

NOSTALGIA....Wismar/Christianburg/Mackenzie/Demerara River

By Peter Halder

Christianburg was my home from 1957-1960. The time I spent there is still etched in my memory. It was an unenviable and unforgettable experience of what living in a mining area was like, especially when everybody knew everybody, and the males greatly outnumbered the females.

Christianburg was part and parcel of the Wismar-Christianburg- Silvertown- Silvercity- Wismar Hill area on the left bank of the Demerara River, opposite the then booming bauxite mining town of Mackenzie, now Linden. It was the District Administration centre for the Upper Demerara River District that extended from Kamuni Creek opposite and Princess Caroline adjacent to Atkinson Field, now Cheddi Jagan International Airport, southwards to Cannister Falls and the border with Brazil. An estimated 30,000 people lived in the Mackenzie -Wismar-Christianburg-Silvertown-Silvercity-Wismar Hill area.

The Upper Demerara River District was a sub-district of West Demerara Administrative District and was under the direction and control of the District Commissioner for West Demerara whose Office was located at Vreed-en-Hoop (really Pouderoyen) , West Bank Demerara, obliquely opposite the B.G. Match Factory. The District Commissioner in 1956 was Mr. James Albert Sholto Douglas and he was replaced by Mr. Ramsingh Rai.

Shortly after I joined the D.C.'s Office, Sproston's Limited at Lombard and Broad Streets completed the construction of a steel motor-launch, the MV Rita C. The launch was named after the D.C.'s wife. I attended its launching. The Rita C was for use in the Upper Demerara River District.

I was elated and excited when, in 1957, District Commissioner Rai informed me that I was being transferred to the District Administration Office, Christianburg. I so wished to travel on the Rita C along the Demerara River and moreso to celebrate life and living in the lebensraum of Mackenzie of which I had heard so much when growing up. It was described as having an unfettered culture where entertainment and partying were the very essence of the local lifestyle. I had a taste of it just once. Alas, it was all too brief but it was indelible. To borrow a few words from Sparrow's "The Congo Man", I "wanted more."

The taste came about in unexpected manner. I was at a sub-party in Campbellville one Saturday night and I had the pleasure of meeting the Hinds sisters, Claudette and Hyacinth, from Greenheart Street, Mackenzie. They were attending School in Georgetown and were leaving shortly for London, the eldest to get married and the younger to study nursing. The latter's upcoming birthday was being celebrated at Mackenzie with a party and she invited me to it. I seized the opportunity with both hands. I accepted the invitation and also got permission to invite my gang from GT.

The Thursday (Holy Thursday) before the Saturday night Birthday Party, with my suitcase containing my dark grey double-breasted grey suit, etc., in hand, I got a ride to Sproston's Stelling, bought a return Ticket to Wismar and boarded the MV. R.H. Carr. I had never ventured on any long river trip before. I did travel on the MV Queriman daily to and from Vreed-en-Hoop. My gang proposed to travel on Saturday, arriving at about 5.30 p.m., celebrate through the night, and board the R.H. Carr next morning to return to GT.

I was fortunate. En route to Wismar, I discovered I had two friends worked on the steamer. One worked in the galley and the other was in charge of the Bar. Glory be! The Captain was called Benjie. The Purser was Mr Pires. The fare was \$4.50 one way and \$9.00 return.

The first stop on the nine-hour trip was Atkinson Field.

There I bought a cucumber, peeled it, threw a dash of salt on it and ate it for breakfast. I washed it down with a Banks Beer.

The next stop was Dora. Some passengers got off, while some boarded. The steamer also stopped at Clemwood, Dalgin and other settlements along the river. It remained in midstream while small boats came out to it.

I stood on the bow of the boat as we neared Wismar to get a good forward look at the scene unfolding before me. The Captain gave three short blasts on the horn of the vessel notifying all boats on the river of the arrival.

The R.H. Carr moored at Sproston's Stelling, Wismar, at about 4.30 p.m. Hyacinth was there to meet me when I disembarked. She walked with me from the stelling to the District Administration Office where I had arranged to stay with my friend Carl Harewood who was District Administration Officer. He lived in the three-bedroom flat above the Office.

After discharging my paraphernalia, I was taken by my friend to a boat landing. Many such landings dotted the river bank. Boats were used to take passengers from Wismar/Christianburg to Mackenzie and vice versa. She shouted out "Boat" and there came one powered by an outboard motor from Mackenzie to pick us up.

We walked along Powell Crescent to Greenheart Street where her family lived. I recall seeing a Singer Sewing Machine Sign on Arida Road, a main thoroughfare.

After introductions to her parents, George and Venus Hinds, I had dinner and we talked about the Party on Saturday night. George worked at the DEMBA Machine Shop.

On Good Friday, I went over to Mackenzie for breakfast. I recall attending Christ the King Church with the family. I never found a Church pew so hard. Maybe it was because the service lasted for nearly three hours.

Following Church and lunch, I met two guys, Teddy Allicock and Joe Blount who invited me to their Bachelors' Quarters building north east of Greenheart Street and obliquely opposite the Mackenzie Sports Club. In the area at that time, you didn't have to know anyone for some time before becoming friends. Everyone was everyone's friend and "the more we were together is the merrier we would be."

I was invited for a drink of rum and coconut water. We had barely settled in Teddy's room in the Quarters when he reached under his cot and pulled out a case of Russian Bear Black Label Rum. I endured the challenge. We imbibed until seven when I called a halt and advised I had an dinner appointment. By then, I was imbued with both the Holy Spirit and the Russian Bear spirit.

