

Port Moresby



Joe Mack was an administrative aide in a branch the Colonial government and was there to welcome Molly and other new recruits to Port Moresby. He asked Molly to wait while he rounded up the rest of the party and their luggage.

Moresby looked like the military base that it was. Huge piles of supplies were stacked on every available space of the wharf, and what seemed to be hordes of workers were shifting around cargo. Navy, Army and airmen from every nation were scurrying around trying to locate and claim shipments coming in to the dock. There were not many people in civilian clothes, and very few women in evidence at all.

Molly saw the two couples bound for mission work being greeted and shepherded to a truck that was also being loaded with supplies. Mack came back with three men in tow, and led the party to an ANGAI truck. Molly was invited to sit in the cab of the truck next to Mack, and when all were ready they drove away from the harbor through the outskirts of town.

It was a mixed bag of buildings they passed, some native houses, some tin warehouses, and some European homes all across the street from a beautiful sandy white beach filled with small boats ranging from canoes to sailboats and occasional larger craft anchored just offshore. After about five km, a school, hospital, and commercial buildings came into view. They stopped next to a recently built large building that was labeled "Colonial Government Headquarters".

Molly was led to an office labeled "Education Services" and handed over to a woman who sat her down and got her a cup of tea. She introduced herself as Margaret Hatcher, secretary to Jim Jones, in charge of educational programs.

For the next hour Molly was handed papers to sign, letters to read, and lists of things that were too numerous for Molly to absorb. Eventually, Miss Hatcher collected all the signed forms, and sat down with Molly for a chat. Temporarily Molly would be housed in a dormitory for women employees, and would shortly be delivered there with her baggage. She would report back to Hatcher's office the next morning to meet Mr. Jones and be given her assignment to a school.

The dormitory was back on the outskirts of town, within an easy walk of the hotels and shops. After depositing her luggage in the small cubicle assigned to her, Molly walked around and found a large common room with desks and chairs, an ironing board, a radio, and all the so-called comforts of home. She found the toilet room and also the shower room, and immediately decided it was time for a wash-up and a change of clothes.

When she went back to the common room, she found two other women and introduced herself. One of the women was Pam, who worked as a secretary in the Colonial office, and the other was Aileen, slated to be a teacher in the new international school. The others had been in Moresby for a few weeks, and seemed to know their way around, so Molly went along with them to a hotel where they served dinner.

For the first time since landing on New Guinea Molly could see that she was in a different world. In spite of the great number of servicemen, the majority of the traffic on the streets was Papuan natives in various modes of dress. Women carrying packages in string bags held by a band around their forehead; children dressed only in a shirt; and men with shorts or a skirt and bare to the waist. Some of the houses they passed were in a western style, but near

or in back of them were native huts thatched with palm fronds. The streets were unpaved, but packed hard from the constant pedestrian and vehicle traffic.

When they arrived at the Hotel, they went into the Lounge and found a table. A waiter came along and directed them to a chalk board where the menu was displayed. Molly opted for steak and eggs, not wishing to chance some of the other items with unfamiliar names. The waiter was dressed in a skirt and a loose fitting blouse, which Pam explained was called a *Lap Lap* for the skirt and a *Meri* blouse for the top. Molly joined the others in a gin and tonic as by this time she was so overwhelmed by the atmosphere that she wondered if she could concentrate on the food enough to eat it.

After dinner they walked back to the dorm in the coming darkness as there were no street lights along the way. Back in the common room Molly plied the others with questions about Moresby, the Colonial Administration and the school until it was time for bed. The room was cooled by the trade winds blowing in through her bedroom window, and she soon drifted off into a deep sleep.

In the morning when she awakened, she found that there was a simple kitchen off the common room where the other girls were heating some tea and biscuits. They invited her to join them and told Molly that a truck would be along soon to take them to the headquarters building.

When Molly arrived she found her way to Margaret Hatcher's office and prepared to meet her boss, Mr. Jones. In short order Jones came along and introduced himself and made her welcome. After a short conversation with Molly, he told her to come along with him to see the new school where she would be working.

