The Mainland
New Guineans under Company and Empire

The New Guinea mainland's north-eastern quarter was known to European explorers at least two centuries before German settlement. Tasman, in 1643, Dampier, in 1700, and D'Entrecasteaux, in 1792-93, all touched at various points on the coasts north of the Huon Gulf. In 1827, three years after the Dutch took possession of the western mainland, Dumont d'Urville entered Astrolabe Bay, which was named after his ship. Until 1871 nothing came of these early visits except for a temporary Catholic mission station on Umboi Island.

In 1871 a Russian naturalist, Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay landed at Bongu on the south coast of the deep and open Astrolabe Bay. Here, on land which rises gently for nearly two kilometres from the coast, he set up camp and remained for three periods of time between 1871 and 1883. Maclay's initial reception was far from friendly, for the local inhabitants were fearful of his fair skin, his clothes, and of the obvious power of the Russian cruiser which had brought him to the area. However the Russian possessed a new material culture which drew people to him, and his serenity in the face of hostility, his readiness to accept death for the advantage of gaining knowledge, finally earned him the respect of the Bongu villagers and of settlements along the length of Astrolabe Bay.

Maclay enhanced his acceptability by being prepared to make suitable gifts to the people, and to engage in the local system of trade and exchange. Visitors from as far away as Karkar, the wooded, volcanic island north-east of Cape Croisilles, came to trade for Maclay's stock of steel axes and adzes, nails, mirrors, cloth, paint and the seeds of new plants. As a source of wealth and the master of new and apparently 'superhuman' knowledge, Maclay came to be revered as a tibud or demigod. The New Guineans of Astrolabe Bay and the Rai coast further south seem to have had some experience of white people before Maclay's arrival, for the people of Bongu and of Siar, a small island to the north, possessed an image of a land across the horizon called Anut, peopled by whites who lived in large houses, and owned iron axes and knives. Maclay was connected with Anut: New Guineans
therefore concluded that he was one of its deities, come to give them the new material culture. Even after his departure, Maclay continued to exercise the patriarchal role with which he had been invested, pleading with the British and Germans at the time of annexation that the Papuans of the Rai coast should be left independent. When he said his last farewell in 1883 he warned the Bongu villagers about Europeans who might follow him, hinting that only those who identified themselves as his brothers should be accepted as ‘good’.¹

The people of Astrolabe Bay were therefore ready for the visits of Otto Finsch in the early 1880s. He came as an exploring agent for the New Guinea Company, the newly-established German consortium run by Adolf Hansemann in Berlin. Shouting ‘Oh Maclay’ everywhere he landed along the coast, Finsch was able to make friendly contacts and buy land in the area, in particular, much of the landing area at Bongu and a 148-hectare forest section. In late November 1884 the German flag was raised in Friedrich Wilhelmshafen, a small but sheltered harbour some thirty-two kilometres north of Bongu, and a Company claim was made to the land surrounding it, which appeared ‘uninhabited, uncultivated and apparently no one’s property’.² By this time Finsch had already explored much of the mainland coast, discovering and naming the Sepik River (Kaiserin Augusta Fluss), Dallmannhafen, Berlinhafen, Hatzfeldthafen and Deutschlandhafen, and at all these points he had taken ‘unowned’ land into possession, mainly to establish Germany’s claim to the area. As a result of Finsch’s enthusiastic reports, the New Guinea Company chose as the site for its first settlement, Deutschlandhafen (now renamed Finschhafen), a densely-wooded harbour sheltered by a small peninsula near the south-eastern tip of the Huon Peninsula. Presumably because of its geographical prominence, Finschhafen was expected to be the node for traffic from the north and east, but especially from the south, for the mainland (Kaiser Wilhelmsland) was to be the scene of the New Guinea Company’s great experiment in planned colonisation from Australia.

The first party of employees, consisting of five Europeans and thirty-seven Malays, arrived at Finschhafen on 5 November 1885. They received an enthusiastic welcome. One old man clasped the captain of the Company vessel to his breast and greeted him as a long-lost friend, obviously mistaking the newcomers for manifestations of local ancestor spirits.³ On this understanding, the whites immediately purchased land in the vicinity of the neighbouring village and put up their houses. With gifts they bought the patronage of the ‘big man’, Makiri, though
unbeknown to them his authority extended only a few kilometres inland and was limited even in his own tribe.

The New Guinea Company initially was irrepressible in its optimism. The Directors in Berlin issued instructions to their first Governor (*Landeshauptmann*), Admiral Freiherr Georg von Schleinitz, to set about opening up the land. Once coastal stations had been secured, expeditions were to penetrate into the interior of the island to determine its topography, note the amount of free, ‘unowned’ land, and learn the language and customs of the inhabitants. Existing trade was to be protected and encouraged, and a system of roads constructed to maintain communications for the planned network of inland stations. The Company anticipated no real difficulties from the New Guineans: they possessed ‘neither the strength nor the will’ to resist, and the Directors envisaged a wholly peaceful occupation of the country and the willing co-operation of its residents.4

The colony was soon overrun by an army of officials trying to administer numerous impracticable regulations derived from Prussian civil and criminal law. There were bureaucratic absurdities and disorganisation aplenty. The pioneers in Finschhafen found that they could not erect their tents because someone had left vital components at home; neither had they been supplied with any eating utensils. A huge machine to process china grass was sent out long before it was known whether china grass would prosper in New Guinea; it didn’t. Company regulations as early as January 1886 fixed the price of copra, and tried to cover every possible contingency, even to the return of empty packing cases.5 Land purchase regulations were particularly unrealistic since all acquisitions, at predetermined prices, had to be approved first by the Berlin Directors, a process which could take six months; moreover the Directors insisted on retaining all subsoil rights. Land, and many more amenities, could be purchased in the Australian colonies at lower prices and with easier credit.

