



RCA Missionary Update

from the Abbases

Papua New Guinea has more than 800 known languages and dialects. About 600 personnel from Wycliffe Bible translators are working in the country to translate Scripture into these languages, but more than 300 languages are not yet being translated. Gary and Denise Abbas support this work by helping to meet the needs of the Bible translation teams that live in remote areas in the northwest part of the country. The Abbases also manage the Wewak Regional Centre, a 64-bed guesthouse and translation office that provides a welcome place for workers from numerous agencies and organizations to work and rest without interruption.

Papua New Guinea facts:

- Population: 5,670,000
- Size: 287,700 square miles (about the size of California)
- Major religions: 62 percent Christian, 34 percent indigenous beliefs



MINISTRY

Bible Translation

LOCATION

Wewak, Papua New Guinea

PARTNER

Wycliffe Bible Translators

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Travels through the Sepik

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This newsletter shares some events and observations experienced in three recent trips through the two Sepik provinces where we share God's Word with the people of Papua New Guinea.

The first trip was in the swamps of the Sepik River area and the second and third were trips into two different areas of the mountains near the East and West Sepik border. Even though things don't always turn out the way we hope or expect, it is obvious to us that God is always present.

Trip 1: "Malinguat - Sepik River, Spirit Houses, and Solar Panels"

Let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. —Hebrews 12:28

This four day trip involved bringing Wycliffe Bible translator Litz Liew and two national language helpers on a four hour drive from Wewak to the "Middle" Sepik River village of Pagwi. At Pagwi we boarded a 30' dugout canoe with a 15 hp outboard motor and traveled one hour down river where we disembarked to hike the last hour, along sago swamps and forests, to the village of Yamuk.

The purpose of this trip was to install solar panels, reg-

ulators, batteries, two-way radios and antennas in each of two neighboring villages. Yamuk is where Litz supervises Bible translation work and Malimbe is where a new literacy office is located. Litz shares her time



between the two villages as she ministers to the eight villages of the Malinguat language group.

As I entered the village it became immediately obvious that a special celebration was in store for our arrival. The addition of a radio to the community means not only communication

for Litz, it also means that access to things like emergency medical aid and



communication with family in Wewak and other places is now a possibility for the village. Solar panels can mean that a laptop computer and printer are possibilities to aid literacy and Bible translation work. As I entered the village of Malimbe a curtain of palm fronds hid my view. Most of the people were gathered in traditional dress on the other side to re-enact a battle scene and sing songs of welcome.

The Middle Sepik area is referred to as a “dark place” with much sorcery and activities revolving around the spirit world. There is a high occurrence of health problems and premature death. Most of the small villages each have Sepik River style Haus Tamberan or Haus Boi (Spirit Houses). To enter you must be a male who is considered of adult age and bear the marks of the initiation rites (scars from skin-cutting), unless you have been given special permission to enter (as I was).



On Sunday I was privileged to be asked to give the morning message at church and following that, Litz, the literacy team, village leaders, and I took part in a dedication ceremony for the new literacy office at Malimbe. After a group meal, the community “big man” asked me to join him as he showed me all eight of the surrounding villages so that I would have a better understanding of his people group.

Trip 2: “Kombio” - Hard Decisions

I am the Lord; those who hope in me will not be disappointed. —Isaiah 49:23

The next trip away from Wewak, three days after the last, involved a four and a half hour drive down the Sepik highway from Wewak along the low rugged mountains of the East Sepik and then 45 minutes on mountain paths delivering Wycliffe Bible translators Jim and Joan Farr to their village house. Despite some steep climbs, sharp descents, and deep ruts, the mountain path was dry and passable, although my concern was how to get back to the Sepik highway if we received rain between arrival and the next five days.

The purpose of this trip was to determine if there was a desire and commitment on the part of the Kombio people to have a New Testament in their language or if they

are content to let their language die and have the people transition to the national trade language of Tok Pisin. Wycliffe desires to make the Bible available to people of the world in the language that speaks to them best, that speaks to their heart. This is done at the request and desire of individual language groups. We provide the necessary assistance, expertise, and resources to make this happen. The people of Kombio have struggled for many years in this process and are showing signs that they are not committed to providing the effort necessary. They have been given several chances to show commitment but this was to be the final opportunity.

Finally, on Monday, the translation team gathered together. Much to Joan’s discouragement, after her years of effort, the team could not agree to proceed and commit to the program. Even though the translation work may not continue, much has been accomplished including the establishment of many churches and schools in the Kombio area.

Trip 3: “Urim” - Bush Mechanic

The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land. —Isaiah 58:11

The third trip, once again just a few days after the last trip, was to merely be a 6 hour drive out to Leningwap village in the Urim language group to drop off Wycliffe Bible Translator Paula Akerson, two of her language helpers, a drum of fuel, and a truck full of cargo and then return six hours back to Wewak the same day.

We left Wewak at 6:00 in the morning, made good time and arrived at the same mountain path that has previously caused me hours of delays stuck on the side of the mountain in mud and deep ruts. This time, however, the path was completely dry. I had only driven 200 feet along the path and through a very steep and rough area when we heard something make a loud bang. I drove a little way farther to a somewhat level place and discovered that the end of the rear leaf spring had broken completely off and allowed the axle to move back against the wheel well. It seemed that there was no way to fix this but we managed to pull the axle back into place.

Trips that we take, such as these, not only provide assistance to the Wycliffe Bible translators living among the language group, but also allow us to experience aspects of the culture we would not see otherwise and show us how we can more effectively serve in our role of bringing God’s Word to the PNG people.

Gary and Denise Abbas

To access extensive information about the Abbases, or to make a financial gift for this ministry, simply go to www.rca.org/abbas.