have taken. It was caught after it swallowed a 2.2 metre shark which had, in turn,





taken a smaller one which had taken a bait.

'Another time I felt something strange in a shark's belly. I grabbed it and pulled it out. It was a sea snake. I got a hell of a fright and hurled it away. It was dead but it looked so alive when I pulled it out.'

Despite the workmanlike way in which she goes about her job, Kim is not without feeling for her victims. She admits to crying when she finds a dolphin caught in her nets. And, on the run we made with her, Kim spoke much like a mother to her baby as she untangled an angry turtle from one of the nets.

Most of Kim's spare time is spent surfing the beaches she protects. There's nothing ordinary about the way she surfs either. Winner of the Australian women's surfing championship two years in a row, Kim gained much of her confidence and experience on a surfboard when competing in the 1972 world championships in California.

And to pay for that trip, Kim put in a tough session on her father's fishing trawler earlier that year. At one stage they filled the holds with prawns in a hectic 10 minutes.

Even in 1972 Kim was no amateur fisherman. She had been helping dad out on his trawler since 1964.

Her love of surfing, ships and sharks(?) has made Kim something of a loner — despite the attention her activities have attracted. In fact she avoids publicity whenever possible.

A recent trip to the United States has hardened her determination to avoid the limelight. Invited to undertake a 'press tour' to publicise the annual Shmirnoff Surfing Classic in Hawaii, Kim thought it would be with a group of surfers and 'I didn't mind that because I can usually hide in a crowd.'

But when she got there she found she was the star attraction in a seemingly never-ending series of nationwide television interviews and press conferences. By the time she was asked to pose nude for a centrefold, Kim couldn't get out fast enough. — *Lawrie Kavanagh and Jim Fenwick are on the editorial staff of the Brisbane Courier Mail.*

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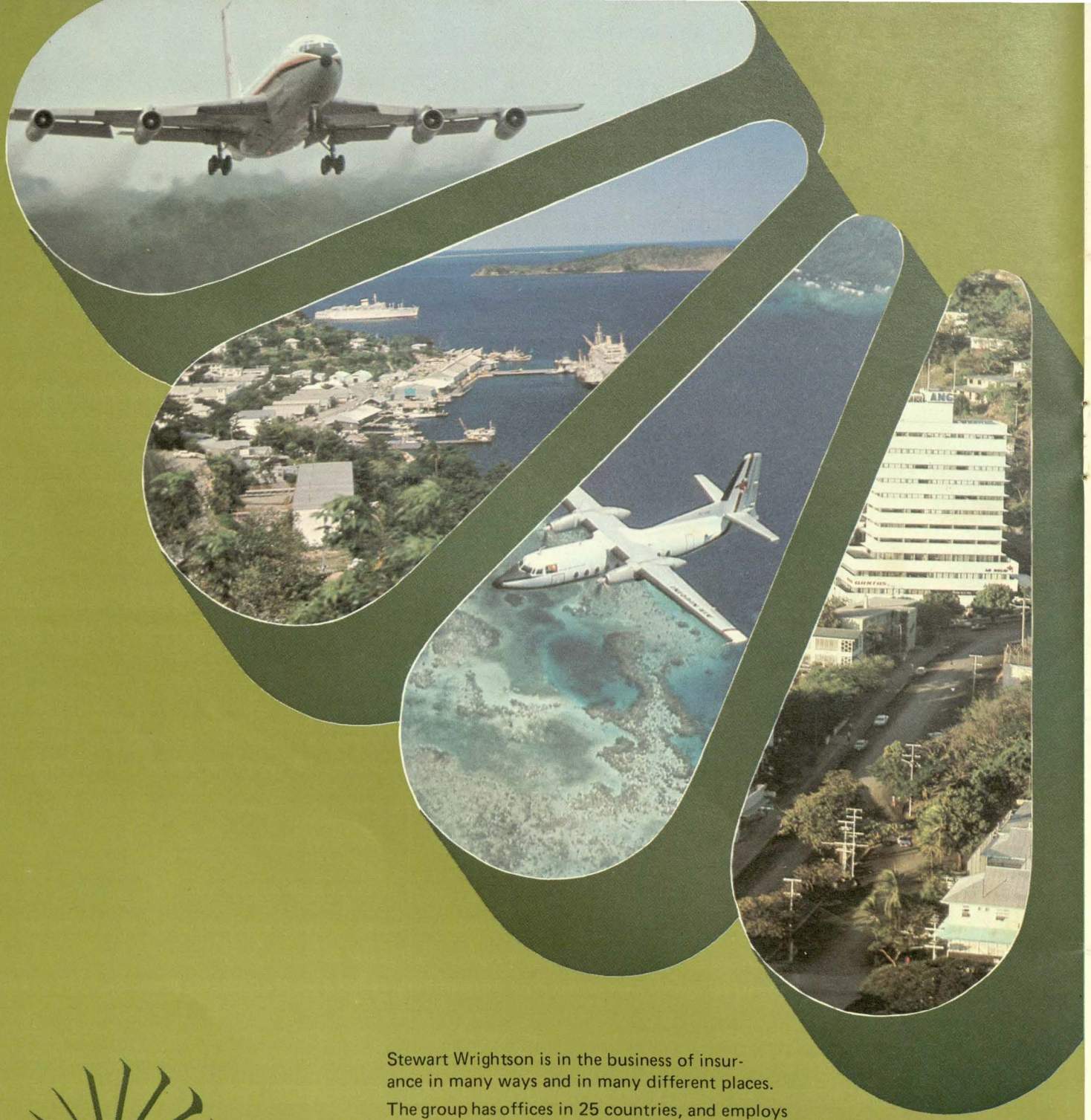
Picture: Shisei Kuwabara

