MATAPUI

An Account of a Gold Prospecting Expedition into the Interior of New Guinea: July 1929 to February 1930

Ekkehard Beinssen

An early draft, but historically the most accurate account.
Initially translated into English from the original German by:

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Subsequently edited by Peter & Konrad Beinssen

Translator's note by Silke Hesse (January 2023)

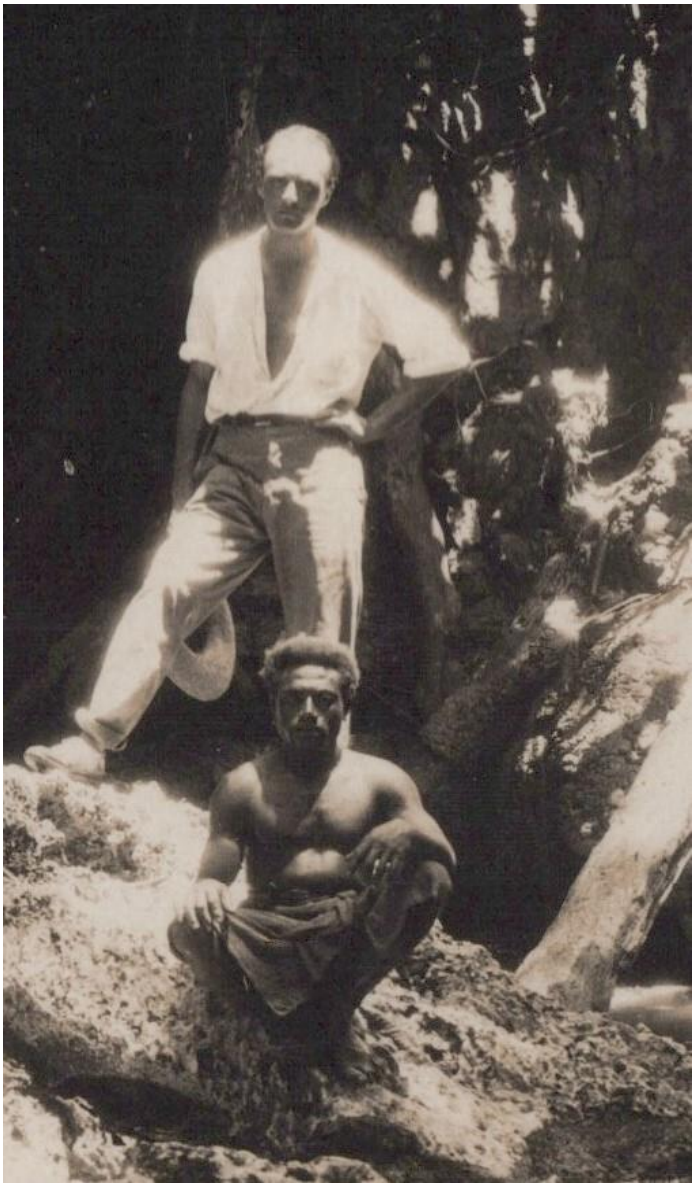
The following account of Ekkehard Beinssen's participation in a prospecting expedition in New Guinea in 1929 is the first of several and was jotted down in sections immediately upon his return. I have pieced these fragments together here.

Ekke's intention had been, from the start, to turn his experiences into a novel for the German market. Consequently, his style tends to be literary in conformity with the times (impressionistic here, then realistic, neo-romantic and later again naturalistic) rather than neutrally documentary. Of the various texts eventually created, this one is the freshest and most accurate, though even here, details (such as allusions to Ekke's own prehistory) are not entirely reliable and were never intended to be. Modern readers are, however, likely to be more interested in the text's contribution to the history of white exploration and gold prospecting in New Guinea in the years 1929-30 than in the adventure itself, which is the reason why this early account is of value.

The fourth and latest distinct version of Ekke's experiences, the naturalistic one, is the one that was eventually published in 1933, just after Hitler had come to power in Germany. This version was significantly and poorly reshaped by the publisher's editors in line with current racist views of "primitive man", to the point where the plot often no longer made sense. At the time Ekke himself, who had been involved with an anti-Hitler movement and had lost interest in and control of the publication, was fleeing Germany. In spite of its easier availability, that version is unfortunately not one to be recommended to modern readers. In contrast the second, a longer and lively realistic version, might still be an enjoyable read today.

The third or neo-romantic version was without doubt the one closest to Ekke's heart. In it the native people are viewed through the lens of the "noble savage" and seen as profoundly admirable. For this version Ekke wrote a number of fairytales, supposedly told by the head porter Biek. It was not possible for me to verify whether and to what extent these tales were authentic. In line with the attitudes of the times, Ekke tended to see himself as having creative ownership of the material of his experiences, an approach that might be

questioned today. That is the reason why that version was not chosen here. The variety of literary approaches Ekke adopted in a few short years is an indication of the disturbing intellectual turbulence of the early twentieth century. As such it is of interest from a sociological and history of ideas perspective. This is of course, is a different interest from the documentary value of the current manuscript and one I have discussed in another context.



Ekkehard Beinssen with boss boy Biek

Editors' Note:

To make it easier to locate places on maps or on Google Earth, the spelling of some of the place names used in the original manuscript has been changed to conform with spellings that are more widely in use.

Part One

It is late July 1929. A leaden heat, saturated with moisture, broods over Salamaua, the harbour town of the gold fields of New Guinea. I am waiting on the verandah of the only guesthouse. Like all the houses and storage sheds of the little white settlement, it stands on a coral reef perhaps a hundred metres in width which connects the mainland to a steep island. I am waiting for my two future comrades.

Salamaua Township

Lump, my large, but not quite pure Irish Wolfhound, is lying at my feet with his tongue hanging out, pumping air. He is squinting obliquely at me with the whites of his eyes showing, as though he holds me responsible for the heat. "It was more pleasant up in the mountains, wasn't it Lump?" His squint turns into a broad grin, and he wags his stumpy tail, though his good manners don't go as far as pulling his tongue in. "Cheer up, Lump, in a few days we will be going into the interior again. There you can hunt wild pigs, cassowaries, and kangaroos, guard the camp and take a bath in a cold mountain creek." In response he blinks his eyes and once again wags his stumpy tail as though he were saying: "I don't quite understand what you are saying but I can see that you are happy, so I'll consider it my duty to show a bit of pleasure too." "Yes, this time I won't have to depend solely on your company and that of a few natives," I say, and I get out the telegram and read it once again:

"Arriving with geologist by schooner *Namanulla*. Will employ you and your twenty-five boys for a gold prospecting expedition on behalf of a German Rabaul-based syndicate. Regards Soltwedel."

Their boat is due today, and while I wait I reminisce about my last two years in New Guinea. First there were months of sailing various routes along the coast in a small trading schooner, carting copra from plantations to the depot in Rabaul. White breakers foaming over the coral reefs and playing along the shores of the islands; dark green jungle, often reaching right down to the ocean; the fight for life and boat in the storms of the south-east and north-west monsoons; then again, nights floating along on a calm sea in chaste moon-lit silence – times when one developed an intimacy with the ocean; times of forgetting everything and dreaming without a care in the world. We earn money, buy land, recruit workers, and start our own plantation. I work on the land with a few black men. They call me Master. I am their master, must fill this role and force myself to rule. They are like children, full of pranks, with a natural playfulness and usually also a good deal of naivety that wins me over. I spend months alone with them in the ocean-lapped jungle, while my Australian partner works the schooner, trading and carrying cargo. All our income goes into setting up this new plantation.

Then one dark night our sailing boat runs aground on a reef and breaks up. Other disappointments follow in short succession. We have to abandon our plantation, and our partnership ends. But there are new challenges ahead. I take on work loading copra onto ocean-going ships in Rabaul. It's not what I would choose to do but there is no choice. Other casual jobs follow, often exhausting; work that whites are not accustomed to in the steamy tropical heat. Kanakas dripping with sweat; monotonous chants; French, Australian, British, and American sailors and engineers; hard-drinking captains with their rowdy humour; gold diggers, planters, traders and recruiters; wild nights of drinking. All the frenzy of the South Seas.

But this state of unthinking surrender to the moment could only be temporary. To reach my goals I must stay alert. Thus it happens that one day I met Helmuth Baum, known by white and black alike simply as Boom. He is the embodiment of a New Guinea bushman; like a cassowary here one day and there the next, always walking barefoot and with little

baggage, often for weeks on end, eating only sweet potatoes and bananas, but always with his toothbrush, soap, and razor in his haversack for use twice a day.

Boom had just returned from one of his long expeditions into the interior of the main island of New Guinea. His experiences fascinated me and his reports of discovering gold prompted me to make new plans. As he talked, night after night about the possibilities and probabilities of finding treasures just waiting to be discovered, the prospect of freedom and independence drives me into the grip of gold fever, a malady against which Boom himself has remained immune.

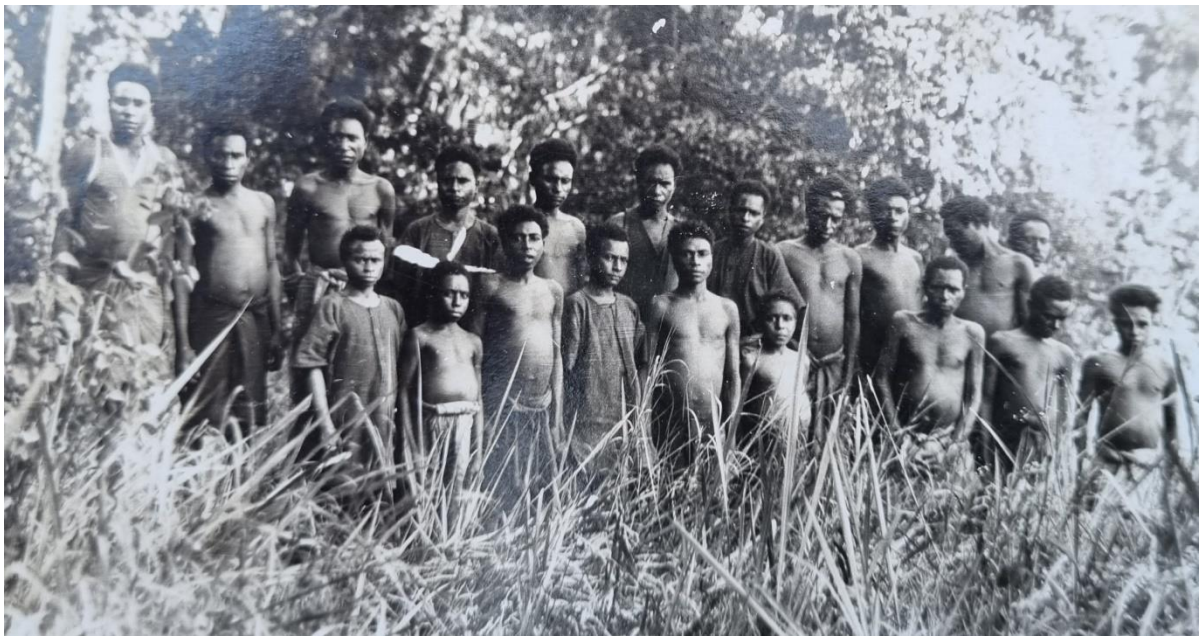
I can now understand the old Australian prospector who had fossicked for the better part of his life and had still found nothing much. In response to my question why he had, at his age, not given up when he had experienced so little success, he answered: "To tell all those who would boss me around to go to hell!" Boom simply smiles; he knows and fears no master. And so my fever also cools and in its place comes the old desire to wander into strange unexplored regions and experience adventures that test both courage and strength; to give in to that eternal primal curiosity about what might lie beyond the mountains. Nevertheless, the thought lingers in the back of my mind:" Just think what I could do with all that wealth!"

It was then that Boom, in his unassuming way, offered to take me into the Herzog Mountains for three months, to learn the trade of prospecting and panning for gold. These three months would render me penniless but give me experiences that were worth ten times more than what it would cost. Three months of glimpsing the majesty of the untouched mountain world with its endless vistas and of listening to the sounds and the silence of the jungle. A magnificent landscape with a small white speck moving through it, where that speck is a human being with an internal emotional world of a similar scale.

New Guinea now holds me completely in its thrall. I have become obsessed with the idea of coming closer to the heart of this land, of penetrating into it and understanding it, no matter whether this would make me rich or send me home a pauper, or perhaps even destroy me. But to turn this idea into reality I must first acquire the means to accomplish it. Fate is on my side. I am soon able to recruit twenty-five black workers and take up a contract

offered by a gold company in Salamaua to build a road to transport goods through the swamps to a new airport which is to become a link to the goldfields at Edie Creek. Fever swamps - but what did it matter? Behind them on the slopes of the high mountains there are the forests, and the unknown.

Many weeks of hard, unhealthy work go by. Then eight days ago, Soltwedel's telegram reaches me, and I grasp his offer with both hands. Here at last is the opportunity to fulfil my dreams.



Mapos recruits

Biek, my boss-boy, is just coming along the veranda. "Master, sail he come now." He points out to sea where a small two-masted schooner can be seen entering the bay. It is the *Namanulla,* and I walk over to the jetty to meet my new companions. The first to approach me is my countryman, Soltwedel, a tall man dressed in khaki. He has a typically German face with a high forehead, brown eyes, and a strong straight nose. We greet each other cordially, for we had known each other in Rabaul. He introduces me to the geologist of our expedition, Mr. Zakharov. A Russian by birth and extraction, Zakharov, with his thickset sturdy figure, broad face, deep-set eyes, high cheekbones, and strong jawbone, is the epitome of the Slavic type. He shakes my hand firmly and, with his square forehead in broad furrows, says: "We are destined to share a great many experiences. I hope we will become good friends out there." "I am sure we will," I reply with sincere conviction, returning his handshake. "Have you seen anything of New Guinea yet?" I ask. "I only arrived from Australia

a month ago, but Mr. Soltwedel has told me a great deal about it on the trip over." "That surprises me," I joke, "because, in spite of the twenty years he has spent here, I always have to squeeze him like a lemon to get him to talk about his experiences. People who have been in the bush for a while become taciturn." Soltwedel laughs and says: "Eating and drinking are sometimes more important than talking. Let's go before hunger and thirst get the better of us." And he is right, because in this hot climate thirst always seems unquenchable.

During dinner Soltwedel briefs me on our plans and duties. We are to prospect in certain precisely defined areas, primarily for gold, but also for any other mineral resources that could be exploited. Our route will initially take us to the Otibanda River to search for the origin of the alluvial gold found there in such great quantities. Then we are to explore all along the Watut River right up to its source. Later we are to go into the region of Mount Lawson to look for the origin of the alluvial gold found in the Lakekamu gold fields in Papua. The last two areas have barely been touched upon by white men, so from a geological point of view, we will be working in completely unknown country. We have a huge task ahead of us. Soltwedel estimates that the entire project will take at least a year.

Towards the end of our meal Jack, an Australian and a good friend of expatriate Germans, sits himself down at our table. He would just love to know where we are planning to go. All the others sitting here in the dining room would also like to know, but such secrets must be closely guarded; there is always the danger that someone could get there ahead of us.
Nothing is more important than being the first to stake a claim whenever new gold is found. Eventually Jack can no longer contain his curiosity. "I'll put ten pounds on the table if you tell me where you're off to." "Very well, put your ten pounds down, my lad, and I'll let you in on the secret," Soltwedel promises, and Jack fumbles around and takes the banknotes out of his pocket. Everybody is looking at Soltwedel. Zakharov whispers to him: "For God's sake, what are you doing?" "So, you really want to know where we are going, Jack? Well, we are going bush!" Soltwedel enjoys the raucous laughter of the onlookers and pushes Jack's ten pounds back over to him. But Jack doesn't want to appear mean, so he takes the money and orders champagne. "Even though I am none the wiser, I wish you blokes good luck anyway". He is a good sport, and as a typical Australian, he wants everyone to acknowledge that.

Still laughing, we all move out onto the veranda and while Zakharov with his stocky portliness walks up and down to further his digestion, I sign my contract with Soltwedel. I am to be in charge of transporting the provisions and managing the camp and the porters, while Zakharov and Soltwedel get on with geological work. Zakharov now finds some Russian balalaika music under a pile of jazz records, and he proceeds to play this over and over until we finally wind up the evening in the best of moods, intoxicated with alcohol, music, and our excitement about the experiences that lie ahead of us.

Some important preliminary tasks need to be attended to now. We need to divide the contents of thirty boxes into approximately a hundred porters' loads in such a way that half of them can be used for the first stage of the expedition and the other half for the second. The latter have to be transported to the airfield at Wau (which services the goldfields of Edie Creek), because it is from there that we plan to set out on the second stage of our expedition, the trek to the Piaru River and Mount Lawson. Twenty-five of the loads for the first half of the trip will be carried by our boys and the rest will be flown to a landing strip on the Watut River where we plan to set up base for the first stage of our expedition. Each load cannot exceed the maximum weight of fifty pounds, and they must all be sewn into sacks with covers to protect them from rain and moisture. The packs must also be numbered, and a list of their contents made.

This work is carried out in Mack's shed. Mack is the agent for many people working in the bush and on the goldfields. Everything they don't immediately need is kept safe in his store. I set up my stretcher between boxes, shovels, picks, pith helmets, sacks of rice, and our personal gear. I spend the nights in the friendly company of rats, mice, Lump, and a few cats, while outside the heavy tropical rain pelts down onto the tin roof almost constantly. After three days of work the packing task is complete, and we are ready for departure.

At last, a clear sunny autumn day arrives. It is Sunday. In the dawn our small motor yacht bobs gently on the ruffled waters of Salamaua Harbour. Not a soul can be seen in the little settlement. All are still sleeping off their Saturday night hangovers. On the boardwalk through the swamp, and down to the beach, twenty-five boys carry twenty-five packs that are ready for the trek. They wade through the water to the pinnace and stow away their

loads, and themselves. We three white men and my dog are carried on board on the shoulders of sturdy kanakas. Mack, our friend and agent, is on the beach receiving final instructions and waving us good luck.

In the bilge of the boat four kanakas are messing about with a blowtorch, a crank, a carburettor, and whatever else is part of this motor, which seems to be held together with nails and wire. Suddenly there is an ear-shattering roar as the engine starts. A smile spreads across the pockmarked face of the black skipper, and our yacht slowly rattles towards the open ocean.

At the cargo hold our porters crouch together fearfully. They are mountain kanakas who can't swim and who are afraid of both the sea and this "devil-devil" of an engine. Before the white man came to their mountains only a very few courageous men had seen the "big water". These would risk their lives to come down to fill a few bamboo shafts with salt water. Still today there is a great need for salt in the mountains.

We three white men lie on the roof of the cabin. Not much is said, except every now and again an explanation of the area for our geologist. We are traversing the Huon Gulf and our destination is the little village of Busama, our point of departure for the long walk ahead. We are each preoccupied with thoughts of the future. How will it work out? What will we find high up in the rain forests and on the grassy steppes behind the mighty mountain ranges that frame the gulf? What experiences will we have? As yet there are no worries to concern us, just the anticipation, which is testing our patience. But let's relax and enjoy the moment. Today is a special day, our first day, and a perfect one at that.

The sea ahead of us is blue and almost motionless, a mirror of the peaceful, cloudless sky. Out on the horizon one can see the narrow trail of smoke left by the steamer that's bringing our mail. In our impatience to get started, we had not waited for our mail.

On our left now, on a mountain that drops down steeply to the sea, Malolo, reputed to be the most beautiful mission station in New Guinea, comes into view, and if we run our eye along the coconut palm fringed beach, we can see a cape ahead of us. Behind it lies Busama and in front of it the waves break white on the reef. Everyone on board is dozing and

dreaming. The dog is asleep and even the black helmsman is dozing, leaning back onto the rudder. The soporific dreaminess of the South Seas has us all enthralled.

Suddenly the captain wakes and sees that we are heading directly towards the reef. He calls out "port" and goes back to sleep again after first making sure that the helmsman has turned the rudder. But we are still heading towards the reef. Then somebody else calls "starboard", the rudder is pulled around hard, but the course does not change. All of a sudden the sleepers and dreamers are woken by the cry: "Steer he go finish!"

Steer he go finish

The rudder has come adrift, and we can see it floating in our wake. To compensate for the loss of steering, rags are wrapped around an iron crowbar and a temporary rudder is made. After lengthy manoeuvring with this bar, we eventually retrieve our rudder board, and around eleven in the morning, under a scorching sun, we run the bow of our boat onto the beach at Busama. We are surrounded by crowds of the local population. Soon the whites, the blacks, and the non-human freight, including the dog, are unloaded.

From Busama the beach widens towards the mouth of the Buang River, the start of the track into the Herzog Mountains. We could have taken the yacht to Buang but there is no harbour there and the freight would have to be carried onto the beach through the surf, so we chose to land in the more sheltered waters of Busama. As Buang is our destination for the day, we get our porters to shoulder their packs without delay and set off at about midday.

The jungle starts immediately beyond the beach, threatening and impenetrable, with its mangrove and sago swamps. To avoid walking on the tiring soft sand, we all paddle barefoot through the edge of the break where the sand is hard. Lump, our expedition dog and great hunter, is enjoying his freedom, racing up and down the long line of porters and amusing himself and us by chasing crabs. The sky and the sea are a dark blue, the sand a blinding white and the wall of the jungle a deep green. The heat is tremendous, so we repeatedly cool off in the tepid seawater.

Under favourable conditions, the hike from Busama to Buang takes three-and-a -half hours. But we take twice as long because the streams we must cross are swollen after heavy rain. We have to wade through them and each time we must first find a ford. At the first river this takes more than an hour. The threat of crocodiles makes the crossing even more difficult, and only after throwing in handfuls of dynamite and patrolling with guns at the ready, can we risk it.

Since the water with its strong current sometimes reaches up to our necks, every boy and every load has to be taken over separately, and all this three times. One of the rivers was so deep that we could only get across where the river flow and the surf of the ocean meet and form a sandbank. It is dark by the time the last porters with their loads have crossed the third river, and we arrive in the camp at Buang thoroughly exhausted. Two huts made from bush materials save us the effort of setting up our tents.

Because of the nearby swamps, there are mosquitoes here in such enormous swarms that we can only ward them off by performing a veritable "St Vitus' dance." As we are all quite tired, we decide to go to bed straight after dinner, but as Zakharov unpacks his swag, his normally disciplined lips suddenly utter a mighty curse. Soltwedel and I are surprised that Zakharov, normally so correct and un-South-Sea-like, can swear at all. This is of greater interest to us than knowing what caused such language. We look at each other and start laughing. Zakharov however, descends upon his bed roll once again, rummages around among blankets, shirts, trousers, and socks and eventually turns to us with an expression of helpless dismay. "It is actually true! I have left my mosquito net behind. What can I do now?"

