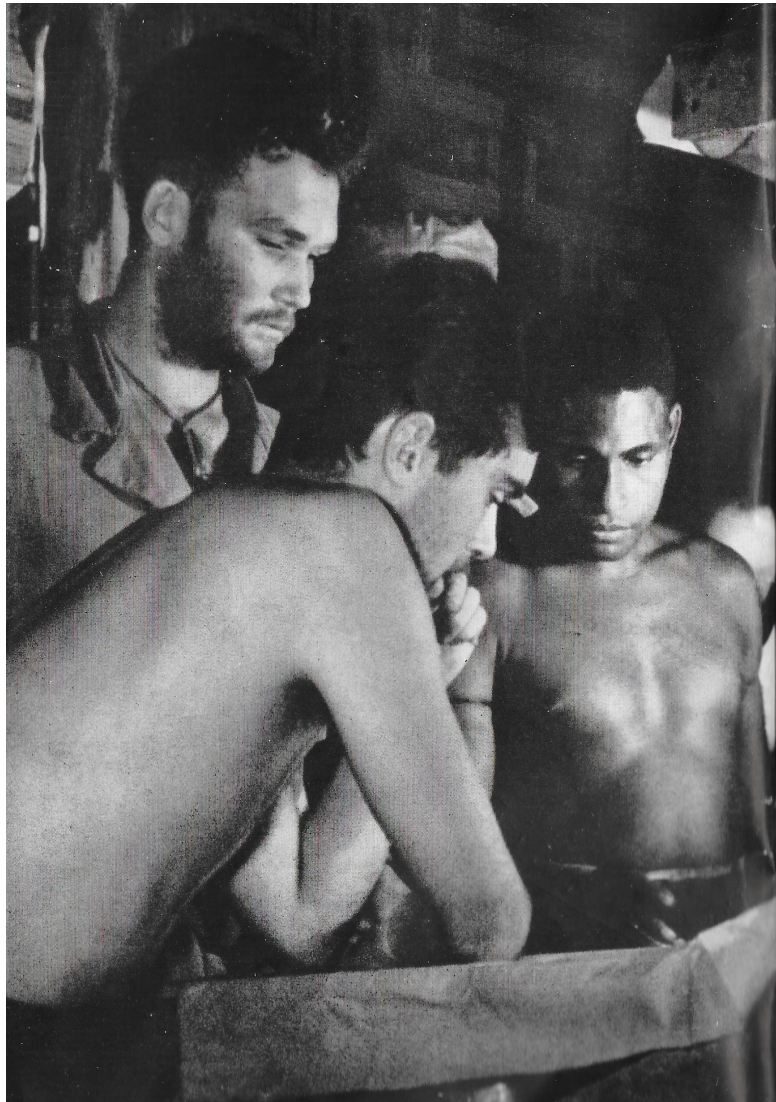




*Among those
Present*

THE OFFICIAL STORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS AT WAR

1/3 net.



Among those Present

The Official Story of the Pacific Islands at War

Prepared for the Colonial Office

by the Central Office of Information

LONDON: HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE 1946



Fox-Strangways



Sukanaivalu



Sen



Marchant



Clemens



Kopana



Bennett



Kennedy

LIST OF

I "I am staying in the Solomons"

- 1. The Long Arm of Japan page 7
- 2. "They shall get nothing from us" page 11
- 3. Phantom Government page 16

II The Battle for Guadalcanal

- 4. "I do something good for my King" page 23
- 5. The District Officers clear up page 31
- 6. Sample from Fiji page 37

With four maps in half-tone, inside the

CONTENTS

III North to New Georgia

- 7. Kennedy's Hideout page 43
- 8. The South Pacific Scouts page 53
- 9. The Taking of Treasury page 61
- 10. The Outpost at Ibu page 64

IV The Shadow over the Gilberts

- 11. Front Line Islands page 81
- 12. The Return to Tarawa page 86
- Epilogue page 94

front cover and on pages 8-9, 44-45, and 83.

Tripp

Sasanibule

Masefield

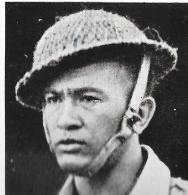
Ilala

Trench

Sitai

Bentley

Ed. Thakombau





"My mind is made up. I am staying in the Solomons."