On return to Christianburg, my friend was entertaining three pals, K.K. Cheong and Rennie Chase, two Forestry Officers and the Government Dispenser. They were playing cards and keeping a close watch on the clock. Unlike me, they were Catholics and did not drink alcohol until lent was over...at one minute after midnight. When they launched their jollification, I retired to bed.

I was there to meet my gang when they arrived on the R.H. Carr from Georgetown, all dressed for the Party as there was to be no sleep.

We went to Poka Restaurant along the Christianburg Road and had dinner. The cheapest, which we had, was pork slops (slices) and rice. We couldn't wait for the food service at the Party later on. We all took our bath by swimming in the river, pressed our clothes and were ready for the Party.

The family home where the Party was held was very narrow. A narrow passageway, adjacent to the one bedroom, was the living room. A small kitchen was at the back. The lavatories were bunched together in a line at the back of the house. There was no bath in the house. Most of the guests stood on the veranda in front of the house or on the roadside. One guest I recall was a Mr Cush who had a sizeable dent in his forehead like if someone hit him with the peen of a hammer.

We all danced, drank met new friends and enjoyed ourselves until it was time to stick the Birthday Cake. I was picked to do the honours and the episode was photographed by Demba photographer Jimmy Hamilton, who I

knew when he worked at the Daily Chronicle at Main and Church Streets in Georgetown. At that time, I was a journalist with Guiana Graphic at Robb and King Streets. The photo was published in the monthly company newspaper, The Mackenzie Miner.

From the birthday party, our group trekked over to Determa Road and continued our celebrations at Senior Supervisors Club.

The gang and I boarded the R.H. Carr bright and early Sunday morning and we continued celebrating all the way down to Georgetown.

But to return to my posting to the District Administration Office, Christianburg.

Prior to my taking up my duties at Christianburg, the Office was upgraded and an Assistant District Commissioner was in charge. He took the residence above the Office.

My travel to Wismar on the R.H. Carr was uneventful and on arrival I was met by the Coxswain and crew of the Rita C. The coxswain at the time was Edwin Allicock and boathands were Vivian McCalman and Lyndon Allicock.

I was conveyed on the Rita C to the Rest House at Section C, Christianburg, where I was allocated a bedroom in which I lived for my entire tenure. I was subsequently offered a newly built townhouse on Wismar Hill but I opted to remain at the Rest House. I unpacked my suitcase which contained, among other things, three work uniforms - khaki safari jackets; khaki short pants and long khaki socks that reached to the knees.

I was greeted by the Caretaker of the Rest House, Miss Phoebe Alstrom and the Assistant Caretaker Miss Albertina Allicock. Aunt Phoebe, as she was popularly called, lived in a flat on the first floor of the huge, imposing two-storeyed building. Miss Tina lived in a small cottage in the compound. The Rest House, had six bedrooms on the top floor, a large sitting/dining room area and a huge kitchen. There was a large bath and a modern flush toilet. On the second floor was the Caretaker's quarters and next to it, the Magistrate's Court. There was no electricity. Gas lamps were used for lighting at nights and kerosene fuelled the stove in the kitchen.

I ate breakfast, lunch and dinner at the Rest House.

The Caretaker walked to the Wismar Market some two miles away to shop two or three times a week.

All residents of the Wismar/Christianburg area used gas lamps, kerosene lamps or lanterns unlike their counterparts in Mackenzie who enjoyed electricity. Battery radios, mainly German-made, were in use.

Shortly thereafter, two teachers from the nearby Christianburg Scots School came to welcome me... a Miss Gwendoline Walton and Miss Iris Allicock. I knew Gwen's brother. We both were journalists at the Guiana Graphic at one time. He resigned and migrated to the U.S.A. Iris lived with her Aunt Phoebe in the Caretaker's flat. Her younger sister whom we called "Scottie" later joined the family.

The next day, which was a Sunday, I took some time to examine the compound. There was a wire fence around it. There were several coconut trees which were laden. On the south eastern side was a large, spreading jamoon tree adjacent to the Demerara River. It was a gift of nature to the cataback fish that lived in the river. They thrived on the ripe jamoons that fell into the river. The cataback was a large flat fish, similar to the sole, but bigger. Aunt Phoebe caught the fish from time to time using a line and the jamoon as bait.

There was a narrow pathway along the southern side of the Rest House that led to a gate and through the gate was a pier over the river that was about eight feet long and four feet wide. On the northern side of the pier was a stairway that led to the river's edge. The pier accommodated large vessels like launches, while small boats and canoes used the steps.

Just inside of the gate, alongside the path, were two palm trees. There was a wide lawn on the eastern side of the Rest House.

A brick pathway led from the bottom of the front staircase of the Rest House to the entrance of the compound and the Christianburg public road.

There was only one main road at the time, running from the northern end of Christianburg, joined further down by the Wismar main road and going to Wismar Hill. And the long roadway was adjacent to the river bank.

There were no road lamps. When it grew dark, it was pitch dark along the road. There were no cars and only a few bicycles. Walking was the going thing and was healthy as well.

Across the Rest House compound was a large Pit Toilet for the use of persons who attended Court which was held once monthly from Wednesday to Friday. The Magistrate and the lawyers travelled from Georgetown. The Magistrate during my time was Mr. Eddie Gunraj.

Near to the Pit Toilet or "Cess Pit" as it was called, was a huge Ubudi or Wild Cashew Tree. I loved eating the ripe yellow fruit.