"There is nothing much you can do except pull your head in under the blankets like a snail," Soltwedel reckons in his rough and hearty manner. "What, in this heat!" Zakharov groans, "I'll go crazy." Soltwedel, who is hardier, comforts him: "Only for one night; tomorrow there will be far fewer mosquitoes and the day after, in the mountains, there will be none." "Small consolation," I say. "We can't afford to experiment with a crazy geologist. By the way, I happen to know how one can sleep here without a net, so please take mine." Zakharov resolutely refuses but Zavil is already following my instructions and attaching my net above his bed. After I have assured him again that my method is mosquito-proof, he eventually agrees. My method consists of picking up my blankets and walking down to the beach. The little pests can't stand the salty night breeze. I bed down close to the breaking surf. With the cool soft sand to rest on, the starry sky like a roof above me, I am lulled to sleep by the boom of the surf. I have a peaceful night until in the morning a breaking wave wakes me with a cold shower.

Back in the heat I find Soltwedel and his companion engaged in a blood feud. Despite all precautions, a few of the mosquitoes did find their way into their nets. Now the two men were taking revenge for an unsettled and sleepless night by slapping wildly all around them. My involuntary bath was undoubtedly more pleasant than the bites my two comrades have on their faces and hands.

Today's hike is short. Our destination is the confluence of the two upper arms of the Buang River, at the foot of the first great climb. Before breakfast, at sunrise, the boys pack up their loads and on narrow swampy paths, we enter the jungle. Zakharov and Soltwedel go on ahead to examine the area geologically.

When all the boys have finally left the campsite, I cast a last nostalgic gaze at my beloved South Sea before I follow them into the twilight of the forest. Out there the smell was of ocean, salt, sand and fish, but no sooner do we take the first steps, we are overcome by a suffocating smell of swamp, black soil, and decaying trees and leaves. Then there is the extraordinary narcotic perfume of exotic orchids and flowers of the jungle, often abruptly spoilt by the stench of carrion. And the same range of impressions for the ear, now muffled, now shrill. I am confused by the many calls and sounds of birds and insects. It reminds me

of oriental bazaars with their vaulted passages and halls, their strong scents, and strange cries. Here too it is cool compared to the world outside.

When I first set foot in this kingdom of the jungle, I walk erect and proud, as one might walk in the world of the Vikings. A moment later a branch brushes the hat from my head as if to say: "Take off your hat in this sanctuary. Don't be too cocky. Here you will have to learn humility and patience." And without doubt the jungle, despite its overwhelming beauty, also provides hard lessons in self-discipline. All who have experienced it will know that fact. Will it test our patience too? An unsettling thought in the midst of all this harmony!

Initially the track leads far into the plain on the lower branch of the Buang River. I cannot hear my own footsteps as the ground is soft and often thickly covered with moss. Every now and again our covered walkway leads into the water and we wade upstream through the river, only soon to plunge yet again into the darkness of the forest.

Once we have arrived at our campsite we pitch the tents, then water is boiled for tea and later we take a bath in the clear mountain stream. In the meantime, Zakharov is examining the riverbed for gold. Gold occurs either as alluvial gold, which is found mainly in river sand in the accumulated deposits of old river courses, or it may be still locked away in mother rock as lode gold. To test a watercourse for its alluvial gold content, one fills a dish that has been specifically designed for the purpose, with a specimen of sediment taken from as deep down in the river course as possible. Then the contents are washed by swinging the dish in circles under water. The lighter sand washes out of the dish and the gold sinks due to its greater weight. It accumulates in a groove in the pan and becomes visible as dust, sand, or larger grains. Depending on how much gold is found in a particular sample, a prospector can estimate whether the area is worth mining or not.

When the gold is in rock, it is most commonly found in quartz and in slate, more rarely in granite. It can either occur on its own or in a chemical combination with other elements. In its first manifestation it can often be discerned with a magnifying glass. One can see small particles of gold sprinkled through the rock. The second form can only be detected by means of chemical analysis. In much the same way one can detect the presence of other minerals and since specific metals nearly always occur in connection with specific rocks, one

can predict by the rock type what metals might be present. Due to the volcanic nature of New Guinea and the unusually high rainfall, the whole landscape is so torn, so jumbled up and washed out, that it is extraordinarily difficult for a geologist to come to a definite and reliable understanding.

After a restless and rainy night (Zakharov put up an umbrella to divert the drips from the tent), everyone is woken early as today's march will be difficult and long. We will have to climb almost 6000 feet from the plain. We leave the foaming white river and enter a giant forest with thick undergrowth. The narrow track winds upward in constant twists and turns. After an hour's walk we arrive at the village of Lega. This settlement has only eight to ten huts and very few gardens and is surrounded by densely planted but unfortunately not yet fully ripe bananas. Lega has only existed for a few years and was established by the Wesley Mission. They brought a few families down from the Herzog Mountains and intended the settlement to be an intermediate stop on the long track from the sea to the villages of the mountains. Lega is built on the slope of a ridge.

We will now climb steadily till we reach the pass that forms the entrance to the mighty valley of the Snake River. We stop here in Lega for the duration of a cigarette, while we cast our eyes through the silhouettes of the bananas, back over the valley of the Buang River and out across the distant ocean. Then we say farewell to that world and continue our ascent through the rainforest for many hours. Whenever we think we can see the last rise we discover, after laborious climbing, that it isn't even the second last rise.

Snake River Valley

We hear an unusual bird call. Its song descends the chromatic scale in a wonderfully pure restrained rhythm. Biek, our boss boy, turns to me and pointing into the forest with a startled gesture, cries out: "Matapui! – Matapui sing! – Matapui bring death!" Smiling at his superstitions, I try to reassure him: "Never fear Biek, Matapui has no power where the white man rules." But Biek remains serious and simply replies: "No Master, Matapui he savvy." His tribe believes Matapui to be the bird of death and when it sings one of those hearing his call must die. I say nothing more but just give him a friendly pat on the back. One can't dispel the superstitions of the natives with rational arguments.

After a lengthy and difficult climb on slippery, clay soil we reach a grass-covered rise. From here we get a bird's-eye view of the surrounding country. Everything is so clear, so pure, and so full of distant yearning and solitude that I am beginning to have a better understanding of the song of Matapui and why the song goes down the scale and not up. His home is high in the mountains so how could he sing any other way? As we listen thoughtfully to the far-off notes ringing in the evening twilight, our hearts are filled with melancholy.

Now nightfall is no longer far off, and since we have arrived at the source of one of the branches of the Buang River and my companions are still a long way behind, I call a stop, have the tents erected, and cook a particularly large and nourishing meal. Our food so far today has consisted of only chocolate and mountain water. Tired, like overworked draught animals, our boys arrive in the camp one by one. The other two men, who are not yet fit, have also found it heavy going, particularly Zakharov who is too exhausted to be hungry.
After dinner the three of us sit by the fire on sacks of rice. I light a cigarette and Zakharov goes back into the tent to get a cigar for himself. Suddenly we hear violent shouting. Slap, slap, a scream and Varandin, one of our houseboys, is catapulted out of the tent. Another scream and Ghabergh is expelled in a similar fashion. Both come towards me with big, surprised eyes, looking for protection. Zakharov returns to the fire. "What happened," I ask, "were the boys going to steal something?" "No, and I want to use this opportunity to request something in principle. I noticed your smile when I rinsed my own plate with boiling water after dinner. You have to understand, it is impossible for me to eat from utensils that have been touched by black hands." "But Zakharov," I say, "I have made a point of always seeing

to it that the cooks and house-boys wash their hands before they prepare a meal." "Black is black," says Zakharov. "I admit that I am sensitive, but I can't suppress my revulsion when I come into any personal contact with black people. They disgust me and make me feel quite sick." Soltwedel and I catch each other's eye. What's ahead of us here? It is virtually impossible to be overly concerned about hygiene in the bush.

Cook boys at work.

Meanwhile Zakharov is washing his hands after his rough contact with Varandin and Ghabergh. They are still standing behind me waiting either for an explanation or for further punishment. Carefully drying his hands Zakharov calls them over: "Show me your hands." They both stretch them out, glad to be able to show that they have not stolen anything and excitedly reaffirming this. But with an expression full of revulsion, Zakharov points between their fingers: "They have scabies and dare to touch my bed. That's intolerable!" He spits into the fire in disgust.

"You will have to get used to it," Soltwedel comments dryly. "All kanakas have scabies, ringworm or psoriasis. Admittedly, it's not nice but it can't be avoided. We can do quite a bit to keep such conditions under control and all that is being done, but as long as they have contact with tribal natives, and that cannot be avoided, you can't eradicate the condition." Zakharov dismisses this angrily. "I'll never be able to get used to it." "Then at least let me give you Dane as your personal assistant." I try to appease him. "His skin is clean, and he is eager to learn. I will try to make allowances for your idiosyncrasies to the extent that this is possible in the bush, but please also take note that no man can serve two masters, particularly not if he is a native. In the eyes of our boys, I am their master. Though I have made it clear to them all that they must obey you and Soltwedel, the right to punish must remain mine. In the case at hand, I would not have imposed punishment and you had no right to do so."

"That means that we have very different views," my companion replies. "It proves that you are far too lenient towards the kanakas." "Not at all, I am just fair. You have to allow them to be themselves, and give them a measure of freedom, but be very firm when it comes to them doing what is asked of them. In this case, there was no bad intention and therefore no reason for punishment." Zakharov just shakes his head. For him the blacks are nothing but slaves. He is too much of an aesthete to muster up enough sympathy to give them equal rights as humans. With clean hands now, and the two scabies-ridden boys out of sight, Zakharov spits the last remnants of his disgust into the fire and tries to smooth things over. "My views shouldn't get in the way of our white comradeship." Soon we are all three lying peacefully beside each other under the tarpaulin, sleeping the sleep of the pleasantly weary.

Next day the normally lethargic boys cannot be stopped. The tent is being dismantled over our heads, our beds are pulled warm from under our backs and the cook-boy doesn't even give us a chance for a second cup of tea. In double quick time all have their packs on their backs and off they go. I just manage to stop the porter with the supply box so that we at least have something to eat on the way. Zakharov looks at me perplexed: "What's the matter? Why suddenly all this energy?" I explain the mystery to him. Our destination today is Mapos, the mountain village that is home to our boys. Up there, dads and mums and pretty, if not entirely hygienic meris *(girls)* are waiting. But more than anything else, it is probably their stomachs that are driving them. They are sure to be sick of their constant rice diet. Up there, there will again be taros, sweet potatoes, yams, bananas, and sugar cane to eat.

The three of us tramp along in the rear on the seemingly endless mountain track. Our boots often sink a foot into the sticky clay. It is raining in heavy showers and the water is running down our necks and backs. We grumble and curse, each one in his own language, in German, Russian and Australian. Letting off steam in this all-too-human predicament eventually allows us to laugh at ourselves. The stretch of track just before we get to the top of the pass is a real surprise to us. It is like a carefully designed botanical garden, only grander than any earthly creator could ever have planned. Zakharov is of the opinion that if this garden could be transplanted to Berlin, he could give up looking for gold and do nothing but sit at the cash register and collect the entrance fees.

At the highest point of the pass the winds are almost chilly for this tropical country. Our ears, unaccustomed to the altitude, give way to pressure from within and open with a pop, allowing a wider spectrum of sounds to be heard. Now through a clearing in the forest we can see, spread out in front of us, the gigantic, deeply furrowed valley of the Snake River running through bare grass-covered mountain slopes. This is where, years before, my friend Baum stood as the first white man in the area and peered into this land which no whites had so far entered. He saw the smoke from many villages rising, saw gardens that lay like vineyards on the steep slopes, and huts perched on the ridges like birds' nests. This was a densely populated valley. The porters accompanying him were terrified and ran off. Only one of them stayed with him. What was he to do? Turn back and end up having done the long trek in vain? Baum took the risk, and it paid off. He succeeded in entering into friendly relations with the natives, recruited a group of them for his work and took them to the coast. After two years they returned and told their people of the wonders and the power of the white man. They had tempting treasures to trade such as knives, axes and iron tools of every kind, loincloths, jew's-harps, belts, glass beads, tin spoons and plates, mouth organs, red paint and perfume etc. Since that time the white man has had a good standing in the area, along with his trade goods of course.

The age-old hostilities between the different villages and tribes, which had long been isolated from each other and were degenerating through inbreeding, were also altered by white men, for both commercial and political reasons. Today the whole valley is like a single country, but during the long period of isolation, the original common language had fractured to such an extent that villages hardly an hour apart could no longer communicate, and even today many different languages are spoken in the valley. After Baum, Soltwedel was one of the next whites to enter. We will have many nights to hear his stories of those early times.

The sun is now shining warmly over the countryside again. After we have rested and eaten, we dive into the darkness of the forests once more and walk down into the valley. Here we find one of our porters sitting stoically by the track in a pool of blood. He has slipped and almost totally severed the tendon of his heel with an axe. We bandage him up carefully and leave him behind with one of the boys. After a long steep descent, we then arrive in the

village of Bulantim, where we employ porters so the injured man and his load can be carried on to Mapos.

From Bulantim the track takes us through dense kunai grass and up and down ridges for many kilometres until we finally arrive in Mapos where we are given a huge welcome.

Creek crossing with Lump standing in the foreground

This village was my base earlier when I had recruited my boys, and now their return is celebrated into the early hours of the morning. We intend to stay in Mapos for at least a week to give our geologist the chance to check out my discoveries from that earlier visit. In response to the invitation of the black missionary, we set up camp in his beautiful large house. Soon after our arrival the rain starts again, and it pours for nearly a fortnight. It is also uncomfortably chilly with constant damp winds, fog, and mud. My beloved sunny dreamy Mapos that I had praised so highly, is showing its most unpleasant side. We feel locked in and unable to move on.

One day, when the weather clears for a short time, I go down with Zakharow to where the Gangwae River flows into the Snake. There we find marble; millions of tons of marble that's perhaps better quality than that which Michelangelo procured from Carrara. But here the insoluble problem of transport prevents it from benefitting mankind.

Folded kunai grass hills and ridges

We return drenched, and since the cold brings to mind the topic of mountaineering and the Russian winter, I dream that night of a fantastic white castle on the top of the Gaurisamkar. I am not sure whether it has been constructed of blocks of ice or of Mapos marble. The light shines through the walls with a bluish tinge, and from within comes a choir of a thousand voices that sing strangely sad and exotic melodies. I am sure that a secure world peace, or the birth of Nietzsche's superman, is being celebrated here and I expect to hear Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with its "joy" and "be embraced you millions" any moment. But as I awake the singing continues. It comes from the distance, blowing in with the morning mist.

It takes me some time to realise that I am no longer dreaming. These are the morning devotions of the hundred strong mission school, conducted in a church that has been built of grass and bamboo down in the valley. The students are singing pious words in a heathen language with heathen tunes. The Wesleyan mission has allowed the natives to keep their own ancient melodies and has translated protestant hymns into the language of the kanakas. This is in contrast to the conservative Catholic Church which, on the whole, teaches its converts the same Latin cantatas that have been sung in Rome for a thousand years. These melodies, born of jungle dreams, strange and melancholy, with a moving simplicity

and sweetness, are sung with wonderful purity by the strong and unspoiled voices of these children of nature. We can expect a free concert every morning and evening for the duration of our stay in Mapos. I know all the tunes off by heart from my earlier visit and often catch myself humming them to myself as I walk.

Rain, nothing but rain! We spend days on end sitting on the verandah of the mission house cursing the weather for holding us up. We buy mountains of produce; kaukaus, yams, taros, pitpit, sugarcane, shallots, tomatoes, bananas and lemons. We now eat a purely vegetarian diet. After the tinned food of Salamaua and Rabaul, we gorge ourselves on vitamins. And all procured for a few teaspoons of salt, some small kitchen knives, jew's harps, beads and matches. There are few places on earth where you can live so cheaply and so well. In addition, there is the occasional wild pigeon that the newly trained shoot-boy, Zavil, proudly brings back. Our boys, who are on leave, only put in an appearance to collect their meals and are then not seen again for the rest of the day.

One evening we get talking about tin, and since I am sure I have come across some, I set out next morning in spite of the pouring rain to find my old worksite beside my waterfall. I say "my", for it is the most beautiful one I have ever seen and it is quite likely that no white man discovered it before me. Off I go, wearing my rubber-soled tennis shoes and using my walking stick like a ski pole, pretending that the slippery, dirty clay is snow. Once I reach the floor of the valley, I need to climb up the steep opposite side in herringbone steps. Behind me are three wet, naked, shivering kanakas.

We leave the grassy slopes and make our way up through dense rainforest into the realm of mosses and leeches. Three times we have to wade up to our hips through water, crossing the Gangwae River. Finally we stay in the water, walking up the riverbed. Two of the boys are carrying bags, and one a hammer. A piece of every rock outcrop is broken off and put in the bag. The boys think the master is completely crazy. There are so many stones in Mapos and he comes all this way in the pouring rain, fills the sack with stones, and has us carry them back. But with their characteristic fatalism they accept it all saying: "Maski. Fashion belong white man." (What does it matter? That's what white men do.)

'My waterfall'

My waterfall can already be heard from afar. Close up one is almost blown over by the force of the fine spray of water. It is cold and wet here, deafeningly loud and full of dripping moss and orchids. A few rock samples are quickly knocked from the walls then we leave this eerie, chilly spectacle behind us. A fire is lit at my former campsite, a tin of meat opened, we cook some rice, then after half an hour we make our way home without further stops on the way. Stiff and wet to the bone, I arrive at the mission house where Zakharov is waiting with his magnifying glass at the ready, and Soltwedel with a bottle of brandy. While I change into dry clothes, Zakharov sits silently next to the heap of stones. In the last light of day, he has discovered enough to justify a closer inspection of the area, but right now we have another project, and so we will have to come back to this area on a later visit.

In the evening we sit together for quite some time and chat. I tell my colleagues about the strange paintings that can be seen in a kind of open limestone cave on the way to the upper Gangwae. These caves are used as burial sites by the kanakas. Like us, they bury their dead, however after some time when the flesh has decomposed, the remains are exhumed, and the skulls and bones are taken to caves. Even today, hundreds, if not thousands of skulls can be seen, a veritable anthropological treasure trove. The sculls of the departed from the tribe currently living in Mapos lie strictly separate from a pile of "big feller men belong before" and these ancestors, about whom I was unable to ascertain details, would presumably have created the paintings. There may have been a Polynesian people living here once to whose art and symbolism the paintings belong. Even today, people who are noticeably Polynesian in appearance can be seen among the generally Melanesian kanakas of the Snake River. They can be distinguished by the shape of the face, the straight lanky hair and light skin colour.

One of the most beautiful paintings, done in red ochre on white limestone, represents a complete symbolic sun sequence in about twenty individual images. The sun is portrayed in the shape of a stylised human being with an enormous head and a crown of light beams. The figures rise up on the left and the higher the sun, the larger its crown of light. In the middle, at the zenith, is the largest sun figure. Then the images descend again to the right with the crown of light becoming ever smaller. Under all this, a red line has been drawn, probably representing the horizon. Beneath that is an image of the sun standing on its head and another with the sun in a prone position as it is being devoured by the open mouth of

a dog-like creature. What is noteworthy is the accuracy of the observation showing the sun just above the horizon, at sunrise and sunset, to be almost as large as the image of the sun in its zenith. It is also worth mentioning that the myth of the sun being devoured by a beast is spread throughout the South Seas as well as being found in the symbolism of American Indian tribes. Despite the extreme remoteness of this area this myth has reached these shores.

That night just as we are about to go to bed, a dripping wet runner arrives with a letter on his stick. Bad news: our agent writes from Salamaua that the airline is booked out and can't transport our provisions to the airstrip at the Watut. We will be in trouble if we can't find an alternative. There is also an element of intrigue in this. Other prospectors who have an interest in such things are bound to have guessed where we are headed. This warrants a rethink. What should we do? After much discussion it is decided we will arrange for our supplies to be transported to the unfortunately rather distant airstrip of Bulowat. We decide that I am to leave for Lae next morning. My two comrades will stay in Mapos to continue prospecting until I inform them that the supplies have arrived at Bulowat. And since we fly directly over Mapos on the way to Bulowat, a red cloth is to be thrown from the aeroplane as we pass over, as a signal to break camp and move on.

I get the two boys who are to accompany me ready for departure. They have to sleep in the mission house, for when it comes to punctuality, they are not all that reliable. I have chosen Zavil and Rapuwe. Zavil is small but a good runner and tough. He has clean, silky skin, a fuzzy head of hair and Mongolian features. He is an excellent marksman with a shotgun. He also speaks Trepang English fluently. I have long promised him a flight in the "ballus" *(plane or bird)* and since he has been with me longest of all the boys, I am particularly attached to him, as he is to me. With the exception of Biek, the boss-boy, he is the most intelligent of my group. Rapuwe is of sturdier build than Zavil, also a good runner but otherwise fairly unintelligent. But he has a good-natured temperament and is willing and reliable. A physical characteristic of his is his huge toes which are of quite startling dimensions. Next morning in the dark we hastily make a cup of tea, warm up yesterday's food, and in the breaking dawn we set off – Lump, the two boys and me. We are all four in the best of spirits and looking forward to the flight across the mountains to Bulowat.

At sunrise we reach a grass covered rise. It is a magnificent morning. Songs and melodies come to my mind, and I burst into loud, full-throated, though by no means melodic, song. I can do that here for apart from the kanakas no one can hear me and they have the agreeable characteristic of accepting the incomprehensible white man for what he is. Only Lump looks at me accusingly as if to say, "you are frightening away all my game", but "Maski," I tell him: "There will be no time for hunting today." In the valley the morning mists seem like a wild ocean from which the peaks of mountains rise as if they are islands. Above it all is the dome of an azure-blue sky. This is our first really fine day in Mapos. We can see as far as the Finisterre Ranges on the one side and the Kraetke Range on the other. The mission house at Mapos clings like a swallow's nest to a steep ridge. On the grass-stalks the dew and the rain of the night have left a thousand droplets that break the light into iridescent blue and green hues. From Bulantim nearby and from the other more distant villages, blue smoke rises vertically and mingles with the blue of the sky. A fresh morning breeze carries that sweetish smell characteristic of all native villages.

We leave the grassy slopes and descend into the darkness of the forest. Once more we walk through our botanical garden, through the village of Lega, and on to the Buang River. Here we take our first rest for the day and boil the billy using wood left from our earlier camp. The river is hugely in flood; a wild, foaming mass. So, off with shirt and trousers because we need to find a place to cross. But no matter where we try, it is too deep and swift. We cannot attempt to swim across because of the rocks and boulders. It takes us more than three hours before we manage to slash a path through the thick scrub on the banks to reach a place where the river divides into three branches and is shallow enough to cross. By the time we finally erect a makeshift shelter of palm fronds and branches, night has set in.

