

## **NZ Eye Team helps hundreds on Bougainville**

In 2002 the New Zealand Eye Team from Volunteer Ophthalmic Services Overseas saw 563 patients, completed 36 eye operations and prescribed 371 pairs of spectacles.

The team of three included Auckland eye specialists, David and Rosemary Murdoch, and Bryre Murphy an optometrist, also from Auckland. They spent two weeks on the islands of Bougainville starting at the main centre of Buka and moving down the country to Arawa and Buin.

At Buka District Hospital consultations were done in the air-conditioned Dental Clinic where dentist Fred Poli was a genial host. Most of the early patients to be seen by optometrist Bryre Murphy were nursing staff and local administrators. Both David and Rosemary Murdoch were pleased to have nurses comfortably reading their notes and medicine labels. The team also met up with Dr Cyril Emoka who works full time with TB and leprosy patients. Dr Emoka still has a bullet lodged near his spine after his ambulance was ambushed during the Crisis.

Sunday afternoon was spent catching up with the local peace monitoring personnel who are involved in collecting weapons from all the factions that armed themselves during the Crisis. In pride of place is a 60 mm Japanese WWII canon which was handed in together with a home made shotgun.

The Arawa Health Centre has been rebuilt and now has an out-patient block with plenty of room. Power comes from its own diesel generator as the town power supply doesn't come on until six in the evening. The surgeons had to get used to power coming on and off as the generator was not totally reliable. The dedicated local maintenance staff saw to it that interruptions were brief. While David and Rosemary Murdoch were completing the eye operations optometrist Bryre was seeing between 40 and 60 people a day for eye and vision examinations. Bryre took 120 pairs of dark glasses from the Lions New Zealand recycling centre for people at risk from sun damage and pterygium. The 'sunnies' caused something of a sensation and were all gone by the end of the first week.

After Arawa the team went by local ambulance to Wakune stopping on the way to photograph the Panguna No-go Zone. The ambulance driver took a lot of convincing to make the stop since he had 3 shots fired over him the last time he paused to let passengers take photos. The team saw 51 people in the single day leaving to return to Arawa before dark.

Next day Sue Knight of VSA took the team out to Loloho to catch the HeviLift helicopter to Buin. There they saw 55 people over two days and did 9 cataract operations and a pterygium removal. Buin has a hospital with a generator, ambulance and well stocked pharmacy but no money to provide meals for patients. This means that relatives have to bring food and the hospital is a busy hub of activity with families coming and going. The team felt safe enough to take a truck back to Arawa and was surprised to find a massive program of road works underway.



Eye surgeon David Murdoch checks out his patient after cataract surgery.

Optometrist, Bryre Murphy with another happy patient.