Construction was still going on in the tin-roofed building but most of it had gotten to the stage of near completion. He showed her where the offices and her classroom would be, and pointed out an area that he hoped would become a library. Books would be in short supply at

first, but a shipment had been promised and hopefully would soon arrive. Molly told him that her mother had been a librarian and had taken Molly with her many times to help with shelving books.

Jones said that the budget did not allow hiring a librarian at this time but indicated that any volunteer work that Molly could do would be appreciated. Desks and chairs were in the warehouse and would be delivered as soon as the construction workers left at the end of the week. He suggested that Molly study her Pidgin dictionary, and contact one of the Papuan teacher aides to help her with the language. On the coming Friday he planned to get the whole staff together at the school to meet with each other and settle teaching assignments.

The school was planned to accommodate children of the expatriates working in Colonial Administration as well as children of Papuans in administrative jobs. It would take day students as well as boarders in order to fill the needs of administrators in remote regions. Some teachers would live with and supervise the boarders while others would live outside the campus.

Molly decided that she would have more time for study and free time if she continued to live in the dormitory. Pam and Aileen were nice people, and seemed to enjoy including her in their activities. The presence of three young women in the hotel lounge did not go unnoticed by the male patrons, and soon the girls found themselves thanking people for drinks they did not order. This was a man's town, and there were at least hundreds of men for each woman. Eventually invitations came their way to visit this post or that ship, or the other officers club. Molly was glad that she did not sign up for house mother duties at the school.

After the Friday staff meeting with Mr. Jones, Molly volunteered to help with setting up the library and shelving books. This would give her a place to study away from the distractions of the dorm, and allow her to know what educational resources were available. She also found out that she could stay indefinitely in the dorm, and as a consequence,

decided to have some of the things from the warehouse delivered there. Pam and Aileen pitched in and soon the dorm became quite a livable place indeed.

Pam had accepted an invitation from a flying officer to visit the club at Jackson's Drome, and asked Molly to come along. When they got to the drome, the women were amazed at the large amount of aircraft lined up on both sides of the runways. Bombers, fighters, recon planes and what seemed to be scores of service trucks were in evidence all over the place.

Flying Officer Collins explained to Molly that most of the aircraft were destined to be flown out to home bases in Australia, and that a great number of Yank planes would be either turned over to the Australian or the New Zealand air force. There was still an American detachment at the field supervising the preparing of aircraft for sea shipment to various areas of the South Pacific.

At the Officers Club Pat and Molly were happy to see that there were several other women, both from the services and the Colonial Government, in the dining room. There was no separate Lounge at this club, and the women were able to join the men for drinks without restrictions. Music was supplied by an American Juke Box stocked with the latest records from the States, and the women were told that there was still a good supply of American films left over by the US forces.

Both girls were introduced to a number of officers, and talked with some of the service women and nurses. They were invited to come again the next weekend, with the promise of a short visit to the Kokoda trail where the Japs reached their furthest point in their attempt to invade Port Moresby.

The evening ended with FO Collins and his chum taking Pat and Molly back to the dorm in an army jeep. Moresby town looked civilized compared to the war-time atmosphere of Jackson's Drome.

The next morning Molly determined to walk into town and do some sightseeing. It was about a mile or less from the dorm, and early morning sea breezes made the air pleasantly cool as she strolled along the main road. Most of the other walkers were barefoot natives, many with bundles on their heads and trailed by several children. It was a mixed bag of houses and shops she passed, with the houses giving way to commercial buildings as she drew nearer to town.

It reminded Molly a bit of the outskirts of Rockhampton in that there seemed to be no building more than two stories high. The road widened and showed signs of paving and the crowd of walkers increased, now passed by an occasional truck loaded with more natives and their packages. Everyone seemed to turn off at one corner, and Molly decided to follow to see where they were all going.