No attempt was made to formulate a realistic policy towards the native inhabitants. From the beginning, the New Guineans were regarded as part of the natural resources of the land, to be exploited with a minimum of outlay. Ordinances were drawn up in 1887 and 1888 to regulate relations with coloured labourers, but these were designed less to protect the recruits than to make easier the work of organising them. The first draft of the disciplinary ordinance composed in New Guinea in 1887 was an unwieldy instrument of 185 provisions; von Schleinitz explained away its heavy emphasis on corporal
punishment with the observation that, from childhood, Pacific Islanders, Malays and Chinese 'were accustomed to blows and other severe punishments'. One of its compilers had suggested that up to 200 strokes a month be allowed for some infringements, and the mandatory death penalty for many others. When finally issued in October 1888, the ordinance was tempered somewhat by the Colonial Department's reservations, but it still sanctioned the reduction of food rations, confinement and floggings. The regulation was revised in 1900, but the attitudes which had informed it before then continued to find expression in the actions of white employers well into the period of Australian rule.

The Finschhafen people refused to accept lightly the one-sided relationship which these plans implied. At Finschhafen the local residents never provided more than occasional day labour, at first for the novelty of working with iron implements, and then to acquire iron themselves in order to trade with inland tribes for traditional valuables like dogs' teeth. But within a couple of years of the Europeans' arrival they became reluctant to work for them at all, out of fear, Makiri claimed, that they were contributing to the growth of the whites' power and restricting their own independence. From October 1886 onwards the Company was forced to import labourers from the Bismarck Archipelago. Increasingly harsh treatment from Company officials alienated the Finschhafen people further. The foreign labourers from Asia and the Archipelago repeatedly abducted women and plundered plantations. But particular offence was given by the Austrian station manager, Julius Winter, who in 1890 organised a raid against a mountain village of the Kai people when they resisted his attempts to obtain a concubine for his black personal servant. The resulting destruction helped to poison relations among tribes in the entire Finschhafen area.

By 1890 local distaste for the New Guinea Company had intensified to such a degree that a black recruiter was murdered in nearby Busum village. On another occasion the Germans received quite a scare when all relations were suddenly broken off by villagers, and a fleet of strange war canoes appeared in the harbour. Gradually, the local residents pulled back away from the station, selling their land and houses to the Company. However, they continued to resist attempts by Europeans to penetrate the hinterland, for traditionally they had enjoyed a monopoly over trade with inland tribes and, since the arrival of the
The Finschhafen settlement never prospered. It was little more than a collecting point for an army of officials who had less and less to do when the expected land rush failed to materialise. Attempts had been made at systematic agriculture, but they foundered on the hard coral base of the soil. Then, in early 1891, a malaria epidemic struck, killing thirteen Company officials and more than thirty labourers in a few weeks. Plans had already been mooted to move the Company headquarters elsewhere, so Finschhafen was abandoned for Stephansort, some 193 kilometres further up the coast, where the shores of Astrolabe Bay curve northwards.

The pressure on coastal inhabitants increased dramatically now, as the New Guinea Company moved into the area in a grand manner, taking up land which its agents claimed to have ‘purchased’ in earlier years. One agent in particular, Johann Kubary, manager at the Bongu station (now Constantinhafen), exploited the favourable impression which Finsch had created in 1884 to set the Company’s land-buying program in motion.

Between 1887 and 1889 Johann Kubary sailed the coast from Constantinhafen to Friedrich Wilhelmshafen ‘purchasing’ most of the coastline of Astrolabe Bay, an area of 32,780 hectares. Most of these purchases were carried out in a cavalier manner, judged even by the standards which the New Guinea Company set itself. From the people of Bilibili Island, south of Friedrich Wilhelmshafen, Kubary presumed to buy all the mainland coast between the Gogol and Gum rivers. The transactions were concluded, not by careful surveying and the signing of contracts, but by Kubary’s sailing along the coast in his pinnace noting the names of river mouths and prominent features, without at any time landing; Kubary then distributed a trivial collection of trade goods to the Bilibili Islanders. This process was repeated with the Islanders of Jabob, between Bilibili and Friedrich Wilhelmshafen. From them, Kubary purported to buy all land between the Gum River and Friedrich Wilhelmshafen, using his boat to note features, dispensing trade to the Jabob, and then posting up a sheet of paper on a coconut palm to conclude the ‘sale’.8

In this way, for a mere 256 marks 90 pfennings in trade, Kubary claimed on behalf of the Company 5,500 hectares of coastal land to a depth in places of 5,000-6,000 metres, land which neither the Bilibili nor the Jabob had any right to sell, nor any idea that in co-operating with
Kubary they were doing so. For his part, Kubary acknowledged that his exercise had given the Company only nominal rights over the soil, rights designed mainly 'to pave the way to a friendly understanding [with the people]'.

