

H EXPANDING HORIZONS

From the dusty flats of Kalgoorlie to the tropical Papua New Guinean highlands, a mining contractor's first foray overseas has been an eye-opening experience. **By Luke Forrester**

A well-timed acquisition has led expanding, Kalgoorlie-based contracting group AVKO Mining out of Australia for the first time and into the rugged highlands of Papua New Guinea to complete work on the country's most advanced, new gold project.

AVKO, which has built its name over the past 12 years offering airleg and other specialised underground mining services to companies with narrow-veined ore bodies in Western Australia's eastern goldfields, took over the operations of reputed eastern states-focused contractor Ian Kidd Mining (IKM) in September following the retirement of the latter's principal and namesake.

According to AVKO director Paul Hurley, the IKM business was an excellent fit in strategic terms, providing the company with an office and workshop in Gympie, Queensland, from where it could better service its growing client base on the other side of the country, as well as an extensive fleet of underground equipment, including jumbos, boggers and Alimak raise climbers, to complement its own.

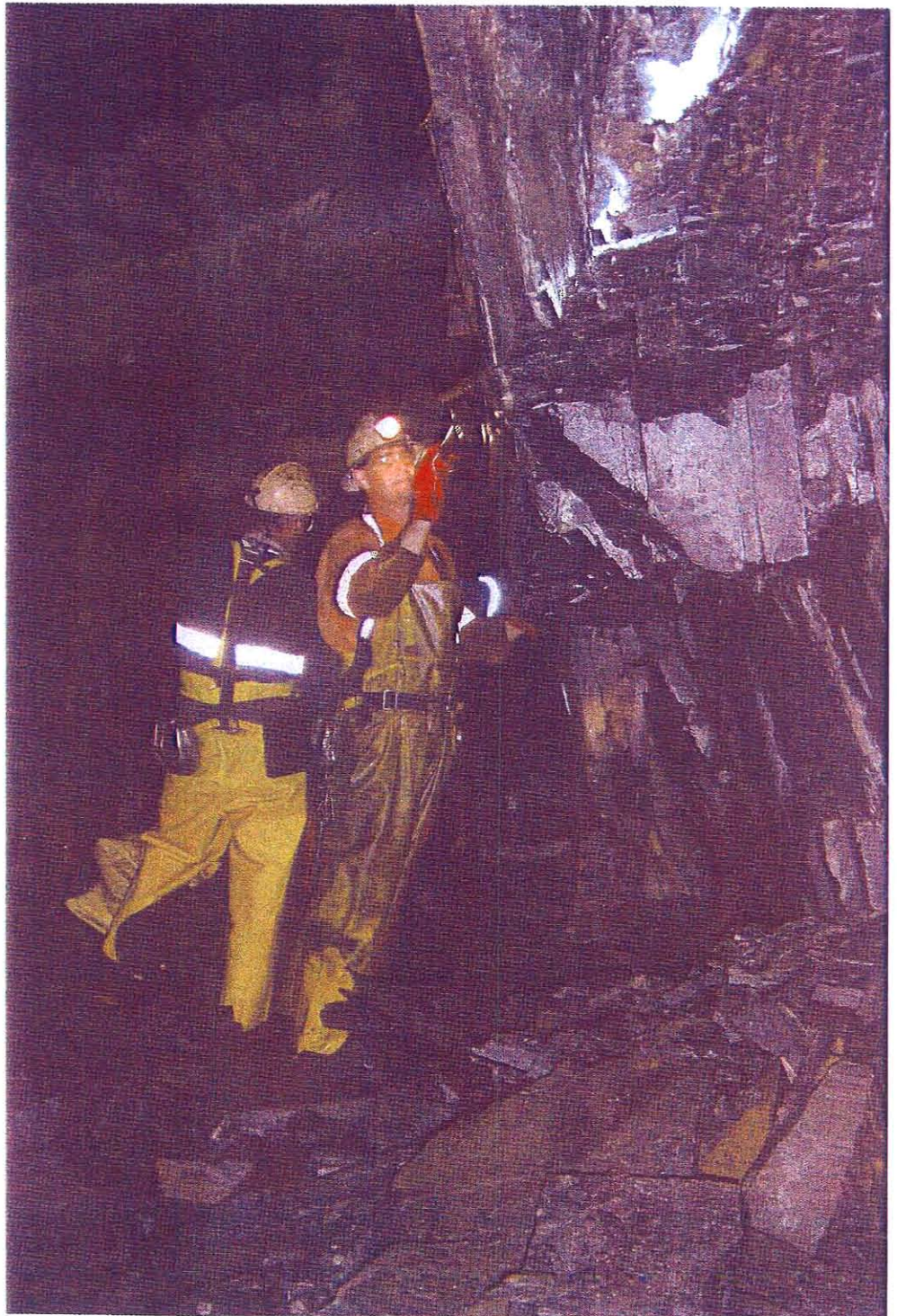
But perhaps the most exciting element of the buyout was that it presented an opportunity to venture offshore, something AVKO had never done before.

It just so happened that immediately prior to selling up, Ian Kidd had bedded down a contract to install a 305m Alimak rise at the Kainantu gold project, being developed on a steep mountainside in PNG's Eastern Highlands province by Australian-based junior Highlands Pacific.

"Ian had just got it organised and they had only just geared up on site when we took (the business) over," Hurley said.

Despite not having a great deal of experience in Alimak mining, a technique typically employed to construct underground ore passes or ventilation rises, AVKO's management was confident the company could provide Highlands Pacific with the same professional service it would have expected from IKM.

"We had a lot of expertise in rising in general, and then we inherited a lot of expertise with (IKM). Plus one of the guys with us has over 30 years' experience and he's been involved with Alimaks for practically all that time," Hurley said. "That's



AVKO employees supporting an in-stope travelway at the Mount Ida gold mine in Western Australia.

