



# ROTUMA REVISITED

*September 1969 – September 1970*

PETER BRIDGES

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PRIDE GUYS PRESS

For Wendy

*My dear sister was taken seriously ill during the preparation of this book and died on 10 September 2020. Her letters to me in Rotuma were a great tonic and they, of course, form an integral part of this memoir.*

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# INTRODUCTION

*Rotuma Revisited* is not my life story, merely the tale of the most interesting year of my life. What occurred in the 18 years prior to Rotuma and the 50 years since would undoubtedly make interesting reading, but that may be for another time! Nevertheless I do, as you will read, refer to and rely heavily on contributions from my parents and my sister. Two of my closest friends, Malcolm and Roger, felt it would be helpful to give a background picture of my family – so here goes...

My father, Kenneth Charles Bridges, was born in Teddington, Middlesex in 1922. I never knew his parents. His father was a bus driver promoted to an inspector just prior to his death in 1935 and I am unaware whether his mother, who died in 1947, had a job apart from being a housewife. He had three sisters. The family also lived in Ross-on-Wye and then Portsmouth. Aged just 17 he joined the Portsmouth City Police Fire Brigade as a Boy Fireman in 1939 – Portsmouth being heavily bombed for being a naval port. In 1941 he chose the fire service route rather than the police and moved to Reading in 1948 followed by moves upon promotion to Hereford and Swindon and then back to Reading as Deputy Chief Fire Officer in 1961. Four years later he became Chief Fire Officer. In 1977 he retired whereupon he was appointed the Commandant of the Fire Service Staff College at Wotton House near Dorking. This was closed in 1981 upon merger with the Fire Service Technical College at Moreton-in-the-Marsh and Dad then worked at the Home Office in London for about six months which he did not enjoy! He then retired for the second time. During his fire service career he received a commendation for rescuing people from a lodging house fire in Reading, was awarded the Queen's Fire Service Medal and received the O.B.E. in 1976 during his year as President of the Chief Fire Officer's Association. He had a huge range of interests from rugby union to charities and served on many committees and became a well known 'Reading person'.

My mother Patricia Strange was born in 1926 in Wallingford, Berkshire (now Oxfordshire) she was the youngest of seven children, although one died in infancy. Mum met my father at a fire brigade function in the town. Her parents, 'Nan' and 'Pop', were the grandparents I knew. Pop was awarded the Military Medal for bravery in the field in WWI in 1917 and was discharged in Oct 1918 – he lost a lower limb. From then until his death in 1964, some 46 years, he wore a cumbersome full length artificial limb and Mum used to say she never heard him once complain about it. It did not stop him riding his bike, working at Ushers brewery and maintaining a superb allotment. Nan was a traditional wonderful homely grandmother and proudly opened her home to Henry Martin an evacuee from Bow, London in WW2. For many years Nan also had one or two local teachers renting a room from her during weekdays. Mum, for very many years, had a series of part-time jobs for extra 'pin money' as they used to say and her own social interests but was principally a great mother, home keeper and hostess and proud to support Dad in all he did.

My sister Wendy is three years younger than me. We have had great friendship and love throughout our lives. Wendy became an *au pair* to a family in Austria after school and after a number of administrative jobs decided to qualify as a nurse. This she did in Reading and subsequently became a midwife and latterly a vaccine research nurse in the community, moving to Gloucestershire back in the 1970s after her marriage to Andrew. She has three children and four grandchildren. As a confirmed bachelor, her family is very much mine too!

Then there was Elsa the dog, our beloved boxador!

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(See Appendix 1, pages 125–129, for related photographs.)

Random snaps from the family album...



▲ Sister Wendy and me, 1956



▲ The family gathered in our fire station home, Reading, 1957.



▲ Nan at our home in the company of faithful boxador, Elsa, the night before I left for Rotuma.



▲ The family at Buckingham Palace for the presentation of Dad's O.B.E. in 1976.





*The author, drinking from a coconut, settles down to contemplate the next twelve months' onerous work schedule away from family and friends...*

# I OUR PLUM PROJECT



On the second day out from Fiji we saw no land at all, just an endless expanse of sea; yet this did not mar the experience of seeing the Pacific sun rise and gradually pass over the ship before sinking beneath the horizon later in the day. Then about nine a dusky silhouette appeared as Rotuma came into view – at last we were there.

Soon the ship was anchored outside the reef and small boats came scurrying to meet us. It was not long before we were heading for the land.

The boat rammed hard against the shore, for there was no wharf and the next move was to jump ashore fully loaded with your luggage. It was wet feet if you missed the dry shore – as I found out. The beach was full of interested faces all eager to see who was arriving and with a boat only every six weeks this was obviously a big event.

It was dark as we then clambered into a truck and began the uncomfortable journey through the bush on the main track around the island to what would be my home for the next year.

Such was my introduction to Rotuma, a sun-drenched Pacific island and with very infrequent boats bringing all the island's supplies and no airstrips (at that time). It is the most isolated island in the Fiji group some 400 miles from the main cluster. You will not see it marked on some smaller scale maps.

One year later – Saturday 10 October 1970 was Independence Day for Fiji and at the Royal Lancaster Hotel in London an evening of celebrations was held for Fijians based in the UK. One of the entertainment items was a ‘Rotuman Dance’ and there I was in my grass skirt, *sulu* (a Fijian sarong) and *lei* (flowered neck garland) about to take part.

The Rotuman Dance requires a group of male and female dancers fashioned in lines and it turned out that there were so few Rotumans in the UK that, as I had returned from the island only a month earlier, they called upon me to make up the numbers, but what an honour! The dessert at the celebration dinner was ‘sweet orange segments from Rotuma’.

This was the culmination of my year’s volunteering for Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO).

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How did this huge experience begin? My secondary education was at Stoneham School (now Prospect School), Reading, and one of my fellow classmates and friend was Stephen Lustig. His elder brother, Robin – subsequently to become a renowned journalist and BBC radio news presenter – after leaving the same school was recruited by VSO and posted to Uganda for a year. From what I gathered it seemed an exciting experience and both Stephen and I decided to pursue the same path.

In principle the way VSO operated was to ascertain from overseas countries, invariably in the Commonwealth, their requirements be they engineers, doctors and nurses or teachers; recruit volunteers in the UK and then match the two. In a lot of cases – for example, engineers, qualified professionals were required, but in the case of teachers a no of countries were willing to take volunteers straight from school with only ‘O’ and ‘A’ level qualifications to their name. As time has moved on, since 1980, unskilled volunteers have been phased out.

So I applied and recall being interviewed in London by a panel. Among my outside interests was involvement in the 1st Reading Sea Scouts, firstly as a sea scout and subsequently as an assistant leader. As such canoeing, sailing and swimming were among the activities specifically undertaken. One of the panel members asked me what I would think about being posted as a volunteer to an island and I recall, *inter alia*, remarking that it would be quite exciting and may offer me scope

to pursue my sea scouting activities. I wonder in retrospect whether this had some bearing on my posting to Rotuma.

The next step was to be advised that I had been successful and, apart from knowing that I would be teaching, had to attend a number of days training over the 1969 Easter holidays at Southfields Girls School in south west London. The training was for all volunteers and thus, from recollection, the training wasn't about your specific task, teaching, but what would be expected of us as representatives of VSO, what to expect working overseas and so forth.

The first session at the training was, however, the most memorable. All volunteers assembled in the school hall and were given an introductory speech by the Chairman of VSO, Mr Carey, at the end of which he said he would be reading out everyone's name and where they would be posted – and so the familiar names of Uganda, Cameroon (to where my friend Stephen went), India and so on were rolled out. The girl sitting next to me burst into tears when her name was called followed by Labrador, Canada – she had wanted somewhere hot! and then my name followed simply by Rotuma – I was none the wiser.

Soon after this the aforementioned girl felt unwell and I accompanied her from the assembly, which was noticed by Mr Carey. The assembly then broke up for mingling and refreshments and the next thing I recall was Mr Carey by our side checking if the girl was OK and then looking at me and seeing my name badge said, 'Oh yes you're off to Rotuma'. I asked him where it was and upon telling me it was in the Fiji group added 'It's what we call our plum project'. He said it was a responsible position there because most volunteers are checked up on regularly as to their progress by a local 'overseer' but in my case as there was a boat only every 6 weeks and no planes nobody would ever be coming to check on me!

I was thrilled to return home and get my family to guess where I was going, which of course they couldn't, and for me to point out this tiny dot in the Pacific on our world globe.

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In those days, at least, VSO relied on airlines flying out volunteers at no cost but at short notice using unsold seats. Thus once my school career finished in July 1969 it was just a case of waiting for a flight to become available.

The sea scouts were having their traditional summer camp that year in mid-August on a farm adjacent to the sea to the west of Cowes on the Isle of Wight (IOW) and I was due to attend as one of the leaders. We checked with VSO whether it was safe for me to go on the camp with a flight possibly imminent and they advised it was OK as it was not envisaged I would be travelling until the early September.

As mentioned in the Introduction, my father was the Chief Fire Officer of the (*then*) Berkshire & Reading Fire Brigade.

So there we are in the middle of a field camping on the IOW one sunny afternoon when the gates of the field opened and a fire vehicle – not a fire engine I might add – headed towards us. A message had come through to home from VSO that a flight was available in a day's time and I had to be on it. My father had phoned his opposite number on the IOW with instructions that I was to get the next ferry and train back to Reading. Thus swiftly packing up my kitbag and saying hurried goodbyes to my fellow campers I was escorted to the ferry at Cowes in the fire vehicle, arriving back in Reading later that day. Dad's work contacts clearing helping out – which would probably be frowned upon today.

Back at home my sister, Wendy, was holidaying with friends in Wales and could not be contacted; Nan was staying with us and our faithful dog, Elsa, was wondering why everybody was rushing about.

The following day Mum, Dad and Nan came with me to Heathrow to see me off on my first ever flight scheduled to fly via New York, San Francisco and Honolulu to Nadi, Fiji's international airport: four legs of some six or seven hours each and then a local flight to Suva the capital.

No time for lingering goodbyes – I was off!

## HALFWAY ROUND THE WORLD

*During my year in Rotuma I wrote home regularly to my Mum and Dad and Wendy, to my Nan and other friends and they likewise wrote to me. My letters home gave a detailed account of my life in the Pacific and those from home give an interesting insight into life in the UK in 1969/70. I kept all these letters and below is a transcription of these letters, précised at times to avoid repetition (different family members often telling me the same things) with some add on pointers from me by way of explanation or comment. I have interspersed letters from me and from the UK to me so that, as far as possible, the year's time line is maintained.*

### **THURSDAY 28 AUGUST 1969 – POSTCARD FROM NEW YORK TO HOME**

*(STAMP ON CARD SAYS 'POSTAGE UNDERPAID')*

We arrived in New York at 2.50 pm (7.50 pm BST), had a great flight with lots to see and do and lunch and tea were good too. The take off and descent were great though my ears went funny. Have met 3 VSOs on the plane and they are going to Fiji first and then on to the Solomon Islands. Send my love to Wendy and say sorry I missed her. Don't know if I'll be able to write until Fiji as I've little American money left. Flight to San Francisco leaves in half an hour.

### **THURSDAY 28 AUGUST – POSTCARD FROM SAN FRANCISCO**

Arrived at 7.30 pm (SF time) and I'm very tired. Flight from New York much better, not so many passengers and I've had 3 seats to myself. Next plane leaves in an hour and it's just starting to get dark. I can't really say I've seen the sights but the Rockies were fantastic.

**SATURDAY 30 AUGUST – LETTER FROM BACHELORS MESS, SUVA, FIJI**

Well now that I've finally arrived I can write in a bit more detail and hope my 2 postcards arrived OK. The London to New York flight was 7 hours, then 6 hours to San Francisco, 6 hours to Honolulu, we then had 6½ hours flying to Fiji, crossing the International Date Line and arrived in Nadi at 4.15 am this morning. By the way we travelled on a Boeing 707 and I thought the seats were rather cramped. From San Francisco onwards I had a gentleman sitting next to me who knows Mr Carey (the VSO Chairman), he was one of those well travelled men who was reading a book about fossils! However, he was very nice and bought me a cup of tea and sandwich at the airport. I only spent my loose English change on the plane – on beer – although some of the drinks, including champagne with supper were free.

When we landed at Nadi dawn was breaking and everything was so quiet. The airport was very clean and tidy and not very busy with Hawaiian type music playing (*obviously Fijian music*) – everybody smiling and nobody rushing around. We had about an hour's wait and then boarded a 28-seat plane – it seemed very funny after the Boeing. Oh, by the way, a bloke from the Government met me at Nadi much to my surprise and he rang Mr Shankar-Lal (my Government contact) in Suva to let him know I'd arrived.

The flight to Suva was only 45 mins. I was met by Mr Shankar-Lal's son (apparently his father was not well) and his brother and sister and they were very nice and it seemed that 'everybody knew everybody' there. Suva was in fact 15 miles from the airport and I was taken to their house (upper middle class I'd say) and given breakfast and met their mother and father. He said he'd see me in his office on Monday. Apparently the boat leaves on Friday so I've a week here. I was taken to the 'Bachelor's Mess' where some VSO and Peace Corps (USA volunteer programme) chaps live. It's a typical colonial wooden building, single storey with a verandah most of the way round. There's apparently 8 of us here. A Fijian lady called Betty cooks and cleans although there's not a meal until tonight so it's a bit do it yourself at the moment. It's pouring with rain and has been for several weeks – the end of the winter season apparently. Everybody says Rotuma is great and envy my going there.

Peter Evans (one of the VSOs who seems to organise the Mess and works for the Government) and I walked into town – about 10 minutes – as he had to do some shopping. There are hundreds of shops and he seemed to know loads of the natives. Today is market day and that was really great and everybody kept smiling. Peter

suggested I bought a *sulu*. Apparently you wear them round the house and instead of pyjamas if you want. You don't wear shoes in the house either. After that we went to meet a VSO girl called Dilys Morgan, she's the VSO who's an announcer with the Fijian Broadcasting Co and improving the English of the locals working there. We had a most interesting conversation and she told me that she had worked for the BBC including *Points of View*. She's already been here a year and is staying until February. She said if I wanted anything in Rotuma, for example, films for my camera to get in touch. (*Dilys went on to work for the BBC upon her return particularly with the nightly Nationwide where she met well known broadcaster Michael Barrett who she eventually married.*)

Today is the last day of the annual carnival and there is a big carnival dance and parade. It should be quite good but I've only had three hours sleep since Thursday morning so I'm not sure yet what I will be doing tonight. I have all next week to look around and buy anything I think I will need, although things seem quite dear here. Well we're just about to have a bite to eat, I'll write again before the boat leaves on Friday.

**THURSDAY 2 SEPTEMBER – AIR LETTER FROM MY SISTER**

*(RECEIVED WHEN I GOT TO ROTUMA)*

Thank you very much for your postcard from New York which we received this morning. We were all thrilled to get it although Mum had to pay 10d because the stamp you stuck on wasn't enough. I had a nice time on holiday although I was a bit upset when I phoned Mum up last Sunday and found out that you had gone. But, if you remember on the morning you went to camp I said 'If I don't see you again have a nice time and I'll see you next year' As it was I did miss you and was crying my eyes out and even had Jane (*Wendy's friend on holiday*) in tears although we ended up laughing at how silly we were. I came home yesterday. We left at 11 and arrived home at 8. To think it took all that time to go 200 miles but you only took 7 hrs 20 mins to go about 2,000 miles. As you probably know we climbed Snowdon in North Wales and then went south to Tenby. On the last day we met these boys from Newport who have promised to write. Mine was called Brian and Jane's was Mike.

Thanks for the note about taping I will probably do some on Sunday. (*I used to regularly tape records from Pick of the Pops on the radio to have a complete set*



of all chart hits. I did this from 1964 to 1984 and still have them. I asked Wendy to do it whilst I was away.) I want to go to Top Rank (dancing) tonight but I've got to clean the fishpond out first!! Will send NMEs (*New Musical Express*) out when I've got about 6 to send.

**SUNDAY 5 – THURSDAY 9 SEPTEMBER – LETTER FROM SUVA**

WRITING SUNDAY – this self-catering lark! All I've seen them eat in the mess is bread, butter, cheese, coffee and Weetabix. So I've delved into this great meal! I hope all the meals aren't like this. After breakfast I finished writing letters and then Peter came in and said we would have lunch in town and were going to dinner at Dilys's so that cheered me up a great deal. About 12 we went to a Chinese restaurant which was very nice and I'd certainly go there again. I had chicken, rice, mushrooms and other vegetables and it was very reasonably priced. The weather has been much better today and with all the palm trees swaying in the breeze and the sun glistening on the sea – it seems more like Fiji should be. We then went to a rooftop garden for some beer, sat in the shade in some swinging basket chairs and had a great view across the bay. This afternoon I have been relaxing in my room, reading some of my VSO booklets and listening to the radio which had news of yesterday's British football results and the British news – it's all in English.

WRITING MONDAY – we had a very nice time at Dilys's, a good meal and we chatted until about 11 – I can't get over what a great time they are all having. Dilys is planning to go to NZ and Australia after she leaves in February until December 1970. For English news Dilys says there is the *Guardian Weekly Review* do you think you could make some enquiries about this, but if it's very dear forget about it. Peter left at midnight last night on some Govt project for a week and at the moment in the Mess it's just me and some American bloke called Jack. Betty and her niece Litty have been very friendly and got my breakfast and lunch. This morning I went to see Shankar-Lal first to fix up about my boat on Friday and then to the Education Dept to meet a variety of people including a number of expat Britons and New Zealanders all looking very high and mighty here. This afternoon I opened a PO savings account as had been suggested and am catching up on letters. Litty has asked me go to a party this evening for some departing Australians.

WRITING TUESDAY – some party! I obviously didn't think they'd be like those at home but I thought it might be jovial. There were 6 of us there and we played cards and sang songs with me doing a run through of those pop songs I could remember. Anyway got up late this morning at 10.30, did some reading and this afternoon had to go to the Education Dept again to fix up about my allowances and the boat on Friday and as a result I realise this Shankar-Lal bloke is as unreliable as they say. When I saw him yesterday he said I was booked for Friday and was getting Mr Singh in the Education Dept to check. Mr Singh today told me I was booked for 21 October! Nothing for this Friday at all. Anyway it all got sorted out and I had to go to the shipping co office to collect my ticket. I was supposed to have a saloon cabin (1st class passenger) but now I am a deck passenger (sleep on a mattress on deck) although can have my meals 1st class. The boat leaves at 4pm and takes about 2 days to get there. My pocket money is \$16.70 about £8 clear of tax a month which is quite good paid from Suva. But my allowance for board, food etc is paid by Rotuma and I don't know what that is yet.

WRITING WEDNESDAY – yesterday evening went to the cinema to see *The Magus* with Michael Caine and Anthony Quinn – it was quite good. This morning I was awoken at 8 and told to get up now or stay in bed until 11 as the decorators wanted to paint the floor outside my room – so I stayed in bed until 11! This afternoon I saw Dilys – she really is a nice girl, but don't get any ideas as she's about 23+ and we went to Walu Bay a few miles away to collect one of her friend's car which she is going to borrow. Tomorrow we are going to the cinema together to see *Where's Jack* with Stanley Baker and Tommy Steele – it hasn't even been to Reading yet. I bought some silica gel which you put in a closed container with your camera and it absorbs the moisture in the hot season and protects the camera. I also cashed £10-worth of traveller's cheques as I don't get my allowances until the end of the month – just in case I run short of money. Then I went to the wharf and it was very interesting and a great smell of coconuts. This evening I might be going to a party of some of Dilys's friends – 2 of whom are travelling to Rotuma on my boat on Friday. I am looking forward to establishing myself permanently so that I can unpack my cases properly and sort myself out.

WRITING THURSDAY – well I didn't go the party and had an early night instead and

felt much better for it. I am going into town later and will post this letter then. It seems there's not another boat until 3 October – although there could be one earlier, so I should write in good time just in case. I hope Wendy's done some taping as there are a no of ones I wanted done and hope her new school term goes OK. I have written to Nan separately as I guess she's returned home now. Would you ring up W Smiths of London Street about the Dewey Classification Book as I'd like it as soon as possible. (*This categorizes all books into a numerical sequence and governs how libraries are organised – see 'Rotuma Library' later.*) Well Dad, I hope the Dragon Venture is a great success. (*More of that later too.*)

**SATURDAY 6 SEPTEMBER – LETTER FROM MUM**

(*RECEIVED WHEN I GOT TO ROTUMA*)

What a lovely long and interesting letter we received on Thursday. Your flight sounded really wonderful. It sounds as if you have met some good friends already. We were surprised to hear about the rain I thought there was only a slight shower every day throughout the year. I'm afraid nothing very much has happened here. Wendy arrived home last Monday and she was really very upset at not seeing you before you left but she is all right now. In fact we are not seeing eye to eye at the moment (no change) as she has been out every night this week and Dad said when she came in last night at 11.30 that she could not go out in the evenings for a week! (*Interestingly, in all the letters from home Mum & Dad refer to each other as Mummy & Daddy a term which I am sure we didn't call them at that stage in our lives!*) She has now asked if she could go to the pictures with some lad tonight and we said NO so I guess she will be in a grim mood when she comes in at tea time. Stephen Lustig rang last weekend and was very surprised to hear that you had left. He is due to leave on the 9th. Stephen Stroud (*perhaps my closest friend at that time*) came to see us last night and stayed a couple of hours. Elsa made such a fuss of him and didn't give him a moment's peace and he very kindly took her for a walk. Ken (*scout leader*) also called to return your camping stuff and had quite a long chat with Dad about the Dragon Venture.

When we returned from Heathrow after seeing you off, Elsa was sitting in the breakfast room and had been stung by a wasp on the leg. It was sad to see her for the rest of the day as she was walking with a limp. I took Nan home on Tuesday. Wendy and I are going to dinner with her tomorrow as Dad leaves for Scotland

at 7 am. Nan will be thrilled to read your letter, she felt much better after we had received your card from New York. Dragon Venture weekend draws near so do hope everything will be OK and the weather behaves itself. It has been grand here, lots of sun and very warm. Dad has sent off his application for the Hampshire job – (*as Chief Fire Officer – it was a bigger fire brigade*) – reading it I can't see how they can really turn him down!! I know you grumble about my writing so hope you don't have too much trouble with it! It seems ages since you left but it's only 9 days. Good luck and take care of yourself.

## ROTUMA AT LAST – THE FIRST FEW WEEKS

**MONDAY 8 SEPTEMBER – MONDAY 6 OCTOBER –**

### **LETTER FROM ROTUMA**

Here's my latest adventures – as you know I was supposed to leave Suva at 4 pm on Friday 5th, well the boat didn't get in until 3 pm and I was told it would be leaving at midnight, so I had time to go to a party first, which was very good. The boat the *Aoniu* left on time and sleep was everybody's first intention. A no of the passengers had saloon cabins but I didn't if you remember there was a mix up. It was really packed and sleeping on the deck was choc-a-bloc. Anyway one of Dilys's friends on board was in the same situation as I was, so we went to the saloon deck and bedded down. I started off stretched out on a bench seat but every time the boat rolled so did I! After about an hour I moved myself to under the bench seat. This was better but I didn't really enjoy sleeping on hard deck planks for 8 hours. Food-wise I had my meals with the saloon passengers, it was quite good and the steward was very friendly. The trip was fairly interesting and the saloon passengers were quite chatty and friendly whereas the natives were very friendly and went into fits of giggles when they knew I was the new VSO.

First sighted Rotuma on the dusky horizon about 6 yesterday evening and it came into full silhouette in the darkness about 8 with numerous lights flashing all over the place. Rotuma has no wharf so we anchored in the bay and waited for the launches to come. When they did come (about 10 pm) they were already full up with friends and relatives of the passengers. Luckily 'Spot' the American Peace Corps here came out to meet me and was very helpful. It was a question of dumping all your stuff in the launch and then yourself. We landed on the beaches and in jumping from the boat I got my suede shoes soaked and covered in wet sand, we then had to catch a truck to Spot's home – an extremely rough journey along

unmade roads although on the hilly bits it was concreted.

Spot's place is quite pleasant with living room, 2 bedrooms, kitchen and shower room. I had a good meal and then a 'shower' which consists of a bucket of water which you just wash yourself down with. I slept for the first time under a mosquito net. This morning I had breakfast and another shower and then we had to go and see the District Officer amongst other people. The beach you can see on both sides of the house as we are only on a narrow piece of land here. The palms are swaying in the breeze and it's really quite hot at the moment. The houses here are well made of wood but the surroundings to them are rather in disorder.

The District Officer was very friendly although Spot said he isn't normally like this and he gave me my first fortnightly allowance of \$15 (about £7) which is quite good. Then we went to the Post Office to see if Spot had any mail from the boat and there for me were letters from you – what a surprise! Everything seems very organised here. We then went to the hospital to meet the doctor and his staff and they weighed me for their records and gave me some pills to take weekly just as a precaution against something they are trying to prevent on the island. We saw the police station and bus station and then went to one of several shops around and they seemed to have a good selection – corned beef very predominant! It seems most likely that I will be living in Malhaha (where the school is) in my own house or with a family – to be finalised. It also seems everything is fixed up for the library or at least will be within the next week or two.

*(The VSO before me Chris Burgess – incidentally also from Reading – had arranged to set up a public library for the island but nothing concrete had really happened before his year's stint came to an end so that would be down to me. Chris had linked up with the Ranfurly Library Service in the UK to provide some books.)*

Well we are just going to the beach for a swim and I must get this letter to the Post Office by this afternoon so that it can be sent on the same boat I arrived on. It seems there are boats about 22 Sept, 22 Oct and 5 Dec so I hope you will write in time to catch them. Not sure what I will be teaching yet, this will be clarified when the term starts. Everything here is very quiet and peaceful. We do have a radio which picks up Radio Fiji and thus Dilys! and Radio Australia – Matt Monro's on at the moment.

Spot has a charming little dog called Flint. Somebody brought in a huge hand of bananas (about 50 in it). It's funny but all these lovely beaches and hardly anyone on them. Hope Elsa's behaving herself and not missing her morning walks with me.

**MONDAY 8 SEPTEMBER – MONDAY 6 OCTOBER –  
LETTER FROM ROTUMA**

I am sharing a house with Spot whose real name is Jules Chourre – what a name! – who's 23. Apparently you have to be graduated in the USA to teach here. Luckily we're getting on very well (I don't think Chris & he did). As mentioned he has a small dog who is quite nice except when he leaves his visiting card (memories of Elsa 1966).

*(I note now that I say nothing further about having my own house as mentioned in my previous letter – I lived with Spot for the whole year, so not sure what happened there)*

There are 3 main types of housing on the island. The more recently built ones are of concrete with open/shut pull lever windows and with very good interiors – it's

*My bachelor pad in Motusa; "a delightfully presented abode that is close to all local amenities in an up-and-coming area ...".*



mainly the teachers and village chiefs who have these. Then there are the common type with coconut leaf roofs and structure made of tree stumps, planks, corrugated iron etc and just openings for windows. The third type like ours – middle class – are built of wood with aluminium roofs, nice cream paint, lots of windows and good ventilation inside as the walls do not touch the roof all round. The loo is outside in a separate structure (it was very basic, just a hole in the ground with concrete surround, no seat you just squatted – I gather this is the healthier way to perform! – and when finished flushed away with a bucket of water). We have one primus to cook on – goodness knows how we manage. Lighting is by one paraffin lamp – we could do with 2 actually. Glad to say food is good and we are not dependent on tinned food. Breakfast is usually tea/coffee/eggs/toast/porridge/cereals. Lunch – we take sandwiches to school; egg/cheese/jam/fish/meat and fresh fruit. Tea, we are usually rather peckish when we get in from school so there are biscuits, apples, make sandwiches and sometimes cakes are made for us. Dinner – apart from tinned options, often a cow or pig is killed and we've a good contact who gets meat for us.

Our house is situated next to a primary school (that's not where we teach) and the headmaster has the neighbouring house which has a very large fridge which he lets us use. There is daily fresh bread and milk and the shops have lots of fresh fruit and veg. I do miss gravy dinners and tomatoes and crisps.

Most of the shops on the island (there's one in each village) belong to the Rotuma Cooperative Association (RCA) and because of this monopoly prices are rather high (small packet of cornflakes 4/6d!). However in the larger villages like Motusa where we are there are 4 shops and the other 3 are run by Indians who specialise in drapery but also stock some food which can be cheaper.

We get up about 6.30 to catch the bus at 7.45. There are 3 buses on the island, which travel the full circle (on the coastal road where all the villages are) in the morning picking up all the children for school and because of this route some of the children get to school at 7! The buses are quite good but the roads aren't.

There are 2 RC primary schools and about 4 others + Malhaha High School where we teach. All schools (except RC) wear the same uniform with different epaulettes to distinguish the particular school – ours is red. I must say it looks really smart. School starts at 8.30. On Fridays we have assembly for notices and on Wednesdays we have 'the ceremony of the flag' – the children are paraded



round the flagpole by the duty master for the week with alert, at ease etc (as in the scouts), the flag is hoisted, an oath of allegiance to the Commonwealth is spoken and then *God Save The Queen* is sung.

I'm teaching English and Geography (as you know I thought it was going to be Science and Maths) – I thought I'd be a bit stuck but it's OK. At the moment I'm doing Geography of Fiji (lots of books on it), World Population – lots of maps which you know I like doing and Monsoon Lands of Asia (luckily I have my Stoneham books with me). For English I do it mainly 'off the cuff' – there's not much to prepare in advance, but more marking afterwards.

*(I now recall that following the VSO induction week we were asked to try and get some teaching experience at our school. I remember after I had sat my 'A' levels my Maths master agreed to my undertaking some lessons and one of my recollections is teaching next year's 'A' level students differential equations – don't ask me what they are now!)*

I teach forms 3A, 4A, 4B, 5B Geography and 4B, 5B English. We have 8 periods a day and I have 6 free periods a week plus 1 doing the DoE (Duke of Edinburgh's) Award Scheme and 1 doing sports so that's 32 teaching, I'm pretty busy. I'm a house master which doesn't entail much and form master of 3B marking the register etc.

All the children go to primary school until 14 then there's a sort of 14+ exam



and if they pass they come to the high school. 3A and 3B are the 1st year. We have the following staff: Aisea – headmaster and teaches some English, Geography, Maths and Book-keeping; Lisa – secretary; Riga (man) – Maths and Biology; Spot – Maths and Biology; Eliesa (man) – Woodwork; Jurie (woman) – Cooking and Needlework; Harieta (woman) – English & History; Lavenia (woman) – English and History and me: 8 staff. Most of them are quite educated and have been to New Zealand and/or England to train.

The school is right next to the beach, which the kids can use as a playground. They have to bring their lunch in a billy can and a toothbrush! We eat our lunch in the domestic science room and have water with it!

A week last Monday we had a day off school – just like that! HMS *Houghton* called at the island (a Royal Navy courtesy visit) and this of course was a big event. We all went to the ship and had a look round and in the evening the District Officer invited Spot and myself to his home for dinner with the ship's captain and the island's chiefs – all very nice.

The same week on Friday we had another day off – it was the island's horticultural show and this included dancing, singing and marching and it was very good. Anyway we had 2 lunches, a special one for the teachers and guests and then under pressure from the locals a picnic lunch. You have a 'table' on the ground of coconut leaves and have to eat everything with your fingers including some sticky tinned pears and greasy meat – what a mess!

Last week was no better; there's a flu bug going round the island and we've

*From left to right: Malhaha High School's Forms 3B, 4B and 5B in 1969. My teaching regime was predominantly based on James Hilton's Goodbye, Mr Chips, with just a dash of Harry Potter's Mrs McGonagall...*

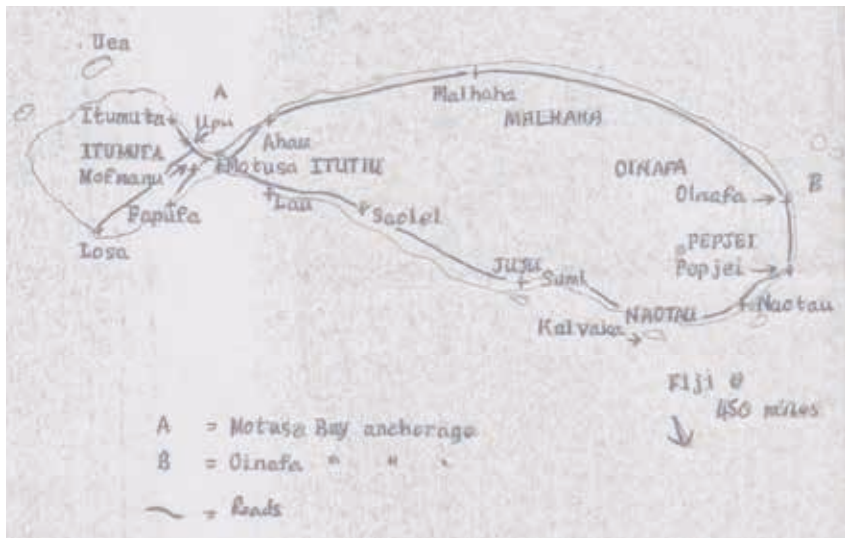


only had 100 out of 150 at school and 3 teachers away, so all week we only had school until lunchtime, then went home and to the beach. Spot has stayed in bed today with a bad cough so I hope I don't get it. We both think the gamma-gobulin vaccination we had before we came out here has helped.

