



Hello again from PNG

First of all, apologies to you who only received our previous newsletter several weeks late. This was down to teething problems in how the MAF news system works. This newsletter is late entirely due to us not having realised how fast time was passing. Some of you who are on our WhatsApp groups will have heard about many of our doings (if you'd like to join, just send us your details). In this episode we will try and catch you up on some of what's been happening.

We left the last letter with our being about to go to Kompiam, a Baptist Mission Hospital in a small, relatively isolated village some 8 hrs drive (but fortunately only 20 mins flight time) NE from Mt Hagen. We were there for 14 days, staying in a small chalet on the hospital site, and being tutored by a range of local people and the ex-Pat staff (Dr David Mills, and his wife Karina) in some of the finer points (and many of the basic ones) of speaking Tok Pisin, and of understanding better how PNG society works. This seems to be traditional tribal Animism overlain with Victorian Christian missionary teaching. Most people would now say they are Christian, but still adhere to many old habits and customs, which makes for interesting actions and interactions.

The hospital in Kompiam does amazing work, handling all sorts of local health situations from ante-natal &



Operating theatre

maternity care to quite major surgery for traumatic injuries (eg cutting half your foot off with a machete, or [being crushed by a falling tree](#), to name 2 that we saw). In conjunction with MAF they also run Area Health Patrols. An MAF plane will collect the doctor, nurses and paramedics in the AHP team and fly them to another clinic in one of the remote villages, maybe some 30 mins away by air but 2-3 days walk, on a set day every month. The AHP team then spend a day or 2 dealing with the accumulated medical needs and check-ups before MAF

pick them up and fly them on, or back to Kompiam. Each clinic might serve 4 or 5 local villages, and with several AHPs a month many people can get treated, quite a few of whom would otherwise die or suffer life-changing effects. MAF run AHPs in 2 separate regions and are about to instigate a 3<sup>rd</sup> once our new aircraft is in service, increasing significantly the number of people in reach of at least basic medical care.



This is a BIG butterfly (or a Behemoth?)

Kompiam was a nice change from Mt Hagen insofar as we were free to go out for walks and swim in the local river without fear of petty crime, or worse, that is always the backdrop in Mt Hagen, where there are people from all over the island, so the sense of local pride and community is a lot less, and therefore less peer-pressure to behave and not let the tribe down. Even then, as we found out later, there is always a rogue element in any society who will act first and not consider the consequences.



Mountain river

We came back from Kompiam more knowledgeable of the language, but not necessarily much more able to speak and understand it, though that is improving with time and opportunity.

Alan then started his work proper, having to leave on the staff bus (which he sometimes has to drive) at 7am, to get to the office at MAF base some 10km away at the airport for a 7.30 start. The drive is somewhat interesting as the main road between Mt Hagen and the airport is a newly opened dual carriageway, with some traffic lights, built and paid for by China. The first and last km of the journey, however, are over unmade or disintegrating roads with multiple potholes, some up to a foot deep, and many several feet wide, so these sections require slow and careful negotiation if a very uncomfortable ride or a broken vehicle is to be avoided. As we are only just South of the equator, every day starts with sunrise at about 6.25 – this changes by only a minute or two throughout the year, so this means always getting up in the dark. The work-day ends at 4.30pm and after collecting staff from 2 locations and then dropping them off, home-time is a bit after 5, so it is a long day in tropical heat (or tropical thunderstorms).

## Alan and Annette Hone - PNG Newsletter #3

Saturdays are therefore catch up of housework days plus shopping (and many shops shut at midday) so Sunday is time for a lie-in if it's not an early church service. Owing to Covid restrictions (still in force here), and the large indigenous congregations that still meet, we have not been able to attend recently, but there is a short daily service at MAF at the start of every day, which we sometimes have to lead.

Alan's work has been "developing", or perhaps "development". He is part of the department responsible for all MAF buildings and vehicles in PNG (known as PVM: **Property & Vehicle Maintenance**), both for offices and hangars, but also for housing many of the staff, both those from overseas (like us) and also native PNGers who come from other regions. Many of these facilities are located in outlying places where we have regional bases and these all require water, sanitation, electricity, gas and internet access (to communicate and co-ordinate the flights).



Alan's new office!

