

VALE:

Malcolm Roy ‘Mal’ Smith was born in England on 10 April 1943 and immigrated to Australia as a child. After completing his education, the then 23-year-old enlisted in the Army on a five-year Short Service Commission to become a pilot. He joined the Army, and commenced his training at OTU, on 29 July 1966, graduating with Class 3/66 on 22 December 1966. He was allocated to Army Aviation and was posted to 2 RTB, Puckapunyal, where he awaited his flying training. In 1967 Mal completed Basic Flying Training with Course 65 at the BFTS, Pt Cook, Victoria, and then Advanced Flying Training with Course 13 at RAAF Amberley early in 1968. He was posted to 171 Air Cavalry Flight in Amberley. 171 was relocated to Holsworthy in early 1969, but Mal didn’t stay long as on 9 April 1969 he found himself in Vietnam with 161 Independent Recce Flight. During his twelve months in Vietnam, he was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross. After returning from Vietnam, in June 1970 Mal was posted to 183 Independent Recce Flight in Lae, PNG, where he learnt to fly the difficult PNG terrain. 183 was based in Lae from 1970 until 1972.



Mal discharged from the Army in late 1971 and returned to PNG where in 1975 he established Pacific Helicopters in PNG. Today, under the banner of the Pacific Helicopters Group, the business has expanded and diversified into building and construction, hotels and resorts, residential estates, a commercial shopping mall, fixed wing Dash 8 aircraft, powerline maintenance in Australia, Israel, China. The group includes APA, which is one of three companies world-wide to overhaul military and commercial Black Hawk engines for the Australian Defence Force. Pacific Helicopters is proud to state there has never been an engine failure in the twenty years that they have been providing the service. Mal is the Executive Chairman of the group and remains actively involved in the business, spending time in Australia, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, China and Nepal.

Pacific Helicopters

The PH fleet peaked at 51 helicopters from Hughes 500 E/R, Bell 206 and 212, Airbus 350 BA, B2 and B3s, Lama’s and Puma 330J, Mil 17. Marking a milestone for both PH and aviation operations in PNG the company has taken delivery of the first of three H145 helicopters from Airbus Helicopters. The H145 had arrived in the Eastern Highlands Provincial capital of Goroka, following final reassembly at Airbus Group Australia Pacific’s Sydney facility.



This H145 is the first new Airbus Helicopters aircraft to be operated in PNG, with PH setting a new industry standard in a country steeped in aviation history and offering an even brighter future. Operators are increasingly looking for high-performance, efficient rotorcraft with strong safety credentials and oil and gas operational compliance – key characteristics of the Airbus Helicopters family. “As a result of the introduction of the H145, and the demonstration flights carried out in Port Moresby, Pacific Helicopters is confident that their prospects for future business opportunities within the PNG Minerals and Resources industry are very exciting.” said Malcolm Smith-Kela, PH owner and CEO. Mal still flies today and has over 17,000 flight hours.

Community Involvement

Mal established Kina Securities Limited (Kina Bank) in Papua New Guinea (PNG) in 1985 as a diversified financial services company. In the 1990s he started the PNG Stock Exchange with this company (with a blackboard and chalk). Once the stock exchange was fully operational Mal sold his interests and moved on from that area.



Mal pioneered and implemented grant development programs and business partnerships focused on improving social and economic conditions in developing communities. He has been named by the PNG Times as one of the most influential business leaders in Goroka, in the Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea and is regularly consulted on issues concerning environmental research and conservation.

Mal became Governor of the Eastern Highlands Province and a member of the National Government from 2002 until 2012. He was on many committees, but he did more work on the Public Accounts Committee where he could only refer the many 'suspect' people to the Ombudsman and Public Prosecutor, 'who did absolutely nothing!' Mal received the MBE and CMG for services to the environment, aviation and business by the Queen. He regards those awards as highlights of his life.

In February 2017 Mal established the Kela Foundation, with the aim of giving underprivileged Australian children and their communities access to the same education and health opportunities that were afforded to him as a child in Australia.

While Governor Mal changed the health system of PNG. The National Government had been managing hospitals and the Provincial Government had been managing the rural health centres. The new system sees Provincial Health Authorities manage both hospitals and rural health centres. Mal is the current Chairman of the Eastern Highlands Health Authority and instrumental in having the new (200 Million Kina) hospital wing constructed, which will be the main specialised health centre for all the Highlands.

Throughout more than forty years in business, Mal has always made time to serve the not-for-profit sector. A strong advocate of global corporate social responsibility, he has held management and leadership roles in several national and international non-profit organisations such as founding Research and Conservation to train teachers.

Visitors to PNG

If you turn up in Papua New Guinea expecting a first-contact experience, then you're half a century too late. "What you're seeing now are the last remnants," says Mal, now naturalised Papua New Guinea citizen. Mal tells bizarre stories of tribal encounters when he was pioneering his way through the wilderness. These days, however, the common garb is T-shirts, not 'pig fat and arse grass' (pidgin for traditional costumes).

Death

The above article was written for 'Whatever Happened To' for this Scheyvillian, but on Tuesday 6 April 2021 it was announced that a PNG National, who had been transferred to Queensland on 28 March for treatment, had died of COVID complications in a hospital north of Brisbane. The following morning it was announced in the press and on radio and TV that the man was Malcolm 'Kela' Smith. Mal Smith had spent most of the last 50 years in PNG running a successful business and had been a Provincial Governor. His body is being repatriated to PNG for burial. A competitor in PNG Aviation, Robert Agarobe, the Governor for PNG's Central Province, wrote Mr Smith had been "a dear friend." "My aviation life with Malcolm Kela Smith was a love and hate relationship and as competitors we had our moments, however, we were best of friends who shared more than a few beers together and assisted each other in times of need when it came to work," Mr Agarobe said. "A tough bugger, a true aviator and a legend."