I am including a sketch map of the island. You will see the rough shape of the island is a dumbbell. As mentioned we live in Motusa and it's about 4 miles to our school at Malhaha. Oinafa is where the boats usually land. There is a RC Mission at Upu (one of 2 on the island), there are 3 RC priests – 1 Rotuman, 1 Irish and 1 from NZ all very nice and then there are RC Sisters. It is in Upu at the Mission where the library will be. We have a nice room there and are awaiting the books arriving and the shelves being built. Ahau is the centre of attraction – here is the DO's office, post office, hospital, bus station, police station and rugby ground – it's good having them all together.

It's surprising what there is to do in the evenings. To start with there are 2 cinema shows a week. One cinema – a large wooden shed shows the top shows (Odeon style) *The Sound of Music*, *The 39 Steps*, *Barrabus* etc and for balcony seats it's 3/= . The other cinema is smaller and costs 1/6d and I've only been

Sketch map of Rotuma.



twice – we had a newsreel about 1960 and a Scotland Yard murder case and Rock Hudson in *Captain Lightfoot* a swashbuckling highwayman in Ireland. This week it was a cowboy and then *Dr Terror's House of Horrors* with Peter Cushing and DJ Alan Freeman!

Then there's an evening at the 'local' – great fun. The setting is one of the poorer type of houses I mentioned. Men and women, but chiefly men of all ages go there and there are card and board games, singing, guitars and any other noises you would care to make. With this is 'grog drinking'. Grog is a drink made from water mixed with the roots of the yanggona plant (also known as kava – you will have seen the Queen drinking it ceremoniously on royal visits). The roots are cleaned and then placed in a hollow tree stump, it is then pounded and the powder then squeezed through a muslin cloth with water. The colour makes it look like mud, indeed it tastes strange too. You drink it out of coconut shells. I think it's supposed to do something to you and when I'm on my 7th or 8th the old men look at me as if something is supposed to happen – but it never does, anyway it's the 'thing' to drink it. Since I have been here I have been drinking some rum but I don't think it's particularly nice.

We seem to have established ourselves with a nice bunch of girls. Spot has his

*Malhaha High School from the road.*





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *Tifanue and others grass cutting at school; Jioje, Samisoni and Fagamaniue painting the school walls; Harieta, Lavenia and Jurie, three of our delightful teaching colleagues.*

BELOW: *The weekly school flag raising ceremony.*



eye on one particular one which is OK because I prefer another called Akaneta. They're not all beautiful here, some are, indeed a large % are fat but there are some nice ones. We often go up to their house to play cards etc, No serious developments yet but quite honestly I don't want to get too involved as news soon spreads around the island.

We have a boy, Rupeti, who comes in twice a day to do the washing up and that's a \$1 a week and also a woman does our washing once a week and that's \$1 too.

Last week Spot and I got roped into the village band for a wedding last Saturday. We made an attempt to learn the songs and succeeded with about 2. Instruments? – just clap your hands. Anyway we had practices on 3 evenings and on Friday we went to Lisi's (one of our bunch of girls) to make our neck chains out of flowers, leaves and shrubs. We also had a shirt made out of the material the band has to wear and at the moment I am planning to wear it home – it's great. (*I did indeed wear a Fijian shirt home but it wasn't this particular one!*) We finished making the chains at 1 am Saturday and we had been told that we would be leaving for the wedding at 4.30 am – the wedding was on this island, yes! We knew if we went to bed we wouldn't be up in time so we went to a grog session and played cards until 4.30. In fact the truck didn't come until 6 am. When we got there we had a wedding breakfast – a picnic type again including freshly cooked pig.

*Rupeti and his relief Matofili.*



*Me fronting the Wedding Band.*



I was the official photographer at the wedding – no other cameras. The proceedings began at 8 when the bride and groom went off to church and the rest of the people from surrounding villages assembled with us starting the singing and dancing. There's one woman aged about 50 known as 'the clown' and she goes to all these sort of things and acts as M.C. Anyway she delighted in dragging Spot and I in front of hundreds of people to dance and then she kissed us both and that brought the house down – it was good fun anyway! At 1 we had lunch which was similar to breakfast. We came home at 4. In the evening we went to see *The 39 Steps*. After all that we didn't get up until 3 on Sunday afternoon.

We have also seen 'extracts' from 2 funerals. The 1st they were knocking up the coffin and then the next week they were carrying the coffin along the street and the funeral was about 3 hrs after the death and then we saw them having a huge feast.

We recently had a water shortage and many of the island's tanks were running out but the last few days we have had a lot of rain so everything's OK again.

Leaving off writing for the moment as I'm going to cut myself a jam sandwich. The other day I cut my thumb with the carving knife – it was quite deep. I had a small cut in Suva and that's just healed so I shall probably have this for 8 weeks – damn!

We are also in with a nice bunch of lads, mainly the rugby crowd. Not much chance to feel lonely there's too much to do.

Clothes are working out OK. I wear shorts or my long green trousers to school and a white short sleeved shirt or long sleeved rolled up, if the washing worked out wrongly. The day I wore my new long white cotton trousers to school was the day we went to HMS *Houghton* and I didn't know that until too late and what with sitting on the beach and clambering in and out of boats they are a bit messed up and I don't know whether to send them for washing or not – what do you think?

Nearly everybody smokes here from about 14 upwards and everyone keeps offering me cigarettes and say I ought to smoke 'for something to do' – but I'm determined not to. By the way does Dad still smoke, I can't say I remember him smoking before I came away? Also I'm not biting my nails anymore. I've had a couple of cold sores, which of course I fiddled with but they've gone now.

I've taken lots of slides. (*Mounted transparencies*) Some I took in Suva should be coming on the next boat and then in due course I will send them to you. They have to go to Australia for developing.

This term is really funny, as I've told you we have had various disruptions with days off. Today is 1 October, there is a national holiday on 13th, then on 27 October for a month everyone is undertaking exams of some kind or another and then term finishes on 5 December for 2 months, no doubt we can get on with the library then. Apparently a party will probably be held for my birthday (4 Dec).

6 Oct – boat's arrived and is leaving later today My post has included 13 letters + my slides from Suva. I am sending 14 letters to various people at home. *(At the very end of the letter home I usually give an immediate quick response to anything of note in letters from the immediate family before sealing – doing this was always a bit of a rush to get letters to the post office to catch the boat.)*

The next boat's about 23 Oct.



# FIRST NEWS FROM HOME – THE DRAGON VENTURE

## MONDAY 15 SEPTEMBER – LETTER FROM DAD

What a lovely surprise to have your letter this morning, the one you wrote on the 8th to catch the boat back that you had travelled on. You must be quite thankful to have reached Rotuma and to realise your travels are over for the time being. Your letter was certainly newsy and everyone wants to read it. Your kingdom sounds absolutely delightful and we all envy you. We are all very well including Elsa who is now used to Wendy walking her in the mornings.

Mum and I are going to Harrogate this Sunday for the conference (*annual Chief Fire Officer's Conference*) returning the following Friday. Wendy is going to stay at Jane's and the Ingrams (*Dad's Deputy*) are having Elsa.

Now for your University news. (*I didn't get good enough 'A' level grades for my 1st 2 choices – a Cambridge college and Warwick – so had to go into what was called the clearing house system.*) London University have offered you a place at Queen Mary College (QMC), Mile End Road for October 1970. The Dean of the Faculty of Law is willing to accept you to read for a LLB degree. I consulted Dr Smith (*former headmaster*) who said the college had an excellent reputation and agreed with Mum and I that we should accept although he is still hopeful that your 'A' level results may be reviewed at a meeting in Oxford next month. If they are then we may have to change our minds. However I had to let QMC know by tomorrow so I have written accepting today. I hope you think we are doing right.

Mum has sent you one or two newspapers and we have ordered the Guardian this costs £3/5/= a year. The book you wanted is still not in, Mum called in last week to enquire. Mum watched another Frankenstein film last week, apparently they ended up in quicksand – that must be the end. Tonight it is *The Werewolf* so apparently her guess was right. Stephen Lustig phoned to say cheerio before

he left last week. Stephen S has been up a couple of times. We have bought him a brown briefcase as a going away (to University) present, we had asked him what he wanted. Wendy and Jane have new boyfriends although I haven't seen them. It seems Wendy's is called Steve which makes things complicated – too many boys with the same name.

Last week I had a wonderful trip to Scotland. A good journey by car which was through new and interesting country north of Liverpool. We visited a whisky distillery and had some samples including a bottle to bring home. Our hotel was good and there was a dinner and dance after the match. Unfortunately Scotland won 2-1. (I can't recall but assume this was a Fire Brigade football match.) I got home about 9 Tue eve very weary. The Scots certainly know how to look after you.

The last 3 days have been full of last minute checking for the Dragon Venture (DV).

*(The Dragon Venture – my sea scout troop had a boathouse on the Thames in Reading and one of our prize possessions was a Chinese dragon boat which somehow came to us after the Second World War. It was used on special occasions. Each fire brigade in the UK regularly raised money for the Fire Brigade Benevolent Fund by holding various events. I can't recall whether it was Dad's idea or not – it probably was – but to raise funds it was proposed that firemen paddled the dragon boat from Lechlade to Windsor which in those days was the length of the Thames in Berkshire [county boundary since changed] some 104 miles. I assume they were sponsored so much a mile. I know it was being organised like a military operation which is typical of Dad. Although nothing to do with Rotuma, I am including a photo and newspaper cutting used for publicity purposes of the Dragon Boat with a crew of sea scouts, Dad is at the front on the right with officer colleague George Hedges on the left. The sea scouts helped with some of the organisation.) (See Appendix 1, page 127.)*

Mike Paxton and I got up at 3 am on Saturday and set out for Lechlade. I was a bit worried as I know the old dragon boat had been shaken up on its road trip up there and leaked. Brian Peach had done some repairs and the training went well up there last Sunday. Mr Evans, Puddephatt and Cull went up on Friday and bailed out about 2". After visiting Farringdon Fire Station (FS) we went to Lechlade with

the 1st crew. The armada left St John's Loch promptly at 6 am in the dark and drizzle. The dragon boat was leading followed by our bright yellow rescue boat manned by firemen and carrying a big sign with the dragon's head and telling the story. The 3rd boat was a cruiser for the coxswains to feed and sleep etc. The coxswains were Messrs Bingham, Peach, Coombes and Julian Foley (all sea scout leaders). They did a wonderful job for us. The only problem was slowing the boat down to keep to our schedule.

The reliefs, feeding, transport, operations and locks all went exceedingly smoothly but we did have to keep losing time. Mr Ingram and I alternated to meet the boats at different points. Mum came with us to Abingdon at 5 pm on Saturday. The RAF canoeists turned out to join us through Abingdon. There were crowds at most of the bridges and locks. At Goring the Oxfordshire FS boys laid on fireworks and a candlelight procession. I was at Caversham (Reading) lock at 4 am Sunday with about 100 people and at Sonning at 5 am with about 30 people. The reception at Windsor was right on time at 3.15 pm with crowds. Apart from our 3 boats we were joined by a Thames Conservatory launch, 20 canoes, the sea cadets power boat and other boats all making a fine procession. We had jets of water into the sky on both river banks and a couple of rockets went up when we reached the bridge.

The Lord Lieutenant, 6 Mayors and other VIPs greeted us. The Fire Prevention Exhibition was also on display and the Army Cadet Bugle and Drum Band gave a good show. Tea was in a marquee and then a bbq at Windsor FS ended a wonderful but tiring weekend.

Money still rolls in and still hoping to raise £2,000. (*£28,000 in today's money*.) We collected quite a bit of money on the way down. 5 people share £50 for guessing the journey time to the 1st lock. I am sending you a couple of pictures from tonight's *Evening Post*. My arm now aches and it's now 12.30 am so bed time.

**TUESDAY 23 SEPTEMBER – POSTCARD FROM MUM FROM HARROGATE**

We are staying at an excellent hotel this year and the weather is lovely. We have collected and posted your book from Smiths. We hope that you are really settled down now and enjoying your teaching and all your new friends.

**MONDAY 6 OCTOBER – LETTER FROM MUM**

We are looking forward to your next letter. I look for the post each morning but

no luck so far. You will be very pleased to hear that Dad is on the shortlist for the Hampshire job and the interviews are being held on 29 October, he seems very keen to get the job and I've started to clear out some rubbish already!

A couple of days before we went to the conference Dad was involved in a car crash. He had been to a lunch at the Copper Inn (Pangbourne) and had had quite a few drinks and then left about 6.30 pm for a dinner in Beaconsfield. He decided to get Paddy (*a fire brigade driver sometimes used for chauffeuring Dad*) to drive and on the way home outside Slough Paddy was doing a right turn and an A30 with 5 lads in it crashed into the side of them. They thought at first that our 1800 was a right off but it turned out to be not that bad but it will take about 6 weeks before we get it back. Dad landed up with a couple of broken ribs which have been very painful but Paddy and H M Smith (*Chief Inspector of Fire Brigades who lived in Reading*) who was having a lift back were only badly shaken – all very lucky.

We enjoyed the conference and there were some lovely dos but because of Dad's ribs we could only have about one slow dance. Elsa loved it at the Ingrams. The Fire Brigade Dinner & Dance was held at the Grosvenor last Thursday. There were about 100 there and Mr & Mrs Peach and Jean Herbert & husband (all connected with the sea scouts) were there as guests as a thank you for helping with the DV. Mr Peach has just called about a film to do with DV and asked me to tell you that they've just been to the Birmingham Regatta and did well with 1sts in 2 events. The sponsor sheets for the DV are a wee bit slow coming in but they still hope to raise £2000 and it was a wonderful effort on everyone's part.

Do hope it's OK but we have sold your bike to Anita Freeman for £10 for her son Robert. You now have £20 in your deposit account and Wendy thinks by the time you come home you will have more money than any of us. Went to Nan's yesterday, she is very well and was thrilled to receive a letter from you. We would like to ring you at Christmas if you think that is possible? I rang the GPO to enquire about the cost and it would be £3/15/= for 3 minutes.

#### **ADDED NOTE FROM DAD**

Mum has told you nearly all the news. Elsa is getting much better on her walks, she invariably manages both 'jobs' and this cuts down on my hole digging and shovelling. In fact the hole you last dug is still in use it might last until next Aug so 'be prepared'. I have now dealt with the paperwork for your admission to Queen

Mary College. I hope you have now received all the college papers and approve of my actions. Isn't it good about the DV. We have a final meeting night and should be able to decide how much we give to the sea scouts.

**TUESDAY 14 OCTOBER – LETTER FROM WENDY**

We are all well although Dad's lost about 1 stone in weight for the Hampshire job as they are quite strict on their medicals – he's got to lose another 7lbs. Now all his jumpers are baggy and his trousers keep falling down! School's OK I suppose with lots of homework which (don't faint) I am doing 2 hours a night and Dad has said I have to give up going out on Fridays for a few weeks to show him I can give up something for school. In History we are doing France between 1875 – 1914 and the Franco-Prussian War, it's all boring and hard but I remember writing it all out for you when you broke your arm. In Geography we are doing Europe and at the moment Scandinavia. For Maths we needed a slide rule so I dug yours out I hope you don't mind. In Art last week we had to draw a horse chestnut and I got 8/10 which I thought was good. Also in games we have dancing with busty Mrs Kenny on a Wednesday and on Friday we have a choice which includes horse riding (7/6d to pay), swimming, judo, badminton, table tennis or orienteering. Jane and I are doing swimming.

On the day I last wrote to you I was going to Top Rank it was Tramps Night and it was very good. The next night I went to the Youth Club (YC) with Nancy and Susan and we got a lift home from that boy Paul. His full name is Paul Deacon and if you remember I liked him. His other friend Steve Wood was with him and I like him better. The next night we went to YC again and I started going out with Steve. On Sunday Dad went to Glasgow and Steve and some others came up. At 10.30 I took Elsa for a late night walk but she saw another dog and got loose along the Tilehurst Road. After about 15 minutes charging up the road Jane managed to get her – that was her 1st glimpse of freedom which nearly ended when she was standing in the middle of the road with a 31 bus heading for her. My heart missed several beats.

Jane has now chucked Phil after 8 months which at least means I won't have to sit and watch his Adam's apple wobbling – had you noticed how big it was? I went with Steve and his brother to see his aunt and uncle who live in Walton-on-Thames. They're rolling in money huge house and garden – I thought of you

mowing their lawn, ours is big enough. They also had a colour TV! By the way Steve's a draughtsman for Southern Electricity.

I had 2 days in bed with a headache, cold and temperature, I felt terrible. Mum bought me a lovely jumper from Harrogate. The other night I wanted to see *Psycho* on TV but the start was delayed by 20 minutes – something to do with the Conservative Party Conference – I did see it but didn't enjoy it as much as the 1st time. (*There then follows details of further trips to YC or Top Rank.*) On Saturday Jane and I went to see *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* it was an X but needn't have been. Anyhow it was quite good. Is there such a word as anyhow – you know what my English's like. Tomorrow Ben E King is at Top Rank but Dad won't let me go – mind you I've never heard of him before.

There's some great records out at the moment. Don't worry I'm keeping up to date with the taping. There's a new type of music out called reggae, I don't know if you've heard any of it. Sorry about your knife cut, I loved the blood marks all over your last letter. We got your last letter this morning it took me about an hour to read. Be kind to your pupils – remember you were young once! Don't get too cross with them; I know what it's like. I'm going on a diet soon so I will be nice and slim when you get home. Happy Birthday – just think you'll be 19.

### **WEDNESDAY 15 OCTOBER – AIR LETTER FROM MUM**

What a wonderful long letter which we received yesterday. We have also received several phone calls from friends to say they had heard from you too. Your new long trousers that you got so dirty – soak them in cold water for a few hours and then wash them in the normal way. Perhaps you could get them laundered if you go to Fiji at Xmas. Have you decided whether to go there at Xmas? It seems awful not to send you a present for your birthday but we will put £5 in your deposit account. Don't forget to tell us if you want anything sent for Christmas. Received a form from UCCA (*Universities clearing house system, now UCAS*) for Dad to fill in but it had his name on it rather than yours so it looks like Dad will end up at University and not you! It is the fire brigade annual conference at the Great Western Hotel on Sunday so Dad will be at that and Wendy and I will go to see Nan and we will take Elsa of course. We often say to her 'where's Peter' and she is all alert for you to open the door. Wendy is just on her way upstairs to revise her history and Dad has gone to Ascot to play darts.

**THURSDAY 16 OCTOBER – AIR LETTER FROM DAD**

I am scribbling this note to you in the hope it will catch your next boat. You ought to keep a full diary and write a book when you come home. (*Well, 50+ years later – here it is!*) My ribs are on the mend from the car accident. I have lost about a stone in weight so am looking in your wardrobe for slimmer clothes! The short-list for Hampshire is on 29 October. The opposition is only reasonable so I am feeling quite bucked. I have received quite a few brochures from estate agents in Winchester and the properties don't look too expensive. Elsa is lovely, she missed you at first but is now used to not seeing you. She has now taken to growling at most other dogs. The Borocourt Hospital Autumn Fair was a great success and we should have broken the record at £350. The DV appeal will close on 31 October. We won darts last night and so go onto the next round. Life is pretty hectic at the moment with social engagements and we have more of a problem leaving Wendy on her own. At the moment I am busy doing reports to try and persuade the Fire Authority to spend more money.

## WELL SETTLED – OCTOBER/NOVEMBER

### **SUNDAY 19 OCTOBER – SUNDAY 26 OCTOBER – LETTER FROM ROTUMA**

We've just had yesterday's football results on the radio and I see that Reading lost, now it's *Listener's Favourites*. The boat is due sometime towards the end of this week so must write the bulk of the letter now. The weather over the last few days has been atrocious, heavy winds and really heavy tropical rain and it has meant we've stayed in all weekend. Last Monday we had another day off – this time it was Fiji Cession Day – although Rotuma also has its own Cession Day in May (days when the islands came under British control) – any excuse for a day off. We arranged to go to a beach and met the local boys and girls, it wasn't the local beach but a nicer one about 45 mins walk away, but walking so far on the sand was quite exhausting. We went swimming, rock climbing and then it was lunchtime. One of the boys scaled up a coconut tree (it's really something to see this) to cut down some coconuts and leaves. The large leaves are spread out on the sand to make a table. We had a 6-lb tin of corned beef, a chicken, some taro – the local vegetable (a bit like a potato) and coconut milk to drink. No sunbathing as the weather was quite gloomy. After lunch we went to another beach and met up with the Sisters from the Catholic Mission and 2 of the Fathers – Father Lui (a local person) and Father O'Neill (from NZ). They were, as always, very friendly and we stayed with them for a large part of the afternoon. We also visited some underground caves where the water was really cool for swimming. I returned with a selection of cuts to my feet – did I tell you we rarely wear shoes!

Tomorrow some forms start exams and in fact over the next few weeks they all will do exams so no more teaching for the moment. If you remember when we saw some of Chris's (my predecessor) slides we saw the pupils doing *Robin Hood* which was the end of term play – I've got to do one for this year so this week I've got to get cracking sorting out some ideas.



Every 2 weeks we have an afternoon off so that we can go and collect our pay from the District Office, the money is working out OK and so far am having a bit spare.

The library – well, the shelves are being made and put up now and after a flurry of telegrams to Suva, the books arrived on the last boat. I haven't seen them as they are locked up in one of the storage sheds but believe there are fewer than we thought. If that is the case I will cable Suva again to see if some have been overlooked or of course it could be a problem at the London end. Anyway we want more books and I have a few ideas there.

About the boats – these are either RCA boats which bring in most of the food and come about every 6 weeks or Planters boats which come mainly to collect copra (from coconuts) and these come about every 2 months – this means that some boats and thus mail are close together.

I have decided to stay here for Christmas for 2 reasons. Firstly if I go to Suva – which would be nice to meet other VSOs – it would mean being away for 7 weeks because of the boats' schedules and I don't think I could stand another 2 boat trips as it was pretty boring. Secondly back here I can be busy with the library and also prepare a whole wad of notes for next year's lessons. Anyway everybody says Christmas here is really something.

Talking of Christmas there's nothing really to send to you. I could send some material, great patterns but it would be heavy to send so I'll send some money for you to get things. I've written to *Family Favourites* in London for a record to be played on Sunday 21 December so do listen in. I feel sure that we'll get a mention as it's from such an unusual place.

Continuing to have good health but as soon as some cuts heal up I get some more! At the moment I have a little hole on each foot caused by stones, a healing boil type thing on one leg and a cold sore not quite gone on my face – no toilet troubles, throat problems – touch wood. Continuing to have good friendship with the girls and I've got my eye on one called Akaneta.

Our weekends seem to pass quickly – on Friday & Saturday evenings we usually go to the 'local' (I told you about that before) and invariably don't get to bed until 3 or 4 am and then not up until about 10 or 11 am.

Given where Rotuma is I really thought that you would 'feel' the isolation and you wouldn't be able to get things etc but people are always popping in and the

radio helps as apart from the music there's loads of news bulletins including the BBC News every morning. We go to the cinema about twice a week – the latest films we've seen are *Border Incident*, *Day of Fury*, *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* & *Paradise Hawaiian Style*. Took photos and slides from home to school and everyone was really interested, although one or two wanted to know if Nan was my Mum!

Can you start saving British stamps especially ones that are different eg birds and if they've got the Investiture on (*Prince of Wales's Investiture – 1 July 1969*) – they'd really like some of those here. I hope you have or will get the new decimal coins to keep as a souvenir. Back to Christmas one thing I would like is a slide box – just keep it at home – get one from Boots like Dad's but a different colour.

That's the end of my news, now a few comments. I am sending the 1st batch of slides back with a descriptive list. I am looking forward to receiving some NMEs. I hope the taping is going OK Wendy and don't forget to make an effort and get them all and if you find one of the tunes comes out crackily don't think 'oh that's OK' – do it again. Has the new ring road in Reading opened yet? Let me know of any good tv shows you've watched. I've heard who's on the *Royal Variety Show* no doubt there will be a row as Dad will want to watch a film instead.

University – it seems that after everything I've finished quite well off. Don't know anything about Queen Mary's and only hope that it's not too much in the East End. (*It was.*) Anyway I've written to Dr Smith and asked him to get a prospectus. I was thinking of the advantages of living in London – easier to get to Reading (or Winchester) and also the theatres, Albert Hall etc but hate to think of the likely expense. There will still be things to sort out eg grants, accommodation.

Wendy, it's annoying me intensely because I can't remember the no 1s for this year and you know how good I am at them. It started with *Lily The Pink* and then *Ob La Di* and *Honky Tonk Woman* was no 1 when I left – can you look them up in NME and let me know. I like Cliff Richard's *Throw Down A Line* and *I'll Never Fall In Love Again* by Bobbie Gentry.

What are your plans for Christmas? I could do with a new watchstrap, the one I've got is looking a bit tatty – it came from Nash's it was 6/6d I'd prefer a brown one but black will do.

26 OCTOBER – boat's arrived today so busy collecting mail and reading it etc. Had

18 letters and slides from Australia. You mentioned about phoning at Christmas but I don't have a phone no so we would have to set up 2 phone links one UK to Suva then Suva to here and at a pre-arranged time. So it's a bit complicated and expensive. I think it was a nice thought but best to forget it. We don't get parcels until tomorrow as they have to be signed for. The next boats should be on 2 & 14 December then apparently there is a long gap until 28 January. By the way Stephen asked if his sister could borrow my Economics notes – that's OK they're in my wardrobe properly numbered Economics 1 etc there's 4 in total. This is the 50th letter I've written since I've been here.

**MONDAY 27 OCTOBER – LETTER FROM MUM**

I'm starting this letter today but will not seal it until after Dad returns from Winchester. I tell everyone that we have had a 24 page letter from you and they are all very interested. Nan was very thrilled to hear from you. When we went to see her last week she passed an envelope to Wendy and said it was a present to be shared between you both and inside was £50 what a surprise! Whatever you do when you write to her don't mention the actual money just thank her for the present – she likes to show your letter to the rest of the family and doesn't want them to know about the money. Your deposit account now has £50 in it – not bad going for 2 months. The DV money is still coming in and may reach £2,500. A social evening is being arranged for the handing over of the cheque. Wendy is half term this week and she is going to Top Rank tomorrow and London with Jane on Thursday – hope that they will find the way to places. She has promised me that she will stop this terrible talking in class and really work hard this year and so I do hope that she means it this time.

Have just read in the paper that The Queen, Prince Philip & Princess Anne are visiting Fiji and Tonga next March – do you think they will visit Rotuma? At the Borocourt Autumn Fayre Ken & Mary Malpass had gone to Stoke as usual and brought a load of china back and we were very busy all afternoon selling it. We were also selling tickets to win a bone china tea service and when Lucy Smith drew out the winning ticket it was my number!! I felt very guilty accepting it as Dad was holding the box of tickets for Lucy. The Rotary Club crowd on the other side of the hall were shouting out – fiddle!! Last Wednesday it was the opening of the new fire station at Wokingham, very good evening and the food was wonderful (I've never seen such a spread and all prepared by the wives at the station). They also had a

draw and I won a bottle of whisky. On Saturday Dad & I went as Kate's guests to an Insurance dinner and dance at the Great Western Hotel and I won another bottle of whisky. It was very good and the meal was excellent.

We still go to loads of dos – dinner and dance at Newbury last Friday and tomorrow night Mr Newman is retiring at Crowthorne and they are having a party for him at Bracknell. This Friday it's Rotary skittles evening at Riseley – Jean & Tim are collecting for us. Actually Ron Over had also invited us to a Masons do as he is President this year and it was Ladies Night but we have had to say no because of the clash. On Saturday we are going to see Mary & Guy but Wendy has decided not to come and on Sunday it's Nan's again.

Next week the Duchess of Kent is coming to Reading to open the new housing estate at Dee Road next to the Fire Brigade HQ. We have been invited so we should get a good view of her. The Police Ball is also next week. I was also asked at work if I would work an extra 6 hours a week so I started last week. Anita Freeman is still very keen for us to go holiday so we will probably try Tossa, Costa Brava and there will be plenty for Wendy to do there and it's cheaper than other places at peak period. You did say that you missed your gravy dinners – can you not buy Oxos or Bisto and make your own gravy? We have the decorators here at the moment, they are doing the outside and there is only one young lad on the job so goodness knows how long it will take. Dad is going to write a couple of pages...

#### **WEDNESDAY 29 OCTOBER – ADDED NOTE FROM DAD**

Well here I am back from Winchester and to my surprise and most others I was unsuccessful. Mr Winning of East Sussex FB was the lucky man and I mean that as he had only been the Chief there for 2 years and his experience before that was limited in comparison with the best bloke there – me. I'm disappointed of course. It all seemed a bit cockeyed as Mr Ashill (current Hampshire CO) was not consulted or given any information about who applied, who was on the shortlist etc. I think he was very hurt and I feel sure he would have liked me to succeed him. I think Mum is secretly pleased as she can now go ahead with plans for home here. The future – we will see.

The Rotary Club have asked me to ask you if there is a community need in Rotuma that we might support. We would raise money and provide equipment etc. Have a good think and let me know.

**WEDNESDAY 19 NOVEMBER – LETTER FROM DAD**

I am writing the 1st part of this letter this time so that you won't criticize me for being in a hurry. Sorry to hear about the cuts on your feet and the cold sore and do hope that these troubles are over. My ribs have healed up now although I have a shocking cold. Mum and Wendy are extremely well although as usual I think Mum is doing too much and getting overtired. We have had the decorators for 3 weeks and this makes extra work. The outside is done and also the dining room which looks great. They are now doing our bedroom. Mum and I are sleeping in the spare room and your room has all the clothes, furniture and spare junk. Elsa is lovely but does seem to be on her own a lot. I'm sure she'll give you a great welcome when you get home as she did with Bill Holmes the other day as of course she has stayed with him before. We have posted a parcel to you – crisps, nuts, writing paper, a film, fruit gums, newspaper cuttings and some crepe paper to help your place at Christmas. Mum insisted on sending it air mail. We shall be banking £5 for your birthday. Mum says it was her fault some of the birthday cards arrived so early, she told people the wrong dates for the boats. We enjoyed looking at your slides and lots of people have seen them. We will certainly listen for your radio request.

We seem to have been to a lot of parties lately – here are some (1) last Sat we went to Fred Cripps one of the AWRE scientists who lives at Newbury – Mum says it was bl\*\*\*y cold (2) we are invited to 2 supper parties on 13 Dec and not sure which one to choose (3) went to the Police Ball at Top Rank a week ago which was jolly good (4) went to Howard Green's last Sunday lunch for drinks. Dr and Mrs Crowther were there but sadly she died later that day (5) Belchers for drinks this Sunday (6) Maidenhead FS Annual Dinner this Friday (7) Sonning Club Cheese and Wine Party this Saturday (8) DV Party on 5 December to hand over the cheques – we should have cleared £2,300 which is wonderful and will give the Sea Scouts £150 for all their help. All your pals from the Scouts will be invited – what a life!

**SUNDAY 23 NOVEMBER – ADDED FROM MUM**

3 more dos to the list (9) The Pilkingtons buffet supper (10) Reading School play on 12 December (11) the Deeres are having a farewell evening on 13th as they are moving to Loughborough. I didn't tell people the wrong dates about the boats as Dad said I did!. When your last letter arrived there was a bit of a do as the post was

late and it arrived just as we were all leaving for work and school and the question was who should take the letter and slides. I won as I felt I should be first as I gave birth to you! I have got you and Wendy the new 10/= (50p) decimal coin that came out recently. Everyone hates using them but we have no choice after 31 December. I will get what stamps I can – is it OK to send them new or did you want them franked?

