

## Refugees in Western Province mark 5th anniversary

RECENTLY West Papuan refugees in Western Province marked their fifth anniversary in Papua New Guinea. I wanted to find out more about their situation and was able to speak with Stuart Kirsch, an American anthropologist who has just completed 21 months of social research among the Yonggom people of Western Province.

Of the nearly 10,000 West Papuan refugees in Papua New Guinea, about 4000 of them are members of the Yonggom tribe. They are currently divided between several camps in the border area and the United Nations sponsored refugee resettlement centre in East Awin.

While the remainder of the refugees come from other tribes and language groups, it is interesting to look closely at the Yonggom people, as their land traditionally spanned the border. Until recently there were about 15,000 Yonggom in West Papua and 3500 in Papua New Guinea.

They own the land between the Ok Tedi or Alice River in PNG and the Muyu River in West Papua. Their history has parallels in Africa and other places in the world where international borders were decided upon by colonial powers that paid little attention to how the local people would be affected.

In the 1950s the Yonggom first had to confront the problems caused by having their land divided by an international boundary line. Patrol officers on both sides of the border were directing the Yonggom — who previously lived in very small settlements of one, two, or three houses — to form villages.

This meant that people had to choose between the better garden land in what was then Dutch or Netherlands New Guinea and the



■ Refugees attending clinic at transit camp — Western Province.

# Blood brothers are split across the border

By JOSEPH KETAN

sago stands that they maintained on the Papuan side of the border.

New villages were set up, mainly on the Papua New Guinea side of the border. In those days, the exact location of the border was not known and one village, Yat, ended up straddling the border. In fact, the Australians placed a concrete border marker at one end of the village and the Indonesians placed their own marker at the other end!

In the 1960s the Yonggom people were once again told to move.

They were directed to leave the rugged border area and move closer to the Ok Tedi River where services such as education and health care could be provided, as well as opportunities for planting rubber.

At this time some of the Yonggom people decided to move back to their land on the western side of the border. Families split themselves up between Papua and what would become the Indonesian-controlled territory of Irian Jaya. Most of the members of Yat village, for example, moved to Mindiptanah in

West Papua, leaving only two families on the PNG side of the border.

In 1984 some of these families had interesting and unexpected reunions as their relatives poured across the border in order to protest Indonesian control of West Papua. They came with the hope that the movement of refugees would create such a stir that they would receive independence within several months.

Five years later the refugees are still in camps wondering what their future will be. Will their old people live to

see their own land again? When will their young children, born in Papua New Guinea, see their homeland? How long must they live under difficult conditions in refugee camps in order to achieve their aim: POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM AGAINST OPPRESSION FROM INDONESIAN RULE IN WEST PAPUA?

And imagine how arbitrary this all is: the border divides people so that one brother is a Papua New Guinean living in his own country and the other brother a refugee!