Kubary’s casual business deals did not end there, for the purchases were not registered until 1896, a procedure which contravened the Company’s own instructions. Nevertheless the New Guinea Company moved in to take up the land of Friedrich Wilhelmshafen in 1891 and renamed the harbour area Madang. It encountered a small population of some few hundred people living in four major villages, Siar, Bilia, Graged and Panutibun, divided into patrilineal clans, and practising a simple root and fruit crop horticulture supplemented by fishing, hunting and trading. They were a people whose male cults, the mulung and mezjab, played a vital role in social control, and who, through common initiation, feasting and dancing, achieved a limited consciousness of unity and mutual assistance across the four villages.

The inhabitants at first accepted the German newcomers as rentiers of the small plot on which the first house was built, but when the whites began clearing vast tracts of land nearby, the ‘big man’ of Bilia protested to the recently-arrived Lutheran Mission. It was to no avail: the Company insisted on the authenticity of its claims, and the occupation of the harbour’s entire foreshores was set in train. In 1893 occurred the first dangerous confrontation over land. Administrator Schmiele set out to erect a quarantine station on Oertzen Island at the edge of the harbour, where the Siar people had fruit trees planted and claimed fishing rights off the reefs. Despite the offer of compensation, the Siar refused to countenance any encroachment on this preserve, and armed themselves to take back the island by force if Schmiele persisted. In the end, with Schmiele, too, in no mood to withdraw, only the intervention of the Lutheran missionary Bergmann, and his threat to leave the Siar to their fate, stopped the Islanders from attacking. Bergmann was becoming an important intermediary in the mounting disputes between the villagers and the New Guinea Company; at least twice more he had to come between the Siar and the rifles of the Company police to prevent violence.

To the villagers around Madang it was soon apparent that the German settlers could not be Maclay’s brothers from Anut. Since the Germans obviously possessed a superior culture—and firearms—the people contrived to resist them in their own way, by remaining as independent of the European economy as possible. Marketing produce
and artefacts brought them a satisfactory standard of living, and they refused to enlist as plantation labourers, preferring work done in their own gardens at their own pace. They were also able to prevent the Company from restricting the prices they demanded for food supplies and ethnologica by exploiting new arrivals and visitors to the area who were willing to pay higher prices. In a certain sense, the Europeans were the economically weaker people in the 1890s, for they needed increasing supplies of native produce to feed their workers, yet they did not find a permanent or increasing demand for trade goods from the local inhabitants. A limited amount of iron and trinkets satisfied the Madang villagers' needs, the surplus being used for personal-profit trading in traditional valuables with inland tribes. Moreover, since stands of coconut were very sparse on the central coasts of the mainland, there were few resources on which to base a trading exchange of mutual advantage. By 1893 the New Guinea Company was forced to look beyond Madang for its supply of contract labour. Between 1887 and 1894 only about 600 mainlanders recruited for work locally, compared with the 2836 brought from the islands.12

The Company's inability to mobilise a local labour force can be traced directly to its failure to extend political control and bring as many of the mainland populations as possible within the framework of an ordered administration by direct rule. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, the Directors in Berlin kept on insisting that the obligation of defence against internal unrest, as well as external attack, lay with the Reich, not the Company, and they looked to the imperial navy to act as a kind of mobile police force at the beck and call of officials in the protectorate. Several collisions occurred in the early years over the role of the navy and the Company's right to requisition vessels for punitive expeditions. To solve the problem this was causing in all of Germany's colonies, not just New Guinea, the Foreign Office and the German Admiralty in April 1887 set firm limits to the navy's police role and issued specific procedural instructions. As a start, captains of warships had to give adequate notice of their arrival, while the Company Governor was required to make a formal, written requisition and to take all preliminary measures necessary for any military action. But the new regulations left to the navy, not the Company, the final decision whether or not military intervention was physically possible.13

Since the New Guinea Company in following years continued to neglect the question of an effective security force of its own, this last clause made further arguments inevitable, especially since in many cases
the naval officer was forced to make a political judgment before acting. For instance, in December 1887 Admiral Heusner of the East Asian Cruiser Squadron refused a request to punish New Guinean villagers near Cape Lambert, since there was some doubt in his mind whether they had murdered a German trader. Heusner went on to reject a similar request against people at Hatzfeldthafen, arguing that it was probable that Europeans were to blame for recent unrest, and impossible anyway for German sailors to punish a mountain-dwelling people effectively.¹⁴

That sailors, even marines, were not equal to the task of hunting down New Guineans frequently made captains hesitate to expose their men and ships in punitive expeditions. Some of the earliest confrontations admittedly were bloody affairs, in one case so bloody that Bismarck suppressed its publication for fear of political repercussions.¹⁵ But only rarely did marines operating on land inflict serious punishment on New Guineans. In most cases they had difficulty even making contact, as at Kabaira in 1886. One of the problems in bringing the power of the navy to bear was the relative immobility of European-trained soldiers in very rugged country and tropical jungle, where New Guineans avoided large concentrations and movement was along narrow paths where troops were susceptible to ambush. Jungle fighting was still a relatively undeveloped skill for European troops in the late nineteenth century, and German marines were continually hampered by their uniforms and cumbersome equipment, while military formations were adopted which were more suitable to large-scale movements in open spaces.