In the early morning all the trees are heavy with water. Whatever is touched initiates a shower. With wild screams, the white cockatoos fly off to warn of approaching danger. It is as though we are walking through an aviary. Bird calls are constant. There is not a tree here without a bird in it. Surely no other place on earth supports so many species. As we walk into the valley, Zavil shoots a number of rhinoceros hornbills and pigeons. These two species, along with the cassowary and the emu, provide our most important source of fresh

meat. Mammals are rare here and consist mainly of wild pigs, small kangaroos *(wallabies)* and a few species of small arboreal bears *(cuscus*). Through the dividing rampart of the trees we can now hear the rising and falling roar of the surf. We stride out vigorously and are soon standing on the white sandy beach once more. After the claustrophobia of the forest, my eyes blissfully perceive the dreamy distant views spread out in front of me. We turn towards the north, swim across a river and walk along the shady beach at a more relaxed pace. Half to the right, in the blue haze of a cloudless day, the peninsula of Lae, our destination for today, lies in the far distance.

After a walk of four hours, we come to the village of Labu situated at the mouth of the Markham River. Here we find the "Markham Watch", two kanakas employed by the government as ferrymen to provide a canoe service for people crossing the often-dangerous river. The mouth of the Markham River is a wild chaos of swamps, sandbanks, small islands, huge tree trunks, and eddies created by the yellow masses of muddy water that flow into the ocean at over twelve miles per hour. Where surf and stream meet, very dangerous conditions exist. Our two boatmen punt the canoe along the shallow bank with long poles, then they jump out and in the lee of an island, wading through the water up to their hips, they laboriously push the craft half a kilometre upstream. Once there, they jump in and paddle furiously. We are carried downstream by the current at a tremendous rate until we reach the cover of the next island. In this way, we gradually work our way across to the opposite bank.

Swarms of white herons cross with measured flight. One of them flies over us so low that we could almost pluck it out of the air. These creatures have no fear of humans. Do they know that they are protected? Zavil desperately wants to shoot but I forbid him to kill such a beautiful bird for the sake of a few tail feathers. On arrival our ferrymen set us down in a swampy area. With the very first step we sink knee-deep, with the second up to our hips into a black stinking swamp. But this is the only access to Lae, and we have no choice. Nothing offers more resistance than such a bush swamp. Every pandanus is full of aerial roots that reach down to the ground and make the tree look as if it has a thousand legs, and every root is covered with thorns. The mangroves too, put down wildly tangled roots all around and they send up spears that stick out of the ground, sharp as lances and a foot high. The sago palms have thorns as long as a finger. Everything forms an impenetrable

tangle. Now sinking, now staggering in the mud, in our desperation even grabbing at the thorns to steady ourselves, we fight our way through this swamp for more than an hour. After this purgatory we finally set foot on white ocean sand, and we feel we are in paradise. Fully clothed, I dive into the surf.

We reach Lae aerodrome at dusk, quite exhausted. Just as we arrive two Junkers aeroplanes land like white herons. In a bungalow belonging to white friends, I am offered a bath, a clean bed, and a sumptuously laid table. It doesn't take much to make a man happy! Here we get some disappointing news. The Bulowat airstrip is too short for a Junkers aeroplane to land. Only the little "Moth" can land there. To ferry all our provisions up with this aircraft would take eight to ten days. We can't be sure of having it all delivered in less than four weeks. In my mind's eye I see my two comrades in Mapos, watching every overflight for four weeks to see whether it drops a red cloth, our agreed signal. What to do? Give up the flight, which would be so much quicker and more comfortable? It is a hard decision to make but there is no alternative. Legs and backs will have to do the work once again.

Mack's motor launch is just dropping anchor at Lae, and I run to the beach and charter it. The boys have already begun to fetch the supplies. An hour later everything is securely stowed on board. With the look of an expert, the black engineer ties the carburettor to the engine block with string. He smiles about my concerns. The motor starts and makes any further argument irrelevant. It is late by now but if the string holds, we could just manage to land in Buang before nightfall. Out at sea the swell is high and soon has the little boat jumping about. Lump and a few of the blacks, among them a police boy with a native convict in handcuffs, get seasick. I choose to ride on the cabin roof. Now the sun is hidden behind cloud, the sea is quite yellow and the sky above the Markham Valley equally so. The whole scene is bathed in a light that seems to shine of its own accord. The effect of this display of colour is enriched by the deep darkness of a thunderstorm brooding over Salamaua.

The black captain announces that he no longer wants to go to Buang. He thinks the surf will be too high to make a landing possible. In addition, he is concerned that the pinnace would capsize if the storm caught us at sea, but I won't let myself be bargained with. I insist we keep our course to Buang. Grumpily the helmsman obliges, and the motor gives a

worried shake of its cylinder head. Nevertheless, we do manage to drop anchor beyond the surf, and the boys carry the loads on their heads through the waves and onto the beach. Lump and I are the last to leave, diving overboard.

By the light of a lantern I make myself at home in the grass hut and can see the pinnace lifting anchor and disappearing into the gathering darkness. Suddenly through wind and rain there are calls. Lump races down to the beach and barks provocatively. We bring a light, and a glow answers from out at sea. It comes closer and then disappears again into the night. We go to bed rather worried while the heavy tropical rain pelts onto the grass roof and soaks us, drop by drop. In the morning the pinnace is lying at anchor ten kilometres away. I knew it, the carburettor string must have failed!

After breakfast I send the resourceful Zavil into the villages on the near slopes of the Herzog Mountains to drum up porters. I know all the village chiefs here and I have a good reputation in the area. Apart from that, taxes are due again soon and money will be needed, so it is not surprising that sixty porters turn up next morning in spite of the heavy rain. I distribute the loads, pay the porters off but postpone our departure till next day because of the heavy rain. In the dusk, swarms of flying foxes fly in and land on the breadfruit tree beside our camp. I shoot about a dozen of them in the course of fifteen minutes and every shot is greeted with howls of delight, for in spite of its nauseating stench this animal, when roasted, is a special treat for the natives. The creatures are so unafraid that they come back to sit in the same spot again and again in spite of the gun shots and the screaming. I examine their wings, which have a span of almost two metres. The construction is functional, but at the same time so artful and simple that it is easy to understand why Leonardo da Vinci took this species of animal and not the bird as his model for a flying machine.

I plan to cover the hike between Buang and Mapos at an accelerated pace in a single day. I have now walked this track so often that it is becoming mundane, particularly if walking alone. I give the porters two days to reach Mapos; they are to spend a night in Lega. I set off before sunrise accompanied only by Lump and with half a bar of chocolate and a tin of meat in my haversack. I follow my old system for long marches: walking steadily but not too quickly and at an even pace, with only half an hour's break around midday. I find I need

to focus my thoughts on some topic, for weariness is less the result of tired muscles than of boredom of the mind. It is remarkable how far one can actually walk in a day.

By five o'clock I have reached Mapos. From a grassy rise I can see the mission house in the distance. All day I have been looking forward to the reunion with my two friends. Now I can see them from afar watching an aeroplane flying south at a height of about four thousand feet *(1200 metres*), so they are very surprised when I suddenly appear behind them, and they are delighted when I tell them that our supplies will arrive next day and that we will be able to move on in a few days. Zakharov fetches an enormous quantity of mixed vegetables from the fire, which I ravenously devour, and we then celebrate with a bottle of port. I have only been gone for six days, but there is a nice feeling of joy and satisfaction to be with my comrades again. I feel I have come home, and I am even more pleased to sense that the other two feel much the same. We sit around chatting together in the best of spirits till midnight. Then my companions each lend me a blanket, as my bedding is still in transit. After we have protected ourselves from fleas with powder and Flix, we go to bed, ready for sleep.

Although the porters arrive punctually next day, we end up staying for another four days before we can move on. New porters have to be hired to carry the additional loads to our first base camp on the Watut River, since the previous porters do not want to go beyond Mapos. We also need to do some repacking. Around this time Naie is recruited. He is a cheeky little prankster and clown with a comic personality all rolled into one. He is a true Maposian, about as tall as Lump when he is sitting on his hind legs, and about twelve years old. Naie has a golden laugh that is so delightful that Baum and I spent whole evenings having fun with the little rascal when he was with us on our earlier trip. But he is also very

Naie The Prankster

independent. For a while he attended the mission school but became bored and with the prerogative of a free native, he quit one day to accompany Baum in search of gold in the interior. The white master with his tins, bottles and instruments was a great deal more interesting than the things the mission people talked about … and then there was all that singing!

Because Naie was quite clever, he was appointed as the cook-boy. It took only a short time before things went awry. The expedition was a week out of Mapos when one morning a whole tin of lard, two tins of meat and a few other items went missing and at the same time it was very obvious that Naie's tummy, instead of being the size of a coconut, that day had the dimensions of a regimental drum. However, Naie is not only clever but also careful, for he knows the "fashion belong white man", that in cases like these a certain part of the anatomy has to pay for what the mouth has perpetrated. So he decided to quit and started off for home with all his provisions already stowed away in his stomach. For six days the little fellow travelled through hostile, and at times even cannibal territory, crossed rivers deeper than he was tall, and eventually, to the horror of all inhabitants, arrived back in Mapos hale and hearty though with a considerably diminished breadbasket. Anyone who is familiar with New Guinea can appreciate what an achievement that was. However, in Mapos nobody wanted him, and since Naie was hungry he organised a kind of robber gang with other orphaned boys. They lived in the bush and took what was needed from the gardens. And Naie needed a lot because his stomach is very elastic!

Now the friend of his "good feller Master Boom" has turned up again. One morning he appears in front of me on the veranda of the mission house, grubby, dressed in nothing but a rope belt and smiling with embarrassment. "Naie come finish. Naie stop bum-bum. Naie cook. Naie no good." (Naie is here. Naie is going to stop bumming around. Naie will cook. Naie is no good.) In view of his obvious remorse, I accept his offer in spite of the protests of my companions. I give him a huge piece of soap and send him down to the river with instructions not to come back before the soap has been used up. He then receives a sky-blue loincloth, a spoon, a plate, a jew's-harp, and a little tin saucepan in which he immediately cooks a few stolen sweet potatoes and a frog he caught while he was bathing, all the while happily playing his jew's harp. So that's Naie's story. The relieved chief of Mapos tells me that I don't ever have to bring him back.

Our departure from Mapos takes on the appearance of a triumphal procession. Even before sunrise the mission square is crowded and by seven I have distributed the loads to our twenty-five boys and the sixty hired porters and paid them. It is the custom to pay for carrier services in advance and there is almost no known case where the porter has not delivered his load to the agreed destination. There may have been occasions when a sack of rice was nibbled if the porter's hunger became too great. That should not happen to us this time because we have bought a mountain of garden produce and have distributed it to the porters. So each man has to carry five days' worth of sweet potatoes on top of his load. Our provisions have been calculated somewhat sparingly because we are hoping to buy more produce on the way.

Zakharov's haversack and camera are given to Naie with strict instructions to always keep five steps behind his master, like a little dog. The haversack contains the most essential scientific instruments that our geologist needs to form an impression of the geological characteristics of the areas traversed. And if you observed Zakharov as he walks you would be convinced that nothing could escape his sharp, deep-set eyes, be it a major formation, some layering of rock, or simply a small stone. He reads the landscape in terms of millions of years and tells the story of the living earth as if he was witness to its evolution. But it is not just the past that he reads like a horoscope. He can spend whole nights talking about weathering, oxidation, displacement and eruptions of subterranean volcanos, and sees future changes in the landscape that further millions of years will create.

Soltwedel, in comparison, does not have Zakharov's scientific training to read the formations geologically, but since the discovery of the goldfields here he has gathered a great deal of practical experience. Whenever Zakharov comments that there might be something here or there, he considers the practicalities. Would mining be economically viable, suitable for machines and sluice boxes, for an individual or a company? Could one build an airfield nearby? How long would the preliminary work take and how many boys and how much capital would be necessary? Soltwedel always has his mind on what can be exploited and if Zakharov is carried away by something that is geologically interesting but of no economic significance, then it is Soltwedel who will redirect his attention to the practicalities of the real world. Whilst I am fascinated by the approaches of both men, it is

a life in contact with man and nature that is more important to me than anything else. Consequently, we three complement each other very well and it is no surprise that now, as we leave Mapos, Lump and I are the first to set out, and my two comrades follow behind. My gaze is directed into the distance whereas Zakharov's eyes usually scan the ground and whatever else is in close proximity.

The track leads from the airy heights of Mapos down to the Snake River. In the language of the natives, it has the beautiful name Sagae, with a slight emphasis on the "ae". Sagae means fairy tale or legend in Mapos. Not far from here there is the Gangwae, meaning song, which runs into the Sagae. Thus, from this point on, the river could well be called the "The river of sung legends". From a rocky prominence which, if situated on the Rhine would certainly have provided a good site for the castle of a robber baron, I can see our expedition moving down the mountain. There are almost a thousand people – men, women, children and infants – like a black snake against the light green of the slopes. Our boys, who will now be away for some time, walk freely. Brother, sister, mum, dad or friend are carrying their loads. They themselves are decorated with flowers and feathers tucked behind their ears, into their hair, or under their arm and knee bands. They are brightly painted with white lime and colours, all wearing their best lava-lavas and strutting along like roosters. Boisterous yelling, calling and singing accompany the procession. The native pigs dive off into the bushes in fear. We descend to the Sagae River where it is fiendishly hot compared to the cool of Mapos – the difference in altitude is five hundred metres. Most plunge into the water to cool off. Only our porters stand stiffly on the riverbank, reluctant to spoil their body decorations. Just as hot as when they arrived, they continue along the narrow track by the river. Behind them follow the farewelling party, like an army of freshly bathed mice.

It is virtually impossible to describe the magnificence of the track we are now following. To our left are the mighty grass mountains, rounded and sparsely vegetated with oaks from the tertiary period. To the right, gigantic grass covered walls rise almost vertically. Their marble foundation awakens the sculptor within; the outlines of grotesque heads and figures can be imagined. Every now and again these walls are traversed by waterfalls which murmur new stories from new regions to "The river of sung legends". The river winds its way through the gorges of the mountain range, white within the deep green of the reeds on its banks.

It flows for weeks, months and years, till it eventually pours the entire wealth of its treasure of legends into the ocean, the ultimate destination of all rivers.

It is three o'clock and in front of us black rain clouds are moving across the sky. To the right, halfway up the slope, there are a number of natural caves that should offer good shelter for the boys and their loads. I therefore decide to call a halt. It will probably take some time before the stragglers arrive. I have our small three-man tent pitched in the grass on a small hill. It has a slanting roof and is open on three sides. Freshly cut grass, kunai as the natives call it, serves as bedding. Night falls, the rain passes and above us there is now a cloudless, pitch-black, starry sky. All around us there are a hundred small fires where our porters are camped with their friends and relatives. A large group has gathered at one place and they are singing the same melodies we heard in Mapos. A few young high-spirited lads have climbed the hill opposite our camp and set fire to the grass. Soon the entire slope is alight. The background is now glowing red, and the fiery tongues that leap into the night sky are bright yellow. It is not dangerous as the river lies between the fire and our camp. From our beds in the tent we can make out three figures silhouetted against the fiery background. They are standing on a little rise and singing with high shrill falsetto voices. I am reminded of the mullahs in Persia and Arabia as they call the faithful to prayer from mosque towers. Like them, our singers incline their heads and cup their hands over their ears. All others are now silent and listening. Throughout the night the tom-tom drums continue to accompany the singing with their threatening, provocative monotone.

The burning mountain, the murmuring of the river, the monotonous melancholy song, the rhythm of the drums and the black, naked figures squatting around campfires or walking noiselessly through the night, come together to create an unforgettable dream that has magically become reality. The three of us sit on our beds of grass in silence. The atmosphere is too powerful and moving to allow a conversation to start. But behind each of our separate silences there are probably much the same thoughts: who are we, side by side, in the middle of this foreign world? Who are these three men who come from quite different continents and now find themselves dependent upon each other in this wild land? Three white men in the midst of exotic, dark people! If only it was possible to untangle the threads of fate. Why the three of us? Why here?

As if he had heard my silent question, Zakharov smiles at us both and says some simple words which seem to resolve everything: "Three men in a tent." Yes, that is what we are! Three men in a tent, just as there have been two, three or four men in tents a thousand and more times. The camp life of us three people coincidentally brought together by fate in a world of its own, with its own problems, its own laws and its own destinies. The fire has now burnt down, the singing has ebbed away and still a cloudless, pitch-black, starry sky stretches above us. Only the tom-toms beat until dawn, like the beat of excited hearts.

In the morning the crowd of accompanying travellers leaves us. The women with their infants slung in nets or on hips return to their villages and gardens. The children return to the mission school or to their village games. And the men, those who aren't working as porters for our expedition, go back to the mountains and forests to check their hunting traps. Now with eighty porters, we follow the course of the Sagae downstream. Here its banks tower ever more steeply and narrowly, and the current becomes ever stronger until at last it hurls itself over a sudden precipice. We are forced, again and again, to scramble up mountains and along steep slopes, precariously holding on to tufts of grass. I need to test each step very carefully, digging a foothold with the toe of my shoe. As I turn around to warn others to be careful, I suddenly slip. My stick falls into the ravine. I manage to hold onto a tuft of grass. My feet find no support and my whole bodyweight hangs from this single tuft. Surely it must give way soon. I can't move and my cries are swallowed up by the roar of the river. But Biek has noticed my fall from afar. Realising my desperate predicament, he comes racing over with the agility of a monkey and manages to drag me to safety, using all his strength. Once the eighty men have trodden out a track, Soltwedel and Zakharov can negotiate the spot without difficulty, and for the next half hour they laugh at my shaky legs.

It is not only legends that the river carries; it knows of life and of death too. As we round a bend we discover, on a sandbank on the opposite side, the mutilated and bloated corpse of a young woman, black upon the white sand, surrounded by driftwood from the last flood. The boys tell us that she fell down the waterfall at Quassang, a village close to Mapos, a few days ago. Her husband had chewed too much betelnut that day, suffered from an attack of bad temper as a result, and had beaten her up. There are obviously the same problems in the world of the blacks as there are among white people. Our boys want to

bury her, but the river is too deep and raging for them to cross to the other side. Once we have reached our camp the boys tell us about the kanakas on the right bank who relapsed into cannibalism a few weeks ago, despite the mission station being there. Since the porters are still spooked after coming upon the corpse, they keep large fires going all night and only very few of them are able to sleep. Lump the dog is very restless too, constantly running into the bush, barking wildly and returning with bristling fur. However, we cannot discover the cause. It is probably the presence of wild pigs or other wild animals. All the same, my two shoot boys ask me for rifles and cartridges because they are afraid of an attack by cannibals, so I do them that favour. Both of them keep watch all night and are full of pride as they see themselves as protectors of the camp.

The following day, I see the full expanse and magnificence of the mountains of New Guinea. The valley of the Sagae is only a minor landmark compared to the scene which now meets the eye. We leave "The river of sung legends" and begin climbing the grassy slopes. The boys go on ahead, and since today's hike is not a long one, we three white men stroll along behind. Upon reaching the top, we find ourselves on the edge of an enormous basin framed by mountains. The heights are all covered with thick rainforest and below these are extensive, undulating grass steppes, criss-crossed by streams and rivers which are identified by trees along their banks. It is impossible to describe the beauty of this landscape, its expanse, its colours and the silhouettes of the mountain ridges and crests that build, one after the other. We sit on the ridge in silence and eventually the experience finds expression in a feeling of delight of unusual intensity. Then we walk down into the valley to the abandoned village of Mengau. We take a bath in the cold mountain stream with its white pebbles, and we camp in kunai grass, open to the night wind and the gleam of the stars.

That night I dream we are three white maggots in a butter bowl and the sky above is a bell jar. I already have a fever in my bones which is to fully break out next morning. A thirty-kilometre trek, while running a forty-degree temperature, with a raging headache, aching bones and painful skin and scalp through a sun-drenched steppe, is not one of the more pleasant experiences in my life. However, we cannot delay the eighty men for my sake, so I plan to cure myself by sweating while I walk. But I do not sweat despite both the external and internal heat. At lunchtime I lie down in the grass beside a creek and drop into a deep sleep while the others eat. It is not until shortly before dark that we arrive at the Bulolo, at

its junction with the Watut River. I take quinine and aspirin and immediately go to bed. In the evening a worried Zakharov wakes me and administers a stiff brandy, as well as some soup made from a freshly caught Bulolo fish. During the night, the sweating that I was unable to induce during the day, starts. In the morning, thank God the fever has broken and I am back to normal.

It is a particularly beautiful morning. We start off by first crossing the Bulolo River, wading up to our hips in water where it widens to seventy feet. When we have all crossed, there is suddenly an anxious cry from across the river. Who else but Naie! He has been distracted chasing a forest rat and has missed the crossing. Now he is standing there without a stitch on, his lava-lava wound round his head, unable to fight the current. Biek, our boss-boy, fetches him in mid-stream and before the little fellow has the chance to wrap his loin cloth around himself, he is given a few hard slaps on his black buttocks. The rat, which he had actually managed to catch, is confiscated.

Now we are back in the dense forest consisting of pines, firs and bunya-bunya trees. The trunks stand erect like columns. Some of them have a diameter of more than four metres and their crowns seem to reach skyward forever. Strangely, the creepers, orchids and ferns, and the parasites of the jungle, are absent here. The giant trees are so imposing that these minor plants apparently don't dare approach. Only their crowns are occasionally covered with a light green, almost greyish moss, but that only adds to their dignified appearance. Only the white man with his utilitarian habits of thought could wonder how one might turn them into money and sure enough, Soltwedel is saying: "I considered building a sawmill here years ago. I was going to raft the logs down the Bulolo, Watut, and Markham rivers, but not far from here that damned Watut has more than ten kilometres of intermittent gorges and waterfalls. There the logs would have been trapped and splintered into a thousand pieces." Secretly, I rejoice that for now at least this forest will escape the axe and may even have a chance to grow for another hundred years.

While we are standing here, mouths agape and craning our necks to estimate the height of the trees, we suddenly hear Lump's barking accompanied by some terrible squealing. It has a strange hollow ring in this columned hall. Not long after, the boys turn up with a wild pig which Lump had cornered and held by an ear till they could get to it. Almost

simultaneously, a shot rings out which brings down a kangaroo. During the course of the day we also kill a cassowary and a few wild pigeons so that by the time we arrive at the Watut River, the cooking hut looks like a butcher's shop, and we get to listen to the lip-smacking enjoyment of our eighty porters till late into the night. Poor Zakharov doesn't like it at all and pulls the blanket over his head. Our tent is situated on top of a cliff, high above the foaming white Watut. This is to be our first base for provisions. Next morning, the hired porters are sent home and we are alone with our own boys. A day's march from here we get to the start of our survey area, which is the region of the dangerous Rock Papuans, also known as the Kukakuka people.