Kundiawa

Bush pilots of old in Papua New Guinea joked about many airstrips that 'it doesn't matter if we don't get air speed before the strip runs out because we'll get it when we go over the end'. Kundiawa's ridge-top runway comes into this category. Capital of Chimbu Province and centre of one of the biggest population concentrations in the whole of Papua New Guinea, Kundiawa lies about 130km east of Mount Hagen, capital of the Western Highlands Province, and about 100km west of Goroka, capital of the Eastern Highlands Province. Through Kundiawa runs the Highlands Highway, Papua New Guinea's longest road which, rising from the Goroka Valley on its way into Chimbu Province, reaches a height of nearly 3000 metres at the top of the Daulo Pass. Just to the north, behind Gembogl, Mount Wilhelm, the nation's highest peak, soars to 4700 metres.



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Death of the Macdhui

By Don Hook.

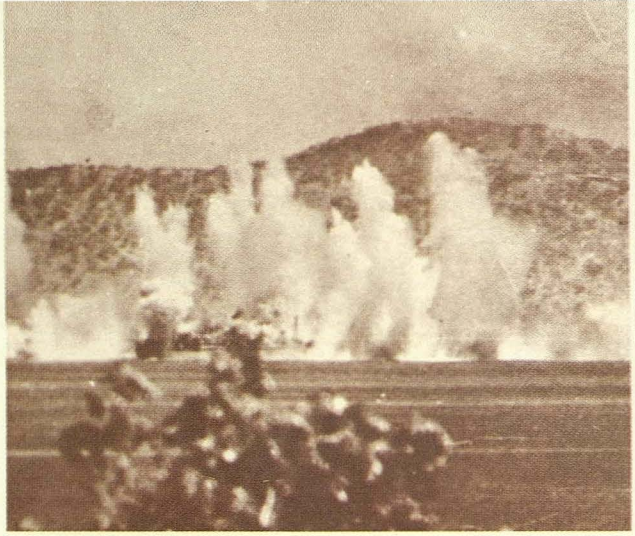
One of the best known landmarks in Port Moresby is the wreck of the motor vessel Macdhui, sunk in the harbour by Japanese bombs in June 1942. The Macdhui, 4,630 tons, built in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1930, was owned and operated on the Australia-Papua New Guinea service by Burns Philp and Company Limited.

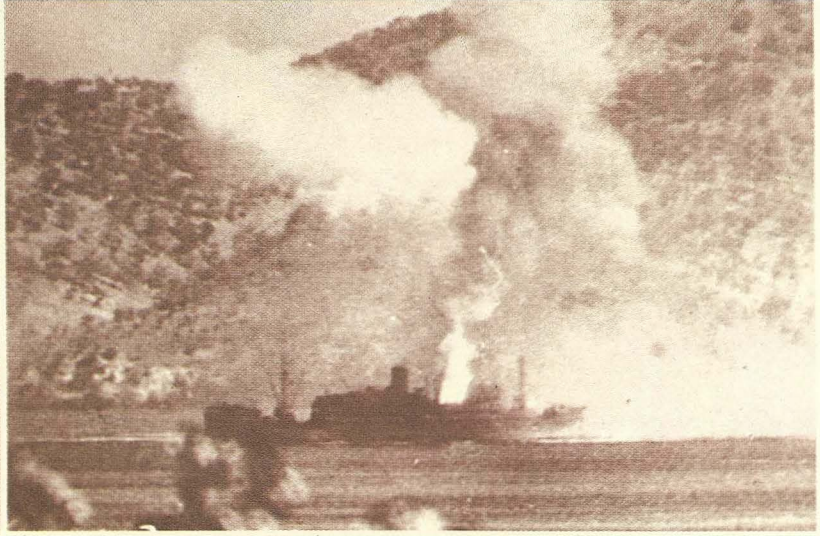
On June 17, 1942, the Macdhui was attacked by Japanese bombers as it was discharging to lighters in Port Moresby harbour. It began zig-zagging around the harbour but took one direct hit which caused considerable damage. The vessel later went alongside the main wharf to unload dead and wounded.

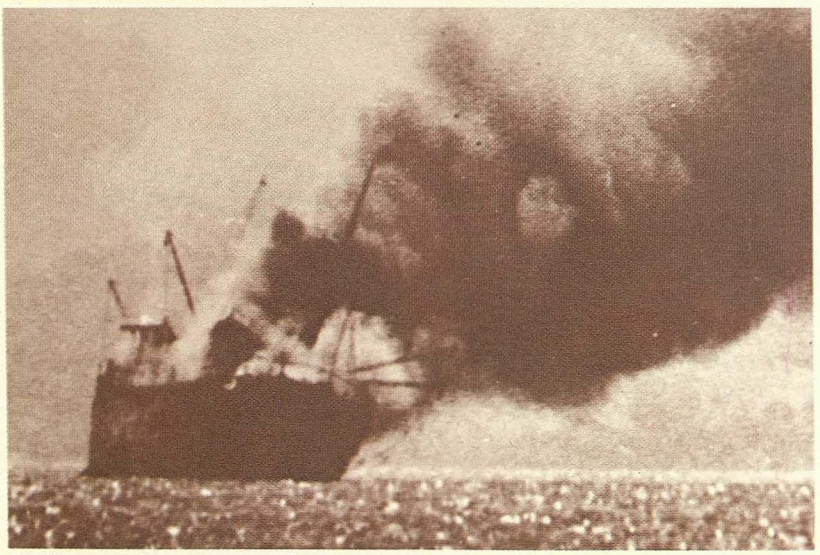
The next day, at 10.45 am, there was another air-raid warning and the Macdhui moved out into the harbour and began manoeuvring. Soon after the raid began it took a direct hit. The captain headed towards shallow water where his ship finally keeled over onto a reef. Ten of the crew of 77 were killed along with five Australian gunners from 39 Battalion.