Formidable difficulties accompanied the organisation of naval expeditions: native bearers were impossible to hire for more than a few days at a time; whites with an adequate knowledge of an area to act as guides and interpreters were scarce; above all, it was impossible to keep secret the preparations for an extensive campaign, for the report of a warship's arrival spread like wildfire and the villagers who were the object of the exercise were immediately on the watch. Even if a naval raid were launched inconspicuously, the ship was usually so large and so slow that the victims had ample time to escape to the jungle with their valuables. New Guineans lost their initial awe of warships very quickly, so that before long even artillery bombardments did not overly concern them. Around Aitape on the north coast of the mainland, villagers were known to collect unexploded artillery shells after bombardments and rework them into sago pounders, and if villages were hit by shells they could easily be rebuilt. Perhaps the epitome of contempt for the punitive
power of the German navy is best expressed in the words of a New Irelander in 1890:

What name you speak belong man-war. Man-war he all same one bloody fool, he no save kill 'em kanaka. He make fire house, never mind. He no save go bush. Kanaka he no 'fraid belong man-war. Man-war he come, kanaka he go bush alright.16

One man who recognised the inadequacy of the navy as police force was Fritz Rose, the Imperial Commissioner who virtually ran the colony during the interlude of imperial administration from 1889 to 1891. After surveying the New Guinea Company’s record, Rose felt acutely the need to start again from scratch, to establish shipping communications, to create harbours and landing places, to cut roads and to improve relations with the inhabitants. Above all, Rose could see that the protectorate was in for serious trouble between the New Guineans and the growing German interests, especially in Astrolabe Bay, where, as he put it, the people ‘feel themselves cramped; and ignorant of the existence of a regime which also protects their interests, they will be moved easily to arbitrary acts of violence in their distress’.17

Rose wanted to make that regime more apparent by placing New Guinean intermediaries in each settlement along the coast and in the interior bordering the mountains. He was the first official to press the New Guinea Company for a sensibly-sized police force and a sea-going vessel able to cover the protectorate; he saw plainly that the job could no longer be left to a navy restricted to short visits and coastal sorties. In the end, Rose was fighting for the establishment of a permanent imperial government as the one organisation that could tackle successfully the problems of security and development.

Neither the New Guinea Company nor the Reich was interested in Rose’s solutions in the early 1890s. In April 1892 the Company returned to the administration of the protectorate, with plans for retrenchment. Several smaller stations were added to the list of those which, like Finschhafen and Hatzfeldthafen, already had been abandoned. Unprofitable plantations like Jomba, behind Madang, were also closed down. The Company then turned to the north coast to develop the area’s recruiting potential, and began to encourage more positively exploration of the interior.

Exploration had been part of the Company’s program from the beginning. According to its 1885 instructions, the fundamental aim of scientific expeditions was to observe if conditions in New Guinea
allowed Europeans to settle and work the land and ‘what modifications to domestic life in housing, clothing, nourishment and other matters would be made necessary’. Explorers were ordered blithely to establish the inland borders of German New Guinea and then criss-cross the intervening land in order to choose sites for a network of inland stations. In addition, they were to keep exact diaries, in duplicate, with daily entries on everything noticed along the way.

To those entrusted with the task, these demands were easier made than met. Inland expeditions like that of Schrader in 1886, which was ordered to report on the ‘geographical, botanical, social and economic situation of New Guinea’, were a failure from the start, because parties could not obtain New Guinean guides and bearers to take them inland. Because of the fragmentation of New Guinea societies, villagers feared to venture more than a kilometre or two from their homes in case of attack by traditionally hostile neighbours. Europeans who were able to find guides and bearers often found their way inland barred by coastal groups who wanted to prevent contact with tribes of the interior, for this would mean the loss of their trading monopolies in European goods from the coast inland. Other explorers were subdued by the sheer enormity of terrain and climatic difficulties: the ill-fated Otto Ehlers and his men were reduced to eating grass in their abortive attempt in 1895 to traverse New Guinea from Salamaua, in the Huon Gulf, to the Gulf of Papua. Ehlers and his German companion were finally shot by their own bearers long before they could reach civilisation.

Coastal and river explorations were much more successful. In the early days von Schleinitz journeyed round the Huon Gulf, entering the mouth of the Markham for about two and a half kilometres. He was followed in late 1886 by Captain Dreger of the New Guinea Company, who also went up the Markham and into the Labu Lakes to the west of its mouth, in the process making a name for the whites as fearsome, unfriendly creatures not to be trusted because of their inclination to shoot when excited. Von Schleinitz then navigated the Sepik to a point above present-day Ambunti. In late 1896, Lauterbach travelled from Stephansort west to the Ramu River, then down the river to its mouth on the north coast, crossing a fertile, thickly-populated floodplain well suited to agriculture on a grand scale, and encountering fierce resistance near the river’s headwaters from a people who manifested no knowledge or fear of firearms.

