

Westwards to Honolulu where I stayed again with Ed Creutz, a Member of my Editorial Board. He advised me that this time I should fly to Kauai, a nearby Hawaiian Island. It is famous for being the wettest spot on Earth and is geologically the oldest of the string of islands which make up Hawaii. I was told when I got there that its minimum annual rainfall is 10.16 m and its maximum 22.86 m (400 and 900 inches respectively). I found it very verdant, raining heavily and covered by thick dark rain clouds—hardly worth a visit.

Westwards to Australia across the Pacific Ocean and losing a day. First to Sydney and then on to Canberra and there at last I met Major General Alan Stretton of the Australian Army, living in quiet retirement. For over a decade, since 1972, I had been deeply interested in disasters [see Title 81], and by great good luck I had found a copy of Stretton's book *The Furious Days—The Relief of Darwin* (Collins-Sydney 1976). It is a vivid, personal and dramatic description of how Cyclone Tracy almost completely destroyed the town of Darwin on Christmas Day 1974.

Immediately after news reached Canberra of Darwin's destruction, Stretton was ordered to fly north to make a Disaster Assessment and at once took complete 'Churchillian' control of the whole situation. He had to deal with 45000 people, isolated in the far north of Australia, and he decided that only a mass-evacuation by air would save them. Civil aircraft were commandeered and after their flight south, the reception for these tens of thousands of refugees had to be organised all over Australia. In this aspect of relief, his able colleague, Colonel Reno Vardanega, also of the Australian Army, was as good in cutting red-tape as Stretton himself. [See also *The Canberra Times* of 20 January 1985]

The people of Darwin were indeed fortunate to have in Stretton, not only a very able and forceful organiser, but also an extremely sensitive and clever psychologist. Every night, he personally broadcast to the People of Darwin a truthful situation report, and thus strengthened their fortitude and patience until their evacuation could proceed. He set up various action-groups responsible for immediate relief in the town itself, bringing back motivation to shocked and listless people, who had lost their all on a Christmas day.

The publication of *The Furious Days* brought virulent attacks to Stretton from Australia's establishment to which he was unable to reply until he retired. Then *Soldier in a Storm* appeared (Collins-Sydney 1978) in which he was able to repudiate the calumny he had suffered. When I saw him in 1982, he kindly inscribed a copy to me and we discussed the International Rescue Organisation proposed by me in 1972 in relation to the Darwin disaster. [See Title 81]