I

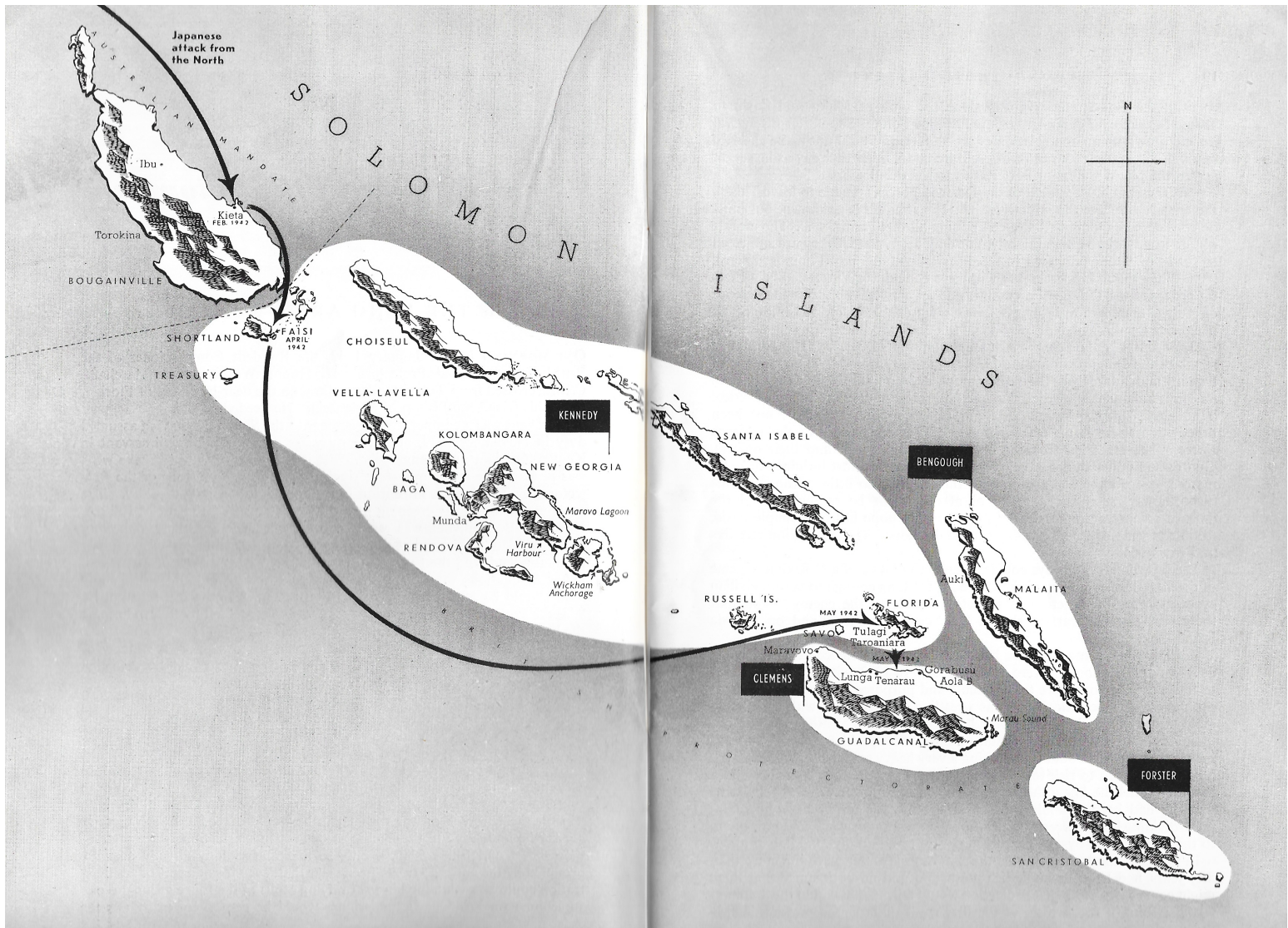
"I am staying in the Solomons"

I. THE LONG ARM OF JAPAN

ONE MORNING in late January 1942, the Resident Commissioner of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, His Honour William Sydney Marchant, C.B.E., crossed from Tulagi to Taroaniara, on the near-by island of Florida, to see his friend the Bishop of Melanesia. He needed advice.

Marchant was a comparative newcomer to the Solomons, having assumed duty in November 1939, after twenty years as a Colonial civil servant in Kenya, Zanzibar and Tanganyika. Yet it had fallen to him to make what was perhaps the most important single decision in the history of the Protectorate. The issue confronting him was painful in its simplicity. The Japanese shadow was creeping down from the north. Rabaul had fallen. Kieta, on Bougainville, was reported occupied. The Shortlands—the tiny group of islands clustered at the southern tip of Bougainville—were already no-man's-land, and the European and Chinese residents had been removed. Other evacuations were planned. The question was, indeed, whether any limit should be set to this policy of getting out before the Japanese got in. Was the Protectorate to be abandoned, and was Marchant himself to become the head of another little government-in-exile?