The Rest House was adjacent to the river and I enjoyed watching the ebb and flow of the water, the travel of canoes, boats and launches along it, and the ripples of fish doing their thing, flotsam and jetsam, through the Rest House window, in the afternoon and at nights. Sometimes, I would take a chair and sit on the pier. Eventually, instead of using the shower, I would swim in the river in the mornings and afternoon, when the tide was in.

On the western side of the Rest House, across the road, was a wide open space followed by a forest. Birds of many plumes, colours and kinds flew there in the afternoons to spend the night in trees.

On the northern side was the remains of a huge waterwheel. It was above the narrow Catabuli Creek. It was built, so the story goes, by the original owner of the Rest House building and compound, a Mr John Paterson from Scotland who used it for sawmilling purposes. It was a pleasure to sit on a log atop of it some nights and enjoy the exquisite view of the river, across the river and the beauty of the night.

Christianburg began at the large Section C Cemetery on the northern end and joined Wismar a couple of miles south.

In the Christianburg Cemetery were three graves which stood out. They were weeded, kept clean and white-washed regularly. In them were buried British soldiers of World War II. They were called War Graves. It was a function of the District Administration Office to maintain them in proper condition in cooperation with the International War Graves Commission.

In the huge Rest House compound, there were two graves, side by side. Paterson and his wife were buried there. An iron railing surrounded the graves. The graves were not upkept, were gray and black in colour from age and the weather and cracked in some places. I never took the time to approach the graves and read the names but I was told that the man's name was John Dalgleish Paterson.

Having only spent about three years in the area, I was not familiar with all the houses and most of the people.

Coxswain Edwin Allicock and his family, I however recall, lived in a cottage not far from the Christianburg Cemetery.

The Charter family lived in a beautiful cottage, going further south. The girls Pearl, Joan and Chrissie, and only brother Ruell, and I were very good friends. Joan and Chris went to England to study nursing. Joan, who was at a hospital in Oxford, visited my friend Fanso Fiedtkou and I in Finsbury Park, North London, from time to time. Joan now lives in Canada and Chris in Australia. Fanso and Ruell were speedboat fanatics.

Further down lived the Spence family. I recall one of the boys was Sydney.

The Hetherington family also lived in Section C Christianburg. Joyce was, in the opinion of many, the cream of the crop.

Closer to the Rest House was a grocery and parlour owned and operated by Yhap. And not far from the Rest House was a smaller business owned by Beatrice Noel. I enjoyed visiting her place of business to issue her her shop Licence since when she laughed, it started from the tip of her toes and lasted for at least five minutes. I laughed at her laugh. She knew the history of the area and about ghosts and spirits that haunted it.

In an area west of the Rest House, where the Catabuli Creek was at its widest, was an Amerindian Reserve called Bucktown. It was a popular picnic spot but permission had to be obtained from the Administration Office.

Across the narrow continuation the Creek was a semi-circular road that ran past the Rest House to a kind of Government housing area. The first house, an aluminium one, was occupied by boathand Lyndon Allicock and his family. Next to it, in a similar cottage lived the other boathand, later Coxswain, Vivian Roderick McCalman and his family. Next was a wooden cottage in which lived the Schoolmaster of Christianburg School, Mr Clive Roland Bancroft and his family. Forestry Officer Kenneth K. Cheong and his family lived in the next wooden cottage. After that was the School and Church. A tiny creek separated that compound from the District Administration Office.

The District Administration Office was a two-storeyed building. Above was the home of the Assistant District Commissioner and below the District Office. The staff of the office at the time was the Assistant District Commissioner Mr William Beekie, myself, the Coxswain and two boathands, two Forestry Officers and a Secretary. Mr Beekie was later replaced by Mr Phillips, then Mr George Jackman and then Mr Paul Mittelholzer who was in situ when I was transferred to the Licence Revenue Office on Brickdam, Georgetown, in 1960.

The Forestry Officers also had a launch of their own for up and down river travels and employed a Pilot, Narine.

The Secretary when I took up my post was Miss Celina Celestina Wong. Her father lived on Powell Crescent near the Crescent Cinema. She got married to the former District Administration Officer and my friend Carl Harewood. She was replaced by a young lady from Georgetown Norma Elsa Shearer Webster. When she returned to GT, Miss Joan Charter was recruited. She was eventually replaced by Rita Olita Agnes Douglas.

In front of the office was a Flagpole on which the Union Jack flew. It was raised at six every morning and lowered at six. Next to it was a large cannon that looked like a relic from World War I. It was kept in top condition. The Office compound was fenced and there was a gate at the front.

There was a small room at the back where our weighing and gauging instruments were located. The instruments were used to measure the accuracy of scales and weights. From time to time, We visited shops in the district which used scales and weights and checked them for accuracy. If we came across any that were not, they were adjusted by us. This, of course, did not apply to shops in Mackenzie. Near to the room was a Pit Toilet for use by members of the public.

Across the road, on the eastern side was the river. There was a bridge/pier extending about 8 feet over the river and next to it was a large boathouse in which the Rita C and an aluminium dinghy were kept. ADC Beekie built a speedboat during his leisure time and put it into official use. There was a large storeroom on land, near the bridge. In it were an Johnson 35HP outboard engine for the speedboat and outside a barrel of gasoline.

Some afternoons, I would take the dinghy and its two oars and row along the river, cross over to Kara Kara creek and row several miles down the creek and back. It was good exercise.