These discoveries did not, however, give the Company new heart. By 1896 the directors had decided that it was impossible to carry out
Bismarck’s original idea of Kolonialpolitik under Chartered Rule, at least for New Guinea, and negotiations were begun for the complete and permanent transfer of political control to the Reich. The original terms proposed gave the New Guinea Company 100,000 hectares in land, a seventy-five-year monopoly over economic development in Kaiser Wilhelmsland, and four million marks in compensation if the monopoly were surrendered, but domestic opposition finally reduced these to a cash compensation of four million marks and 50,000 hectares of land to be taken up by 1902. The New Guinea Company finally relinquished control in 1899.1 To that date the Company’s record, whether of profit or administration, was an unenviable one.

Economically, the firm’s achievements on the mainland were confined to the planting of some 60,000 coconut trees, only a small proportion of which were bearing, and the export of a small amount of copra and inferior tobacco, 147 tonnes and thirty tonnes respectively, in the year to April 1899. Compared with the Bismarck Archipelago, which exported 3,567 tonnes of copra the same year, Kaiser Wilhelmsland was a commercial flop. As Heinrich Schnee, Imperial Magistrate from 1898 to 1900 declared cynically, the Archipelago was ‘the only place where the New Guinea Company got a plus’, having already earned a profit of 25,000 marks on its initial investment.2

On the mainland, the Germans had established a small foothold on the coast, concentrated in Astrolabe Bay where plantations had risen and fallen in the last decade of the century. Except for one station on the north coast and a few on offshore islands, the Company had been driven from its other attempted settlements. Fewer than 100 Europeans were yet settled in Kaiser Wilhelmsland. Of rivers, only the mouths of the Markham, the Gogol, and the Ramu had been explored, while the Sepik had been navigated but in no way ‘opened up’. In 1899 the interior was still a vast unknown, and the Germans were ignorant of what lay more than one hour from most of their stations. Little or no attempt had been made to provide the prerequisites of development: there were no public roads, no health stations, no definitive maps of land or sea routes. Furthermore, European security was still an uncertain factor in areas where New Guineans had suffered massive land alienation or abuses from the Company employees. Three instances of violence, including the murder of two Lutheran missionaries, fourteen Melanesians and a white trader at Hatzfeldthafen in 1891, were still unpunished in 1899.

No doubt the climate and topography of the mainland were very real
impediments to development for the New Guinea Company, as was the sparseness of the population in the areas settled. But the firm's lack of experience in Charter imperialism, its ill-judged alienation of land, particularly around Madang, its indiscriminate and erratic retaliation against New Guineans, and its refusal to establish a viable system of internal security were all larger reasons for the Company's failure.

Most of all, the Company had ignored the New Guineans themselves as a variable in the equation of profits. The Directors sitting in Berlin considered as automatic and inevitable the 'native's' conversion to the philosophy and aspirations of European capitalism, so no definable program was drawn up to encourage a permanent economic alliance by protecting the land and culture of local groups, by redressing their grievances, or by making more equitable use of New Guinean labour. It was a short-sighted policy, for in the final analysis profits depended on the continuous availability of labour and the acquiescence of mainland New Guineans in a cash economy. Between 1895 and July 1898 the Company's workforce on the mainland dropped from 2000 to 735, and the majority of these were labourers imported from South-East Asia. The number of contract labourers in the plantation district the same year was 695, only 414 of whom were New Guineans, mostly from the Bismarck Archipelago. By passive and active resistance, the local inhabitants helped to foil the New Guinea Company's ambitions on the mainland.

The Missions in Kaiser Wilhelmsland

By 1899 three Christian missions were operating on the mainland. Because they provide a dramatic contrast to the Company both in their motivation and in their acceptance by New Guineans, they deserve separate treatment.

Johann Flierl arrived at Finschhafen from Australia in July 1886 to found the Lutheran Neuendettelsau Mission to the new protectorate. Mission participation in the colonisation of New Guinea was included in the Company's program at an early stage, but Flierl was the first and, for some years, the only missionary to overcome the procrastinations of the firm and gain its support for his venture. After living for two months in Finschhafen with the firm's employees, Flierl established the first mission station at Simbang, a few kilometres east of the settlement. His reception among the Yabem people in Simbang was a mixed one: while they recognised the material advantages to be gained in the way of iron and various trade goods, they had the New Guinean's inherent
fear of the stranger and the outsider. Moreover, the villagers of Simbang had seen how the Finschhafen people were crowded off their land by the coming of the Company, and they regarded Flierl's arrival as an extension of that process, particularly when, out of ignorance, he neglected to enter into any agreement with the owner of the land on which he settled. Only after numerous protestations, gift exchanges and a light skirmish with Simbang's leading warrior was the station able to be set up.