He could see that there were good arguments to support a strategy of wholesale retreat. Any notion that the Protectorate could be defended against attack by the Japanese was ludicrous. At Tulagi there was a minute detachment of the Australian Imperial Force, but it was there only to protect an advanced operational base sometimes used by Australian reconnaissance planes and to assist, as a sideline, in the training of the local Defence Force. This Defence Force consisted of three officers, one British N.C.O., one native warrant officer and 112 native other ranks. It had been hurried into existence at the eleventh hour. Its Commanding Officer, Major Vivian Fox-Strangways, had been in the Protectorate little more than a fortnight. But for the outbreak of war with Japan he would never have been there at all, for he had come to the Pacific as Resident Commissioner-Designate of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, only to find that Colony already partially occupied by the enemy. It had been clear that, even if some sort of administration could be maintained in the outlying atolls of the Ellice group, no one so senior as a Resident Commissioner would be needed for many months



to come, so Fox-Strangways was given the rank of Major and flown to Tulagi to take over command of the Defence Force. Soon after his arrival he had drawn up an appreciation of the situation. It did not make cheerful reading. Snatches of it ran through Marchant's mind that day as he set off across the placid waters of Port Purvis to see the Bishop.

"As the H.Q. Detachment of the Defence Force is unable to leave Tulagi, the enemy will have the initiative. . . . His strength is unknown, but must be considered as unlimited and comprising all three arms. . . . The morale of our troops will be high initially, but may deteriorate if they are subjected to forms of attack unknown to them (dive-bombing, naval bombardment). . . . When the A.I.F. leave they will leave behind five Vickers. Six Vickers on order for the Defence Force have not yet arrived. . . . For the defence of Tulagi there are available 3 Lewis guns (1914 issue), 113 rifles, Short Magazine Lee-Enfield, 6 pistols, 455,51,000 rounds Small Arms ammunition 303, and 100 rounds Small Arms ammunition 455. . . . The European ranks of the Defence Force are in no sense fully trained. The standard of training and musketry of the native troops is low and as yet no native N.C.O. has any real grasp of fire direction and control or of section leading. Tactical handling of troops, ammunition and ration supply, etc., have not been practised. There is no trained Lewis or Vickers gunner in the Defence Force. The force is composed chiefly of native police and their officers. Guards and police duties have obviously militated against training. . . . So many ways of approach are open to the enemy; so little is known of his dispositions; such short notice of attack might be received; and the defence resources are so slender that the only hope lies in a simple basic, flexible scheme of defence which can be developed as the situation requires and permits."

The best Fox-Strangways could suggest in the way of a "flexible scheme of defence" was that Tulagi should be held "long enough to permit civilian evacuation and destruction of objects valuable to the enemy" and that thereafter guerrilla warfare should be "carried on from and on Florida island."

In 1936, when some attention had been given to a defence scheme, the real defences of the Solomons were at Singapore. In 1942, with Singapore about to fall, the Solomons were to all intents and purposes defenceless; and the problem with which Marchant was wrestling was whether, with such negligible forces at his disposal, it would be right for him to attempt to defend them at all. From a strictly military point of view, perhaps evacuation was the right plan. He would be assuming a very heavy responsibility if he asked a handful of men to risk torture and death by remaining at their posts in a territory which he knew the Japanese could overrun at will. At the same time, he had been a soldier himself in the last war and he knew how faint is the dividing line between "evacuation" and running away, and how often, to the uninstructed bystander, there appears to be no dividing line at all.

In this case the bystander was the Solomon Islander who, for more than fifty years, had been under British protection and never dreamed that there might come a day when that protection would fail. What would the Solomon Islander think if the British, at the first whiff of Japanese powder, simply

pulled up stakes and made off in the direction of Australia? How could one explain to these British Protected Persons that, for reasons of high strategy, there were battles which had to be fought and won in other parts of the world before regard could be paid to their safety? It would be futile to talk to them about the collapse of France, about Japanese treachery at Pearl Harbour, about the underlying causes of the defeat the Empire was about to suffer at Singapore. All they would want to know was what the Government proposed to do in discharge of its trusteeship in the Solomon Islands. If the answer to that inquiry had to be, "Nothing, for the present," Marchant knew well enough what reaction he could expect. The staggering inexplicable news would fly through the islands "Government no stop!" To the Military Observer it would be evacuation. To the people of the Solomons it would be desertion.

This, then, was the problem Marchant had to discuss with the Bishop, on that morning in late January 1942. His Lordship of Melanesia, who had won the D.S.O. and the M.C. with Bar in the last war, listened while the issue was propounded. Then he said: "My own mind is made up. I am staying in the Solomons."

Marchant too had made up his mind. A few days later, the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, Sir Harry Luke, received, at his headquarters in Suva, Fiji, a telegram outlining a plan for the maintenance of British administration in the Solomon Islands during the impending occupation. There was to be no defence of Tulagi, and those civilians who wished to leave the islands were to be evacuated to Australia. But Marchant himself was to stay, with such officers as volunteered to stay with him, and, so far as the exigencies of the situation might permit, he was to keep the flag flying.

The plan was approved. Preparations for the game of hide-and-seek began.