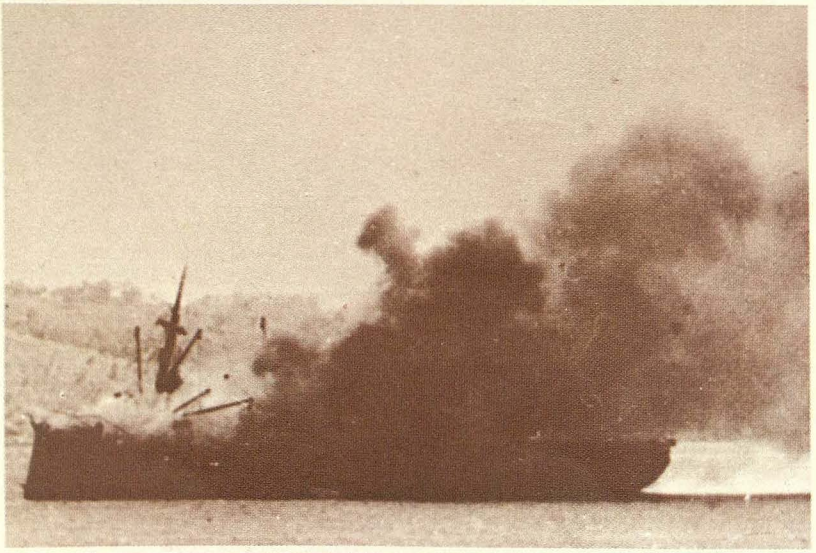
Altogether, the Macdhui took four direct hits.

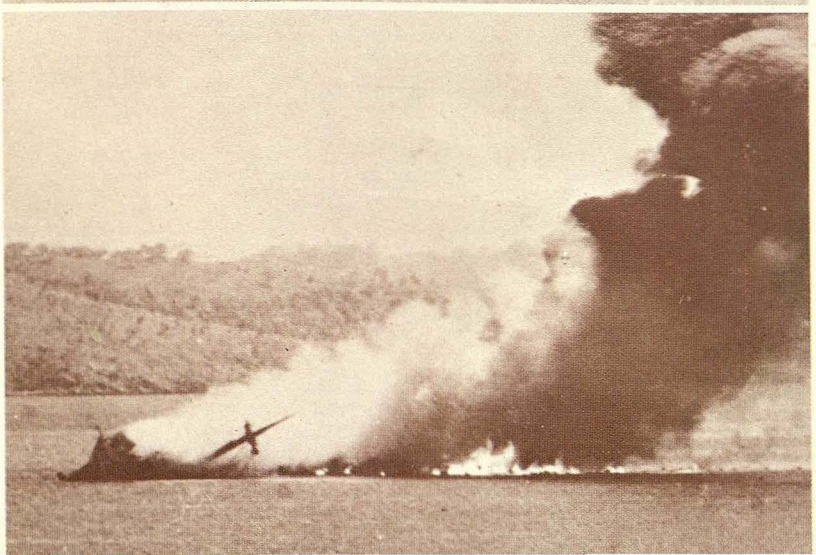
The loss of the Macdhui was a great











From above: *Bombs fall . . . direct hit . . .* Macdhui *burns . . . lists . . . the end*

blow to the morale of Australian troops in Port Moresby. Until then it had been the only regular and reliable link between Australia and Port Moresby. After the war the Australian Government compensated Burns Philp for its loss.

Ownership of the wreck is now rather obscure. It has changed hands several times over the years. It's now believed to belong to two men who bought the wreck to salvage non-ferrous metal. It was while they were removing the screw about six years ago that there was an oil leak and the Macdhui was again in the headlines.

In 1974, the Papua New Guinea Harbours Board issued an order against the owners to remove or dispose of the wreck. The board feared there could be further oil leaks causing major pollution in the harbour. The people of Tatana village, which is close to the wreck, welcomed the move. They claimed that oil leaking from the Macdhui was poisoning fish. The Papua New Guinea Chapter of the Naval Historical Society launched an appeal to try to preserve the wreck as an historical landmark.

In a compromise of sorts, the wreck of the Macdhui remains but some seven-and-a-half tons of fuel have been removed at considerable cost to the Harbours Board. The threat of major oil spill from the wreck no longer exists.

The wreck itself is now deeply pitted and corroded under the waterline. It's gradually breaking up but even if it does slip completely under the surface part of the Macdhui will remain in Port Moresby. About 10 years ago the mast was removed and it now stands outside the Papua New Guinea Yacht Club. Plaques at the foot of the mast commemorate the loss of the ship and crew members. — *Don Hook is the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's senior correspondent in Papua New Guinea.*

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Bainings fire dance

By Dick Pearson

The wailing of a bamboo orchestra and the crackle of a palm frond blaze permeates the eerie darkness of the jungle night. A grotesque, near-naked figure in a hideous white mask emerges from the shadows. It moves ghost-like in the flickering of the firelight. One by one, more figures join the first — and the beat intensifies. The bamboo tempo reaches a crescendo — and holds it for almost an hour — as the figures, in turn, move through the blazing fire, sending out cascades of sparks. When the fire dulls to a glimmer, the figures drift off into the darkness.

