

Doves Over the Pacific: In Pursuit of Peace and Stability in Bougainville

Reuben Bowd

Reviewed by Dr Bob Breen

With this book Reuben Bowd continues a fine tradition of serving army officers finding the time to write important contemporary Australian military history to educate, commemorate and inspire. A veteran of a peace support operation in Bougainville, he has told the story of two regional peace support operations – Operation *Big Talk* and Operation *Lagoon* – both conducted in the North Solomons Province of Papua New Guinea (PNG) (now called the Autonomous Region of Bougainville). *Big Talk* was conducted on New Zealand naval vessels in the waters off Bougainville in early August 1990. *Lagoon* was an Australian-led multi-national operation that was conducted in support of a peace conference held in Arawa, an abandoned mining town located on the central Bougainvillean coast, in October 1994.

The publisher, Australian Military History Publications, in a joint venture with the Australian Army History Unit, has done a magnificent job in presenting Reuben Bowd's work. The book is stoutly bound with a colourful 'peacekeeping blue' jacket with yellow lettering reminiscent of the distinctive colour of hats and T-shirts worn by regional peace monitors in Bougainville in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Top-quality paper facilitates optimal presentation of well-selected and informative maps, photographs, tables and nominal rolls. This book is the twentieth publication from this productive and professional collaboration.

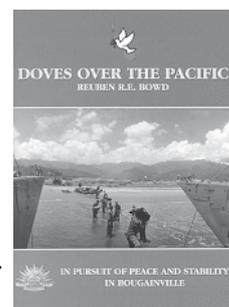
Bowd begins his story with an introductory chapter that covers the geography, demographics, prehistory and history of discovery of the Pacific islands in general, and the Solomon Islands in particular. He briefly describes the colonial history of the territories of Papua and New Guinea, concluding that the colonial era resulted in 'an artificial political and geographical division of the Solomons archipelago into two new nations – PNG and Solomon Islands.' The next chapter also covers quite a lot of history in a few pages to explain the origins of the Bougainville crisis. It sets the scene for the two main peacekeeping stories that follow in the remaining four chapters. Bowd's observation that the Panguna mine was not the root cause of the Bougainville crisis, and that the Bougainvillean people should take much of the blame, will be warmly debated among scholars who specialise in PNG political and economic history.

The author is an impressive historian of the record. His use of primary sources and inclusion of the complete text of several key documents are features of his narrative. For Operation *Big Talk*, he managed to obtain a record of interview with the senior New Zealand naval commander and the Reports-of-Proceedings from participating New Zealand naval vessels. Sometimes these sources draw him into detail like the depth of water, cruising speeds and each vessel's maritime housekeeping and routine tasks, but they form a solid factual foundation for the story.

For Operation *Lagoon*, he accessed the Combined Force Commander's diary, a unit history, post-operation reports and Department of Defence files, including some confidential material. Once again these primary sources constitute a solid platform for a detailed account. Bowd concludes the book with a brief postscript of key milestones of Operation *Bel Isi*, an unarmed regional peace support operation in Bougainville that began in 1997 and concluded successfully in 2003 – after six years of patient negotiation and Bougainvillean reconciliation.

The author is to be commended for assembling the elements of a fine historical publication. The narrative is a factual and detailed record. The supporting detail is also well-done. Each of the 49 photographs speaks its thousand words. Each of the six maps clarifies geography helpfully. The 11 appendices are replete with useful background and tabular information. The book includes a useful and well-organised 10-page bibliography and a comprehensive 9-page index. Those who served on Operation *Big Talk*, Operation *Lagoon* and Operation *Bel Isi* will greatly appreciate the author's inclusion of participant nominal rolls at the end of the book. ♦

Reuben R.E. Bowd, *Doves Over the Pacific: In Pursuit of Peace and Stability in Bougainville*, Australian Military History Publications (and the Army History Unit), Loftus NSW, 2007, Casebound and jacketed, xv+259pp., RRP \$A45.00 (free postage if purchased from the publisher).



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