She came to a large area that was obviously a market with a few stalls and many vendors just sitting on the ground with their wares displayed around them. She noticed several other white people and felt a lot safer for that. Usually the vendor had a large stick with which she pointed out what must have been special items. Fruit, vegetables, cloth and handicrafts were the main items, with an occasional spot for fish and some chickens. Prices were not plainly marked, and she noticed that bargaining seemed to be the proper way to go.

Several Papuan police in colorful purple lap laps with slung rifles and full cartridge belts were wandering through the crowd, and admonishing vendors whenever too much litter was in evidence. There were a few religious orders with their robes and veils, and many servicemen clustered around stalls selling necklaces and small carvings. Molly decided that it would be more discrete to look than to buy, considering that she had not visited a bank yet, and had no idea of how long her cash would have to last. After an hour of browsing, she made her way back to the main road and continued into the heart of town.

Here there were fewer natives and a great deal more whites both servicemen and civilians. The signs over buildings seemed to all be labeled "Headquarters..." of this that or the other

thing. There was a Fire brigade, a Post Office, and a Police station, and a number of Pubs, interspersed with general merchandise stores and even an apothecary. Finally Molly spotted a building housing the Bank of Queensland, and went in to open an account.

She presented her passbook from the Rockhampton bank to the manager who assured her that he would be able to take care of transfer of funds and any other banking needs she might have. The Australian Pound was the currency in New Guinea, and her pay from the Colonial Administration would be in that currency.

When she returned to the dorm, she told the other girls about her visit to the market and her decision to stay in the dorm. Pat and Aileen were happy with her choice, and confessed that they were waiting for Molly to make up her mind before they made their choice. Aileen had been assigned to the same school, but in the primary grades, and said she would join Molly in trying to learn Pidgin. Pat had already picked up a few phrases but said she would also work to improve her skills.

Desks and chairs had been delivered to the school, and now supplies and a few boarding students were coming in. By the end of the week most of the classes were complete, and Molly was hard at work trying to sort out the students according to ability.

Most of the students had some missionary schooling, but very few of them had any broad knowledge of the world at large. Beside the children of ANGAU workers, there were some children of planters and business men, and a few Papuan children who all spoke a fair amount of English.

After the first week Molly felt comfortable with her students and was relaxed enough to try to set up the Library into some sort of formal order. While going through the books and titles as she shelved them, Molly discovered that she was woefully lacking in information about the land where she was living. In the evenings back at the dorm she was her own best client of the library as she brought home books about New Guinea to study.

The more she read, the more she realized that she must get out and see the land about her. The German occupation of Papua was fascinating to her, as was the early work of Australia in administering the affairs of the native population that had so recently been engaged in tribal wars and complete isolation from the outside world. She was fascinated by the multi-cultural make-up of the native population, and the physical differences between the Melanesian and the Papuan population.

A few weeks into the school term, A program was arranged for the parents of the students to come to the school for tea, and to meet the teachers. Unlike the Grammar School in Rockhampton, there was little opportunity for Molly to come into any contact with the parents of her students. She had no idea of where any of the boarding students lived, and only a dim idea of the housing of the day students. Uniforms were not the rule in the International school, the only restriction in dress besides being required to wear shoes was that clothes be clean and neat.

Molly had earlier retrieved from the shipping company the two bikes belonging to Pat and her, and now she was pedaling her way to school each day as she did in Rockhampton. Aileen joined her on the ride to school most of the time but occasionally opted to ride the truck to school. As this was now the winter season of July and August there was very little rain, and the roads were in good shape.

Molly was looking forward to Parents Day, not only because she was anxious to meet the parents of the students, but she had not met all of the staff of the school except in a cursory way at the initial staff meeting several weeks ago.

The Parents night started in the auditorium of the school with some remarks from Mr. Jones and the Colonial administrator in charge of the Education office. After formal speeches from the dignitaries every one went to the classrooms with their teachers.

Molly's English class included students from 9th thru 12th grade who all were capable of speaking and understanding English. When it seemed that all her students and their parents had filled the classroom, Molly introduced herself, and then asked her students to stand up and introduce their parents.