This is the Bainings fire dance, a ritual of initiation — or fertility dance. Of all the many spectacular traditional dances in Papua New Guinea, few compare with this insight to the pre-Christian beliefs of the Bainings people of East New Britain Province.

In days gone by the secrets of this dance were kept from the womenfolk. Today they know that the hideous creatures are not spirits — but still they show respect and keep their distance lest they set eyes on a mask and bear children in the likeness of the mask.

The story goes that the Bainings people were the original inhabitants of East New Britain's Gazelle Peninsula but hundreds of years ago they were pushed back into the mountains by Tolai raiding parties which came in boats from the Duke of York Islands and New Ireland.

Fire dances are performed only at night — and only on special occasions. The dance is in honour of the spirits and at times is held in conjunction with the arrival of puberty in young males.

The dancers are naked with the exception of the mask, called a *kavat*, and a penis covering called *limid*. The *kavat* usually takes the form of an animal or bird, perhaps a cassowary, pig, bush rat, dog or crocodile, and is made from the bark of a special tree which is stripped, beaten and stretched to form a tapa cloth. This is then stretched over a bamboo frame and decorated with black and red dye extracts from trees.

Dancers' bodies are painted with a glutinous peaty substance gathered in the bush. Arms and legs are painted with white clay. A watery syrup from bush honey is sprayed over the mouth and body giving a shine to the black dye.

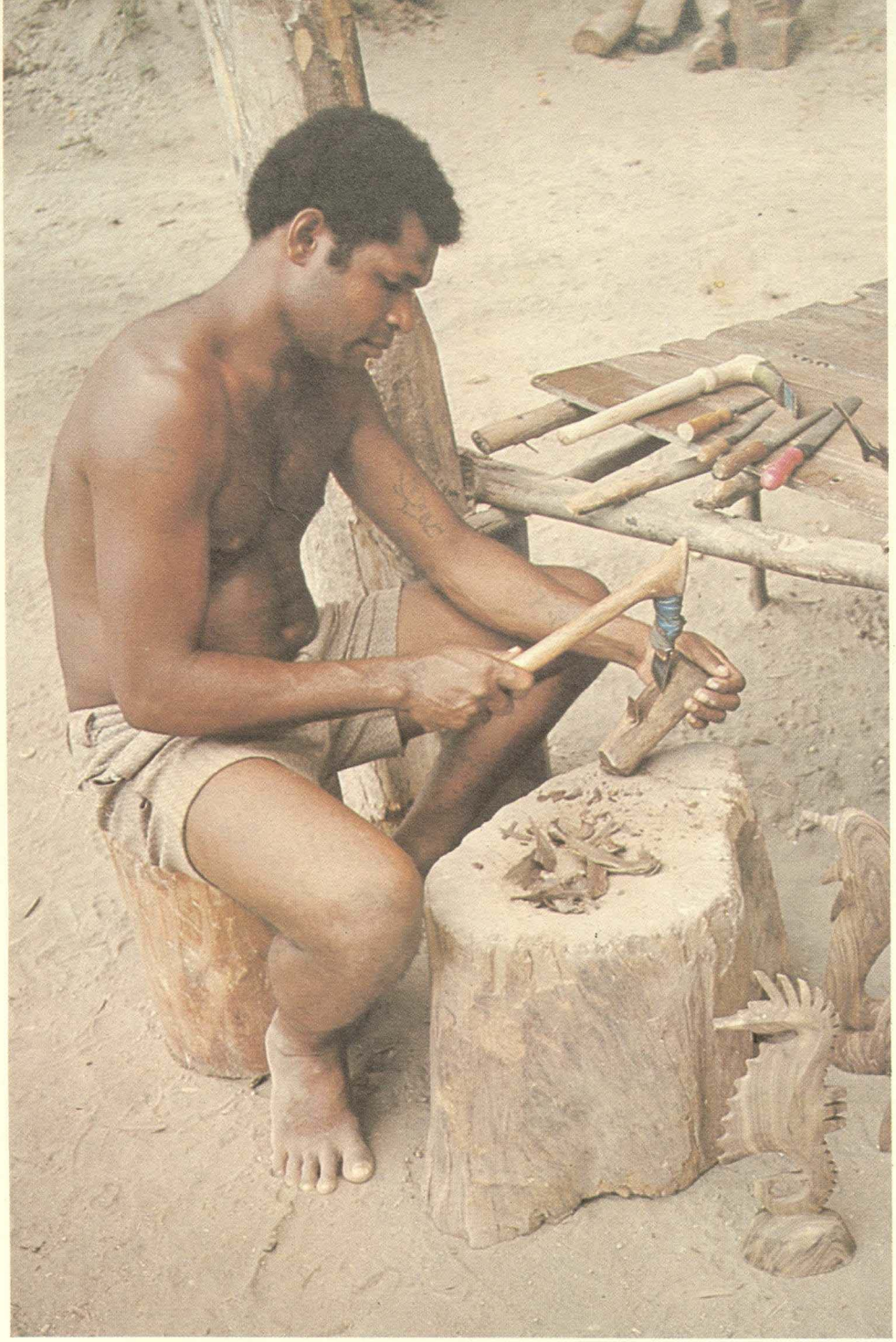
The penis covering is a saucer-shaped disc of bamboo and tapa. The tapa is fastened by pubic hair, pulled tightly downwards over the genitals and under and through to the base of the spine where it is pinned to the skin, usually with a sharpened cassowary bone, a sliver of bamboo or even — nowadays — by a safety pin. A portion of the material is left hanging like a tail. A seasoned Bainings fire dancer can be identified by the many scars in skin tissue at the base of the spine.