At several of these bases there is no road access at all so everything needs to be flown in, from fuel drums for the aircraft (and the generators) to IKEA type houses which come in small sections and need assembling on site. Also, much of the food, if not available from locally produce, has to be flown in too.

His main job currently is to prepare a scheme to build a new headquarters and terminal for MAF in Mt Hagen, their main base in PNG. At the moment administration and aircraft engineering is centered on the main hangar



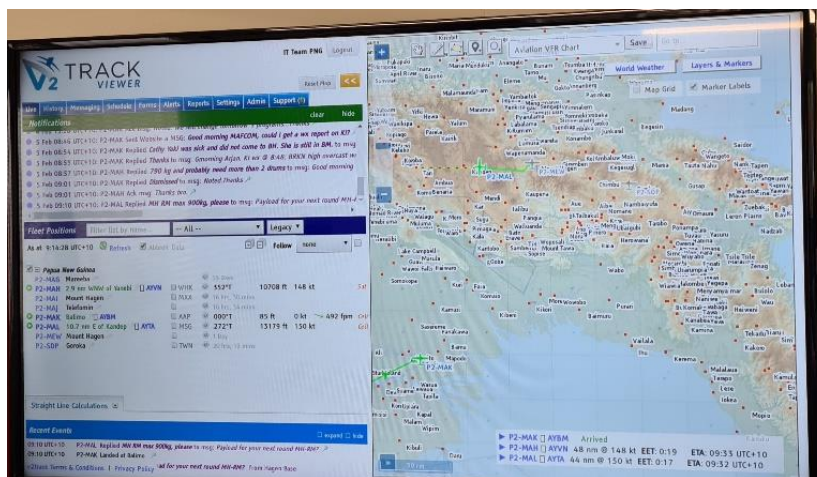
MAF Base (on left!) next to new airport terminal

at the far end of the apron, the airport parking area for aircraft. The "base", where all the passengers and cargo are handled is some 300m away, on a site shared with PVM. This is, however, shortly to be taken over by the Airport Authority who own the land and need the space for expansion of their own international terminal. MAF therefore will soon have to move out and find a way to integrate every department and function somewhere else. This might involve the takeover and re-use of the airport fire station and control tower, both of which are

being re-sited across the airfield. As this has not yet been finalised or decided, design options are quite wide ranging and consolidating them into geographically, financially and politically (things depend upon planning laws and permissions) acceptable plans is quite a task for Alan's one-man department.

Both MAF & Annette spent time considering how best she could serve our needs here and she has finally joined MAFCOM, the department responsible for organising and operating the flight schedules for all our aircraft, and pilots, throughout PNG. We currently have 7 Cessna 208s in service, with 2 being upgraded and a brand new one (for AHP work) about to arrive any day. There will then be 10 aircraft, 20 pilots and 200 destinations to be co-ordinated for passengers, freight, fuel, pilot hours and authorisations (not all pilots are "checked out" for every airstrip), and for aircraft duty hours. Then there are flight disruptions owing to bad weather or unforeseen circumstances to be coped with. This sometimes means planes and pilots don't get home when expected and have to overnight somewhere, in a pilot-house kept ready by PVM at several remote locations.

MAF do run sophisticated software and live tracking systems but these themselves need a steep learning curve to be mastered, and even then experience and awareness count for much. Fortunately, Annette's boss is an ex-Navy Commander and is very good at teaching what is needed and keeping the show safely on the road (or in the air).



MAFCOM V2 Live aircraft tracking

## Alan and Annette Hone - PNG Newsletter #3

We recently spent a week in Telefomin, one of our regional hubs, located in what is effectively a large crater – a valley surrounded on all sides by 2 or 3 mountain ranges. It is about 1½hrs flying time from Mt Hagen, but inaccessible from anywhere by road and relies on MAF for any external goods, and for medevacs. Even by plane the flight is not direct as there are several high mountains en route, including some just where you want to come in to land, so the pilot has to detour around them and turn 540° while descending onto the airstrip, consisting of rolled gravel with grass to hold it together.



