Reform, Rebellion and the Sunset of German Rule

The arbitrary nature of ‘feudal’ rule in Ponape, with its expulsion of tenants, banishment of dissidents and disputes over tenure, tribute and advancement, was an inexhaustible source of conflict which the Germans found difficult to control before 1907 because of the widely scattered nature of Ponapean settlement, the lack of roads and the dependence on slow boats for transport. The new Colonial Office initiatives gave Hahl in New Guinea the inducement to consider implementing the changes he had projected in 1900. Not just security, but also the need to stimulate indigenous production and raise Ponape’s economic output—indeed the output of the whole island sphere—dictated positive action. In 1907 Hahl was sure he could introduce a new system of land tenure into Kiti district at least, because population pressure there was straining the available land, and because in Kiti lived Henry Nanpei, whom Hahl saw as a certain supporter of the German moves.¹

The Governor undertook a tour to Ponape in September 1907 while the island was still without a new district officer. On 23 September, he announced to an assembly of chiefs the Reich’s intention of converting the present land system into freehold ownership by farmstead tenants, and he managed to extract from the High Chiefs a written agreement that they would refrain meanwhile from dispossessing their present tenants of cultivated land.² Without offering any further information Hahl then departed, leaving behind him general confusion. Some sections of the population saw the agreement as a total abolition of chiefly powers; the High Chiefs feared that the agreement meant their position and prerogatives had been swept away by mere fiat.

When the new district administrator, Georg Fritz, arrived many months later, in April 1908, he found a highly unstable situation. In the absence of a strong hand, the leading chiefs had been spreading rumours that the Germans were planning to introduce new taxes and customs duties, and even forced labour camps.³

Fritz was a young, ambitious man, sensitive about professional status and esteem, who had just completed a successful tour of duty as
administrator of the Mariana Islands. There, among the peaceful, passive race of Chamorros and Micronesians, he had with little difficulty set up a poll tax system, regulated the planting activities of the inhabitants, and introduced compulsory labour for the administration. Fritz was an official in the true colonial mould. He was eager to bring the ‘realities of civilisation’ to the Naturvölker, namely, the will to work for its own sake, joy in private property, and love of family, preferably the nuclear family. A patronising man, filled with the need to uphold the honour and prestige of the Reich among ‘native races’, Fritz was yet anxious to be, and to appear to be, fair, impartial and understanding.

Because the Marianas had been such a congenial area for his talents, Fritz came to Ponape unwillingly at first. His instructions from Hahl were to address himself to the land issue. Hahl wanted a survey of every farmstead and common on the island so that the needs of the people and of the administration could be gauged before effecting any changes. Fritz was in agreement with the Governor that things could be allowed to drift no longer, and that the seat of administration might just as well be shifted to another, more prosperous centre in the Carolines unless economic development were accomplished in Ponape along the lines desired by the Colonial Office.

Fritz himself foresaw the extension of his Marianas work to Ponape, including the levying of personal taxes and the imposition of corvée labour, but felt that it should be discreetly organised so as to overcome the resistance of the Islanders. He did not take kindly to Hahl’s method of procedure, regarding the Governor’s reform project of September as ‘immature and unjust’ and its disclosure in Ponape premature. In February 1908 he had already informed Hahl of a scheme of his own which would transform the social system, and involve the Islanders throughout the Carolines in the tasks of development. In areas where the chief and his tenants agreed, the absolute right of the chief over the commoner’s land was to be abolished, as well as the constant obligations of tribute in produce and labour. In return, the main chiefs were to be compensated financially through a system of compulsory work which the government would organise for the emancipated tenants. The tenants would gain the freehold possession of their land, to be handed down in perpetuity to their heirs, but would be obligated to work on government projects for fifteen days each year at a wage rate of one mark per day. Half this wage would then be distributed to the chiefs as recompense for their lost income and privileges; the rest would fall
to the government treasury. Fritz anticipated that, as the traditional leaders were incorporated into the administrative apparatus as officials and overseers of the public works, their 'pension' would be phased out and the tax of fifteen work-days on each Islander would accrue to the administration. It was a subtly-disguised system of mass taxation and corvée labour, designed, at one stroke, to reduce the independence of the chiefs and involve them more closely in administrative control, to accustom the people to ordered work, and to open up the island at minimal cost. Fritz later estimated that, with the extension of the scheme to the rest of the Carolines group, and with the added innovation of a direct cash or copra tax on the low copra-yielding atolls, the island sphere might generate 100,000 marks in cash annually.6

Hahl and Fritz had just managed to convince the Colonial Office in June 1908 that the reforms were essential to productivity, and to law and order, when suddenly the entire scheme was thrown into doubt by growing unrest over the reforms themselves. Not only had the latent dissatisfaction touched off by Hahl's visit spread throughout the native community, but Fritz was also becoming unavoidably embroiled in a major dispute between two Kiti chiefs, Henry Nanpei and Sou Kiti.7

Nanpei's legacy of land, his acquisition of the Protestant leadership, and his business ability had earned him a power base in his section, Ronkiti, which rivalled that even of the Nahnmwarki. In so doing he created enemies in the 'royal' line of chiefs. Among them was the section chief of Enipein in Kiti, Sou Kiti, descendant of a famous Enipein warrior of the same clan, who had conquered the Ant Islands off Kiti in a major district war of the eighteenth century. This connection, along with the titular headship of the goddess Naluk cult gave Sou Kiti significant historical rights to the Ant Islands, which Nanpei also claimed through his father's testament of 1863. Over the years, Nanpei had developed the islands, which were rich in coconuts and marine products, as the major base of his business operations, and he regarded Sou Kiti's claim with hostility.

The issue was revived in 1907-08 with Hahl's announcement of the proposed land changes. Though the Spanish regime in 1896 and Hahl in 1899 had recognised Nanpei's inheritance, his claims, particularly to Ant, strictly contradicted the traditional system of inheritance, and there were those from within Kiti itself who would gladly seek any charge to circumscribe Nanpei's power and wealth. Nanpei was particularly apprehensive of Sou Kiti as a political rival, for Sou Kiti was equally a man of reputation in Kiti. He was resolute, brave, loyal and
clever; a warrior who had taken the Sou Kiti title after aiding Sokehs and Net in the Spanish wars and a leader who could mobilise many people in Kiti in his support. Because of this Henry Nanpei had a vested interest in seeing the German land reforms introduced. His chances of confirming his claims to the Ant Islands and their wealth were far greater if he supported the German plans than if he took recourse to traditional custom in Kiti.

At the same time, a new element complicated the dispute and aggravated Nanpei’s dilemma. Sou Kiti was not a Catholic but he possessed clan relatives in the Catholic districts and was sympathetic to the Capuchin missionaries. They appear to have courted Sou Kiti to provide land in his section for a school and church.8

To Henry Nanpei this represented a serious threat: not only could Sou Kiti count on the Capuchins for active support in any campaign against Nanpei’s estates, but a Catholic intrusion into Kiti would undermine Nanpei’s position and considerable influence as Protestant head. It would also imply a certain triumph for the northern districts who identified themselves with the Catholic cause and treated Sou Kiti as an ally.

The district chiefs of Sokehs and Net were particularly wary of Nanpei. They continually suspected him of deliberately augmenting his landed estates and his prestige so that he would be in a position to demand recognition as the most powerful man in Ponape, strengthening the southern districts against the northern in the process. The German administration repeatedly seemed to these chiefs to be favouring Nanpei by seeking his company and advice and taking him as interpreter or mediator on tours around the Carolines.

Their suspicions hardened when, after Hahl’s visit in September 1907, Nanpei reconstructed a group of his supporters which had grown up in the Spanish period as a direct result of the Boston Mission’s attempts to introduce American ideas of party government and private property. This body of Protestant-trained chiefs in Madolenihmw, Kiti and Uh had acted, not always consciously nor without violence and coercion, as a vanguard of American ideas. On Georg Fritz’s arrival, the group paraded itself as a new democratic movement which had formed ostensibly in response to social reforms. Its plan was to elect three chiefly representatives from each of the five districts, with Nanpei as ‘chairman’, to act as an ‘advisory council’ (puin en lolokon) to the administration in ‘native affairs’.9

On one level the plan might be seen as a progressive initiative to have
power shared in a colonial situation: but it is also necessary to recognise in it the operation of plain political self-interest: Henry Nanpei's primary aim was to capture a position and influence commensurate with his standing as Ponape's foremost land baron and entrepreneur.

