THE FINGER FONE STORY IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

LESTER DEVINE



See CV in vol 2 # 1

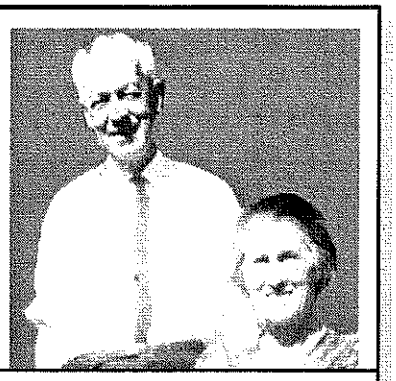


SYDNEY STOCKEN

After graduating from the ministerial course at Avondale Missionary College in 1943, Sydney Stocken served as an evangelist in South Australia.
He began a long period of mission service in 1946 when he was appointed to PNG. He went to the Solomon Islands in 1950 and returned to PNG in 1952 where he had the satisfaction of developing the Fingerfone work. (He was in Sth NSW from 1963-65)
He once again served in PNG from 1966-1970. He 'retired' in 1977 after serving for 7 years in NNSW but continued to care for churches for another 22 years. He and his wife Beryl (Johanson) live in Forster, New South Wales .They have 4 children—Len, Alwyn, Warina and Delmae.

PASTOR ALEXANDER J CAMPBELL served 33 years in the mission fields of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Like many missionaries of his time and since, communicating the gospel to the 3,500,000 people in Papua New Guinea who speak more than 800 languages and dialects was and still is a formidable challenge. However Pastor Campbell and Pastor Syd Stocken met this challenge in a very economical and effective way with the "Finger Fone Ministry." In Pastor Stocken's files there are numerous letters and press releases describing how the ministry began and rapidly grew in Papua New Guinea — and indeed around the world. This then, is the remarkable story of how a simple technology and the "Good News" came together to meet a real need in the hearts and minds of the people of Papua New Guinea nearly 50 years ago.

In a 1966 newsletter[1] Pastor Campbell related how in 1954 he was attending the 47th Session of the General Conference in San Francisco and there the Voice of Prophecy radio program speaker, Elder H M S Richards Snr, put him in touch with John E Ford, the Director of International Educational Recordings in California. He soon saw how the low cost gramophones used by that organisation would solve the problem Pastor Stocken was struggling with in his experiments to record evangelistic messages in different languages for the peoples of Papua New Guinea. Initial experiments by Pastor Stocken with metal-type "cake-tin" gramophones at Kainantu in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea were encouraging and he realised that a very powerful evangelistic tool was within reach. Even better, the world's largest electrical company, RCA, under the leadership of General Sarnoff its Chairman, developed a finger driven plastic player. The required set of 45 rpm records weighed only two pounds compared with the nine pound earlier metal-type machine. Not only would the plastic machines be extremely cheap to manufacture, they could be easily transported in great numbers on foot across the rugged terrain of PNG and were soon called "finger-fones." John Ford obtained permission from RCA to use the plastic machines on a non-profit basis and in time he made some necessary improvements to the little devices. Fourteen (later 16) scripts outlining basic Biblical principles were prepared by John Ford and Spanish was the first language used for the program. In time, Pastor Stocken and others had the basic script translated into 40 PNG languages.



Pastor A J Campbell & his wife Emily

The list of those languages follows:

1. Pidgin
2. Agarabe
3. Auiana
4. Bena Bena
5. Moge
6. Kamano
7. Porei
8. Lufa
9. Orumpa
10. Kumul
11. Chimbu
12. Efogi—Moresby
13. Markham
14. Enga
15. Gadsup
16. Krankat-Madang
17. Panam
18. Motu—Moresby
19. Cabeofa
20. Yani
21. Taiora—Papua
22. Tari
23. Youie
24. Kanaka—Yani district
25. Gimmi
26. Delta
27. Kemanimoe
28. Vailala
29. Iagaria
30. Maprik — Sepik
31. Yangoru—Wewak
32. Bombieta-Wewak
33. Hagen
34. Wokeo — Schouten Isles
35. Ipi — Porgera
36. Avatip — Sepik
37. Bunguis — Sepik
38. Bosman—Nubia— Madang
39. Mugumat — Madang
40. Yaga — Lake Kopiago