Once we complete our first day's trek from the Watut base, we enter a chaos of mountains, gorges, streams, rivers, and virtually impenetrable scrub. We stay only one to three days in each camp. While my companions are prospecting by examining the creeks and reefs geologically, I am constantly on the move with most of our boys, collecting the remaining supplies stage by stage. I can't allow the boys to go by themselves, as there is a risk that wild kanakas would rob them. There are only a few useful native tracks, so we usually have to slash our way laboriously using machetes. So this transportation of our supplies is initially slow until tracks have been built. Only then, provisions can be brought in more easily.

Eight weeks pass in this way. They are strenuous for the porters particularly as there has been little food to buy from the local natives. We have had to reduce rice rations to a minimum. However, despite reduced rations they carry their fifty-pound loads day-by-day along the treacherous tracks across these mountains without a word of protest. They serve as an example to us with their good humour despite all hardships. In this region it rains daily. During our time so far, we have only had three reasonably fine days, but we are never really dry since the tracks usually follow creek beds. The trees are completely covered in moss and are constantly dripping. It is only thanks to the skills of our men that we have always had a fire to sit by each night and been able to more or less dry our clothes. To cap things off, it is cold at night. We are used to the heat of the coast, so here we often sleep with two or three layers of trousers and shirts as well as two or three woollen blankets. During the day, however, the heat is moist and humid.

Here our men again prove their worth. They are used to the cold, wet climate of Mapos so they see nothing wrong with the weather. Their naked bodies shiver less than we do in our warm wrappings. In spite of their eternally rumbling stomachs, they never steal food and hardly ever snack. Even Naie, who is distinguishing himself as the cook and kitchen boy has, under the good influence of the other men, converted his kleptomania to begging. There are occasions where I have to use a stick on one or other of them, particularly with Naie, but they think that is quite in order if they can see a justification.

Two days after leaving our camp on the Watut, we first make contact with the local natives. We had been following the course of a larger stream when our men saw kanakas to the left and right in the thick undergrowth. They were walking parallel to us. Every now and again we also see the wet imprint of a naked foot on the rocks. We decide to set up camp thirty metres above the stream. Shortly before dark we hear the calls of natives from its upper reaches. "Hold onto the dog or tie him up," Soltwedel yells out. "If he chases them away they will never come again. We are dependent on them." When you enter into relations with wild natives, everything depends on the first moments of contact. We are hoping to buy garden produce from them so we can conserve our supply of rice.

We call back and they answer again and approach step-by-step. Finally, in a curve of the stream, eight superbly muscled men, festively adorned with feathers, necklaces and strings, a kind of cape from beaten bark on their backs and wearing short grass skirts held with a belt of bones, appear before us. In one hand they carry their bow with a bundle of arrows, in their belt a stone club, and hooked across their shoulder a stone axe. Stone age men from the tertiary period, in Zakharov's geological lingo. We wave for them to come closer and show them our empty hands as a sign that we do not hold weapons. Lump barks madly but they can see he is tied up. Wild kanakas are afraid of large dogs in much the way we whites are of lions and tigers. Eventually, although suspicious and hesitant, they come up the narrow track to our camp. We show signs of friendship, and they respond by slapping us on the chest with an open hand. Then we display our treasures: axes, tomahawks, knives and plane blades; the latter they normally use to attach to their cross hatchets in place of the traditional stone. Seeing these items has the expected effect. They pick up the displayed items, turn them over, test the cutting edges and try them out on nearby trees. Their delight is great, and they would like to leave with these trophies immediately. But that's not how

bartering works! It is only with some difficulty and gentle force that these trade goods are returned. In sign language, the men are then told that the goods are theirs in exchange for garden produce. As a guarantee, I chop an axe or a knife or an iron into a tree and they each tie a piece of bush string around a selected one to show they have understood the contract. And Zakharov now surprises us greatly by cleaning and bandaging up a deep wound in the hand of one of the visitors. At nightfall these men move off and we admire the beautiful elastic gait of their muscular bodies.

Early next morning they bring a variety of garden produce but not enough for an exchange. It is not an easy task to explain to them that though the weapons fastened to the trees belong to them, they must first bring us some more fruit. In the course of the following days, they become used to us and we to them and they end up providing us with enough food to halve our daily rice use. In fact, they do not have much food themselves because they are hunters, constantly moving from one place to another. They plant only small gardens where they intend to stay for a few months. They have no villages but build light rain shelters from leaves. Where they stay longer and plant gardens, they usually build one or two round dwellings on stilts. They are the only kanakas in New Guinea who are not afraid of the dark. They hunt at night and also conduct their raids at night, which gives them considerable superiority over other tribes. Most kanakas are so afraid of ghosts and magic that they will not leave their huts at night. An indication of the health of this primeval culture is that these people will not accept anything other than iron tools as payment for the produce they provide. Lava-lavas, matches, and mouth organs arouse no interest. They think our clothes are peculiar and interesting but by no means desirable.

Another encounter with them is also informative. One day Zakharov and I happened to come close to their hidden stilt dwellings on the upper reaches of a river. We are brewing a cup of tea during a lunch break when several natives step out of a thicket and, after lengthy precautions, approach and eventually sit down at our fire. We show them a watch, a compass, the wonders of the magnet, tell them the names of various things and in return are told names of the most important objects of use and exchange, such as pig, dog, forest, tree, track, axe, bow and arrow. We note this information down. We are also told the names of the streams and rivers that flow into the left bank of the Watut and these names are an indication of the beauty of their language: Weganda, Otibanda, Irua, Fortinante, Minja,

Aijakudanda, Ikedanda, Jedanda, Mirawanda, Morma, Ahwiganda etc., with emphasis on the last syllable as if asking a question. While we are talking, we hear the soft humming of an aeroplane in the distance which is probably on its way to the landing site of the Watut Company. Before we can say anything they all point in that direction and together say "Junkers". Later we find out that Baum (who else but Baum) has been here before us and had taught them the name.

I had noticed earlier that the natives appeared to be particularly interested in Naie. They kept on pointing to him and laughing with pleasure until Naie enlightened us, grinning impishly, that he had been with Master Boom on that occasion and knew these hunters quite well. It was here on the Odibanda that the episode with the tins of meat had happened, and it was from here he had made it back all alone to distant Mapos. Naie had also experienced another adventure here. Baum had left his camp, entrusting it to the care of two of his boys and Naie for a few days. When he did not return at the arranged time, the two boys set off taking rifles to look for the master, leaving Naie alone to defend the camp. The result was that the bush hunters, who had been constantly observing every move the white man made, took advantage of this opportunity. They captured Naie and tied him to a tree while they plundered the camp. In fact, they found little of use. However, Naie remained tied to the tree for an afternoon, the entire night and half the next morning until Baum arrived back at camp. In spite of all his fasting he had not come to harm and was able to see the funny side even though he was the butt of the joke. He grinned with amusement when he recognised his erstwhile captors.

One day Zakharov and I, along with ten of our boys, follow a tributary of the Ahwiganda leaving Soltwedel back in the main camp. We pitch our tent near the water where the stream runs through a gorge so deep that it is hard to find a suitable camp site. From here we plan to go prospecting. On the way Biek has shot a dingo, a female brown and white checked example of an Australian wild dog whose existence in New Guinea had previously been unknown. The six pups of an estimated month-old litter are caught by the boys. Proud to have their own private dogs that promise to grow as large as Lump one day, they share their, by no means plentiful, meals with the animals. At some time, they will of course realise that the dingo is a predator which can't be tamed and trained like a domestic dog. They will then come to the only logical conclusion and slaughter and eat their pets in a fairly

unsentimental fashion, thus repaying themselves for what they had earlier sacrificed. In the meantime, the slain mother is roasted and consumed with great delight. Zakharov manages to prevent the young ones being given the flesh of their mother, a prohibition that is quite incomprehensible to our boys. For the kanaka, meat is meat. The fathers of these boys were still cannibals. "White man's prejudice and sentimentality," Biek would have said if he had known the appropriate Trepang-English words.

Next morning Zakharov goes prospecting up the main river and I cross a ridge to another stream. Wherever I go, I wash samples and examine the rock, but nothing of interest has ever turned up. I go further up and after climbing a rise I reach an extensive densely wooded plateau. In a small gently bubbling creek, I wash a sample. Tin! Almost a kilo of tin in a single dish! My surprise and joy are unbounded. I drive the boys on, and they cut a path through the bush with feverish haste. Another little creek and another showing of tin, and this time more than previously. The same result in a third creek. I wash a sample of dry earth from beneath the surface of a layer of humus. Tin once more. I hurry back to camp to inform Zakharov. I blaze a short cut through the undergrowth and reach the course of a larger stream. There a boy points out a newly cut branch and fresh tracks in the grass. That gives me quite a shock. Is it possible another prospector has beaten us? Moments of great anxiousness – we follow the tracks. Now the boy points out footsteps in the sand. I recognise Zakharov's shoes and Naie's little footprints. Soon we meet with Zakharov. "Have you found anything interesting?" I ask. "I have found tin", he answers, and produces a rusty old tin. "But I have found real tin," I burst out and produce my sample. Zakharov examines it. "Looks like tin," he says. "Humm, very nice, but first let's try the magnet. If it is tin, it won't react." He holds out the magnet and *swish*, the entire sample is stuck to it! Things are unfortunately not always what they seem. To top matters off, we are caught in heavy rain on the way back to camp so that we eventually arrive there wet through and tired after a hike of many hours. This brings on a fever which now takes hold of me with hitherto unknown ferocity. Staggering and wracked by the shakes, I lie down immediately. In my state of tumultuous imaginings and confusions, Zakharov needs all his strength to hold me down in bed. The fever continues till morning. Zakharov spends all night sitting beside me and caring for me. Even though communal life in the bush gradually erodes manners and hardens the heart, it produces a finer and more lasting treasure. That is the care of hard men in a life without women, born out of living close together in times of illness and danger. But few words are

lost over this incident. "Are you able to walk?" Zakharov asks next morning. "Yes, my temperature is down," I reply. "Then let's get going straight away." And that's that!

On another occasion, Zakharov and I go up the Minya, again with a tent and ten boys. But we soon leave the river and try to climb the 8000-foot-high ridge *(2500metres)*. We pull ourselves up on roots and lianas as three boys ahead chop a narrow break through the undergrowth. In this way we laboriously work our way higher. Just before we reach the ridge top, we suddenly hear a shot coming from Soltwedel's camp. After that two or three more in the far distance, hardly audible. Has something happened to him? Should we turn back? We fire off three shots in short succession and listen. No answer. The same signal again on our part. But only the soft rustling of the forest and in the far distance the rushing of the Minya River can be heard. After a good deal of indecision, we decide to continue.

Around three in the afternoon we are up on the ridge and come across the felled trees of an abandoned kanaka garden. From here we have our first unrestricted view in every direction since our time on the Watut. We remain here for almost an hour. We regain our bearings and see how on all sides one densely forested mountain ridge follows the next, like a huge, wild ocean where the waves have solidified. Then we follow a ridge formed by a single gigantic iron stone reef, and as darkness falls, we reach the source of the Minya. There we set up camp for the night, but our boys are restless. On our trek they have seen dark, lurking figures in the scrub and discovered the roofs of concealed stilt huts that lie directly on the ridge above us. They also point out recently broken twigs and fresh footprints. Do the bush hunters really have hostile intentions? Could those shots from the direction of the main camp this morning have been emergency signals after all? We reproach ourselves for not having turned back earlier and decide to keep watch that night, each in turn with one boy. If Lump were with us now, this would hardly be necessary. But we have left him with Soltwedel.

It turns out to be a long night. Scouring the dark with eyes that are accustomed to light, is extremely strenuous. At various times our boys believe they can see figures creeping around in the dark but, however hard we try, our own eyes perceive nothing. In the morning, however, the boys are proven right. Everywhere on the dewy ground the fresh foot and handprints of natives are discernible and, as might be expected, they all lead up to the huts

above us on the ridge. We had intended to stay away for a few more days but due to our concerns for Soltwedel, we decide to return immediately. On the way we take a short cut and in doing so lose our bearings in the dense scrub. Finally, the distant barking of Lump tells us where the camp is. On our return to camp, we find everything is in order. Soltwedel also had very little sleep and kept watch for a long time since the dog had been unusually restless. His boys also thought that they had seen figures in the night. The kanakas had almost certainly planned a raid but in view of our armed wakefulness it seems that they thought better of it. The shots that we thought we heard the day before had not come from Soltwedel.

The overall experience has taught us to be even more careful in future, particularly as the black hunters have not returned to trade more produce. It is a peculiar feeling to be constantly aware, when in the jungle, that inaudible and invisible figures are hiding in the thickets; that lurking eyes are watching and ears are listening, just like beasts of prey stalking their quarry. Such excitement may have its attractions but the loss of the garden produce we were expecting to trade has thrown our plans into disarray. Our rice rations will last only another three days. This is all the worse because we have reached the source of the Watut or Ahwiganda, at a place where the river divides into three branches. We are now a full nine-day walk from Wau, the only place we can supplement our provisions.

L-R: Soltwedel, Beinssen & Zakharow

That night our camp is close to the river, only two metres above water level. For dinner, Zakharov has cooked his favourite meal of curry and rice but this time without using tinned meat as an ingredient. Instead, there are two fat wild ducks which I killed with a single shot from my bed this morning. Naie, always on the lookout for quarry, noticed them in the river. He had woken me excitedly and pushed rifle and cartridges into my hand. I aimed as I lay and pulled the trigger. Without hesitation, Naie rushed into the water with a wild leap and retrieved the ducks just before the current carried them away. Naie is clearly convinced that I am infallible. The master only has to pull the trigger and "all he die finish." The shot rudely woke my two companions, who began the morning sacrilegiously with a string of curses. But when Naie displayed the two ducks they calmed down, even though they were of the opinion that my masterful shot had been nothing but a "bloody fluke". That night we fill our stomachs. Naie greedily re-chews all the bones I give him before he throws them to Lump. He and Lump keep closely watching me, their eyes bright with pleasure.

Later the three of us lie under our fly while Naie serves coffee. We hold a relaxed planning session. "Do you want to go to Wau tomorrow and get provisions, Beinssen?" "Fine with me," I say, "but I am afraid you will have starved by the time I get back. It is a nine-day trek to Wau and then ten days return carrying provisions. We only have three bags of rice left for the boys." But Soltwedel reassures us: "I have looked at the map. The trek along the normal winding route can be considerably shortened by going cross country. You go up the next stream on the right of the Watut, climb across that ridge and from there you'll see Wau. You follow the river towards the east. There is only one ridge which separates us from the valley of the Bulolo. You can be there in a day or two, buy provisions, and on the evening of the third or fourth day you could be back here."

That plan seems promising to me, particularly as the map we use was photographed from the air with only the detail drawn in by hand so the proportions should be fairly accurate. If I keep heading due east, I will inevitably run into the Bulolo River. But when? I therefore say: "Keep enough provisions for a fortnight for the two of you and three boys only. I will take the remaining food and twenty-two boys for the fastest possible transportation of new supplies. We'll do our best." Whilst we chat, Soltwedel expresses the opinion that the time

has come to reduce our load by drinking the last of the brandy. Even though there's only one bottle left, that should be enough to make us merry and talkative prior to our farewell.

"Have I told you the story of when I was at the Ramu River with Jack and Bill six years ago?" "No, Soltwedel, that's a yarn I haven't heard," Zakharov replies: "Go ahead." "I almost lost my head on that occasion, not metaphorically but literally. We were sitting in a village and had just finished our lunch when Bill noticed that something had lodged under the plate of his false teeth. Without much fuss he took out his teeth, removed the impediment and put them back in his mouth. The village chief and the many blacks that always surrounded us inquisitively were simply speechless. With eyes and mouths agape, they demanded to see the magic spectacle again. So Bill had to repeat the business many times to the applause of a hundred kanaka voices. Bill's success aroused Jack's ambition. He had lost an eye in an Amsterdam pub brawl. He took out his glass eye, showed it to all, peered around the corner with it and behind his back and returned it to its socket. The onlookers were amazed. Everyone thought they had the world's greatest magicians before them. That old gag would have been fine; it's a joke as old as the invention of false teeth and glass eyes, but Jack in his devilish way told the chief that what he had seen up to now was nothing, for the other master (and that was me) could take his head off. That was too much for the villagers and after that they would not leave me in peace. I tried to explain that the other master was a joker but they believed Jack. Since I wouldn't take my head off they wanted to perform the feat themselves and a dozen hands were already reaching for my hair. Only with difficulty and with the intervention of Jack and Bill, was I able to save myself."

We laugh at this story. Naie, lying nearby, chimed in with his bell-like laughter. Of course, he doesn't understand a word but he just has a feeling that he must join in when others are enjoying themselves so much. Then he can't stop himself and continues to laugh about his own laughter. While we are still telling stories of this kind, heaven's floodgates open, accompanied by thunder and lightning. Though it is dripping onto our beds and whipping in through the tent sides we aren't going to let it spoil our nice brandy mood. "When we were in Salamaua, I heard a story that gives you a good idea of the psyche of the gold prospector," says Zakharov, shouting above the roar of the rain and the howling of the six baby dingoes. "I have to tell you. Once three old gold prospectors died and were admitted to heaven. They had been there for less than a fortnight when a fourth gold digger asked

to be admitted. 'Who are you and what do you want here?" asked St Peter. "Holy St Peter, let me into heaven. I have led a good life. I was a gold-digger." "If you were a gold-digger I can't help you. No gold-digger is coming in here ever again! The three who arrived the other day have created a huge mess in next to no time. They are ripping up my golden stairs, they have dug prospecting holes in all the clouds so you can no longer walk safely at night; they are washing the golden stars from the blue vault, and they even intend to excavate the Milky Way. They have been recruiting all the black mission angels to work for them. No, I'll never allow gold prospectors in here again." But our candidate understood the psyche of the gold digger: "If you let me in, St Peter, I'll promise you I'll get rid of the others within a day!" St Peter who hadn't succeeded in separating the three from their rich finds of gold and showing them the door, accepted the proposal in spite of his misgivings. On the very next day our gold-digger came to St Peter: "They have left. They crept away secretly last night." "Tell me, how did you manage that?'' "I simply told them that there had been a new big find in hell. That was all it took." So our candidate was allowed to stay in heaven. But it was only a week before he came back to St Peter quite embarrassed. "Please St Peter, let me out again." "Where will you go, my son?" "To hell. You see, the other three haven't returned. That makes me think there may have been some truth to the rumour after all." We liked this story because it hit the nail on the head, and we laughed loudly even though the rain was drumming down harder than ever and wetting us as we lay in our beds.

"Now, Zakharov, I am going to tell you a story from your Russian homeland. Do you know the story of Catherine the Great and the tall soldier?" I ask. "No smutty ones, please," Zakharov requests. "But it's a good one, even though the moral may not be edifying." But I could not continue. In the distance we hear a rushing that rises to a roar and is soon drowning out the drumming of the rain. "It's a flash flood coming our way. Quick, rescue the essentials," Soltwedel shouts. The three of us are up in an instant, dragging out what we can get hold of from under the beds and throwing things onto the raised stretchers. By now the flood has reached us and soon the water is a foot deep in the tent, while we and the boys who have rushed to help, are holding on to the tent and the beds. It takes what seems an eternity till eventually the current subsides. Then by the dim light of lanterns, drainage canals are dug, and levees built. After more than two hours, the tent is dry enough for us to again store our supplies. It is not till around midnight that we are back in our now

totally drenched beds. My comrades don't encourage me to resume my story about Catherine the Great.

The next morning the weather has somewhat improved. I set off equipped with compass and map, accompanied by twenty-two porters. We need to head due east and the stream we follow also flows from that direction. There is no track, so we walk upstream through the water. But after an hour the stream veers sharply to the south, so we leave it and laboriously climb a precipitous ridge. Eventually we reach a peak which rises above the forest. According to Soltwedel's estimation, we ought to be able to see the grassy plains of Wau from here, but we see nothing to give us a bearing. High mountains and gorges block our view of the distance. I refer to the compass to find our easterly course. In that direction we see only dense jungle and sinister mountains. So we initially stay on the ridge and follow it until it too veers to the south. We must now make our way down a steep slope into the valley. Far below, hidden by trees, we hear the rushing of a river. I let the exhausted porters rest a while. They will soon have to push through dense undergrowth to cut a track. Compass in hand, I indicate the direction.

Finally, in the afternoon, we discover a river deep down beneath us, but unfortunately it flows through a gorge with vertical walls almost sixty metres high. We now work our way along, puffing and panting, but find nowhere we can get down to the river. What's more, it starts to rain heavily and dark sets in soon after. The country here is so fissured and steep that we can't find anywhere to set up our tents. Feeling our way in the dark we try to discover a level spot but eventually have to pitch the tents on the edge of the precipice. This region is the loneliest and eeriest wilderness I have ever seen. It is likely that no human has ever stepped into it. However much we search, we find nothing that points to any trace of humans. The night is extremely dark. Far down below us the river is roaring, and whilst the rain has stopped, water is still dripping from the trees. There is a heavy overpowering smell of black earth and wet moss, and there is a peculiar stillness despite a loud and painful silence of shrill dead sounds. In the distance we hear the screaming of possums, and the calls of tree kangaroos that sound like human distress calls, short and without echo. Close by there is a rustling in the bush as if someone is approaching. Then suddenly the steps of a fleeing animal. The boys in the tent next to mine talk in their sleep. One of them cries out, wakes another who complains with subdued annoyance. Then they settle and the night is

again heavy with sounds of the forest. I lie in bed but cannot sleep. Thoughts and images storm through my mind. I remember scenes from former times with great clarity as if they had only recently happened. I have a yearning for music, which I have missed for so long. I recall melodies, sad Russian songs. I remember the record we played in Salamaua, and it brings back memories of those earlier days. And suddenly the night song of Zarathustra is in my head, great and clear, as though it were the voice of this night:

I slept, I slept,
I have woken from a deep dream:
The world is deep,
And deeper than the day had thought.

And then a phrase from Pfitzner's "Palestrina" comes to mind like the essence of a philosophy. "The innermost being of the world is solitude." Yes, solitude! Solitude is the essence of this night, and as though he were having the same thoughts, Lump licks my hand with the tenderness of a loving human. I am deeply moved. "But, my faithful Lump, you only make things lonelier because we love each other and yet cannot talk to each other." Yes, to love. I see the image of a woman and I am overtaken by an overwhelming yearning. Sleep, sleep.