2. "THEY SHALL GET NOTHING FROM US"

EARLY in February the Australian vessel *Morinda* arrived at Tulagi to withdraw civilians. As she entered the harbour she was spotted by a Japanese reconnaissance aircraft which dropped a number of bombs uncomfortably close to her bow. It was taken for granted that the attack would be resumed and the loading of the *Morinda* proceeded in an atmosphere that was the reverse of festive. She got away, however, without further trouble. Among her passengers were several of Marchant's officers, including two or three young men who had decided that they could serve the Empire best by joining the Armed Forces in Australia. Less than six months later these young men were back, in the uniform of the Royal Australian Navy. The part they played in the subsequent operations in the Solomons would be a story in itself.

Major Fox-Strangways left, too, with the arms and ammunition of his virtually disbanded Defence Force. His orders were to hold himself in readiness for duty in other High Commission territories, but more than a year elapsed before he landed at Funafuti, just ahead of the American Marines and Seabees, to set up temporary headquarters there as Resident Commissioner, Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony. It was almost two years before he moved those headquarters north, in the wake of Admiral Nimitz's amphibious forces, and re-established them on the shell-blasted atoll of Tarawa. In the meantime he sought, and was granted, permission to join the Royal Australian Air Force and served for several months as an airman trainee at a station in the Commonwealth.

The Administrative Officers who stayed with Marchant were Donald Kennedy, who was given charge of the western islands and was therefore closest to the enemy; Martin Clemens, who was stationed on Guadalcanal and was therefore destined to see a great deal of the enemy; Bill Bengough, on Malaita; Michael Forster, on San Cristobal; and Colin Wilson, at Vanikoro, in the Santa Cruz group. As things turned out, Forster and Wilson were left undisturbed by the invader, but that fortunate immunity could not be foreseen at the time when they elected to stay at their posts.

Although the Headquarters Detachment of the Defence Force had been dispersed and its precious Lewis guns carried off to Australia, where even weapons of 1914 vintage were at that time very nearly worth their weight in gold, the Force itself remained in existence and was later to form the nucleus of that guerrilla army, known to the American Command as the South Pacific Scouts and to its own members as the "International Brigade," which fought alongside the regular Allied Forces first on Guadalcanal and later on New Georgia, Vella Lavella and Treasury.

Each Administrative Officer was given commissioned rank in the Force, with authority to recruit such native volunteers as he might need to meet the changing situation in his own district; each had at his disposal a detachment of old sweats drawn from the ranks of the Armed Constabulary. Uniforms had to be improvised and it was not until the arrival of the Americans that a full issue of khaki was available. At first the only arms were the out-of-date, but well-cared-for, constabulary rifles. As the months passed, however, at least one unit of the Force was able to equip itself with ample modern weapons, surrendered by the Japanese.

The first task that faced Marchant and his much reduced staff was to ensure that the natives understood what "the Government" was trying to do and were willing to co-operate in getting it done. Clearly, if the natives were to prove disloyal, the whole project was suicidal. One by one the hiding places of the District Officers and of the other Europeans—missionaries and planters—who were involved in this bold conspiracy to preserve the continuity of British rule would be pointed out to the Japanese and the framework of Marchant's phantom administration would be broken. The measure of Allied debt to the people of the Solomon Islands is that not once during the anxious months of the Japanese occupation was a white man delivered by a black man into the hands of the enemy.

In what little time remained to them, Marchant's officers visited as many

villages as possible and explained to headmen and elders exactly what sort of behaviour would be expected of the natives in the event of the temporary intrusion of a foreign Power. They were told that the first essential was to shun contact with the enemy and that the only way to avoid giving him information was to avoid talking to him at all. What the Japanese later mistook for moroseness on the part of the islanders was actually the result of their faithful determination that no careless words of theirs should cost European lives.

The natives of the coastal villages were given special training in the technique of non-co-operation. Refugee camps and reserve garden areas were established in places not easily accessible to the enemy, and each village had its emergency provision dump far back in the bush. Arrangements were made for the destruction or concealment of surface craft or machinery likely to be of value to the Japanese. So smoothly did these arrangements function when put to the test that of the scores of small vessels which might have been used by the enemy to keep his outposts supplied not one was allowed to fall into his hands.