We didn't see all of the *Royal Variety Performance* as we were down at Nan's and had to get home and as it was the 1st day the new road was open Wendy wanted to go that way which delayed us a bit. What we did see was much the same as usual. *Benny Hill Show* was on last week and that was excellent – he took off Katie Boyle doing the *Eurovision Song Contest* – you can imagine how funny that was. Tonight there's a new Paul Temple serial on by Francis Durbridge so hoping that'll be good.

Wendy has now had her hair cut but I'm trying to get her to take it off her face but no luck so far. She really does seem to be doing a lot more homework lately, Dad hopes she hasn't left it too late. At the moment she is taping for you a new record by Marv Johnson.

Since Dad started this letter on Wednesday Wendy and I have both developed colds, sore throats and everything else that goes with them. Dad still has his. I think we all need some of your sunshine – how lovely to spend a whole winter in that climate.

#### **SUNDAY 23 NOVEMBER – DAD AGAIN**

At last the decorators have gone and we are back in our own bedroom. It all looks good. Have been out in the garden all afternoon sweeping leaves – that's your job! Also emptied the pond which was full of leaves. I've now put wire netting over the pond. Elsa has been out there with me all the time and she loves it. In the parcel we sent are some cuttings about a girl being attacked in Bath Road just along from us. We have got rather involved as Wendy had been out with Elsa just before it happened. She passed a young man and also the girl. We think and so do the Police that, but for Elsa, it could have been Wendy. Anyway Wendy had to give a statement and build an identikit picture. All very exciting for her and she had several visits from the detectives and had to walk the route. They haven't caught anyone yet.

Dr Smith rang the other day in a bit of a flap – could I go and talk to the 6th & 7th year boys the next day? I did this once before if you remember. Lucky for him I was free. I thought it went well and Wendy overheard some boys saying that it had been an interesting talk. Several stayed afterwards for a discussion. Ken Maynard (*a school friend and my successor as Head Boy*) looked after me well and Dr Smith told me that he (*Ken*) had applied for VSO but had been unsuccessful. I collected your 'A' level certificate whilst I was there. He also told me that the people at Oxford had had a 2nd look at your Economics paper and that you must have had an off day as it had been properly assessed – still it was good of him to query this. Steve Stroud rang a couple of weekends ago – it seems he is happy in his digs but is finding the work hard.

A bit more about my accident, when the 2 cars collided we mounted the pavement and H M Smith was thrown onto me and his elbow went into my ribs. He and Paddy were shocked and had minor cuts. I rushed to the other car and found 5 youngsters in it all with cuts about their faces and heads but otherwise OK. We got it all sorted and I got another car sent out from Maidenhead FS and I drove it home but when we got to Sonning we found an unconscious man in the road – nearly ran over him – what a night!. My car is OK now lots of work done. Paddy was prosecuted for driving without due care and attention and fined £15 and his licence endorsed.

Work going well at present – 5 new stations and major alterations at Dee Road and Maidenhead all agreed for the next 3–4 years. Doubled my expenditure on fire appliances too. I am trying to improve the status of the firemen too by using them for fire prevention. Chris Burgess has been in touch and suggested the Rotary Club might give a radio and tape recorder to your school, I am telling the club this plus the need for more books and any other suggestions of yours.

I had a nice trip to Germany last week with Mr Carvin – we went at the expense of John Lewis to see a large high bay computer operated warehouse as John Lewis are going to have one near Bracknell to hold goods for Waitrose. This is a new concept and has fire safety implications. It was a good trip but a bit tiring out one day and back the next. Mum bought me 2 new records but she didn't have much luck. We didn't like one so returned that and the 2nd one we had already! So that went back too. Have anti-freezed Mum's car and it also has a new battery. Tyres seem OK she has them checked most weeks.

**SUNDAY 6 DECEMBER – LETTER FROM MUM**

Do hope you had a good birthday and did they give you a party? Hope you received the telegram OK. Tony Roberts (*from school*) has married – a case of having to, it is the only girl that he has been with since school. Fancy having to settle down at his age when you're seeing the world. The Police have not caught that man yet. They are patrolling round the streets here at night. Auntie Dais has invited Nan and us for Christmas Day and then we shall bring Nan back with us. On Boxing Day we have been invited to the Malpass's at lunchtime and the Cairncross's are coming round about 4 pm for tea and supper. Dad and I have been invited to the Tees for Sunday lunchtime drinks. We have sent you a calendar with London scenes we thought the children might be interested. Hope you have a good Christmas.

**ADDED FROM DAD**

This is a shorter letter as want to make sure we catch the boat. We have several people collecting stamps for you. I'm a bit worried about that book you wanted being sent from the Stationery Office – now that the account has come through I see they only paid 3/= postage in spite of my request to send it to catch the boat this month. Do let me know when you get it as I am holding up payment. We are buying new fitted carpet for the front spare room. In fact Wendy now has this one as hers was so cold. The weather here has been pretty cold recently. We are also having a quote to have fitted carpet to the hall – the shop in the Precinct has some to match that on the stairs etc – what luck as that must be 14 years old! We had the final DV party at Caversham Road FS last night. I had the Mayors of Reading & Windsor, the CFO from Cheshire who is the Chairman of the Benevolent Fund and various other dignatories plus reps from the Scouts + reps from all the fire stations. We had 3 films shown of the event – all very good – you will be able to see them when you come home. We had a mock up of the Dragon Boat but with the real head and tail and Mr Evans did a little ditty called '*10 Little Chinky Boys*' with a shallow drum beat which got louder as the ditty went on and then when it got to one little chinky boy in came the boat with a dozen money bags full of nuts and bolts to represent the money. I then made a speech and then bags of money were presented to the Cheshire CFO amounting to £2240/6/2d. Marvellous wasn't it, this was the highest amount ever raised in one go. The Scouts had £150 for their help. Various other presentations were made. After that we had food and drinks,



Mum & Wendy came – unfortunately it was very cold and a lot of the ladies didn't enjoy it too well. Mum says to tell that *Where Eagles Dare* is still on at the cinema, its 6th week – we hope to go and see it. I believe I gave you the book to take with you. We have been invited to the Freemans on Xmas Eve, we feel quite honoured as she kept mentioning about going round and has never got round to making it definite. Look forward to hearing your record choice on the radio. Have a happy Xmas.

**SUNDAY 7 DECEMBER – LETTER FROM WENDY**

I bet you're sunbathing somewhere and we all thought that when we woke up this morning and it was snowing and it's settling. Do your pupils know what snow is? I did as you asked and looked up the no 1s for you – I bet it did annoy you forgetting some of them. Here they are: *Lily The Pink*, *Ob-La-Di Ob-La-Da*, *Albatross*, *Blackberry Way*, *Half As Nice*, *Where Do you Go To*, *I Heard It Through The Grapevine*, *Israelites*, *Get Back*, *Dizzy*, *Ballad Of John & Yoko*, *Something In The Air*, *In The Ghetto*, *Honky Tonk Women* and the no 1 now is *Sugar Sugar* – it's terrible, have you heard it? There's some good records out now called reggae. Tonight there's a dance on with all reggae music but I'm not sure if I'm going 'cos of my homework. This afternoon I'm going up to Jane's to see her auntie and uncle who we stayed with in Edinburgh. Last night Julie stayed, she was going up to London with her boyfriend and didn't get back until gone 1 but I was still up writing my diary.

You asked about what tv programmes were on so I thought I would list them all for you (*Wendy then listed the week's programmes on both BBC & ITV I include a few to give you a flavour of what was on*): *Bonanza*, *Please Sir*, (*David*) *Frost on Saturday*, *Star Trek*, *Simon Dee*, *Dixon of Dock Green*, *Harry Secombe Show*, *Match of the Day*, *Golden Shot* – Nan loves this, *Randall & Hopkirk*, *Tom Jones Show*, *David Nixon*, *Crossroads*, *Opportunity Knocks*, *Coronation Street*, *Junior Showtime* – terrible, *This is Your Life*, *Wrestling*, *Peyton Place*, *Curry & Chips*, *Here's Lucy*, *Monty Python*, *Ask the Family*, *Z Cars*, *Andy Williams Show*, *Panorama*, *Harry Worth*, *Cilla's Show*, *Blue Peter*, *Top of the Pops*, *Dad's Army*, *Softly Softly*, *Crackerjack*.

I've finished making that dress for my 'O' levels and am now doing a skirt. Have been to the club and Jane's quite a few times. You know about the police coming to visit, it was quite exciting – they still haven't caught anyone. A boy at work

called Pete asked me out and we went to the cinema. His sister and brother-in-law were sitting behind us – we found out at the interval. I found out he was only 16, I thought he was 18. Mum & Dad like him. I got you a slide box for your birthday as you asked. For Xmas I'll send you that watchstrap you wanted and put 10/= in your bank account. I'm getting Mum some slippers and Dad wanted a slide box too. How are you getting on with Akaneta – what's her hair like etc? I haven't had my hair cut and I'm not going to! It's past my shoulders now. Must go now have a good Xmas.

## DANCING ROUND THE ISLAND AT CHRISTMAS

### **SATURDAY 6 DECEMBER – LETTER FROM ROTUMA**

School finished yesterday and there's a lot to tell you. Going back to 20 October week the exams started and between then and mid November all the classes had various exams and in total I had 142 2 hour papers to mark and I now sympathize with all teachers at exam time. I also had to write a report on each subject and who answered what questions etc... 10 of class 5A (the top class) have been doing the Senior Cambridge exam a bit like 'O' level but this hasn't involved me and they have an outside supervisor to do all the work.

As I mentioned the VSO usually arranges the end of term play so that was down to me. I decided to do something that would be action packed and would involve a lot of people. So I settled on *Peter Pan*. This would involve 40 people which would be a large % of the 3rd year. We had quite a few problems getting people to play their parts especially as those not involved had free periods and the play was regarded as work! We had difficulty getting a girl to play Nana the dog but succeeded in the end, whereas the boy playing the crocodile just lapped up his part.

There has been a lot of end of school year administration to do apart from connected to the exams. I have also been helping clear up the library at school and also been organising the boys playing cricket to while away some of their spare time.

I have more late nights here than when at home. We continue to have cinema shows twice a week. Recently we have had generator problems and no shows so we have had a build up of films. On Sunday eves we usually go to Lisi's. The local youth club run by Lisi and Akaneta recently started bingo sessions and as a new thing they have been really popular. Prizes have been good – about £3 a line and on the 1st night I won 10/= which was very welcome. Sometime events clash. On 21 November the Upu Youth Club (Lisi) was having a dance and also the Island's

Teachers Association were having a social to say hello to me and another teacher and goodbye to 2 others. This was being held at Papea which is the other end of the island to Upu. So we went to the social first it was very enjoyable with plenty to eat with loads of fresh pineapples and water melons. After this we dashed back in the truck to the dance until 2 am.

The following week on 28th was another double event. Firstly during the day the 3 Junior Schools had their sports day (cricket) and we – the Senior School – were invited to play a match, so we fixed up 2 teams east & west and played non stop cricket with 20 a side for an hour, which entertained everybody. In the evening the Sumi Catholic Youth Club were holding an Island Night – a big dance with lots of prizes – everyone to wear their best clothes. We planned to go with the girls as our partners, but unfortunately on 26th their grandfather died (this was their 3rd grandparent to die since I've been here) and this meant 5 days of mourning so they couldn't go – but we decided to go without them.

A slight detour now – most of the men on the island drink a lot – rum, whisky etc. It's quite expensive but numerous drinks parties are held. Well Spot likes drinking and often buys some and invites the local young men in and they all sit in a circle on the floor and drink 1 or 2 bottles. Well whether you believe me or not I don't really enjoy drink to that extent and only drink to be sociable. I only usually have a couple and then refuse anymore. Apart from feeling a bit tiddly if I had more I'd be expected to chip in for the booze and I don't feel like spending my money in that way. However on the Island Night something went wrong. Some rum was bought and I refused at first as I was getting ready for the event but as we were then waiting for the bus I had 2 or 3. Then the local policeman arrived (off duty) with some more drink and offered me one which he said would be 50/50 (?water) but was more like 75/25. The result was for the 1st time I was drunk. The bus arrived I remember getting on it and then – blank – I apparently slept on the bus the whole evening which I was pleased about as I would have hated to go into the event and made a fool of myself. I might add that there were a lot in my condition and some caused problems. I arrived home on the bus at 2.40 am and was sober enough to put the key in the lock and set my clock. Luckily I wasn't sick although Spot was. I was disappointed at missing the do as apparently it was excellent. I hope I don't get like that ever again.

Next on Monday 1 December came the final rehearsal for the school concert and then in the evening we had been invited as guests to the UPU Catholic Mission

School Concert. The school only has 3 classes so as you can guess it was small scale with all the pupils dressed nicely etc. The District Officer and the District Chief then made speeches which went on and on and we only stayed because as guests there was food afterwards. Being Monday it was film night and with the build up of films they first had to be shown at Soeiei about 3 miles away and then here at Motusa starting at 10 pm. As both films were lengthy we thought they would finish about 2 am. As it happened the van, equipment and films didn't arrive until 1 am so it was an all night session finishing at 6 am. What a night there were lots of people there and thank goodness they were good films or I think I would have fallen asleep. After this we just had breakfast and went to school.

TUESDAY 2ND – in the afternoon was Malhaha Junior School concert – we were guests again and after that we had an early night.

WEDNESDAY 3RD – was our school concert which started with *Peter Pan*. It went very well with no hitches although I didn't approve of the trees being knocked over! In the evening was the Sumi Catholic Mission concert. This was most enjoyable. We went with the District Officer's party and in fact Spot got asked to leave the bus as he was too casually dressed! We had some very comfortable seats on a verandah. Everyone else sat on the grass. When I first arrived here I felt a bit uncomfortable being a guest at all the functions – but at one when I sat on the grass I saw everyone sniggering and looking and it clearly wasn't the done thing for me to have done this.

THURSDAY 4TH – my birthday. Thanks for the telegram which arrived on the 3rd. The morning was spent at school as usual but we finished at 1. The boys had had a cake made which was very nice indeed. I believe I am the only purchaser who buys Hacks sweets from the shop near our house and it's a standing joke that I eat so many and the boys brought me 50 as a present – that'll keep me going. In the evening it was the concert for the school next to where we live, so not far to go. We were guests again. I've never seen so many people there and it was very successful and the headmaster (whose fridge we use) was very pleased with it.

That's brings us to yesterday and the school picnic. The site chosen was near us. About 100 turned up. We started off with singing and dancing at the school

next to us which is the custom and the pupils from there come round and sprinkle talcum powder in your hair. We then all went to the beach for more singing and dancing, games, swimming and the picnic. Lisi had made me a cake for my birthday so we had taken that to the picnic.

What a busy time and a guest all over the place and this has meant my ties have come into use for the 1st time since I arrived. Later today we have a band practice for a wedding just before Xmas. Tonight there's a film show and then the boat arrives tomorrow or Monday. In fact we have 3 this month. The 2nd one on Tuesday is bringing some Govt officials for an inspection and then the 3rd one about 15th mainly to take people to Fiji for Christmas.

I forgot to mention on 17 November we had another day off for Prince Charles's birthday (on 14th) and so another picnic. It was absolutely pouring with rain and I felt like saying I wouldn't go but I knew the girls would be disappointed so I went. It was good fun but I got soaked. The locals don't care as they swim in their clothes anyway.

It's all been very busy. There are a few times like Saturday afternoons when with the radio off you look out and it's quite desolate with nobody about you feel as if you're the only one on the island.

A few other bits and pieces – when I was first here I wasn't that keen about Spot. I found him making all the decisions and I seemed to just tag along with what he was doing. I suppose to some extent it was inevitable as he'd been here quite a while before me and so knew what was what. As time's gone on things improved and it's all been OK recently particularly as for the last 6 weeks we've had one of his friends visiting. I wasn't that keen to start as I thought oh no not another Spot but he's been a really nice bloke. His name is Kirk Smith and he went to school with Spot. He graduated with degrees in Chemistry and Astronomy. Seems to know all about everything and he reads a lot. His father died recently and he has an aunt who is apparently a world expert on Dickens and lectures all over the world. He has an uncle who is a marine but it seems it's just a cover for him being a spy as he often disappears into the night in Egypt after mysterious phone calls and was refused permission by the US Govt to go to Russia. He's very nice and it's been good to have him around. He's travelling around the world and next going to NZ and Australia. He's leaving on the boat tomorrow and Spot has decided to go home for Christmas and is going with him tomorrow – result is thus that I will be

on my own for the next 6 weeks and I'm quite looking forward to it. I will spend quite a lot of time at Lau with the girls and at Atoposi which adjoins Motusa where the boys live. There are lots of feasts and parties lined up and also I must get busy organising the library ready for use after Xmas.

The band I am in, which has played at weddings, has a really big one coming up. We have to learn 7 Rotuman & 4 Samoan songs and dances to go with them. These are most interesting and complicated. You basically stand in lines and most of the movements are hand movements and hip wriggles thrown in for good measures. Then the back row of dancers come round and become the new front row and all the others move back and so it goes on!

Now the girls – you may recall the one I'm interested in is Akaneta she's 17 and has a sister Suzanne who's 19 and their 2nd cousin is Lisi who's 23. Everything concerning boy-girl relationships is rather hush-hush but as you can imagine anything concerning Spot and myself quickly gets around and we just put up with it. For some reason these girls' parents are much more liberal than many and we are quite welcome to go to their houses when we like. Just as I was getting on well with Akaneta, Kirk arrived and she seemed to take a shine to him but at the same time Suzanne's parents objected to her boyfriend as he was Methodist and they are Catholics and so they split and this resulted in Suzanne and I getting friendly. I have also had 2 letters from Kijiana who is the DO's niece and Chris's old girlfriend and she wants to meet me but I declined. Anyway Kirk is off to Australia soon and Suzanne is also going there to stay with relatives so I am hoping that Akaneta and I can get back together again as she's the prettiest of the lot.

Kirk had a \$10 note stolen from the house. We decided to get the police involved. In Rotuma hardly anyone has a \$10 dollar note so it was easily traced via the shops and it turned out one of the boys who visits had taken it. Kirk and Spot weren't keen on proceeding with the issue and didn't, which annoyed the police but it turned out that he is to be prosecuted for 2 further offences!

The boat has now arrived and I have a chance to look at your letters. Yes I have been getting your letters OK and the telegram for my birthday. It arrived the day before my birthday and I opened it in the shop and of course everyone wanted to know what it was. I have a total of 33 letters and packages including a new diary from Steve, a calendar from you, Xmas cards, press cuttings, *NMEs*, University info, newspapers – so lots to read!

DANCING ROUND THE ISLAND AT CHRISTMAS



ABOVE: *The Motusa dancing group – I'm in there somewhere!*

RIGHT: *Suzanne (in Suva where we met on my way home).*



BELOW: *Lisi and me.*

BELOW RIGHT: *Akaneta and Eleisa.*





I was of course sorry to hear about Dad and the Hampshire job, we must console ourselves with the fact that we all like Reading and have our friends there. You didn't let me down Dad. I was pleased to hear about the money raised by the DV & the Borocourt Autumn Fayre. Please don't send any Oxos – what an embarrassment. You mention about the decorators finishing – any chance of getting my room done before I get back – hint!

I meant to mention that since October I have had some septic mosquito bites on my leg – loads of them. Apparently Chris had them too. Anyway none of my medical stuff has helped to clear them up so I went to the doctor about them. (*For the rest of life I have never been bothered with mosquito bites this was particularly noticeable on gulet cruises in Turkey where many of my friends suffered – I presume I built up an immunity.*) I also dropped my watch twice and it's not working properly now so am sending it to Suva for repair.

#### **WEDNESDAY 10 DECEMBER – LETTER FROM ROTUMA**

It's surprising how quickly news builds up on Sunday when the boat was here we all went to Suzanne's for the day. Had breakfast there and then I finished my letters. Then it was lunch after which we went for a walk and heard that the boat had arrived which was a shock as it wasn't expected until 8 pm. This caused a flap as Suzanne's aunt was on the boat with her Australian husband and we were all supposed to be meeting it. She hadn't been back to Rotuma for 19 years. There was chaos as Suzanne's parents got a taxi and went off to meet her going one way round the island and then the bus arrived from the other direction with the relatives on it! We eventually had a huge dinner and left about midnight – very tired and due to return for breakfast at 8 the next morning.

Forgot to mention that normally the post for each district has its own pigeon hole and is delivered to each district for onward delivery to individuals but because Spot and I get so much mail it won't fit in a pigeon hole and ours is just left in a pile on the counter and we collect it. I never thought I'd get so excited about the boat coming but I do. It was great to get your parcel with the crisps etc!

On Monday we went to the boat to see off Spot and Kirk and it left at 11.30 pm. Got home at 1 am and sat up eating some crisps and fruit gums with 2 of the lads who hadn't had them before. On the boat bringing up the Govt inspectors I was told that Peter Heywood who is a VSO in Suva running the DoE Award Scheme

was coming up to see me about running the scheme here. I spent about 3 hours cleaning the house and was about to leave to find out when this boat was arriving when the bus pulled in and Peter got off. He seems a very nice chap from Wales and was previously in industry. Had a good chat about a lot of things, walked to the DO's office and post office and then went to Lisi's for lunch followed by another walk and a swim. In the evening the DO was having a cocktail party for the Govt inspectors which we were expected to be invited to but no such luck – everyone said we should gatecrash it! Instead we went to the Catholic Mission where there was a party for some of the Sisters who were leaving. Today we have spent the morning walking and taking photos, lunch with the girls again and then this afternoon we are going to watch a rugby match with a visiting team. Peter is really impressed with the island. The boat leaves at 10 tonight. By the way had a letter from Steve Lustig addressed just to Peter Bridges, Rotuma, Fiji – arrived OK.

#### **MONDAY 15 DECEMBER – LETTER FROM ROTUMA**

Boat's arrived and leaving later today so a rather hurried note. The day after the last boat, Thursday, I had a lazy day and on Friday went to the Co-op's main shop to get various bits for the library and found they sold gravy mix so I bought some but haven't used it yet. On Saturday it was another big rugby match with the visiting team. In the evening it was the cinema again *Viva Maria* with Brigitte Bardot – very good. The visiting rugby team were spending each day in a different district and yesterday was ours. I was invited to breakfast with them which was a huge meal and there were speeches etc but being Sunday no festivities until midnight (coming into Monday) when the dancing, singing etc started on the school field outside my house. This went on until 6 this morning. We have also had band practices on 3 nights ready for the wedding so all in all I'm pretty tired. After the boat and sports team leave later we will then have a quieter week until Xmas.

On Friday night we had some orange wine made by the boys. It was very nice but quite potent. Last night we sampled a drink called 24 Hours – because that's how long you leave it. It's made from water, yeast and sugar and is potent too. Some of the boys had too much and were shouting around and we had guitar playing too. The house was rather crowded. Aisea the headmaster from next door came round and told us off for making so much noise and told me he didn't approve of drink being consumed by such a large crowd on the school compound. I of course

apologized and was annoyed at being told off. Anyway that's in the past now.

Tell Wendy the people here do know what snow is.

**MONDAY 22 DECEMBER – FRIDAY 30 JANUARY –**

**LETTER FROM ROTUMA**

Monday 22 December – last week's events – you remember I said that Suzanne was going to Australia to visit relatives well that was the aunt and uncle who arrived here. As I mentioned they hadn't been to Rotuma for 19 years hence she is very pale and talks Australian as is her husband who's very mouthy and talks all the time about nothing really. They're just like a couple of tourists. She keeps wearing very short skirts and huge sunglasses (I think Wendy's got some) – but they are both very friendly.

The last boat anchored near here rather than the usual anchorage at the other end of the island which meant trucks started arriving at 5 pm for a 3 am departure so our village Motusa was a buzz of activity all evening. That night we had another film show *Desperate Search* about 2 lost children but the girl kept screaming I want Daddy which got on my nerves. This finished at 10 and I then joined the hundreds waiting for the boat. At this stage they were still loading cargo and it was not until 2 am that the passengers started to go on board – because the tides were getting low they wouldn't let friends go on board to say goodbye. Suzanne said she would write to me and there were a few tears as she said farewell to her family and I stood in the



LEFT: *Petero dancing at the '24 Hours' party.*

RIGHT: *Lisi and me at her home making necklaces for the wedding.*

background. So it was 2.30 am when I got to bed and to my horror it was 2 pm when I woke up on Tuesday – what a waste of a day, anyway I certainly needed the sleep.

In the evening we were sorting out our costumes for the band for the wedding. Apart from the red *sulu* and white shirt we also had to have a grass skirt made also a head dress and necklace. Wednesday was the big wedding day so this meant a 4.30 am start. Some of the boys were staying up all night but I decided to get some sleep but just laid on top of the bed and set my clock for every half hour to make sure I got up OK. The trucks came at 5 am. At the wedding first we were given breakfast which was only sandwiches and some horrible tea, this was 6 am, then the guests arrived and lots of spectators. After this our band struck up with pop tunes and we had to do dancing to these tunes and get the audience involved. About 8 the bride arrived and plonked herself on a huge cushion-throne, then the groom arrived and off they went to the church. We had a break and went off for a nip (*drink*). The bride and groom then returned and we performed our rehearsed Rotuman & Samoan dances and it all went OK and I was very pleased with my dancing. I was in the front row for the start of the dance so everyone was watching. Some of the audience started dancing too. I then felt someone touching my back, I glanced round and found an elderly woman had joined in. The result was we finished up dancing together and it brought the house down especially as we finished with a kiss!!

There were then a lot of speeches. After this someone from the bride's side starts shouting slowly then someone from the groom's side does the same then



others gradually join in and it finishes up with everyone shouting across each other. Even the boys in the band told me they don't know what's being said. Then it was lunchtime followed by more dancing and the trucks came to take us home at 5 pm – a 12 hour wedding and quite tiring. What food wasn't eaten at the wedding we took some back and shared out. Eventually home at 7 worn out.

On Thursday 18th I spent some time at the library – this is the 1st occasion I'd been during the holidays. On Friday I had a busy day clearing up my room, moved the furniture round, scrubbed the floor and also put up my Xmas decorations. As it happens they do sell crepe paper here but it was 1/= a roll and when I unrolled it, it was only a third the length of that you sent me. I must say the front room looks very nice and all the visitors like it as they don't do anything similar. On Saturday I didn't feel too good and had a lazy day and didn't feel like eating. In the evening I felt a lot better and went to the film show and then a grog session. On Sunday had a day at home with lots of visitors and wondered if my radio request would be played for you.

And so to today – this morning I went to the library again to carry on sorting out and this afternoon went to the post office to send you a telegram for Xmas, did some food shopping, read a Sherlock Holmes book and started this letter but got interrupted by the daily onslaught of visitors – not that I'm complaining about them. Tonight's film was *To Catch A Thief* with Cary Grant – very good – I like his films. I had a parcel from the Strouds which included Mars & Bountys which hardened up after a day or two, an autograph book, pack of cards, 2 combs, 4 biros, some Quality Street, 3 blancmanges and an instant dessert. I made the instant dessert and a blancmange and the boys loved them as they don't have anything similar. I told you I found some gravy mix so I made some gravy and had it with some meat from the wedding.

Tuesday 16th was the start of the Xmas holidays with most workers now off for a month. It is also the beginning of *fara* this is when the children are given free time and are allowed out at all hours of the night without question. They tend to form groups and go around houses singing and dancing through the night. If they go to someone's house who's in bed it doesn't matter and traditionally the person in the house comes out and sprinkles talcum powder over you. After Xmas our band is going on an organised *fara* round the island. Also on the 16th is what you might call the grand payout day. It's the day the Co-op pay out their dividends and also

those who sold their copra to the Co-op get a lump sum payout – so there's a lot of money around. Indeed Mr Inia who is head of the Co-op told me they are due to pay out \$60,000 (£30,000). The result of all this money being around is that the shop opposite me has been absolutely packed. His radios and record players were whipped up. In fact I waited 2 days before going in for a few bits. He has employed Akaneta to help out and stays open an extra 3 hours a day. The men also just buy loads and loads of drink and get drunk. The other day somebody offered me a drink and it was beer and rum mixed – it was horrible!

It doesn't seem much like Xmas with the sunshine and when they play *White Christmas* on the radio – well! I have spent a lot of money this month but put this down to Xmas. As you can guess I'm very organised with my finances.

SATURDAY 27 DECEMBER – last Tuesday I went to the library again and made good progress but I keep finding good articles in books to read which delays me. In the evening we went round the village with our *fara*. Apart from the talcum powder the householder also puts some perfume on your shirt. Usually some of the locals will gather round and after about 10 songs you move on. On Wednesday Faga (*one of the boys*) came just after breakfast for me to go with him to the next village and when we got there I found a small celebration breakfast with about 30 guests for the announcement of his stepsister's marriage. So I had a 2nd breakfast. They also had a skinned cow there ready for Xmas and they chopped it up to share with the villagers – I didn't like that.

Well Xmas Eve and obviously the last chance to shop and there was a lot of liquor around! Surprise, surprise I went to Midnight Mass with the girls at the Catholic Church. I was bored for an hour. And so we get to Xmas Day and considering that with Boxing Day both were a bit of a disappointment. It was quite enjoyable but I'm looking forward to next year at home. I thought a lot about what you were all doing – Wendy up sharpish for a change and helping everyone open their presents. No doubt *Meet The Kids* was on the tv – we had something similar on the radio – and Nan saying to Mum, oh Pat do come and look at this little boy. Lovely turkey lunch, Xmas pud (with fruit for Wendy) and then I suppose tv – usual format? circus, *Disnevertime*, pantomime, *Xmas Night With The Stars* and then a film and Mum says, oh Ken look at the time, it's 12 and Nan says, it's not is it. I hope you enjoyed it anyway. What did I do – I got up early about 7 as I thought

somebody's bound to come early. Master Aisea came from next door and wished me happy Xmas and offered to bring me lunch but I said I was going out (I thought it funny if he thought I was going to spend Xmas Day on my own). I decided to go to Atopisi to see Faga. It wasn't a very bright day, a slight drizzle and nobody around. Faga was asleep as were most people as he had been on a *fara* all night. I said I'd let him sleep and went to Lisi's. There was a bit more action there – at least everyone was up! I had lunch there which was fine. After that some of us went for a walk although it was now raining and so we finished up at Faga's and had dinner which was virtually the same food as lunch and then back to Lisi's. Some more people from the village joined us and we had a dance session using her new record player. There were about 40 of us and we went on a *fara* to the next village unfortunately it was spoilt by 2 or 3 of the boys who were drunk and started to fight. Afterwards I had a rather nice *tête à tête* with one of the girls and got home at 3 am. So it was a quiet start but it picked up.

And so to Boxing Day with no intentions of getting up early as I guessed nobody else be, I woke at 12 and it was absolutely pouring down – one of the worse days to date – and this continued until about 4 when Faga and I went for a long walk to another village called Fapufa and I must say it was most interesting. The scenery was good with lots of different plants and trees – saw some pineapples growing and went to an underground cave. On the way back some men were chasing a wild pig which had damaged some crops and a little later we heard a noise behind us and found the pig following us so we hid behind a tree and it went by. So back home for a meal and then there was a dance at the Upu Mission Youth Club (Lisi etc) which was very good and it finished at 1.30.

SATURDAY 3 JANUARY – last Sunday 28th we went round the island in a truck doing a *fara* singing and dancing as usual with 2 stops for swimming but I only watched for 2 reasons. Firstly on the inside of my knee I had a mucky blister (I think 'cause of the sweat) and I had neatly bandaged it up before we left and didn't want to get it wet. Secondly the Rotumans go swimming in their clothes and then dry off naturally. I didn't fancy that as we were going to be out for quite a while. In fact we went round the island twice and got home about 6. Then in the eve we had a good film *The Miracle* with Roger Moore & Carroll Baker – she was a nun always rushing around with the other nuns complaining and she had to see the Mother

Superior who walked over to a window and I thought she was going to burst into *Climb Every Mountain* it was so alike *The Sound Of Music*! After the film I got pestered by a girl Kijiana – I mentioned her before – and basically spent 2 hours telling her to clear off as I wasn't interested.