Did I sleep or am I just dreaming? There, again that horrifyingly human cry of distress out of the darkness! It is raining again. Cry of distress? Yes, from Zarathustra. Images and experiences with a woman return. Suddenly I have a name for all these thoughts: "sexual repression". And while I am still searching, half dreaming, for where this cynical wisdom may have come from, I awake, and I can laugh at myself. By now the dawn is breaking and I hear my own voice calling the boys to wake up. What comfort and what strength-giving force lies in your own voice! Soon it is light, and with it grows the will and strength to carry on. Today we need to find the Bulolo River! We will need to keep moving all day until dark. The tents are dismantled in no time, and I can hear the swish of the machetes again, hacking a track through the undergrowth.

We continue to work our way along the riverbank, but this trends north and so we need to find a place where we can cross. Eventually I organise for a tree to be felled. It comes to

rest like a ladder at the edge of the gorge. Steps are chopped into it, a bush rope attached, and we climb down. Lump, vehemently protesting, is lowered down on a rope. We now need to find a way of getting up the opposite side. Initially we walk down river because there are high rocky walls on both banks. If there is another cloudburst like the one two days ago, we would surely be swept away. After some time, we are able to climb out of the ravine and up to a ridge. We now reach a complete chaos of mountains, gorges and precipices, so jumbled that it is impossible to keep to a compass heading. We have been walking since five in the morning and it is now growing dark. Dense clouds and mists block out the sun. My watch has stopped, and I ask the boys whether it is evening yet. Rapidly falling darkness makes the question irrelevant. So I order the tents to be erected and just as we have finished, a strong wind blows away the cloud cover. To our surprise, the sun is still almost overhead. It could not be later than two o'clock.

So we dismantle the tents again and in spite of our tiredness and hunger, we move on. Through the undergrowth our procession laboriously makes its way over mountains, down chasms, past small streams and always through dense forests. Nowhere is there a view. One could entirely despair – when will this forest wilderness ever end? There is no way of telling where we are, and how far it might be to Bulolo. I curse my map, but there is no alternative; we must continue. At a height of about three thousand metres, sweaty, rain drenched and shivering all at once, we set up camp and light a fire to warm ourselves. I share my last tinned meat with Lump and the porters only get a meal of measly dry rice. They are annoyed and start to complain, which is unexpected. "Where have you taken us, Master? We'll never get out of here. Evil spirits that confuse the mind have cast a spell on this country. We can't see anything. We have lost our way and will starve to death."

I gather the boys around my tent and deliver a speech. I speak about Wau like Moses might have spoken to the Children of Israel about the Promised Land. I call on them to trust me, as I have never yet let them down. Biek, in the role of the mediator, draws my attention to the fact that "belly belong all he cry". I answer that their bellies would be crying still louder tomorrow if I distributed the rest of the rice today and that my belly is putting on a veritable sing-sing. I tell them that Lump has given up barking because his belly is doing the same. I tell them to pull themselves together and not act like young Marys or old women. "And if

there is any more grumbling except by stomachs before we reach Wau, I will drive out that cowardice with a stick. Finish!"

Later I can hear the chopping of busy axes. In the darkness the boys are cutting down a pandanus tree and half the night I can hear them hammering open its nuts. Finally, at last the camp falls quiet. But in spite of my tiredness, I still cannot sleep. Something in me is wide-awake. And so the night passes in much the same way as the previous one. Next morning, soon after starting out, we come upon a river. I take bearings with the compass and discover that it is flowing towards the northeast. We have obviously already crossed the dividing range so I conclude this river must end up flowing into the Bulolo. I therefore decide to follow it but after an hour, gigantic perpendicular waterfalls block further progress. Yet again, we must climb up the mountain to circumnavigate these obstructions. So up we go once more, almost three thousand metres, scrambling past dangerous precipices, over landslides and small ridges densely covered with dwarf bamboo where the going is slow. On the summit, Biek and a few other boys climb a tree. As they are swaying backwards and forwards on the highest branches like birds in the wind, we suddenly hear a howl of joy. They can see kunai in a north-westerly direction but a long, long way off. "Would we be able to reach it today?" I ask. "Impossible." says the boss-boy.

There is a wide valley to the right but there is dense bush as far as one can see. Could that be the Bulolo? Are we south or north of Wau? After lengthy consideration I decide to make for the kunai. The ridge we are on leads in that direction. We waste no time resting and follow the ridge down. After a few hours the country has become less steep, and we can hear the rushing of water below. We climb down and discover the same river we followed this morning, only further downstream. Here there are parrots and cockatoos and rhinoceros birds once again. We can't be much higher than one and a half thousand metres. The river is broad and flowing gently so we can now walk along its bed. We are all exhausted and I have begun to look around for a suitable campsite when suddenly the boys ahead let out a wild howl of joy. They have encountered a freshly cleared track at the end of which, sparkling silver through the dark forest, we can see the softly flowing Bulolo River. We hurry down, forgetting our tiredness, and in no time the tents have been erected and the fires are burning. I distribute the last of the rice. Now that we know where we are, we should be in Wau by tomorrow evening. The boys are as happy as little children. As soon as the rice

from the cooking pots has disappeared into their stomachs, all the pain of the last days is forgotten. I can't be anything but fond of them with their simple outlook on life, and I join in their laughter, amused by their gluttonous merriment. In spite of our hunger, or maybe because we're driven by it, we race like cassowaries to Wau next day. Everyone knows that there will be plenty of good food again once we arrive. Our first stop is the store. I buy three large tins of meat for each of the boys. Agricultural produce is bought at enormous expense from an Australian entrepreneur who has planted gardens in Wau. Our poor fellows can at last eat their fill, and to them that is the height of bliss. There is mail for me, and I lie in my tent all night stuffed as full as a boa constrictor and read. At last, a day that has ended happily, by bush standards.

In the morning there is some bad news. In the whole of Wau there is not a single bag of rice to be purchased. Due to bad weather only two or three planes have made it here in the last three weeks. The air company cannot guarantee to have new provisions flown in before three or four weeks. I also discover that a few weeks earlier a new goldfield was discovered on the upper Watut and some forty or fifty men have already moved to the area. What was discovered must be what we ourselves have been looking for; the source of the gold in the Watut River. Someone must have heard where we were planning to prospect and arrived there ahead of us. What should we do now? Zakharov and Soltwedel need to be informed but above all, they need fresh supplies. I decide to load the boys with only essential stores but have them carry fifty pounds of garden produce as well. I place an order for rice, and even though we could all do with a few days rest there is too much at stake to delay our departure. We need to be on the track again next morning.

Since we veered much too far north on the way down, I now decide to keep further to the south and initially use the comfortable track via Edie Creek. The boys are carrying full loads, but these provisions will last barely a week. So we need to be back in Wau in six days at most. This time we must not get lost. The track to Edie Creek, the largest gold field currently being worked in New Guinea, is good. I walk ahead and the boys follow. In any case, we can't get over the dividing range today. With an even gradient, the track now winds up in countless serpentines revealing wonderful vistas across the Bulolo valley and into the coastal ranges. After walking for four hours we can see Edie Creek below flowing through a bed that has been churned up by humans. It is here that a small group of adventurers sought

their fortunes, and occasionally found them, but also where hundreds lost their money and in many cases their lives as well. Every piece of land here is pegged. Wherever you set your foot you are standing on soil that contains gold, a few ounces here, perhaps many hundreds there, just waiting to be dug up.

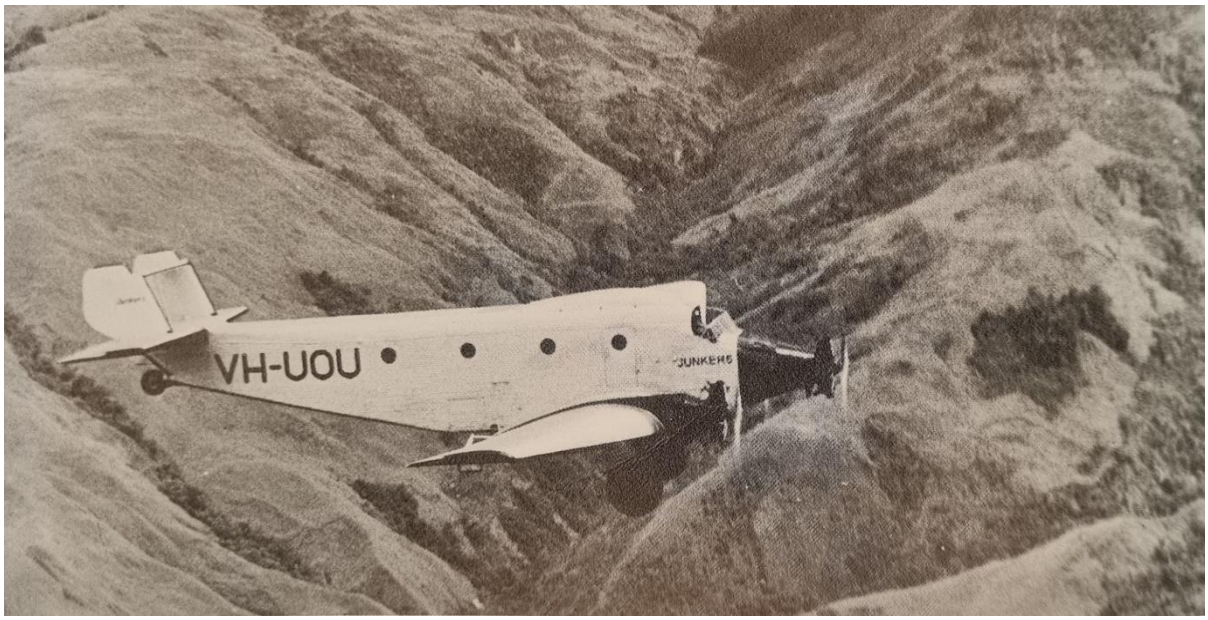
Everywhere people are hurrying and the calls and shouts of the labouring boys sound completely out of place in this world of primeval seclusion. Now and again there is a dull detonation to which the blacks in their childlike high spirits respond with wild shouting. The owners stand or sit beside their individual claims and give instructions or drive their boys on with unambiguous shouts. In this country, white men don't work. It would lower their prestige. Their energy must therefore find an outlet in curses which direct operations. It is amazing to witness the level of swearing perfection achieved by the Australian gold diggers in New Guinea. Perhaps they would command more respect if they did a bit of work themselves! However, these are matters of incontestable social convention, and every gold digger would consider his neighbour to be a dangerous agitator and anarchist if, spade in hand, he worked alongside his boys. When you see them in their gumboots, muddy trousers, dirty shirts, crumpled hats on the back of their heads, and red handkerchiefs around their necks, it is hard to imagine that many of these men are rich. Harder still to imagine that they will one day return to civilisation, buy elegant suits and cars, and live a free life, thanks to money which can buy anything. Anything? Perhaps not. They may be free of the external fetters of everyday life, but will they really know what to do with their newly won freedom? I meet many of these rough, but in their uncomplicated way, often very sincere men; strange hermits of every kind. Wherever I pass by, they invite me in for a drink. Thus I am handed on from one camp to the next in a chain of hospitality. When I have finally extricated myself and pitched camp at the source of Edie Creek, the evening twilight has set in, not only over the landscape but in my head as well, befuddled as it now is with whiskey and gin.

The next morning is rainy and almost frosty. Autumn winds bite to the marrow. It is one of those days you may be better off staying in your tent and giving the boys an opportunity to warm themselves at a big fire. But weather like this can continue indefinitely and every lost day could endanger our waiting friends. Wet through and freezing, we therefore leave the "civilisation" of Edie Creek and dive back into the dense forest with its barely discernible

tracks. We now need to cross the dividing range between the Bulolo and Watut Rivers and once we are on the other side, find a stream that will guide us down to the Watut. We will keep to the ridges and crests again and hope to find a well-worn track leading in a westerly direction. I notice fresh cuts in the branches and bushes. A white man must have passed by not that long ago. Then the track leads to a creek and follows its steep course. Taking this direct, but back-breaking route we climb down six waterfalls, several of which plunge nearly a hundred metres. In my estimation this should take us straight to the Watut. Suddenly the boys call out to me: "One feller master he come." Is that Soltwedel or Zakharov? Could they hold out no longer? But then I realise that this must be the track that people going to the new gold fields would take, and that proves to be the case. The white-haired old prospector who I now meet tells me that he is on his way back from the new diggings and that there is nothing tempting about the find. Forty men are still working there but he believes that they will all be returning very disappointed. Yes, there was some gold but in quantities too small for economic mining in that wild and remote area. Apart from that, the climate was much worse than at Edie Creek: icy cold, with rain and mist. Tired and disappointed though the old man is, and in spite of signs of his ageing, one can still see the extraordinary strength of his body which has known nothing but a life of hard work. He asks me how far it is to Edie Creek, and I recommend a spot where he can set up camp for the night. I then enquire about my comrades, but he has not met them or heard anything of them. He reports that if I keep going, I can reach the Watut River by evening.

I can reach the Watut today! Then Soltwedel was right that you only have to cross one ridge to find the valley of the Bulolo. If that is the case we must have misjudged the position of our camp. It must be further north than we thought. Now I realise where the earlier gunshots we heard came from, the time we thought Soltwedel was in trouble; they came from people who were heading to the new gold finds. This demonstrates how close one can pass others in the jungle without being aware of it. The old digger is right. After a hard march we get to the Watut shortly before nightfall. The tents are erected hastily in the light of a hand-held lantern. We have no need for the murmuring of water to induce sleep. The exhausted porters throw themselves onto the ground almost too tired to satisfy their hunger first.

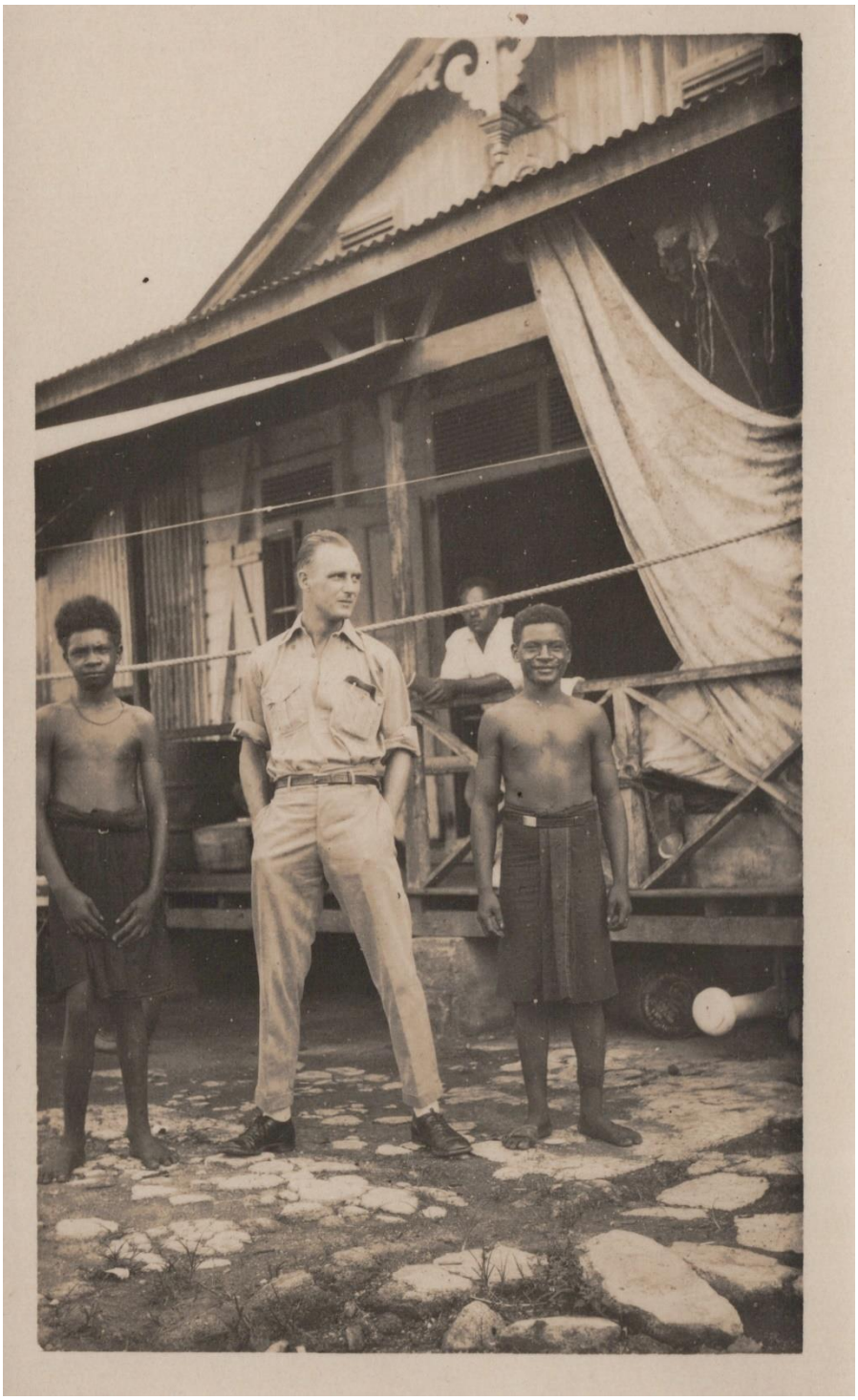
The freshly hewn track we have followed so far now turns to the south, up the Watut. In the morning we head downstream, again cutting our own track, but soon we come across another freshly cut track and at a spot sheltered from rain the boys find the footprints of Zakharov and Soltwedel. Like a tracker, Zavil follows the trail, proud to show what he can do. Despite the load he is carrying, he moves so fast that I have to hurry in order not to lose sight of him. After a further six hours, at around midday, we arrive at our camp site. We have been away for eight and a half days. We find Soltwedel baking bread with the last of the flour. Zakharov however, whose eyes usually scan the ground, is sitting on a tree stump dreaming. I know that he is thinking of his wife in distant Queensland and yearning for her letters. I have them in my pocket. The joy of our unexpected reunion is sincere. First up I deliver the mail, and Zakharov takes his letters and moves away with unusual haste. He wants to be alone to read them. Soltwedel and I squat in front of the warm campfire and start by having a drink from the brandy bottle that I brought with me. I then report the bad news. Towards evening the three of us discuss our options. We conclude the best plan is to return to Wau next morning. The porters' loads are packed and distributed that night and we leave at first light.



Junkers aircraft above Kunai hillsides

Since we are now familiar with the route, we reach Wau after a comfortable three-day walk. There we pitch our tent on the edge of the airstrip. The weather has finally cleared, and it is a real delight to see the Junkers aeroplanes landing and taking off: beautiful birds, born of the ingenuity of man. Soltwedel writes his business resume and Zakharov his geological

reports. So ends the first four months of our expedition. Unfortunately, I cannot reveal the details of our findings for reasons of business confidentiality!



Beinssen

Now once again healthy and confident, we make plans to visit the vast and still unexplored region around Mount Lawson.

Part Two

The fortnight of rest and recreation in Wau is over. We have supplemented our provisions, received further instructions from our Rabaul syndicate, so early tomorrow we will head off to the unexplored wilderness around Mount Lawson. The three of us are sitting in the tent on sacks of rice. Soltwedel is telling the story of his journey to the upper Ramu River with Baum, when their raft capsized, and they lost all their possessions. They walked barefoot, eating only kanaka food. It took them three weeks to reach Madang. In times when you feel safe and secure, it often pays to remember earlier hardships overcome. While we talk, Soltwedel is enjoying his pipe, its smoke mixes with Zakharov's cigar smoke and the light blue plume from my cigarette.

As we sit there, presumably occupied by thoughts of new adventures and experiences, I remember an image from the battlefield of Ypres in Belgium. It was near Reims, on the eve of the last great German offensive in July 1918. Around midnight we were ordered to move to the attack position and the offensive was to begin at around three in the morning. As dusk fell on the previous evening I was sitting, like now, with two friends on the edge of a bomb crater. We too were smoking a pipe, a cigar and a cigarette. Although we wrote high spirited cards home, in our hearts we felt something that bore a strong resemblance to fear. But it was fear paired with determination and perhaps also with a sense of trepidation born of premonition. For when I looked at my two comrades, I was forced to think that one of us would fall, another would be wounded, and one would survive. And then the speculation began. Who will it be? Which of us will die, who will survive? By sunrise one of my comrades had already fallen. Then on the evening of the next day we had to move through a dense forest. Suddenly there was a call from the undergrowth. "Hey, can you carry me, I am wounded!" It was my second comrade who had a serious injury from a shot in the leg. It was four weeks before we were relieved, and I had to keep touching my body as though it was a miracle that I was still intact.

Why do I recall this memory now? Pipe, cigar, and cigarette! I want to shake off these thoughts, and so I walk into the forest and climb a nearby hill. It is capped by a solitary giant tree and from this place one can see far into the distance. The sun has set but I would like to take another look at the tree before it gets completely dark. Lump walks beside me as

though he too is weighed down by thought. When I reach the foot of the hill, uncertain whether to continue in the twilight, the lament of Matapui suddenly pierces the evening's silence. This melancholy mood is about to get the better of me. Then Lump barks sharply and becomes lively again. He bolts up the hill and braces himself against the trunk of the giant tree, barking madly. Matapui falls silent. I can see him flying from the tree's crown and streaking into the twilight. By now it is growing dark. I hurry back to camp with Lump barking and jumping around me. Through the trunks of the forest our campfire glows to welcome me back. I start singing and running a race with my dog. I feel I need to hurry back to my friends in the camp to celebrate this last evening "behind the lines".

Both my friends are standing beside the fire with brandy glasses raised, calling out to me to hurry. Naie fills a third glass and passes it to me with his little hands. He already knows the "fashion belong white man" is that they only ever drink and be merry when they are together. None of us are aware, however, that this will be the last unencumbered celebration for a long time.

Less than two days out of Wau, Zakharov takes to his bed with severe diarrhea. In the morning we find that he has dysentery. Two days later Soltwedel discovers that he is suffering the same problem. Now they are both laid low with wracking pains. We cannot continue. My first thought is that we must prevent an epidemic. I give all the boys a strong prophylactic dose of salts and have their camp moved to another water source. I order them to observe strict sanitary procedures. Our own camp is on a spring that flows directly out of the ground so that the water is completely fresh. The two patients observe a strict diet and take the appropriate medication.

This state of affairs lasts for a fortnight without any signs of improvement; fourteen bad days because both men are disgruntled due to constant pain and frustration at being held up. They become easily irritated. We white men tend to keep control of our feelings towards each other, however occasionally both my companions lose their temper with the boys. The poor fellows are yelled at for no good reason. Confused and in fear, they compound their mistakes and have to put up with more abuse. I try to keep the boys away from our camp as best I can, but the personal servants and the cook-boy live in constant fear. I can't really say too much because the relationship between us whites is also very strained. But I request

the sick men to give their instructions to me personally so as not to cause unnecessary upset. The tensions become stronger from day to day. I repeatedly advise my comrades to go to Salamaua where they can be treated. I assure them that the boys and I would stay in the vicinity of the surrounding villages where I could feed them cheaply with produce purchased from the gardens. Soltwedel tells me that he will consider that option if there is no improvement in three days' time. But Zakharov stubbornly refuses.