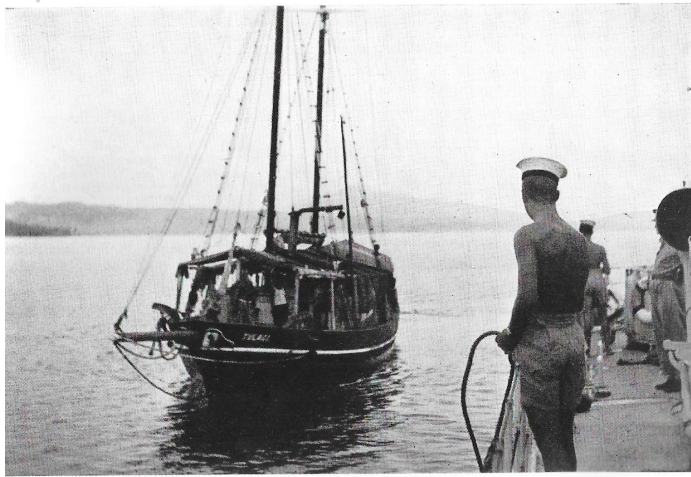
Soon after the evacuation by the *Morinda* Marchant moved his headquarters from Tulagi to Auki, on Malaita. The most urgent problem confronting him in those early days was that of repatriating more than two



AS THE ENEMY APPROACHED TULAGI, Marchant moved his headquarters to Auki, this huddle of leaf and bamboo huts on Malaita. There H.M. Government stayed.

thousand native labourers who had been left stranded on copra plantations in the western and central islands of the group. Working against time, for Japanese landings were expected any moment, a tiny fleet of schooners, varying in size from 7 to 20 tons, maintained a continuous shuttle service, making repeated voyages through waters where Japanese naval and air supremacy was unchallenged and returning each time with their decks crowded with labourers. On more than one occasion these schooners were bombed and strafed by Japanese planes, but the native crews carried on fearlessly, and within a fortnight the last labourer had been safely returned to his home island. Peter Sasambule, the native skipper of the Resident Commissioner's schooner *Tulagi*, took a leading part in these rescue operations and later, despite the attentions of Japanese airmen, kept up a regular launch service between Malaita and selected points of rendezvous where District Officers stationed in occupied areas came to collect supplies.

It is a remarkable tribute to the discipline maintained by native headmen in areas from which all Europeans had been withdrawn that on none of these abandoned plantations were there any serious cases of looting or disorder. On the Russell Islands 600 labourers were left behind. The only Government Officer on the spot was Tommy Kokolauia, the headman. On his own initiative he organised patrols of the various plantations, and his presence inspired such confidence that the labourers, although they had not been paid



A TINY FLEET OF SCHOONERS maintained a regular service, often under fire, to the stations in occupied areas. "*Tulagi*," Commissioner's schooner, was one.

off and were short of food, waited patiently in their settlements until vessels arrived to take them home.

As District Officer of the Western Solomons, where communication is chiefly by sea, Kennedy had his own flotilla of schooners, which constantly ran the gauntlet of enemy bombing and strafing. The crews developed a simple technique for dealing with attack from the air. They had—at any rate in the early stages—no armament, except one or two ancient rifles, so that it was impossible for them to strike back at the Zeros and Mitsubishi's. They decided, therefore, that their aim should be to live to sail again another day; and when an enemy aircraft showed signs of coming in to bomb, or swooped to spatter the tiny decks with machine-gun fire, they dived overboard and took individual avoiding action in the water—all of them being expert swimmers—until such time as the enemy had tired of his trivial quarry and had passed triumphantly on his way. Then they would swim back to the schooner and resume their journey. Not once did an enemy bomb find its mark (a merciful deliverance, for one hit would have been sufficient to reduce any ship in the fleet to unidentifiable flotsam), but the machine-gun fire was often accurate enough to be troublesome.

Kennedy used his small but well-disciplined fleet for a variety of purposes. His ships helped to repatriate stranded labour, carried supplies to refugee camps and maintained communications with the remotest corners of his district. Later on, with the Japanese all around him, Kennedy devoted himself to amphibious operations. When he had decided that the garrison of some enemy outpost must be destroyed, he would go by schooner to the point from which he judged that a surprise attack could best be made and would disembark his little Commando force under cover of darkness in the rear of the Japanese lines. The schooners, small as they were, gave his ground forces a mobility they would not otherwise have enjoyed, for an army that has to travel by canoe is likely to arrive at its destination too weary to fight at its best.

The finest ship in Kennedy's flotilla was the 14-ton *Waiai*, which had been built in Australia for the Protectorate Government and had sailed up from Sydney, across more than a thousand miles of ocean. She was what Kennedy called a "real deep-sea job" and she could stand up to any weather. In her he carried out some of his most daring patrols, and it was for him one of the blackest days when she was trapped and sunk in a lonely bay many miles behind what the enemy regarded as his front line. She had come through some desperate scrapes before then—notably when she had chugged her way into the shadowy recesses of a mangrove-fringed creek just in time to avoid a stately procession of nine Japanese cruisers. But in the end her luck deserted her. She was lying at anchor—Kennedy was not with her on this trip and Billy Bennett, a young half-caste N.C.O. from New Georgia, was in command—when a landing barge full of Jap troops came swirling round the point and opened up with machine-guns. Mindful of Kennedy's instructions that on no account must the *Waiai* be allowed to fall into enemy hands, Billy ordered the crew to pour petrol over the deck and prepare to set fire to the ship if necessary. They got as far as drenching her with petrol and Jap tracer bullets finished the job for them, starting a

blaze which gutted the poor *Walal*, the burnt-out hulk being left to sink at its moorings. Billy and the crew dived overboard and, despite Jap rifle fire, reached the shore safely, although two of them were badly burned.