The mission's troubles were far from over. Because of the recurring hostility of the local inhabitants, the continued existence of the Simbang station remained in doubt for the first year, and only the close proximity of the Company saved Flierl from being driven out. The people showed a contemptuous indifference to his teachings, regarding him either as a trader or a rich philanthropist, and he suffered a great deal from thefts of his belongings. Only very slowly, as Flierl adopted a conscious policy of setting himself apart from Company employees and their actions, did he come to be regarded as a singular type of white man: Flierl went about unarmed; he would not trade for profit; he diligently learned the local language; and he offered himself as advocate in the peoples' disputes with the Company over land, labour and women. Sensitive to local mores and the fears which the villagers had of being pushed out by the white people, Flierl had early recognised that the Company's station manager at Finschhafen, Julius Winter, was a direct threat to the possibility of coexistence with the Finschhafen people, and he joined in a campaign with Fritz Rose to have Winter removed. By the time the Company abandoned Finschhafen in 1891, Flierl and the three German companions who by now were with him, had gained acceptance among the people of the Finschhafen coast, though the latter had as yet manifested no desire for conversion.

Isolation after 1891 brought its own rewards. The mission’s activities were no longer compromised by the presence of a commercial enterprise and the actions of men whose primary aim was profit. With a secure base on the coast, Flierl now attempted to expand into the hinterland of Finschhafen. His success was limited at first because of perennial village divisions which stopped him from obtaining bearers willing to penetrate the interior of the Huon Peninsula. In 1892 he did reach an inland plateau 610 metres above sea level and some nineteen kilometres north-west of Simbang, which had been discovered by the Schrader expedition in 1886 and named the Sattelberg. Here Flierl built his first inland station, taking care this time to build well away from the local
village so as to avoid arousing its resentment. Sattelberg, too, had to withstand the ordeal of acceptance, and thefts of Flierl's belongings grew to such proportions that he was forced to construct a palisade around the station and equip himself with a rifle. The new station was particularly resented by those people living between the coast and the plateau, since it destroyed their control over the movement of European goods into the interior, and by their constant raids on Flierl's supply trains they finally forced him to seek out another, more difficult and circuitous route to Sattelberg.

On the other hand, the inhabitants of Sattelberg itself quickly reconciled themselves to the station as a regular and more profitable pipeline for the supply of iron, beads and cloth. Though Flierl knew that he was regarded as 'a good but stupid man, endlessly rich and, as a stranger, without any rights', he gradually earned the respect of the villagers by insisting on reciprocity for every service he performed, and by showing himself prepared to shoot anyone who attempted to burgle the station. In his desire to establish a reputation as a man of authority and determination Flierl was prepared to use the threat of force against stealing, though in general he rejected force as an instrument of persuasion. By 1893 so considerable had his influence become among the people of Sattelberg that they were prepared to leave their weapons at home and trust in Flierl's rifle on mission trips to the coast.

The mission's control, however, remained limited well into the 1900s. Its area of influence in the hinterland depended solely on local toleration of its presence, on co-operation in providing bearers and guides, and it did not succeed for some time in preventing wars and cannibalism, or in countering the fear of sorcery. By 1900 the Neudenettelsau Mission could boast of only two adult converts, but it was infiltrating villages near Sattelberg with New Guinean youths who had accepted work and limited instruction on the mission station and who were carrying the mission's message back to the village. It had also advanced much further into the territory and lives of New Guineans than had the New Guinea Company to that date.

To the other Lutheran mission in Kaiser Wilhelm Land, the Rheinische Missions Gesellschaft (Rhenish Mission), New Guinea was a stumbling block for many years, and its relations with the inhabitants and with other Europeans were far from harmonious. The first missionaries, Thomas and Eich, arrived in Finschhafen in 1887 only after protracted negotiations with the New Guinea Company. Eich surveyed Hatzfeldthafen as a site for a first mission settlement, but the hostility
of the villagers persuaded him to concentrate the mission’s energies further south in Astrolabe Bay. In November 1887, after the New Guinea Company had refused him land on Bilibili Island, Thomas acquired six hectares in the vicinity of Bogadjiem, on the coast south of Bilibili, and the first station was founded. Now began a succession of tragedies which threatened to exhaust the mission’s personnel, and its reserves of spirit. Missionary after missionary arrived, only to be struck down within months of beginning work. While the Neuendettelsau Mission went ahead with its program unaffected by deaths, the Rhenish Mission lost ten of the twenty missionaries sent out to Kaiser Wilhelmsland between 1887 and 1895, more than in all her other mission fields combined: one drowned before he even reached Bogadjiem; another shot himself accidentally; most died from fever.

From the beginning, the Rhenish Mission was apprehensive about race relations in the Astrolabe Bay, particularly when it became the centre of European settlement after 1891. The deteriorating situation between the Company and the New Guineans soon reflected itself in local attitudes to the missionaries. In their dealings with the people, the missionaries were constantly identified less as friends of the people than as whites seeking advantage for themselves and their compatriots on the plantations: their preaching voyages to surrounding villages, for example, were seen purely as journeys for profitable barter. The mission inevitably suffered from its association with the European community as the pressure on land and the competition for local products and labour increased.

Two Rhenish missionaries, Scheidt and Bösch, were murdered at Hatzfeldthafen in 1891, at least partly because they were identified with European expansion. A Company official and sixteen Company labourers had accompanied the missionaries to Hatzfeldthafen, and this stigmatised them as supporters of the plantation settlement which had been causing so much trouble to the local residents. It is also possible that Bösch had been indiscreet enough to display openly the large collection of trade goods he had brought: resentment and covetousness were a consistent formula for New Guinea attacks.