Later a health record was added which warned of the dangers of smoking and betel-nut chewing and encouraged personal hygiene. Pastor Stocken recalls the challenge of converting the original English

script into the vernacular via Tok Pisin — an unwieldy and time consuming process. Then the recordings he made were sent to America for production into 45 rpm records. Missionaries such as Pastor Len Barnard soon saw the almost unlimited possibilities of the finger fones stating in a taped message, "Two weeks ago I visited Mt.Hagen. Pastor Stocken lent me one of the gramophones with a set of records in Pidgin English. They made a great impression on the locals up there. We are looking forward to the time when we too shall have the privilege of receiving them from you people. These gramophones are going to mean a great thing for the nationals in the work here in New Guinea. The work we can see can go ahead in leaps and bounds because God can bless the work of these boys with these gramophone records."[2] Visiting from Australia Wally Wilson reported, "I have seen these gramophones in action in Port Moresby and Lae and now see the wonderful work they are doing here in Pastor Stocken's area. They seem to be quite the answer. They will be a great asset in finishing the work in a hurry." [3] Pastor J. B. Keith, then the President of the Coral Sea Union Mission was of a similar opinion, writing, "I am firmly convinced that God is richly blessing the gramophone work. I have had ample evidence of this and I believe it is one of the simplest methods that God has ordained in reaching the multitudes of people back in the mountains and valleys." [4]



Kai, the leper, with Pastor Syd Stocken

Pastor Stocken's files contain an account of the struggle to get the little machines through customs and how demonstrations of assembling the devices in seconds and playing them for agents rapidly allayed all concerns.[5] One of the real benefits of the program was that International Educational Recordings provided the machines and records without charge as John E Ford had set up the program as a non-profit donation funded ministry — a wonderful service, and one which still continues under the leadership of Herbert P Ford.

The story of this program would not be complete unless it also told of the impact of the program on the local people in Papua New Guinea generally and the faithful local Adventists specifically. They were excited that they had an evangelistic tool which they could easily take everywhere— including unentered and restricted territories.[6] In Papua New Guinea, the little machines were known as the "Fingerfone" and seemed to appeal particularly to Adventist women and girls who took a strong lead in this ministry— unconventional though that was in the culture of the time. In looking through the files Pastor Stocken has kept over the years, three names seem to stand out. The first of these is Kai, a leper. He helped Pastor Stocken with the early recording. Also notable was Irake, the Leper missionary who witnessed among his fellow sufferers at the local hospital in Kainantu, PNG. With only stumps for fingers, Irake found a way to get his message from the recordings at 45 rpm. He said he was now a missionary, instead of a hospital patient. Also significant was Tunako, an ardent young laywoman in the fingerfone ministry in the Kamano language area of Papua New Guinea. While still very young, her people in time came to accept that as a woman she could do this work.

In 1956 Pastor Stocken wrote, "When the record begins to play there is dead silence among the people. The children and all listen intently. Gospel teaching by gramophone records is a success."[7] Later Pastor Campbell was to write, "We send this urgent request for 100 more gramophones and sets of records in the Wabag language. The machines you sent us are all in use and the call is for MORE. We are far short of meeting the needs. What we have are achieving their purpose in a very fine way. A strong call has come for a new worker down in the eastern end of my field because of the use of a gramophone down in that area." [8]

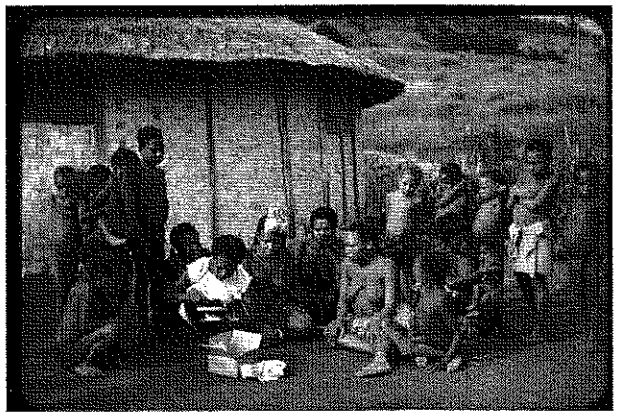
The program was not without its challenges. The records were easily scratched and when roughly handled had a relatively short life. The documents of the time suggest keeping up the supply of needles was also a challenge. A new development in this ministry came with the advent of cassette tape technology and Lae based Pastor Ray Coombe,[9] with the assistance of his visiting father, Les Coombe in 1981, was able to obtain the return of Pastor Stocken's master reel-to-reel tapes from International Educational Recordings in Califor-



Irake, the 'missionary' not the patient.

nia and initiate the production of thousands of cassette tapes which were played on cheap battery powered players. Thus the witness of the original recordings has continued for many more years.