Nanpei's uneasiness with traditional custom did not stem simply from the Ant Islands affair; he laid claim to parcels of land all over Kiti and in other districts as well. In fact Nanpei's status in Ponape was exceptional in every way. He was the son of a celebrated Nahmken, and enjoyed the title Ipwin pohn warawar (Born Upon the Ditch), which gave him considerable prestige; he held the Nanpei title in three districts, Kiti, Madolenihmw and Uh; he was head of the Protestant faction in those three districts; and he possessed eminent kin connections in both Madolenihmw and Uh, who enjoyed the ear of their Nahnmwarkis.

For all his high birth, innate ability and the power and influence of his own making, Henry Nanpei remained a prisoner of custom. He had nowhere to go in the title system. Not being of the appropriate clan, he would never progress either to Nahnmwarki or Nahmken. As owner of a great deal of unconventionally-inherited land, he was always, in theory at least, vulnerable to sequestration by the Nahnmwarki of Kiti. It was logical, therefore, that Nanpei should initiate moves to counter and neutralise, if not abolish, the power of the High Chiefs, and secure for himself the maximum freedom of action. His proposed advisory council would achieve just those ends. With his followers from the three southern districts and their influence on the Nahnmwarkis, Nanpei would be in a position to manipulate both the traditional system and the German regime. The northern districts at least were in no doubt that Nanpei was out to destroy the Nahnmwarkis and entrench himself as an ally and protector of the foreign regime. From their vantage point in the north, the Capuchin Fathers agreed; indeed their Superior believed that Nanpei was out to create a new ruling line through which he and his descendants would become in effect hereditary Deputy Governors of Ponape.

By July 1908 there was once more open animosity between the southern and northern districts, with the inexperienced Fritz totally confused by the complexities of the dispute. The isolation of Mesenieng, or Kolonia as it was now called, on the northern shores of Ponape added to Fritz's difficulties, for it effectively prevented him from discovering what exactly was going on in the south.

To counter this, Fritz began in May to construct a road from the
colony to Kiti with paid out-islander labour. It had not gone more than 1000 metres, when, on 17 July, the road workers were thrown into consternation by a warning to stop work on the project or risk being attacked by Ponapean warriors. Five days earlier, people from Pweipwei and Paliapailong in Kiti had raided Sou Kiti's land in Tomworoahlong, destroying coconut and breadfruit plants and damaging some canoes and a house. Fritz was in Kiti investigating this incident when he heard of the furore at the roadworks. On top of this report came one from Nanpei: that the Catholic areas of Sokehs, Net and Awak were furious at the rumours of enforced land changes and new taxes, and were planning an assault not only on the European colony but on friends of the regime like Nanpei as well.

By now totally flustered and believing Ponape on the brink of rebellion, Fritz retreated to Nanpei's base in Ronkiti. At the same time he dispatched a message to the colony to prepare its defences and one to the Capuchin Fathers asking them to use their good offices to pacify the northerners.

The northerners, for their part, were genuinely nonplussed at the whole affair and then highly indignant at what they saw as a plot by Nanpei to discredit them. Two days after the unrest on the road project, the chiefs of Sokehs and Net gathered before Fritz in a demonstration of loyalty and obedience organised by the Catholic mission and Fritz promised that no changes to land tenure would be made until the chiefs approved.

None of these measures really solved the crisis or reduced the tension. When letters continued to arrive in Kolonia warning against a northern attack, Fritz contemplated calling in military support, but decided instead to tackle the island chiefs in a general assembly.

The assembly, on 4 August 1908, revealed how close to the edge of war Ponape had slid since the issue of land reform was raised twelve months before. The delegates from Madolenihmw came bearing rifles, the Uh people arrived in forty-two strongly-manned canoes, and rumour was rife that Nanpei and the Kiti district were waiting to fall on Sokehs. And Fritz did not help his cause by determinedly ignoring the recent incidents on which the northern chiefs in particular expected judgment. Instead, he simply welcomed the chiefs' queries about government policies and accepted the principle of Nanpei's advisory council, to comprise the five High Chiefs, section heads and one or two other representatives from the districts, who would all assist in the tasks of native administration.12
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This proposal was greeted with stony silence, for the northern chiefs saw in it the triumph of a campaign carefully orchestrated by Nanpei. Both mission societies and Fritz, indeed most of Ponape, agreed that Nanpei was behind the series of false alarms in the previous few days. Nanpei appears to have paid the Pweipwei people, a group who could be bought at any price, to damage Sou Kiti’s land in a traditional gesture of displeasure, with the hope that Sou Kiti would retaliate. Nanpei could then denounce his rival as a troublemaker and so destroy his claim to the Ant Islands.

Likewise, the incident at the roadworks in mid-July was Nanpei’s work. His purposes in this case were labyrinthine. First, Nanpei did not want a road into Kiti, for that would compromise his freedom of action and enterprise; the warning of attack on the road workers was meant to be a deterrent. Second, Nanpei implicated the northern districts in the unrest hoping that Fritz would take action against them and the Catholic Mission. In drawing the disconcerted administrator to him in Kiti, it is possible Nanpei hoped to provoke a dispute between the Capuchin Mission and Fritz by convincing the former that Fritz was favouring Nanpei and his Protestant supporters. But, third, Nanpei had a genuine reason for seeking Fritz’s protection, for Nanpei had enemies within Kiti itself who were accusing him of plotting with the administration to introduce taxes and change the land system in his own favour.

Nanpei was under siege from all sides, and through his manoeuvres he was attempting to manipulate circumstances to his advantage: the threat from Sou Kiti would be removed; Catholic pretensions in Kiti would be thwarted; and German support would be won for Nanpei’s claims and his position in Kiti. Fritz’s August assembly seemed to his opponents to confirm his success.

A few days later a new occurrence dashed all Fritz’s hopes of regaining peace and stability by negotiation. It was imperative that Sou Kiti receive compensation for the destruction on his land if he were not to lose face to Nanpei. Traditionally the victim extracted justice by reciprocal force or intimidation. Fearing a major district collision, perhaps civil war, if Sou Kiti took matters into his own hands, the Capuchin Mission pressed the administrator to come to Sou Kiti’s aid. In a secret meeting Fritz promised Sou Kiti that the government would compensate him financially and Sou Kiti expressed himself satisfied.

At this point, when the situation seemed most under control and the ways of the Ponapeans no longer a mystery, the frailty of German understanding was revealed. The mission’s sources suddenly reported
that Sou Kiti was disappointed with Fritz's offer and wanted a written assurance of support from the Government. Fritz baulked at the new demand. From his experience in the Marianas, Fritz had acquired a deep suspicion of Catholic priests, after observing the destruction of the Chamorro civilisation which the militantly-Catholic Spanish regime had wrought over the centuries. Fritz's reading of Ponape's past convinced him that the rivalry between the two Christian confessions lay at the heart of the district disputes, and he was almost frantic that the German regime should not take sides as had the Spanish. Any written agreement given to a Catholic sympathiser would, he was afraid, be used by the Catholic districts to incite the Protestants, and he minced no words in telling the Capuchins so.

There followed an acrimonious correspondence, the mission disclaiming all responsibility for the future behaviour of its adherents and Fritz accusing the Fathers of trying to enlist the administration in a religious war against Protestantism. The estrangement became more complete when two letters, inspired by Nanpei, arrived from the Protestant High Chiefs in the south, begging Fritz to curb the activities of the Catholics and restrict them to the northern districts. By mid-August relations between the Government and the mission were virtually broken off and passions were so inflamed that Fritz felt it necessary to send for a warship and extra police to forestall the outbreak of fighting.

The cruiser SMS Condor sailed in, cleared for action, on 2 September, and 100 Melanesian police-soldiers from New Guinea landed. Fritz had already warned the Ponapeans of their impending visit, and had played up their reputation as 'black cannibals' to salutary effect. When Governor Hahl arrived in mid-September to assess the situation, a sullen peace prevailed, and he grasped immediately that the passive population he had known was now uneasy about German rule. In early October he telegraphed for a second cruiser and requested a further 100 soldiers, with the object of maintaining a garrison on the island until the tension had eased. Some weeks later the gunboat SMS Jaguar arrived from Kiautschou.

Partly with Melanesian labour, partly with local volunteers, Fritz was able to resume work on the road to the south, an urgent project now in view of the unrest, and in six months a twenty-four kilometre road was cut through the island over the mountains into Kiti. A road ten kilometres long now also linked the colony with Sokehs. At the beginning of March 1909, the landing corps of the Condor and a
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detachment of the Melanesians marched ceremoniously from the colony to Kiti district to demonstrate the administration’s new-found capacity for mobility; the journey took six hours! The Germans followed up with displays of firepower and close-quarter fighting by the warships. Arrangements were made to remove to the Marianas over 600 out-islanders stranded on Ponape since a typhoon in 1907 had destroyed their atolls, and who were in danger of being used as mercenaries in the district conflicts.