The days pass with torturous slowness. Zakharov complains and groans a lot and is constantly bossing little Naie about. Naie, in his helplessness, seems to be considering whether he should surreptitiously take off again. I sit in the shade of the tent in a most depressed mood. The illness of the two weighs like a nightmare on my mind. Zakharov's constant irritable scolding, which may somewhat relieve his suffering, strikes a raw nerve in me every time. But I control my feelings because I know from my war experience that the best men often resort to being vocal as a safety valve. Still, it is badly affecting the boys and I need to ensure that the abuse does not go too far. Fortunately, I am able to shield them from the worst of the abuse. I send them off on long hunting and fishing expeditions each day and they often come back with a rich booty of fish, pigeons and occasionally eels a metre and a half in length. I must keep an eye on the cook and the house-boys in particular. On the one hand, they should not feel that I think they are right, and the sick master wrong because white men must always give the impression of being of one mind. But on the other hand, they have to know that I will treat them fairly. They need to respect and obey the other master too but without taking his annoyance too seriously.

Shoot-boy returning with the kill

One night when we are all on the point of going to sleep Zakharov asks for Naie. He wants to drink boiled water. Naie is already asleep and does not hear him immediately. This triggers a furious outburst. At that point Soltwedel, who has complained little of his own pain and illness, now confronts Zakharov. He does so in hard short words. He then declares that he intends to return to Wau on the following day to be treated. He has controlled himself tremendously for many days, but his own illness and his friend's lack of self-control have finally got the better of him. So he freely speaks his mind. Initially I am shocked but secretly I am also relieved because this explosion may help to sort matters out. Zakharov sits up and looks at us, as if in surprise. There is the trace of a wistful smile about his mouth. In a milder tone Soltwedel tries to persuade him to come along and I suggest that he allow himself to be carried by the boys. He seems to be considering it but suddenly all his features become tense, and he cries with apparent contempt: "Never! I am not returning to Wau. Do you hear me?"

Next morning Soltwedel transfers the leadership of the expedition to Zakharov as the older of us two. Since the latter is determined to hold out here till he is well again and all my attempts to persuade him otherwise are in vain, I decide to give in to his stubbornness and agree to stay with him. Soltwedel begs me to do all I can to change our friend's mind. He had hoped strong words might make him see reason but unfortunately, they had the opposite effect. He had no doubt that Zakharov would be more sensible in a few days' time and, following his own example, agree to retreat to Wau. Since Zakharov insists that I accompany Soltwedel, we set out next morning with eight strong boys. But Soltwedel doesn't want to be carried. Dragging himself along on his stick used as a crutch, he eventually manages to get to Wau walking all the way. Half an hour after our arrival he is able to board a plane that takes him to hospital in Salamaua.

Returning after an absence of two days, I find Zakharov considerably more self-controlled but hardly in the mood to speak to me. I feel that he is suffering and that this may be the moment to change his mind, so I talk to him persuasively and sincerely. But at this point the fury at his own helplessness, which he had suppressed for days, suddenly unloads itself and he swamps me with a flood of accusations and suspicions that leave me speechless. For many weeks now I have stayed by him day and night with only short breaks. I did this not only as a matter of course but out of fondness for him. I had come to value him as a friend.

To see all this misunderstood makes me angry. By now I am at the end of my tether. I realise how much I have supressed, and I yell at him using words much harsher than those Soltwedel had used, I hurl my whole unconstrained anger at him. In spite of lack of control on both sides, I have made sure that none of the natives were present at this altercation. It ends in exhaustion and with us no longer on speaking terms.

I don't want to sleep in the communal tent anymore and have my bed taken outside. Then I reconsider, remembering that the person in the tent is severely ill, so I take my bed back into the tent. When night comes, I lie down, dead tired but too agitated to sleep. So there we lie in the tent, not a metre apart, two men who hate each other. Hate? A terrible feeling of sadness comes over me when I think back to the many wonderful hours of comradeship under this same tent. I suddenly become aware how much I miss Soltwedel and what his companionship has meant to me. How marvellous and how valuable is the quality of self-control! My revolver is hanging at the foot of my bed. When I sit up to have a drink of water, Zakharov apparently assumes that I am going to reach for my weapon. He must have thought of this possibility earlier, for when I get up, he puts his hand under his pillow, and I hear the soft click as he cautiously disengages the safety catch. Does he really believe that I am going to murder him? Why? I pretend not to have noticed and leave the tent. When I return, he still has his hand under the pillow but when he sees me going back to bed he relaxes. After a while I hear him softly re-engaging the safety catch.

How strange is the soul of man? What primal instincts come to the surface at such moments? The solitude of bush life, the dependence always on the same few people, the lack of comfort along with the lack of so many of the elements of culture and civilisation, and not least, a life without women, changes men. It turns them into eccentrics, and they end up no longer true to themselves. Without rhyme or reason, respect can turn into contempt, fondness into resentment, and even hatred. That then leads to brooding and eventually, in semi-madness, acts are committed that later can neither be explained nor excused. Tropical madness! Beside me lies a man whom I have suddenly come to hate and whom I want to hurt. And he? He has similar feelings and because he is probably a little madder than I am, he plans to use a weapon to defend himself.

Outside, the stars are twinkling and the moon throws black shadows into the valley and colours the treetops and slopes of the mountain world around us silver. I am suddenly very aware of all this. Deep in my subconscious I am normal and can see the situation with "objective" eyes. Part of my soul feels like laughing out loud at all this "ado about nothing". Towards morning I fall asleep and on waking discover in myself a desire to reconcile. But while I am still searching for the right tone, Zakharov gives the brusque order to prepare for a departure on the following day. He has decided to move on instead of turning back. I try to point out to him that he is now more ill than ever, but he cuts me off. The spark of reconciliation has been extinguished in me. I leave the tent without a word in reply. Outside I slap my forehead as if there is something wrong with me. I have the feeling that I need to act independently, ignore the sick man's orders even though he is entitled to make decisions and give orders. But with the objective part of my mind I again realise that he, my enemy, is suffering. What toughness of will to want to continue in spite of his weakness and his pain, to refuse to be defeated by stronger external forces. I have respect for him, even though I know that his decision is crazy, that his condition will worsen, and he will simply not be able to manage. I feel responsible for him but can see no possibility of persuading him to change his mind. I know that the further on we go, the more difficult the return journey will be when his health has deteriorated even more, and he finally consents to being carried back to Wau.

But from the tent, Zakharov must have observed my hesitation and without me noticing, asked for the boss-boy to be called. I can see Biek coming out of the tent and giving me a questioning look. "What is it Biek?" "The other master says we are going on into the mountains. Should I pack? What do you say, Master?" Should a white man revoke the command of another white man? No, the dice have fallen, and I tell Biek that we will pack today and set off early tomorrow morning.

Zakharov can see and hear the preparations and it seems to calm him and do him some good. It's the first time for weeks that he hasn't yelled at the house-boys. It is weeks too since I have heard Naie laugh. But this evening he is sitting, legs dangling, on a swinging branch by the boys' fire and playing the jew's harp. It reminds me of past times, and I close my eyes to block out the changed situation. The night comes and goes, and I have not slept

a wink. But Zakharov has, for the first time, actually had a full night's sleep. Could it be true that will power and stubbornness will overcome all odds?

And so we set off with the boys and me only a few steps ahead of Zakharov and Naie carrying a bottle of boiled water. Completely out of breath, Zakharov drags himself up the steep mountain tracks with the help of his stick. Every few hundred steps he has to sit down, and a cold sweat collects on his brow. But his face shows determination, a dogged determination, which worries me. I can understand that if there is no other option, then such determination can be admirable but here it makes no sense and helps none of us. We drag on for the whole day, despite my suggestions to stop for a rest, which Zakharov rejects. Hardly a word is spoken. Around four o'clock we have still not covered a third of the day's march. Then Zakharov waves me over and begs me to set up camp here. This time he doesn't order but requests. The familiar old tone of voice immediately awakens the best in me. I have the tents erected in the long grass of the upper Bulolo plain and help my comrade to bed. He looks touchingly wretched but still there is determination in his features.

"I am, after all, weaker than I thought," he excuses himself. "I'll give myself fourteen days here. If I am not better by then we will probably have to turn back." So another fourteen days of misery and indolence! But I tell myself that they will pass. Any attempt to change his mind now would only rekindle his hostile mood. About two hours away, high up on the crest of a grass covered mountain ridge lie the villages of the Winima kanakas. The day following our arrival I visit the chief, bring him gifts and promise many times more if he sends us produce. I have come at the right time since Winima is at war with the Wirre-Wirre villages whose men are accused of having murdered a Winima woman in the gardens. As I approach I have already noticed that the entire ridge is occupied by heavily armed warriors in their finest war regalia. On another ridge in the distance and against the evening horizon great numbers of Wirre-Wirre warriors can also be seen gathering. The villages here are all barricaded with high bamboo fences and the huts are in clusters and built on mountain crests so that they are hard to access. The chief invites me into his hut and promises to send sufficient produce in return for our "neutrality". I tell him, with poorly concealed amusement that we will not get involved as long as he leaves our party in peace. Then as a token of my esteem, I paint his body, face and forehead with red paint in all sorts of grotesque figures and lines, which makes a huge impression on him and all his warriors. Now they all come,

about a hundred men in all and also want to be painted. But I declare that the red paint is something rare and valuable and I can't just splash it about. But if they come with produce then I will paint one body for every net *(bilum)* brought. In their delight they perform a war dance in which they pretend I am the enemy. Backwards and forwards the swaying stamping crowd reels. The women who had initially gone into hiding when the white man entered the village, now emerge along with scores of their picaninnies. They accompany the dancing men with rhythmic clapping. More than a hundred arrow tips are aimed at me, then a hundred clubs threaten to cave in my skull. The whole performance is accompanied by a strange monotonous but threatening chant. These men are wild fellows, and they would probably like nothing better than to club me to death. But fear of reprisals from the other white men or the fear that I could haunt them after my death holds them back. Furthermore, as they are at war with the Wirre-Wirre, they can't afford to make another enemy. The lack of concern with which I watch the ceremony, as if it were simply a beautiful and interesting spectacle, is based on this assumption. The two boys who accompany me stay very close. But the expression on the face of their master does not reveal that he is constantly thinking of his revolver, which hangs from his belt. My brave smile seems to reassure them that everything will be alright.

We arrive back at our camp in the dark, by the dim glow of the hand-held lantern. Biek has met us halfway back, armed with a rifle and accompanied by half a dozen of the bravest of our men. Our boys had seen the warriors and heard the chants and cries carried on the wind. Believing that the master was in danger, they had come to my rescue without having received an order from Zakharov; in fact without him even knowing about it. I am most grateful and let them feel my approval. However, I choose not to tell Zakharov about the experience because it would worry him in his current state of health.

Next morning the Winima people bring mountains of produce. Even though I had intended to do this barter business with knives and valuable goods, I can generally pay with red paint alone. Red paint has increased in value due to the war. Two weeks of provisions for twenty-five boys cost us only a few shillings. The next days limp along painfully slowly. To occupy my time, I go hunting, prospecting in the Bulolo, and occasionally visit my new friend, the warlike chief. He has not yet fought a battle but is content with intimidating his equally undecided Wirre-Wirre opponents with noisy threats and a show of weapons.

Zakharov's health does not improve, and his pain becomes more acute by the day. He can hardly bear it at night, and so I prepare hot water bottles for him. Obviously the illness has already affected the lining of his bowel. Thank goodness we are now reconciled, and we try our best to treat each other respectfully. But his rough and abusive behaviour towards the boys is unchanged. His nervous irritability has to find an outlet and our boys are the scapegoats. On the tenth day of our sojourn the great day of battle between Wirre-Wirre and Winima has at last arrived. About a hundred warriors on each side face one another on the grass-covered slopes about three kilometres from our camp. Wild shouting accompanies the battle, which expresses itself mainly in attempts to intimidate the opponent. Occasionally a whirring arrow can be seen and a kanaka runs off the field. I have found an observation point for myself as a war correspondent and watch the somewhat amusing to and fro through my binoculars. Just when an apparent climax in the fighting has been reached, a curtain of darkness descends as night sets in. The brave warriors now realise that they are hungry. The noise dies down as both sides retreat. That night many of them file past our camp, fat bundles of unused arrows still in their hands. Zakharov, who is lying helplessly in bed and who is still unaware of the state of war between the neighbouring villages, becomes worried at the sight of these wild-looking fellows and asks me to keep them away from the camp. So I untie Lump who soon clears the area with his wild barking.

That night Zakharov's illness changes for the worse. He suffers from terrible stomach cramps and loses a lot of blood. He is full of despair both about his condition and losing face. I strongly advise us to return to Wau. He must have come to that decision himself for he immediately agrees and asks me to construct a chair in which he can be carried.

Zakharow being carried on his makeshift chair

That night everything is prepared. Eight of the strongest boys are chosen and given careful instructions for the trip, while I hand over the camp with its provisions to Biek with instructions to transport everything back to Wau as quickly as possible.

We leave at daybreak with Zakharov in the chair, which is attached to long poles carried in turn by four boys. Around midday we stop for a rest at the highest point and boil some cocoa. Then we pass our former camp and descend into the Bulolo River valley. Half an hour before our arrival there is a burst of heavy tropical rain. We are all drenched, Zakharov too, in spite of umbrella and coat. The day has been very strenuous for him, and he is completely exhausted. He again loses his temper and bitterly accuses me of carelessness because the boys are not pitching the tent and preparing his bed quickly enough. In fact, they are busily doing their jobs in the rain. We continue next day, with care but at an accelerated pace. Zakharov travels in his chair, exhausted and hardly able to hold on. The naked shoulders of the boys are rubbed raw by the poles but not a word of complaint passes their lips. Around midday one of the carriers collapses. He has overexerted himself, which has brought on a heart attack. I organise the necessary treatment and leave one boy with him. When he has recovered, he is to follow slowly behind. It is moving to see him suffer. He utters no words but has the large pleading eyes of a wounded animal. In their ability to put up with hardship kanakas are greatly superior to the white man. Closer to nature through birth and death, closer also to the world of creatures, they resemble them in their stoic and fatalistic acceptance of misfortune. We whites in contrast tend to abandon all sense of proportion and direction in our exaggerated desire to achieve. Impatience makes us lose our ability to bear our sufferings with stoicism.

In the late afternoon we can at last see the airstrip at Wau. Huge satisfaction and inner jubilation fill my heart. We have succeeded! We have managed to get our patient to where he can receive help and care before it is too late. All the pressure of the last weeks has suddenly dissipated. I feel warmth and fondness for the person who only recently thought he had to defend himself against me with a pistol. As I now step up to his clean bed, my rediscovered friend from past happy days takes hold of both my hands and overcome with emotion, he thanks me. He wants to be told that I have forgiven him, but I must also ask him to forgive whatever I may have done to upset him. In spite of his severe pain, Zakharov asks for the porters to be called late that night and gives them each a generous gift; the same man who had always been so disgusted by their touch, now shakes their hands in friendship. Naie, however, gets a pat on the head and the eyes of the little rascal light up

in childish delight. Four days later Biek arrives with all the supplies and the boys. Not a grain of rice is missing.

By now it is mid-December. Soltwedel reports by letter that he is much better. He asks me to fly down to Salamaua, but first I am to store the supplies at Wau and then send the boys back to Mapos on leave so they can take part in the Christmas celebrations at the mission. They are to meet us again on 28th December on the beach at Buang. We will then return to Wau and pick up Zakharov who has decided not to go to hospital in Salamaua but rather be treated in Wau hospital. He has quickly befriended the doctor, and all other hospital staff like their new patient.

I attend to all my jobs and next morning the boys start on their homeward journey to Mapos in high spirits. Only Zavil and Lump remain with me. The three of us will fly to Salamaua. Since the planned flight to the Bulowat did not eventuate, I want to make good my promise to him. The morning of this December day is magnificent. Early on there was still a thick ground fog on the airfield. From the hospital situated at the lower end of the airstrip, where I have been staying with Zakharov as guest of the British medical assistant, we hear two planes circling for a quarter of an hour before the mist rises, finally allowing them clear visibility for land.

The boys have already left, and I make use of the available time to discuss the technical and geological aspects of the prospecting excursion to be relayed to Soltwedel. Since arriving at the hospital Zakharov is a new man. The security of civilisation, the calm confidence of the doctor, and the attitude to accept the inevitable have already half cured him. We say heartfelt farewells and he begs me not to take too long before returning, since he is hoping to be well again in three weeks' time. He is very keen to pick up his work where illness forced him to abandon it. So Zavil, Lump and I set out for our departure by air. Zavil and Lump are to go to Lae in the Junkers Limousine and then come to Salamaua in the pinnace.

Balus bilong masta

I will fly directly to the new airfield in Salamaua in the little sports aeroplane. Zavil is anxious he might miss the plane and I can see both his excitement and his nervousness. I have often wondered what a kanaka might think an aeroplane is, and how he would interpret the experience of flying.

When Naie first saw a plane close up, he asked me whether it was an animal. He could not imagine that something lifeless could roar and race into the heavens with such incredible speed. Zavil for his part doesn't give it much thought. The word "mashin" covers everything incomprehensible and he probably doesn't ponder about it any more than a horse would about a car. When he arrives in Salamaua by pinnace that same evening and I ask him what it was like, he just says "good fella", but I can see how proud he is to have been the first of our boys to fly in the "ballus". Later, he is sure to report unbelievable things; he will want to appear almost like a white man in the estimation of his compatriots. Though much is made of the naturalness of primitive people, they are quite often so self-conscious that they can't really enjoy themselves.

When I arrive in Salamaua, Soltwedel is waiting for me at the hangar. He looks very thin, but he is feeling well again. We are both happy to see each other and notice how close we have grown through our shared experiences. Over an ice-cold beer in the guesthouse, we discuss plans for the immediate future. Then I take the first hot bath after many months of uncivilised bush life. With something approaching solemnity I take the unaccustomed white clothes, silk shirts, shoes and socks, out of a suitcase that smells of camphor and get dressed with great delight. As I strut along the verandah all spick and span, it suddenly strikes me how comical my get-up is. I think of my boys, how they left for Mapos, proud as peacocks wearing their festive regalia.

The hardships of bush life, along with all the oaths I have sworn in moments of despair to never go bush again, are soon forgotten. Civilised once again and bored with doing nothing, I can only think of plans for the next project and be full of enthusiasm for what is to come. The deprivations are of course the price one pays for the magic of the upcoming experiences. We stay in Salamaua for Christmas. Most of the gold-diggers have flown in from the fields to celebrate the festival in their own way. It becomes an orgy of drinking and costs the lives of three men. They die the blessed death of delirium tremens. Two die on Boxing Day but their burial is initially postponed till enough mourners are sober. They rest not far from our guesthouse in a corrugated iron hut. Noisy drinkers are yelled at. "Shut up or you'll wake the dead." One of the most successful gold diggers shouts drinks all around and seems to have set his mind on giving the dead men further company. But only one more man joins the deceased.

On the broad verandah that surrounds the building, people dance nonstop until far into the night, in spite of the leaden, humidity-laden heat, while the noise from the bar drowns out the jazz music from two competing gramophones. The women mostly remain sober, but their banter vibrates with self-pity. An old bushman redoubles his swearing when told to consider the women. "Certainly not!" he shouts "Swear them out! Drink them out! Disgust them as much as you can! They have no business to be here! Do you think I would let my old woman kick the bucket here? Stuff your ears with wax, you sluts, if you don't want to listen to people when they get rid of their anger by swearing!" And to make the point he plants himself on a table in close earshot of them and thunders down his sermon without repeating himself once.

A tall, reeling surveyor who wants to dance takes over from him. But no one is willing to partner somebody who can barely stay upright. So he goes from one group to another with his tearful litany. He pleads he is a former officer, betrayed and sold out by the nastiness of life and of people. Exhausted, he finally drops into an armchair sobbing about his fate. Then suddenly he stands up wearing nothing but his shirt and is about to divest himself of that last stitch of clothing. Somebody tears the loincloth off a black servant so that man is now naked. He wraps the cloth around the miserable frame of the tall fellow and leads him away. Gasps of "shocking" emanate from the insulted women and calls of "good night" from

the amused men. In his clean white suit next morning the surveyor is once again a representative of the strong sex. My cursing friend has a point; this is no place for women.

Happy to leave this atmosphere, Soltwedel and I take the pinnace to Buang as planned. There all our boys, having returned from Mapos, await us. This little excursion without Zakharov is simply to perform an acid test on an extensive ore deposit we had discovered earlier. We could not do this test at the time because Naie sat on Zakharov's bag and broke the acid bottles. But I cannot give any information here about the direction or the results of this rushed two-week excursion, which was conducted in many forced marches.

For Soltwedel and me it is like a pilgrimage of penance because all our Christmas over-indulgences had to be sweated out. We swear a lot but it is on the whole, "gallows humour" directed at ourselves. In Mapos we meet up with our injured porter. His damaged tendons have healed completely, and he can join us once again. We are glad to have one of our best boys back with us. When we finally arrive back in Wau we feel fitter than ever in spite of all the exertion. Zakharow, thanks to the nursing care and medical treatment, is fit and eager to resume the Mount Lawson expedition. Consequently, we only stay in Wau for two days to complete preparations, then leave on 12th January, well equipped and provisioned.

Our provisions, intended to last us for six months, are packed into sixty loads, and initially moved to Winima in three consecutive trips. But there we can only recruit a limited number of additional porters, not enough to transport all our equipment. I therefore remain in Winima with only two boys, while my friends and the porters continue the trek to the village of Piaru, five days away. Piaru is situated on the dividing range between the old German territory of New Guinea and Australian Papua and is only two or three days walk from Mount Lawson. Here we plan to make a depot for our provisions, entrusting them to the care of the black mission. So I wait in Winima for the return of the porters and in the meantime negotiate with the old chief, who visits me in camp every day. He claims that he unfortunately can't let me have any more of his boys, but I keep showing him the lovely, seductive trade goods and quietly hope that he will give in to my request.