Spent quite a bit of time last week at the library getting it ready, another film show on Monday *The Naked Brigade* with Shirley Eaton, quite a good war film. Tuesday eve was bingo – didn't win a thing and then Wednesday was New Year's Eve so there was quite a lot of drink around again. The next day we went for a walk to a different beach which had an imposing hill about 400' high, it wasn't too difficult to climb and had some wonderful views over the isthmus where our house is so took some good slides and also the waves on the rocks were quite spectacular. After the climb we went to an underground cave for a swim but the water was pretty cold! Another film that night *Operation Pacific* with Patricia Neal – quite good about a submarine in the war. Thursday Faga arrived and said it was his brother's birthday so off we all trekked for a meal – same format as all the others but I really enjoyed it. That evening I spent a lot of time reading Reader's Digest magazines from the library – I like them.

And so to Friday to the DO to get paid – I was thinking of asking for a rise (we are allowed to do this) as money seemed tight but then I remembered with Spot away my expenditure was higher on some things eg paying Rupeti for doing the washing up etc so I'll wait until Spot's back in February and see how things are then. In the afternoon at the library I found one of the books that had come over was *The Fire Service Drill Book*. I was thinking of burning it as having little use here but then thought someone might be interested in the pictures and diagrams so I've kept it. There was also a book on English Law so I've taken that home as I thought it might be interesting as that's what I'll be doing. In the evening there was another dance at Upu and there were more girls there so it was better than the Boxing Day one. 2 of the boys came back for eats and drinks and it was 4.30 this morning when they left. Today I was up late and then housework and reading and tonight there's another film show.

Now a few other bits and pieces I've thought of:

Thank you for your Xmas telegram, unfortunately it didn't arrive until after the 25th this was a combination of time differences and when the telephone links between Suva and here are open – oh well!



I was hoping to report a clean bill of health one of these days – well not so. I don't mean I'm laid up in bed or anything but there was a day before Xmas when I didn't have a plaster anywhere – hurrah I thought. The mosquito bites were really bad through November, though I got some cream from the doctor then on the plaster free day I got terrible earache. Anyway I'd found I'd got some eardrops (do you remember Dr Crook's locum gave me a bag of bits and pieces many of which have been useful) and it was soon OK. Then in the hot weather the bends in my arms and legs get sweaty and red and sometimes blister – they come and go but it's annoying. They get well creamed.

Wendy – hope the taping is going OK. They keep playing here Elvis's *Suspicious Minds* which I like and one by Jose Feliciano but I can't get what it's called. Do you remember that when I got home I would have the tape recorder (*reel to reel*) if I bought you a small cassette recorder. I have been in touch with a shop in Suva that sells them as it's duty free but I'm a bit worried about customs etc when I get back and then I remembered when I go to university I can get student's discount on things so think I'll wait until I get to uni to get you one. Hope that's OK.

University – there still needs to be sorted out about the grant and accommodation. I know we won't get much by way of grant and think you will need to get in touch with the Education Dept in April to see what needs to be done. It seems if you're in London and in halls or lodgings the highest grant you can get is £395. In terms of accommodation I think you need to do something now. Can you get in touch with the Registrar at Queen Mary College (QMC). The halls of residence look pretty new if you go for Creed Hall you share dining facilities with the girls in Lindon Hall so can you go for that one. There's only 450 rooms so I expect there's a lot of competition.

SUNDAY 11 JANUARY – have just heard on the radio that Reading beat Bournemouth 2–1 so that was good. We now have *Listeners Favourites* with Dilys doing the show – they are playing lots of good British hits. Last Monday we had another lunchtime feast following the announcement of another wedding. In the morning I went to the bush to help get some vegetables for the lunch. Could you cook a whole pig in 2 hours? well I doubt it – they heat a huge pile of small rocks and then when they are heated they are spread out and the skinned pig and veg are put on them and then sacks placed over and then piles of earth on top – this is to

keep the heat in. Very quick results – you ought to try it on the lawn at home! Also made a great curry – they say that goat makes the best curry. That evening we had a double film show a comedy with Micky Rooney which was quite funny and then *The Prisoner of Zenda* with Stewart Grainger and Deborah Kerr which wasn't as good as I thought it would be. The rest of the week had a similar daily pattern – up late and then to the library in the afternoons. The problem with sorting the books is that sometimes you can't tell what sort of book it is from its title so I have to read some of it to find out. On Tuesday I also cleaned the windows of the house and that really made a difference. Wednesday eve was bingo again. On Thursday I went shopping about 6 and got involved in a grog session en route and Eleisa and I had too much and were sick – how many years is it since I was sick? On Friday there was another dance at Upu but I was a bit fed up as it was all the same as the previous 2 weeks. The weather this weekend has been bad. The forecast said gale force winds near Rotuma and I can verify that. Saturday afternoon I went to the library accompanied by a goat! And in the evening the film was *Wind Across the Everglades* about a chap saving some birds – it wasn't very good. Next week we are having *The Miracle* again by popular demand.

This holiday is getting too long and I'm looking forward to school again. The boat should be here again on 25th.

SUNDAY 18 JANUARY – this last week has just flown by. I've been going to the library each afternoon and the sorting of books has nearly finished. There's been about 550 books to sort into categories, list them all, line the shelves and then put the books on them. Also put up various posters with information. I've been busy but working quite casually. I'm a bit worried whether it will be used much – I mean in a place like this you really need a mobile library. Only time will tell. I spent 2 fruitless trips on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings to the post office to see if my money had come though from the Education Dept, it eventually did on Thursday. On Friday morning I weeded the flowers beds outside our house and as the grass outside had been cut across the whole school compound it all looked a lot better. I also went to the RCA HO to pay the bread bill and get some sellotape etc for the library. It's quite interesting going to the HO because you can go on the bus one way round the island and then complete the circle coming back. On Monday eve we had 3 films! First a Tarzan film, then *Your Cheatin' Heart* which was the Hank

Williams story & then *Boys Night Out* with James Garner and Kim Novak – this was one of those Doris Day type films. I thought it was funny but none of the Rotumans were laughing. I won 10/= at bingo on Wednesday. On Friday it was another dance but I decided to have an early night and on Saturday it was the 2nd showing of *The Miracle*.

So the Xmas school holidays are nearly at an end and all in all it's been pretty busy and I've managed to get the library just about ready. The weather's been really hot this week and I've been sweating like anything!

Wendy – on the radio pop programme we've just had on they've played Clodagh Rodgers *Biljo* which I like and The Foundations *Welcome Back My Love*. I don't think much of Dusty's new record *I'm Not The Same Girl*.

SUNDAY 25 JANUARY – the boat was due today but it's not coming until Thursday, delayed for some reason. I meant to say one of the films we had a while back was *The Naked Prey* with Cornel Wilde, it's the best one we've had – go and see it if you get the chance. It's about some white hunters in Africa who are taken hostage by some natives, one escapes and it's the story of how he is hunted by the natives, how he lives etc – there's a lot of animals in it and it's very tense all the time. Last Sunday I wrote a lot of letters ready for the boat and went for a walk with some of the girls – it was a glorious afternoon. On Monday I sent 2 telegrams one was to Dilys to remind her to send me some more films for my camera and the 2nd one was to Spot to remind him to collect my watch – I thought after 6 weeks he might forget. I went to the library on Monday & Tuesday afternoons to finish a few jobs. Monday night was film night again. It started off with some cartoons where they put the words of a song on the screen and you're supposed to join in and sing – it was quite funny and then *The Day Of The Triffids* – this was an X and they sent all the little kids home to bed. Tuesday bingo. Thursday we had a supper for some of the RC Sisters who will be leaving on the boat. The local youth club had prepared it and I was one of 3 guests – so honoured once again. After this there was a dance and as I hadn't been for 2 weeks I went and enjoyed it more.

I have been very busy typing this week. I thought there was a lack of information about Rotuma and that if you don't meet any VSOs then you know nothing about the island so I thought I'd write a short *Guide To Rotuma* mainly for the next VSO's benefit. I borrowed a typewriter from next door and got cracking. I was

slow to start with but soon got going. It finished up being 26 pages long with 18 sections e.g. climate, recreation etc. I'll send it to the HQ in London to get it typed properly and get them to send one to me.

*(I'd forgotten I did this, it's very detailed and must have taken me quite some time. It also includes much fuller descriptions of certain aspects of Rotuman life than I have put in my letters. The final typed up copy is quite long – I am attaching it as Appendix 2, pages 130–144.)*

I meant to ask is BBC1 in colour yet?

FRIDAY 30 JANUARY – the boat's arrived but no post yet. Last Monday I went to school to sort out some work ready for next term and in the evening the film was *The Day They Robbed The Bank Of England* with Peter O'Toole which was very good. On Wednesday I was at school again and whilst there heard some scratching in the store room and when I looked through the window there was a huge rat there – it was horrible!! That night I won \$1.50 at bingo. Yesterday I wrote a load of letters and today I went to Oinafa to have lunch at the chief's house and the boat arrived at 3. Spot seemed particularly friendly and glad to be back. We've been hearing all his exploits and he says he was pampered for a month. There were other members of staff on the boat including the headmaster and we have just found out

*The tricky task of unloading a supply lorry from a makeshift ramp.*



*Passengers disembarking from the transfer boats.*



that his wife has died. Also our new teacher was not on board so that will upset things at school

SATURDAY 31 JANUARY – have collected my post at 7 this morning and there are 32 letters, 3 parcels and 33 newspapers for me! First of all congratulations to Dad on his medal. (*He received the Queen's Fire Service Medal (QFSM) in the New Year's Honours List.*) I feel very proud as I'm sure you do and I also feel that the medal is not only for his service to the fire service but for all the other things he does in spare time. Steve Everett (*a school friend*) wrote from QMC – he's there – to say that's he's in the halls of residence at Beaumont Hall and the food's good, so if you have no luck with Creed Hall perhaps you could try this one. The halls are near Epping Forest so sounds a nice area. I had a letter from the *Reading Evening Post* Editor, Mr Rich, to say they would be interested in an article from me. Dad if you see him would you say I'll send one. A few letters to do about providing more books for the island. Wendy I hope you do well in your exams and it seems you have been working hard. Thank you for all the stamps – I think that's enough for the moment. There are 2 boats in March one very early in the month and then one about the 20th . Before then there are of course 2 events Dad's birthday on 15th February and Mother's Day on 8th March – hope both go well. I think this is the longest letter I've ever written – 63 pages.

*Spot, Susua – wife of headmaster next door – and a big fish!*



*Sumasafu and other villagers wait patiently for the bus.*



## RECOGNISED BY THE QUEEN – NEWS FROM HOME

### **MONDAY 12 JANUARY – LETTER FROM MUM**

Dad received the enclosed letter (*not included here – about the medal –see my reference in previous chapter*) on the Tuesday and was very calm about it and then it was in the press on the Thursday. We have had a lot of phone calls and 79 letters of congratulations – everyone is thrilled. We were also sent a copy of the relevant bit from the *London Gazette* which is the official publication with the announcement. The photo used in the *Evening Post* came out pretty good too. When Dad gets on his high horse now Wendy and I will say to him just because you've got a medal from the Queen...

### **TUESDAY 13 JANUARY – LETTER FROM MUM**

A very Happy New Year to you. Thank you for your Xmas money I'm going to buy a couple of charms for my bracelet which I've been wanting. Your letters are wonderful and long. We received one letter on 10 December and then on Xmas Eve it was a lovely surprise to receive the one written on 15 December. We also got your telegram on the Tuesday before Xmas, Wendy was so excited that she rang us at work. It has place of honour over Xmas on the fireplace. I'm afraid I let you down about the Xmas cards, we got the trellis out to put the cards on as you do but didn't get round to it so I just stood them up all over the place (*we had a piece of thin trellis about 8' x 2' and I used to pin them on as a collage to make one big display and this was then displayed on the wall – it was very effective*). We had 140 cards. Wendy did the tree on Sunday 21st it was smaller than last year and we stood it by the fireplace. We had problems with the lights so Dad bought some new ones. It looked pretty as you will see from the photos. I got a nice lot of presents: blank cheque from Dad (I want to get an evening dress) – he'd wrapped that up in a nightdress,

slippers, money, talc, hand cream, headrest for the bath, vase, handbag mirror, outside slip-ons for holiday. I put £20/10/= in the bank last week all from your Xmas presents and pocket money – they kept your book to add the interest on. We are all looking forward to your next letter to hear about your Xmas. It sounds if you're having a wonderful time but be careful about the drinking (headmaster next door telling you off!). We wouldn't want you letting yourself and VSO down.

Have you received the book *Britain: An Official Handbook 1969* yet, we ordered it from HMSO in London and stated most definitely that we wanted it sent air mail to arrive for Xmas. We've received the account for this but are holding on to it until we hear you've received it. Auntie Elsie & Anita both sent you packages by sea so hope it won't be too long before you receive them.

Now for some news on our 'outs' – Sunday 21st we were surprised to be invited to the Drews christening at St Peter's Church at 9.15 am it formed part of the family service. We went back for eats and drinks and then got home just as the pips on the radio were at 12 and were disappointed that they didn't play your request for us – What did you choose? (*It was The Carnival Is Over by The Seekers.*)

Wed 24th we enjoyed our evening at Anita's and had a lovely meal. We were late getting up on Christmas Day and we were just undoing our presents when the Deere family arrived unexpectedly, it was nice to see them but it was a bit hectic with 3 small children. Arrived at Auntie Dais's at 12.45 pm and she gave us a lovely lunch. In the afternoon Dad & Wendy took Elsa to the river then we had tea, watched tv & played cards and got home about 1 am bringing Nan with us. On Boxing Day the Cairncross's and Malpass's arrived about 4. Jane's grand-dad was with them and he and Nan had quite a giggle between them. Dad had organised several games that went well. We had tea and cake about 5 and then a buffet supper about 8, they all enjoyed it and left about 12.30 am. On the 27th we had a free day so Dad & I went to see *Where Eagles Dare* at long last and we both thoroughly enjoyed it. On Sunday 28th we went to a lunchtime cocktail party at Harry Tee's (we had invites to 3 actually) and then about 2.30 pm left for Auntie Elsie's. Cynthia & Roger (*cousins*) weren't there as they had left for France the previous day to spend a week with a penpal. It was a pleasant day and Nan enjoyed it. We went to Caversham Road FS on New Year's Eve for their dance. It was good but a bit quiet, Wendy came and was dancing with a little fireman!

On 2 January Mrs Lustig arranged a coffee evening to raise funds for VSO. She

had arranged for a volunteer who had been to Jamaica to talk and show slides and it was very enjoyable. On 3 January I was a judge again for the children's fancy dress at Station 2. Then at 7 we went to a cocktail party in the Mayor's Parlour – only 30 people so we felt quite honoured. I think the Mayor (a woman) has a soft spot for Dad. We stayed until 9 then called back home to pick up Wendy to go to a dance at Abingdon FS. It was very good and we got home at 2 am. Last Saturday it was the Rotary Xmas party at Theale Grammar School. It was beautifully decorated and an excellent band. Wendy wanted a new long dress but we couldn't find one she liked so I made her one. Stephen Stroud came to visit us in the week and I asked him if he wanted to come with us which he did.

Had a letter from Auntie Nancy in the week before Xmas to say that Jean (*her daughter*) was collecting a 6 week baby girl from the adoption society. She seemed very thrilled about it. You will also be pleased to hear that Joan Bushell (*a scouting leader friend*) has at long last adopted a baby boy, she and her husband are like 2 dogs with 4 tails. You can imagine how funny it looks her husband (*very tall and thin*) holding the wee baby. Mrs Baldwin has had to have her dog Dandy put to sleep. They were very upset. By the way I gave Stephen a gift box of Old Spice talc and after shave from you for Xmas hope that was all right

We've had new red carpet put in the hall and what was there originally we've had put on the landing and it all looks a lot cosier! Wendy is having new carpet in her room and she has promised to keep her room a lot tidier.

### **TUESDAY 13 JANUARY – LETTER FROM DAD**

Here's some more of my scribble. Happy New Year and hope Xmas went OK. Ours was very enjoyable although not the same with you away. I didn't have anyone to shout at or share the walking of Elsa. Mum will tell you all about our outings and she did some wonderful food when we were entertaining. I have sent you quite a few slides of us at Xmas please keep them safe. Mum bought me a nice suede fronted jacket for Xmas, unfortunately it was too small and they don't do a larger stock size so they are making one specially. I have also bought a new projector and screen so am independent and don't have to keep borrowing.

My big news is of course the QFSM – what a great surprise and honour; mainly of course an honour for the brigade. So sorry you will not be here when it is presented. I don't know when this will be but it will be in Reading and with



HM Lord Lieutenant representing the Queen. I can now write KC Bridges QFSM MIFireE (*Member of the Institute of Fire Engineers – this is a professional qualification*) – what a mouthful.

Rotary is in touch with the club in Suva about buying a tape recorder and radio for your school. You remember Miss Gregory's film and slide shows – in spite of my very amateur status she asked me to do her latest show which was last week, Mum came and I showed all I'd got. It lasted about 2.5 hrs and they all seemed to like it. You asked about Paddy's fine for the accident – he was at fault and there were no circumstances that would allow me to pay officially. However, I gave him £10 towards the £15 fine but this is confidential. Elsa continues to give us a lot of fun and love and for Mum plenty of work. Last week Mum had your old blazer out to see if it would do for young Carvin – Elsa was very interested in the smell!!

After the christening which Mum told you about and listening out for your record request Mum and I went to Wayland House to see the disabled children do *Cinderella*. They really were marvellous and very funny. Someone read the dialogue from the wings and the children knew when to move etc. The next week the Governor of Reading Prison and I took 2 of the prisoners to Wayland with a big sack of chocolate for the kids donated by the prisoners. It was a wonderful gesture and I think the prisoners were moved. Wendy now has my black and gold watch – she liked it so I had it repaired and gave it to her at Xmas. Our holiday is now brought forward to 2 August and we are going to Tossa for 2 weeks. Should be great and the papers speak highly of it. We have timed this so that we will have a tan to match yours when you come home. We are going with the Freemans and a friend of Robert's is coming too, he is from Stoneham called Peter Sparks – do you know him? I meant to say that I started my slide show above with some that you had sent and everyone was very complimentary about your photography and were very interested to hear about Rotuma.

#### **THURSDAY 15 JANUARY – LETTER FROM WENDY**

Our mock 'O' levels start in 2 weeks and I have started revision already (don't faint) – they are spread out over 3 weeks. I may not be doing history, I don't want to but have to see Mr Horton about it. I'll tell you some of what I've been up to, back on 10 December it was our school dance but I didn't go and I'm glad about that because it wasn't the usual band and the decorations were an underwater theme

same as your old school last year. Your old school dance was last week and they had the theme of the devil but I didn't go to that either as Dad makes me stay in every school night – I suppose it's for the best really! On the 12th I went with Pete to see *The Dirty Dozen* – it was very good, have you seen it? The next day we went to see Nan. On 15th I went with Mum and Kate to a concert at the Town Hall. It was all different choirs and we really went because Mrs Cairncross was in it – it was OK. On 17th Jane and I went to Alfred Sutton School to see a play, well it was more like an opera but it was very good. On the Friday I went to a dance at Henley Rugby Club. I didn't get in until 1.30 am but Dad wasn't cross. We broke up school on 19 December and went back on 6 January.

On Xmas Eve I went to Top Rank with Pete and Mum & Dad came and picked us up on their way home from Anita's. It was a good night but I didn't pay thank goodness because it was 16/6d. The next day was Xmas Day of course, I had lots of nice presents including dressing gown, watch repaired, pants, slippers, false nails, silver cross ... money from you thank you very much. I have put that in my savings. On Boxing Day we had a good day at home with the Malpass & Cairncross families but everyone kept getting locked in the loo – stiff door. Mum didn't like what Jane was wearing even though it was in fashion. On 30 December Mum and I went to London to get me a long evening dress but in the end we got a short one! I wore it at the New Year's Eve do at Station 1. On New Year's Day Jane and I went to see a double bill at the cinema – *Winnie The Pooh & 20,000 Leagues Under The Sea*. Mum forgot to mention that on Sunday 4th Auntie Peggy & family came. We had quite a nice day except I couldn't understand a word Michael (*older son*) was on about and Gary (*younger son*) thinks he knows it all and keeps on and on about things. At the moment Mum is telling us about the husband of someone at work and all she does is keep laughing so much she can't get to the end of the story. By the way it snowed last Thursday and I fell over twice on Elsa's walks and she just jumped on top of me and I got soaked.

On Xmas Eve Jane got a letter from a Fijian girl – it started off – I got your name from your cousin Peter – which of course was wrong but Jane was very amused and has written back. I have now got my mock 'O' level timetable here it is. (*Not replicated here.*) I thought I'd give it to you so that you can be thinking of me. By the way I had an argument with Mum & Dad about your drinking – you shouldn't mention it so much!

**MONDAY 19 JANUARY – LETTER FROM WENDY**

This airmail is really to tell you what records I've taped for you. (*There is then a very long list of 70 records from the later 1969 period, I'll mention a few to bring back memories – good or bad!*) Thunderclap Newman – *Something In The Air*, Four Tops – *What Is A Man*, Joe Dolan – *Make Me An Island*, Plastic Ono Band – *Give Peace A Chance*, Humble Pie – *Natural Born Boogie*, Rolling Stones – *Honky Tonk Woman*, Zager & Evans – *In The Year 2525*, Mama Cass – *It's Getting Better*, Joe Cocker – *Delta Lady*, David Bowie – *Space Oddity*, Archies – *Sugar Sugar*, Tremeloes – *Call Me No 1*, Jimmy Cliff – *Wonderful World Beautiful People*, Cufflinks – *Tracy*, Blue Mink – *Melting Pot*, Roger Whittaker – *Durham Town*.

**SUNDAY 15 FEBRUARY – LETTER FROM DAD**

Well it's my birthday – always a bit strange when it's on a Sunday as the cards arrived yesterday but best surprise was your telegram. We were all delighted – it was phoned through and we await the written copy. What a long newsy letter you sent last week – 63 pages, hope you don't expect the same length back. One complaint didn't like your page numbering – do it different next time. I sympathize with you about your septic bites as for the past fortnight I've had the most super boil on my left arm it had 3 roots and still it isn't healed. Otherwise we are all OK. So pleased you have got the library done and do hope it will be used. Mr Lotheim is on the move and has given me another box of books which I shall pass on. You asked about how much the telegrams cost – they are between 8/= & 12/= so not too bad but don't worry about that. Your £ notes will still be valid when you get home. Please let me know if you are short of money particularly if you want some for the journey home. It seems early to mention it but let me know sometime when we stop the Guardian and other papers. We had a good laugh at you imaging the conversations here at Xmas – we all appreciated the joke and that you could remember all the idiosyncrasies.

I have written to Queen Mary College asking for the form to apply for Creed Hall and enclose a copy of my letter. I have also written to Mr Thomas (*Director of Education*) about the grant. I also went to see him about Wendy as we have just read in the Reading Chronicle that the Wilson Secretarial College is closing in the summer. What she will now do will depend on her 'O' level results. Mum would like her to go to a finishing school in Switzerland for a year – poor me (cost). I have

bought you a fire brigade tie and have sent it out to you in case you have a chance to wear it. We are laughing at Elsa. Mum rolls up the white rug when we aren't having visitors and Elsa is using it as a pillow – looks lovely. She is very excited as we had a good fall of snow on Thursday and you know she likes playing in it. I have started some decorating in your room. You certainly seem to see a lot of films and bingo – Nan is getting quite jealous! We will look forward to reading your Guide to Rotuma and article in the *Evening Post*.

BBC1 is in colour now – we haven't got it although I am under pressure from Wendy. Mr Evans (*Fire Brigade*) has it but I don't know anybody else. The first section of the ring road is open and it certainly helps going to and from Caversham. The next section is well underway as is the new Civic Centre and Shopping Complex where Holmes the Furnishers was – this has been demolished. I think Rotary have now settled on a new generator and slide projector to send to you – will you also want a screen?

I had a good selection of presents for my birthday including a new suitcase from Mum and a new pipe from you and Wendy. To celebrate the medal and my birthday, Mum and I & Jean and Tim went to the Hatch Gate at Burghfield for dinner – we hadn't been before, it was very good but Jean wasn't well and didn't eat. Today Station Officer Wooton from Windsor came over with the German Fire Officer and his wife who were here last summer with some fire cadets – do you remember? They brought Mum some fancy top pocket hankies which when undone were ladies knickers! I was guest of honour a couple of weeks ago at the Earley BP Scout Guild dinner and dance – Mum came too. We had a lovely time including my speech and jokes. Mum said be sure to see the photo in the *Chronicle* we sent you. Other events we have been to were the No 6 District Chief Fire Officers Association dinner and dance held at Surrey FB HQ, Ted Ashill's (Chief of Hampshire) leaving party and The Berkshire Rugby Club cheese and wine party. Tomorrow I'm off to Winchester for the FB Group Quiz Final which includes Bracknell FS so I hope they do well and win. I have undertaken to organise the District Final and so I have arranged with Dr Smith to hold it at Stoneham School, Mrs Gray is doing the catering. Yesterday I went to Twickenham to see England v Ireland, Tim had your ticket and Tom Ingram and Bill Carvin came too – by jove it was cold. England won 9–3 so not a very inspiring game. In 2 weeks time it's England v Wales and I'm going up with Mike Paxton.

**SUNDAY 15 FEBRUARY – LETTER FROM MUM**

It took me 3 hours to read your last letter! What a lovely lot of films you manage to see, guess it makes up for no television. I went to see *Dr Zhivago* again the other week with Auntie Doris and Kate. The cinema was crowded and bang behind us was this fellow with 2 girls who kept making loud remarks so Kate turned round and glared at him and he said he had paid for his seat and could make as much bloody noise as he wanted – quite embarrassing! On 24 January 5 of us from work plus 2 husbands including Dad went to the pantomime at Oxford. It was Roy Castle in *Cinderella*, very good show but Roy Castle is very tiny and wears thick glasses. Actually the ugly sisters stole the show they were really fantastic and super costumes. Roy Hudd was on tv the other night as a gym instructor and he was very funny – I could just imagine you laughing your head off. By the way when we were at the BP Dinner at the Grosvenor some woman came over to ask after you and said she was Jane Anson's (*an old girlfriend*) mother. I told her lots about you as I do with everyone who asks after you.

Your bank balance to date is £88/15/1d with your monthly pocket money it should be up to £124 by August!. I don't think I told you I'm working 6 hours extra a week and we've just had a 4d per hour rise making it 8/5d an hour which is very good for part time work. We were seriously thinking of buying a house in Mortimer. It was very nice but when we got home and talked about it we realised it was too far out for Dad's work as he often has evening events as you know and there's also Wendy getting home from school and her social activities. Kate is flat hunting again and was looking at some new ones in Southcote Road – what a game it all is. Reading Garage had an *Ooh La La* evening to promote the new Simca car. I had a trial run in one. Dad keeps on to me about the A40 as there's rust at the bottom of the doors but other than that she is running fine. I really begrudge spending the money – getting a real miser.

You will be pleased to know we've sold the washing machine for £8, We need to get rid of the bikes next, that will make the shed easier to clean. Next Friday we are at the St. George & Dragon at Wargrave for the cricket club Dinner – it should be good. On Saturday I am collecting Nan and we are then stopping to collect snowdrops at Ipsden on the way back to Reading, she is staying the night and then Auntie Dais & Uncle Jack and the Baldwins are coming on Sunday for the day and will take Nan home. In the paper yesterday it said that Danny La Rue and Roy Hudd were opening in a show at the Palace Theatre so I hope to get to see that.

**TUESDAY 17 FEBRUARY – LETTER FROM WENDY**

I had a letter from a Rotuman girl living on the main island, her name is Sue Thomas (is this the Suzanne that was in Rotuma until Xmas?) – I am going to write to her after this letter to you. Fancy sleeping all day and 2 nights, how did you know which day it was? I'm glad the boys liked your Xmas decorations – looking forward to seeing the slides. Fancy having talc sprinkled over you on the *fara* – it must look like a lot of dandruff. I prefer our carol singing when you receive money. You were right with your quotes of us at Xmas. I got told off for keep eating the nuts. Nan only went out of the house once – to town, except to the dustbin. BBC1 is in colour now – Colin & Ann have got a colour tv as you know and a couple of other friend's relatives. Jane went up to see *Top Of The Pops* and said the Temptations had bright pink shirts and green trousers and waistcoats on – they've got a great record out called *I Can't Get Next To You* – have you heard it?

The new shopping centre in town is getting on well, I think they are digging out the foundations. I had forgotten when Mother's Day was so thanks for reminding me. I'll get something from both of us and Elsa of course. Fancy *Viva Bobby Joe* being no 1 with you, it must be years old. That girl Kijiana must be a bit thick not taking the hint you weren't interested after 2 hours – hard luck! That sounds a very good idea about the tape recorder, I don't mind you getting me one when you get home. By the way we don't know what your house is like – can you draw a plan or take some photos.

Well what have I been up to – usual visits to Pete's house and we went to the new Golden Egg restaurant at the back of Woolworth's. It's like the one in London but not so big. Top Rank a few times and we want to see a new film *Spring & Port Wine* – do you remember we saw the play in London. Jane and I took Elsa on the bus to town the other day, she loved it. I think that's only the 2nd time she's been on a bus. I hated my mock French oral exam – she was asking me questions about dressmaking and materials in French (of course)! On Tuesday we had needlework practical and nobody finished it. It was 2 and a half hours long and the 1st thing I did was knock over the tin of pins all over the floor. So our old teacher got on the floor to pick them up with her beloved magnet – this started everyone laughing. I had a still life exam – everybody thought that was terrible. On Friday it was art nature exam – we had to draw a tomato which was cut in half with the pips showing.

On Saturday I didn't go out and stayed in and read the whole of a book we are doing for 'O' levels *Animal Farm* – have you read it? It's a bit mad really and has according to our teacher a 'deeper meaning'. In the evening we went to see *Funny Girl* with Omar Sharif and Barbara Streisand – it was funny to start but sad at the end but his eyes are gorgeous. I hope it comes to Rotuma I am sure the locals would like the songs and his eyes. On Monday we had Eng Lit exam – by the way on the Sunday I read *Henry V* all the way through! Tuesday it was French – murder. That evening I went to the opticians to get some new glasses and they told me my right eye was getting worse. Wed was Maths and Geography, Thursday – History. Mr Horton the history teacher had told me that I needn't do the History 'O' level but still had to do the mock. This will give me more time to study for the subjects I am better at. On Friday it was English Composition & Language. The comp was quite easy because it was last year's paper which we had already done in class! We have 3 more exams but at the moment it's half term.

On Valentine's Day Pete sent me a great big card and I also got a small one which was from Dad – although he won't admit it. Mum also got one – from Dad. Tonight I'm going to see a double bill – *Bullitt* and *The Ballad of Bonnie & Clyde*. On Thursday it's back to the grindstone – school. Thank you for the good luck telegram. By the way last Monday I went to the Ship Hotel for a demo of a new product *Gramosan* and they wanted some people as guinea pigs – it's for acne and spots. Afterwards we had a lovely chicken, ham and salmon salad. We were then told that in 6 weeks time we would have a questionnaire to fill in and would then get a fee of £3/3/= so I'm looking forward to that. The stuff has made my face sore and the skins just flaking off. I rang up the man in charge and he told me to use less and rub cold cream in and it now seems to be getting better. Anyway it's worth it for 3 guineas. Elsa's just been out in the garden and dug a huge hole under the pine tree so Mum and I have just washed her and put talc all over her – wonder what Dad will say.

#### **SATURDAY 7 MARCH – LETTER FROM MUM**

Looking forward to your next letter which surely must come soon. Everyone here is envious of your weather as it's been bitterly cold here – I've never known Dad come in so often and complain about the cold. We woke up on Wednesday and had a picture postcard of thick snow but Wendy didn't appreciate me getting her

out of bed to have a look. We've been following the Queen's visit to Fiji with great interest. Dad's medal presentation is to be on 4th March at the fire station. I think Auntie Elsie & Uncle Cyril will be coming and we hope to persuade Auntie Nancy too – do wish you were here for it. On the Thursday the Divisional Officers and the Assistants have invited Dad and I to dinner at the Caversham Bridge Hotel which is very nice of them. On 20th February we were at the St. George & Dragon at Wargrave for a cricket club dinner. It was a good evening but we were sitting opposite Les Evans and his wife and she always smells very much of mothballs – it's quite shocking! On Sunday 22nd Dais & Jack, Nan and the Baldwins came for lunch. After lunch we put the tv on whilst Dad and I cleared up – it was *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness* with Ingrid Bergman so that was the end of everything until 5 pm – I must admit it is a lovely film. After that we put the screen up and looked at the slides you'd sent which they all thoroughly enjoyed. They also brought some slides of their family to show. Tea was then served and then a game of cards before they all went home. Jean & Tim came for a meal last Saturday, they are a very nice couple – seem to speak the same language as us.