Kara Kara Creek was special for me. I was good friends with the Croft sisters who lived in a cottage about 10 yards from the mouth. Their father, I believe his name was Sigmund Croft, was a gold and diamond seeker.

At the bend, on the other side of the Creek lived Sam Allicock and his family. There was a large, flat area in front of his house that had a thatched roof over it. It was called Renee Park. There were frequent sub-parties there and I was a patron, along with Derek Moseley and Clarence Bourne. Clarence was engaged to Sam's daughter Renee. There was a younger sister and two brothers. Since the Park was across the river and up the Creek, I used the aluminium dinghy to cross over and return. Parties usually lasted until 5.00 a.m. In those days, nobody complained about the loudness of the music and how late the party went. It was difficult dancing on the earthen surface since it was bumpy.

The speedboat was used instead of the Rita C when an emergency upriver or down river occurred. Like for example, there was a time when a huge boa constrictor swallowed a wild cow (tapir) and lay across the channel through the Station Rapids at Mallali. It affected tugs transporting lumber and children paddling canoes to the Mallali School. A team was sent to Mallali using the speedboat and taking our Springfield rifle. At the locus, the huge, thick bodied, 20 ft snake was easily spotted. It was shot in the body and when it raised its head, it was shot three times in the head. The carcass was soon removed from the Channel.

The speedboat was also used once to take a group of four of us to Soesdyke. It was tied up at Manassa Landing Boat House and we took the bus to Georgetown where I had an appointment. Fully dressed in my striped dark suit, shirt and tie, we returned to Soesdyke Sunday afternoon for the return journey. On the way, the speedboat hit a high wave in the wash of a passing passenger launch and it flipped over. Clarence Bourne and Derek Moseley swam to the western bank of the river where there was the Princess Caroline School. I plummeted downwards towards the bottom and quickly realizing what happening, I halted my descent and streamed upwards. Luckily for me, the speedboat was near to me with the bow above water. I swam to it and held on tight. With my feet, I had discarded my shoes; I paddled to where the two guys were. We spent the night at the schoolmaster's home. The next morning, the boys cleaned and dried out the engine and we were on our way to Christianburg. Sadly, we ran out of fuel and had to paddle until we reached a timber grant. We borrowed a jerrycan of fuel, had some pepperpot labba with eddoe and cassava for lunch, and headed back to Christianburg.

The speedboat came to a sorry end. The Wismar police borrowed it to travel downriver on official business. The boat turned over during the journey and Policeman Fernandes was drowned. The boat and engine were never found.

Administrative functions included overseeing the administration of the Christianburg/Wismar Village by the Village Council and its revenue collection, including rates and taxes and market stall fees. The Village Overseer was a Bajan, Mr. Allan King. I saw him every fortnight when I audited his revenue and expenditure accounts.

The office issued Shop Licences, Ball and Dance Licences required for parties held for gain and other licences. Unlike Georgetown, licences were not required for bicycles and there were no cars. Cars and bicycles at Mackenzie were not required to have Registration, Fitness, Insurance or Vehicle licences as in Georgetown. In fact, our Office had no authority over Mackenzie.

Pilots were required to have Pilot Licences for ferry boats. They were issued by the Harbour Master, then Bruce La Borde, after an oral exam on Harbour Regulations.

Our staff investigated applications for Old Age Pension and Public Assistance and I paid both monthly at the Office and along upriver and down river. We handled land matters, matters affecting Amerindians and complaints of all varieties.

Concerned over the plight of passengers travelling on the small boat ferries, especially overcrowding on them, I called a meeting and read the River Navigation Regulations. I found that many of the ferryboat owners were

not in compliance . I subsequently went from landing to landing, ensuring that each driver had a Pilot's Licence, that there was a powerful lamp on top the boat at nights and there were enough lifejackets on board for the amount of passengers the boat was allowed to carry. The Harbour Master also came up to hold talks with the owners and pilots about safety standards.

As a District Administration Officer, I was appointed and performed duties of Justice of the Peace, Commissioner of Oaths to Affidavits, Marriage Officer, Sub-Protector of Amerindian Rights and Sub-Warden for the Mining District. I required special dispensation for some since I was not yet 21.

I never had to perform a wedding although I came near to having to doing so once. On a trip upriver, at Muritaro, a young Amerindian man and an old, gray-haired woman came to see me. He wanted to get married. I asked him how old he was and he said 24. I asked him where his intended bride was. He pointed to the old woman. I asked her her age. She said 56. I spoke to him seriously and he told me that the truth was she was the only woman in the area. I eventually managed to dissuade him from marriage... nothing else.

I also prosecuted revenue and land matters at Christianburg Court on behalf of the Government.

Behind the Administration Office and the Government houses, a cricket ground was cleared and prepared and we played there from time to time on Sundays. On one weekday afternoon, we invited Magistrate Gunraj and some of the visiting lawyers to play...and they did.

The Sanitary Inspector's house was next to our Office. It was two-storeyed building of colonial architecture with servants' quarters below. It was obviously not built for a Sanitary Inspector but was eventually used by him. There was a large vat in the yard, the same as in our office compound. It turned out that the SI was one Telford who was a schoolmate at Enterprise High School in Georgetown.

Following the SI compound was the Christianburg Community Centre. There was an office below which housed the Village Overseer. The Chairman of the Council at that time was Mr Adams. I believe his son later opened the Adams/Crescent Hotel at Powell Crescent, Mackenzie. I attended many sub-parties at the Centre on Saturday nights. The cream of the girls from the area and from Mackenzie came to them.