These measures restored at least some external respect for the power of the German regime, but they also heralded a new phase in its relations with the Islanders. The era of temporisation was over. The administration was now committed to a policy of economic and social development and to a more rigorous control over the political activities of the Ponapean districts. It was clear that for seven years Ponapeans had merely tolerated the Germans. Hundreds of firearms were still being hoarded in various parts of Ponape and there was a general feeling that serious disorder could occur at any time. Fritz felt obliged to institute armed patrols for men working on government projects, and the defence forces of the European colony were kept constantly mobilised in case of trouble. The Germans were approaching the state of siege which had prevailed under the Spanish two decades before.

Fritz and Hahl were of one mind that there was no going back from this position. The honour and reputation of Germany, not to mention that of her local officials, depended on the successful completion of the new social and economic tasks. Both men therefore pressed the Colonial Office for funds to establish a proper peace-keeping force in the Carolines which would ensure that all the reforms were carried through. A naval vessel stationed in Ponape waters, 200 soldiers, and a network of roads were the prerequisites they envisaged. Fritz also asked for an extra fiscal grant of 40 000 marks over two years to offset the cost of constructing the roads with voluntary labour, since the planned public corvée was momentarily out of the question.15

However, the recent disturbances had begun to raise doubts in Berlin about the wisdom of an aggressive forward policy on an island which possessed so little value for the Reich. In the circumstances, the State Secretary for Colonies, Bernhard Dernburg, considered cutting Germany’s losses and withdrawing the government apparatus from Ponape altogether. The real ‘epicentre’ of the Caroline Islands, the focal point for traffic from the smaller islands, was Truk, the archipelago of high islands 616 kilometres to the west of Ponape, with a population of
20,000. Truk was, as Victor Berg had once described it, the 'Paris' of the island sphere, or what Zanzibar was to the negroes of the East African coast. Its islands held half the population of the whole area; it had far better harbours and far richer economic prospects than Ponape, producing five times as much copra; and it was much closer to the more populous western half of Germany's island sphere. It is not clear why the Spaniards chose Ponape as a base in 1887, though its individual size, the difficulty of consistent water supplies in Truk and the fearsome reputation of Truk's inhabitants all played some part in their decision. The question of transferring the seat of German administration there had already been raised as early as 1902, but the same difficulties applied. By 1908, Hahl was using the insecurity of Ponape as the strongest argument against withdrawal. Hahl believed that unless Ponape was pacified there was a real likelihood of disturbances spreading to other islands in the group, like Truk. Germany had no choice: she was trapped on Ponape.

Dernburg accepted Hahl's argument and compromised. Germany would stay. But he refused Fritz's request for special finance, ordered the withdrawal of the extra troops, and in September 1908 instructed Fritz to follow Hahl's original policy and 'hold the ring', leaving development to the Ponapeans themselves. The naval authorities had already advised that a second cruiser was due to be appointed to the Pacific in 1909-10, which should ease the patrolling strain on SMS Condor.

During the next nine months, the island colony stagnated as Germany resumed her defensive posture. In February and March 1909, Fritz was able to obtain the grudging consent of Kiti, Madolenihmw and then Uh to his reform scheme. The money argument was definitely influential in winning over the leading chiefs. In Kiti, for example, with over 200 men of working age, the Nahnmwarki would receive 1000 marks from the tax labour, with a further 700 marks divided among the Nahmken and his prominent colleagues. Since many chiefs were in debt, a guaranteed income from the Germans was an attractive proposition. Nanpei certainly used his influence to campaign for acceptance, an important factor since several chiefs were in debt to him. And the temporary presence of SMS Jaguar, as well as the belief that the districts could withdraw from the agreement if dissatisfied, seemed to have assisted Fritz in gaining the chiefs' assent.

Fritz got as far as beginning the registration of land holdings and organising the first work periods. But though the three southern
districts completed their obligation for 1909, along with Net, which accepted the reforms hesitantly later in the year, the results were not encouraging. Anxious not to provoke the people, or the wrath of the Colonial Office, Fritz let the work proceed in haphazard fashion, with no European supervision and workers coming and going as they liked. As a result the project lacked any serious co-ordination or direction, and after the 1909 series was finished Fritz made hardly any headway.

Most people of the northern district Sokehs were not unsympathetic to the German innovations, but a small body of chiefs put up a stolid resistance and refused to accept them, at least for 1909. The dissidents were led by the leading trader and warrior of the district, Soumadau en Sokehs, section chief of Mwalok where the Sokehs ceremonial house was located.

Soumadau was not of the ruling clan, Soun Kawad, but his father had been a high ranking member of it, which gave Soumadau substantial prestige. Indeed, his prestige, energy and influence so eclipsed that of the weak and vacillating High Chief (Wasai Sokehs), that Soumadau was, in effect, the chief executive of the district. Soumadau was the embodiment of Sokehs' fiercely independent reputation. He had fought on the side of Awak in the war with the Protestants in 1898, and had led famous charges against the Spanish fortress. Sokehs district had long considered itself foremost among the five of the island. It had been the scene of the first uprising against the Spanish in 1887, and, though later forced onto Spain's side in distrust of the south, Sokehs continued to retain a sense of superiority over Europeans, jealously guarding its isolation on the small island which lay to the west of Kolonia. It was Sokehs which resisted Berg's disarmament in 1905; and Soumadau en Sokehs was even supposed to have been behind a plot to kill an acting administrator, Stückhardt, in early 1908.18

Soumadau was intent on safeguarding the integrity of the district against the southerners, and on this account he opposed the German reforms. There is also evidence to suggest that Soumadau was a committed traditionalist, and that in particular he was against the loss of traditional chiefly privileges and the possible destruction of clan control of land. This was despite the fact that he owned a western-style store in Mwalok and wore only European clothes.19

Many of the northern chiefs were suspicious of the German changes because they imagined them to be the inspiration of Henry Nanpei, whom they saw as benefiting from the new land distribution. With these misgivings in Sokehs, Fritz was unable to move them to accept the
German plans for 1909. And he was in no position to force them since not only had he promised that the reforms would be subject to district approval, but also he was now without military support again. However, after the mediation of the Catholic Mission, which assured the Sokehs chiefs that the reforms were 'a government affair' and nothing to do with Nanpei, they were finally persuaded to consider a work period for 1910 and let the survey of their land holdings go ahead.20

All in all, the Ponapeans still retained the initiative in 1909. Fritz’s incipient system of close imperial control seemed to have been dealt a damaging blow, and the success of his innovations was very doubtful. Moreover, he was still tied by his agreement to the principle of a Puin en lolokon, Nanpei’s advisory council.

Suddenly, in October 1909, Georg Fritz was transferred to Yap, to take over the government of the western Carolines. The reasons for the move are not known, though the Capuchin Order in Germany had considerable influence with the Centre Party and it is more than likely that the Order had been putting pressure on Berlin for his removal. There is little doubt that Fritz had come to Ponape predisposed against the Catholic Mission, and had allowed himself to be distracted from the real causes of conflict in Ponape by his involvement in religious sectarianism. Because of this his reputation suffered, and his later polemics against the priests did not help to redeem him.

But Fritz was nonetheless a competent and careful administrator, one who worked to gain a consensus of agreement about his reforms. Without that consensus he would not proceed, partly because he considered the Ponapeans a mercurial and unpacified people, torn by class conflict, inter-district envy and religious strife over which one could not ride roughshod. But Fritz’s instincts were also fundamentally non-aggressive and conciliatory, and he disliked having to resort to military solutions: hence his agreement to implement his ideas not at his own, but at the Ponapeans’ pace. If he did call for armed forces in the end, it was as a moral support rather than as a punitive instrument. Ponapean tradition is relatively tolerant of Georg Fritz. He grew with his job, though not to the extent that he was a match for Henry Nanpei, the island’s eminence grise.

Ponape now received its fifth administrator in ten years. The new man was Carl Boeder, and he came directly from Dar-es-Salam in East Africa, where he had been involved in Germany’s struggle against the Maji Maji uprising of 1905-06.
When he arrived in Ponape on 14 December 1909 a cloud of lethargy hung over the island. The absence of real rapport between Islanders and government, a chronic lack of finance, and continual changes in official personnel had brought most administrative activity to a virtual halt.