The little craft of the Solomons have resumed their unromantic peace-time occupations. The war has brought them fame, but it has also shortened their lives. The waters of the South Pacific harbour a particularly industrious type of worm, which loves to eat its way through the timber piles of jetties or the hulls of wooden ships. In normal circumstances every schooner in the Protectorate, with the exception of the few that are copper-sheathed, is taken on to the slipway twice a year and given a coat of worm-resisting paint. The exigencies of war compelled the abandonment of this practice, and the worms were able to pursue their destructive operations undisturbed. Most of the schooners are still in commission, but some have been condemned already; the days of many more are numbered.

In one or other of his schooners Kennedy visited, between mid-February and mid-April 1942, all important villages on Florida, Savo, the Russells, Ysabel, the islands of the New Georgia and Shortland groups, Vella Lavella and Choiseul. Wherever he went, he carried the same message: "These islands are British and they are to remain British. The Government is not leaving. Even if the Japanese come, we shall stay with you and in the end they will be driven out. We may have to endure dangers and discomforts, but they will be only temporary. Make every preparation for the arrival of the enemy. When he is here, avoid him if you can, and in any case do not help him." At the end of his tour, Kennedy was able to report: "The natives entered readily into all the plans and offered their services, their food supplies and their canoes without demur."

Footslogging it through the thick bush of Guadalcanal, Martin Clemens was carrying the same message and meeting with the same response. On Malaita, on San Cristobal, in the far-away Santa Cruz islands, the natives were being told that, invasion or no invasion, the lawful administration of the Protectorate would be carried on without interruption. "Business as usual"—despite the worst that the Japanese might do—was the battle-cry. The loyalty of "Government" evoked an answering loyalty from those governed. From one end of the Protectorate to the other the vow was silently taken, "If they come, they shall get nothing from us." And the vow was kept.

3. PHANTOM GOVERNMENT

THE JAPANESE were now on the doorstep; and arrangements for their reception were complete. As Kennedy wrote afterwards: "The numerous inhabitants of the coastal villages in the no-man's-islands north-west of Guadalcanal and Florida were constantly on the alert, ready to pick up bag and baggage and rush inland on the first appearance of the enemy. They

were required to keep their canoes safely hidden and to keep sentries posted night and day. Never, since the head-hunting days, had there been such a to-do."

Throughout March and April enemy bombers were over the Tulagi area every two or three days as a matter of routine. They paid a gratifying amount of attention to the wireless station on Tulagi, little suspecting that all its equipment had been dismantled and transferred to Malaita, where civil servant Tom Sexton, resolutely surviving a series of "technical hitches," kept it in operation right up to the arrival of the Marines. The air attacks caused only two casualties, both of them natives who were killed by the explosion of a stray bomb near a village on Florida.

On April 10 the Japs landed at Faisi, in the Shortlands, and took prisoner Hughie Wheatley, a native medical practitioner who had himself landed only the day before. He had gone to the Shortlands, well knowing the risk he ran, because he had received reports of an outbreak of pneumonic influenza.

On May 2 there were five heavy bombing raids on Tulagi, and watchers on Malaita that night could see a bright red glow in the sky. It was assumed that the little A.I.F. detachment was burning its stores and withdrawing according to plan. Next day the Bishop of Melanesia arrived at Auki by schooner, with the news that the Australians had got safely away in the *Balus*, a vessel of 50 tons. On May 3 and 4 the Japanese made their first landings on Tulagi and the neighbouring islands. This meant that Kennedy had been by-passed, and that Clemens, on Guadalcanal, was now the District Officer nearest to the enemy.

Clemens was at his headquarters at Aola when the Japanese went ashore at Tulagi. With him he had eighteen native policemen, twelve serviceable rifles and 300 rounds of ammunition. By swearing in clerks, native dressers from the hospital, gardeners and other volunteers as members of the Defence Force, he contrived to build up a local army of nearly sixty men, which carried out extensive patrols during the period of the Jap occupation and, when the Americans landed in early August, joined up with General Vandergift's Marines. From an outpost evacuated by the A.I.F., Clemens's men collected six extra rifles and 2,500 rounds of ammunition, while a number of useful weapons were later captured from the Japanese.

About the middle of May native canoe patrols which had been keeping watch at Tulagi and Florida reported that the Japanese were preparing to land on Guadalcanal. Clemens then proceeded, quite literally, to take the Government station to pieces and remove as much of it as was portable to the village of Vungana, in the foothills behind Aola. The natives gave their services free to assist in effecting this laborious migration. Valuable records and heavy office equipment were concealed in a tunnel dug in the hillside near Aola; all were afterwards recovered. Sixteen men sweated over the task of transferring to this tunnel the District Treasury safe, which contained £800 in silver.