When the introductions were finished, Molly breathed a sigh of relief. Her students were a mixed lot, some educated in Mission schools, some in private schools, and some obviously educated at home by their parents.

The parents were also a mixed bag, some speaking English, some German, and some only Pidgin and a limited amount of English. Molly had to resort to using the children as interpreters to get her words across to some of the parents, as she very early found out that her limited knowledge of Pidgin was wholly inadequate.

The evening ended with the staff members gathered in the auditorium exchanging experiences of the evening. The principal talked to them all and assured them that their lack of skill in Pidgin was no real handicap as the focus of the school was to develop real skills in English in the students. He introduced his assistant, Mr. Edwards, who had been born in Papua, and had Pidgin as his native language.

Edwards was a handsome man, obviously of Papuan heritage, with light skin, and broad features and hair that was black and curly, but hardly in the fuzzy-wuzzy class. He spoke to the teachers and told them his father was Australian and his mother Melanesian. He had his primary education in a mission school and then was sent to Queensland for Boarding school and later a technical college where he got his Education degree. He offered to help any of the teachers with their Pidgin lessons and with communications with any of the parents.

Among the teachers reaction was cautiously favorable even though there were some remarks about "Boongs" and half castes. Obviously, Mr. Edwards knew the ins and outs of the school system, and came across as friendly without being familiar. Molly, through her

Canteen work had met many soldiers of various racial mixes, and was quite comfortable with Edwards the way he was.

Up until now, Mr. Edwards had been busy with administrative work and rarely was able to get around to see the teachers and the classrooms. One of Mr. Edwards jobs would be interviewing teachers to chart their progress and evaluate their performance.

Two months later, a notice was posted announcing that preliminary interviews would start and continue until the next school holidays. The notice stressed that these interviews would not be for official valuations, but rather for the staff to get a comprehensive look at the teachers and be sure that they were in classes where they would be most effective.

Molly, for instance, would rather teach social studies, but realized that her lack of information about New Guinea would preclude that. She was, however, determined to learn as much as possible about the people and the land as she was able. When Molly went for her scheduled interview she noticed on the door of the Assistant Principal's office his full name: Eban Paul Edwards.

The teachers at the new school were not sure about their opinions of Mr. Edwards. A few were shocked that he had come right out in the open and revealed his mixed race background, and others were worried about how he would treat white women.

Molly was not sure of her own reactions and maintained a nervous "wait and see" attitude. She had talked to several black soldiers from the American Army at Rockhampton, and found that they were just like the other American soldiers -- some were polite and intelligent, and others were crude and churlish. In any event, they were a far cry from the inarticulate Boongs of the Australian outback.

This Mr. Edwards seemed to be about her own age, and talked pretty much the same as the other people in ANGAU. He did look as though he had a good amount of Papuan blood in

him, but his general appearance was that of a handsome young man with deeply tanned skin, black hair, and a smile that would be just right for a bushleman at the Race Track.

Molly knocked on the door, and entered when he called "Come in!" and found him standing to greet her with his hand outstretched. He invited her to sit in the chair drawn up to his desk, and then opened a file in front of him.

"I see that you went to school in Brisbane, at just about the time that I was there." He settled back in his chair with a smile on his face, and then asked "Were you a boarding or a day student?" Molly said she was a boarder, and had her home in Rockhampton, where she returned after getting her certificate.

They talked a bit about the school, and then Eban got down to the business of the visit and asked Molly various questions about the curriculum and if it seemed to be in tune with the goals of the school.

Molly said that she felt that the missionary-educated children seemed to absorb her teaching rather well, but the native born were slower to grasp her ideas. She told Eban that she thought that as she gained knowledge of Pidgin and the native culture, she would be able to reach the children easier.

Eban offered Molly some books and pamphlets about Pidgin, and offered to help her with her studies whenever she felt the need. He tried out her knowledge of the lingua franca, and concluded that she needed more experience on a conversational level, and recommended that she go to the market more often and engage the vendors in conversation without resorting to sign language. He offered to go to the market with her and show her how this could be done. After a bit more conversation, Molly left and Eban made ready for his next interview.

