



# Sandal Prints

*In the Capuchin Missions*



**changing a way of life**



**to bring a new kind of life .....**



Father Brian Newman, O.F.M.Cap. quickly learned that his own two feet would be his main means of transportation in New Guinea.

By: *Father Benjamin Madden, O.F.M.Cap.*  
*Papua, New Guinea*

What is in the mind of new missionary priests when they first are assigned to the missionary territory of Papua, New Guinea? There are probably as many answers to this question as there are missionaries. All would have thoughts of dedicating their priestly life in a special way to God. Some may have visions of hardships and sufferings; others may visualize thousands flocking to hear the word of God. And the possibility of giving their life for God possibly lurks in the back of everyone's mind.

There is a bit of truth in all these thoughts. But when a missionary actually gets into his job, he usually puts these thoughts to one side and gets down to some good hard work. No doubt the life here in Papua involves more hardship than life in the States, but it becomes an accustomed routine after awhile, something which is not not even adverted to. There are hundreds of thousands here to be converted, but first there is a lot of ground-work to be laid. The natives here are very primitive and capable of violence, with a history of fighting and killing among themselves. They are also reasonable men, possessing values different from our own, but nevertheless reasonable and willing to listen if you have something to offer.

Fr. Brian Newman, O.F.M.Cap., recently came to Papua to begin his missionary work. He was quickly introduced to many of the facets of his future work by accompanying another missionary on a bush trip. Father had arrived with the idea that he would change the lives of many of the people here by offering them the teachings

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## a way of life . . .



New Guinea's food is different but nourishing: sweet potatoes, sugar cane and plantains are supplemented by native greens.

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Litho in U.S.A.

of God. He found from this brief first experience that in order to do this more successfully, he had to change a few things in his own life to better adapt himself to his work.

To us Americans who are accustomed to ride a few blocks to go to Church or to buy a newspaper, perhaps walking offers the biggest challenge here in Papua. Where there are roads, a motorbike is the most successful vehicle. It is much easier to push a motorbike through a soft and muddy road than a four-wheeled vehicle. But most travelling is done on foot, and a walk of 10 to 15 miles is quite the regular thing. There are no sidewalks here as Fr. Brian can well testify. Instead there are narrow and slippery walking tracks, mudholes, swamps, streams, primitive suspension bridges spanning rivers, formidable mountains well over 7 and 8 thousand feet, daily rain, and when it isn't raining, there is the direct tropical sun. This is what hits the new missionary first, the change in his way of life.

No missionary starves or goes hungry in Papua. Of course, one doesn't run into one of Hilton's Hotels along the road either. It stands to reason that since one must usually walk from one outstation to the next, and he must keep on the move quite a bit, he cannot carry all his food. He carries only his tinned meat and a few essentials. Otherwise he relies on the native foods. Fr. Brian found the native food somewhat different, but very edible and nourishing. The staple food here is the sweet potato, and there are many varieties. Sweet potatoes are supplemented by many types of greens, and sugar cane. Gradually such foods as white potatoes, corn, tomatoes, and cabbage are being introduced to and grown by the natives.

Housing in the bush also creates no great problem. It is somewhat different, and lacks some of the comforts of

*Continued*

## a way of life . . .



A mission trip generally involves a group: Father Brian's interpreter is at his side, and the native carriers in the background.

home, but it is very adequate. At all the outstations, the missionary has a house constructed, rough timber being used for the frame, woven matting for the walls, and grass for the roof. Rarely would a missionary be forced to sleep under the stars.

But these are only a few of the physical changes one encounters in Papua. There are other changes which must be made, language ranking near the top of the list. Understandably, Father must first communicate and instruct through an interpreter. This is not as easy as it sounds either, for outside the schools, it is next to impossible to find someone understanding English. So for work in the bush, it is necessary to gain some proficiency first in the

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Speaking through an interpreter is not the ideal way to instruct others, but it is a necessity for new missionaries.



## a way of life . . .

trade language of *Pidgin English*. At this stage, language work has just begun.

There are well over 500 languages in New Guinea, and about 15 of these are found in the Southern Highlands, encompassing approximately 8000 square miles. Just how many more are to be found in the sparsely populated coastal area of our missionary territory is still a matter for conjecture. None of these languages have been completely analyzed yet. Fr. Brian will add his efforts to the work of others in order to gain fluency in the language of his particular field of missionary labor. It is possible to work through an interpreter, but much more effective to speak directly to the people.

Finally, there is the actual work of catechizing and converting. Here again, there is a marked change from what is found "at home." Here we find a people whose life is filled with a fear rather than a love of the supernatural. And this fear is not caused by an all-powerful God, but by the spirits of dead friends, enemies, and ancestors. This fear, along with its many superstitious practices and rituals, is an integral part of their lives. If they have a vague concept of an all-good and loving God, and many of them do, they seldom advert to it because of this ever-present fear of evil coming from alien spirits.

This will be Fr. Brian's work in the future, possibly for the rest of his life. He must supplant this fear with knowledge and love, love of a God strong enough to protect them from all evil forces. In the place of superstitious and sacrificial rituals, he must teach them the effectiveness of daily prayer. Where there is now interest and curiosity during the celebration of the Mass, he must instill a deep love and appreciation of this, the greatest sacrifice of all time. He must implant into their minds

that knowledge necessary for them to grow into strong and faithful Catholics.

To do this, Fr. Brian must change his life somewhat. He must give up comforts to contact his people, dispersed over a wide area. He may even have to alter his eating and living habits. He faces many years of hard work on one or more new languages. But what are these changes when compared to the supernatural changes which he will bring into the lives of hundreds and possibly thousands of people here in the Southern Highlands of Papua, New Guinea? God has put into his heart a missionary vocation. Just as His graces have made fruitful the work of so many of His missionaries, so His graces will also assist Fr. Brian in bringing about all these changes.

END