Vungana, in Clemens's own words, was "a miniature Edinburgh Castle, which could have been stoutly defended with a few rifles." From this fastness he could see everything happening on the beach below, as well as all

vessels entering or leaving Tulagi harbour. This was a great improvement on the lookout arrangements at Aola, where a native sat perched on the top of a banyan tree with instructions to blow a conch shell when he sighted an aircraft and wave a red flag to indicate the approach of a surface vessel.

Although from now on his preoccupations were largely of a military nature, Clemens did not neglect his routine duties as a District Officer. He established two sub-stations, with Clerk Daniel Pule and Police Sergeant Andrew Langabaca, both soldiers now, in charge of them.

The drugs from Aola hospital he divided into three, and distributed to three improvised bush dispensaries which were regularly visited by native medical practitioners. He held court at Vungana and even transferred the district prison there, housing the convicts in ordinary leaf huts.

The main problem was food. Realising that his tinned stores would soon be exhausted, Clemens had planted gardens of fast-growing yams and tapioca on the plateau below the foothills, taking the precaution of siting them in such a manner as to obliterate the tracks leading to Vungana. His men went to the gardens daily to dig food, until one morning they found soldiers from a near-by Japanese outpost there before them. There followed a precarious interlude during which, as though by mutual agreement, the Japanese and Clemens's men dug in the gardens on alternate days.

From Vungana, Clemens was able to send out regular patrols, not only on land throughout the entire area where the Japanese were active, but also on the sea, his men sallying forth in their canoes in the roughest weather. When the naval history of the war in the Solomons comes to be written, sandwiched modestly between lengthy disquisitions on the part played by battleships, aircraft-carriers and other imposing craft, there should be at least a few sentences of tribute to these humble native canoes. The canoe used by the Solomon Islanders is cunningly built, but is not a plaything for the uninitiated. As Kennedy has said, "It's like a bicycle—whether it works or not depends entirely on the person riding it." The islanders themselves travel blithely to and fro in these flimsy craft with the unthinking skill of a cyclist, steering their few inches of freeboard safely through rolling seas, but the Japanese who ventured to go voyaging in floating stock stolen from the natives almost invariably ended among the sharks. In the later stages of the Solomons campaign, if the Japs used these canoes at all, they lashed two or more of them together, a precaution which gave added safety but meant exchanging the knife-like motion of a giant fish for the wallowing gait of a turtle.

There is many an American soldier or sailor who has reason to be thankful for the strong arms and stout paddles which the crews of these tiny craft were always ready to place at their disposal. Native owned and operated canoes brought wounded pilots back to their bases through Japanese-patrolled waters, carried supplies to ground forces temporarily isolated by the enemy and maintained a regular mail service to lonely outposts on the farthest fringe of the sprawling battle zone. It is the proud claim of these native mariners that, of the many hundreds of European personnel they have carried on board their canoes, every man has been delivered safely at his destination.

The patrols Clemens sent out, whether by canoe or on foot, lacked nothing



IN THESE FRAIL CANOES, wayward craft which the Japanese found too tricky to handle, the islanders blithely patrolled the inshore seas and harried the enemy's posts.

in effrontery. On one occasion a Japanese political officer visited a village on Guadalcanal, assembled the inhabitants, and told them he had reason to believe that a white man was hiding in the bush near by, who had with him a number of native policemen misguided enough to be still loyal to the British. He offered a liberal reward for the capture of any of these fugitives and went away greatly pleased after receiving from the villagers assurances of their eager desire to co-operate in the man-hunt. His satisfaction might have been less marked had he known that in the front row of the audience, gravely listening to his discourse, were three of the policemen he was seeking.

Another time an islander returned from patrol with an unusually detailed description of the equipment brought ashore by a new Japanese landing party. Asked how he could make so accurate a report, the native replied, "I wanted to know exactly what they'd got, so I helped them unload it."

The political officer who offered the reward for Clemens's capture was among the first arrivals on Guadalcanal after the Japanese had formally occupied the island. His duty was to pacify the inhabitants and obtain their assistance in establishing a new administration. He set confidently about his task by sending a circular letter to leading natives, inviting their co-operation. The letter, a copy of which was duly passed along to Clemens, declared that the British and American navies were at the bottom of the sea, that British rule in the Solomons was at an end, that in future only Japanese

law would be recognised, and that all Europeans of enemy nationality still in the islands would shortly be rounded up for internment. The letter drew no response, for those to whom it was addressed had good reason to know that the boasts it contained were, to say the least, grossly exaggerated. They knew that British administration had been embarrassed, but not interrupted, by the arrival of the Japanese and that the Union Jack, if it had been hauled down at Aola, was still flying at Vungana.