Finally, after ten days, my boys return with the replacement porters from Piaru. They bring a letter from Soltwedel reporting that the long, forced treks have not been good for

Zakharov, who again has become extremely impatient. Immediately after arriving in Piaru he had to go to bed with a temperature of forty degrees. Soltwedel hopes it is only an acute attack of malaria and that the expedition into the mountains can begin as soon as all supplies have arrived. I am therefore especially happy when the old Winima chief finally agrees to my request that very same evening and promises twenty additional porters for the next day. I thank him with generous presents and prepare the loads that night. But at first light no one turns up. I send Biek and a companion to the village to collect the promised porters. They come back and report that the village has been abandoned. All the pigs and the women have left and only a few old men remain. The young men are assembled in the high kunai grass with their bows and arrows. They had given insolent responses to Biek's questions and followed up with threats and insults. I cannot understand this turn of events. Only yesterday we seemed to be on good terms with the Winima people. The old luluai couldn't do enough to help us and in view of the much-coveted presents, expressed his delight and friendship. Fearing the worst, I go into the village myself with Biek and Zavil carrying the rifles. I know that when kanakas take pigs and women to safety, they have hostile motives.

After a short inspection of the village, I see that everything is as Biek has reported. But when I step out of the bamboo enclosure again, I find myself in a semi-circle of about a hundred warriors. Their bows are drawn and a particularly tall, pockmarked fellow imperiously calls out to me in Trepang English to stop and come no closer or otherwise his men will shoot. Zavil sidles up to me closely. He is afraid. Biek, however, carefully retreats towards the entrance of the village and posts himself there, with rifle at the ready. He wants to prevent the master being surrounded and attacked from behind. Everything now depends on fast and decisive action. Taking the initiative and bluff are important in confronting kanakas. I pull my revolver out of its holster and aim at the arrogant speaker who is about twenty metres away from me. Advancing towards him, I loudly order him to throw down his weapons or I will shoot. This tactic surprises him, and he squirms indecisively. When the chief addresses him with a hasty barrage of encouraging words, I jump forward and rip the club from his hands. Again, I order him to tell all the warriors to throw down their weapons. He is now shaking all over. He tries to ward off the revolver with his left hand and lets his club and bow drop. He wants to encourage the others to act but is too paralysed to find words. When I grab his arm the wide circle around us jumps backwards and disappears into

the kunai. I then take our prisoner as hostage, and we start back towards our camp. We are followed from a safe distance by the warriors with the old chief at their head calling to me, saying that he wants to talk to me and that "everything is alright."

I now realise what their plan was. They wanted to ambush me and the two shoot-boys in the village so that they could plunder our unprotected camp. I could now no longer trust them. I let the chief know through my captured interpreter that he should come to my camp and negotiate directly with me there. Furthermore, he should understand that my generous gifts are proof that I am a friend of the village. And so the old luluai actually does sit down at my fire, as if we were still the best of friends. Pleased by his conciliatory demeanour, I first let the old man discuss things with his interpreter. Whilst I can't understand their conversation, their spitting and constant laughter makes me wary. When I ask them what they are talking about, their replies are evasive. I now want to make my views clear to the chief, but his tall spokesman refuses to translate. He tells me the luluai demands that I leave the Winima area immediately, without the promised porters.

By now the camp has been surrounded by a great many armed warriors taking cover behind bushes and trees. Without much forethought, I grab hold of the old man and his interpreter with intentional roughness and lock them into a little hut which Naie had previously erected. Naie always builds a hut for himself if he knows we are staying longer than one night at a camp. Then I let Lump, who had been impatiently tugging at his leash for some time now, loose and just say to him: "Go on Lump, fetch!" Barking furiously, he storms off into the nearest bushes. I can hear two or three cries and then the trampling flight of more than a hundred marksmen. Once the siege has ended, I send two of the fastest boys off through the bush on the side furthest away from the village, with instructions to make for Piaru with a letter explaining my delay to Soltwedel. I inform him that I will attempt to hire porters from neighbouring tribes since I can no longer count on the Winima people.

Under cover of darkness and with only one of the boys, I secretly leave the camp. It has by now been carefully barricaded and put under the command of Biek. I leave him the rifles along with Lump, who I tie up outside the hut holding our hostages as a much-feared guard. I have explained to Biek that I will make my way to Wau as quickly as possible and

try to hire reliable boys there to defend the camp and help transport our goods to Piaru. The splendid fellow only hesitates for a moment. He takes in the dangerous situation I am about to leave him in, and he also realises how much I trust him. He answers simply: "You can depend on me, Master. I know that you will come back. Shame on Winima."

I had hoped to see the police master in Wau to hand over the responsibility for dealing with the incident to him, but the officer is out on another punitive expedition and is not expected back for weeks. However, I am told that the Winima people are next on his list as they have notched up a number of offences. By a lucky coincidence, an Australian prospector is able to lend me his twenty porters. They are from the Sepik, big and strong, and with a warlike disposition. But my worries about Biek and the camp increase when I see Lump coming towards me. He is smeared with blood but is uninjured. He is excited and I have difficulty calming him down. I fear that there may have been an attack on our camp and that Lump has bitten his way out and come looking for me. So we set off immediately. As we arrive at the kunai ridge, I can see the camp from a distance, and it is again surrounded by a wide semi-circle of warriors. The twenty Sepik blacks now burst into wild war cries and stomp a grotesque dance as they walk. The surprised warriors are panicked, and their fear increases when Biek fires a few live shots into the air. They scatter and run towards the village with Lump in pursuit.

Once I am back in the camp, Biek reports that he and Zavil kept watch all night. The Winima warriors had been active throughout. Warning shots had been fired a number of times and eventually Lump had been let loose. He had really laid into the warriors but then had not returned. Maybe he had been killed, Biek thought. When I tell him that the dog followed me all the way to Wau, he gratefully strokes the snout of the creature that is nuzzling up to me, and says: "Good fella Lump, me think he savvy all too much!" Lump responds by licking Biek's thigh.

The noisy Sepik men together with Lump as our night watchmen, allow us to have an uninterrupted rest, and as we set out in the morning, Winima looks as peaceful in the sunlight as a European village on a Sunday morning. I am later told by the police master in Wau that the trouble came about because I had denied an old woman, who had influence with the chief, a colourful cotton loincloth. At the time I did not know what an influential

personality I was dealing with. I believed I had been more than generous to her. Even among the kanakas, high politics often seems to be determined from behind the scenes by the desires of women.

From Winima we initially follow narrow mountain tracks that run along the ridge of the dividing range and then through an endless fairytale forest where the heavy moss carpet swallows every sound. It often seems as though one is hearing the animals of the forest breathing, that's how silent and lonely it feels. There are no villages or native gardens in this area. The forest is so unbelievably vast, so dense in every direction, that it would be easy to become disorientated and be unable to find a way out. Amazing tree and ground orchids abound, with honey eaters flitting about and giant yellow, black, blue and green butterflies living their short lives amongst the trunks of the forest trees. And the bright plumage of the Birds of Paradise delight the eye, until their hoarse cries fracture the harmony of their beauty. Now and again we encounter a tree bear *(cuscus)* that looks us up and down with the huge eyes of a child. Wild boars, cassowaries and small kangaroos *(wallabies)* also abound. These are magnificent hunting grounds for our shoot-boys and for Lump. The forest is never-ending and deathly still. It smells of heavy black soil and is criss-crossed by streams with coloured pebbles and cold mountain water. This is a fairytale kingdom in which beautiful, but also very frightening things can happen, just as in storybook adventures read to children around a warm fire while outside the snow swirls about. Such stories may turn out well but may sometimes end in sadness hidden under a veil of beauty. For four days we move through this beauty as if in a fantasy world.

When we reach Piaru we are shocked back into realty. I discover my two comrades lying in a dimly lit, stuffy kanaka hut, both seriously ill. Soltwedel has had a relapse of his dysentery and Zakharov an abscess on the liver as a result of his earlier illness. Two days later I have to face the fact that I am also coming down with dysentery. Now all three of us are ill, six long days march from Wau and without the necessary medicines. We had not been able to buy these in Wau because stocks there had run out. My first instinct is to leave as quickly as possible while we are still strong enough to walk; simply to leave before it is too late. I discuss our predicament with Soltwedel. "Now all three of us are sick and Zakharov seems to me to be very sick. We can't help him. He has to be in the hands of a good doctor as soon as possible. We'll have Zakharov carried but we two should be able to walk if the days

are not too long. In this way it won't take more than ten or twelve days to reach Wau." But my suggestion is met with icy silence. Zakharov groans and vomits up pure bile. Soltwedel turns on his sickbed and I can read in his features the expression of impotent rage against fate.

"So what do you intend to do?" I ask in alarm. "Stay here and get well," is Soltwedel's brief response. "But we will never get well here. Just take a look at Zakharov." Soltwedel answers: "There are people who would prefer to die with the goal in front of them rather than turn back shortly before they have reached it." I am not sure whether he is referring to himself or speaking on behalf of Zakharov. I say nothing and leave the hut. An autumn wind is blowing. Deep down in the valley the Piaru River foams white and winds its way through a maze of grass-covered mountains and gorges. All around, the horizon is framed by massive mountain ranges. In the distance the beautiful, symmetrical summit of Mount Lawson, the mountain of our hopes and dreams, can be seen. From the hut I hear Zakharov's tortured voice. Then Soltwedel joins me outside. He walks bent over with pain and we sit down on a log and, deep in thought, we silently survey our mountain. That is where the gold is, maybe a lot of gold. The gold of the rich Lakekamu fields in Papua must have come from somewhere in that area. No one has yet found the source, but it is obvious that it has been washed down by the rivers from these mountains. Nobody has prospected there yet. It is the chance of a lifetime.

Our eyes follow the course of the Piaru through the nearer mountains and slopes, till the white river disappears into the chaos of the forests, gathering to it the streams which come from Mount Lawson, eventually ending in the Lakekamu. Dreams, plans and possibilities chase each other in our heads. For a moment our dire situation is forgotten but then Zakharov's voice from the hut brings us back. I give Soltwedel, sitting beside me, a questioning glance. His feelings of devastation and extreme resignation show on his face. Without a word he stands, and I take hold of his arm.
"What is your opinion of Zakharov's situation?"
"I fear for his life." he replies.
"We have to take him to Wau. He may yet be saved.", I say.
"Do you know what it means to carry a stretcher through the bush for a fortnight on tracks like these?"

"But we must do something while there is still hope".
"There is nothing we can do. We can't let Zakharov go alone with the porters yet we ourselves have dysentery and can't possibly walk for ten or fourteen days. Apart from that, Zakharov doesn't want to leave. I have already spoken with him in detail. He doesn't want to turn back a second time when we are so close to our goal."
"But he has to be persuaded, or even forced, because he doesn't seem to realise how sick he is."
"Try to persuade a person with the dogged determination of Zakharov," says Soltwedel.
But that's not a solution. We can't just resign ourselves to our fate. So I try to persuade Soltwedel that we must not give in but to take things into our own hands now and act for Zakharov, whether he likes it or not. He is too ill to make rational decisions. To wait here simply because that is what our friend asks us to do, makes us responsible. We know that only surgery can save him.

At that point my comrade, so sick himself, puts his hand on my shoulder and with his voice barely able to hide his suffering he asks me: "Do you think I just don't care? If I decide to stay here it is only because I have no choice. I have lost too much blood. I am too exhausted. If I left now, I would have to be carried myself. I wouldn't be able to last the distance. Believe me, after twenty years in the bush I know my own body. I have no choice but to stay. Diet and care will see me through this. But you are right, Zakharov has to go. Don't think that I don't agree with you on that point. I haven't made any decisions on his behalf yet because I know that he still hasn't come to terms with giving up on the goal of our expedition."

I am unable to respond to this straight away and he misunderstands my hesitation and continues: "You try once more to persuade him. By forcing him, you would break his remaining strength. If you force him to leave contrary to his own wishes, he will arrive at the coast as a corpse." However, my worried silence is directed at him for hadn't he said: "I have to stay. With diet and care I will survive?" So I anxiously ask him who is supposed to nurse him if I go with Zakharov. But he brushes me off impatiently. He wasn't talking about someone having to nurse him. He can look after himself. This isn't the first time. And he finishes off with brutal directness. "If you and Zakharov leave, I'll have peace and quiet and I'll see to my own diet." He gives me a probing look. He wants to laugh but the pain distorts his features into a bitter smile. I am not sure whether he wants to conceal his suffering or

whether it is scornful suspicion directed at me. Does he think that I am acting out of self-interest? Is he of the opinion that I only want to accompany Zakharov because that way I myself can reach safety? Is he accusing me because I can even consider leaving him alone in this wilderness? I feel a feverish rush running through my head and call out his name as he crawls back into the hut, bent double with pain. He stops and waves his left hand. My suspicious feelings along with my irritable hypersensitivity now make me think that he is dismissing me, as though he wants to say: "Just go, if that's what you want."

As I am sitting there alone, miserable, sad and helpless, staring at the hut inside which two human beings that I want to help at all costs while I still have the strength, lie suffering. My dog pushes his head between my knees and his faithful eyes seem to ask me: "What's up?" The concern of this dumb creature restores hope in me and the confidence and determination to act. One of the blacks tells me that the goldfield on the Waria River can be reached in only three days from here, and there are reasonably good tracks across the mountains. He tells me an aeroplane carrying engineers once landed there. *(in Garaina).*

Could that actually be true? Only three days? It is over twice that distance to Wau, and on the map the distance from Piaru to the Waria looks longer than the distance to Wau. Still, this map can't be trusted. A discussion with the black missionary suggests that the native is probably right, though he himself had not yet walked the track. Now my confidence grows that Zakharov can still be brought to safety. I hasten to the hut to give Soltwedel this news. Outside the sun is shining in a bright blue sky but inside it is dark and stuffy. In the dim light I can see that both the sick men are asleep. I am disappointed because my excitement can't wait, but I sit down and, as I listen to Zakharov's regular breathing, I feel happy that the poor man is getting some rest.

It has now been days since Zakharov was last able to talk. Whilst in our presence he has forced himself to bear his suffering in silence, but it is clear to us that he is in terrible pain. He groans whenever he thinks he is alone. We know that he is fighting a heroic battle for control so that, in view of our newly restored friendship, no new hostile feelings arise.
During the night I hear him talking and I lean over his bed, close to him. He has a smile apparently brought on by a wonderful dream he is having in his feverish state. I see that Soltwedel is sitting up in bed, so I tell him the good news about a possible shorter

evacuation route for Zakharov. He is surprised, lets me outline my plan, and enthusiastically joins in by making further suggestions. We decide to send off runners to Wau to arrange a flight to Garaina on the Waria River on a pre-arranged day so that Zakharov can be flown to Salamaua without delay. At the same time, drugs for Soltwedel and me are to be procured and brought back by the returning runners.

At that point we become aware that we have been whispering too loudly and that Zakharov has woken up and is listening to us with an expression of anxious concern. Though worried that I could trigger his resistance, I tell him what needs to be said and conclude with the assurance that the injections he will be given in hospital in Salamaua will cure him in just a few weeks. "What do you think of this plan, Zakharov?" I ask as casually as I can, but he is overtaken by a sudden spasm of pain, rears up and falls back onto his pillow with a muffled cry. Soltwedel and I leave so that he knows he is alone, and without us witnessing his terrible torture. But he calls us back and asks hastily: "Only three days? Do you think we can make it?" At long last he has actually accepted the idea of an evacuation. I can't hold back my emotions and taking hold of his wasted hands, I describe every aspect of the plan to him, and am wonderfully reassured when I feel him squeezing my hands in return. That night Soltwedel writes the required letters. We book the aeroplane for eight days' time, the tenth of February. The boys are to set out at first light to cover the six-day route in three or four days, running all the way.

Zavil, Lumbuk and Kapul volunteer, and I give them careful instructions which they each have to repeat to me. I tell them that they are to pass Winima at night and if possible, by a detour. They are only to use the rifle in an extreme emergency. They know what is at stake and that they can only allow themselves one day of rest in Wau because they must return with the medicine for Soltwedel as quickly as possible. They are so impressed with the importance of their mission, particularly Zavil who likes to draw attention to himself, that they can hardly wait for daybreak. Sitting on my log in front of the hut I follow their progress for an hour before they disappear around a bend in the river – three moving black dots. I know that the life and health of both my friends, perhaps even my own survival, depends upon them.

Zakharov and I plan to depart two days later. That allows six days to reach the plane booked for Garaina, because I tell myself that it is sensible to allow twice the time the natives think will be needed for the journey. On the day of departure, we say our farewells to Soltwedel. I have constructed a light stretcher from Zakharov's camp bed to be carried by four boys. We lift Zakharov, who is no longer able to raise himself, onto it. "Good-bye Zakharov, and good recovery," says Soltwedel. "We'll meet again in Salamaua." Zakharov replies: "Maybe; who knows? Farewell."

I squeeze Soltwedel's hands, but his eyes seem to avoid me and again I worry that he doesn't trust me. I search for words to reassure him and in my concern about having to leave him here I make a promise which is almost impossible to keep, namely to return immediately once I have delivered Zakharov. An impatient, dismissive smile is his response. "Nonsense, my friend. You can hardly walk yourself as it is. The long journey will soon have you exhausted. You have not yet experienced the full effects of dysentery. Look after yourself and don't worry about me." Our procession starts moving. Lump, who is glad to be out and about again, constantly gets tangled up in the legs of the porters. I call him off with a few sharp words. On the first rise I stop to look back. I can see Soltwedel sitting on our log, wearily resting his head in his hands. I wave to him, and I am filled with joy when he waves back a number of times in return. Then he stands and enters the hut.

At first the track follows grassy slopes and is quite broad and comfortable but soon it turns into a narrow forest trail. It is the same fairytale forest of the dividing range, just a small portion of the vast New Guinea jungle; so dark, so hushed, hiding so many undiscovered secrets, that one is drawn to it again and again. At the same time, I am spooked by it because of its eeriness and vastness and its impenetrability.

There is now always a need for three boys with machetes and axes to lead in order to widen the track. We walk through a round green vault and the density of the bush lessens only when we come to a stream, allowing us to glimpse the blue sky above. Although we continue until dusk, I estimate that we have not even completed half a day's march.

At night Zakharov is very feverish and hallucinates in Russian. I can only understand an occasional word, and it is often hard to make out whether he is dreaming or awake and

uttering a request. I hardly sleep to allow myself to be easily roused. I spend the night in a dozy state between tiredness and worry, very aware that my friend's condition is deteriorating. On the track next morning, I tell the porters to slow down a little to make it more comfortable for the sick man. Zakharov says, as I bend over him. "It is a race. But there is another racing us, and he will win." I try to encourage him out of this idea but know only too well that death is competing with us. I have a terrible feeling of light-headedness. On one occasion I go ahead and lie down in the moss beside a creek to stretch out for a short rest. The voices of the porters rouse me and reawaken the realisation of a dreadful reality. But this reality seems quite unreal; dreams can often appear more real than the waking world itself.

By now it is day three, and we have walked through sheer unending jungle, up and down, airy crowns here, moist mossy gorges there, and nothing but more jungle. Towards midday the view becomes a little more open. With great difficulty I climb a rock and discover that there is now no new mountain ahead. The track leads down through a deep forested valley. We must at last have reached the dividing range between Papua and northern New Guinea. Gerepo, the first village between Piaru and Garaina, which according to the kanakas we were to reach after only one day's trek, cannot be far away. I send Naie on ahead to investigate. He thinks he can smell smoke. He is to try to locate the village. After an hour the little fellow comes back, holding a kanaka by the hand. I have never seen such an enormous human being. He looks like one of those fairytale giants who eats a naughty child for breakfast. His dress shows me that he is from the Waria valley. With a grin a metre wide and a terrible "Uuaah" he greets me, and in the manner of mission kanakas, gives me a firm hearty handshake which almost splinters my bones. I just manage to prevent him from expressing his sympathy to Zakharov in a similar manner. He guides us, and an hour later we arrive at a clearing where twenty Gerepo boys are warming themselves by a fire.

Heaven only knows how the news could precede us but the entire Waria valley is already informed that a sick white master is being carried to Garaina. In response, the black missionaries have sent these boys ahead to widen the path for the stretcher. They have managed to do that quite well and now our progress is quicker and smoother, but our carriers are exhausted. On top of that we are surprised by a heavy shower of rain, so we

finish our trek early and set up camp for the night under the dense protective shelter of the forest.

It is not until the afternoon of the following day, four days after leaving Piaru, that our procession reaches the village. According to the initial estimates of the kanakas, we were to reach here on the evening of the first day. We take Zakharov, who has been asleep with exhaustion for the past hours, to a hut and I then enquire about the state of the track ahead and how far it is to Garaina. Again and again I am told: "If you walk quickly, two days." That means that we will need at least another three or four days. We will arrive in Garaina two whole days too late to meet the flight. So I decide to immediately send a runner ahead to tell the pilot that we will be late. If he cannot wait for us, he should return in another three days, on the 12th of February.

Mock, our best runner, volunteers for the job. He has always liked being given special tasks. One of the Gerepo blacks will hand him over to the chief of the next village, and for a small gift he will provide him with a companion to run with him to Garaina. I make it very clear to Mock what his task is all about; he must think only of the dangerously ill master and not of his legs. He must run as fast as he can so as not to miss the aeroplane. He should also not be afraid of the local natives who are all from the mission and will not harm him. Before evening, he sets out to run through the moonlit night with his Gerepo guide and companion. Never-the-less, I am extremely worried that he may miss the pilot, but I hope that the Garaina people will already be informed of our progress by the "bush telegraph" which is so difficult for white people to understand.

Zakharov has not regained consciousness and far into the night he hallucinates in Russian, then he grows quiet, wakes up and asks me, in view of the hut he is in, whether this is Garaina and whether the plane has arrived yet. I have to confess the truth to him and explain our slow progress. I tell him that I have sent Mock ahead with a message for the pilot. "Another three days. How can I survive that?" I can see terrible despair on his face which, in the light of the lantern, already has the hollow expression of death. "Let's get going again. We have to be quick, quick!" he pleads with me. I tell him that it is night and the porters are completely exhausted.

Next morning I wake the boys before first light and prepare for a dawn departure. Zakharov himself encourages the porters to walk so quickly that in spite of my efforts I can barely keep up. Around lunchtime we finally arrive in a village, and I have to engage relief porters since my own boys are exhausted. With replacements, we now move at a faster pace, but the village boys are not used to this work and jerk the stretcher up and down as they run. I can no longer keep up. I call out desperately to slow down but they do not seem to hear me. Eventually I send Lump after them. He is happy to oblige and in his enthusiasm snaps at their legs. They drop the stretcher and climb the nearest trees. All this wakes Zakharov out of his daze. Standing in front of him I now realise that this is all in vain. In a fading voice he begs me to call a halt. "It is beautiful here," he says. This is where he wants to die; it couldn't be much longer now. He is again wracked by a fit of pain and I can see how severe his suffering is. He turns his head so I can't see his face and I believe he is crying. Then he looks at me with completely clear, but very deep-set eyes and says: "What miserable creatures we are. So this is the end. I would not have wished to live for this price." I repeatedly try to encourage him not to lose hope, to persevere, but he shrugs me off apathetically: "I can't do this anymore." The pain has complete control of him, so I give him a second dose of Chloroquine because of the morphine it contains. It relieves him and he falls asleep. But I don't have the courage to take him further on this day and therefore set up camp. I fall fast asleep under the tent fly before sunset, my first long sleep for many days. But around midnight Zakharov's voice wakes me: "Quick, quick! On, on!" He mistakes the moonshine for daylight and so as not to disappoint him when he seems to have regained hope, I break camp immediately. But we only make slow headway, for even though it is light around us, our feet can only feel their way on the darker ground of the track with its tangled roots.

