

SKY PILOT NEWS

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KELLYVILLE SCOUTS SPENT A DAY HELPING AT THE MISSION FARM

THE JUNGLE MAN: From the Sky Pilot's Log 2CH Broadcast

There is very little real jungle country in Arnhem Land; it is mostly open eucalyptus forest, except along river banks and in pockets among the hills in the interior. The true jungle is found in Cape York Peninsular, where the great rainfall and tropical heat work on the fertile soil, making jungle so thick that it is very often necessary to cut one's pathway through the living undergrowth. I was fortunate in being able to spend some time west of Cook-

town, and back from Cairns; but I was used to the forest, and never felt quite at home in the jungle. There is something about the jungle that is antagonistic to man. The jungle is a living thing, always creeping in, seeking to smother and choke man's puny efforts to make a clearing. We cut our way through, but almost in a single night our path was gone. Tendrils came swaying from the trees; branches and vines swung across to close the gap; yellow

leaves of plants pushed through the cleared soil like mushrooms in the night. The lawyer vines were the worst obstruction to progress, covering large areas — the great knotted and twisted butts; the curving, palm-like leaves; the hundreds of feet of coiling, twisting cane armed with cruel, hooked barbs. Many a fall we had due to the coiled canes hidden in the low undergrowth; many a deep, jagged wound from the dreadful barbs.

This jungle country is the home of strange birds and animals; of huge, loathsome insects and reptiles, many of them phosphorescent and awesome at night. It is the home of strange plants; the sticky *Pisonia* tree, the strangler-fig that chokes to death every tree within reach; here are plants that live on the blood of living creatures; plants like the small bee-catching plant, fastened to the trunk of a tree, which tempts the native bee into its scented flower; then soft petals close gently on the insect, and hold it tight till every drop of life juice has been sucked from it. Here also is the plant's bigger sister that feeds on birds and small rodents. . . . But I could go on for hours talking about the strange life of the jungle. No one can forget the jungle. Even now I fancy I can hear the drip of moisture from the tree, the rustle of teeming life in the undergrowth, and smell the dank odour of rotting leaves

In the prospecting camp a man was ill; and they had sent for me, as there was no doctor within a hundred miles. I was sitting on a half-decayed log in a little clearing when something moved in the undergrowth, and I gripped my rifle and waited. This was the home of the wild pig, the dreaded man-killer with tusks that could rip the flesh from the bone in one swift strike. But it was not a wild pig I heard; it was a wild man; a white man, though he was burned almost copper colour. He wore no clothes but a tassel at the waist, and he carried a long hunting spear. Behind him was a full-blooded aboriginal woman, complete with dilly-bag, to carry the smaller game killed by the strange hunter. I was speechless. For a moment, I thought I was dreaming, but the man walked straight towards me, and when he spoke, it was in a quiet, cultured tone.

"You are the Sky Pilot," he said, "on your way to the prospecting camp?"

"Y-e-s," I stammered. "Yes, I'm the Sky Pilot; but how did you know me? And who are you?"

"Does it matter? They call me the jungle man. I suppose I am. You can call me Norman — it's as good as any other name. And this is Mrs. Norman."

He introduced me to the naked lubra, and in spite of myself, I was on my feet and acknowledging the introduction as if she had been a white woman, properly clothed, and we were in the centre of civilisation. Norman watched me closely through half-closed eyes, and I sensed that a good deal depended on my reception of the aboriginal woman. When Norman spoke, there was something strange about his voice; I could not be sure what it was. Later, I discovered that, although he always spoke softly, his voice had remarkable carrying properties; he seemed to have the knack of being able to shout in a whisper. Suddenly I realised that the jungle man was speaking again.

"It worries me not at all what people think or say. I live in the jungle, and *on* the jungle. I have heard about you, and, strange to say, I am pleased to have met you. Of course, I came here with that purpose."

"But that's impossible!" I exclaimed. "No one knows I am going to the camp, except my black-boy guide. It was only by chance that I was there when the message for help came through. This is not my country."

The jungle man smiled quietly. "You would be surprised how news travels in the jungle. I knew yesterday that you were on the way, and I waited for you. As a matter of fact, I have been following you for over an hour, and I could have spoken to you any time. Didn't you see me?"

"No, I'm hanged if I did! But what was your idea in following me? Why didn't you speak before?"