Last night Dad and I went to see *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, we enjoyed it but not as much as the other James Bond films. Tomorrow we are going to Nan's for Mother's Day – I have bought her a lovely plant. I have a feeling she may want to go and pick snowdrops again!

Wendy and I went to town today to get some material for a new long dress for her for the Fire Brigade Ball next Friday. I also bought a new dress with the blank cheque Dad gave me for Xmas. We have received an invite to Carol Over's wedding on 11 April and Wendy is included. It is at St Michael's Church and then at the Mill House at Swallowfield, should be a pretty wedding. Do you remember when we took you and Wendy there for lunch? It was very expensive and you ran out and asked if we could stop at Woolworth's for an ice cream – KIDS! The Bachelors have their own show on tv – they are good. Listen out for Lee Marvin singing *Wanderin' Star* you feel like helping him clear his throat.

#### **SUNDAY 8 MARCH – LETTER FROM DAD**

We are at Nan's as it's Mothering Sunday. Wendy got up 1st today – quite exceptional – made the tea and then cooked breakfast. She sent a card from both of you and a bottle of perfume which Mum wanted (I have financed your half at the



moment). We have had a lovely day but the snow is hanging about. Last Wednesday the snow had been heavy overnight and I was due to go to Southampton for a meeting. I telephoned through and they said it wasn't too bad there. The journey down was OK although the engine cut out 3 times all in awkward places. I set off home at 3 pm and suddenly between Winchester and Basingstoke it went completely dark and a blizzard started. In addition the snow was blowing off the fields and building up dangerously on the roads. There was quite a lot of traffic and lorries all travelling fairly slowly with their lights on. Suddenly the 2 cars in front of me skidded on the ice and crashed together and went off the road. I skidded and went round and round. The cars and lorries behind me skidded and crashed into each other. My car was broadside across the road and believe me I bailed out quickly expecting it all to pile on top of me. Luckily not one of the cars touched me or the car. We could hardly stand up in the gale and driving snow and were soon like snowmen – clogged snow all over our clothes etc. We pushed and shoved and eventually got all the damaged cars off the road and mine round the right way. I then came home wet through and frozen but feeling lucky to be alive and undamaged – what an experience!

The England v Wales rugby match was terrific with England on top all the 1st half and scoring some beautiful tries. The French ref had his leg broken and then the Welsh came back and eventually won 19-13. I have now got the forms for your university grant and also halls of residence – I will send them off. The CO of London Fire Brigade is retiring. I put in an application and as expected didn't get anywhere. They have appointed the CEO of the Hong Kong FB much to all our disgust. Good luck to him though – a tough job. The Ministry of Aviation firemen at London Airport have been on strike for a week. This closes the airport although the officers have been manning the crash tender during the day. As planes should be arriving all day and night you can guess the disruption. We are wondering if it will disrupt your mail.

Next Friday is the FB Ball at Top Rank – Wendy is coming but who she'll have as a partner is a bit of a mystery. We have 65 guests and have already sold 900 tickets so should be a good do. On 14th March I am organising the District Final of the wholetime technical quiz – it will be at Stoneham School again. Dr Smith, Mrs Gray and the caretaker have all been very helpful. Unfortunately we are not in it – the finalists are Kent, Eastbourne & Bournemouth. Last Friday I went to see Dr Thomas, Education Officer about your grant only because the form asked

no details of my income and about Wendy. Mum had heard about grants for a finishing school in Switzerland – Dr Thomas laughed at this but I did find out about courses for medical secretaries and about hotel receptionists. Wendy can't decide which she would like but she is interested enough to write for details.

The Rotary Club have Lord Boothby coming to talk on The Future of Europe. We have arranged a champagne reception, his oration and then supper at Palmer Hall at Reading University – cost 25/= each. Proceeds are to League of Friends of Borocourt Hospital. I have sold 22 tickets. I have also got up a party to go to the Civic Ball. I shall soon be broke! But the Mayor has supported me well this year. Have had to have the radiogram repaired and when it was returned we decided to re-arrange the lounge which I think is much better and really good for sitting and listening to the stereo. We are having the kitchen floor re-covered too.

Elsa was whining to go down the river which she knows we always do when we are at Nan's, it was good fun but she got very muddy – she is still not very good at the 'return to the lead' drill. I washed most of the mud off in the river and finished her off at Nan's with warm water. I have been pruning the rose bushes and apple trees but last week whilst up the ladder it decided to topple towards the fish pond. I managed to twist away and landed on the lawn – unhurt but of course Mum and Wendy were very amused. Not my lucky month I think.

## SPRING BACK TO SCHOOL – A CLOSE SHAVE AT SEA

### **SATURDAY 7 MARCH – LETTER FROM ROTUMA**

I expect you have been wondering why you haven't heard from me recently well basically the boat was delayed as there wasn't enough copra for a full load and the boat now arrives next Tuesday. The boat after that is due on 17 March so 2 boats in a short space of time! The past 6 weeks seem to have flown by since I last told you what I've been up to. On 2 February the day before school started there was a big feast for Mr Inia who is the head of the RCA he's an OBE & JP too and a very nice man. There was dancing all day and then he made a speech which lasted over an hour!

The next day, the 3rd, school started again and I must say I was looking forward to it. The 1st week was spent largely in meetings sorting out timetables etc. I am including my timetable for you (*not included here*) and you will see I have 2 free periods on Monday & Friday afternoons! This year there are 121 in school. 2 of our staff are not here yet, one of them is having a baby and we are expecting a replacement for her. You will see that I am the main geography teacher which is funny really as I didn't do geography at 'O' or 'A' level but I'm thoroughly enjoying it and learning a lot myself. I am also doing English with some classes and have been 'promoted' to take 5A because they are the top class doing their 'O' level equivalent. They are a hard class to teach. This year I am form master of 5B – only 11 pupils with 2 boys and 9 girls – all they do is laugh. I continue to be a house master and sports master which doesn't involve much really. I have also been appointed Sanitary Officer and you will be pleased to know that this involves only inspecting the toilets and not cleaning them too.

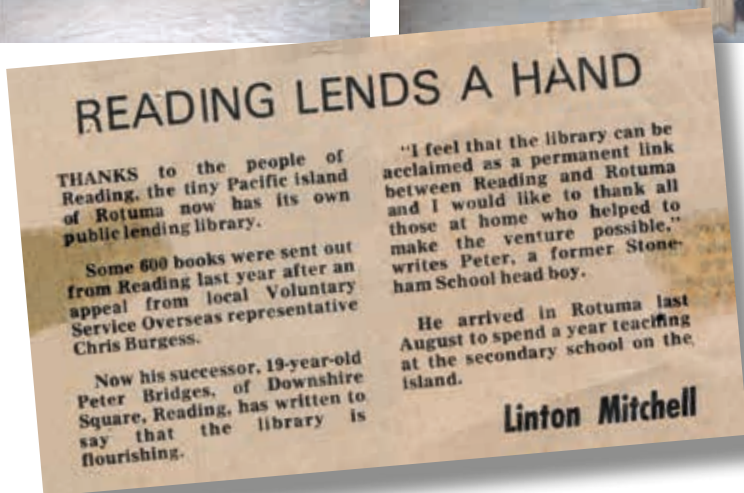
I have also been able to get cracking with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. I now have 2 groups, the ones doing it currently (19) and 3rd formers



LEFT: *Sumi, looking west.*

BELOW LEFT AND RIGHT: *Sparsely-filled shelves in Rotuma library; desperately short of books before ;*

BOTTOM: *The short press cutting from the Reading Evening Post thanking the noble citizens of Reading for stocking the shelves with 600 books.*



who will start when the 1st group have finished. I am doing a 1st Aid course with them at the moment and at odd times we do the interests and athletics sections. Much time in the evenings is spent marking or preparing for lessons. Obviously my main task is teaching but in my spare moments I always seem to be organising something which as you know is what I enjoy.

Library – well we had a job finding somebody local to help and the DO said we would probably have an opening ceremony of some sort but there appeared so many delays that we decided to go ahead and open. So Opening Day was Sunday 15 February – we had leaflets issued round the island’s shops, but I was still worried about how it would work out. Sunday is a day when a bus goes all round the island. Well we were packed all afternoon and issued 120 books. We opened from 1-5 pm and also Tuesdays and Thursdays 5-7 pm – these days aren’t so popular, so it gives us a chance to tidy up etc. I usually go on Tuesdays, Spot on Thursdays and both on Sundays. A lot of children go and just look at books but I am pleased with the amount the adult section is being used. We have our regulars and many of the older pupils (who can’t easily get there) ask me to take books into school – last Wednesday I took 17 books to school – I felt like a branch library!! I hope some of the noisier children stop coming.

On Saturday 7th February it was the twins wedding which I mentioned to you. Spot and I were among the guests of honour and there were over 1000 people there (about a third of the population). They weren’t all guests but anybody who turns up gets fed as it’s the standard fayre of meat and veg. Being a twins wedding it was like 2 weddings. It started at 9 with villagers from one of the groom’s villages bringing all the food. Then there is what I call ‘the mat business’. Each village sends its women with piles of mats. All they do is pile them in front of the bride and when the last person has been they queue up again to collect them – so no purpose really. About 10 we had a feast. The brides were wearing mauve – very nice. At 1 we went to the church with the brides now wearing white gowns. After the service they changed into red satin and then the other groom’s villagers arrived with more food for another feast.

We still have 2 cinema shows a week and the recent films have included *Girls On The Beach* featuring lots of Beach Boys music, *The Russians Are Coming*, *Kid Galahad*, *Island of Blue Dolphins*, *Tale of Two Cities* with Dirk Bogarde. There has also been the bingo and dances.



*Twin brides on their happy day.*



*The never-ending parade of mats...*

We have a new shopkeeper at the food store and this is much better. He opens much more regularly and for longer. You'd think he was running the shop just for us as he keeps asking if there are things we would like him to get in – mind you we do spend a lot there. There is a much better selection now and he has now a working fridge with fresh meat and fish and frequently pineapples and mangoes and he always keeps some for us. Last week we made a fish stew which was very good. The butcher came round today so we bought 6lbs of meat and an oxtail and at the moment Spot is making a stew with the oxtail. All the meat only cost us \$2. We seem to be having a much wider variety of food now. Last week one of the boys brought us 60 oranges which were great and of course free.

I have received a pay rise up from \$1 a day to \$40 a month. At the moment we are painting the house. We have paid for the paint ourselves but are likely to be re-imbursed by the Rotuma Council. Next thing the DO has been at loggerheads with the District Chiefs and is leaving on this boat! The Chief Accountant will be taking over and everybody seems pleased about this. About 2 weeks ago I stubbed a toe and although there was little blood I had to trim part of the nail and then the rest became loose so that came off too, so I'm without a toenail – that's what comes of not wearing shoes – it must be terrible to wear shoes again.

Last Thursday it was the Queen's Visit to Fiji so we had a day off school and we listened to it on the radio – it would have been better to have been in Suva to see it. We had a lazy pleasant day but in the evening we were told that Spot's dog Flint had been run over by Father Johnstone's land rover so that dampened the day. Flint

was always chasing vehicles so it wasn't a total surprise it happened. Another dog nearby has just had some puppies so we'll get one of those.

Soon we are having a visit from Fiji's Chief Minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara (what a mouthful) he's coming with some school inspectors – so with the inevitable socials it should be a very busy time so I'll tell you about this next time.

I thought Wendy might be interested in our pop charts here from no 7 to 1 – 7 *Rub A Dub Dub* – Equals, 6 *Meet My Lord* – New Seekers, 5 *Don't Cry Daddy* – Elvis, 4 *Come & Get It* – Badfinger, 3 *Berry Rides Again* – Steppenwolf, 2 *Nah Nah Hey Hey* – Steam, 1 *Make Your Own Kind of Music* – Mama Cass. We have a programme on at the moment where they play songs from which our *Song for Europe* is selected – it's Mary Hopkin this year. I haven't liked the 1st 3 we've heard so far but *Puppet On A String*, *Congratulations & Boom Bang A Bang* (all selected as our entry) were all the 5th song played so look out for that. (*I've since looked it up and our entry Knock Knock Who's There? was the 6th song played – so that's that theory out of the window!*)

We've had very hot weather lately and the tail end of a Hurricane Dolly with very heavy rains and winds – I had my plastic mac in use every day and you know I hate plastic macs as they cling to you! We will have 2 days off for Good Friday and Easter Monday as term doesn't finish until 1 May. Dilys Morgan has left Radio Fiji and is now off to Australia and NZ – I sent her a bon voyage card. Dad hope your birthday went well. Wendy it will be your birthday before I write again – Mum will you give her £2 from my pocket money. When I come home I thought I might bring you some lovely Rotuman dress material. The standard width is 3' so can you let me know what length for say 2 dresses each.

TUESDAY 10 MARCH – the 1st boat has arrived and no mail! Apparently it's on the Govt boat arriving tomorrow. Last night Faga, Spot and I went fishing on the reef. It was great fun. It was the 1st time I had been and worn my shoes since November! There were loads of different fish, eels and snakes we caught about 20 fish including 3 lobsters.

WEDNESDAY 11 MARCH – boat and post has arrived but I've just come in from a cocktail party and there isn't time to read and comment on your letters so I will do it for the boat next week.

**WEDNESDAY 18 MARCH – LETTER FROM ROTUMA**

Sorry for the rushed signing off last time, as mentioned the post was on the 2nd boat with the Chief Minister Ratu and we persuaded the headmaster to let us have a half day at school so that we could go to Ahau and watch the dancing display for Ratu. We walked there which took about an hour, watched the dancing and then laden with post came home intending to sort the mail and start reading etc. We then got a hurried invitation to a cocktail party and dinner for Ratu – so out came my tie for about the 4th time. At that stage I hadn't opened the new tie Dad had sent which was a pity as I could have worn that. I did of course meet Ratu which was a great honour, when you think he met the Queen 6 days earlier. We chatted briefly when he joined our group. He is extremely tall and dignified yet not overbearing. When we got back we realised there was a film being shown *The Malta Story* with Jack Hawkins & Alec Guinness. When we got home it was time for bed. There is another boat tomorrow to take back the rest of the copra so hoping to find time to sort out some letters before then.

The only other news in the past week is that the Catholic Mission had a change of Fathers and the new one was having a clear out and was going to ditch some 400 books, so I salvaged about 250 as 'good' and spent Saturday sorting them out at the library. We now have about 800 books there with others en route or promised.

Now responding to your letters etc – thanks for the tie and I hope to have an opportunity to wear it out here. I was thinking that when I get back to Suva I might go the Suva Rotary Club luncheon as we've both been in touch with them and that the Club Secretary Mr Connell is the head of the Fiji Tobacco Co which is connected with my sponsoring firm in Britain (*which from recollection I think was the British American Tobacco Co – not something I would wish to be associated with today*). Apart from a lot of letters I received the *NMEs* up to 13 Jan and *Guardians & Reading Chronicles* up to 20 Jan – Mum in the *Chronicle* did you see the wedding photo of Graham Grant – do you remember the Grant twins from primary school, they both couldn't speak properly. I didn't like the picture of Dad on the front of the *Chronicle* (*about his medal*) but the one in the *Evening Post* is good and is now displayed.

I hope Dad's boil has cleared up – I bet Mum was dying to squeeze it but guess you didn't let her. As the newspapers take quite a while to arrive I suggest you stop them at the end of May – please then save them at home. When you go on holiday



who's looking after Elsa? Much as I consider a finishing school for Wendy a bit snobby I suppose it might help – are you serious about it? Touch wood I have no health problems at the moment apart from my stubbed toe – the nail is re-growing now. 3 of my short sleeved white shirts we bought in that shop in West Street have shrunk and don't look very attractive so I don't wear them anymore. I have had one made and bought another one. 3 pairs of my shorts have split under the crotch beyond repair so I have bought some new ones! I think I will need a lot of new clothes when I get back. We got a new puppy called Becca – Wendy would love him

You said Dad's presentation was on 16th so I presume that's March and will look forward to hearing about it next time and the Fire Brigade Ball on the 13th. My VSO correspondent has had my *Guide to Rotuma* typed into a nice booklet and sent me a copy, it's rather bulky so I'll bring it home rather than send it. I have still to write to the *Evening Post*. I wrote a lengthy article for the *Scout Bulletin* – April edition and soon there should be something about me in Berkshire Scouting. I see in the *Chronicle's* 'Here, There and Everywhere' section they have news about people and there was something about a former VSO – would you send something in about me and what I'm doing. I do think we ought to have colour tv. I'll buy the BBC2 aerial only £10 when I get back.

Turning to the Rotary project I don't think we'll need a screen. You were lucky getting tickets for 2 trips to Twickenham. Steve has told me Reading are top of the league – we get the results as you know but not the league positions. I really think you should get a new car, the A40 is going downhill rapidly and anyway it's economical to change them fairly regularly. What do you think of Wendy's boyfriend she seems quite involved with him. Wendy that girl is called Tue Thomas not Sue Thomas and it's not the one I was going on about – that Sue is in Australia. Where did you get that I slept 2 nights and 1 day – I didn't at all!! I quite like that reggae music. On the radio they keep playing *Love Grows* – Edison Lighthouse, *United We Stand* – Brotherhood Of Man and *Temma Harbour* – Mary Hopkin. I am enclosing a plan of the house as you requested and you do have a photo of it already! Hope your mock results are OK.

FRIDAY 19 MARCH – boat arrived about 1 pm and only 2 letters including the ones from you 7/8 March – great surprise! Tonight there's a party for the DO's daughter who's leaving to go to Fiji – she's smashing but 23.

**SUNDAY 19 APRIL – LETTER FROM ROTUMA**

The next boat due here has been delayed because our Mr Inia head of the RCA and Chief Maraf are in London as part of the Fiji Independence talks and it's waiting to be able to bring them back to Rotuma. First school news – Spot and I managed to get a new timetable adopted and it's been in operation since Easter and everybody seems to like it. The advantages are that all periods are now a standard 40 mins, there are shorter breaks and lunch. This results in an hour each day at 3 pm for (Wed) extra sports (Fri) clubs (other 3 days) compound cleaning, helping weaker children and all ready for the 4 pm bus departures. As I told you I am taking 5A for English who are preparing for their Senior Cambridge exam – 'O' level equivalent. The pupils keep slipping up on silly things. We had the results of the 1969 exams and only 2 of the 11 pupils passed. Everyone was disappointed. However, only 4 passed in the whole of Fiji so 2 of those 4 is good. I think the exam is harder than 'O' level. Most schools in Fiji do the New Zealand school certificate which is apparently easier so heavens knows why we do the Cambridge one. Starting tomorrow some forms have exams and these should all be over by 1 May.

For sports this term we have been doing softball – mainly because we didn't have any other equipment! We mark the pitch out with sandbags and lines of sand. We have also started rugby again ready for a tournament in May. The headmaster says everybody must be fit. Our house is currently 2nd of 3 but with rugby coming back we have a good chance of catching the leader. Things are also moving well now with the DoE Award Scheme. All 19 boys have now completed the athletics section and 8 have finished the interests sections. First aid training is ongoing. I am hoping to secure a map of the island showing the bush tracks so that I can plan the routes for the expedition during the May holidays.

At the end of my previous letter I told you we were going to a party for the DO's daughter – her name is Akata and although I've always said to you that Akaneta was my perfect girl well Akata shows that perfection can be surpassed. She's 23 and works in the Education Dept in Suva. We've tentatively arranged to meet when I'm back in August – so that should be good fun. We continue to have film shows twice a week and recently have included *Spartan Gladiators*, *Roustabout*, *Frankie & Johnnie*, *The Deadly Bees*, *A Stitch In Time* with Norman Wisdom, hilarious – Wendy do you remember we saw it at the cinema a few years ago.

Now that Lent has finished the dances have started again but there is a bit of

a glut with 2 a week – all the same. The library continues to flourish. In a report I have prepared for the DO since we have opened (2 months) we have issued 1260 books an average of 112 on Sundays and 40 in the week. We have 890 books. Spot's assistance soon gave up with a no of excuses and until 2 weeks ago I was on my own. Lisi is now helping and said I should have asked earlier! I think Spot is quite envious about this. My main task is to get someone to take over long term. Sundays there can be quite tiring especially as everyone seems to come at once as soon as we open.

Easter weekend provided a good rest. Good Friday and the Saturday were completely lazy days. On Easter Sunday we went to a village about 4 miles away to one of our friend's brother's house – the main reason was that he had made some orange wine and after that we went to the youth club dance which was the first one we had been to since the end of January so it made a nice change.

On our nights in we have a really good selection of radio stations. On one of the programmes *Seafarers Magazine* they have a quiz with a prize. The 1st 4 questions are straightforward but the 5th one is always geared to catch you out which we can't usually get. On 31 March the question was: *What do you get when a bird gets caught in a lawnmower?* We thought shredded wheat ie shredded tweet (the bird sound). In fact Spot said he'd heard this before. One of the 4 earlier questions was: *What was the real name of Cilla Black?* (answer Priscilla White) and I thought many Fijians might not know this. So we thought we stood a good chance of winning. So the next day I telegraphed our answers. We had to wait a week and then on the programme the presenter said – *And now quiz time and we didn't get many entries this week but we did have one correct answer all the way from Rotuma and the answers were...* We shouted out with delight! They never tell you what the prize is just that it was donated by Carreras Ltd (the tobacco firm). As the prize had not been won for 2 weeks it was a triple prize worth about \$4. So we have to wait for the next boat to see what it is. I hope it's not a cigarette lighter!

We have had a couple of teachers' meetings which are for all the island to discuss things like team sports etc; they are quite interesting in the way the meeting is conducted. At the last meeting we had 5 motions on the floor at once and voted for them altogether (Mum – get Dad to explain about motions at meetings). Last Monday a boat arrived unexpectedly but it turned out to be a Korean fishing vessel and one of the crew had broken his leg and needed hospital treatment – so it wasn't

much of an event after all. It returned today to collect him – we did get some nice tuna fish out of the deal though!

2-3 weeks ago we picked about 400 oranges and most of those went to making orange wine. Before going to the dances we have a 'little session' with the wine which puts us into a good mood. At a recent grog session Spot and I had a curry made which we took with us and shared round and everyone was very thankful

On 1 May which is the last day of term it is schools sports day at Sumi which for the teachers at least includes a good lunch. On 11, 12, 13 May it is the Cession Day celebrations (when Rotuma was ceded to GB 1881) which is during the holidays so it should be good fun.

I'm normally 1st up about 6.30 am this gives me a good hour before the early bus and saves a rush. I am continuing to enjoy the food. We have been experimenting with different ways to do corned beef! I mentioned the Indian shopkeeper opposite who keeps pressurising us to buy things. I am well into curries now! The Indian shop we prefer (there are 2 nearby) have made me 3 shirts. His wife is Rotuman and she does a lot of cooking much to our delight. They have a daughter who works at a top hotel in Suva, then there's Rupeti who is our washer-up boy. The next son is Suakmasa and he's top at everything at school and there are other children. One of the things they make is 'curry and roti'. Roti is a sort of thin dry pancake and the curry of meat and veg is rolled inside. It's about 9" long. Well they always make some on Saturdays and I can't explain how much we look forward to them. We buy about 10 each and they do for 2 meals and they are only 10c each. Touch wood I am now keeping well, Spot always seems to have some fungus on his skin, a cut etc.

Wendy – do you remember before I came out here we wrote the words down to various pop songs which we had got from my tapes and one of the local bands have been using it. The band asked me for more so I did some more from memory and if I couldn't remember I made them up (I think I would be quite good at songwriting) and there are now 84 songs in the book.

I have heard that there are some 250 books on their way from a regional Fiji library source so with the ones from the UK too the library should be well stocked by the time I leave. Can you check I am on the electoral roll (for the 1st time) as there ought to be a general election soon. Let me know about the local elections too please – I hope Labour do OK.

MONDAY 4 MAY – Apologies, I was going to send a telegram to congratulate you on your medal presentation but I couldn't afford one. Exam week passed very quickly and I managed to get my marking done quickly. The last week was spent cleaning the school compound and the boys constructed numerous seats from odd timber all to face the sea. The children all take great pride in the school and I must admit the school and its surroundings always look smashing. Most afternoons the boys were playing rugby. As mentioned 1 May was Sports Day (there is one each term). The competition is really between the primary schools and this term it is athletics. We decided, for our secondary school, to play a rugby match so we arranged 2 teams – north and south Rotuma. It was an extremely hot day and when I got home I was quite sunburnt but it doesn't last. Although tired there was a dance in the evening which we went to and they were selling curried goat and vegs for 20c and it was very good too.

Yesterday I was busy organising the expeditions. 6 are ready to do them so I have put them in 2 groups of 3. I have worked out 2 different routes using roads and bush tracks. They have to collect their instructions from 4 different points (teacher's houses) en route and are given tasks to do. The routes are devised so they meet up and all camp together overnight when I will visit them. The camp is near Harieta's (a teacher) house so she has invited me to tea before I visit them – this will be on Thursday 14th.

SATURDAY 9 MAY – before the boys go on their expedition they have to have a trial one and I'm supposed to go with them. I arranged for this in 2 groups, one from each end of the island. There's a hill about 2 miles from home called Paho it's flat topped and had in the past been used by the Americans for landing helicopters and that's where we were going with the 1st group on 5th May. At 9 am I met 3 boys and we walked along the road to a junction with the main bush track where we were to meet 2 other boys. When we got to the point they had left a note on a tree to say they had gone on. They then left various messages along the track with arrows as to which way to go. It was very hot and I was sweating. Eventually we turned off the track and started to climb the hill. We came to a small shelter and the 2 boys were there – they had left at 7 am not 9 am! The boy who was the guide lost his way and I waded through what seemed like the Burmese jungle you see in war films. We eventually got to the top of the hill and the views were fantastic. The boys built

a shelter for practice and had lunch. We returned about 3 pm and I was worn out.

The following day was for the other group so I went to the other end of the island on the bus and intended to return on the bread truck at 5 pm. Again it was very hot. When I got to Naotau, Fuata met me – he's in 5A and not doing the DoE Award but is helping out. He says he likes Wendy and about a year older than she is. His guardian is Chief Maraf and at the moment he's just coming back from the Conference. Anyway for the practice we decided to go to the island called Afgaha which is about half a mile or more off the coast. It's an unusual island in that at the western end it's wooded then the rest of it is just a grassy patch with one coconut tree! We travelled out to the island in Fuata's canoe which are like ours but have a long stabiliser about a foot away on the left side with 2 connecting bars. When we got to the island there were 14 boys not the expected 5 all from school and all from Naotau. I don't know if you would fancy this but there were 2 birds (like seagulls) sitting in a tree and one of the boys catapulted them out of the tree, they fell, he 'finished them off', de-feathered them and cooked them – within half an hour we were eating them. The small island is really interesting. The boys asked me if I wanted to sleep there the night. They seemed keen for me to do so and I thought it would be good fun. The boys built a large shelter to sleep 14. About 6 pm Fuata and I went ashore to do some shopping and also as I had got wet swimming, had a change of clothes at Fuata's, which presented a problem with the shorts as I am quite a bit bigger than Fuata.

The next day Thursday, as we were settled and there wasn't much transport that day we decided to stay overnight again on the island. We had a lovely relaxing day. The boys went fishing and caught some which we had for lunch with a chicken one of the boys fetched from home. Fuata and I went shopping again and en route we encountered quite a storm, the wind was very strong which made the sea rough but not too bad as Rotuma is protected by the reef to a great extent. The boat seemed to be going all over the place and I must admit I was quite worried. We both got soaked again which meant another change of clothes – Fuata's home has housegirls who seem to be continually doing washing so no worry about that.

Thursday night it poured with rain and the shelter was quite leaky! The next day Friday was quite adventurous. It was intended that we all travel back early so that I could get the 10 am bus back. About 8 one of the boys Avaiki took all the equipment, clothes, my camera etc back and we awaited his return so that we all



ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Joseph, Jioje, Rigamoto, Mario and me on the island of Afgaha; alfresco dining on Afgaha; the view from our campsite over to Oinafa, Rotuma; the fearless campers defying gravity in a coconut tree – beers had been taken!

RIGHT: The gathering of chiefs in formal dress and children at Cession Stone, Motusa for Cession Day.



travel back together. There was a terrible storm with lightning so we waited and when the storm was over we decided to start back. There were 4 of us in the canoe. Fuata and I had *sulus* on so we tied them round our waists and held the other end up in the air to create a sort of sail and it worked and we really went along. It was still quite windy. When we were a good way across the wind caused 2 other canoes to capsize. Fuata and I jumped out and swam to a very small island so that the canoe was available for the others in the water. Fuata suggested that we swim ashore. Now at any other time I would have said no, the sea being rough and my not being a strong swimmer and it looked quite a long way ... but off we went. A huge crowd gathered on the shore and it all seemed quite dramatic. The swim was about 300 yards and it really tired me out but we got there – what a relief! On reflection the situation was serious and somebody could have drowned. One of the older men took a boat out to help and somebody told the RCA to get their motor launch ready but it was eventually unnecessary. Anyway I missed the bus had lunch at Fuata's and intended to get the bus back at 2 but the ambulance was at Naotau so it gave me a lift back. I then went to the post office, had my haircut and got home and fell asleep. I woke at 1.40 am which meant I had missed the dance at Upu! A most enjoyable adventurous 3 days.

SATURDAY 16 MAY – well the Cession events began on Monday 11 May. Proceedings for School Day were due to start at 8.30, but as all the island's children had to be brought to one place the buses started picking them up at 4 am! First on the agenda was a parade of the children and a short service at the monument celebrating Rotuma's cession to Britain on 13 May 1881. All the big-wigs were there – the chiefs and their wives, the DO, the Miss Rotuma contestants – they attend all the functions and are being judged throughout. There was a hymn and a prayer, a couple of speeches and *God Save The Queen*.

After this we all walked to the sports field at Ahau where the Govt buildings are. The main events throughout the day were rugby and netball matches. There was also an ongoing agricultural show and 'the ladies section' dressmaking etc. In the agricultural show the winning yam (like potato) weighed 142lb. There were also stalls all round the edge of the field selling everything under the sun and lots of food – the stallholders sleep there overnight. At 3 pm it was speeches and prize-giving. In the evening there was a film show.



On Tuesday the day started with a Catholic service which I didn't go to. For the day's events I was invited as a guest to sit with the DO. I told you Mr Konrote the Chief Accountant had taken over. Apparently he wasn't entitled to be the DO as he wasn't a qualified accountant, however the Chiefs told the Chief Minister when he visited that that was the man they wanted and the Chief Minister said OK then I'll give him 3 years – just like that! But he's really nice and looks a bit like Khrushchev. The main event was the athletics heats. I was supposed to be helping out as a starter for the races and was listed in the programme as such but I was with another chap Eleisa and he'd been doing it for years and didn't really need help so I helped organise the field events. At 3 pm it was prize-giving again. In the evening it was mainly dancing and singing by the village groups. The DO, doctor and weatherman (? – *I don't remember him*) did a turn dressing up as negroes and singing *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*. That night I felt really ill – very hot, headaches and diarrhoea and little sleep – anyway I got over it.

And so to Wednesday the actual Cession Day. There were hundreds of people at Ahau. First of all we had the athletics finals which were most exciting, then it was the end of the 6 mile bicycle race and to finish the morning the copra cutting competition – each contestant had a pile of 50 coconuts which they had to split open and take the coconut out and put in a bucket – it was a close contest. Then there was another feast style lunch. After this it was the arrival of the floats 6 in all and each carrying a Miss Rotuma contestant. The winning float was the best one in my view. 4 of the Miss Rotuma contestants were quite large which only goes to show how tastes are different. The winner was from our district I would have put her 2nd. More prize-giving followed – there really were some excellent trophies. Then it was afternoon tea for the dignitaries (including me of course!). In the evening there was a dance but I only stayed 2 hours as I was tired out. The 3 days had involved a lot of walking.

Thursday was a lazy day at home although at 5 I set out to see my boys at their campsite on their expedition. I found them all right, they had made a good camp and had cooked their meal – I now have to see their reports on their journeys next week at school. After I left them I went to Harieta's and had a huge meal and she had 2 friends there including Miss Rotuma who is related to Harieta. We then played a board game called *Flick* and listened to the radio and I got home about 11. On Friday there was yet another wedding. It was in our village and the groom was



*Form 4A boys – 1970.*



*Form 4A girls – 1970.*



*Form 5B girls – 1970.*



*Form 5A – 1970.*

32 and the bride 16 who had only left our school last year – this is apparently quite common in Rotuma. We were guests again – there are perks like having your food individually served to you by a woman sitting opposite but on the negative side you are sitting cross legged on the ground for a long time which is not comfortable. There was a film show in the evening. No real news during the next week except I picked up an infection near my big toe and got some penicillin from the doctor which appears to have done the trick.