A grass thatch covers the calves of the legs but the dancers' feet, contrary to speculation, are not treated to protect them from the red hot embers. These people really do walk on fire — and occasionally they do get burnt. There are no hot stones as in the fire walking of the people of Beqa (pronounced Benga) Island of Viti Levu in Fiji. Pythons are sometimes used, being carried briefly by the dancers early in the performance and later eaten.

Other participants, but non-fire walkers, are called *vung vung* who wear rectangular frames made from bamboo, covered with fine patterns of pandanus leaves and painted in human blood, drawn by rasping the tongue with a sharp serrated leaf. The *vung vung*, also wearing a mask, circles the dancing area and blows a deep foghorn sound through a bamboo tube.

The orchestra assembles some time before the dancers appear. It begins playing to 'call up the spirits' and introduce the dancers to the spirits as the *kavat* wearers emerge from the jungle. To the beating of pieces of bamboo of various length and diameter, the players in the orchestra sing and chant songs associated with the occasion and of local and village events.

AIRPORT ART



By Geoffrey Heard

Old skills + New approaches = Fine art. That's the artistic equation in Papua New Guinea as a new generation of artists and craftsmen — spurred by the market generated by a rising flood of tourists — break with tradition and use their ancient carving skills in new ways.

So-called 'connoisseurs' may shudder in horror but, whether they like it or not, a new wave of 'airport art', aimed at the tourist market, has appeared in Papua New Guinea. And it has come to stay.

Despite the shocked 'connoisseurs', the new form has a stout champion in one of the country's leading authorities on art, Geoffrey Mosuwadoga, a traditional artist by right, a multimedia, trans-cultural artist by training, and the director of PNG's National Museum and Art Gallery.

Mr Mosuwadoga — from the fabled Trobriand Islands, born the son of a traditional artist, trained in the village, then sent to High School in Port Moresby and finally to the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Australia for further training — defends the new art for a number of reasons.

'Art in Papua New Guinea is going through an exciting phase of change and development as a result of the impact of new pressures and ideas on an old, old culture,' he says. 'People are experimenting in all directions. Of course some rubbish is produced, but there is also some very, very interesting work appearing.

'We at the museum are keeping a close eye on developments and we are trying to buy a selection of pieces in an attempt to chart the development of this new art wave.' Mr Mosuwadoga notes that traditionally,

only a relatively few people had the right to be artists. And they often worked in accordance with rigid artistic conventions.

'The demand by tourists for carvings to take home to hang on the wall or put on the mantelpiece has given many people the opportunity to enter the field and exploit talents which would have remained hidden in the old days,' he says. 'This has resulted in an injection of new ideas and a break from what were in some areas rigid and artistically stultifying conventions.'

In addition to these factors, Mr Mosuwadoga sees this tourist-orientated art as performing a valuable role in the protection of Papua New Guinea traditions. It provides a barrier, he says, between people who simply want an artistic piece to take home as a memento of their visit to Papua New Guinea, and the traditional artists who labour to produce works of spiritual and social significance in the villages.

'Without the emergence of this new art to meet the tourists' demands, there would have been enormous pressures on traditional artists to produce to meet the tourist market,' he says. 'As it is, there is a buffer between the tourists and the traditional artists which allows the artists to continue to work in traditional ways, preserving Papua New Guinea's rich variety of cultures.'

Mr Mosuwadoga sees no shame in carvers working to meet the needs of a market. 'Artists and craftsmen, both in Papua New Guinea and in western cultures, always have either worked on commission or sold their works he says. Indeed they have, even the greatest. Michelangelo was paid his fee for the Sistine Chapel ceiling, wasn't he? — *Geoffrey Heard was until recently on the staff of the PNG National Broadcasting Commission.*

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RJP 264/76

super shells come out at night

By Bob Halstead

Initially enticed by the superb wreck diving around Rabaul, many divers have discovered that the underwater treasure is not limited to the monuments of man's madness. The appearance of some rare species of shell — including the famed *Conus gloriamaris* (Glory of the seas) — at a local market turned their heads away from hulks in search of magnificent molluscs.

Some of the finds have been near fantastic. For example, in the past year sport diver Jim Beasley has found shells of three species only known from three or four previous specimens. These shells — *Conus crocattus*, *Spindrupa martinetana* and *Cypraea rabaulensis* — although not as gloriously coloured and marked as some of the more common species, are valuable because of their rarity.

To collect these shells, Jim dives at night in deep water — to depths of 40 metres. In the daytime shells hide away and only by turning rocks or digging into the sand can they be found.

However at night the small molluscs liven up and move about freely looking for food. So night time is the best time for collecting and Jim and his diving companions go down, sometimes seven nights a week, underwater torch and bag in one hand, a glove on the other.

Ignoring local shark stories, Jim says he's never seen one while collecting. But then he dives with his light always shining into the coral. Only occasionally does he give a sideways

Night time is the right time to catch shells out walking. This tiger cowry. Cypraea tigris, *its mantle covering a lustrous shell, was spotted in shallow water on the shore reef of Ela Beach, Port Moresby. An attractive and common species, it is found throughout Papua New Guinea.*

glance along the bottom or to check his companion's situation.