"I was interested in watching you. I have heard so much about you that I was curious to see how you acted in the jungle. You are not a jungle man."

"No," I replied, "I am not. Most of my time has been spent in the desert, or forest."

"Do you see that tree on the left with the bright, green leaves nearly as big as a plate? Do you know what it is?"

"I have no idea; but we have passed several of them on the way."

"Why were you so careful to avoid touching it? I noticed you gave it a wide berth every time you came to one of them. Why?"

"I don't know. But my black-boy was careful not to touch it, and in the country where I belong it pays to imitate the blacks."

The jungle man smiled approval. "The same applies to this country. That tree was one reason why I came to meet you; sometimes the blacks

forget to warn strangers. That is a stinging-tree. A proper sting from that tree means agony for hours. Men have gone mad with the pain; horses have done the same — even dogs. I was interested to know if you had been warned, or were just naturally observant. But it's time we went on. However, first I'm going to tell you something I had no intention of mentioning — something I have not bothered to tell anyone before. Mrs. Norman is my legal wife; we were married in Brisbane. Not that it makes any difference in the jungle. But, come on, there's no time to waste."

As we continued our way, the jungle man took the lead. I followed close behind him, followed in turn by my black-boy; the woman brought up the rear. It was wonderful to watch the jungle man walking. Seemingly without effort, he pushed on, instinctively avoiding the lawyer-canes that frequently tripped me up. He belonged to the jungle; I was a clumsy amateur, though until then I had thought I was a good bushman.

There is not time now to tell of that trip; perhaps I may do so in a later story. But in due course we were at the prospecting camp, where a group of men spent their lives separating small particles of gold from great masses of Queensland that were mixed with it. I examined the sick man. As far as I could tell, he had acute appendicitis. I never felt so hopeless and useless in my life. I jumped when the jungle man spoke; I didn't know he was standing behind me. He had a disconcerting way of gliding about like a noiseless shadow.

"Well," he asked, "what is the trouble?"

I told him what I thought it was, and he nodded; then, to my surprise, he said: "You'll have to operate at once."

"I can't," I cried. "I'm not a doctor; I've only had a smattering of medical training. Anyhow, I couldn't operate without instruments and proper drugs and anaesthetic."

"There's a proper medical kit here, complete with instruments and drugs. A doctor should have been here also. At present, he's away on the jag. He's not registered in Queensland, but he's quite a fair doctor — when he's sober. That won't be for three weeks, at least." I could sense the contempt in the jungle man's voice; evidently drink was not his own weakness. I said nothing, and the jungle man went on: "If you don't operate, he'll die of peritonitis, most likely."

"If I do operate, he'll die a lot quicker. But what do you know of peritonitis? Do you know anything about operations?"

"Yes," was the surprising reply. "I think we can manage it between us; but we'll have to be quick. I'll sterilize the instruments while you scrub up."

The jungle man talked about us doing the operation between us. All I did was to hand him the instruments and act as general rouse-about. There, in the little clearing in the jungle, I watched one of the quickest and neatest operations I have ever seen. The jungle man stayed until the next day, giving me detailed instructions as to the care of the patient. Then he picked up his spear, smiled quietly at me, and with a wave of his hand, started for the jungle with the black woman at his heels.

"Here, Norman, come back!" I cried. "You can't just go off like that into the jungle."

"Why not? The jungle is where I belong. I've done with civilisation; this was an unforeseen event. I'll admit I was interested, but I'll soon forget it, as the world has forgotten me."

"Look here, Norman, we've only known each other for a few hours, but — well, circumstances have drawn us closer together than most men. You know I'm not one to pry into any man's private life, but I can't let you go like this. Surely there's something I can do? Where did you practise? In Macquarie Street?"

The jungle man stood silent, and his clear, grey eyes bored into mine. At first, I thought he was going to ignore my question; then the answer came in little more than a whisper: "No, Smithy, Harley Street. But that is my secret alone — and yours. It is too late to do anything now."

"No, it's not! It's never too late!"

"That's the Sky Pilot talking! So long, mate." And with a quiet, mocking smile, the strange white man faded into the jungle, followed by the faithful black woman.