Boeder was in a difficult position, inhibited by the negative attitude of the Colonial Office, yet saddled with the reform initiative taken by Hahl and Fritz. His personality was ill-suited to the monotonous life of a small, close-knit island community isolated from the rest of the world; his experience in Africa was certainly no guarantee of success in dealing with Pacific Islanders. A correct and rather distant man, Boeder tended to assume that his personality and authority would ensure peaceful solutions to any problems which might arise between the two cultural communities. To the job of dealing with other races he brought goodwill, but he was authoritarian and demanding, and he carried with him from Africa the conviction that the rod was a legitimate and effective method of instilling 'colonial discipline' into fundamentally primitive peoples; in fact, rumours later circulated in Ponape that he had been in trouble in Africa because of his severity. With these attitudes, and despite the warnings of his predecessor, Boeder set out to re-invigorate the German presence on Ponape.

The new administrator was rather contemptuous of what he conceived as Fritz's weakness in dealing with Sokehs and the other districts over the compulsory labour question, and his first objective was to renegotiate the issue of Sokehs' approval of the reforms. Throughout February 1910 Boeder put pressure on the chiefs of Sokehs, mainly through the irresolute Wasai, to begin their work period at once, arguing that the Ponapeans could only enjoy increasing prosperity if they all worked hard and obeyed the government's orders. At an assembly on 16 March 1910 the reforms were publicly accepted, albeit under duress.21

The compulsory labour periods for all the districts got under way in April with remaking the old roads to Kiti and Sokehs. Of Fritz's road through the island to the south coast barely one and one-half kilometres was still passable, the rest was overgrown and fallen into disrepair. Boeder at least recognised that the road was economically and militarily of little use to the regime since the south could be reached almost as quickly by boat. But he planned to recut it nevertheless, since in his eyes inconsistency was the gravest sin which a regime could commit against its subjects. What Boeder really wanted was a new road around the
coast, touching most of the sections, and then one along the foreshores of Sokehs Island, to give easier access to its interior.

The Ponapeans suddenly found themselves subjected to a new and distasteful regimen. For a start, their work was closely supervised by a European, Otto Hollborn, a former employee of the Jaluit Gesellschaft who had recently joined the administration. Sokehs in particular resented this: perhaps it awakened memories of the Spanish period. To quieten them, Boeder appointed Soumadau en Sokehs as a second overseer, to work in conjunction with Hollborn, at the rate of two marks a day. The results were only temporary. At the end of April 1910 the German administration demanded that Sokehs work a second period of fifteen days in 1910 to make up for the one that they had refused to perform under Fritz the year before. Despite the bitter protests of Soumadau, Wasai Sokehs and the Nahken, Boeder and Hollborn insisted that the double obligation was all part of the package to which the Sokehs chiefs had agreed in February.22

The whole of Ponape was now greatly apprehensive about Boeder and the methods he used. Chiefs everywhere began to resent the fact, made clear to them for the first time, that the implementation of the new order meant that they must forfeit tribute from the people permanently. Tributary labour and the first fruits from tenants' harvests were the only sources of income for some chiefs, and consequently the money to be divided among the leading few chiefs after the work periods were over was small compensation for the majority. Boeder began to encounter resistance to the scheme, not only from the chiefs but from the common people also, who supported the chiefs' appeal to halve the amount of compensation and allow tribute to go on being paid. Boeder refused, and in addition he made it clear that voluntary acceptance of the reforms did not mean that the Islanders could withdraw at will.23 Boeder's vision of a quickly-constructed network of roads for Ponape began to fade as people refused to work outside their districts and the organisation of work faltered in consequence.

The most persistent resistance came from Sokehs, which took great offence at the exaction of a second labour period. Boeder had ignored the fact that his predecessor, Fritz, had waived the fulfilment of the 1909 obligation for Sokehs, and he seemed deliberately to be provoking the district by ordering that this work period be used to build the projected road around the island, thereby compelling the people to destroy their coveted isolation and expose Sokehs to unwanted influences from the mainland. Throughout May protests and complaints about the ad-
administration's injustice continued to be made by Soumadau and Wasai Sokehs, and the smouldering unrest was manifest on the roadworks, where Sokehs labourers carried long knives and Hollborn had difficulty in extracting obedience. The Sokehs people, led by Soumadau, completed their first fifteen days ill-humouredly and demanded a month's interval to attend to their crops before beginning the second period. The administration could only get voluntary day-labourers to maintain the works when Soumadau's wage was raised to four marks a day. By the end of May there was a definite groundswell of opinion against Boeder and his subordinates.

Boeder was aware that something was afoot in Sokehs but discounted its importance, feeling secure enough to embark on an official tour of the Carolines at the end of May with half of the fifty Melanesian soldiers attached to the colony. No sooner had he left than the Superior of the Capuchin Mission hastened to Boeder's young deputy, the Secretary Brauckmann, with news that the Net people had warned of a plot by Soumadau to attack the colony on 31 May; simultaneously the people of Awak arrived to defend the colony. In the days that followed, Ponapeans began lurking around the perimeter of Kolonia or appearing in the settlement with their long knives, while Uh people, fearful of a revolt, came to remove their relatives from the government hospital.

Brauckmann initially gave little credence to the priests' report: relations between administration and mission had never fully recovered since the collision over the Sou Kiti affair. However Brauckmann was also inexperienced at deputising as chief official and seems to have willed any plots to be figments of the imagination. When he visited Sokehs and found nothing, he reported to the priests with some relief that he felt the matter was all 'idle talk'. Those found in the colony with knives he arrested and then released immediately, though evidence he had received since his visit to Sokehs confirmed the likelihood of a conspiracy. There had, indeed, been a conspiracy, and it had failed only because Wasai Sokehs and the Nahnken were hesitant, and the Net people, traditional allies, refused to help.

Boeder's return on 24 June changed nothing. He, too, refused to take the matter seriously, declaring complacently that the unrest was simply 'the empty talk and bragging of some hotspurs' who were discontented with roadwork. Rather than act against the 'hotspurs' in Sokehs, Boeder thought it 'politically more astute' to threaten them with naval intervention, knowing that a visit by the East Asian Cruiser Squadron was already scheduled for early July. The squadron arrived promptly
on 2 July, but, contrary to the expectations of Boeder's staff and the rest of the European community, the administrator made no effort to punish those responsible for the growing agitation. Instead Boeder invoked the 'moral impression' which the collection of vessels was supposed to have, encouraging the Ponapeans to visit the ships and arranging for parades by the 400 members of the squadron's landing corps. That the mere external display of size and power was already an outdated sanction in the conditions of Ponape, Boeder does not seem to have considered, nor that his self-conceived tolerance might be taken as proof of weakness. Soumadau, for one, compared the Germans unfavourably with the Spanish who, though fearful, proved their bravery by fighting, while the Germans always talked about their soldiers, their ships, their glorious Kaiser, but did nothing. Nevertheless, at the end of the banquets, the manoeuvres and the parades, Boeder once more felt master of the situation. He believed there was nothing to fear from the 'natives' in the foreseeable future, and to prove his point he decided not to go ahead with reinforcing the island's police troop as he had been planning.

Unfortunately for Boeder's optimism, the difficulties with Sokehs began all over again when the district was told it must now complete its second work period. Soumadau and the leading chiefs kept up their complaints and queries, while the road labourers continued to disobey Hollborn. In August, at a time when there was not a ship of any kind in Ponape and the island was effectively cut off from the outside world, the Wasai Sokehs demanded from Boeder an increase in the day wage of the road labourers. Boeder refused, threatened the High Chief with deportation and threw him bodily out of his office, an action which was provocative in the extreme.

Worse was to come. After July 1910 Boeder introduced corporal punishment as a punitive sanction against anyone found guilty of lying, insubordination or 'shameless behaviour' towards whites. Despite the fact that, from this point on, clear warnings abounded that beatings would cause the Islanders to rise up against the Germans, Boeder made no concessions to indigenous sensibilities. He began to acquire a reputation for cruelty and contempt. A special convict uniform was introduced, and prisoners now had their heads shaved, a gross and calculating insult to the Ponapeans. A tradition exists that Boeder would use a drawn revolver to interrogate Islanders during a trial, occasionally shooting it off in their faces to frighten them; and that if
he stumbled on a stone or a coconut while on an expedition he would fly into a rage and threaten to beat his guides and bearers.  

