

Continuing the fine tradition of
the "Torres Straits Pilot and New
Guinea Gazette"
Established in 1888

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Circulation numbers: **2900**
Published every Wednesday.
Readership average: **11,000**

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*We pay our sincere
respects to the elders
and the peoples of
the Torres Strait and
NPA, across whose
traditional lands and
seas we report.*

*This newspaper
is dedicated to
recognising,
preserving and
promotion the
traditional cultures
and customs of the
Torres Strait Islander
and Aboriginal
peoples of this region.*



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All letters are subject to
editing.

Forty-five years ago, on November 22, 1963, two other U.S. Air Force airmen and Bill Snell (*pictured right sitting on a bunk*) landed on Horn Island from Port Moresby aboard a USAF C-54 along with all their equipment to install a HIRAN Radar survey site on Mt Scott, Muralag Island. Bill contacted the *Torres News* to recall his visit to the Torres Strait. He shares those memories with us. All photographs were provided by Bill.

Remembering Thursday and Muralag Islands

By **BILL SNELL**, Indian Rocks Beach, Florida, USA.

We were part of a joint U.S. and Australian government survey mission to connect New Guinea with the northern coast areas of Queensland.

Thorpe Transport Company took us, our equipment, and 25 Torres Strait Islanders who were to help us carry our equipment up and clear the top of Mt Scott for our site.

We were dropped off on Country Woman's Beach, and the boats left us there with the Islanders who we had only met a few hours before.

We had no maps, little briefing about the island, other than no one lived on it, and we should beware of snakes. We were told one of the Islanders knew the way to the site.

We set off almost immediately. The

Islanders just took charge and we all started walking along the beach and then into the bush.

I do not need to describe the walk up to anyone who knows the island. I was awed by the terrain and the total environment.

We were only carrying essentials, no equipment. I remember thinking how are we going to carry the equipment, fuel, water etc. up and through this bush.

The view after we reached the top looking over Horn and Thursday Island with the blue sky and water was spectacular.

Later in the day I walked back to the beach for some reason. On my way back to the site and in heavy bush, I heard crashing in the bush behind me and this Islander came running up to me shouting "Kennedy shot himself, Kennedy shot himself!"

It was an unforgettable moment. He wasn't part of our crew and he turned around and ran away towards the beach and I never saw him again.

We learned later that Kitson Thorpe sent him over from Thursday Island to tell us the horrible news that President John F. Kennedy had been assassinated.

One morning a dog ran on to the site followed by an old, really thin man who shouted out, "Hello ole chaps, my name is Jimmie Joyce."

Jimmie lived on the north-west side of the island beside a creek not far from where an abandoned air field is today.

He kept horses, goats and pigs and lived by selling them and who knows what else to people on Thursday Island. We learned later he wasn't viewed too highly by many on Thursday Island, but he was wonderful to us.

Bringing us beer or other needs from T.I., building that tin house that survived a cyclone, letting us ride his horses, and taking us to T.I. in his dinghy.

He never asked for anything from us except buying him beer when we were on T.I. He was a true Torres Strait character.

I have thought about him often over the years and what may have happened to him? He expressed fears of being forced off the island and I've always wondered if it happened before he died.

Being it was dry season when we arrived water was a serious issue especially for bathing. We followed an animal trail and found a large pool of water up stream from what was Bat Falls.

I'll always remember walking down to this spot after the rains started to find a roaring stream and the falls. The island seemed to change almost overnight with the rains.

Recently, while searching the web for historical information about Muralag Island I learned of John Singe's book "*My Island Home, A Torres Strait Memoir*" and purchased it.

I read with keen interest his adventures in the Torres Strait. His wonderful descriptions of hunting on the island brought back my own memories of discovering Bat Falls, the wonder of wild orchids, sunrises over Horn Island, and the abundant wild life.

Learning the names of places, like for the first time where we were, "Mt Scott" has only added to my memories and enjoyment of his book.

I also wonder if someone might know of Jimmie Joyce and what happened to him relative to staying on the island?

Kitson Thorpe and his family were also incredible kind to us. I have wondered about him for all these years too. Might any one know if he is still on T.I.?

I would enjoy hearing from

anyone who might remember, or know of the above events or people.

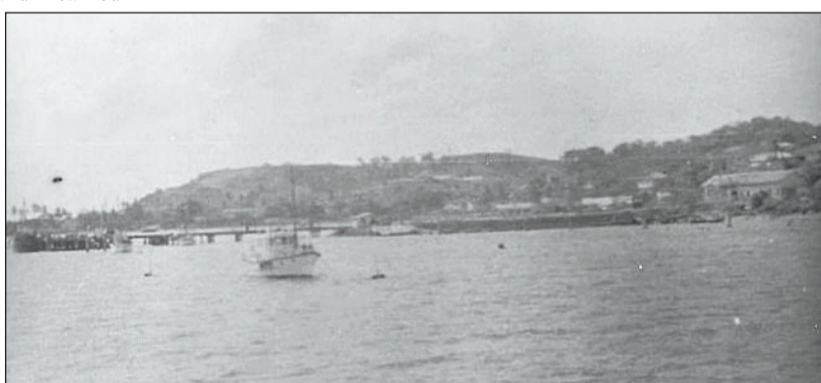
Readers should feel free to contact me at wescon@tampabay.rr.com



ABOVE and BELOW: Thursday Island, December, 1963.



ABOVE: Thursday Island outdoor movie theatre, 1983.
BELOW: Landing site on Prince of Wales.



ABOVE and BELOW: Thursday Island Harbour, with pearling luggers prominent.



ABOVE and BELOW: Walking on Prince of Wales.



BELOW: Anthills on Prince of Wales.

