

Key Dates in Papua New Guinea's Road to Independence

1884 Colonial Claims Begin

- Germany declares a protectorate over northeastern New Guinea (German New Guinea).
- Britain establishes a protectorate over southeastern New Guinea (British New Guinea, later Papua).

1906

Australian Administration Begins

- British New Guinea is transferred to Australia and renamed the Territory of Papua.

1914

German New Guinea Occupied

- Australian forces occupy German New Guinea at the outbreak of World War I.

1920

League of Nations Mandate

- Australia is granted a mandate to administer former German New Guinea.

1942-1945

World War II

- PNG becomes a major battleground. Administration disrupted. Post-war unity of territories considered.

1949

Territories United

- The Territory of Papua and Territory of New Guinea are combined under one Australian administration.

1964

First House of Assembly Elections

- PNG holds its first national elections with limited self-government.

1972

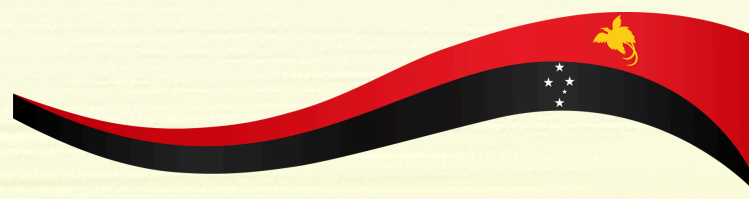
Self-Government Achieved

- Michael Somare becomes Chief Minister as PNG gains self-government.

16 September 1975

Independence

- Papua New Guinea becomes an independent nation within the Commonwealth.



Celebrating 50 years of an
Independent Papua New Guinea

This Brochure was put together by the
Piku Biodiversity Network

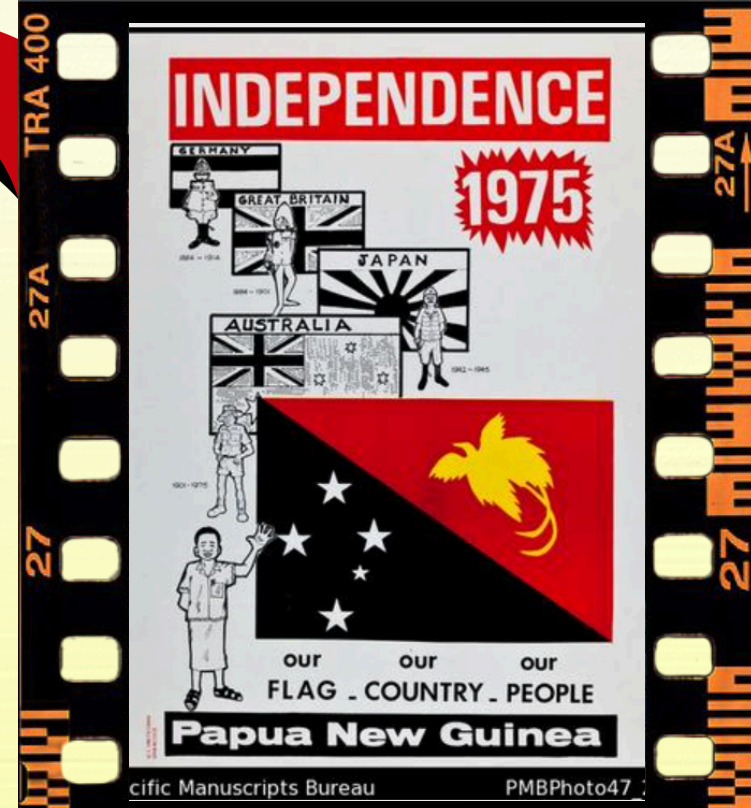
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Papua New Guinea's Colonial History

Our Road to Independence





Before Colonisation – Our Lands and Peoples

Papua New Guinea is home to over 800 languages and rich cultural diversity, shaped long before foreign contact

Our ancestors lived in complex societies, trading between coast and highlands, between islands, and stewarding land and sea through customary knowledge. Spiritual, political, and ecological systems governed everyday life.

European contact began in the 1500s, but it wasn't until the 19th century that outside powers took an interest in claiming our lands

. At this time, our people were already thriving with their own governance and trade systems—long before colonial borders were drawn.

Divided Rule – German New Guinea and British Papua

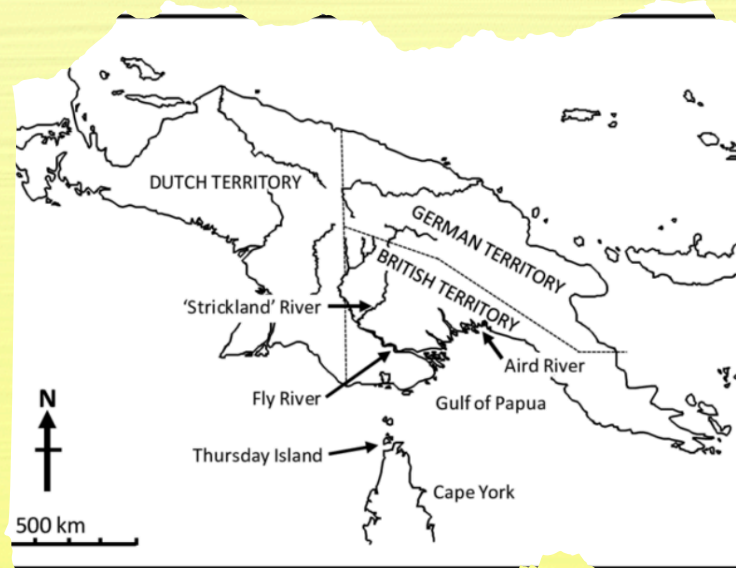
In the late 1800s, colonial powers carved up our islands.

In 1884, Germany claimed the northeastern part, calling it German New Guinea.

That same year, Britain claimed the southeast, later calling it British New Guinea, which became Papua in 1906, under Australian control.

Colonial rule brought missions, plantations, and new systems of government. But it also disrupted traditional ways of life, removed land from clans, and introduced foreign laws.

Indigenous voices were silenced, even as we adapted and resisted in our own ways.



showing political divisions in 1885.



War, Unity, and the Road to Independence

World War II changed everything.

Our land became a battleground, and many Papua New Guineans served as soldiers and carriers. After the war, Papua and New Guinea were placed under Australian administration and joined as one territory in 1949.

A new generation began pushing for change. Indigenous leaders like Michael Somare and others called for self-government. Schools, councils, and local leaders helped lay the groundwork.

In 1973, we gained self-government, and on 16 September 1975, Papua New Guinea proudly became an Independent Nation.