The next Saturday morning, Molly got up early and dutifully followed Eban's advice. She left her phrase book at home, and went to the market determined to communicate with the

vendors on their own terms. It seemed silly of her at first, to speak in the sing song voice that the natives used, but she found that they could understand her a lot better when she did so.

Molly tried hard to fathom the speil of the merchants, and found out that if she ignored their words the first time they would repeat the same sales pitch until she indicated that she was either buying or moving on. It became fun for her to play the game, and soon she was enjoying dickering for some bananas or yams just for the sport of it.

When she got to the handicraft section of the stalls, she became bold enough to ask the carver who the figure represented. The only trouble was that the more interest she showed, it unleashed a torrent of words that soon overwhelmed her.

Back to the dorm, she reflected on the morning and concluded that the intonation of the words was almost as important as the meanings. Pidgin, she knew, was a form of Creole that had been the language of seafarers for hundreds of years. In a situation where each crew member of a ship spoke a different native language, Creole was developed as a simple way of communicating between the cultures.

On Government Friday, which Molly discovered meant the day when all Administration employees were paid, Pam told Molly and Aileen that the three had been invited to a dance at the Officer's Club at the airfield. Flying Officer Collins managed a staff car to pick them up and assured them of a return trip when the evening was over.

This evening there was a live band that played the latest tunes in the Australian dance style, which Molly explained to Pam meant that all couples danced the same step, and circled the floor in the same direction. Tom Collins was familiar with the style, and said that the club manager, a former pilot from Queensland, had specially requested it.

The manager, Alec Lund, stopped by their table to ask them if they enjoyed the music, and was promptly asked to join the party. A genial fellow, he immediately shouted for drinks, and complemented the girls on their dancing ability. Pam, immediately asked him if he wanted to dance, and Alec said he would be delighted. While they were chatting, Molly noticed a huge scar on Alec's face that must have come from some ghastly wound.

When Pam and Alec moved off unto the dance floor, Molly asked Tom about Alec. "He's a bloody Hero," Tom said, "He was the first of our pilots to be shot down by the Nips, and live to tell the tale." He continued with the tale, and said that Alec had been shot down deep in enemy territory in the jungle, and been rescued by a group of volunteers led by the son of one of the planters.

He told her that the rescue party had carried Alec to a remote airfield, and then fought off Japs as the plane was ready to take off. He said that Alec was always trying to find his rescuers to thank them but was so far unsuccessful. After recovering from his wounds, Alec was put on light duty, and ended up as morale officer of the squadron, and manager of the Officer's Club.

By the time Pam and Alec came back to the table, several other officers had joined the party, and all three girls spent the rest of the night on the dance floor. Both Molly and Aileen each had a dance with Alec, who was not only a good dancer, but a bright conversationalist as well. When the dance ended, it was Alec who drove the car back to the dorm with Tom and the girls as passengers. It turned out that Tom had borrowed the car from Alec for the trip as Alec was the only one of the group that had a car assigned to him.

As the group was saying Good Night in front of the dorm, Alec drew Molly aside and asked if she would come to the next dance as his guest. As she could think of no reason for refusing, Molly accepted, and was pleased to see a broad smile on Alec's scarred face. Over tea as they were getting ready for bed, all three girls agreed that they had a lovely time. Molly

filled in Pam on Alec's background, as the matter had been discussed only when she and Alec were dancing.

Pam confessed that even if Alec was a hero, she still preferred Tom, but would be happy to double date any time, especially if the staff car would be thrown into the bargain. Two weeks later, Alec called and invited Molly to the club, and said that Pam and Aileen were also included in the invitation. Tom called a short while later, and confirmed the invitation, but Aileen begged off saying she had a lot of personal work to do.

After they were settled at a table with a snack and a drink, Alec excused himself for a short while saying that he had to make sure that some special guests of the Wing Commander were being taken care of. When he returned, he told them the special guests were the Principal and Assistant Principal of the new school where some of the children of the Air Base people were pupils.