The Japanese made recurrent efforts to carry out their threat to round up all the white men in the Solomon Islands and promised to impose dire penalties for the withholding of information about their whereabouts; but wherever enemy patrols went, news of their intention flew before them and the hunted always had ample time in which to elude pursuit. Late in July the Japanese paid their only visit to Malaita, where they found both the Government and the Melanesian Mission stations deserted, Marchant and the Bishop, with their staffs, having withdrawn in good order into the bush. After looting the two stations, the raiding party set out on its return voyage to Tulagi. There is good reason to believe that it never got there, for something closely resembling the vessel in which the Japs were travelling collected a direct hit from a thousand-pound bomb, dropped by an American Flying Fortress which happened to be nosing about off the coast of Malaita.

It is doubtful if Japan's "co-prosperity" propaganda has anywhere fallen quite so flat as in the Solomons. The invader spoke fair words, only to belie them with crass and vicious deeds. The forces which landed on Guadalcanal seemed to develop a genius for doing the unpopular thing. They took over churches as barracks, first removing all ornaments of value and packing them off to their relations in Japan. Their method of negotiating with the natives for the purchase of food was to take what they wanted at the point of a gun. All able-bodied males were required to register and were told that if they worked they would be given rations. No mention was ever made of wages. The promise that all taxation would be abolished, intended as sugar for the pill, therefore meant little. Soldiers would wander into villages, ransack houses, wrench open boxes and carry off as souvenirs articles of even the smallest value. In the end the Japanese Commander on Guadalcanal found that the only way he could get the labour he needed for the construction of an airfield was to threaten to exterminate whole villages.

If Marchant were writing this account of what happened in the Solomons in the twilight months that preceded the American counter-invasion, he would be anxious that the exploits of himself and his young officers, and the story of the patient loyalty of the native population, should not obscure the splendid part played by the missionaries who, in face of enormous difficulties, carried on medical and educational work in occupied areas. With certain adjustments of itinerary necessitated by the presence of Japanese forces, mission doctors and dressers continued their regular tours, treating the sick in remote villages, giving injections, and maintaining the child welfare services. Temporary schools were opened in the bush for children evacuated from territory under direct enemy control. Shortly after the Marines had landed, two Roman Catholic fathers and two nuns were murdered by the Japanese on Guadalcanal. Natives who witnessed this atrocity say that

the killings took place after the Japanese had tried unsuccessfully to extract information concerning the whereabouts of American troops.

The presence of the Bishop of Melanesia on Malaita was a boon in itself, for his robust good spirits were as infectious as they were unquenchable. One of the numerous unchurchly chores which fell to His Lordship's lot during this period was to act as Assistant Cipher Officer at Marchant's headquarters. Every day, reports would come in from outposts manned by District Officers or by other European and part-European members of the Defence Force. The Bishop would help to decipher them, and would often have to bring his ecclesiastical good sense to bear on the problem of making them mean something once the deciphering was finished. His intimate knowledge of Solomons geography proved invaluable. One urgent signal came in which, after everybody in the office had checked the decipher, still presented this tantalisingly uninformative concatenation of vowels and consonants:

FORTRESSINSEASEASSESEARSSEARSGELA

The beginning and end were easy enough. "Fortressinsea" indicated the crashing of an American plane. "Gela" is the native name for the island of Florida. But the rest seemed to be nonsense, until the timely arrival of the Bishop solved the mystery. He took one glance at the message and pointed out that it told, with admirable brevity, this story: A Fortress had come down in the sea, south-east of the Asses' Ears, a well-known mountainous feature dominating a stretch of the coastline of the island of Gela.

The Bishop did not, for all the pressure of his war-time duties, neglect his flock. His chief handicap, as time wore on, was the impossibility of obtaining fresh supplies of clothing and in his subsequent report to Melanesian Mission Headquarters in Australia he told how, when making the circuit of his scattered parishes, he had to take with him a native whose job it was "to sew the soles on my shoes again at various halts along the wayside." As this expert service was not available on Guadalcanal, Clemens's shoes soon became a complete war casualty and by the end of July he was going bare-foot, trying, as he afterwards said, to look like a dignified version of Robinson Crusoe.

The drama being played out in the far-away Solomons, under the cloak of what the communiqués call "security silence," was watched attentively in London. On July 27 the Secretary of State for the Colonies sent this telegram to Sir Harry Luke: "Please wish Marchant and his colleagues, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the best of luck in the difficult and valuable work in which they are showing such spirit."

The message was duly relayed to Malaita, where it was received with gratification. But even more gratifying was a message which, a few days earlier, had reached Marchant from another quarter. It was terse and to the point, telling him only that "it won't be long now." The phrase became a slogan among Marchant's young officers and the loyal band of natives who were their immediate accomplices. "It won't be long now!" The ordeal was almost ended. Something was going to happen. And, on August 7, something did happen.