It was Flierl’s private opinion that, in this case, the Rhenish Mission had been at fault in trying to expand too quickly. Indeed, the missionaries had taken every opportunity to penetrate as far inland as possible. Eich and Thomas accompanied the Schrader expedition up the Sepik in 1887; the plains of the upper Ramu appear in mission reports early in the piece; and missionaries often visited the Gogol plain
inland from Bogadjim. But, in the end, the loss of personnel forced the Rhenish Mission to restrict its activity to a small crescent round Astrolable Bay and to consolidate its presence there during the Company period. Attempts to place stations in the hinterland were thwarted by sickness and by the coastal New Guineans, who refused to share their source of special wealth with inland tribes by guiding the missionaries into the interior. Thus, by 1900, the mission had four stations and four schools in a fifty-kilometre stretch between Madang and Bongu, but only 136 pupils could be attracted from surrounding villages. As yet there were no converts. The people evinced no interest in the spiritual world of the whites, no sense of spiritual need. They treated the missionaries as traders or doctors or advocates, or rich men whose obligation it was to share their wealth. As Reverend Kunze reported ruefully, their attitude was summed up by a small boy who told him the missionary was there to teach strange songs and writing, and to bind wounds: it went no further than that. After 1900, this indifferent and simplistic view was replaced by a more hostile attitude to the mission, as it intensified its attacks on the secret male cults and festivities of the Madang coast area.

The third mission on the mainland was Catholic, the Society of the Divine Word (SVD, or known as ‘the Mission of the Holy Ghost in Kaiser Wilhelmsland’) which established itself on the north coast in 1896, at Tumleo Island in Berlinhafen. After an initial struggle with the New Guinea Company over the amount of land to be sold to them, the Mission of the Holy Ghost settled also on the mainland across from Tumleo, and, in November 1899, at Potsdamhafen in Hansa Bay. By 1900 there were six priests, six brothers and four nuns on the north-east coast of the mainland, operating schools which taught over 100 pupils reading and writing in the German language. The mission baptised its first convert in March 1900. At that time, the north coast was still an untamed frontier of European settlement with a mere eight traders along a 320-kilometre stretch of coastline.

All three missions had contributed more to the pacification of the mainland by the end of New Guinea Company rule than had the Company itself. The Mission of the Holy Ghost could claim with justice that the firm’s recruiting attempts on the north coast would have been fruitless without the mission’s civilising influence on the inhabitants. The Neuendettelsau Mission’s influence on relations around Finschhafen had the same effect in encouraging recruitment; indeed the Yabem and Kai from the Huon Peninsula were the only mainland
people to recruit regularly for the plantations of Astrolable Bay. Mission activities had established the presence of white people further inland by 1899 than any Company station had managed. Sattelberg dramatically increased the area in which European material culture—iron, cloth, beads etc.—was known and used as a medium of exchange, and through Sattelberg contact with the interior was achieved comparatively quickly in the 1900s. Even in Astrolable Bay the Rhenish Mission had tried to encourage the local people to work regularly on the plantations. More importantly, the Rhenish Mission acted as a pressure valve for New Guineans in their relations with the whites. Part of its instructions were to press the Company to provide reservations for those villagers deprived of land, and to police the treatment of indentured labourers on the plantations; while individual missionaries like Bergmann on Siar, acted as ombudsmen for the Madang people, passing on their complaints about foreign labourers to the Company.

Because of the missionary's primary concern for the quality of the New Guinean's existence, there was a conflict of interests with the New Guinea Company which occasionally resulted in a breakdown in co-operation. Both Lutheran missions were at different times accused of hindering development by trying to dissuade their flocks from enlisting as plantation labourers, though in the case of the Neuendetelsau Mission, with the number of local recruits, this was patently false. The missionaries were at times angry about the abuses practised during the recruiting process and on the plantations, such as deceptions about the length of contract, the brutality of overseers and particularly the frequency of sickness and death. These were ample reason for New Guineans to refuse recruitment of their own accord. One naval report in 1896 claimed that in Stephansort workers were dying at the rate of eighty a month. By 1898 forty to fifty Yabem people had died there, a figure which represented one-twentieth of the Yabem population. Missionaries were, in fact, occasionally endangered by being identified in the minds of villagers with the death of kinsfolk on the plantations. As for the villagers of Madang and the coast southward, they were simply reluctant to tie themselves to the whites by contract. Outside the increasing loss of land which embittered them, the area supplied sufficient food, and trading, for a moderate and improved standard of living without resort to wage labour.

The New Guinea Company's accusations against the missions were, in the final analysis, an unconscious tribute to the extent to which the
missions had been effective in influencing and organising New Guineans. The new imperial administration, especially under Hahl, recognised that the missions provided a solid base on which to construct the model of development anticipated for New Guinea.

Race Relations on the Coastal Frontier 1900-14

Though the New Guinea Company’s privilege was whittled down considerably by the 1898 treaty with the Reich, the firm remained the major force in race relations on the mainland after 1900. In effect it retained the power to exploit and monopolise, without being as fully responsible for the political consequences of its activities as had been the case in the 1880s and 1890s. Hahl’s decision to concentrate on the Bismarck Archipelago in the first years of imperial rule only reinforced the Company’s predominance on the mainland.

