

## **Australian Hydrographic Office - Wollongong News Item**

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### **PNG SOJOURN – ‘HS BLUE GOING WHERE NONE HAVE GONE BEFORE’**

HMAS MELVILLE (HS BLUE (LCDR Reg Sowter, RAN) embarked) recently completed a deployment that covered the majority of Papua New Guinea in support of the PNG Hydrographic and Charting Redevelopment Project. The Project is jointly sponsored by the Australian Hydrographic Service and the PNG Maritime Safety Authority and funded by the Asian Development Bank, with the aim of providing new charts including ENC's, and improving existing charts in the PNG area. CPCS Transcom, a Canadian company, is managing the rehabilitation project on behalf of the Asian Development Bank, whilst the Australian Hydrographic Service's managing of the chart production component has been outsourced to HSA Systems, an Australian company. A significant amount of the navigational charts in the area were surveyed in the 1950's and 60's and surveyed to local datums which could not be easily converted to the modern WGS84 Geodetic Datum and it was MELVILLE that was given the task of enabling this to happen.

The ship sailed from Cairns and headed north into sunshine and adventure. The PNG Hydrographer, Mr Joseph Kunda joined in Alotau to provide some local language and liaison assistance before the ship conducted operations in China Strait to the south of Milne Bay, Seeadler Harbour in Manus Island, Kavieng Harbour (New Ireland), Kimbe Harbour (New Britain), Aitape Roads and Wewak (far north mainland PNG) and Marshall Lagoon on the far south coast. A four day port visit to the resort town of Madang broke up what was a very intensive two month program.

The main tasking included a series of successful GPS recording observations which involved finding small, brass survey plaques in the middle of the PNG jungle and setting up a receiver over the top of them. The survey task became significantly easier after talking to the local chieftains who were able to direct the detached survey teams to the marks as they were part of local folklore from when the previous teams had visited over 40 years earlier! It turned into a unique experience as the teams spent up to six hours in each area with precision Geodetic GPS measuring equipment with fascinated locals. As well as this, the ship deployed its embarked Survey Motor Boats CASUARINA and CONDER to conduct Multi Beam Echo Sounder operations in some incredibly remote areas, collecting over 46 square nautical miles of new data. This culminated in a period where the ship had 20 of the 55 embarked personnel detached in surveying operations, including the two SMB's, a Single Beam Fitted Light Utility Boat and three GPS teams at the same time.



**Photo:** Shows SBLT 'Monty' Burns and some of the local PNG Highland children amazed at seeing their image on a camera.

Another unique experience during the deployment for the newly joined, non-droggie XO, LCDR Carlton Longhurst, RAN and Navigating Officer, SBLT Chris Emoson, RAN was to watch the ship head into "white area" of a chart, that area where no ship has ever been before. While transiting between areas, the HS routinely conducted single lines of sounding, called passage sounding, in unsurveyed areas, keeping itself safe by the use of the fitted Forward Looking Sonar and the mark one eyeball. A hair-raising experience for the "Grey Ship" sailors however for the MGO-H's as we are now known, all part of the job.

The ship returned safely to Cairns on time, despite the efforts of Tropical Cyclone Kate, in early March with a 100% job completion rate which included over 618 linear miles sounded and full 52 days survey availability. On return, the crew rendered 12 AH68's (Summary Reports of Survey) and over 120 photographs of navigational marks and areas of interest, living up to the Hydrographic adage of no day too long, no task too arduous!



**Photo:** Shows SMB 'CONDER' being lowered into the water from HMAS MELVILLE off PNG waters.

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