

Notes on First Edwin Smith Memorial Lecture

for the Pacific Islands Society of the United Kingdom and Ireland

Held at St. Philip's Church Earl's Court Road, London on Thursday 28 June 2007



Brian Macdonald-Milne Introduces Bill Morell

Speakers were Mr Bill Morrell, former Police Commissioner in the Solomon Islands and his Assistant Commissioner, John Lansley.

In January 2003 he and his wife, Mary, arrived in the Solomon Islands. Brian Baldwin, the UK High Commissioner, had been approached by the SI PM Kemekeza asking for a contingent of Gurkhas; the response has been only a British Commissioner of Police! He took with him Sue, his assistant in Manchester, and later an Assistant Commissioner came out at his request. SI Police had stolen funds before his arrival; petrol had to be paid for by cheque. In 2000 there had been a Police initiated coup, and senior police officers, mainly from Malaita had held power. Some he felt had just been wrongly promoted. The militant leader Harold Keke had just kept fighting. Some Guadalcanal police were sent with firearms to the Weather Coast, perhaps to justify their holding firearms! Special Constables had to be demobilised, during which process Sir Fred Soaki was assassinated in Malaita. Archbishop Pogo offered MBH (Melanesian Brotherhood) to accompany him on his visits; their faith and courage reassured him in his work. The Australian HC asked Bill to go to Canberra to discuss an intervention force. In July 2003 RAMSI arrived, and so did John Lansley as Assistant Commissioner of Police. The militants then left Honiara. About 4,000 weapons were collected. The situation on the Weather Coast then calmed down. It was then discovered that the six MBH Brothers who had gone

to collect the body of Brother Nathaniel had also been killed. There was much investment in the intervention by Australia. After both his and the Assistant's contracts expired, and an Australian replaced him, but he was not allowed back into the SI after 18 months. An Indian Fijian has now been appointed. He reported the burning of China-town a year ago was tragic. Unfortunately not enough MPs were returned to the new parliament who could provide the 'new broom' required. He felt it would take a long time for the country to fully recover,

John Lansley said he became Chief of Police in Honiara, and then became Assistant Commissioner of Operations when the Solomon Islander holding the post was arrested by RAMSI. John had served in the Metropolitan Police, and was one of four applicants for the post advertised in the 'Police Review'. Sir John Stevens gave him three months leave as he was then Police Commander in Barking and Dagenham. After his return from the SI he served in the Sudan, He observed that alcoholism was a huge problem, including with the police. There was no control. The first thing he did was to control alcohol supply and the selling of betel nut in Honiara. Police patrols began at Borderline and White River (where the Police Station had been destroyed). He even had to go and collect police men and women who had not turned up to work, and discipline them. As Assistant Commissioner, Territorial Operations, he found the task daunting because of the nature of the country. Some people had no idea that the Police still existed, if they were living in the more remote parts of the country. One of the Australian police officers was murdered. The Bali bomb experience had alerted the Australians to be watchful of the area. The great difficulty was lack of money and resources. He was amazed how happy people were away from the centre, largely ignorant of, or ignoring politics. Performance indicators were largely irrelevant, although crime statistic began to be gathered. The Police however took pride in the fact that those arrested and taken to court had all been convicted, and they began to be proud of their uniform and the ability to provide a service. Gradually women and children began to report crimes. Because of Bill's work a new spirit emerged, and the police were no longer hated. Religion is so important in the Solomon Islands that the churches were always packed. Both he and Bill took part in the pilgrimage on Lui Kopuria's Day on Guadalcanal — in bare feet, A memorable, physically painful, but challenging experience for both of them as Christians - Bill and Mary as Roman Catholics, and John and Sue as Anglicans.

Discussion

Ben Burt has copies of a report by a Malaitan Special Constable. Michael Kwaiotoa, which shows that there had been Special Constables who did good work before the troubles!

Bill reported that he was one of four candidates for the post. He was asked at interview by the FCO if he went to Church. During the interview the FCO reported that in the SI the Finance Minister had been taken at gunpoint and forced to hand out money.

Notes by Brian Macdonald-Milne.

(With thanks to Chris Luxton of PNGCP for the photograph)