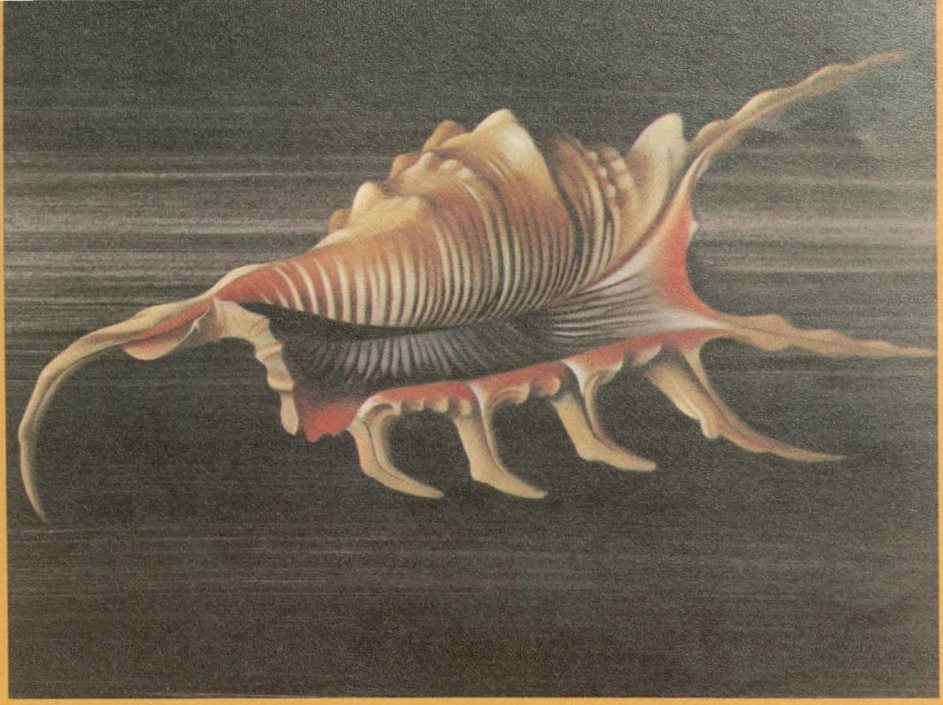
For common shells, collecting at night is not necessary. Many can be found by just walking along the beaches at low tide and turning rocks. But if you do this, please remember to turn the rocks back again. If you don't the marine growths on both sides will die.

In a sandy seabed, shells are buried during the day but can be found by following their trails left from the previous night's walkabout. It's fun to follow a trail. Some run several metres. You can dig into the sand and come up with a good find — or discover that you've tracked it back to the beginning of its nocturnal wanderings and then you have to retrace your steps.

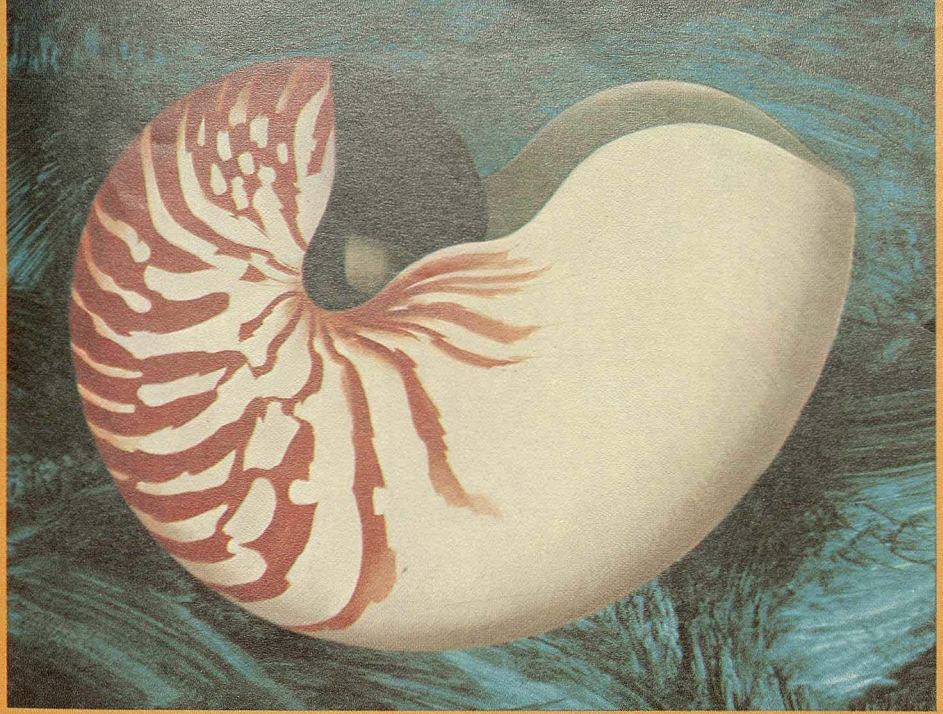
You should always wear a glove when collecting. Some shells are extremely venomous and can produce fatal stings. These shells are members of the cone family, named because of their cone-like shape. Stories that cone shells can be safely handled by their wide end at the base of the cone are dangerous. Although this is the safest place to hold, the animal can still injure you by firing a small poison dart. Wear a glove!