On the other side of the road, opposite the Centre was the Government Dispensary and home of the Government Dispenser. The first I recall was "Doc" Maclean and he was followed by "Doc" Deo Narine. Next to the Dispensary, at the river's edge was a boathouse in which was the Dispenser's launch which he used to travel upriver and downriver once a month, each way. The dates of travel were circulated and people wishing medical attention would put up a white flag. The Dispenser would stop and render medical assistance. The boat's coxswain was Butters. I visited the Docs from time to time to chat and share a bite and a drink.

There was a Customs Officer in the District. I recall his name was Bourne and he smoked a pipe. Strangely, he lived at Mackenzie. We thought nothing of it at the time.

The exits from the Christianburg and Wismar main road were not called roads or streets but Alleys and Paths, for some unknown reason. They began after the Government area, going south.

The first was Stewart Path followed by Alstrom Alley and there followed, not in any consecutive order, by Maxwell Alley where there was a Pilgrim Holiness Church, Bruce Alley where there was a Seventh Day Adventist Church, D'Anjou Alley, Cholmondeley Alley, Yhap Alley, Yaws Yard, Poka Alley - named after the cookshop owner Poka who cooked the best Chinese food.

I think the Bremner family, including son Theo and daughter June, lived at the junction of Alstrom Alley and the main road.

Eytle's Food and Beer restaurant near Silvercity was top class. She made the best cook-up rice.

Wismar took over where Christianburg ended, and there was Third Alley, Second Alley, First Alley, Gateway Alley also known as Becca Downer Alley and D'Aguiar Street. Along Christianburg/Wismar main road, I can recall a parlour/cake shop, Lieu Ken Pen Grocery, Chin Poi Kee, Harris Drug Store, Choo Kang and Sue Tang and Sue Wo, near Wismar Stelling.

The manager of Sproston's Wismar Stelling was a Mr. Hopkinson, a dark-skinned Indian man.

There was a cloth and dry goods store near First Alley, owned, I was told, by a Mrs. Parris who lived above it.

There was also Branford Bar and Billiards saloon on First Alley, Wismar.

And of course, I cannot forget the Diamond Orchid Beer Garden. I spent many afternoons there with friends sipping Banks Beer and shooting the breeze.

And then there was the Wismar Police Station and compound along the way. A good friend of mine Corporal Haniff was a member of the force at that time. He was a regular customer of Eytley's restaurant. He and his family migrated to Canada and lived in Ottawa. I met him there when I was posted to the High Commission there.

The Wismar Market was the only of its kind in the area. Fruits, vegetables, meat, fish and other foodstuff, grocery and cloth were sold there daily. People from Mackenzie also patronized it. It was almost directly across the river from Choo Kang's Ration Store at Mackenzie. Walter Choo Kang managed the Ration Store. I bought a few sports shirts there, my alcohol and my tins of Churchman's No.1 cigarettes.

Past the Sproston's stelling were Silvercity followed by and Silvertown. The road to the right led to, the first turn on the left, Hakkim's Hotel called "The Ship". Continuing straight along the road led to Wismar Hill and the Government Housing Scheme. The Scheme was managed by Mr Arnold Godette of the Housing Department. He was an officer in the Volunteer Force of the area.

Along the Christianburg and Wismar foreshore, a number of boat owners plied their ferry service across the river, day and night. Some people took their bikes on the crossing. The largest were Dutchy boat service opposite First Alley and Quamina boat service.

There was also the West Indian Hall on the main road. People from the Caribbean Islands made up a significant proportion of the people at Wismar/Christianburg and the work force at Mackenzie and they were very progressive. I attended many parties at the spacious Hall.

Many residents of Wismar/Christianburg took their baths on the sandy bank of the river. Some swam while non-swimmers and children used buckets of water. Women also washed their clothes there.

The river bank along the Christianburg/Wismar foreshore was covered with wide stretches of light brown sand which matched the dark brown waters of the river.

Apart from the Christianburg Scots Church; there was a Seventh Day Adventist Church, the Pilgrim Holiness Church and the St. Aidan's Anglican Church. And besides Christianburg Scots School, there was St Aidan's Anglican School at Wismar. A multilateral school was later built on Wismar Hill.

Wismar Hill, with its new concrete townhouses was a hive of activity at night. One night, a friend and I visited the home of a Croft sister from Kara Kara creek. We partied until midnight, then I arranged for the purchase of a live rooster. She and my friend cooked curried chicken and rice. We left at about one in the morning to join a party in full swing at a friend's home. I met there Avery King who was a brother of my GT friend Colin King. I finally got back to the Rest House at 6.30 a.m.

I did not spend a lot of time at Mackenzie since it was not under our administrative jurisdiction. I paid calls on the Officer-in-Charge of the Mackenzie Police on official business from time to time. He was then Dick La Borde, brother of the Harbour Master Dick La Borde.

I was also a patient at Mackenzie Hospital at one time. I took the speed boat and a Springfield rifle to do some hunting at Zion Hill, upriver. I was thirsty when I arrived so I told the Seventh Adventist Sister I would climb the coconut tree and get some coconuts. Alas, I was not in good physical shape as I thought. When I reached near the top, I couldn't continue any more. I slid down the tree, scraping skin off both of my hands and chest. I was rushed to the Mackenzie Hospital for medical attention. One of the doctors at the Hospital at that time was Charlie Rosza. There was no Hospital at Wismar/ Christianburg.