Then, in September, Boeder had the first thrashing administered, to Eliu Santos of Kiti, who lied to the authorities about a theft of money from Henry Nanpei. The ethnologist, Paul Hambruch, at that time travelling round Ponape, reported to Boeder that a secret society was now mobilising in all districts, with Soumadau as its leader, to plan the overthrow of white rule.  

Boeder seemed oblivious of any danger, and disregarded persistent warnings by the Catholic Mission that Soumadau was the main troublemaker and should be deported. The cruiser SMS Cormoran came and went in September without any action being taken.

Ponapeans say that Boeder counted Soumadau as a friend, and, if so, it is more than likely that Boeder felt he could control the Sokehs chief; after all, he had given him a well-paid job on the roadworks. But Boeder betrayed no understanding of the difficult position in which Soumadau now found himself. Soumadau en Sokehs was losing face. As overseer and virtual Chief of the district, he was supposed to protect Sokehs. But as Boeder's abuses mounted and he paid no heed to protests, Soumadau's collaboration began to look shabby. This was not improved by the fact that he was getting paid handsomely for his supervision. To allow the fiction of his co-operation with the Germans to continue would only destroy Soumadau's credibility with Sokehs: he would lose his prestige, his influence, his ability to move Sokehs at all. Pressure was mounting for Soumadau to demonstrate his leadership more forcefully.

The pressure finally became intolerable on 17 October 1910. On that day, one of the Sokehs labourers, Lahdeleng, was sent by Hollborn to the administrator with a piece of paper alleging insubordination; Boeder had no hesitation in ordering ten strokes with a wire-lined rubber hose. The beating was administered by a Melanesian, and Lahdeleng was helped back to Sokehs, barely able to walk. On the island that night an emotional meeting took place, at which the marks of the beating were exhibited to all. Soumadau now had no choice but to prove he was a warrior chief, that he would not recoil in the face of so serious a challenge. He called for war to make away with the Germans as Sokehs had done with the Spaniards. There was some resistance from a party led by the Nahnken, who advocated compromise and co-operation with the regime. But the party of Soumadau and his brother, Lepen Ririn, had great influence over Wasai Sokehs, and it proved the stronger.  

Lahdeleng, after all, was a member of the Soun
Kawad clan, the Wasai's own, and the imperative of retaliation was too strong to deny. Boeder had treated Lahdeleng like an animal in a culture where dignity and strength, courage and patience were the touchstones of manhood.

The entire district was caught up by the desire for vengeance, not simply in the passion of the moment, but because of regional loyalties and a peculiarly Ponapean feeling that fate dictated the destruction of Sokehs. There were no illusions about who would win in a head-on confrontation with the Germans. About a month before Lahdeleng's beating, a corner of Pan Kadara, the most sacred location in the stone city of Nan Madol, had crumbled. The corners of Pan Kadara were revered on Ponape as symbols of the various districts, and if any were to crumble it signified the impending destruction of that area. In this case it had been the Sokehs corner. Thus the Sokehs people knew and accepted that Sokehs must die, but, if so, they desired to die fighting, as men. Their decision was probably strengthened by the belief that they could expect assistance from other districts because of cross-district clan relationships; Soumadau's own clan, Dipwenpahnmei, was the ruling clan of Madolenihmw and Net was ruled by Soun Kawad.

Early the next morning when Hollborn and the recently-arrived road engineer, Häfner, came to Denpei on Sokehs to begin work, they found Soumadau and his followers in war garb, their bodies oiled, wearing new grass skirts and carrying knives and rifles. The warriors began to converge on the two men, who immediately took refuge in the nearby Catholic Mission. While the angry Sokehs people surrounded the building shouting for Hollborn's blood, messengers were dispatched to the colony to raise the alarm. The first party was turned back and it was not until three o'clock in the afternoon that three mission helpers were able to get through. Boeder immediately rowed over to Sokehs with Brauckmann and five Mortlock Islanders. Thinking perhaps that a military display would only further provoke the Sokehs, or that they would immediately recognise his authority and submit to talking, Boeder brusquely refused his police master's plea that a troop of Melanesian police be allowed to accompany him.

Boeder arrived at Denpei about four o'clock, where he was met by Hollborn, Häfner and the mission Fathers who had managed to slip out of the house. They were amazed that he was without military escort and tried to persuade him of the danger. Waving them away, Boeder went south towards Mwalok to confront Wasai Sokehs. He had gone only seventy yards when Lepen Ririn, Soumadau's brother, fell in beside
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him. Suddenly Lepen Ririn drew a gun and shot the administrator in the stomach. Mortally wounded, Boeder is reported to have appealed to Soumadau, who stood now above him: 'Ponape is good, Soumadau. Ponape is good', he said. Soumadau then replied, 'Ponape is good', and is alleged to have shot Boeder in the head.33

A frenzied crowd now rushed on the other whites. Brauckmann, Hollborn and Hafner were hacked down with knives or shot as they attempted to escape in Boeder's boat, and four of the five Mortlock Islanders were also killed. Only the two priests, Fathers Gebhardt and Venantius, managed to escape when they took refuge in the church and a group of loyal Sokehs women shielded them from attack with their bodies. After the killings, Boeder's body was mutilated by the people in a Ponapean gesture of contempt for a hated enemy. His hand was cut off and the body was thrown into the sea along with those of the others.

The Sokehs insurrection should have been the least likely such occurrence in any of Germany's Pacific territories. From the beginning, the Berlin authorities had insisted on a policy which would not provoke the Islanders, and their feelings on the subject were clearly expressed in the censure of Berg in 1902. The great reform scheme itself had not precipitated violence even though it represented a radical structural change in Ponapean society, by removing land possession from direct dependence on the hierarchy of power, and by implicitly subverting traditional authority. The changes initially were unpopular in all districts, though they were accepted in the end by the southerners. Even the resistance of the Sokehs leaders had been blunted by the time of Fritz's departure, and they had conceded that the changes might be instituted by negotiation at a later date. But then came Boeder and his methods. Initially Sokehs made the best of it, but Boeder's brutality and his injustice in foisting upon them a second work period in the same year aroused resentment beyond toleration. Not the reforms themselves, but the timing and manner of their enforcement brought about ultimate violence.

In the end, the uprising shows that, despite the dictates of official policy, the initiative for handling the colonised Ponapeans lay squarely with the individual officer in Ponape, in the same way that it did in Samoa and New Guinea. In Ponape, Boeder incorporated all the functions of colonial rule: legislative, executive and judicial. Measures like disarmament and the reforms of 1907-08 originated in the colony, not in Berlin. Most importantly, Boeder had been able to act for nine
months virtually in contravention of guidelines laid down by Berlin, Hahl and Fritz.

There is no doubt he brought Sokehs' revenge upon himself. Boeder was an aggressive and ambitious administrator, yet he lacked the creative touch of a Hahl, or a Solf in Samoa; he had quickened the tempo of change without appreciating the consequences of the resulting unrest; he had been highly inconsistent in his behaviour towards the Ponapeans. In refusing to make concessions to a colonised people, in denigrating their sense of self-respect, and in dishonouring his predecessor's agreement, Boeder overstepped the bounds of moderation. That he could do so without censure from Berlin demonstrates that, in the final analysis, Ponape was too far from New Guinea, let alone Europe, for the actions of its executives to be supervised in detail.

For all the provocation, the insurrection had been almost spontaneous in execution, and the main objects of their hatred removed, the passions of the Sokehs people quickly subsided. This spontaneity, along with the feeling that the crimes against the district had been expiated, probably saved the colony. Max Girschner, the local doctor, was the most senior German official remaining, and he set out by boat for Sokehs as soon as the first confused reports reached him. Halfway there, he encountered the two priests who had been allowed finally to depart in a canoe. They advised him that the people were in 'a raging fury' and that there was nothing he could do, so Girschner returned to the colony to organise its defences.\textsuperscript{34} No attempt was made by the rebels to shoot the doctor in his boat, though it would have been an easy matter, and would have left the colony at their mercy.

The Europeans were in a critical plight. There were less than fifty of them protected by another fifty police-soldiers, in a settlement with a two-kilometre perimeter and no walls. The rebels numbered at least 250 and it was soon evident that they were well armed. Some ninety rifles and new ammunition appeared from nowhere, as well as an old cannon and a case of dynamite stolen from the roadworks. Furthermore, the other districts on the island were as yet an unknown quantity, and no ship was scheduled to arrive in Ponape for at least six weeks.