In looking over the materials made available for this article, one cannot but be impressed with the commitment, dedication and energy of all involved. The record also makes clear that the demand for fingerfones was massive and the baptismal results very rewarding. In summation, the evidence suggests that the fingerfone ministry was an effective and powerful witness to the peoples of Papua New Guinea—and beyond. It is also the story of committed expatriate missionaries and their wives who gave much in their years in Papua New Guinea. Those involved in the program who are still with us today have already had a glimpse of their eternal reward. The seed sown so many years ago with this simple technology is still flowering today with Papua New Guinea currently the area of the most rapid growth for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific.



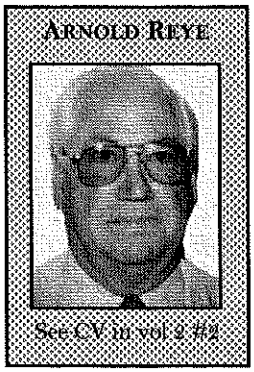
Tunako, one of the women who ministered in this way.

Dr Lester D Devine — in collaboration with Pastor Syd Stocken

References & Notes

1 *The Voice in the Jungle*, World Wide Gramophone Ministry, Feb 1966.
2 International Educational Recordings newsletter, Oct 1956.
3 ibid, May 1956.
4 ibid, Aug-Sep 1958.
5 ibid, Apr 1958.
6 ibid, Jan-Feb 1958.
7 Related by A J Campbell in the International Educational Recordings newslatter, Feb 1966.
8 S A Stocken letter, 13 Nov 1958. Pastor Stocken was then the District Director for Kainantu. He does not precisely identify the uncontrolled or restricted areas other than to say they were as far as 60 miles from the mission station.
9 Interview with R Coombe at his SPD office, 22 Jul 2002.

ADVENTIST RESPONSES TO THE WAR IN THE SOUTHWESTERN PACIFIC—Part 2



Synopsis:
72 Adventist expatriate workers were serving in the Pacific Territories lying in the path of the Japanese invaders. Following directives from the Australian & British Governments, most women and children were evacuated from PNG & the Solomon Islands during January 1942. Plans were in place for the evacuation of mission personnel using mission boats when needed, and for the care of mission stations by nationals, but the rapid advance of the Japanese caused confusion. In PNG some of the men sailed in the *Diari* along the Papuan coast and on to Cairns in February, 3 others were flown out and 2 were able to travel on a Petroleum Company ship. In the Solomons the *Melanesia* took others straight across the Coral Sea to the coast north of Brisbane. Sadly 3 missionaries lost their lives. Unfortunately some British officials spread untrue reports about the evacuation of Adventist expatriates from the Solomon Islands but the facts tell a different story.

The Nationals

LET US RETURN to the assertion by historian, Stewart Firth, that nationals felt abandoned and betrayed by the flight of missionaries back to Australia. Were this the case, what kinds of behaviours would it be reasonable to expect from the Adventist national converts in Papua, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands? The following are suggested as possible indicators: (1) a high level of defection from the church; (2) a cessation of missionary endeavour by national pastors; (3) neglect of mission campuses; (4) active looting of missionary homes; (5) letters from nationals which conveyed their sense of betrayal; (6) an unwillingness of nationals to support Australian and United States military personnel; and (7) resentment at the post-war return of missionaries. Is there evidence that all or some of these indicators came into play?

Upon his return to Australia, Robert H Tutty encountered pessimism on the part of some church members with regard to the well-being of the church's mission program now that expatriate leadership had evacuated to Australia. They thought the mission program would collapse. Tutty did not share this perception and to counter it he wrote to the *Record* to express his confidence in national leadership. Unequivocally he stated "I