Senior Supervisors Club on Old Year's Night was a must. We usually closed office around one in the afternoon. I would go over to Mackenzie and get into the spirit of things, so to speak, then back to the Rest House, eat and take a rest, then don my black and white formal wear. I picked up my female companion from Spinsters Quarters on Arvida Road and by ten thirty we were in the Club. Our friends had a table ready. We left the Party at around 3 a.m. and our group would walk to the nearby Mackenzie Swimming Pool singing Auld Lang Syne and jump into the pool fully dressed. We would then go our separate ways after seeing each other home. I recall one New year's morning, after partying and pooling, I walked to the riverside and called a boat. I told the pilot to take me to the Rest House. I dozed as the boat travelled and I heard the pilot say something like we are there. I got up and stepped off the boat into the river. The pilot saved me from drowning and took me to my room.

I visited the Crescent Cinema twice a week to check attendance for the payment of entertainment tax. I was a good friend of the Manager, Mr Gomes, who moved around in a wheelchair and he and his wife lived in a nice concrete cottage on Arvida Road.

I travelled by hire car to Ituni once a month to check tax return documents. The staff cinema was owned and operated by DEMBA. On one such trip, the car accidentally hit and killed an armadillo. Boathand Clarence Bourne who was with me at the time, picked it up, put it in the car, and took it home. The other boathand, Moseley, cooked curry armadillo that night. It tasted very strange. Lots of curry this and that in those days. Quick and easy to cook.

Once in a while, I went to dances at the Mackenzie Recreation Hall, next to the YMCA at the south western corner of Arvida Road and Powell Crescent. Next door was a good friend, the former Miss Bumbury who was a dressmaker. She had a thriving business.

Across from the Cinema was the Mackenzie Recreation Ground. Next to it on the western side and next to the river was the Mackenzie Shopping Centre/Market. There was a grocery, a butcher shop and a parlour owned by a popular personality Mr Blair who later opened Blair's Delight.

South of the Ground was the Mackenzie Public School. It was a top school. Across Arvida Road, from the Ground, was the Mackenzie Library. I believe the Librarian was Mrs. Alvarez.

There was a Royal Bank of Canada on Arvida Road near the Ration Store. A guy named Ellis was the first black person to work in it. He was popularly called Banker Ellis. I had to go to the Bank once weekly to deposit Government revenue and once a month to cash the office's general salary cheque and a sizeable cheque to pay Old Age Pensions and Public Assistance. An Old Age Pension was then \$5.00 and Public Assistance \$3.00 per person.

I never got my hair cut at the Barber Shop on Arvida Road. I used one at Wismar.

I used to go to the Mackenzie Sports Club some nights to play table tennis and to watch some top billiard players with heavy bets involved. I recall two top players at the time were Raj and Garvan Fiedtkou.

On Powell Crescent, near the Catholic Church in a well-appointed cottage, lived the Evans family. One sister, whom I met, was Nola. Another sister, Gena, who now lives in Oklahoma, is married to my friend, Piercy Fiedtkou who worked in the Company's Lab. Next to the Evans lived the Carr family.

On Henderson Road, lived the Fortune family. I was a friend of the two sisters. The eldest sister was married to Bertie Shannon but after splitting, lived in Spinsters Quarters.

I recall the Moseleys, father Jason D being a member of the Wismar Village Council. The family, including children Derek, Keith Gem and Star, lived on Parsons Road.

Then there was Rainbow City where persons who were displaced from their land by DEMBA's expansion built houses. My friend Evan Allicock, who sold his land at Speightland to the Company moved there. He was building a huge hotel there but it was not completed when I left. I went to many Saturday night parties there. I recall one night meeting Stanley and Jeanette Gravesande there and after the party we went to their home to continue. When Stanley brought out a bottle of White Diamond Rum, and feeling hungry, I was able to persuade him to scout around and buy some frozen chicken to cook curry and rice. We ate at five in the morning. Evan Allicock was called "the Governor of Speightland". His brother was Teddy and his niece Rita Allicock.

I met Rita at a dance at the Christianburg Community Centre some weeks later and was invited to dinner the next Saturday night. I had the gourmet delight of curry tortoise (land) and rice. It tasted good but there were too many bones.

I also knew the Couchmans who lived at Speightland. The father Felix captained a tug, cum passenger launch. I travelled on it on one occasion from Georgetown (La Penitence Market wharf) and he invited me to meet his family. He had two beautiful daughters, Volda and Mickey.

Along the riverside was a popular shop, C.T. Lam. I visited it several times for licensing purposes.

I was still at the DAO, when the Alumina Plant was being constructed and the new houses at Retrieve being built. The walls of the houses were made of aluminium, like at Silvercity and Silvertown. I had several friends who live there, including Dundas whom I knew from Kitty, a Miss Brewster and my friend Jimmy Hamilton.

I remember several cross streets in Mackenzie, named after woods or trees. I went to friends who lived on each for a drink, to listen to music or attend a birthday party. The roads I remember which ran North/South were Arvida, Potaro, Berbice, Whittaker, Henderson and Parsons. Some of the East/West cross streets were Crabwood Street alongside Cockatara Creek and the DEMBA Fence, Wismar Street, Pine Street, Mora Street, Greenheart Street, Bulletwood Street, Silverballi Street and Determa Road.. I think there was one named Wismar Road.