The future of the little colony was firmly in the hands of Max Girschner, a man, ironically, whom Hahl had once judged as too 'soft, irresolute and vague' to handle the business of administration.\textsuperscript{35} But Girschner had lived on Ponape for ten years and in that time he had earned the respect and affection of the inhabitants by his sympathetic attitude and his attention to their medical care. In the circumstances,
Girschner chose the only course he saw open to him: he gambled that the remaining districts were not party to the revolt and would respond to his call for assistance. Within twenty-four hours, some hundreds of warriors from Madolenihmw and Uh, as well as Net and Awak, allies of Sokehs, were encamped in and around Kolonia. Stone walls were built, barbed wire erected, the ground cleared, and sentries posted; Girschner even distributed 100 rifles to sentry parties. His measures did not meet with the unanimous approval of the remaining Europeans, some of whom warned that the ‘loyalists’ would take the earliest possible opportunity to make common cause against the whites.

It is difficult to penetrate to the truth of where most Ponapeans stood. There was no general support for the Sokehs in the aftermath of their act, not even from Soun Kawad members; only a few clan members from Kiti and one from Madolenihmw joined the rebels. That traditional friends like Net and Awak hastened to the side of the Europeans was the result of fear: they understood, as indeed did the Sokehs themselves, the consequences of a collision with the Germans; and the influence of the Catholic Mission was also important in keeping the northern districts loyal to the Germans. As for the south, Girschner’s call capitalised on the enmity which was now fixed between Sokehs and the southern districts, and, by offering an opportunity to take up arms against Sokehs, Girschner probably localised the revolt to the one district, at least for the time being.

But there were other, less visible signs that the other districts respected Sokehs for the action it had taken in defence of Ponapean virtues. Kiti, for instance, waited three days before sending any warriors to guard the colony, and it is the inscrutable Henry Nanpei who was credited with holding them back. Nanpei is also widely regarded as having clandestinely supported the rebels with food and equipment from his stores throughout the ensuing campaign. Those guarding the colony made no attempt to counter-attack or even challenge the Sokehs. Indeed, the European camp was full of rumours that the ‘loyalists’ were actually succouring the rebels with food and weapons.

In the days and weeks that followed the uprising, the rebels themselves made no concerted assault on Kolonia, but confined themselves to nocturnal sniping and foraging raids. They even allowed a party of out-islander labourers and their Spanish overseer who were based on the Sokehs roadworks to return to the colony unscathed, and Soumadau made only a half-hearted demand for the surrender of the colony’s weapons. These were all indications that the heat of the insurrection had
been fanned and maintained by a relative few in Sokehs, and that it was more an explosion of frustration than a wholehearted rejection of foreign hegemony.

But the conviction of their inexorable destiny was too strong to permit the Sokehs to capitulate there and then. In the only attempt made by any of the Germans to talk with the rebels, Girschner on his own initiative sent a letter enjoining them to disarm, and pleading with those who had not participated in the murder to surrender. The reply was gracious but resigned: ‘Thank you for your goodness, but we cannot come. We fear that we have committed too great a sin’.38 Wasai Sokehs wrote explaining why they had been forced to act. Prison or exile they may have tolerated, but they would rather die than let themselves be treated ‘like pigs’.39 The Sokehs proceeded to dig themselves in on the inaccessible twin peaks of the island. They cleared a line of fire, erected fortifications, and waited for the invasion they knew must come.

They had to wait a long time. Not until the end of November, six weeks after Boeder’s murder, did the post vessel, Germania, touch at Ponape and carry the news to New Guinea. It was a further month before Berlin heard. Meanwhile, Deputy Governor Oswald, who was administering New Guinea in Hahl’s absence, sent 172 Melanesian police to relieve the beleagured colony. He also requested of Berlin a fleet of cruisers from the East Asian Squadron, and a new district administrator to take Boeder’s place and to direct operations.

Berlin granted these requests immediately. Following the experience of the Spanish, the German authorities had assumed from the beginning that only a large-scale military operation would have any hope of restoring European authority if the Ponapeans were to rise again. They not only expected the most bitter resistance from the Sokehs people, but also concluded that any attempt to appease or accommodate them would simply add fuel to the fire. This campaign was to be more than a punitive expedition: it was an opportunity to pacify Ponape completely, and to establish once and for all Germany’s hold over all of Micronesia. It was therefore agreed that the leaders of the Sokehs would be executed when caught, and the entire district banished from the Carolines.40

By 10 January 1911 the cruisers Emden, Nürnberg, Leipzig and Cormoran, together with SMS Planet from New Guinea and the armed schooner Orion, were all anchored in Ponape’s north-western harbour of Langar, with over 300 inexperienced but enthusiastic German marines on board. In the following days no attempt was made to
negotiate with the rebels. Instead, the ships proceeded to shell the heights of Sokehs, while Captain Vollerthun of SMS *Emden* worked out the plan of operations with the newly-arrived administrator, Dr Heinrich Kersting.

On 13 January, the marines made a completely unopposed landing on the northern foreshores of Sokehs Island, and prepared themselves for a struggle of several days to drive the Sokehs from the fortified heights. Then, on the same afternoon, Kersting arrived in the front lines and prevailed upon the senior officer to make an immediate attack on the enemy’s main position, the Apalberg, arguing that surprise was the best way to overcome the stolid resistance of the Islanders. Before the main contingent of troops had been landed, and with the help of the Melanesian police who had to be prodded upwards step by step, the Apalberg was stormed and taken under heavy fire. The other peak of the island was captured soon after.41

The speed with which this initial victory was achieved surprised the Germans, but they were no less convinced about the difficulty of their task. Only two of the Sokehs defenders had been killed in the encounter and none were captured. More urgently, if the rebels managed to reach the mainland, they would be in a position to wage an almost endless jungle war with the German troops.

To forestall this possibility, a land and sea blockade of the little island had been set up at the beginning, consisting of the police troops, half the marines and the ships *Nürnberg* and *Planet*. This was all to no avail, for in the week following the conquest of the peaks, Soumadau and most of his band slipped through the cordon at night. Search parties combed the island for a week, seeking out probable hiding places. They caught thirty men and eighty-four women and children, but none had played a significant role in the revolt.42

Meanwhile the administration, under Kersting, proceeded to organise logistical support for the operations. Kersting’s first task was to ensure that the unrebellious districts remained firmly in his control and were given no opportunity to consider throwing in their lot with Sokehs. If the stories of their collusion with the rebels while guarding the colony are true, then this was at least a possibility. The conduct of the ‘loyalists’ during that time had certainly not been without blemish. Several Islanders were guilty of robberies and pillage, and quarrels had broken out between the districts. When the first Melanesian reinforcements arrived and the Ponapeans were sent back to their farmsteads, the European community had heaved a collective sigh of relief.
By mid-January, the remaining districts were properly impressed by the size and earnestness of the German response. Kersting was anxious to drive home the impression that Germany would no longer be trifled with. He therefore warned the district chiefs that their only hope of preventing the war from ravaging their farms and possessions lay in co-operating with the government. They were to supply food for the troops, and guides and interpreters for the operations; they were to report rebel movements and to deliver any rebels they caught to the government. In this way Kersting managed to set up, if by fear, a workable intelligence service on which the manoeuvres of the German troops were based. Near the colony, he also constructed camps where captured Sokehs could be detained, and arranged medical and general welfare services for them through the missions. For the later stages of the campaign, Kersting, largely on his own initiative, formulated a strategy whereby small detachments of troops would be stationed in various parts of Ponape and billeted on the ‘loyalists’, to search for and constantly harass the enemy. Kersting’s experience in African bush wars in Togo had taught him that the only way to success in such wars was to take guerrilla tactics to his opponents.

In the last two weeks of January, the sorties on Sokehs Island were extended to the mainland, and the Germans occupied the sub-district Palikir, which had pledged its support to Sokehs. By 25 January there were 250 Sokehs men, women and children in German hands, among them five men directly involved in Boeder’s murder. On 26 January this group of prisoners was transported to Yap. Palikir and its neighbour Tomara were then shelled by the waiting cruisers and the farms razed so as to deny the enemy any secure base for its activities.

Suddenly, on 25 January, the Superior of the Capuchin Mission received information that Soumadau and his remaining followers had entrenched themselves in the interior at Nankiop, where an old Spanish fortress was built on the side of a cliff. Nankiop was the symbolic centre of the Soun Kawad clan: its legendary place of origin. It was also an exceptionally difficult position to attack, with a tower and stone walls from which to fire, a high cliff at its back, and protected by almost sheer drops on three sides. It seemed that the Sokehs were making ready for a final, organised stand.

