



TARLENA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

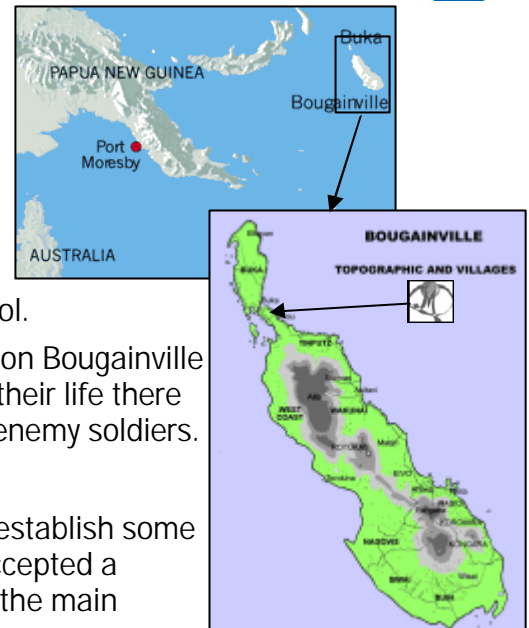
Marists at Bougainville

Bougainville has, since 1989, been the scene of civil war which started over the control of a large copper mine in the centre of the island. The war resulted in a climate of distrust and suspicion. By 2001, peace had returned to Bougainville and rebuilding processes had to begin. Many young men had been soldiers of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) during the fighting and had begun their military career at the age of thirteen when they should have been starting high school.

Marists (sisters, brothers and priests) have been highly visible on Bougainville for a long time – the brothers since 1942. Three brothers lost their life there during World War 2. They were last seen being taken away by enemy soldiers.

Bishop Wade Secondary School, Tarlena

In the middle of the Bougainville crisis in 1997, in an effort to establish some signs of good order and civil society on Bougainville, AusAID accepted a submission to build a secondary college on the northern tip of the main island at Tarlena.



Mrs Bernadette Ropa, a local woman, was the main instigator of this project and she called upon the Marist Brothers to assist her. School was established in an old primary school building, with the boys living in a diocesan centre at Tsiroge about three kilometres away.

Brother Ken McDonald established the boys' dormitories and Mrs Ropa looked after the girls' at Tarlena. Later, AusAID agreed to purpose-build a new school on the site of the bush classrooms that originally made up the primary school. Thus was established a secondary college of about 500 students catering for students from

years 9 to 12

Because the school is relatively new, many of the initial establishment projects have been completed. The school, however, still needs to develop agriculture and self-reliance projects so that students who may not be successful in obtaining one of the limited tertiary education opportunities on offer in the country can have a productive life back in the villages.

Marists have been assisting with this since the completion of the school. Since the departure of the last Marist principal, Mrs Bernadette Ropa has reassumed principalship, and she has been supported by a community of Bougainvillean Marist Brothers who take a special pastoral interest in the students.

Tarlena is the closest Marist-associated school to the main town centre on Bougainville, Buka. It is, however, separated by Buka Passage, and is serviced only by a very poor road. This means that Tarlena would have the least effective means of communication of all Marist projects in the District of Melanesia. The aim is to improve this situation by facilitating radio communication and email.

It is ironic that Tarlena was the site of the first establishment of Marist ministry on the island of Bougainville. Brother Ken Eaton, who now lives in Ashgrove, can remember going there immediately after World War 2, and establishing a teachers' college for local people to aid in the development of education on the island of Bougainville.