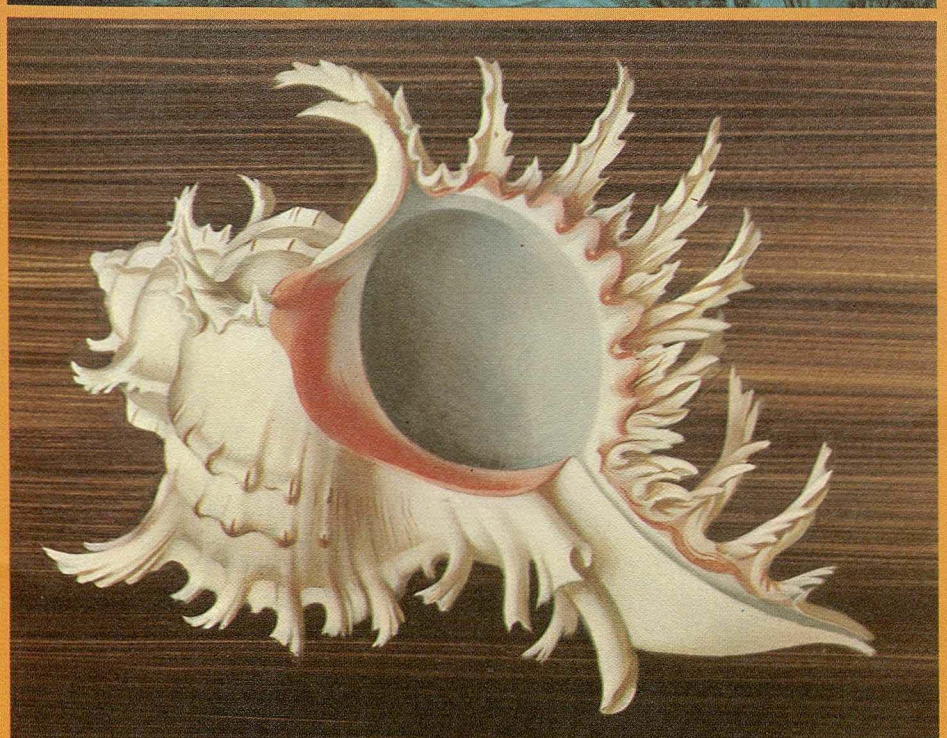
Collectors can also obtain some fine shells by buying at the markets or from villages. Some markets in Papua New Guinea are becoming so popular that they are getting to be known as 'reefs'. Musgrave Reef in Port Moresby is the area on Musgrave Street where the local people display and sell their shells.

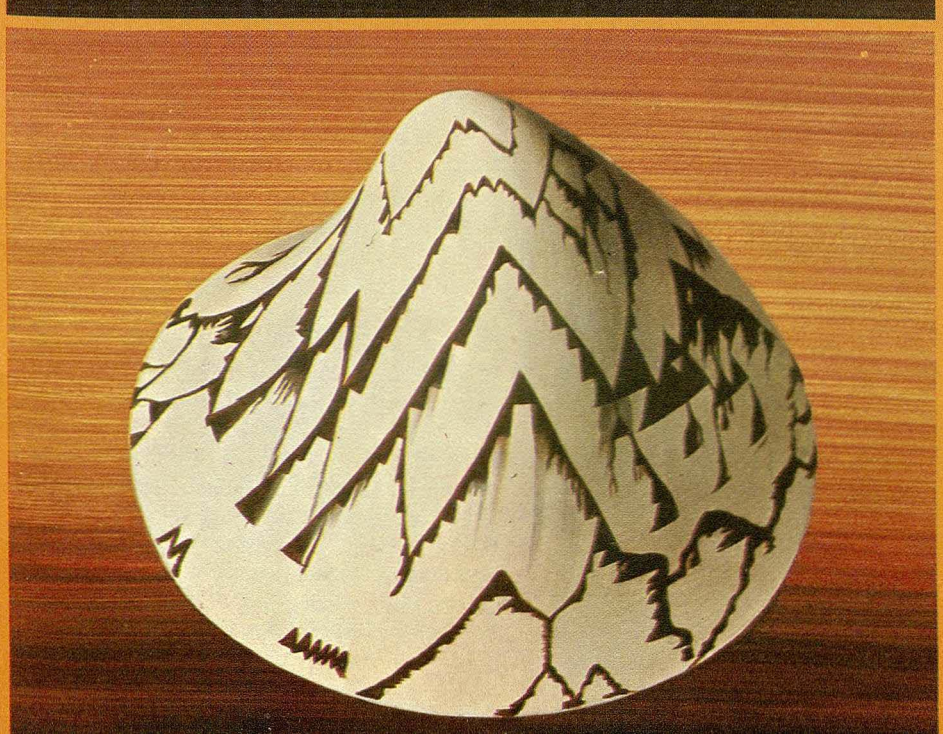
Because of the commercial potential, a national industry has been



Artist Paul Jones *painted the shells on these pages for a definitive stamp series issued by the Philatelic Bureau of Papua New Guinea between August 1968 and January 1969*
Top: *Scorpion shell,* lambis scorpius, *is easily recognised by its claw-like projections which are distinctly gnarled. It grows to about 5cm and is found in shallow water on coral reefs;* **centre:** *Triton's trumpet,* Charonia tritonis, *is widely used by islanders throughout the Pacific as a musical instrument;*
bottom: *Orange spotted mitre,* Mitra mitra, *is a common species which is easily recognised by the orange-red spots arranged in spirals around the shell*







initiated by New Guinea Shells, based in Rabaul. Owned by Papua New Guineans, the company trains its own SCUBA divers and also buys shells from village collectors in various parts of the country.

These shells are mainly exported. They find their way to collectors and museums all over the world. Shells exported also include those of some of Papua New Guinea's land snails. Many of these have shells as excitingly shaped and coloured as any marine variety. The company now intends to start up bases, with trained diving collectors, in other provinces of Papua New Guinea.