Next day, two companies of marines and Melanesians were sent to make a frontal assault on the fortress, while the landing corps of SMS Emden worked its way round by a secret path to attack the rebels on their most unexpected flank. ‘Loyalists’ sympathetic to Sokehs were
able here to lend their assistance by leading the *Emden* corps along the most difficult and circuitous routes, so that it was three hours late when it arrived at Nankiop. By that time, the main force had suffered heavily from accurate Ponapean fire. At 5 p.m., as darkness was falling, the fortress was finally stormed, but, at the decisive moment, Soumadau and his men retreated up the cliff behind them, leaving three of the German forces dead and eight wounded, and without a single casualty themselves.\(^4^4\) It was a pyrrhic victory, which worried Kersting and Vollerthun: if Soumadau were to repeat these tactics at every encounter, he could take a heavy toll of German life and remain virtually untouched. They did not yet know that the Nankiop encounter had virtually demoralised the Sokehs, and that their cohesiveness as a fighting force had been destroyed. From now on, the Sokehs were split into small groups which wandered aimlessly about seeking food and shelter, and trying desperately to avoid the German troops.

Kersting’s harassment strategy had been put into operation by this time, and detachments of sixty men each were placed in Kiti, Tomara, Palikir and Nankiop. In addition, Kersting had the Ponapeans harvest all crops in the areas of fighting so as to starve the rebels gradually into submission. These procedures hastened the dissolution of the smaller and smaller bands of Sokehs, and, as hunger, sickness and the denial of solace from the other districts took their effect, surrenders became more frequent. By 8 February, another 137 persons, including Wasai Sokehs, had been delivered to the administration, leaving a core of about thirty or forty young and committed supporters of Soumadau.\(^4^5\)

The group was reduced more and more to a nomadic existence as the German detachments carried out regular patrols. The ease with which the rebels had eluded the combined forces of Germany since the storming of Sokehs was proof that Soumadau possessed the potential to fight a long and effective guerrilla war, but it soon became evident that most of his followers lacked the tenacity and endurance, let alone the commitment, to suffer the constant hardships such a life involved. Some threw themselves upon the mercy of the Germans, which Kersting felt was due to the debilitating effects on ‘Ponapean character’ of prolonged contact with Western civilisation.\(^4^6\) But he completely missed the point, for the hearts of the Sokehs were just not in the struggle. From the start they had accepted their lot: to be dispersed and destroyed by the sheer weight of Germany’s might. It only remained to hasten the result.

The Germans never expected Soumadau and his close accomplices
to surrender, since the rebels knew they could expect no mercy. Consequently, the administration was genuinely surprised when Soumadau and five of the ringleaders succumbed to their fate on 13 February 1911, and gave themselves up to the chief Nos en Net; the rest followed suit within a few days. By 22 February the last of the Sokehs warriors was in German hands.

The denouement was swift. A court-martial was convened on 23 February, the day after military operations were declared at an end. Representatives from the two missions and the trading community joined with Kersting, Girschner and a naval officer to try summarily those accused of the murder of Boeder and his companions. Though each of the leading Sokehs figures was given a full opportunity to defend himself, the tribunal was interested less in the justice of the result, which was already a foregone conclusion as far as the judges were concerned, than in the necessity to make an example which would deter malcontents in the future. The bulk of the evidence revealed that resentment of Boeder's actions had run deep and wide, and there were no regrets that he was dead. It also became clear that there had been a lingering, almost desperate belief that the Germans might be driven out as had been the Spaniards. After all, until Boeder's arrival, none of the districts had really experienced the strong hand of Germany. Deputy Governor Oswald had concluded when he first heard of the uprising:

In the final analysis they didn't fear us and didn't believe we were earnest in our threats ... We suffered from the mistakes of the Spanish. Perhaps if we had begun energetically this would have been avoided.

But the court-martial tribunal was not interested in why the revolt occurred, only that it had and must therefore be punished. The trial lasted only a day and the court agreed that seventeen Sokehs should be executed, several others sent to prison with hard labour at the Angaur phosphate works, and the remainder of the district banished en masse to the Palau group. Ironically, the only call for clemency towards those to be executed came from the navy's representative. Though Kersting himself acknowledged that Sokehs had suffered under Boeder, his concern for 'consistency' of punishment, together with the 'deterrence' arguments of the missionaries and traders easily won the day.

The very next day, 24 February, fifteen of the condemned prisoners, handcuffed together and escorted by Melanesian police, were marched down to Kumunlai, an old cemetery and cult place outside the colony.
**Plate XII**  
*Right: To Bobo (on left)*  
(from the Fellmann Collection, Mitchell Library)

**Plate XIII**  
*Below: A New Ireland war party*  
Plate XIV  Above: A leader of the Baining massacre, 1904, possibly the adoptive father of To Marias (from the United Church Archives, UPNG)

Plate XV  Below: The execution of one of the leaders of the Baining massacre, 1904 (from the United Church Archives, UPNG)
There they were lined up against a makeshift fence strung between coconut trees and tied with their arms outstretched, 'as Christ crucified'. The Melanesian soldiers (for the tribunal had decided that German soldiers should not be subjected to this undignified ritual) ranged themselves in two lines, one standing, one kneeling. Soumadau was refused permission to speak to the expectant crowd, but in a quiet voice he greeted the people and urged them not to follow the Sokehs example. Before he could finish, the first volley of shots rang out; the soldiers kept firing until all were dead. Then the bodies were thrown into a common grave and the crowd, now hushed, was told to return to their districts.

With the ending of the Sokehs uprising, Germany’s occupation of Ponape had a little over three years to run. It was a period of remarkable tranquillity on the part of the Ponapeans, considering all that had gone before. The key to their docility lay in the retribution suffered by Sokehs; in that sense German policy had succeeded. Not just the execution (which shocked many Ponapeans), but the size and capacity of Germany’s response was a revelation to most people, accustomed to the odd biennial visit of a light German cruiser.

But it was the quantity, rather than the quality, of the amphibious operation that had cowed the Ponapeans. The navy does not deserve the credit claimed by its Public Relations Bureau for the rapid completion of the campaign. Sokehs Island had been stormed by a few officers and the Melanesian police before the main body of German troops had even landed, and the rebels had little difficulty in slipping through the navy’s cordon and escaping to the mainland. For over a month, the rebels successfully eluded the troops, who seemed to have a singular capacity for getting lost in the jungle. Such was their awkwardness, and their profligate use of ammunition, that the German navy was the butt of many jokes among ‘loyal’ Ponapeans during the operations. Kersting was more justified in claiming that the work of the administration, in organising support facilities and mobilising the districts, had put the greatest pressure on Sokehs.

Kersting was in a position to capitalise on the Ponapeans’ subdued temper. Heinrich Kersting took his job as administrator of the eastern Carolines very seriously. Indeed he had, perhaps, an exaggerated view of his role in the government of empire, for he foresaw himself as ‘Chief of the Island Sphere’, commanding a sea-borne administration which would trip from island to island dispensing edicts and advice. Nevertheless, Kersting showed every sign of respecting the sensibilities of the
island people, and he combined an authoritative presence with sympathy for the plight of Pacific Islanders under German rule.

He wasted no time in reasserting the priorities set in 1907, in a way which would excite least distrust and resistance. Time was important to Kersting: if the implementation of his predecessors' reforms were allowed to drag on, there was the danger of their objectives being diverted. He therefore discarded the plan to survey all land holdings on Ponape prior to issuing certificates of freehold tenure. Instead 'commissions' of Ponapeans themselves were charged with the task of setting off the limits of each farmstead, erecting boundary markers and making maps of each district. The commissions of seven, several to a district, consisted of section chiefs, title holders and the more important district representatives. Most of their work had been completed by September 1911. It was an original method of evading the conflict which would have inevitably accompanied a European survey of Ponape, a survey which it was estimated could have taken twenty years.\(^5^1\)

Hand in hand with the reform of land tenure went the regulation of inheritance rights. The Germans did not like the traditional system of matrilineal inheritance, whereby land fairly automatically went to the descendants of the mother's brother after the death of a tenant, or was divided up among several matrilineal descendants. The new land deeds provided that land should go to the oldest male heir of the tenant, and all landless male, as well as female, relatives were expected to farm it for the profit of the entire family. In this way the government hoped to eliminate the multiplication of small, uneconomic, scattered pieces of land. Each family was also required to plant 100 coconuts on its farmstead before the new land deed was issued.\(^5^2\)