SUNDAY 24 MAY – today the boat is due. Spot and I are going to Oinafa where the boat anchors and having lunch at Eleisa's, a master from school. I'm not going to

have time to do an article for the *Evening Post* so if you see Mr Rich from the paper would you apologise for me. I see there is a General Election on 18 June – as Mum doesn't usually vote perhaps she could vote on my behalf and vote Labour.

The boat arrived and Spot and I helped sort the post at the PO. I had 30 letters and papers etc. One of the letters was from the Sullivans who were connected to the scouts. They moved to Australia and still had the Reading newspapers and read about me there and said they would be happy to send anything I wanted – that was nice of them. Harieta has also heard that her application for a Commonwealth Scholarship was successful so she will coming to Leeds University in September. We will probably leave on the same boat. (*I subsequently went to Leeds to see her during her year.*)

## THE MEDAL PRESENTATION AND OTHER NEWS FROM HOME

### MONDAY 20 APRIL – LETTER FROM MUM

We enjoyed looking at your slides and the one of your room we had fun picking out your belongings. In one with you on your hair looked a mass of tight curls – what have you been doing to it? Dora Gregory has already booked you to do a film show when you are home. You seem to be having some interesting food, I'm not sure I'll be able to compete when you get home but I'll have a good try. We realise you will need some new clothes – I was thinking of getting rid of your suit as I think it will be too small but decided we'd better wait until you're back. You can guess that everybody has been glued to the tv over *Apollo 13* it was wonderful to watch and I feel certain that it's possible that you saw something of the landing as Rotuma was so very close – Dad thinks I'm crazy! I've ordered the book you asked for on the Dewey Classification System (*for library book classification*) and they have promised to let me know when it's arrived but I will keep pestering them. Dad will tell you about the Halls of Residence, one of them wanted a photo of you so we had fun going into that shop Jeromes and explaining that you had had a passport photo taken there last June and could they help about the negative. The lady was very helpful but couldn't find it. We have however since managed to find one.

Did you know Andy Williams is back in the top 10 with *Can't Help Falling In Love* but I don't think it's as good as the Elvis recording. What a lovely lot of films you have seen. Last Sunday it was pouring with rain so we watched the afternoon film *The Hills of Home* with Lassie and I cried buckets it was so sad, it had Dad all watery eyed as well! On Saturday there was a really gripping film on *Cape Fear* with Gregory Peck and Robert Mitchum – see it if you get the chance. I decided I can't really afford to change the car this year as it would mean finding £200. I have had some minor jobs done on it and it has just been returned from the garage

having had the rust treated and that will be about £30 and I have the tax and insurance coming up soon. I keep hoping ERNIE (*the Premium Bonds' random electronic number generator*) will turn up. Nan came to stay for 10 days at Easter and left £5 for me to put in your bank account. The kitchen floor has now been tiled and it really is so much easier to keep clean. Wendy and I would like some material – what a marvellous idea. I will tell you how much in my next letter.

The Fire Brigade Ball was a huge success and Ken Maynard (*a Stoneham friend*) was there surprisingly but he was with Carol Carvin (*father in the Fire Service*) and I had a long chat with him and he was disappointed not to have been accepted for VSO. The following day was the quiz at Stoneham Mrs Gray came up trumps with the refreshments and I came away with a lovely bag of cakes. The following Friday we were guests of Tom & Ella's at the Irish Ladies Night held at the Calcot Hotel. The next day was Wendy's birthday – I'll leave her to tell you about that but she was very thrilled to get your telegram. The next Friday it was the Civic Ball. This was really an excellent do and we made up a party of 10. It was at the Top Rank and finished at 2 am, then they all came back for coffee and it was 4 am when we got to bed. We have had terrible weather recently but fortunately it was a sunny day for Carol Over's wedding. Wendy had 8 glasses of champagne but she maintains it was 6. It was a top and tails do and there were about 160 guests. Last Tuesday I had an invitation to have lunch with the Mayor in the Mayor's Parlour. I wasn't looking forward to it without Dad for moral support but it turned out very well and I think I said all the right things! – just 12 females. Last Friday it was Rugby Ladies Night at the Upper Deck which was a rip roaring evening.

#### **TUESDAY 21 APRIL – LETTER FROM DAD**

We are still wondering when summer is coming – most days are wet, cold and windy but the spring flowers are out. I have re-built 2 rockeries and built a small wall by the vegetable patch with rocks from an old wall at Abingdon FS which had to come down as it was dangerous. As Mum mentioned the Fire Brigade Ball was a great success but we had 80 guests to look after! We sold about 850 tickets and with the tombola it was a financial success too. The 1st prize in the tombola was a lovely easy chair but nobody claimed the prize. 2 days later another firm gave us another easy chair (they had got the dates mixed up) so now we have 2 chairs which we don't know what to do with. At the Rugby Ladies Night we had a great band

and everyone let their hair down and they even laughed at the jokes in my speech. Talking of rugby England are bottom of the Championship. Reading were top and now near the top of Div III but I don't think they will get promotion. It is the Lord Boothby event tonight. I am going to start an Officers Club in the Brigade ready for when the new Dee Road Headquarters opens. We had an inaugural meeting last week and will probably have 2 or 3 functions elsewhere in the meantime. Mary & Guy came the weekend after Easter and they enjoyed your slides. They are now in Benidorm for a holiday. Wendy has been invited to (*their daughter*) Julie's 21st in July in Bicester. My boil has now healed up and hasn't left too much of a scar. We were pleased to read you'd met the PM and that he seemed a nice guy. Glad that the DoE Award Scheme is going well.

The medal presentation is on 4 May. There will be 120 people there plus the men on parade. It will be held at Caversham Rd FS. Included in my guests are Auntie Elsie & Uncle Cyril & Nan and other ex fire brigade staff, all the Fire Authority members and the Mayor of Reading too. After the presentation there will be a reception. Courages will be doing the catering. You are now registered with the Halls of Residence and they have your driving licence photo so we now await to hear from them. I have also completed the forms for a University grant which were a bit of a bind. I still enjoy my pipe and would welcome some tobacco if you are able to bring some back. Wendy is going to Bournemouth for a college interview on Thursday, Mum is going with her and then she has one in Eastleigh at the beginning of May. She requires 3 'O' levels for one and 4 at the other. If she gets cracking she may get them. I have got a new RFU tie to celebrate its centenary.

I have not ordered a colour tv and doubt if I will. I am currently of the opinion that it is too much of a time waster and would be worse if in colour. Congratulations on getting the library finally open and you must be encouraged by its initial success. The quiz at Stoneham went well and Bournemouth won. The school looked after us well especially your old sweetheart Dolly Gray (!!!). One of my new young officers Mr Holland did a lot of the arrangements for me and finished up quite scared of her! Roy Edwards met her the other day – I don't know in what connection – he was scared too (*Mrs Gray was the school secretary, as Head Boy I had quite a lot of dealings with her – I think I just buttered her up for things*). Yesterday I ceased to be Chairman of the FB National Football Committee as I was elected Vice Chairman of the FB Sports & Athletic Assoc this means I will become Chairman next year for

probably a 2 year term. I will be at the FS College at Dorking next week as I am now part of the Regional Board for Selection of Officers to go on courses at the college.

### WEDNESDAY 22 APRIL – LETTER FROM WENDY

I've just looked at my diary and realised it is 2 months since I last wrote to you when it was half term. It was then back to school to finish my mock 'O' levels. At weekends I have mainly been meeting Jane and/or Pete at their houses and listening to records. Went to see *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* which was sad at the end. I didn't think George Lazenby was as good as Sean Connery. On 7 March it was University Rag Day so I met Jane in town to look at the floats etc but didn't think it was that good. I have been making a couple of skirts which have had to be handed in for the 'O' level. I enjoyed the Fire Brigade Ball and didn't get to bed until 3.30 am. I have had a couple of days away from school with a terrible cold. I just had to have a break because Elsa has grabbed a load of rubbish out of my bin so I had to chase her all the way down the stairs. She's still as frisky as ever.

I decided I ought to get a Saturday job so I have started phoning shops and eventually got one in Timothy White's (*now part of Boots*) and I started there on 21 March. I start at 8.45 am and finish at 6 with an hour for lunch and 2 x 15 mins tea breaks. It's very tiring but good fun. I get 28/= so I save 25/= of that. Guess what counter I'm on – gardening! People keep asking my advice about fertilizers and as you know I'm not much help about that. I also have to wrap up potted plants and get in a right mess. We went to Top Rank for my birthday which was good but I am getting a bit fed up with Pete but I don't know how to finish with him. I was really pleased to get your birthday telegram and for the £1 which I will put towards a blouse I want. Mum & Dad gave me a lovely radio and Nan, £5. I had various other presents including the LP *Motown Chartbusters Vol 3*. Jane came up on my actual birthday and we were going to go to the sea but just finished up at Finchampstead Ridges (*only about 10 miles away*). I also got dragged into playing school hockey again and Jane too who'd never played but surprisingly our team won the trophy but we ached for 4 days. Went to see *John & Mary* with Mia Farrow and Dustin Hoffman which was quite good. The next day I told Pete that I couldn't go out but he phoned about 9 and asked if I still wanted to go out with him and I said no! So that was the end of another romance (ha ha)! after 4 months 2 weeks and 1 day which was a bit long anyway wasn't it?

Tomorrow I am going to Bournemouth for that college interview, it is at 4.30 pm so I am having the day off school. I think your friend Eleisa looks lovely can you bring him home in your suitcase. If all the boys out there are like him I think I'll join VSO.

**SUNDAY 26 APRIL – LETTER FROM MUM**

Just a couple of bits I forgot to put in my last letter. Did you get the letter in which I told you that Auntie Dais and Auntie Peggy had given me some birthday money to put in your account because you mentioned their cards but not the money? And also Anita Freeman wondered if you got her package because it was so small. The Rotary Club do with Lord Boothby was a great success. I went with Wendy to Bournemouth – we went by train, Wendy thought we might get lost if I drove. She was very thrilled to be offered a place but she needs to get 3 'O' levels including Maths & English – she is having homework for her English and her mock result wasn't too grim. Wendy is dead keen to go. On Friday Dad and I went to the Fire Brigade Ball at the Fire Service College at Moreton-in-the-Marsh – it was a wonderful do and we made pigs of ourselves with the food! We asked Wendy to come but she wasn't interested. Last night we went to The Bull at Sonning with Jean & Tim and then went onto Bracknell FS as they were having an Old Comrades Evening and then back home for a final hot drink. You will be pleased to hear Wendy has been taping for you this tea-time. As you know Philip & Margaret are in Lagos, Nigeria but Margaret has jaundice and is very depressed and wants to come home.

**FRIDAY 15 MAY – LETTER FROM MUM**

Wendy has been busy with interviews, after Bournemouth she went to Eastleigh which was for a medical course. Dad and I went with her and had lunch at the college. Wendy enjoyed the interview so we now await for the result. This interview was on a Saturday so we went on to Southampton to look at the shops. We had Elsa with us and she was lovely and enjoyed all the crowds and traffic. Wendy bought a very sweet nightie for our holidays. By the way on our way to Eastleigh I suddenly remembered I had left Elsa's meat in the oven at 400 and we did not intend to get back to Reading until the evening – as you can imagine Dad's mind was running wild. He had to radio fire brigade control to ask if someone could go round with



a ladder to open an upstairs window, get in and turn the oven off – quite funny really. On Friday Wendy attended her last interview at Slough College, she didn't feel she had done so well so was very surprised when she received a letter this morning offering her a place subject of course to her exam results, she could travel there daily.

The book from Smiths arrived and I have sent it on to you about 2 weeks ago – surface mail, you did say you were in no hurry for it. Nan continues to keep well and is going on holiday with Auntie Dais to Weymouth for a week in July. The Council are buying the adjoining Ushers Brewery site and we are wondering whether they will offer Nan some money for her property. She's not worried about it as the Council will have to find her somewhere else. Last Sunday we were at Nan's and Dad, Wendy and Elsa went for a walk and called in The George for a drink. They met Colin and Ann (*cousin*) in there and had a good natter. They were a bit late back for lunch but Nan was OK about it when she knew who they had been talking to. Last Thursday I went to a film show at the Town Hall with the girls from work, they all came here for a cup of tea before we went there. I think I told you I was doing extra hours well I'm finding it too much so I've told them I want to go back to 15 hours a week and will do that as soon as they've sorted things out. There are a no of shops closing in Reading town centre and I'm sure you will enjoy having a scout round at the changes. The Caversham Rotary Night was held 2 Fridays ago, it was very successful. Our party of 8 came here for a drink first and then coffee afterwards and got to bed at 3 am. We are still meeting Jean & Tim quite regularly on Saturday evenings for a pub visit. We take it in turns to choose and have a few lined up. We have had an invite to the Press Ball and Bob Monkhouse is the cabaret. Michael Parkinson is also doing something. We also had an invite that night by our bank manager to a Ladies Night but have had to turn that down

Dad has just poked his face up against the window to get me to ask you if you would rather come home here or to a new house. As you can guess we are still talking about it but are getting nowhere fast!

#### **SATURDAY 16 MAY – LETTER FROM DAD**

The weather has been poor recently which doesn't help with the gardening. The vegetable patch is doing well, I've planted radishes, carrots, potatoes and beetroot this time plus some rows of beans. As I write I am surrounded by the lovely smell

of our first lilies of the valley and the garden is full of lovely flowers and flowering bushes. I need your help to cut the grass! We are going to see some kennels at Goring next week for Elsa for when we are on holiday. I went on a training course at the College to do with the Selection Board I am now on. They now have closed circuit tv there so they recorded our practice interviewing and played it back so we could see how we got on. I didn't realise I was so severe. You can guess what Wendy and Mum said – I told you so. Wendy and I are a bit at loggerheads at the moment over her visits to Top Rank on Saturday nights I expect we shall sort it out though. The new inner distribution road is coming on well and also the new FB Headquarters at Dee Road. I am enclosing some slides of these. The adjoining officers houses should be ready for 1 June.

Now to the medal presentation. It was a wonderful evening. The appliance room at Caversham Rd FS had been gaily decorated with flowers etc. Courages were doing the bar and food. There was a parade of officers and men from all stations and about 120 guests. All the Fire Authority members were there plus the Mayor of Reading and the Chairman of the County Council. The medal was presented by the Lord Lieutenant of the County. Mum and Wendy both looked smashing – Wendy was a hit with all the young firemen, Nan got on well with 2 of the Reading aldermen and Mum can't remember much as she had too much gin. I am enclosing a slide of it and I expect you have seen the press cuttings. The following Thursday the senior officers took Mum and I out to dinner. The venue was a secret – we went to the White Hart at Sonning to their Elizabethan Room. This was great – I was crowned king and could give what orders I liked. The waitresses were suitably dressed and we drank mead and wine and had our food on wooden platters and ate with our fingers. There were a couple of speeches and then music afterwards. So we have had a very busy week and are all worn out.

#### **THURSDAY 21 MAY – LETTER FROM WENDY**

What's happened since I finished with Pete – well I bought a new dress for Carol Over's wedding but I also wore it to Dad's medal presentation. I also bought some material for a skirt and made it in 6 hours! which is marvellous for me. Auntie Mary & Uncle Guy came over and we looked at your latest batch of slides which were very good. The other Thursday it was *Radio 1 Club* at Top Rank. The papers said there were 3,500 people there. Tony Blackburn was the host. Carol's wedding

was very good but I had too much to drink. On one of our Top Rank visits it was over 18s only so we couldn't go in. We went to see *Butch Cassidy & The Sundance Kid*. I think Paul Newman is lovely, it was a great film. I had a careers interview at school, Dad came to it – we both thought it was a waste of time because I had already put in for all the relevant technical colleges.

Mum's told you about my Bournemouth interview and I'm still waiting to hear from Eastleigh. Then there's Slough. It all depends on my 'O' level results. I am keeping up to date with the taping and am now on the 19th tape. I am going to dancing classes regularly on Mondays but they tire me out. We had our French oral exam and I was very nervous about it and shaking like a leaf. The examiner was very nice but spoke a bit fast and I don't think I did too badly. I had a crafty look at his marking sheet and think I got 12 out of 20 which isn't too bad for me really. On 3 May we went to Nan's for the Sunday and had a lovely roast – are you missing those? I enjoyed Dad's presentation and was speaking to a lot of firemen. I don't really remember the end of the evening much except that I got to bed about 1. I was feeling happy and proud but I was also swimmy and kept bumping into things. I got up at 7 with a splitting headache. The next day my picture was in the paper and people are still coming up to me about it! I went to a fair at Hills Meadow which was very good but I spent too much. We went to a dance in St George's Hall in the Oxford Road but it was really grotty so we left at 10 and went into town. We went to the Glendale cinema to see *Henry V* because we are doing that for 'O' level. It was funny because the film was really old and you could see where it was cut. Dad and I had a row about Top Rank as he didn't want me to go there because of its reputation and the age limit, so I was really fed up. I don't think it's fair – I only go out on Fridays & Saturdays and it's my money and there's not much else to do and I enjoy it. Don't tell him for goodness sake. Please think of me when I'm doing my 'O' levels as you're the only one in the family who really knows what's involved.

#### **TUESDAY 26 MAY – LETTER FROM MUM**

It seems a long time since we heard from you. Nan is well – I wanted her to come to Reading for the Whit weekend but she decided not to bother! We went down on Sunday and her 1st words as usual were – have you heard from Peter, doesn't it seem a long time. Auntie Doris visited; Nigel (*her son*) has really long hair down to his eyebrows and (*other son*) Paul's wife is expecting a baby. Wendy and I went

to see Mike Paxton's baby only 3 months old now but a sweet baby girl. Ella came round. Angela has applied for a summer job in Germany. She has been offered a chamber maid job in a hotel in the Black Forest if she decides to accept she will be leaving this weekend. Dad and I went to see some kennels for Elsa, they've only been open a year and look good. They were spotlessly clean and the woman in charge seemed very nice. Had an expensive time with the car recently. The insurance this time was £10/11/=, repair of the rust £30/6/6d and the tax is due this week, I'm only going for 4 months tax this time which is £9/3/= as I had the other bills to pay. Wendy has now also been offered a place at Eastleigh College. I think that is very good to have 3 interviews and have 3 offers. She has decided to accept the Eastleigh one if she gets the exams.

#### ADDED BY DAD

The weather has been really good lately. On the Whit weekend The League of Friends of Borocourt Hospital had Daneshill Gardens again. I had my usual band of helpers doing teas and a variety of other jobs. We took about £60. I am on holiday this week and spending some time each day in the garden. I must say I think it looks really good even if nobody else does! and tidy. Today while Mum was at work I took Elsa to Christmas Common. She had a lovely run and then we went to a country pub for a beer and a sandwich, another run and then home for tea. On Tuesday Mum persuaded me to go shopping – I bought some new sandals for my holiday and tried to buy a new lightweight suit for the holiday and Heelas (*John Lewis*) are trying to get my size. By the way when we go on holiday we think we ought to give VSO an alternative address in case your flight is while we are away. Jean & Tim would be happy to meet you and accommodate you if necessary. How would that suit you? Already planning the Borocourt Autumn Fair. We had a meeting this week and decided a no of things – no star to open, no entertainment – always difficult to arrange and not very profitable. The old folks summer outing is to the new Billy Smart's Safari Land – I have a contact and they are letting us in free. This is a place you must see when you return. We will probably be having a young Canadian staying with us for a few days in June. He is joining the Ontario FS and had the opportunity to come here to study the British FS. The new headquarters is progressing well. We will be going to the Order of the Garter Service at Windsor and hopefully will get tickets for Royal Ascot.

# TALKING TO COWS AND LOCKED IN THE LOO – YES VERY FUNNY!

## **SATURDAY 6 JUNE – LETTER FROM ROTUMA**

Thanks for the parcel, a nice surprise – the nuts were sheer bliss although quickly consumed and the crisps made lunch much nicer and you know how much I like fruit gums. They must have been the most expensive crisps because the postage was wow! and also because I had to pay 50c (5/=) duty on it, I expect because of the films included. I also received a package which was the radio competition prize which turned out to be 2 pkts of playing cards + 600 cigarettes. Spot had 300 of these and I gave the rest to some of the teachers and boys (*not schoolboys!*). The last recent boat we had was a Govt vessel bringing cattle – in fact it's an old army landing craft and can come right onto the beach. Some Govt Inspectors came too and we are expecting one at the school, so the past week has been busy making sure everything at the school was 'just right'. The next boat should be about the 17th which will principally be to collect the copra. On 8/9 July another boat is bringing the Governor, Sir Robert Foster. I expect I will be invited to a function at which he is present. I don't expect I would have met both the Governor & Chief Minister if I had been on the main island.

Last week I went to see the DO to say I hadn't heard about my boat back. So he sent a note through to the RCA bookings for a saloon passage (rather than the deck!) for the early September boat – so I hope they have a vacancy. The last boat that came brought a good variety of food including potatoes and fresh corned beef which we have enjoyed. We cook in peanut oil and I have been cooking quite a few chips recently while the potatoes last – they turned out very well. With this food variety the butcher had liver and oxtail for a change. We made a stew with the oxtail which lasted 3 days. In March Spot ordered some coffee which he percolates, peanut butter, currants plus numerous spices and 2 bottles of cheap wine and this

has now arrived. There has been an enormous cock-up with Spot's pay and to cut a long story short I have had to pay for most of the food for the past couple of months and he has had to borrow and have credit all over the place. We are still waiting for it to be sorted. Spot was going out with Lisi quite seriously and in fact asked her to marry him – she declined. I was like the postman passing letters between them. Spot was very upset but Lisi didn't seem too bothered! Lisi and I still get on very well, she cuts my hair, we go to the dances together and the films, it's a pity she's 23 otherwise... That reminds me that Suzanne who went to Australia is now back in Suva apparently she didn't like it in Australia. She wants to come back here but her mother isn't keen as in going to Australia she went against her mother's wishes. Records – I particularly like *Venus* and *The Same Old Feeling*.

I hope you'll let me use your car when I get back, I know I'll have to get used to the traffic again. My toe is playing up again, the injections seemed to help initially but there's a problem again. The doctor wasn't there yesterday so I will go again on Monday. Recent films we've had have been *Jailhouse Rock*, *Rotten To The Core*, *10 Commandments*.

#### **SUNDAY 21 JUNE – LETTER FROM ROTUMA**

In my last letter I forgot to mention best wishes for Father's Day and I trust Wendy got you a card and tobacco. I am very disappointed at the election result (*Conservatives won – Ted Heath elected PM*). I may be coming back on a boat about 6 September. I went to see the doctor about my big toe and he said the best thing was for my nail to come off. I had an infection either side of the nail which meant the skin was growing over the nail which was getting rather soft and yellow. I had the operation on Wed 11th. I had 6 injections in my toe to deaden it and he peeled it back from the sides to the middle. I had a dressing put on and have to have it changed every 2 days but the dressing is now off. While I was having the operation a no of locals were watching through an open window!

FRIDAY 12TH FUNNY INCIDENT NO 1: I was due to visit some boys camping out as part of their DoE expedition (they had done their trial run with Chris, my predecessor). I borrowed a bicycle from the shopkeeper and as it was dark also had a torch. The road was rough and the ride was an experience in itself plus one to my crotch. I got to a point on the track where I had to leave the bike to walk. There

was bush both sides of the track and it was quite windy after about half a mile I got to the right place and against the track the boys had left a stick with a message attached – gone this way sir – pointing into the bush. Note I was only wearing shorts and shirt. I turned off the track but could hear no voices. I called out and thought I bet they're hiding and will jump out on me. Very soon I heard a deep voice saying hello..o..o..o. It was just like Suakmasa's voice. I turned the torch off and stood there calling to them and after about 10 mins called out – right you lot I'm going home and you've all failed. I got back to the track, walked to the road and just as I got there the boys appeared – they had been to the next village to get a lamp. I told them what had happened and they said that there was a cow there! This has now gone down in the local news as the time I spent 10 mins in the dark in the bush talking to a cow. But – the next morning I had some spots at the top of my legs and blotches on my arms. The next day Sunday I was covered head to toe in blotches and I was very worried as they had appeared so quickly. I went to the hospital and the nurses were shocked, the doctor wasn't there. They thought it must have been caused by brushing against some plant or other. They gave me some pills and cream for the itchiness and by Monday evening it was gone! On Tuesday I had a dreadfully sore throat and so back to the hospital and more tablets. I had more boys camping last Friday but this time I wore long trousers, shoes and socks.

FUNNY INCIDENT NO 2: It was at the coconut shed where we have our Saturday film shows. Adjoining the shed is a toilet which I went to use before the show started. I noticed there was a wooden swivel catch on the outside, but went in and slid the inside bolt along. Having finished I slid the inside bolt along but the door wouldn't open – I think when I went in and slammed the door the outside catch had somehow locked. The toilet was situated at the screen and speakers end of the shed and I could hear they were advertising a future film with Connie Francis singing *Where The Boys Are*, it was so loud so no point in calling out as I wouldn't be heard. It was very hot in there and I thought I might be there all night. I stood on the seat and through a gap at the top of the door called out each time the film went quieter and kicked the side of the toilet which was corrugated sheeting. Apparently some people inside heard the noise but thought it was just somebody messing around. Then I saw some children on a nearby path and called out and waved my hand through the gap but they just ran off and then came back to peer so I called again and they ran off – I think

they were scared. I was sweating buckets. Eventually 2 boys came along who I knew and I called them and they let me out. I had been in there 45 mins and missed half the film. No doubt that will be the latest funny when word gets round school tomorrow

There's a small group of 35-45 year olds we call the 'hoo-hee' gang – they get together to drink orange wine before any social event, dance etc and usually get a bit tipsy and are most amusing and once I joined them and had too much wine and fell asleep. One of the woman is called Ragafuata and when she dances and sees a nice boy she says 'hoo-hee' loudly – hence the name. Anyway when I was asleep she kissed me and ever since then they have called me Tifao (that's her husband) the 2nd. Anyway 3 weekends ago a picnic was arranged by the hoo-hee gang, the Indians who own the shop, Father O'Neill, Spot and I. We had a smashing time with curried goat, roti, rice etc plus beer and rum. We played cards and had music, went swimming – it was really good.

Films we have had recently include *7 Brides for 7 Brothers*, *Son of Spartacus*, *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold* and yesterday *The Yellow Rolls Royce*. Next Friday 26th it is the big social event; Island Night with about 300 attending. You have to wear a *sulu* and shirt. I'm having a new shirt made – yellow and black and probably a new *sulu* too. Lisi is making me a grass skirt too. Last Monday we had a day off for the Queen's official birthday and so had a relaxing day

We soon have exams starting too. 2 of the boys have finished their DoE and I have their books and badges and we are waiting for the DO to present them. Other boys will be finishing soon.



SUNDAY 5 JULY – not much news during the last 2 weeks – the Island Night was a great success. My insurance policies expire on 26 August and I think they should be extended by a couple of weeks.

MONDAY 6 JULY – boat has arrived so need to go and collect my post.

LEFT: *Ragafuata and I dancing at a picnic.*  
*Fr. O'Neill, with hat, in the foreground.*



## II

# UPDATE FROM HOME

### **SUNDAY 7 JUNE – LETTER FROM DAD**

Thank you for the Cession Day programme what a wonderful 3 days you had. The Miss Rotuma contest reminded me of the Miss Reading contest at the Press Ball – as usual none of us agreed with the judges but they were all lovely and it's always difficult to choose. It was a good thing we only knew about your canoe capsizing in retrospect or we would have worried. Nevertheless you seemed to have done very well and it is nice to have these emergency tasks now and again to prove yourself. We were very relieved that nobody was hurt. Wendy is busy swotting and so far hasn't thought her exams were too bad. I have been working hard in the garden and think I got it better than it has ever been. The mower was recently overhauled and now does a very good job. Today I cleaned out and scrubbed the pond, it had got very green and slimy and you couldn't see the fish. I watched the World Cup match tonight – England v Brazil. Wonderful match but as you will know England lost 1-0, great shame but England missed a no of chances. Reading by the way slowed down at the end of the season and finished just above the middle – same as usual! Last week I heard from University Halls and I am accepted as a Junior Common Room member at Commonwealth Hall. This reads well and is in the centre of London. They want confirmation by 15 June and I haven't yet heard from Queen Mary's Halls. I may telephone them this week to see if there is any news. I think I must accept the Commonwealth Hall's offer – I hope that's OK.

Tim, Jean, Mum and I went to the Dog and Partridge at Binfield Heath last night and afterwards had some eats at home. We had a slide show too, some Tim had taken and of course a collection from you. Tim thinks you are taking much better balanced photos now!. We are going to the Garter Ceremony on Monday with

the Canadian boy who is staying. I hope they have the flagpole upright this year. I am going to the bank tomorrow to see the best way to send you £20.

**MONDAY 8 JUNE – LETTER FROM MUM**

I'm a little bit worried that you won't enjoy the old roast beef when you return after all your exciting dishes you are having. I can see that you will have to take over the cooking. Dad is very fond of curry so we shall have to see what can be done. I just could not have eaten those birds that were killed out of the tree!

Wendy was thrilled to get your good luck telegram for her exams. She was busy taping for you yesterday. Dad says to tell you that he rang the Queen Mary's Halls of Residence and eventually spoke to Dr B H Chirgwin the Warden and he said that you were going to be offered a place. So on that information we shall turn down the Commonwealth Hall's offer. We hope you are pleased about that. I have cut down my hours at work and apparently we are getting a pay rise of 12% so my hourly rate will be 9/11d an hour. Dad has been working hard in the garden and it looks lovely not a weed in sight. The Canadian boy is arriving this weekend. I was reading your letter the other day and the phone and door bell went at the same time and as I got up Elsa grabbed a page of your letter and darted off down the garden. I was getting really mad at her but naturally she was having great fun – we eventually got it back although it was torn. I think you will find the local girls dull and unattractive back home. I was telling Kate about your orange wine and she said that her mother had made some grapefruit wine and that it made her grandma quite light-headed – she is 93. You mentioned about bringing back some material for dresses, the amount I would like is (*detailed amounts then follow*). *Dr Zhivago* is on again at the cinema but I don't really think I can go a 4th time. A lot of the roads in Reading are being made one way from next Monday! I will do as I'm told a week Thursday and vote LABOUR for you – ok?

**MONDAY 22 JUNE – LETTER FROM WENDY**

Fancy having *The 10 Commandments* – do you remember when we saw it at the cinema Nan fell asleep. Yesterday I did some more taping, including *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, *United We Stand*, *Instant Karma*, *Wanderin' Star*, *Let It Be*, *Don't Cry Daddy*, *Spirit In The Sky*, *In The Summertime*, *ABC*, *Alright Now*.

I've got to go for a while now as I'm cooking the dinner – just to whet your

appetite it's fish fingers, fried potatoes, peas and rhubarb and cream and a cup of tea. Do you have traditional tea out there?

On 20 May we had a half day for the Town Sports Day so I went to town shopping. The next day we went to see a double bill of *Midnight Cowboy* and *Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush* – they were both very good. The next day we helped at the Daneshill Gardens which Dad or Mum has told you about. There were some boys there and one called Gerry phoned later to see if Jane and I would go out with him. We weren't that keen so said we would after our exams. He said he would phone again. Then we had 2 days off for half term. The following Friday I went to babysit for Marion Lane and she gave me 15/= which was good, I slept there overnight. They had a nice house. Then my exams started – I thought they were all quite hard especially English Language so now we have to await the results

I've been to the dentist and have to have some fillings which I'm dreading! Mum saw an advert in the paper for a Saturday cashier at Guys the hairdressers. I went in about it and he said I could start on 4 July. I'll get 35/= which is 7/= more than I get at Timothy White's. Georgie's boyfriend Kim works there so at least I'll know someone. All the other staff are men so I hope I'll enjoy it. At school we had a film called *To Janet, A Son*. It was about the birth of a baby. I still don't fancy having kids much. Tomorrow Jimmy Ruffin is on at Top Rank and I am looking forward to that. About the dress material would you mind if you didn't bring me back some as I'm not into dresses much at the moment. If there is any plain material – navy or brown – that would be OK.