As a Government Officer, I encountered no problems visiting Watooka or being at the Watooka Club. I was a visitor some Saturday nights at a place called Montreal or Servants' Quarters where female maids who worked at homes in Watooka lived. I recall there were frequent discussions at an official level that the expatriate staff of DEMBA appeared to be above the law and that many of the laws of the country did not apply to Mackenzie or the people who lived there.

There were times when the company's boats the MV Polaris and the MV Kara Kara caused problems for other users of the river. The heavy wash of the boats, when travelling fast, created difficulties for small boats and canoes on the river and for people bathing or washing on the river bank. I held discussions with Company officials. They were sympathetic and agreed to give instructions for all their motor vessels to slow down when they neared settlements along the river or when they saw small boats.

I travelled upriver to Mallali once monthly. The trip took 3 days mainly due to the work that had to be done on the way up. We always spent the first night at Muritaro and the second at Mallali. I took with me a pistol, shotgun and Springfield rifle, in case I wanted to go hunting but also to protect documents and the cash with me to pay Old Age Pensions and Public Assistance.

Leaving Christianburg, we stopped at the Ration Store where we bought items to make breakfast, lunch and dinner. Derek Moseley was the galley chief. He was very good. I particularly enjoyed for breakfast a large, round, thick bake he cooked in oil in a large covered pot. He called it tikar and we ate it with Marshall's canned Sardines in Tomato sauce done in red margerine sauce with onions, spring onions, black pepper and fresh thyme leaves. Curry canned corned beef with potato and cabbage was another favourite and on one occasion he even cooked curry canned Clams.

The Rita C crew was then McCalman, Coxswain; Lyndon Allicock and Derek Moseley. When McCalman left on posting to Vreed-en-Hoop, he was replaced by Clarence Bourne.

In the launch, there were two bunk beds in front and two at the back, where the diesel engine was. However, it was the custom for the ADC or myself to sleep alone in the front and the two senior crew at the back. We usually spent the night where a school was so that the junior boathand could sleep there.

There was a bath place with a manual water hose on board but one had to be an acrobat to use it. The river was the biggest and best bath tub. There was also no lavatory on board. Bushes alongside the bank of the river, were always there when nature called. Newspapers had other uses than containing news reports.

A tabletop two burner kerosene stove at the back was used for cooking.

It has been over 50 years and I cannot remember all the places upriver we stopped at to conduct Government business. I do remember however, Old England, Lucky Spot, Coomacka, Three Friends and Maria Elizabeth and Akaima where there were bauxite mines and a steel bridge across the Demerara River, high above the river so as to allow boats to pass easily under it. It was variously called Three Friends, Maria Elizabeth or Akaima Bridge. I also recall Aurora, Arcadia, Wainibisi, Butuba - a Seventh Day Adventist settlement with a lovely white sand beach, Muritaro, Seba Quarry, Crapaud Creek, Zion Hill, Grassfield, Tiger Hill and Mallali.

On my first trip, I met Peter Flemming and a Rebeiro who lived at Butuba; the Browns, bajans, who operated a shop at Zion Hill on the right bank of the river and the Sister who headed a Seventh Day Adventist settlement on the other side. I recall catching a hymara fish at Zion Hill. The fish had only one bone, a backbone and was very tasty.

At Grassfield, I met an Amerindian Mr. Paul who gave me a smoked labba leg. Sliced and heated, it tasted like ham. I offered him money which he rejected. "Where are you going to spend it?" he asked. I brought for him on the next trip some enamel plates, cups, plates and spoons and fork which were cheap at that time.

At Muritaro where we spent the night, I had the pleasure of meeting and talking with the schoolmaster Mr McKinnon. I knew his brother in Georgetown.

That night, I heard the sound of a cat meowing in the school. After several hours, I became concerned and it prevented me from sleeping. I asked Coxswain Edwin if someone could go and collect the cat and take it to the schoolmaster. Edwin calmly replied, "Chief, the sound you are hearing is not from a cat." I said nothing but took some cotton wool, plugged both ears and soon fell asleep.

The evening we arrived at Mallali on my first trip, I had the pleasure of meeting the Headmistress of the Mallali School, Miss Mentore. The school was on a hill of light brown sand. There were two cannons on the Hill, a relic probably from World War I. There was a large ubudi (wild cashew) tree near the school.

That night there was a party at the school. The girls, Amerindian or mixed, were beautiful and well dressed. One I danced with Una Allicock, wore the fashion of the time "can can". She was a very good dancer. The men were inelegantly dressed, many wearing t-shirts that were stained. I asked her how come the girls danced with them and she replied, "We have dances only once a year so you have to go all out and enjoy yourself."

I was also introduced to a local drink called Sleepy Tonic. It was, I am told, fermented from sweet potato or English potato. It was pink in colour. By 11.00 that night, the sand area around the school was laden with men

fast asleep and snoring. It also induced fights and there were two such that night. I also had, on other occasions, other local brews like warrup (made from the juice of the sugar cane) and pywarri.

Pepper pot upriver contained labba, deer, wild cow and lots of hot pepper, hence the name. It was usually eaten with cassava bread. Both were tasty.

Other meats I ate on my trips were accouri and wild hog. I once had alligator tail soup with eddoe and plantain. The flesh was flaky and had no taste to me. There was also a white worm acquired from the palm tree. The heart was taken from the tree and left outside to acquire the worms called tucuma. The white worm was fried in hot oil and expanded when thrown frying pan. I ate the crisp delicacy with toasted cassava bread for breakfast. I also ate perai (piranha) fried dry with black pepper.

