

Papua New Guinea's Road to Independence

by Roy Ranney- 15/10/2021

1883: HM Chester, Queensland Government Agent on Thursday Island, raised the Union Jack near present-day Port Moresby and annexed, on behalf of Queen Victoria, that part of New Guinea and adjacent islands lying between meridians 141E and 155E longitude.

1884: On November 6 Britain proclaimed a protectorate over south-east New Guinea. Germany raised its flag over Kaiser Wilhelmsland, the north-east part of the country and allowed its administration by the Neu Guinea Kompagnie (NGK).

1888: The British assumed sovereignty over the protectorate of British New Guinea (BNG) by annexing it outright on 4 September 1888.

1899: The German Government resumed responsibility for the administration of German New Guinea from the NGK.

1902: British New Guinea was transferred to the newly federated Commonwealth of Australia on 18 March 1902.

1905: Following the Papua Act in 1905, British New Guinea became the Territory of Papua as a Territory of the Commonwealth of Australia. The Papua Act formally incorporated Papua as an external territory of Australia and remained in effect until Papua's merger with New Guinea with the passage of the Papua and New Guinea Act 1949.

1906: Formal Australian administration began and Papua remained under Australian control as a Commonwealth Territory until the independence of Papua New Guinea in 1975.

1907: Australian Sir Hubert Murray appointed Acting Administrator of Papua, and then served as Lieutenant-Governor until his death in 1940.

1914: Australian Forces invaded, occupied and administered German New Guinea at the commencement of World War I. The first Australian 'killed-in-action' in WWI resulted.

1920: The League of Nations conferred a mandate on Australia for the former German New Guinea. The two territories, the Mandate and Papua, were administered separately, both being responsible to the Australian Government, until 1942.

1942: The Japanese invaded New Guinea landing at Rabaul. Administration of Australian-held territory was transferred to the military. ANGAU was created for this purpose.

1945: The Japanese formally surrendered off Rabaul on 6 September 1945 on board HMS Glory. The final surrenders in New Guinea were on 13 September 1945 at Cape Wom and Wewak airstrips.

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1945-1946: The Papua-New Guinea Provisional Administration Act was passed by the Australian Parliament in July 1945. The Act established a single administration for the former territories which, in 1949, became known as the Territory of Papua and New Guinea.

1946: Civil administration restored to Papua and New Guinea. The General Assembly of the United Nations approved a trusteeship agreement for New Guinea and its administration by Australia.

1949: The Papua and New Guinea Act formalised the provisional administration for the two territories and provided for a Legislative Council.

1961: A twenty-eight-member Legislative Council, set up in 1951 by the Australian Government was reconstituted to allow for the inclusion of six elected indigenous members and six nominated indigenous members.

1964: Legislative Council was replaced by an elected House of Assembly.

1971: On 13 December 1971 the territory's name was changed to Papua New Guinea.

1972: Michael Somare elected as Chief Minister.

1973: As Chief Minister, Somare led the country to self-government in 1973. Papua New Guinea became self-governing on 1 December 1973.

1975: Papua New Guinea became independent on 16 September, the day when HRH Prince Charles officiated at a ceremony in Port Moresby at which Australia's flag was lowered and PNG's flag raised. The proud new nation, led by Michael Somare, became a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, with Queen Elizabeth II Head of State and was admitted as a Member of the United Nations Organisation.

We, the members of the PNGAA, in reflecting on the past fifty years, can be justifiably proud of our past and continuing contributions to the Independent Nation of Papua New Guinea.