On the ground at Telefomin base

We went to help renovate an MAF house so that a new pilot family could move in. On our flight were also 2 teams of 2 PNGers coming to open up some small remote airstrips that had become disused. One team was from the Rural Airfields Authority, a government agency tasked with looking after these small airstrips. The other team was from MAF Technical services, whose job was to set up a radio station so that the airstrip can call for help and communicate with us on weather and conditions when we send a plane. They transferred from our flight, with loads of gear, to a 2<sup>nd</sup> MAF aircraft which then flew them on to their 1<sup>st</sup> job. That flight was only 10 mins, but to walk it takes 3 days, without any equipment, as it involves climbing and descending 2 mountains. The airstrip had already been assessed to be just adequate for one of our planes to land if only part loaded, and with an experienced pilot (in this case 2) to fly it.

The vehicles in the Telefomin area (and there were only about ½ a dozen, including MAF’s 25 year old Land Cruiser pick-up) were mostly flown in at various times courtesy of the RAAF (Royal Australian Air Force) who come up on occasion with a C130 transport aircraft to practice landing in difficult locations, and they kindly bring up heavy goods instead of tanks and guns. The new(ish) local police car actually arrived slung under a helicopter. After a busy week, but having



C130 makes a visit



And the cloud is quite low!

done something different in a more exotic, albeit isolated, location, our flight home was then cancelled due to bad weather. We were able to leave the following morning, with a stop en-route, some 20 mins along the way at Oksapmin, to collect one of our teams. The village was apparently covered in thick cloud when we arrived. This required Ryan, our pilot, to go around, dodging the nearby mountains, and corkscrew down through a gap in the cloud at the other end of the valley, then fly along the “tunnel” below the cloud-base, which was at about 200 feet, to land at the 1<sup>st</sup> attempt on the rudimentary runway. Lots of people come out to meet the plane – always an exciting event in such a small community. In comparison to our “old” truck in Telefomin, we did see just one vehicle there, another Toyota pick-up, which was just as indestructible as the one Top Gear tried (unsuccessfully) to destroy. This one had no glass, no seats, no lights or dashboard and had been dug up from where it had sunk once in mud and laid buried for 10 years. A new battery and some diesel, and off it went! Amazing.



This truck really does work!

# Alan and Annette Hone - PNG Newsletter #3



Back home again in Hagen we were just about able to catch up with the shopping, cleaning and washing before it was time to go back to work, which is where we'll leave it for now.

MAF have just celebrated 70 years of service in PNG. You can view a brief film [here](#).

If you'd like to support the work of MAF, or help defray our costs out here in Papua New Guinea, you can go [here](#) for further information.

Our house is behind the trees in the middle of the picture

Thank you for all your prayers and encouragements. They really do help.

Alan & Annette



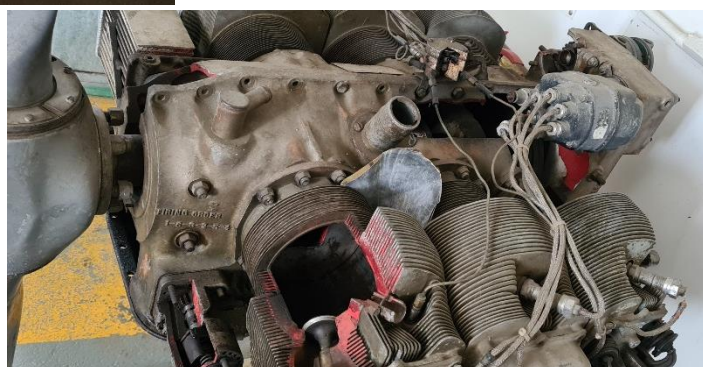
Sunrise in Mt Hagen



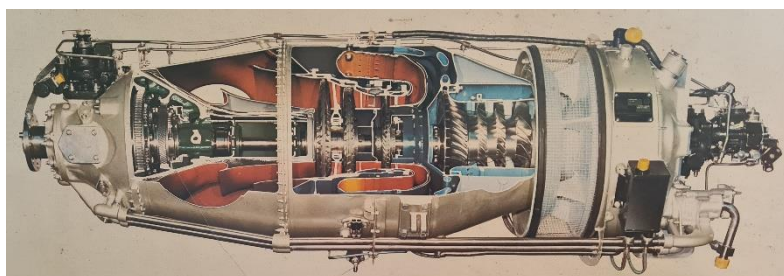
Our organic alarm clock



This guy lives at the Local coffee shop!



One of the old aircraft engines (now retired!) (with bits cut away for instruction)



Picture of new aircraft engine (Turbo-jet) (with bits cut away for instruction)