At last the day dawns. A wonderful, invigorating freshness fills the air and the rays of morning sun are so full of glowing energy and there are so many joyous calls from creatures in the bush, that I can't help but pick myself up. It gives me the will and the faith that our efforts can and will work out. The track now leads down to the Waria River, which we have to cross on a strong log, sixty feet above the water. I turn away when I see the boys balancing across it with the stretcher. One false step and they would be lost along with Zakharov. But with natural confidence they walk over the giddy height on the narrow curve of the trunk. In the state I am in, I can no longer manage it by myself, so Biek and one of

the Gerepo boys guide me across safely. With our hopes raised by Zakharov's own positivity, we walk nonstop all day and by evening we arrive at the village of Wapi. It is situated in dense forest and is enclosed with high, strong, bamboo and pole fences, like a small fortress. The entrance is blocked by a twelve-foot-high barrier which one needs to climb over. Since it is impossible to carry the stretcher across, I climb the barrier with Biek's help and carry the sick man into the village. I put him to bed in the clean hut of the black missionary.

Zakharov, once so portly and heavy, is now light as a child. His limbs are only skin and bones. The formerly full and rounded face is narrow and sunken, and the eyes that used to be so bright and defiant are now deep in their sockets with a tired and fading glow. But he is still conscious and noticing the pleasant seclusion of the village, he says to me: "How beautiful this all is. Nature surprises us again and again." He would like to stay here and fade away in the security of this sanctuary. But when I encourage him that life and his future are still waiting for him, he turns to me with a kindly smile: "My friend, you deserve for that to be the case. Act according to your plan." Happy at his grateful confidence I tell him that from now on things would get easier. We are close to the goal, and we could manage to get there in two days as the tracks were now becoming better. But there was no point in rushing since I had sent Mock with a message to arrange the flight for the twelfth of February. We have three full days left and can now carry him more carefully and look after him better. He nods gratefully.

I pause. Melodies reach my ear. I step outside the hut. The whole village has assembled around it. Men, women, and children are singing their evening devotions; old Waria tunes with pious texts; melancholy tunes sung in three or four verses. Above all of them the high falsettos of the boys' voices float almost shrill against the heavy basses of the men. Then prayers are murmured, and the chief tells me that they are praying for the sick master. When I return to the hut there is an expression of serene joy on Zakharov's face, and he asks me to have the chorale sung once more. I inform the chief, who claps his hands to interrupt the murmur of prayer. Then they sing again and I sit down at the bedside of my friend who seems to have forgotten his pain. There is an expression of deep happiness on his face and he talks to me about his wife. Soon his words become quieter and subside to a mumble. He is asleep.

In the meantime, darkness has fallen, and a cold wind blows through the treetops. Suddenly Biek appears before me and says hastily and briefly: "Master you come!" Noticing how perturbed he is, I ask him what has happened, but he replies: "Master, you come look." We walk through the dark village, climb past the guards and over the barrier, and go to the boys' fire. They are squatting around it in silence and none of them look up when I arrive. Biek points to a figure cowering all alone to one side and says: "Now the white master must die. Shame upon Mapos. You beat him, Master." Now I recognise Mock. Mock the runner who I sent ahead to Garaina with the urgent message for the pilot. I am stunned because now all seems lost. The blood rushes to my head and fury grips at my self-control. I pull him up and yell at him. "Why are you back? What have you done?" Mock is unable to speak for fear and shame. He is trembling all over. So Biek provides the explanation. Mock had almost reached his destination when foreign kanakas started shouting incomprehensible words at him as he ran by. He suddenly felt a terrible fear that they wanted to do him harm and so he turned back. The native accompanying him then also turned back, having tried all he could to persuade Mock to either continue on to Garaina or to hand over the letter. But he was unable to catch up to Mock, who had just run on until they both recognised the camp of the master. That is a typical example of the psychology of the natives when they feel fear. A kind of panic will suddenly overtake them, and they become unable to think rationally. Fear clings to them and whips them on. They run as though possessed and nothing can stop them.

I am extremely angry at this turn of events. I consider the consequences. If the plane arrives now, as initially requested, and we are not there, it will fly off again and who knows when and if it will ever return. Biek can see my anger and hands me a stick with the words: "Shame upon Mapos. All of us Mapos boys are ashamed. I would kill him, Master, so you hit him yourself." Mock cries and begs me, pleads with me, not to beat him. He will make up for his behaviour and he will run, run, run and hold onto the aeroplane. The sick master must not die. Stick in hand, I only now realise how weak I am myself with my own illness. I can hardly stay upright and when I try to swing the stick it falls from my shaking hand. By now Mock has run off into the dark night. "I'll fix it up, Master!" he calls back. Biek chases after him and hurls a hundred curses at him. They will cling to his back all the way to Garaina. Exhausted, I sit down by the fire in the circle with my boys. I know how humiliated they feel through

Mock's cowardice. None of them dares say anything, particularly as Biek repeats again and again: "Shame upon Mapos. But believe me, Master, Mock will run now, all night and all day. He will fix it up, believe me, Master." I stand up, freezing in my thin shirt. The icy cold wind whistles and blows sparks from the fire into the dark night. I nod at Biek and then say with great seriousness so that they can all understand: "Great, great shame upon Mapos." Biek calls after me: "Too true, Masta, too true."

I enter the house and throw myself onto the bed for now I am completely exhausted. But I cannot sleep. Outside the wind is moaning eerily in the high crowns of the jungle trees. I expect the light grass roof of our house to blow off at any moment. The fire from our boys' camp throws a restless gleam into our room. Every now and again I can see Zakharov's pale face as it lights up white in the glow. He is asleep but his lips are constantly murmuring incomprehensible words. I think of Mock, and in my mind's eye I can see his naked, black form racing along narrow tracks through this windy night, beset by his fear of the night and of the moaning voices of the wind. I can see him startle in terror when the storm throws dry branches from the treetops to the ground. But he runs, runs, runs, possessed by one thought only: he must get there. Fear begins to creep into my own heart. In my dream I run with Mock through the dark night, always just behind him without ever being able to catch him.

In the morning, the devotional songs of the Wapi villagers wake us. The chief has ordered an opening to be broken through the barricade so that we can carry the sick master through on his stretcher. Eight particularly strong Wapi boys accompany us all day and every two hundred metres they exchange with our carriers. The thick bushy jungle is now behind us. The Waria valley is wide and level, and our track leads us through grass that is only rarely interspersed with rough stony patches. We make fast progress, so fast that I, accompanied by Lump and Naie, cannot keep up. Much later we arrive in the village of Timanagosa, after a hike of eleven hours.

Under Biek's direction the boys have set up the camp and bedded Zakharov comfortably in a hut. He had been half conscious for the duration of the trip and had not complained or given any orders. In this village, I meet another white man, a New Zealander, who is on his way to the Ono River to have a look at some gold concessions there. He encountered

Mock not far from Garaina and had barely been able to stop him from running past. Mock had given him some fragments of information from which he could only gather that a seriously ill white man was being carried to Garaina. He therefore set out immediately to meet us. He had seen Zakharov on our arrival, but he was asleep and is now still unconscious. The New Zealander too is of the opinion that only immediate surgery could perhaps save my friend. He fears that an infection of the chest walls could already have set in. From him I also hear that Boom, my friend Helmuth Baum, has landed in Morobe and should arrive in Garaina in a few days. The man admits that he has only heard it from the blacks in Garaina and doesn't understand how news like that could get there so quickly. But I know that these bush rumours that circulate among the natives are more reliable than the news the daily press puts out at home. I believe him and am gripped by a wild hope without quite knowing why.

Zakharov does not regain consciousness during the night, but because I am aware that he is suffering terribly, I apply cold poultices every half hour, which provide him with some relief. Naie is my faithful helper and stays by his side. Every time the sick man has problems with his breathing, Naie throws himself onto me with an urgency by no means gentle. I have to help! We sit Zakharov up dozens of times during the night. When he finally falls into a quiet sleep in the morning, Naie asks me, as he hands me my tea: "The poor master must be your brother, Master?" It is not an inquisitive question but one that shows real sympathy. "Yes Naie, he is my brother." Naie just replies: "I don't have a brother." It sounds terribly sad, like an admission of great poverty. In the morning we set out for the eighth and last day of our torturous trip. On today's march I stay close to the stretcher and to the extent that this is possible, give Zakharov relief from the heat, for in this broad river valley the sun burns down with incredible strength and on the shadeless grassy steppes we are completely at its mercy. Suddenly Naie calls out: "Master, Master, me hear him ballus!" But however much we strain our ears, we hear nothing. Naie, however, is insistent. "There! Isn't that like the soft hum of a plane, far, far away?" We stop for a quarter of an hour and listen but cannot hear anything. It was probably a giant beetle or maybe just our imagination.
Around two o'clock we reach the end of a vast, completely level stretch of grass, and the kanakas point to a tiny dot, a house at the other end of the plain. "House belong Master Boom." It is the house that Baum built for himself when he was first prospecting on the upper Waria. At last our goal can be seen with the naked eye, at last, at last! And my friend

is still alive. I am overcome with joy and a wonderful feeling of peace enters my heart. Now we are safe! Now everything will work out.

In Garaina, we move into Baum's house. The airfield where a plane once landed is directly beside it. A hundred kanakas, men, women and children, are working with machetes to clear it. The grass is over a metre high so a landing on it would inevitably be a disaster. The chief of Garaina has organised this work on his own initiative. But is our plane still going to come? Has something happened to it on the way? Or did our boys not get through to Wau? Could the Winima kanakas have stopped them or attacked them? I am almost beginning to fear the latter.

In the evening a group of natives from a village half a day's distance down the Waria arrive and also bring the news that Baum is already on his way here. I immediately write him a letter and the chief of Garaina makes a messenger available who is to leave the next morning. I have my deckchair put out in front of the house. Inside it is musty and confined. Outside the sun is setting behind the mountains with spectacular colours. I look across the wide plain at silhouette upon silhouette of mountain ranges like the stylised backdrop for a play. Then night falls quickly and where only moments ago there were the colours of the sunset to admire, I can now see a sea of stars. As night falls, the nightingales awaken, and their sweet melancholic song can be heard from every direction. They are roosting in the small clusters of trees and bushes around the house. Otherwise, it is eerily quiet. The Waria River can be heard in the far distance. It does not sound like the rushing of water but like the distant tinkling of bells. Then I hear Zakharov's voice and go in to be with him. He is groaning in his fever and struggling for breath. I sit him up in bed. It gives him some relief, but he doesn't fully regain consciousness. Carefully I lay him down again. Then everything is quiet once more and the noises of the night hold my attention again and fill my soul with an unbearable sadness and nostalgia. I am unable to sleep. All my senses seem to be particularly acute, and I stay sitting in the chair next to Zakharov's bed until sleep is finally possible around morning.

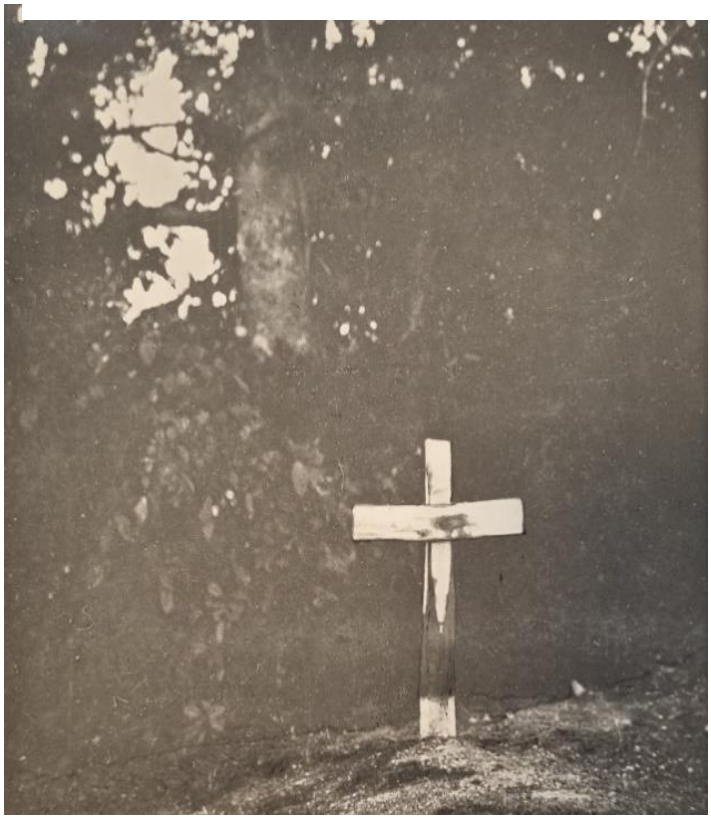
At dawn the kanakas return to extend the airfield, but I send them away again. There is no longer any point. Something must have gone wrong with my plans. If need be, one can land on the field as it is. I have lost hope that a plane will come. I have given up hope for

Zakharov too. Even though he is now sleeping peacefully his breathing comes in short gasps. He had not regained consciousness during the night. Naie calls me to say that the master is awake now. I go to him, but he is not fully conscious. "Has my wife arrived?" "No," I reply, quickly collecting myself, "but she is waiting for you in Rabaul." "If that is the case, all will be well." Then he falls asleep again and I realise he is no longer in pain. I stay beside him. Perhaps he will come to and want to say more. Two hours pass and then he sits himself up with the last of his strength, as though suffering a spasm, gazes at me with a long, silent look, as if he wants to say something more and then falls across the bed. My friend has passed away. It is the morning of February the thirteenth.

I bury him that evening. In this hot and humid climate that task always has to be done quickly. We can't make him a coffin, so we wrap him in his coat and sew him into a tarpaulin like a soldier.

Zakharov's funeral procession at Garaina

Our twelve boys, the entire male population of Garaina and I accompany him on his last journey. The procession winds through the high grass to the spot at the edge of the jungle that I have chosen as his last resting place. By the time the sun sets, a cross has been erected on the new grave mound.



Zakharow's lonely grave

Another long, sleepless night follows. Baum arrives in the morning. He has already heard the news and has walked all night. He stays with me for the day and then sets out for Piaru, to check on Soltwedel. By doing that, he relieves me of my promise to return myself. I would not be able to do so in any case. Baum insists that I remain in Garaina till he returns with Soltwedel. But less than two hours after he has left, we hear a plane. We light fires on the landing strip as signals. The plane circles above us a few times and then lands. Its landing run is halted by the high grass. The pilot is Shoppee who flew me to Salamaua on that earlier occasion. He is completely shattered when he hears he has arrived too late. Four times he had tried to get through to Garaina but on each occasion he had to turn back.

I now send the two boys who have stayed with me off to inform Baum that I will fly to Salamaua and that Shoppee will return to Garaina in ten days to pick Soltwedel up. Then I arrange for the kanakas to lengthen the runway after all. They work all day, but that afternoon heavy storm clouds roll in. Our way to Salamaua is blocked, so we have to wait here for the night. Heavy rain and wind rattle the aeroplane at its tiedowns. I spend another restless night during which few words are exchanged. Towards morning the rain clears. As dawn breaks, we warm up the aeroplane's engine, and at first light we take off. The runway is only just long enough. In the village everyone is still asleep. The only one to see us off is Naie, who stands all alone on the vast field, his eyes full of tears. The chief has promised me that Naie will be well looked after until Baum returns. Lump has gone with Baum. I have given him my faithful dog because he has always wanted him.

We fly along the valley of the Waria and then across the dividing range to Wau where we briefly land because of an engine problem. On the way, I see our mountain for the last time, rising up above the chaos of the mountain ranges, majestically and victoriously. So far, no white man has set foot on it. In one of those valleys, lies Soltwedel with his illness. He is as yet unaware of all that has happened. But in two- or three-days Baum will be with him.

After a short stay in Wau we continue on to Salamaua and I immediately check myself into hospital. Meanwhile Baum has reached Soltwedel who had already received the drugs brought by the boys returning from Wau. He was able to treat himself and not long afterwards, he was fit enough to walk the six or seven days to Wau.

About the time I had more or less recovered my own health, Soltwedel also arrived in Salamaua. On account of the death of Zakharov and our impaired state of health, our Rabaul syndicate now instructs us to abandon the expedition. Our gold prospecting venture has come to an end. Baum returned to the Waria after Soltwedel left. He took over our boys and all our provisions for his own work on the Waria.

" …. Chaste moonlit silence"

Postscript

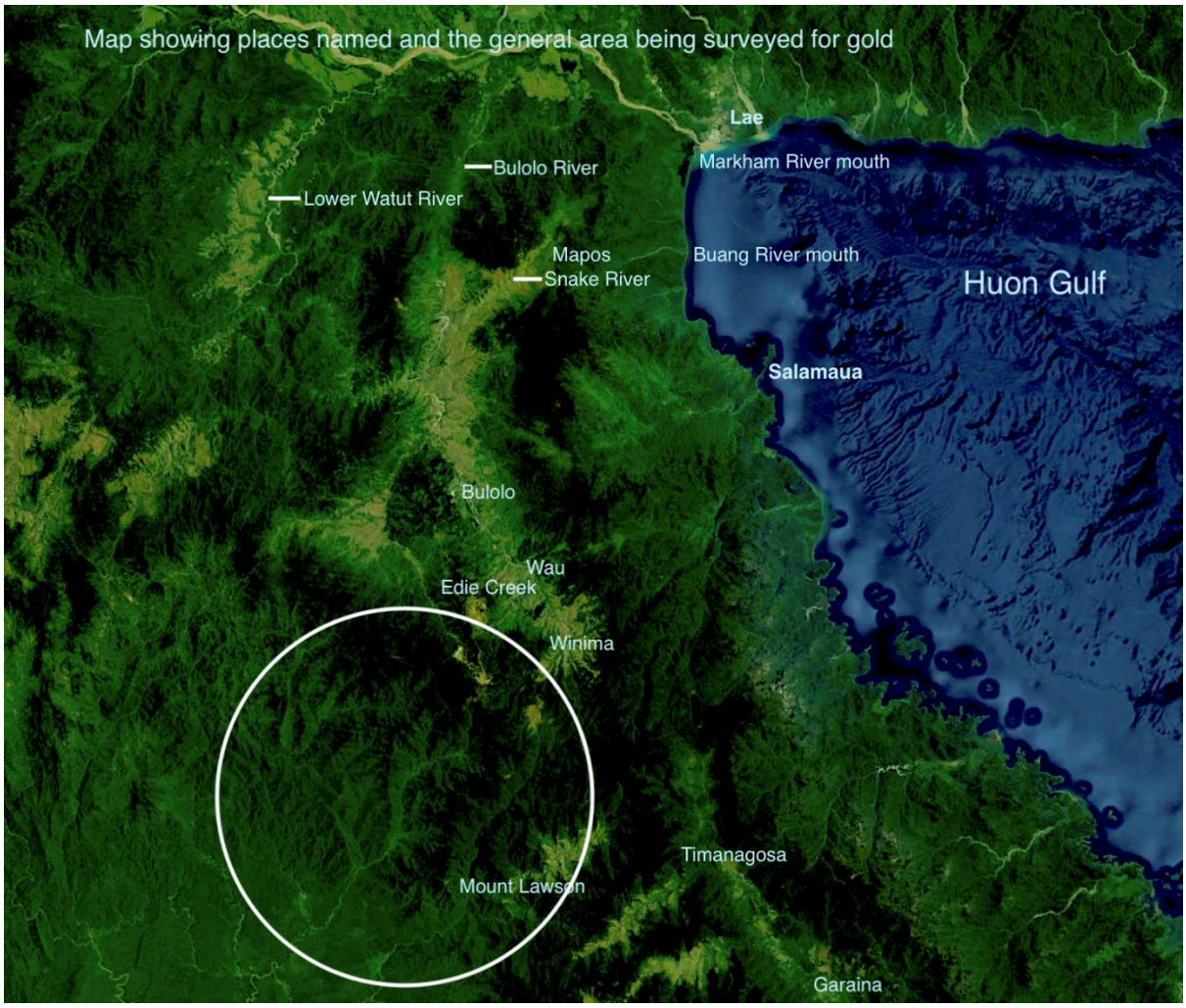
A few weeks later I am again sitting with Soltwedel on the veranda of the guesthouse in Salamaua, in exactly the same place where the three of us had made such hopeful plans ten months ago. In the bar a rumour of new gold discoveries is circulating. Everyone is restless. Gold fever has taken hold again.

"Shouldn't we give it another go together?" asks Soltwedel. I find it hard to answer. I am in two minds. Soltwedel notices my indecision and as though he is dragging thoughts up from deep down, he says: "It is not really fair that I make this suggestion to you. You can still escape – go back to Australia. You should leave this country while you are still able to." "And you?" I ask. "Are you also going to leave?" With a tired, resigned look he gazes at me for quite a while: "I can't leave anymore. People like me who have been out here for so long can no longer find a place in "civilisation." Unfortunately I am under the spell of this country. But I won't go back to the bush right away, I'll accompany you to Rabaul. The steamer leaves in three days." I am aware that it is difficult for my friend to deny his own wishes and not put pressure on me, and as though he had read my thoughts he gets up and says with a laugh: "Come; the only thing that will cure gold fever is brandy. We are both suffering from it again. Let's drown it in grog."

That day everybody thought we were celebrating a major gold find; nobody realised that we were actually saying farewell to gold. Three days later a small steamer carries me out into the South Pacific Ocean. It's the same ship I boarded three years ago in Australia, filled with such high hopes. Now it is taking me back to Sydney. Memories storm through my head and images of my experiences flash back. Three men under a tent fly; a solitary white cross on the jungle's edge; bell-like laughter ringing out; sad, strange songs; naked black figures and gentle faithful eyes; a cold, soft snout pushing into my hand.

Now that my jungle-covered mountains disappear in the distance, a terrible sense of sadness surges through me. All this must now be left behind; all this along with the free lifestyle of the past three years. So what did I end up finding and what am I taking home?

Unforgettable experiences of joy and of sorrow.
My memories are my gold.


Map showing places named and the general area being surveyed for gold
Lae
Markham River mouth
Bulolo River
Lower Watut River
Mapos
Snake River
Buang River mouth
Huon Gulf
Salamaua
Bulolo
Wau
Edie Creek
Winima
Timanagosa
Mount Lawson
Garaina