All these measures were intended to give individual Ponapeans a greater stake in their own productivity and the incentive to improve it. To guarantee that, Kersting now turned his attention to the demands which High Chiefs could traditionally make on the time and resources of their commoner tenants. Instead of the customary twenty-two feasts, and the offerings of first fruits and special canoes, which a section was expected to provide each year to the Nahnmwarki and Nahnken, the land deeds stipulated that only one feast, a Feast of Honour, need be given by a section to its Nahnmwarki; all further feasts were non-obligatory. Moreover, a High Chief could call on a commoner to provide only one day's work twice a year. The High Chief was required now to work his own farm, though he was still paid a 'salary' from the proceeds of the annual work periods, which never faltered under
Kersting refused to abolish this annuity, arguing that it was an absolute precondition for continuing good relations between government and people.\textsuperscript{53}  

It was not Kersting’s intention to emasculate the High Chieftainship or eradicate its authority completely. On the contrary, he was anxious to preserve the bases of social control and intra-district stability. Kersting emphasised the importance of the Nahnmwarkis by promulgating regulations in 1911 which gave the chiefs power to try and to sentence districts people guilty of a range of offences, from disrespect to the High Ones to stealing and bodily harm.\textsuperscript{54} Thus he was implementing the scheme Fritz had projected in 1908: to draw the Nahnmwarkis out of their isolation into the administrative system and delineate their duties exactly. The Nahnmwarki was transformed into a \textit{Kaiserliche Richter} (Imperial Judge), but a petty Richter, along the lines of the \textit{pulenu' u} in Samoa.

In emphasising the importance of the Nahnmwarkis, Kersting protected the Ponapean social system to some extent. Islanders were made aware that their new autonomy and economic freedom did not eliminate the duty of submission to customary social sanctions, or to lawful demands from their High Chief. And, indeed, patterns of social behaviour continued much as they had in the past, despite German attempts to alleviate the more demanding aspects. People kept offering first fruits and special gifts to the Nahnmwarkis, while feasting on a grand scale remained an integral part of district relationships and the chiefly prestige competition.

It would be erroneous to regard this division of roles between the Germans and the High Chiefs as a new balance of power in Ponape. The island, its people, their authority structures remained very firmly in German hands after 1910. There was no talk now of an advisory council. Henry Nanpei’s designs had been suspect from the beginning. The mass of the Ponapeans was not behind such an innovation and Nanpei probably recognised, as did Hahl and Fritz, that in an open break with the Nahnmwarkis the people would follow them, not Nanpei. Any chance of the council’s gaining German approval was in any case lost in the confusion of the revolt and its aftermath.

However, Nanpei did not suffer from the abandonment of his creation, nor from the revolt, though his attitude to that event was ambivalent, to say the least. With the German triumph and Kersting’s program, Nanpei finally gained indisputable title to the Ant Islands and his various estates in Kiti. Ponapeans claim that he did even better from
the new system, for he persuaded several tenants on his lands to claim only modest portions as their freehold, arguing that the Germans were going to tax people according to the area of their land. Nanpei is then alleged to have claimed for his own whatever private land was left.

The future now lay with Henry Nanpei, whether Germany ruled or not. In the final years before war broke out, he increased his standing with the Germans, sending his sons to be educated in Germany, and visiting the headquarters of the Liebenzeller Mission himself, where he was fêted as 'Defender of the Faith' against the Ultramontanism of the Capuchin Mission. Since the removal of Sokehs, the old power struggle between north and south more and more took the form of a personal confrontation between the Catholic Mission and Henry Nanpei. Nanpei regarded the priests as the one remaining danger to his position. With his advisory council lost and Germany well in control of district relations, Nanpei's access to power as leader of the Protestant faction was considerably more exposed to any renewed campaign to extend Catholic influence. Catholicism he regarded as a particularly subversive political force because of the hold which traditionally it asserted over adherents, especially through the chiefs.

After the exile of the Sokehs district, the Capuchin Fathers did cast about for areas in which they might carry on their mission to spread the Gospel. The rebellion they regarded as the perfect argument against continued confessional demarcation of the island. To them it was obvious proof of their oft-repeated arguments that religion was not the cause of Ponape's major disturbances and therefore they could envisage no objections to peaceful and indiscriminate proselytism after 1910.55

Nanpei saw things in a different light, and he opposed vigorously their intensified expansion campaign. His attacks on the mission were carried into the Protestant press during his second visit to Germany in 1912, and in late 1913 he even brought a libel action against the priests. In all this, Nanpei managed to enlist the sympathy of Heinrich Kersting, who regarded the chief as a Ponapean of unusual enterprise and sophistication, and whose own relations with the Catholic mission were growing less and less cordial.

Kersting would not argue the moral rights and wrongs of divided spheres of influence when, from his secular point of view, the stability of the island depended upon maintaining them. Kersting knew that the Protestant chiefs in the south were worried for their continuing influence, especially in the wake of the traumatic social changes now taking place, and he would not risk their fear sparking off a new explosion
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against the Catholic Mission. As well, Kersting was increasingly impatient with the mission’s approach to education, which he saw as narrow and partisan. A grand scheme for the island sphere possessed Kersting, in which he, as Ruler, would give the education of the Islanders into the hands of the Reich and build a new generation of colonial subjects dedicated to material improvement.56

The administration’s relations with the Capuchins worsened to the point of estrangement as the mission resorted to a series of petulant actions after 1912 in defence of its prestige. The priests became convinced that the government was collaborating in a conspiracy to degrade the mission in the eyes of the Ponapeans, and they ostentatiously disdained to cultivate relations with the rest of the European community. When the new Bishop of the island sphere came to Ponape for the first time in 1913, the mission deliberately refused to issue invitations to Kersting and the other Europeans; even the officers and crew of SMS Cormoran were ignored.57 The reputation of the Fathers had not been enhanced when, in 1912, the Superior of the mission was convicted of a libel action which Georg Fritz had brought against him in 1908, and fined 900 marks. On top of this, Kersting had been forced to investigate charges that one of the priests had committed adultery with a Kiti woman. In Awak there were mounting complaints that the resident priest, Father Fidelis, was encouraging the people to lie to their chiefs. How much these incidents were inspired by the hostility of Protestant chiefs is difficult to assess, but the result was that the moral authority of the mission was considerably weakened in the eyes of Protestants, Catholics and the administrator alike.

Ponape was outwardly ‘pacified’ in 1914, but was a long way from being a prosperous and loyal corner of the empire. Germany had obeyed the Ponapean dictum inta puain inta (‘blood buys blood’) and had won the right to impose law and order throughout the island. But law and order and communal peace were not one and the same. The Pacific Islanders of Micronesia, and Ponapeans in particular, remained as distant from their rulers in 1914 as they had been in 1900. True, changes had been made and accepted: some 1100 individual land deeds had been registered, confirming tenants in the possession of their farmsteads;58 roads encircling Sokehs, and around the mainland to Madolenihmw—projects considered not feasible only a few years before—had been constructed; the annual work periods after 1911 had been performed without demur, and the chiefs had agreed that from 1914 on the work periods should be replaced by a cash tax; the
Nahnmwarkis had retained their authority, and were vested with new powers. Indeed Ponapeans of later generations looked on the German period as being the most innovative of their history. But in terms of enduring social harmony and economic development, Ponape was not much further advanced than it had been when Fritz arrived in 1908. No-one was sanguine about the island’s future. The only certainty was that Germany was committed, by fear of withdrawal, to staying.

Even that certainty was destroyed by the outbreak of World War I. In May 1914 Kersting left Ponape on leave. On 14 July the East Asian Squadron, under Graf Spee, sailed in without warning and stayed for several weeks, ‘reprovisioning’. It was to be Ponape’s only contribution to the German war effort. On 6 August, with war declared, the squadron cleared for action and sailed away. Exactly eight weeks later, Ponape, with the rest of the Carolines and Mariana islands, was occupied by the Japanese.

Epilogue
Over 400 men, women and children of Sokehs were sent into exile in 1910, at first to Yap in the western Carolines. There the men were forced to work very hard and bear the harshness of the police whom the German administrator put in charge. Food was insufficient and of poor quality, and conditions only improved after Hahl visited Yap and angrily ordered better treatment. The exiles were later removed to Palau where former warriors had to work in the Angaur phosphate mines while the women and children lived at Aimeliik, on Babelthuap.

When Japan occupied Micronesia, the Sokehs were free to make their way back to Ponape. Now their cup of bitterness was filled to overflowing for they found that the Germans had settled 1200 out-islanders from the Mortlocks, Pingelap and Mokil on their land. These brought specialist skills in fishing, canoe-building and navigation, but they have been regarded ever since as interlopers, especially by those Sokehs now confined to the mainland.59
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