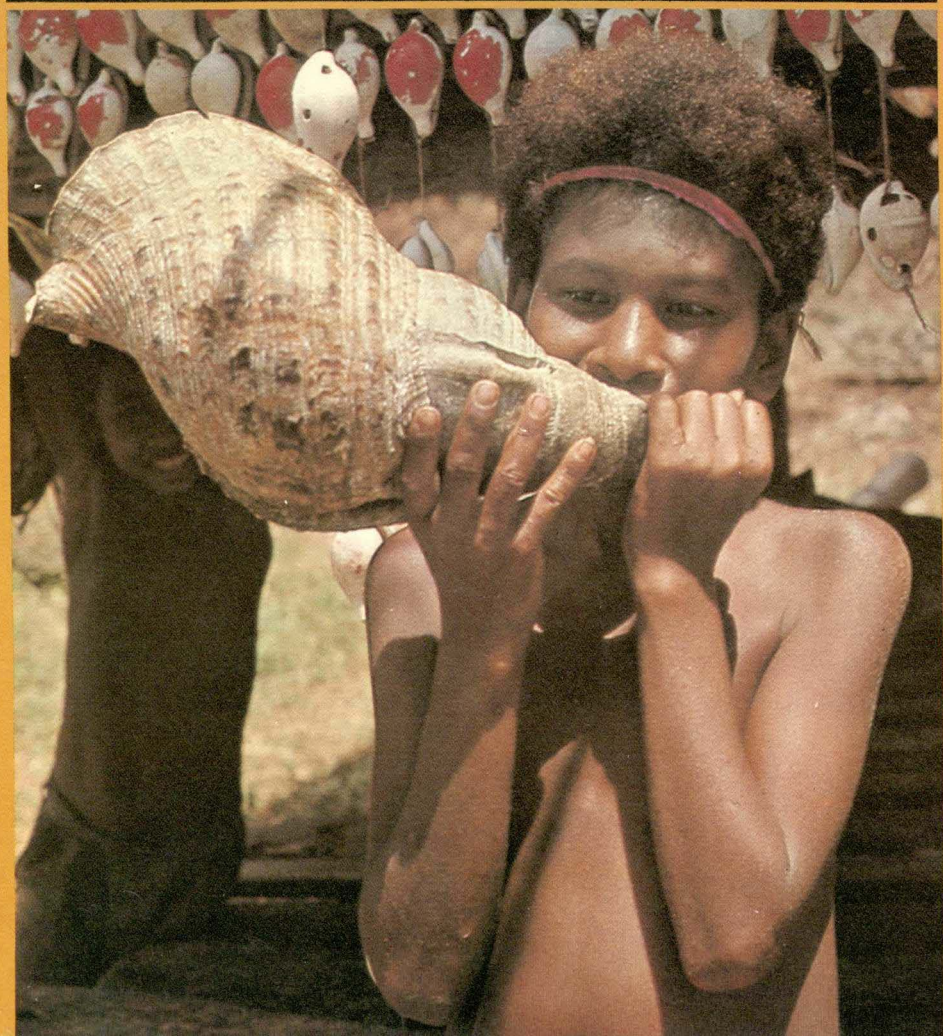
Since commercial shells must be collected live, there is always a fear of over-collecting. Indeed, some biologists will claim that the Crown of Thorns starfish plague on the Great Barrier Reef was started by the collecting of the large triton shell which feeds on the starfish. The taking of triton shells is now illegal in Australia.

By this, I mean that it is important that collectors — professional and amateur — only collect those species which they need. They should also leave behind specimens which are damaged or not of top quality.

Considering the vastness of Papua New Guinea's coastal areas and the present small scale of collecting operations, there is little danger at the moment as long as responsible collecting procedures are adhered to.

There is a lot of work involved between the taking of a live shell from the sea and putting it, cleaned, on display. If you are not prepared

Top: *Chambered nautilus,* Nautilus pompilius, *belongs to the same mollusc family as snails. When cut in half this shell reveals numerous chambers and a perfect logarithmic spiral;* **centre:** *Giant murex,* murex ramosus, *is common along the coastline of Papua New Guinea. The largest of all rock shells, it grows to more than 30cm and attracts attention by its rosy pink mouth;* **bottom:** *Chocolate flamed venus shell,* lioconcha castrensis, *is a solid cockle which grows to about 5cm and is found buried in sand patches in coral reefs. The smooth exterior is white or cream, decorated with dark brown or black zigzag lines*



Above: *New Guinea Shells' showroom in Rabaul;* **left:** *three rare shells recently found* — Spindrupa martinetana, Conus crocatus *and* Cypraea rabaulensis; **below:** *a Trobriand boy, playing the triton shell,* Charonia tritonis, *stands in front of the chief's yam house which is decorated with white cowries,* Ovula ovum

to put up with the smell, care and effort of cleaning, then it is better you leave the animal in the sea to breed and maintain its population. You can always buy your specimens from a commercial collector!

Too many times shells are ruined by an initially enthusiastic amateur who, faced with the stench of rotting molluscs and the painstaking and delicate job of cleaning off coral growth, just leaves them out in the sun and rain to fade and spoil.

Shells have been collected by Papua New Guineans for as long as we know. Indeed, our currency — the kina and toea — was named after shell money. The so-called white cowry — *Ovula ovum* — was and still is used to decorate canoe prows and yam houses. The conch or giant triton was used to signal great events in village life.

This traditional collecting apparently had little effect on the shell population; these particular shells are still common. Even so, it would be wise — with expanding populations in the villages and new commercial interests — to keep a close watch on the shells to maintain for Rabaul — and Papua New Guinea — yet another of its rich resources. — *Bob Halstead is a schoolteacher in Port Moresby.*

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