I also met A.P. Fiedtkou who had a beautiful house at Massabuna above Anthony Rapids. He was in the timber business. His sons were Garvan, Fanso and Piercy (twins) and David. Piercy worked in the Demba Lab at one time.

I did a lot of fishing with the equipment I bought from the Ration Store but was unlucky. I did better at spear fishing. I used to enjoy spear fishing along the bank of the river. At night, when it was dark, some fishes parked in the water at the edge of the bank to sleep. I would focus the light of my flashlight on the fish which became stunned when it opened its eyes and I would spear it and pull it on land. Sometimes, when there was moonlight, myself and the boathands would jump from rock to rock in the nearby Station Rapids at Mallali to spear fish. We caught some large-sized Lukunani from time to time. The Station Rapids, were followed by the Kaikuchekabra Rapids, then Anthony Rapids and then Great Falls. Cannister Falls was near the Brazil border.

The Station Rapids, according to A.P. Fiedtkou who had heard it from his father, was so named because at some time in the past there was a Police Station and Magistrate's Court on the right bank of the river, opposite the Mallali school and in close proximity to the first set of rapids. Maybe that explains as well the presence of the two cannons near the school on the other side of the river.

The Rita C, steel-heavy and with a very low draft would have had difficulty going through the channels of the three Rapids. It could only do that once a year when the tide was at its highest. It definitely could not go beyond Great Falls. During my tenure in the Upper Demerara River District, I never went past Mallali.

There were several rocky outcrops upriver. There was one set opposite Watooka, at Butuba where it was way above the water at low tide and near the river bend at Mallali going towards the school. Expert and knowledgeable pilots were needed to guide launches and tugs along the river, especially from Wismar/Christianburg to Mallali.

I also liked to go hunting on the trip with my rifle but never shot anything.

On the eastern side of the river at Mallali was the popular Seon Shop. I remember, shotgun across my shoulder, I walked about a half-mile to it to issue the shop's licence. It was a pleasure meeting Mr. Seon and sharing a cold Trappenstein Beer with him. I also had a great surprise. My friend from St. Stephen School, Geoff Sampson, came into the shop for a beer. He was with a geological survey team in the area. He eventually obtained a PhD in Geology.

As we swam in the river, we had to be careful that there were no piranha fish around. To avoid them, it was the practice to beat the water loudly for about five minutes before swimming. That chased them away for a time.

I usually slept with the glass window pane in my cabin down. There were two windows. I recall one night, I was aroused from my sleep and awoke with my hands through the window, almost touching the river. It looked like if something in the river was pulling me into the water.

The down river trip was much shorter. It lasted only two days and we spent the night at Santa Mission in Kamuni Creek, opposite Atkinson Field.

Again, I cannot remember all the places in ascending or descending order but I can recall some of the names of the settlements where we stopped from time to time on official business or settlements near where we stopped.

I recall Gold Hill, Dalgin where there was a huge wood grant, Dunoon, Silver Hill, Huradaia, Tenaboo, Yaroni, Vryheid, Endeavour, Clemwood which was a large settlement, Liberty Hall, Susannah's Rust, Staina, Dora, Lowwood, Sandhills and Princess Caroline.

There were two Amerindian Missions in Kamuni Creek... Aratak Mission was the first and then Santa Mission which was quite large. Santa was about 12 miles up the Creek.

The Mission was located on an expansive, white sand area on which were thatched troolie huts where the families lived. Apart from paying Old Age Pensions and Public Assistance, it was my practice to engage in discussions with the Cacique there to find out how our Office could help him and his people. The Amerindians were a protected people and I was Sub-Protector of Amerindian Rights in the district.

There was a school at Princess Caroline and I once had the pleasure of meeting the Schoolmaster and his charming wife after our speedboat accident. Another school was at Dora and it had a sizeable population.

Clemwood with its timber operations was a central point with shops.

I did not make a lot of trips downriver. The ADC had the lion's share of it since, after discharging his duties, he and his family would travel to Georgetown and return the next day.

The R.H. Carr stopped at many of the settlements listed above to discharge or embark passengers, deliver and collect mail and discharge or take on cargo. Captain Benjie would blow one loud blast on the boat's horn to alert residents that the Carr was in the neighbourhood. The boat also slowed down when nearing settlements or when boats and canoes were on the river.

Land inspections up and down river were tiring experiences. The files never stated how far from the riverbank the land was. The applicant, when he came to take me on site, would tell me "Not to worry chief, it's just down here." That was about two to three miles away.

I was never in fear of my life. I never came across any tigers or jaguars. But there were a lot of flies called kaboura. It stung you and the stings remained under the skin. The spot turned to a large abscess in 48 hours and was accompanied by high fever. Having been warned, as soon as I got bitten, I went to an Amerindian who went out, got some leaves, crushed them and applied the paste to the spot/s. It cured the bite/s in 24 hours.

Mosquitoes were prevalent. Mosquito coils and using green branches to burn and create thick smoke kept them in check.

A frightful creature was the vampire bat. They lived in trees near the Government Rest House. Their principal blood donors were cows, sheep and goats in the area.

Conclusion

Living in the Upper Demerara River District was a lasting, memorable and wonderful experience. I was not yet 21. The experience influenced my future life. In my opinion, it was the best working experience in my life. My knowledge of people, responsibility, the law, the district and the beauty of friendship was a treasure beyond compare. Georgetown was tame when I returned to it from my tenure.

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