#### **SATURDAY 27 JUNE – LETTER FROM MUM**

We have sent you £20 in travellers cheque and hope they arrive ok, we have sent it registered post. As you know Dad laughs at me because I don't trust the post box down the road and always go the General PO. What a pity your prize was cigarettes but I guess you were popular with the school teachers and boys. Hope your passage back has been organised properly. I guess you will start in London in early October. You'll be pleased to know that the decorators are coming next week to start on your bedroom, we are having the lounge done at the same time, the ceiling there has got really filthy this last year. It will be a right muddle for the next couple of weeks but hopefully worth it in the end. We have been having lovely weather the last few weeks and I am hoping to get a tan before we go on holiday to Tossa. I have

been busy buying Dad new clothes for the holiday. Thought I'd better smarten him up for the beach as we are joining forces with Anita and family. Dad and I do not like Wendy's dress sense of late. I more or less have to beg her to wear a dress. She wears long skirts and shirt tops. She looks so nice in a dress and much slimmer!

Dad and I are going to a VSO coffee evening on 15 July. Mrs Lustig phoned and said she hoped Stephen would be home by then and could show some slides. They asked if we knew who the next VSO is in Rotuma and suggested it should be a Reading lad again. Sunday – we are at Nan's again.

### **SUNDAY 28 JUNE – LETTER FROM DAD**

Phase 1 of the new Fire Brigade HQ is open, the 6 officer's houses are occupied as is the workshop and we should be taking over the fire station part any day now. It is all very exciting. Phase 2 starts on 1 August. For the new Officer's Club we are having a social evening at the Sports Club next week, then a swimming party at Eric West's in July and a skittles evening at a pub in Riseley in October. Mr Lovegrove retired last week, he was the last of the old Reading Fire Brigade. We had a social evening for him with nearly 200 people there and I presented him with a certificate, camera and tankard. He has been a good chap and has done a lot for the Brigade and the Sports Association. On Friday evening we went to the Fire Brigade Fishing Club Dinner at an hotel in Maidenhead, the meal was lovely but not very lively company. On the way over on the A4 the whole route had hippies thumbing lifts to go to a jazz festival in Somerset – it was quite entertaining.

The Annual Inspection of the Brigade starts on Monday 7 July so it will be a hectic week, but nothing to hide so it will soon go. Your girlfriend talk sounds interesting but I wouldn't get too attached to anybody. Do you remember Lionel and Joyce George – he used to be a fireman and emigrated to Canada. He's a policeman there. They have been here for the past 3 weeks and had an evening at home with us. They asked if they could have a party at the fire station – this I allowed and all his old colleagues and friends came – it was quite a do! I am off to Taunton tomorrow for 3 days interviewing officers for courses at the FS College. The long awaited Holyroyd report recommends only 40 Fire Brigades so a lot of CFOs will be axed. It also recommends that the College at Dorking is closed and it all moves to the one at Moreton-in-the-Marsh (*this indeed did happen but not until the Thatcher Administration in the 1980s*).

# ALL GOOD THINGS MUST COME TO AN END

## **SUNDAY 12 JULY – LETTER FROM MUM**

You will be pleased to hear that your bedroom is finished but we haven't put the furniture back yet. I am pleased with it and only hope that you approve. Had a lovely surprise on Friday, there was a knock on the door and it was Stephen Lustig standing there. He came in and nattered for about an hour about his year with VSO. He looked quite thin and said he had lost about a stone in weight. He said it was a funny feeling to be home again and everyone looking so rich. He had been to town and was staggered at all the one way streets. We will be seeing him again on Wednesday at the coffee evening. Stephen Stroud also called as his university year has finished, you have probably heard that he passed his exams. His Mum has suffered a nervous breakdown and has been in Moultsford Hospital – she was always such a lively soul so hope she will soon be better. We have at long last had the Creed Hall offer in writing. I think that is much better and that you will enjoy it – Stephen Stroud of course disagreed with me – I could get cross with that lad at times!! In the June VSO newsletter there was a list of 1970-71 volunteers and 2 listed for Fiji Peter Jackson and David Wilkins so one of them might be for Rotuma. We may find out more at the function we are going to on Wednesday. I passed David Goodchild in town the other day, he looked very smart and had a smart young lady with him. Terry Chapple I haven't seen since you left but there is an end of term dance next Thursday for Westwood & Stoneham Schools and Wendy has told been told that it's Terry's group that will be playing the music. Wendy is going so we may hear something of Terry then.

Wendy, Jane, Dad and I went to Julie's 21st. There were about 60 friends there all very noisy and with it and plenty to eat and drink. Mary & Guy had hired a hall which was better than trying to do something at home. Doesn't seem possible that

you will be 21 next year, we will have to hire the sports club at Sonning if you want a party. I'm not looking forward to Tuesday – I begin some sessions at the dentist. Dad is digging potatoes – they really are super. Our air tickets arrived yesterday. To date we have no news of your grant and I doubt if we will get much.

#### **ADDED BY DAD**

This week I was notified of my pay rise – 13.5% which was 1% more than other local govt officers, I don't know why but not complaining. Our wedding anniversary was quiet, Mum bought me some tobacco and some swimming trunks with matching beach jacket. I bought her a bouquet and let her chose a new swimsuit – black and white, it looks lovely on her. As you know we had HM Inspectors here last week. It all went well with different events and visits each day. We went to a very good cocktail party at Bracknell Development Corporation on Friday eve and on Saturday to Marion & Les Lane's for supper and Wendy was of course at Top Rank. Today I have been gardening as Mum mentioned (the potatoes) and Kate has been round and cut the lawn edges for me and done some sunbathing. Next week should be quieter although I have the Fire Authority meeting on Thursday, I am asking for more men and a change to the duties pattern so expect a battle. The new station is finished but not occupied – I shall do this gradually as I recruit more men. Next Saturday I am judging the Squirrel Trophy for your sea scouts and in the evening we have the Rotary Swimming Party at Riseley. As you can guess we are all looking forward to your homecoming and hope you don't arrive while we are on holiday.

#### **TUESDAY 14 JULY – LETTER FROM WENDY**

I am bored at school as there's nothing much to do with term finishing on 21st. The Jimmy Ruffin show was really good, there was a great atmosphere but it had to finish at 11 and nobody wanted it to end. The next day I had to go to the dentist for 3 fillings and at the end I couldn't close my mouth. The dentist pulled and then I was OK – apparently I had dislocated my jaw. I am going out with Ian at the moment and we have been seeing each other quite a bit. Mum mentioned about Julie's 21st it was quite good although Jane and I were the youngest there. I got to bed at 2.30 am and had to be up at 7 to start at Guy's. It was really good and I've never earned 35/= so easily before in my life. On Sunday I did some taping for

you. Last night Ian and I went to a new youth club in Tilehurst, there were a load of people from school there. On Thursday it's the school dance, Terry's band are playing! Stephen Stroud came up and we finished up arguing about the Labour & Conservative parties. It was lovely to see Stephen Lustig, he said it was strange waking up and not remembering where he was. I am writing this in what is normally Maths lesson and will finish as the bell's about to go. Yesterday I did my personal survival swimming test at the Central Pool – we had to swim 12 lengths, do a surface dive, get out at the 6 ft end, jump off the 2nd board, swim another 2 lengths, tread water for 3 mins with pyjamas on, take them off in the water. It was hard but luckily I passed – all you get is badge. I'm feeling very pleased with myself at the moment. See you soon.

**TUESDAY 14 JULY – LETTER FROM MUM**

This is a hurried note to say we received a letter from you today. Very sorry to hear about your toe and the injections. Hope the travellers cheques have arrived. Had a lovely laugh about you being locked in the lavatory and could picture the situation. Also your conversation with the cow, what a lovely life you seem to be leading in Rotuma. By the way Dad posted a letter to you yesterday without a stamp, hope you get it OK – the PO normally put one on and send us the bill. It was a great shock about the election Dad can't quite get over it. The price of tobacco has gone up today by 2d – Dad is blaming the Govt.

**SATURDAY 18 JULY – LETTER FROM ROTUMA**

As expected I had an invitation to a Welcome Ceremony for the Governor on 8 July and then on the 9th to a Cocktail Party. For the do on the 8th it said RSVP which I did and apparently only 3 out of 78 replied!. The school was given another day off on the 8th. I wore long trousers, a white shirt and tie and sports jacket. For their best dress the Rotuman men wear a dress *sulu* of good quality cloth of a plain darker colour and white shirt. Spot decided he'd get a similar *sulu* – it looked really odd as it only went 4" below his knees (they should be nearly to the ankles) with a bright tie and a sort of brown-green jacket. With his moustache and long hair he looked a right sight and there were lots of sniggers. The children formed a guard of honour. I was in the guest's enclosure and had a seat right behind the Governor – very honoured. The school choir sang *God Save The Queen*. We'd had a rehearsal

at school the day before at which I was the Governor. There was a lot of dancing too and there were 2 presentations. Mr Inia one of the District Chiefs received the MBE and the Police Sergeant received the Colonial Police Medal. After this it was luncheon. I didn't have my camera with me deliberately as I didn't think it was appropriate as I was a 'distinguished guest' – so this will just have to be in my memory.

You will recall the problem I had with my big toe – well a similar thing seemed to be happening with my middle toe so after the luncheon we went to the hospital by appointment to have that nail removed too. As it was a smaller toe I only had to have 2 injections. Spot was watching and said the needle bent as it went round the bone (sounds terrible). After this we went home for 2 hours before the next event. The Archbishop had come from Suva to confirm 100 children. I went to the church ceremony at 5. Now I'd been to 2 Catholic Church services before and found them boring, but this was interesting probably because there was so much going on – anyway, it was 2 hours long. The Archbishop was an American. After the service, the Archbishop, Father O'Neill, Spot and myself went into the Father's living room and had some beers and hors d'oeuvres. We were then told the meal and dancers were ready.

We sat down and thought that the dancing would start but, oh no, everybody wanted to kiss the Archbishop's ring and as there were some 300 there you can imagine that took quite a while! Once again, as guests, we had our meal first and each of us had a woman to serve us. Home at 10 after another hectic day but most memorable once more.

The following evening was the cocktail party at 6.15 pm held in the DO's house. I was introduced to the Governor, Sir Robert Foster and once inside there was plenty of nattering and the local band was playing. It was whilst talking to Mr Inia that the Governor joined us and we chatted for about 10 mins and he was interested in my exploits on the island and then related a few humorous stories about his life. The event was quite merry and the Governor was dancing. 2 men including the local doctor had too much to drink and fell on the floor – fortunately the Governor didn't see this. The party finished at 9 and then we all went in buses to the anchorage at Oinafa. The massed choir sang farewell songs, there were a couple of speeches and then the Governor was carried on a specially decorated platform to the boat which took him out to the ship. Then we had to wait for the



Archbishop to arrive (bad planning there) and went through the rigmarole again and then off they went. By the time the buses had dropped off everyone round the island and we had something to eat it was 1 am. Nothing much else since then. Recent films: *King of Kings*, *Clarence*, *the Cross-Eyed Lion* which is the same as *Daktari* on the tv. Surprisingly a Govt boat is coming tomorrow to mend the mast at the Post Office – so hopefully will get some mail.

A few comments on your letters – the travellers cheques arrived ok, so I will change them when I get to Suva. I hope Elsa will be OK in the kennels. It's good Wendy got 3 college offers. I'm really looking forward to a roast meal again! But not pork as we have a lot of that – and a good steak and kidney pie and cheese and tomato sandwiches. Thanks for sorting out my accommodation at Creed Hall, in the prospectus it says the dining facilities are shared with the female Hall so that sounds good. I don't think the Halls are actually near the College (*actually they were at South Woodford further east and Queen Mary College is in Mile End Rd – a few miles apart but only 5 stops on the tube*). According to the prospectus the University term starts on 6 October a Tuesday, it then says the 1st year students usually start on the preceding Monday so I don't know if that means the 5th or Sept 28th. Strictly it should mean the 5th but I bet it's the 28th! I have not heard who my replacement is yet but gather the details were sent through to Suva but lost! As soon as I know I will write to him or her with some info like Chris did for me. Wendy – I know you don't want me to bring any bright material for a dress, but there's some I've seen as a dress on a girl here. It very bright and florescent and would be great when dancing with lights in a darkened room, so I'm bringing some and if you really detest it somebody else can have it (*it was white with huge coloured flowers – and fortunately Wendy did make a dress and liked it very much*). 3 records I like and don't know if you've taped yet *Biljo* by Clodagh Rodgers, *Yellow River* by Christie and *El Condor Pasa* by Julie Felix. I hope you all have a wonderful holiday in Spain.

#### **TUESDAY 4 AUGUST – FINAL LETTER FROM ROTUMA**

The boat that was coming with men to mend the PO mast arrived, left the men and had to return urgently for Suva to take a little girl who had been run over and gashed her head. The doctor thought it looked serious. We went on a picnic yesterday which was very pleasant. The place we went to was rocky rather than sand so

good for swimming. Funnily each time we decided to go swimming it decided to rain and the water was really cold. I am now quite suntanned although tomorrow it will probably have faded. To eat it was the usual fayre! I've also just had my haircut it's a bit like a Roman Emperor. There are only 9 days left before school exams and there seems a lot of work to do. Still no news on my successor. Yesterday at the picnic the girls took a photo of me so I am hoping it will be good enough to enlarge and have on show at home! We have had some very good dances lately and they have all been well-attended.

I haven't told you about our shipwrecked couple. It must have been about 8 weeks ago, they were from New Zealand and their boat got wrecked on the reef, luckily it got swept onto the reef and when dawn broke they came ashore in a dinghy. The 'captain' is called Bas and he must be about 60, small and wiry but the sea-faring type. Tends to be very muddled in his mind. His wife is small, more intelligent but has a terrible whiney voice. They have a boy called Chris who's about 12 who's rather cocky. Well they're still here just sitting around quite fed up. When the boat was 1st wrecked he thought it was irreparable and 'gave' the boat to the local people. However overcoming the shock and looking at the situation more rationally he decided the boat could be repaired and 'claimed the boat back'. It has cost him a packet to get local men to move it up the beach and get supplies from Suva. The local chief is hindering him hoping he will give up and give the locals the boat back. They have been staying with the chief but now have their own place. They did have some of their property stolen which shocked me but funnily she had 7 pairs of shoes on their verandah and one of each pair was stolen!

2 of the local boys Faga and Mua have just called in and have sent their love to Wendy. I'm looking forward to coming home to see you all but am leaving with some misgivings as I have had a wonderful year and have made many friends. The boat is due soon and in fact we have just seen its lights approaching the island.

Wed 5th – boat arrived and I have the final raft of newspapers etc plus letters. I see my replacement is to be David Wilkins from Newbury which you may already know. I have had a short introductory letter from him and it may be you met him at that VSO Coffee Evening as the letter was written some time ago. If it's OK with you I might go with Stephen Stroud to his auntie's in the country before I go to university. When I get to Suva I'll telegram you with the flight details. Look forward to seeing you in about 4 week's time.



*David Wilkins, my VSO successor, with local dignitaries on my last day.*



*Jione, Faga, Victor and me saying our final 'Adieus'.*



*Motusa children's farewells.*



*My last view of Uea and Itumutu.*

*David Wilkins the new VSO arrived on the boat on Monday 31 August and I left at 10 pm on Tuesday 1 September. I did not keep any detailed notes of my departure. I did note that I had a saloon cabin on my return and arrived in Suva on the 3rd. I saw Suzanne whilst there, the Rotuman girl who spent some time in Australia. I returned home a couple of days later but have not recorded the exact date*

*What a year!*

# APPENDIX I

## PRESS CUTTINGS AND FURTHER PHOTOGRAPHS



### Reading youth off to the Fiji Isles

EIGHTEEN-year-old Peter Bridges, of Downshire Square, Reading, hopes to be on his way to the Fiji Isles this month to take over from another Reading teenager with the Voluntary Service Overseas.

Peter, who is Head Boy at Stonham School and an Assistant Scout Leader, is waiting for final clearance to travel to Rotuma in the Fiji group.

Rotuma is 500 miles from Fiji—and the only way in is on the boat which calls every six weeks.

Peter will replace Christopher Burgess, of Woodcote Road, Caversham, who has spent the past year in the island. He will be going to teach English and another arts subject—probably geography.

He will also establish a library after Christopher appealed to the Reading VSO committee for books.



### Peter Bridges recalls his V.S.O. work

ON the second day out from Fiji we saw no land at all, just an endless expanse of sea; yet this did not mar the experience of seeing the Pacific sun rise and gradually pass over the ship before sinking beneath the horizon later in the day. But about nine a dusky silhouette appeared as Rotuma came into view—at last we were there.

Soon the ship was anchored outside the reef and small boats came scurrying to meet us. It was not long before we were heading for the land.

The boat rammed hard against the shore, for there was no wharf, and the next move was to jump ashore fully loaded with your luggage. It was wet feet if you missed—as I found out. The beach was full of interested faces all eager to see who was arriving and with a boat only every six weeks this was obviously a big event.

We then climbed into a truck and began the uncomfortable journey through the bush.

Such was my introduction to Rotuma, a sun-drenched Pacific island, and with a boat every six weeks bringing all the island's supplies making it the most isolated island in the Fiji group.

This also marked the beginning of my stint as a volunteer for V.S.O. (Voluntary Services Overseas).

My "project" for the year was teaching at Malaha High School. I had been told it would be Maths and Science but I found myself teaching English and Geography—which just shows that you have to be ready for anything.

In such an atmosphere as the Pacific and with the sea and sand outside the classroom, teaching must be one of the most pleasant jobs around.

The year gave me scope also to assist in other fields—the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and establishing a public library, being just two of them.

What spare time there was gave me ample opportunity to join in the island's social life and hence study the way of life of the 3,000 Polynesians resident on Rotuma. There were only six Europeans, including myself, on the island.

Opportunities arose for me to take part in Rotuman dancing and singing and to sample various tropical drinks such as orange wine and "grog" made from the roots of a local bush, looking like mud, tasting much the same but making everybody very sociable.

But I was lucky because Rotuma is as near perfect as one could get. Other volunteers will find themselves in the cold of Labrador, the humidity

of Central Africa or such places as India where tension is nearly always present. Yet wherever you are the fact that you are there, doing a job of work in surroundings you never quite would have believed—is an adventure and a chance of a lifetime.

When I went to Rotuma I was fortunate enough to go straight from school; but as the standard of education and all other facets of life rises in these countries so the standard of the volunteer must be higher. Consequently the number of volunteers who are accepted straight from school is steadily decreasing.

The need, as it always has been but increasing so now, is for graduates and other qualified persons. Volunteers are wanted not only for teaching, far from it, but also for medical assistance, road construction, farming and Government work to name but a few. Graduate volunteers normally go for two years.

A point of two on finances. All expenses are paid for by

V.S.O. in some way or another and reasonable allowances are given for kit, before you leave, and for board, food (if not provided in kind) and pocket money whilst you are at your project.

It is difficult to mention all facets of a year with V.S.O. but what I've written will give you some idea of what's involved. A year or two may seem a long time to be away from home and all its obvious attractions but I think once you've made the decision that you'd like to go and have sent off the application form you'll eagerly await the day of departure.

Recruiting is from September to March, so if your interest is aroused at all drop a line to: V.S.O., 14, Bishops Bridge Road, London W2.

It may not be all orange wine and hula-hula girls, it could well be darned hard work, but you'll certainly have a great time.

# Orbit Frisked! for a pair of scissors

WITH all this hijack business about, the airport officials at New York were taking no chances this week. In fact they confiscated the scissors that 19-year-old Peter Bridges, of Downshire Square, Reading, was bringing back from the island of Rotuma, in the Fiji group.

"I had to open my bag to show them what I had," said Peter, who has just returned to Reading after a year with Voluntary Service Overseas in Rotuma. "They took away the scissors."

A former assistant Scout leader and head boy of Stoneham School Peter is the son of Mr Ken Bridges, Chief Fire Officer of the Herks and Reading Fire Brigade.

## Successful

In October, Peter goes to London University to read law.

His main projects . . . apart from teaching at a secondary school in Rotuma . . . were to firmly establish a library and continue training boys for the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme.

Both these have proved successful.

In Rotuma, Peter taught the school's top forms English to just beyond O-level standard, and geography to the fourth form.

There were six other teachers. "Some of the pupils were only nine months younger than I was," he said. "The people of Rotuma are very friendly and helpful but rather shy. They made me welcome everywhere I went. It was unusual eating roast pork and going for a swim on Christmas Day. But it was pretty hot."

He said: "I am very glad I went for the year. I consider it well worthwhile."

What are his immediate plans?

"I think I'll have to get used to the traffic first," he said. "There have been some changes in Reading since I left. And anyway, I have to get used to the rush again. You don't rush around at all on Rotuma."

## EYES and EARS Peter Brown



Steve McQueen

As the fire chief said after seeing



Ken Bridges

## Towering Inferno . . .

SPOTTED queueing in Friar Street to see The Towering Inferno was Berkshire's fire chief Mr Ken Bridges.

The film tells the spectacular tale of what happens when the tallest building in the world catches fire. Mr Bridges got in by the skin of his teeth and had to sit in the front row.

How did he enjoy watching his screen "double" Steve McQueen playing an American fire chief performing deeds of derring-do suspended from a helicopter? And how would he fancy doing the same?

"Yes, I did enjoy it," says Mr Bridges. But no, he wouldn't care to dangle at the business end of a chopper cable. "That wouldn't be good management."

"You train your staff to carry out the sort of functions you decide are necessary."

Tallest building in Reading is Nugent House, the riverside HQ of the Thames Water Authority.



tions ensure that the sort of thing I saw in the film could never happen here. Or should never happen.

"But, of course, if a stairway is blocked or staff aren't properly instructed, any escape system can break down."

"On the whole it was an exciting film, though there was some exaggeration in the more spectacular sequences. I'd recommend anyone involved in the construction of buildings to go and see it."

"We certainly don't have equipment capable of reaching to the top of that," says Mr Bridges, "but we don't need to. British building regula-

ABOVE: "Welcome home, Mr Bridges. I believe you are a friend of John Huckell so could you please step this way..."

LEFT: Dad was a well-known 'Reading person'...

OPPOSITE: With a plan to raise £2000 for the Fire Services Benevolent fund, Dad takes the leading role in the Dragon boat charity relay.



## Fire chiefs blaze a trail



### —DOWN THE THAMES ON A DRAGON

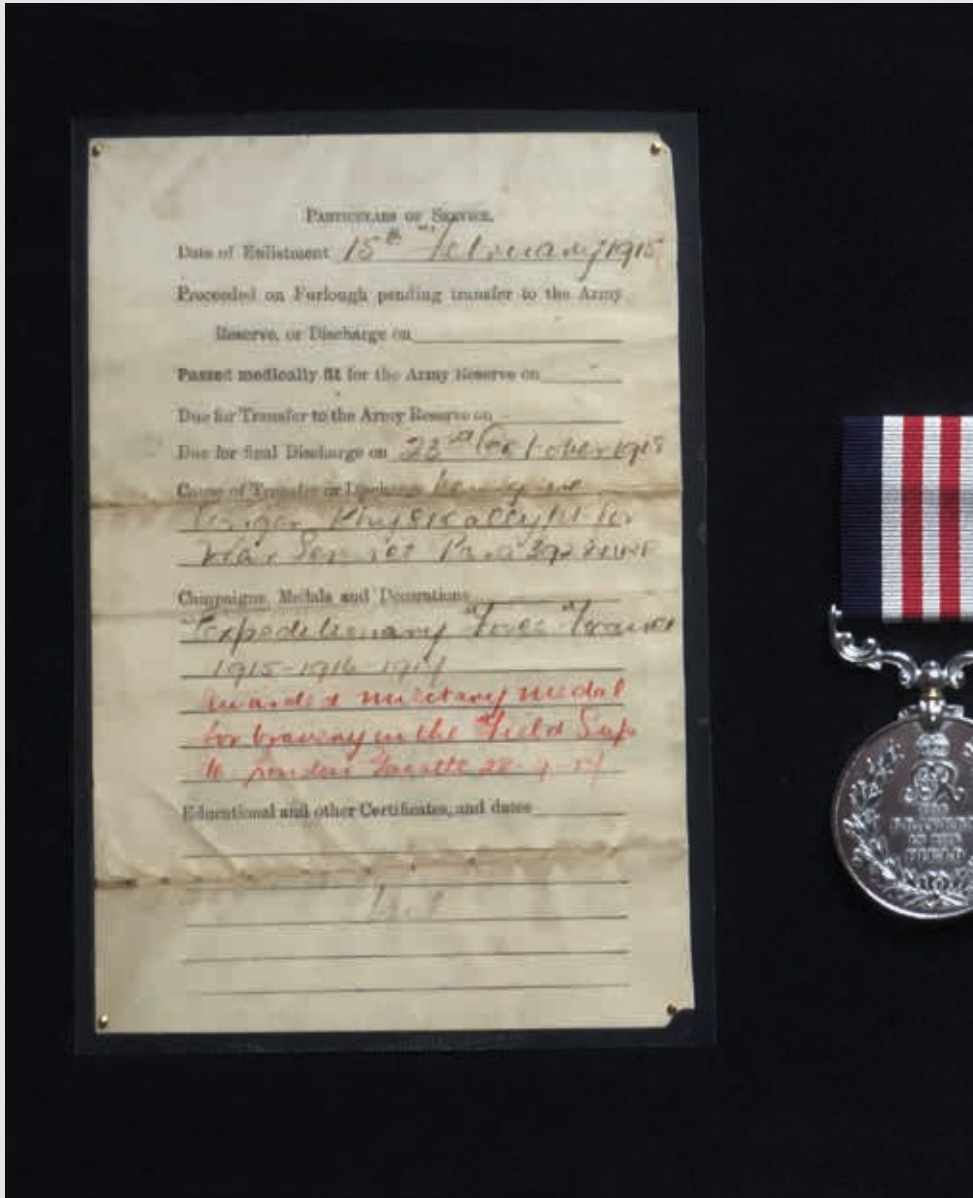
FIREMEN are pretty used to handling water—but it isn't every day they have to float on the stuff in a Chinese Dragon canoe.

So a group of Berkshire firemen were down on the Thames at Laversham today to inspect the dragon-aid canoe in which they plan to paddle 100 miles along the Thames in September. The firemen aim to spotlight an appeal for £2,000 to the Fire Services National Development Fund, and the idea of paddling the canoe 100 miles in under 40 hours came from Berkshire and Reading chief fire officer, Mr. Ken Bridges.

The canoe is being loaned to the V.M.C.A. Sea Sports, and today it was shown to the fire brigade group by Mr. Brian Peach, Assistant Scout Leader with the 1st Reading V.M.C.A. Sea Sports.

How did a "Chinese Dragon" canoe come to be in Reading? It was once the property of the British Army, and was later acquired by the Sea Scouts. A flat-bottomed, timber-built craft, it is 20ft long and weighs approximately 1 ton.

The "Dragon Venture" as it is called will be carried out by relays of rowers. Obviously a great deal of administration and planning will be required, and Mr. Bridges, "in addition to our ranks of rowers we will have a large number of people waiting behind the scenes, monitoring, feeding, and communicating during the week-end of September 13-14."



CITATION READS: "Expeditionary Force France 1915–1916–1917. Awarded Military Medal for bravery in the Field Sup to London Gazette 28-9-17."



LEGEND READS:

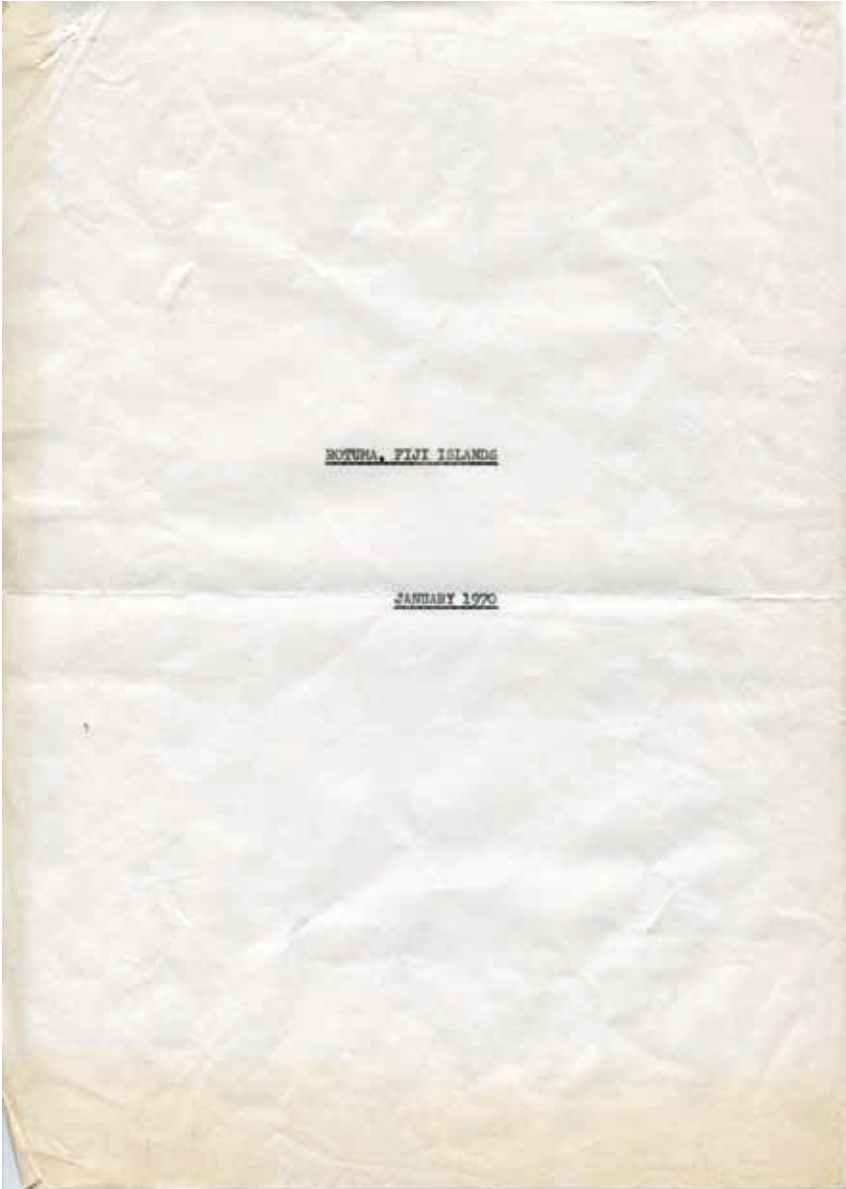
94165 • Gunner Frederick Strange MM • Royal Field Artillery



# APPENDIX 2

## GUIDE TO ROTUMA

*Produced by the author, January 1970*



-1-

A brief guide to Rotuma, one of the Fiji Islands.

Rotuma's position is quite isolated and if you have been fortunate enough to come here, then you are one of a privileged few. The fact is that so few Europeans have been here that very little information is available about the island. I do hope you will have the chance to meet someone who has stayed in Rotuma and can give you a more detailed account and perhaps illustrate the description. Because of this lack of information I hope this brief guide will be of some assistance.

January 1970, Peter Bridges V.A.O. 1969-70

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2 Map of Rotuma	11 Economy and industries
3 Description	12 Occupations
4 Relief	13 Shops
5 Climate	14 Services
6 Vegetation and crops	15 Education
7 People, customs and ways of life	16 Communications and shipping
8 Animal life	17 Recreations
9 Buildings	18 Religions

#### 1. A FEW FACTS

Rotuma is located at 12° 27' South, 177° 7' East. It lies some 450 miles NNW of the main Fiji Islands, Viti Levu and Vanua Levu.

Rotuma is approximately 10 miles long and is at its widest point about 2 miles. It lies east to west and is shaped rather like a dumb-bell, with the eastern bulb much larger than the western bulb.

There are ten islands lying with a mile offshore, all individually named and all uninhabited.

Rotuma has an area of about 18 sq. miles.

At the 1966 Fiji Govt. Population Estimates, the number of Rotumans within the colony was 5,997.

The number of people in Rotuma stands at 3,067 (1969).

Altogether there are some 6,000+ Rotumans in the world, taking into account the number within the Colony and also the relative handful elsewhere - chiefly Australia and New Zealand.

Rotuma was ceded to Britain on May 13th 1881. Among current discussion is the course Rotuma should take if Fiji becomes independent of Britain. It is most likely that Rotuma will stay with Fiji, but she does have the choice to go the other way.

/ . . . .

● MAP OF ROTUMA



-3-

3 DESCRIPTION

For a tour around Rotuma the island is best divided into two sections, east and west of Motusa - the village where the two bulges come together and the roads meet.