I never saw him again. That was many years ago, and sometimes I feel that I failed miserably in not doing something to try to bring that man back to the world he had left. I do not know his story; but I have spent many an hour trying to work it out from a story-teller's point of view. Was he struck off the roll for some illegal operation or unprofessional conduct? Was there some white woman at the bottom of it? Your guess is as good as mine. I suppose it is natural to be curious, but that secret is none of my business. But it is my business to protest at that lie he told — those words that still ring in my ears: "It's too late to do anything now. Too late, too late!"

That's the devil's lie! It is not too late. With man, perhaps it is, but not with God. It's never too late while life lasts. God does not merely patch up a broken life; He makes a new creature. Oh, if every broken heart that hides the secret of a ruined life would only remember that! "Call upon me in the day of trouble," saith the Lord, "and I will answer."

And as a final entry in my Log, I wrote these words: "Though ye have lain among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold." Psalm 68: 13.

CHRISTMAS, 1960. We would like to take this opportunity of wishing all our friends and supporters a very happy Christmas and God's richest blessing during the coming year. In past years we have sent out some hundreds of Christmas cards; but owing to the increase in postage, and the fact that our circle of friends has been extended vastly, this practice has had to be discontinued. In place of the usual Christmas text that, we are pleased to note, is found on the postage stamps now being issued, we would leave with you these words from Isaiah 30: *In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.* There is nothing spectacular about the steady growth of this work for the needy dark children. From a very small beginning, we have gone forward in faith. Our needs have been met as they arose. In quietness and confidence, we have gone on, and are still going on, and the blessing of God has been more marked each step of the way. During the past few months especially we have been very conscious of the presence of God. We have a sympathetic Council, absolutely united and wholeheartedly behind us; our two branches of the Women's Auxiliary are working tirelessly; our hundreds of supporters and voluntary workers have grown in numbers, and, what is more important, they are increasingly conscious of the Spirit of God binding them together as one body, working unitedly with God in this project which is to His glory and the comfort of His little ones. Our prayer is that each of our friends may be able to go forward in the New Year in quietness and confidence.

MRS. LANGFORD-SMITH. We are sorry to have to report that Mrs. Langford-Smith has been seriously ill for some weeks, following a collapse of the heart. She was some time in hospital, but is home again now and making slow but steady improvement. It will be some months before she is able to resume full duties,

of course, but she will be able to help in the direction of the work. For some years she has been overworking. At the beginning we had few conveniences and many difficulties; and the strain of caring for so many little children under such conditions can hardly be imagined. Meals had to be cooked in a tiny kitchen and carried over 100 feet to the temporary quarters, in all weathers. The children had nowhere to play in wet weather, and no shelter from the heat in summer. No rooms were fly-proof, and the attempt to keep food for 20 to 30 people in a small household refrigerator was almost impossible. The small washing-machine was going almost all day, and there was never sufficient drying space on the clothes-lines, or over fences. There were no toilet facilities . . .

What a difference now! The Apex Club built a shelter for the children; the kitchen has been increased to double the size; a 20-cubic-foot deep freeze and a 30-cubic-foot refrigerator are in operation; a large washing-machine has been added, and two hoists for drying the clothes. We have the annexe, fly-proofing in the kitchen and children's dining room, the septic tank, a large double sink for washing up, a slow-combustion stove for cooking and hot water, and so on. And all this within the space of our first Five Year Plan!

But even with these conveniences, it was no easy task caring for up to 20 small dark children, many of them little more than babies. Mrs. Langford-Smith and Isabelle had to see to all the cooking, washing, feeding and caring for our large family. When Mrs. Langford-Smith was taken ill, we wondered how we could possibly manage, and, in desperation, we sought the Lord. But He knew of the need even before we did, and He had His chosen one ready. Mrs. G. Onslow, Secretary of our Women's Auxiliary and one-time a Council member, came forward as a voluntary worker, and took over the cooking and supervision of the household. For weeks she has been working tirelessly, and everything is running smoothly. We are deeply grateful to her for so ably filling the gap in the time of our need.

THE DARK CHILDREN. All the children are now well. They are counting the days till Christmas! The R.A.A.F. and the staff of the G.P.O. are both giving them parties; we are not letting them go to other outside parties, as several are planned for them at the Mission Farm. Please remember that the Mission Farm will be closed from 1st to 21st January, 1961, when the children are away on holidays.