

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: DISPLACED PERSONS

appeal no. 1.25/97

situation report no. 05

period covered: 1st - 31st July 1997

Drawing on experience gained from the two previous phases of the operation, the Federation/PNGRCS completed Phase III , in the Buin area of Bougainville, in record time, distributing family packs to more than 5,700 families . Careful preparation, intensive co-ordination with the armed forces involved in the conflict, strong local support and the use of a versatile "banana" boat were all important operational factors. Preparations have begun for the fourth and last phase, beginning in September.

Latest events

Papua New Guinea's new government, constituted after general elections in mid July, found itself in immediate difficulties, as the mercenaries imbroglio which rocked the country earlier this year continued to dominate national politics. Widespread dissatisfaction over the composition of the government team, perceived as failing to distance itself from the affair, was followed by an inflammatory confrontation with some army units opposed to disciplinary follow up measures. Rapidly defused, but at political cost, the flare up signalled that future difficulties generated by the still unresolved mercenaries issue were almost inevitable.

Diplomatic efforts of the New Zealand government to broker a peace meeting between the Bougainville Revolutionary Army/Bougainville Interim Government (BRA/BIG) and the Bougainville Transitional Government (BTG) bore fruit. The meeting resulted in the release of the five PNGDF (Defence Forces) and Police personnel held by the BRA and raised hopes of an improved political climate, despite the many problems that remain to be resolved. The calm and favourable conditions on Bougainville produced by the NZ initiative contributed to the fast and successful execution of Phase III of the Federation/PNGRCS operation in the south of the island.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Phase III of the operation, covering Buin area, was carried out in record time. Careful reconnaissance of the landing beach, bush trails and transport availability was combined with face to face meetings with the local BRA and PNGDF commanders, local elders and chiefs and administration officials. This extra effort paid off and, despite terrible weather conditions, the landing and subsequent distributions went exceptionally well: the whole operation took less than ten days from the initial loading at Lae to the final close down on 25 July.

Port Moresby/Lae: Weather delayed the loading of the relief goods by a day but the ship was quickly under way and made up time to Bougainville.

Buka Island (FTC HQ): As a result of advance meetings and documentation the processing of the ship's security clearance went much more smoothly. To reduce the expensive dependence on helicopter flights the vessel proceeded around the east coast of Bougainville to Red Cross Operational HQ in Arawa and loaded all field equipment and the PNGRCS Team for transport to Kangu Beach. The newly acquired "Banana" boat and generator donated by the British High Commission in PNG were taken on board in Buka.

Bougainville, Kangu Beach/Buin: When the ship beached at Kangu on 16 July five trucks were waiting to load the supplies, thanks to excellent local co-ordination. While the Relief Administrator and PNGRCS staff co-ordinated the transfer of supplies up the bush trail to Buin the Federation Head of Delegation (HoD) and PNGRCS staff established a distribution centre at Buin High School. Distribution commenced as the supplies arrived and by the time unloading was completed at the beach over 70% of the village distribution was already completed. Thousands of villagers walked in from as far as 50 km away to get their supplies.

The Federation delegates and the PNGRCS Field Officer routinely met with BRA sector commanders in the bush to ensure free and safe movement for both Red Cross staff, trucks and material on the Kangu/Buin road and villagers returning to their homes with goods. In addition a particularly helpful PNGDF local Commander significantly contributed to the positive environment that allowed for free and rapid distribution.

Heavy rain throughout the distribution made the already terrible bush trails almost impassable at times, and living conditions were again difficult for the RC staff and the many local volunteers.

The team went several times into BRA area villages to distribute goods and medical packs directly to beneficiaries. In addition 16 Medical Packs were distributed to area Health Care Centres.

Distribution Summary at 31st July 1997

	Families	Persons
February	155	324
March	1,499	6,822
April	4,268	21,904
May	315	1,551
June	4,690	20,663
July	5,729	29,673

Total to date	16,656	80,937
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Logistics: The shipping and beach unloading went well , again demonstrating the advantage of the ship being able to drop the bow directly on land. Transit through Buka took only a few hours this time, thanks to much improved local co-operation from FTC HQ. The main problem was considerable damage to pallets from high waves breaking onto the deck and soaking family packs with yet again the need to dry out clothing and material. Most of these were recovered and distributed, with some bulk being handed out to schools and church groups.

Ground transport was better and local co-ordination superior -- both key to successful execution of the work. Because of an acute fuel shortage on the island adequate supplies need to be carried on board the ship to maintain the mobility of the transport fleet.

The new boat was put to immediate use delivering supplies to island villages. It eventually returned to Arawa Base with additional medicine for outreach islands and returned for the transport of the team's field equipment to base at a fraction of the cost by helicopter. This boat will play an important role in remaining operations and future Red Cross work around the island.

Outstanding needs

For the present, there are no major needs for the next phase. In the longer term, if peace initiatives make road access to the more remote areas feasible, the acquisition of an additional pick up to reinforce the damaged one will be essential. The arrival of a third delegate has improved financial reporting and logistic support to the HoD and Relief Administrator when both are in the field.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

At the invitation of the Federation/PNGRCS, senior officers of AusAID from PNG and Canberra visited the Phase III distribution in Buin with an information officer who will produce articles on the operation.

In co-ordination with the PNGRCS, the Head of the ICRC Regional Delegation was consulted and informed about the operation. Contacts also covered the ICRC Workshops on IHL to be delivered to 2 RPIR Battalion rotating onto duties on Bougainville. The Federation's role as well as that of the National Society were included in the workshop agenda.

Contact with the new Commander of the PNGDF continues. Additional efforts will be necessary to meet new government officers as soon as they have settled into office. A new Minister for Bougainville Affairs is part of that exercise.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The successful completion of what had been considered to be the most sensitive and potentially politically difficult phase of the operation indicates the high level of awareness, acceptance and co-operation that the Red Cross operation has elicited from all parties on Bougainville. Phase IV will undoubtedly provide considerable logistical and operational delivery challenges. The weather, sea conditions and the high risk of transferring supplies to small boats at sea are unavoidable and plans are being reviewed to minimise these difficulties. The only other possible option -- a long, hazardous and expensive cross-island road transfer from Kangu Beach inland to Tonu Town -- has been rejected.

In the first half of August, the distribution of some 500 Family Packs remaining in the Phase II region will be completed in the BRA areas north of Soevele. Pre-operation preparation for Phase IV in Sewai Region will then be carried out and the supplier will be ready to load the ship for a planned Phase IV start up in the first week of September.

Whilst the outlook for security conditions and ongoing Red Cross operations on Bougainville Island seems positive the operation must hold itself ready to respond to effects on it of any crisis that might arise in the country as the new government embarks on what could be a difficult start to its term of office.

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