Travelling eastwards on the north side of the island - the road here as in all parts of the island is just sand except on the hilly parts or areas likely to become boggy in bad weather, in such cases the road is concreted. The road between Motusa and Ahau is perhaps the steepest on the island. Ahau is some 200' above sea level, a small village housing the Govt. buildings and houses for Govt. workers. The buildings are modern, built of wood with a fresh-looking appearance, (see section on 'housing'). After leaving Ahau the road does not run along the sea edge, which is usual, but runs a few hundred yards inland with heavy bush and trees on both sides. Two or three villages are passed through before reaching Malaha. A long out-stretched village of about a mile. The High School and Primary School which stand together are imposing white buildings. The road from here to Oinafa is quite rough with bush to the south but open to the north to give clear views both of the sea and also of the coastline ahead. Although more or less at sea level, the coast is craggy with rocks and small coves - about two villages are passed through. Oinafa is only really busy at boat time as it is here that the boats anchor and also the R.C.A. have some warehouses here. Two offshore islands lie within a  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile of the beach, contrastly one of them is quite flat whereas the other is tall rising to about 150'.

The distance from Motusa to Oinafa is about 7 miles. Whenever the road passes through a village it tends to spread out reaching the front of the houses or their gardens - and these do not usually stand in a uniform line.

The road between Oinafa and Nactau is flat and open to the sea to the east, the road passes through Pajjai, with the school on the left hand side and the playing fields on the right. Nactau is largely occupied by the buildings of the R.C.A. Headquarters - offices, warehouses, etc.

The northern side of the island is generally very humid mainly because it is sheltered by the inland hills which shield the wind, blowing from the south-east.

The road now bends southwards and the coastline becomes much more interesting with rugged coast, rocks, coves, and several interesting offshore islands. One of these islands is about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile long, at the western end has a large section of trees but at the far eastern end, quite alone, stands one coconut tree. At Kalvaka, on this road, is a unique coconut tree on some 50' up its trunk, it splits and becomes a forked tree, the only one on the island. At Sudi is the large Catholic Mission which is set in extensive grounds and is very impressive. Of course all along the route hundreds of coconut palms are in abundance plus numerous other trees including some really large tropical varieties with diameters of some 7'. The coast continues to be as above, we pass through Lau, a small village, but very pretty and extremely well kept; and so back to Motusa.

Now travelling westwards there is no circular route, but a choice of three roads. Taking the northerly road first; once you have passed about a  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile of wood on both sides then you are immediately in Itusuta which stretches for about a mile along this coast, flat and solid dwellings on each side, until the road finishes and a large hill towers above you. This hill dominates this part of the island and it is best viewed from Motusa, especially with the sunset behind it.

Just before entering Itusuta a road branches to the west and this passes through the bush for about two miles to Iona - somewhat cut off and the westernmost village. Before leaving Motusa the third route, winding its way through the houses, reaches the

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southern side of Rotuma bay. (Rotuma village has sea on both sides), and here is the village of Hofmann which lies facing the south and is very exposed to the sea. Although this i.e. Hofmann, is as far as the buses go the road does continue, though narrower, and after an interesting journey of about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile up and over a small hill we come to the village of Papufa. It is sheltered on all sides by hills, has a lovely beach and is very quiet and pretty. Papufa is very popular for picnics and recreations with its rocks and adjoining cove and the additional attraction of an underground cave, a few hundred yards from the beach, with very cold, refreshing water, whose level is controlled by the sea level.

The whole of the western end has a special attraction - probably because it's, on the whole, more awkward to get to. Very rugged coastline, hilly and on making your way through the bush tracks (which is not difficult) you probably find yourself some 40' above the beaches. Three islands lie offshore on this side of Rotuma. Uea is the largest island offshore and it rises to about 700' and is about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile from the mainland. Another island is known as Split Island as it is almost two islands joined by a 'rock bridge', it lies further afield - about a mile out.

There are many other roads - 'bush tracks' - leading into the 'blank' areas on the map, these are in good condition generally.

#### 4 RELIEF

The coastal lowlands which extend around the islands (eastern bulb) are rarely more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile in width. The average height is below 150' above sea level and the surface is on the whole fairly flat. All the villages lie at sea level except for Abau which is about 200' above the sea. In the interior there are volcanic hills which are below 1,000' e.g. Solhefu - 840' and Solmafua - 710'. The hills have steep sides and are almost round. Geologically the hills and the island are very young (tentatively estimated to be about a million years). There are some twelve or so hills in Rotuma. The interior flatlands occupy the rest of the island with some of the flattest parts being between Malaha and Sumi.

The eastern end is generally higher and less inhabited; where the land reaches the sea, there are usually cliffs of about 40'.

#### 5 CLIMATE

Rotuma lies within the Tropics.  
There are two seasons although not well defined.

- i) The Hot Wet Season (Hurricane Season).
- ii) The Cool Dry Season.

The Hot Wet Season lasts from the end of November to the end of March or early April. Variable winds blow across the area during this season but mainly from the north north-west, west. This is the Wet Season too because these winds are rain-laden.

The Cool Dry Season lasts from the end of May to October when the south-east winds blow regularly. These are known locally as the 'Tongan Winds' because they blow from the direction of Tonga. In normal years a fair amount, at least 3" a month, of rain falls during this season, but often there are short droughts of some 6 weeks. Nights are fairly cool and dew is formed early in the evening.

The annual average rainfall is 139.87". Most of this falls between December and March. There is an average of 240 wet days.

The daytime temperatures are frequently over 90°F, but the cooling effect of the sea breeze can counteract this.

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6 VEGETATION AND CROPS

Natural Vegetation cover consists of original bush and tropical forest with trees growing close together, and reaching heights of over 200'. Climbing plants are plentiful and the forest is fairly clean and free from thick undergrowth.

Largely in between the coconut groves is found secondary bush and scrub - noticeably near the volcanic hills. These are areas which were once cultivated but are now left fallow.

The rest of the vegetation is chiefly coconut palms, sometimes concentrated at 180-200 palms per acre, or gardens. In the interior the density of palms is probably 15-20 per acre interspersed with the gardens. The lantana weed is the greatest enemy to the palms which may be (estimated 65% are) 50-70 years old and past their greatest yielding period.

The gardens - often worked by the younger boys - include all crops used for subsistence; yams, taro, breadfruit etc. - all these are in plentiful supply. There are also many fruits - bananas, pineapples, melons, mangoes, fac and other green-skinned varieties. Local fruits and vegetables are all in abundance and, of course, the coconuts have many food qualities which are greatly used.

7 PEOPLE, CUSTOMS AND WAYS OF LIFE

Rotumans are a unique race of people really - there are only 6,000 of them in the world; they have their own language and have a beautiful island as their 'territory' where conditions are such that they have all necessities they could want - they are really in a very enviable position. They lead a life where 'cannibalism' is the key word.

Rotuma is administratively part of Fiji but other than that the two countries have little in common. Fijians are of Melanesian stock and as such have dark skin and fuzzy hair; Rotumans are of Polynesian origin and therefore are more associated with the islanders of the more westerly islands of Tonga, Samoa etc. They are light-skinned and have straight hair - admittedly some do have some Australasian (and hence originally European) ancestry.

They are an extremely happy people who seem to have few, if any, problems. They are very friendly and - as I'm sure is common elsewhere - willing to help friend and stranger alike. An activity of one family is really an affair for the whole village and everyone joins in to help both for the work and for the fun afterwards.

Rotuma has its own language which is spoken largely at home and in the village; English, however, is the language of business and teaching, is spoken not only by the schoolchildren but by almost all Rotumans. The standard is surprisingly good and they are well acquainted with modern day terminology of things outside their experience. Often Rotumans will lapse into English when conversing (and not necessarily out of courtesy because a European is present - although they do of course acknowledge this fact) - it's a case of knowing two languages and choosing the one you feel like. The Rotuman language has over the years become rather distorted i.e. meanings changed, words obsolete - but this is probably due to the fact that it is mainly a spoken language very little is written. There is little material about the language - although a study of it was made and a book written 'Rotuman Grammar and Dictionary' by M. A. Churchwood (-ward?). It was written some 30 years ago and a lot of it is now not relevant.

A few aspects of life here.

Rotumans spend a lot of time preparing food - especially when a feast is due; indeed this is another aspect of life - any reason to have a feast, then the Rotumans

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will have one. For example a wedding not only involves the feast on wedding-day but two others as well; one when the announcement of the event is made and the groom's parents assure the bride's parents that their son will not 'back out at the last minute' and secondly when the prospective husband and wife and the bride's father go to the local office to register the intentions of a wedding. Thus two feasts both with plenty of guests even before the wedding takes place. Whenever anybody of note (e.g. the sisters at the missions) leaves the island then there is sure to be one, and so the list goes on - teacher's socials, Xmas etc. Much preparation goes into the food. The main item being the meat - a cow or pig will be killed and skinned and an oven prepared. A large pile of rocks will be thoroughly heated for some hours, they are then removed from the fire and spread out on the ground in one layer, then the animal plus a large pile of vegetables are hurriedly placed on the rocks, covered with smoking and then earth is piled on - the final oven being about 3' high. After about 3 hours the earth and smoking are removed and the food is cooked. While this is going on other foods will be prepared, noticeably various combinations of the coconut meat and bananas, animal fat, other fruits etc. The final feast ready, then a table will be made on the ground of banana leaves which are very firm and when washed very clean. The guests sit down the sides of the table and the local girls will be constantly fanning - mainly because of the large number of flies in Rotuma. The meal will thus consist of beef or pork (perhaps both), local vegetables, chicken, sometimes a goat curry, fresh melons and pineapples and the various coconut mixtures which are by now tied up neatly in a banana leaf. This meal is virtually the standard dish for a feast, but it makes a pleasant change from the otherwise rather standard meals of everyday life. At such feasts a large number of speeches will be made - some of great length, this is also typical.

Rotumans - although, (as in all small communities) many families are inter-related - on the whole families are not really very close. Firstly some of the family will probably be on Viti Levu, where there is obviously more future; but it is not only the young people who are there, in many cases it is one or sometimes both parents, leaving children in Rotuma. Therefore children are often to be found living with uncles, older brothers and sisters etc.

The men, generally have more of a life than the women here. The women mainly stay at home keeping house and looking after the, probably rather large, family. The men having finished work will probably indulge in a 'grog' session (see later), or drink and in the evenings it is noticeable that at such things as the cinema shows of the adults it is mainly the men who are present. It is very rare to see a man and his wife and family walking together. This does not of course mean that the women never go out and enjoy themselves but when they do then it is probably something extra for them whereas the men treat it as customary.

Some dress of Rotumans is typical of this part of the world some is more associated with the western world. I will point out here that one thing that will strike you is how associated with some western ideas Rotuma is - although it is isolated (and this is probably the factor that makes people think the other way i.e. isolation, hence backwardness c.f. the west), any chance to progress towards a more modern life whether it be in education or in equipping the home with modern appliances - then Rotuma will be eager to adapt itself whilst still keeping its own distinct character. Anyway, back to dress - the traditional costume is the 'sulu' - this can vary in design and material but is basically a piece of cloth wrapped around the waist (about 5' long), and hangs about 3-4'. For everyday casual wear the sulu will be of cotton material with a gay flowered pattern. It is considered proper for the women to wear the sulu under her dress - hence only part of it shows - the men wear theirs on top of their shorts or longos. For formal occasions and such things as going to church, for the men the sulu will be a thicker material and will be a plain colour, grey, brown or sometimes white (for church) and they will wear a white cotton shirt and tie. The women will wear their best clothes which again will include a sulu of a plain colour beneath their dress which itself will almost touch their ankles (i.e. hardly any of it shows).

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The young girls often wear skirts above their knees and on more formal occasions may wear a mulu as the older women do, but not always. The boys and girls all wear gaily coloured shirts, which add to the colour of the island. Cosmetics are often worn by the girls. So all in all, the mulu adds the tradition of the dress but otherwise clothes are such the same as in the rest of the world.

Shoes are not commonly worn in everyday life except by those in official capacities - again on formal occasions they may be added to the dress.

Grog sessions are part of a man's life here. Grog is the name given to the mud-coloured drink, made from the crushed roots of the yanggona plant and water. The roots are placed in a partly hollowed tree stump, they are then pounded with a heavy metal pest, the remaining shreds are then placed in a muslin cloth and are 'worked' in a bucket of water i.e. one man mixes the shreds in the water - making sure they don't come out of the cloth. The result is that the water turns a milky colour, it is then strained and ready to drink. The sessions which take place at any time of day, though normally in the evening (sometimes, quite common, the sessions go on all night), begin as soon as someone arrives with a bag of roots - and the news soon spreads that the session has started. The men sit in a circle and the coconut shell from which you drink is passed round almost continuously; once you've joined in a session it's very difficult to refuse to partake in the drink. Often card and board games will be played, with the women joining in. If you do anything not agreed with by the majority, e.g. have a private conversation with someone, then you will most likely have to have a 'punishment' drink. There is a very friendly atmosphere at the session, but after several drinks it does have its effects (so watch it). At Xmas time when the two copra associations have paid out their dividends then a way of life is certainly the drinking of beer and spirits.

Singing and dancing is another feature of Rotuman life. Rotuman dancing for display purposes is formal some dances being solemn and others gayer. Basically it is done standing in straight lines - the men forming rows to the right and the women to the left. The accompanying beat and lead singing is performed by a small group sitting on the floor behind the dancers the only instrument is usually a cardboard box which is hit with wooden sticks. The dancing is done more or less on the spot, with most of the actions being with the hands and arms although a swaying motion is set up by the constant shifting of weight from one foot to the other. The accompanying songs are of four lines the first two lines are sung twice and then lines three and four twice. Each time this point is reached then the front row moves to the back and a new front row starts the dance again. The gayer dances are similar with hand movements etc. but the dance is taken at a much faster pace and significantly the back rows move round the side to be a new front row - this continues until the original front row is in place.

Once this formal dancing is completed then the performers will strike up some gay folk tunes, singing and clapping begins and the dancing too; the dancers will go towards the audience and get them to join in - nobody is ever embarrassed by having to join in - for a bit of fun the old chiefs and women will often be asked to dance and this always brings the house down. At Xmas time (and in fact extending through much of January), Rotumans take part in what is called 'fara'. Fara is along the lines of carol-singing. Large groups, sometimes 50 plus, walk around the villages and decide upon someone's house as the 'target one', sit down outside it - it can be any time of night and start playing (some have guitars) Rotuman songs, coupled with this some get up and dance. Soon the occupants and neighbours congregate and bring lanterns and, by tradition, they come round and sprinkle talcum powder and scent on the back of your heads. After some ten songs you move on to another house. There are basically two variations on this theme. Firstly faras may be organized on a very large scale by villages; trucks will be hired to take what may be 100+ people round the island, stopping at various villages to perform - these faras will most likely include some formal dancing. This will be done in the evenings. Secondly groups may hire trucks to take them round the island - not to stop and perform but just for their own enjoyment. Singing takes place en route and a stop for swimming will probably be included in the

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schedule. This all takes place during the 'holiday' period which is authorized by the Rotuma Council and lasts from about December 19th for 4 or 5 weeks. Fans clearly illustrate Rotumans love of dancing and singing, their mutual friendship to all the islanders and their hospitality - as the village where the fans is taking place will 'pay' the performers with melons, pineapples and other foods.

In May we have the 5 day Cession Day celebrations held at Ahau. These include sideshows, a large Athletics meeting, a Miss Rotuma competitions, round-the-island bicycle race plus dancing etc. Perhaps the highlight of the year.

#### 8 ANIMAL LIFE

Although within the Tropics the usual assortment of creatures one might expect to find, are not present here. There is no jungle, the winds around the island cool down what would be a very humid climate, the fact that Rotuma is an island - are all factors which influence this position. Lizards are common but there are no large varieties; some small flesh-coloured ones are common within the houses.

Insect life is fairly busy. Mosquitoes are, as in most tropical countries, a nuisance but more of a pest here in Rotuma are flies - this is the real problem. Also present are cockroaches, beetles etc.

Many families keep cows, bulls, goats, pigs and fowl and also dogs and cats.

There are very few birds on Rotuma but the surrounding waters carry an abundance of fish.

#### 9 BUILDINGS AND HOUSES

There are three main types of houses in Rotuma: 1) houses made of the local materials available, 2) more modern buildings made of wooden painted planks and having aluminium roofs, 3) concrete houses with aluminium roofs and windows of a series of slanted panes of glass, for example.

The first type made of the trunks and leaves of the coconut tree are fast disappearing as the main building for living but such structures are still used (and indeed specially constructed for the purpose) as kitchens and sheds for copra etc. as cheap and easy to construct. The second type are on the increase, a large display of such buildings can be seen at Ahau and they look quite modern and not out of keeping with their surroundings. The third type are still to be fully developed, at the moment there are few of these. However all three can be seen together throughout the island.

The older houses basically consist of one room with the bedroom area curtained off, if at all. The more modern ones do have internal walls, although because of the heat they have no internal doors. More houses with aluminium roofs are now also having ceilings, because without - the noise of the rain on the roof is extremely heavy.

A lot of the furniture, in the more modern houses especially is completely in keeping with modern western styles, sideboards, fridges, linoleum on the floors etc.

The Govt. buildings at Ahau and Rotuma primary school are of type two; the other schools and a lot of the buildings at the Catholic missions are built of stone or concrete and on the whole painted white with aluminium roofs.

#### 10 ORGANISATION

Rotuma is divided into 7 districts namely, Itumate, Itutin, Nalaha, Oinafa,

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Naotau, Juju, Peppei. They are not equal as Itutiu has a population of just over 1,000 and Peppei some 200.

The district chief's position is hereditary within a family i.e. it does not have to be the eldest son. The new chief is chosen by the rest of his family. Each village also has its own chief and there are also sub-chiefs to the districts. Each district also has a 'representative'. He calls a meeting, before the Rotuma Council meeting is due, within his district to discuss matters to be brought up.

The Rotuma Council which is the immediate governing body in the island therefore consists of:-

7 District Chiefs  
7 District Representative  
District Officer  
Agricultural Officer  
Medical Officer

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and the Clerk to the Council - a Govt. official.

The District Officer is the Chairman of the Council and also the Chief Administrator in the island.

The Head Chief is by custom always the Chief of Naotau District (the district offices used to be at Naotau).

Meetings of the Council are held every 3 months or more often if the District Officer thinks necessary.

The Rotuma Council acts much like a local authority in Britain - making decisions concerning roads, buses, welfare of the people etc. All decisions made, however, have to be approved by the District Commissioner for Eastern Division (in which Rotuma is placed) of the Fiji Govt. Administrative Division.

Recently formed is the Rotuma Development Planning Committee made up of different sections of the community, schoolteachers, R.C.A. representatives etc. - it is to tour the island and try to formulate 'a plan for the future'. It will then act in an advisory capacity to the Rotuma Council. This committee has yet to function properly.

One of the topics under discussion at the moment is Rotuma's position if and when Fiji becomes independent of Britain.

The organization of Rotuma is completed by its two magistrates here and its two men police squad.

The magistrates are the District Officers:

Mr. Frederick Gibson, J.P.

and Mr. Wilson Inia, C.M.E., J.P.

Mr. Inia has done much for Rotuma, hence the decoration, is a former Head of the Senior School and is currently a schoolteacher at Rotuma District School and also the General Manager of the R.C.A.

## 11 ECONOMY AND INDUSTRIES

The economy of Rotuma is based upon its one industry - coconut production and copra making. Besides being 'nature's supermarket' (quoted in 'Reader's Digest') for the Rotuman household, the coconut tree is the basis of the island's wealth.

In Suva copra is graded 1, 2, 3, and Rotuman copra is almost without exception top-graded at something like 148 dollars a ton (2 dollars = £1 sterling). Something in the region of 300 tons a trip is about average. The handling of copra on the island is handled either by the Rotuma Co-operative Association (R.C.A.) or by the Rotuma Development Corporation (R.D.C.) - formerly known as the Planter's Association (and this term is still commonly used). The latter is the minority group of some 100 members, established in 1966.

The R.C.A. buys the coconuts from their owner virtually when they are still on

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the tree, from then on it belongs to the Association whose own workers cut it, dry it, sack it etc.

In the R.D.C. each individual member does his own cutting etc. the central association just dealing with transport etc. The situation arises thus:- the person dealing with the R.C.A. is paid sometime before the copra reaches Suva (when indeed it is not his anymore anyway), and the copra collectors etc. working for the R.C.A. will receive more or less a standard wage. In the R.D.C. the individual does not receive any money until his copra reaches Suva and can be graded. When this has been done he can then pay the R.D.C. for their transport, pay his helpers etc. and then see what profit he has made. Although a longer process the people in this association do enjoy a freedom not associated with the R.C.A. Both associations pay out dividends in December to their shareholders and these are usually quite substantial.

The R.C.A. has 8 boats calling each year.  
The R.D.C. has 5 boats calling each year.

Few taxes are paid in the island; few people earn enough to pay Income tax, although the Govt. employees do contribute to the National Providence Fund - which provides for later life. The copra workers do pay a few cents of each dollar earned to the Rotuma Council. This is usually paid by the R.C.A. in bulk and in a fortnightly period they may pay 500 dollars (\$250) to cover all their workers. The income of Rotuma is thus provided by Govt. payments, this copra workers' contribution, and obvious extras such as bus fares and very low school fees. On the whole for the manual worker, wages are fairly low but are supplemented by a plentiful supply of local food.

#### 12 OCCUPATIONS

The main employer on the island is the R.C.A. Firstly there is the large group concerned with the copra - copra collectors, copra buyers (those who weigh it), truck drivers, workers at the copra driers etc. Other employees of the R.C.A. are the office workers at Motuan, the workers in the warehouses there, bakery workers and more truck drivers to deliver goods to houses and shops. A handful of the workers at Motuan are women. The shopkeepers running the stores in the villages number about 18. The workers of the R.D.C. would probably be classed as self-employed although their business is copra too. The Govt. employs quite a number of workers too; bus drivers, mechanics, work-gangs to repair roads etc., office workers, 2 policemen, 2 post office officials, 2 weathermen, doctor, nurses, Agricultural Officer, and the District Officer himself. There are also domestic workers at the Govt. Station. Schoolteachers number about 37 with about a 50-50 ratio of men to women. There are 3 Catholic priests and about 7 'sisters'. There are also 3 Indian merchants at Motua.

#### 13 SHOPS AND FOOD

These are run by the R.C.A. in the villages and there main concern is food although the larger ones e.g. Motua, do do tailoring and sell such other items as toiletries, stationery.

Most foodstuff is of course available; tinned-meats, fish, (both in large quantities) jams, vegetables, flour, rice, onions, in fact all necessaries plus extras like jellies, tinned fruit. They are also the stockists for benzene (for the lamps) and keroosens (for the stoves). Sterilised milk, butter, and sometimes cheese, are also available. Fresh bread is available daily except Sunday. Note, however, that once stocks are finished there is no more until the next boat - you just have to go without, this sometimes does happen.

At the R.C.A. H.Q. at Motuan all things one could possibly need are available - you will probably be surprised just what you can buy in such a remote island. Food, toiletries, stationery of all kinds - they equip the schools, hardware, ironmongery, furniture, wood, paint and so the list goes on.

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The three Indian merchants all based at Rotuma do a large amount of tailoring but each also has a special sideline: one sells a good stock of food, the second holds a liquor license and the third specialises in radios, record players etc., runs a taxi service, and sells many household 'bits and pieces'.

The R.C.A. have set opening hours; whereas the other shops - as the owners live with their shops - do not.

The local people do, of course, supplement their purchases with local fruit and vegetables from their own gardens. Also a lot of the people, men and women, go fishing. Fresh meat is provided whenever there is a slaughter, which is fairly often; indeed if there is a feast, wedding, dus (which is often) then there will definitely be one. There are cows, pigs and goats on the island.

The visitor will be amply provided with local crops and fresh meat and fish.

#### 14 SERVICES

The Government Station is at Abau, and here are found the Police Station, Hospital, Bus Station, Post Office, Geol. Agricultural Officer, Accountant, District Officer etc.

##### Post Office:

Monday-Friday, full day, Saturday half day service. All post office facilities, including savings bank, radio telephone, telegrams, etc.

##### Police Station:

Police Sergeant and Constable, as members of the Fiji Police Force are on duty here. Crime rate almost 0.

##### Hospital:

A good service is provided for a relatively healthy country - being luckily one area free from malaria. There are three wards:- men's, women's and Maternity. There is also nursery to a limited extent and X-Ray facilities. Plans for extensions should come into action during 1970. Charges are low and the hospital staff can virtually be consulted at any time. There is a doctor and 3-4 nurses plus some domestic staff. There is an ambulance service and the hospital staff frequently visit the villagers at home. There have recently been campaigns against Tetanus and Filariasis.

##### Bus Service:

(See section on 'Transport and Communications')

##### Officers:

District and Agricultural Officers can usually be consulted informally in their offices at Abau, without an appointment. The Accountant's Department deals with wages etc., and also the issuing of licenses, registration of marriages etc.

##### Library:

A library has been established by the Rotuma Council and is being organised by the V.S.O. and P.C. volunteers there. It is based at the Epu Catholic Mission. Books, to date, have been given by V.C.I.S. from Britain. Other sources are being tried in an attempt to increase the number of books from its current level (January 1970) of 500.

#### 15 EDUCATION

Rotuma is the only island in the Fiji group which has compulsory education up to the age of 14.

There are three groups of schools:

- i) the Secondary School,
- ii) the Catholic Mission schools,
- iii) the three other Govt. financed schools.

The schools are as follows:-

Epu Catholic Mission ..... classes 1-3 (afterwards Sini)

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Suni Catholic Mission ..... classes 1-8  
 Motuma District School ..... classes 1-8  
 Malhaha District School ..... classes 1-8  
 Fepjei District School ..... classes 1-6 (afterwards Malhaha)

An examination is taken in class 8 to select candidates for secondary entrance. At this stage in their education many children go to Suva to complete it. In the schools with 8 classes the roll is about 250. As much teaching as possible is done in English. Subjects taught are such the same as in Britain ranging from Maths to Nature Study, with emphasis on such things as coconut trees, mosquitoes etc.

The High School at Malhaha has 4 levels of teaching:-  
 Forms 3a, 3b  
 Forms 4a, 4b.....at the end of this year the Fiji Junior Exam. is taken.  
 Form 5b.....for those retaking the F.J. exam and for others who will be taking the Senior Cambridge exam in their 4th year.  
 Form 5a.....Senior Cambridge ('O' level) exam. year.

Again many students leave after obtaining their Fiji Junior Cert., either to work or to continue their education in Suva. In 1969 there were 11 pupils in Form 5a. All teaching is in English, (Motuman not to be spoken in school) and subjects taught are Maths, English, Arithmetic, History, Geography, Biology (it is hoped to introduce some general science as soon as possible), Book-keeping and Craft subjects. Attached to the school is the Motuma Craft Centre (in fact it more or less is part of the High School). Staff at the school number 8; Headmaster, 2 Craft teachers, V.S.O. and P.C. volunteers and 3 others.

There are library facilities in the schools. Text books are in good supply but many are out-dated. The Catholic schools are on the whole privately financed by the Catholic Church, whereas the Motuma Council and Fiji Govt. are responsible for the other 4 schools. School fees are very low indeed.

16 COMMUNICATIONS AND SHIPPING

External

Communication is only to and from Suva. Shipping calls at Motuma either on behalf of the R.C.A. or the R.D.C. These boats are the lifeline for the island as they bring in all the island needs plus passengers and mail, and take back to Fiji coypre, which is how Motuma gets its money.

The R.C.A. has about 8 boats a year - approximately one every six weeks and the R.D.C. boats, calling every ten weeks, have about five boats a year. This means that on about four occasions in a year two boats will call within about three weeks of each other, otherwise there is usually a six week gap.

The R.C.A. boats anchor at Oinafa, whilst the R.D.C. boats use Motuma Bay. There are no wharfs and smaller boats (about 20' long) have to go and fro between the ship and the beach many times loading and unloading the ships. When lorries etc. are to be brought ashore then this entails lashing planks across two or more boats to form a platform. Loading and unloading usually takes about 2 1/2 hours. However, this time is affected firstly by the tides and secondly by the fact that if the boat arrives on a Sunday - which is usual - then nothing except for mail and passengers can be unloaded until midnight, when everyone gets busy; because Sunday is a strictly no-working day. The boat rarely stays for more than 48 hours.

Occasionally Government boats will call bringing officials to inspect schools, conduct driving tests, advise the Motuman authorities etc.,. Once again these rarely stay for more than two days. The odd occasion will occur when a naval vessel, in the vicinity, will call at Motuma. This is mainly an informal, friendly gesture. Some-

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times a good turn may be performed. In September 1969, H.M.S. Moughton called and whilst here blew a small section of reef up to widen the passageway to the beach.

Post Office:

There is a link between Rotuma and Suva by radio telephone and telegraph service.

Internal

Within the island, public transport is provided by 3 buses. During school terms these run trips between 6.0-8.30 a.m. and 3.30-5.0 p.m. ensuring that all children are taken to and from their villages and the 6 schools. Round trips also run about 5 times a day on certain days of the week. The bus service is extended for certain events e.g. Xmas Day services run at midnight and 3.0 a.m. for sports day, concerts, agricultural shows etc. Special arrangements are made. The trucks used by the R.C.A. and the R.D.C. are usually willing to give the walker a lift. There is also a taxi service run by one of the Indian merchants at Rotuma. There are few cars on the island, increasing rapidly is the number of motorcycles here. There are many bicycles and also some horses.

It is seen in the future the possibilities and advantages (and also some disadvantages) of a wharf and airstrip, although these are in a very elementary planning stage especially the latter.

17 RECREATIONS

As is common within a rural community a large amount of entertainment is provided within the home by the individual; card and board games, singing etc. The majority of homes have a radio which receives Radio Fiji and those with aerials can receive Australian, New Zealand and even American stations.

Singing and dancing groups are common within the different villages and these provide fun for the participants and also for the spectators when these groups tour around the island (see section on 'Customs and Ways of Life').

Two films shows can be seen each week; one run by the R.C.A. and the other by the R.D.C. These both show at different villages during the week and so this facility is available to all. The standard of films varies in presentation from old 1960 westerns to recent box-office attractions such as 'The Sound of Music'. All shows attract large audiences.

The two Catholic Youth Clubs based at Upu and Sani also arrange weekly entertainment programmes - the chief attractions being bingo drives and 'pop' dances, the music being provided by local groups, who are of a good standard.

Sport-wise; Rugby, Soccer, Athletics, Cricket, and Netball are played on a competitive basis during the year between the seven districts. The main sports field is at Ahau, although there are good fields at Sani and Pajjel too.

Rotuma Cession Day celebrations also provide much fun (see section on 'Customs and Ways of Life').

18 RELIGION

Religion is an important part of life here to the majority of people. There are three religions - Methodists, Catholics, Seven Day Evangelists. The majority are Methodists and the latter religion only has a handful of members.

There are Methodist churches in all the villages and the religion is taken exceptionally seriously. The two main Catholic churches are at Upu and Sani, although

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there are smaller churches in other villages but these are not serviced so regularly by the three Catholic priests here. It is generally thought that the Catholics are less tolerant than the Methodists, well if this is the case, then Rotuma is an exception. The Catholics enjoy more freedom than the Methodists (excluding the periods of Lent and Advent), the latter having rules concerning drinking, dancing, with partners etc. This is illustrated by the fact that it is the two Catholic Youth Clubs who provide much of the entertainment on the island.

Some areas are notably one religion e.g. Malhaha, chiefly Methodists; Lau, chiefly Catholic. In past history there have been feuds between the two religions which have helped this separation; nowadays both live amicably.

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# ROTUMA REVISITED



*Me arriving home – Heathrow September 1970  
with sister Wendy, left, and Mum.*

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What people are saying about *Rotuma Revisited*:

‘Totally implausible.’

STEVEN HENNEY, *Tide’s Out*, LONDON

‘I can’t wait to go there.’

JOHN HUCKELL, *Tide’s Out*, ENFIELD

‘Being an author is a *people* job: that’s why Peter Bridges is good at it. Yes, he is a loony, and he makes mistakes. But he knows how to deal with people, so they respect him.’

SIR GEOFFREY BOYCOTT, *I’m Simply the Best*

‘As I was saying to Alec Bedser, Tony Lock and Jim Laker at this morning’s Members free full English breakfast, this should be worth reading. Once.’

MICHAEL SARGEANT, KENNINGTON