The consequences were particularly important in Astrolabe Bay, where there was little love lost between New Guineans and the Europeans. Madang and its harbour had become by 1899 almost a no-man’s land for the original inhabitants; a traveller there the same year reported that most local New Guineans appeared to have been driven back away from the coast. This lack of rapport continued into the new century. Only during a drought in 1902 did Madang villagers offer themselves for plantation work, and then it was always for the more remote stations. They openly rejected the enforced government labour because it meant neglecting their gardens for a four-week period. Local roadworks were continually disrupted by people absconding from the job, and then refusing to pay the fines; in 1900 and 1903, police troops had to be quartered on Siar before the villagers would comply with orders to help in road-building.

Resentment of the Europeans in Astrolabe Bay reached fever pitch in 1904, and every village from Siar to Bongu had grievances about European contact. With its reversion to a private enterprise, the New Guinea Company claimed in absolute ownership all the land which it had taken up around Madang, leaving the local inhabitants no rights or privileges except by sufferance. Hahl was reluctant to dispute the firm’s tenuous ownership in court, lest he thereby hinder the colony’s progress and incense influential merchant circles in Berlin, so in 1904 the administration finally accepted the Company’s titular right to the 5500 hectares which comprised the site of Madang, subject to the survey of native reserves.

Between 1900 and 1904, the firm’s land-clearing operations were
intensified: the Scheering Peninsula and Kalibob were cleared and planted, and by 1904 plantations at Madang and nearby Jomba (which had reopened in 1900-01) spread over an area of 649 hectares. As clans (especially among the Bilia and Siar) lost all their land on the islands and harbour foreshores, they were forced to rent garden plots from other clans. Added to their shame and sense of deprivation was the general resentment at the enforced roadworks, the repeated punishments for transgressions of the white people’s law, and the desecration of totemic objects by road-building or plantation development. The Rhenish Mission did not help its cause by condemning the secret male cults as paganistic mumbo-jumbo and a profligate waste of time. The final aggravation was the rumour that the Germans were about to regiment local villagers even further by appointing district chiefs as agents of government.

The people of Siar, Kranket, Yabob and Bilibili finally determined to put a stop to the encroachments of the whites. At a meziab clubhouse on Bilibili, in the presence of the ancestral spirits, the influential men of the four islands drew up a plan to kill the whites living around Madang. The Siar and Bilibili people were the ringleaders; the latter were the ‘patricians’ of Astrolabe Bay, whose potting monopoly on the Madang coast was being threatened by European expansion. The movement also included the mainland villages of Ragetta, Bogadjim and Bongu, though they were more diffident, and decided to wait on the success of the attack; in the end Bogadjim and Bongu defected.

According to local and European reports of the plan, Siar, Kranket and Bilibili Islanders were to cross over to Madang, enter the district office (Hauspepa) and seize the armoury of the native police before they had a chance to react. The whites would then be dispatched by a corps of former police soldiers among the rebel villagers. Not even the missionaries were to be spared, for they were guilty of collusion with the whites, but to be sure that the white man’s tibud would not interfere, the conspirators buried a volume of the scriptures before starting out.

The plot was well organised, even to the lengths of an alternative strategy should it be discovered prematurely. In that case, each group would take refuge with the missionaries and try to convince these indulgent men of God that they were innocent. Ironically, the missionaries themselves were the first to know of the conspiracy, for news of an uprising leaked out to the Reverend Hanke at Bongu in January 1904. He gave it no credence, but, when the rumour was repeated in February, Hanke notified Wilhelm Stuckhardt, the Madang district
Pacific Islanders under German Rule

Stuckhardt did take the matter more seriously, but so well was the secret kept that he could find no confirmation of a plot, and his only action was to arm the police on duty in Madang. When the revolt did come at last, on 16 July, it took the European community completely by surprise. Eighty armed men managed to reach a small bridge near the district office without detection, and since there were only twenty-six whites in the town, very likely they would have succeeded in their object if, at the last moment, their plan had not been betrayed by Nalon of Bilia, who was houseboy to the local doctor. Stuckhardt was able to restore order very quickly: the police secured their firearms and fired on the advancing attackers, dispersing them by land and by water; one Ragetta man was shot dead in the mêlée. Even then, most whites living in Madang remained unaware of what had occurred.

Since no European had been injured, and because he had no idea of the cause of the attempted coup, Stuckhardt did not treat the incident as war, but proceeded cautiously with an investigation. The fortuitous arrival of the naval survey vessel, SMS *Moewe*, boosted his authority, and by mid-August he was in a position to negotiate the surrender of several Siar and Ragetta ringleaders, who were promptly transported to Herbertshöhe; the Bilibili people had fled *en masse* to the Rai coast. At this stage the European community was still rather dazed by the swiftness of events and took some little time to adjust to their significance. Settlers and officials living and working in the area had always been complacent about their security, believing that the Madang people were incapable of any organisation or secrecy. The sudden realisation that they had barely eluded death, and that the plot likely encompassed the coast as far south as Bongu, threw them into a panic. In mid-August, New Guinea Company officials circulated a petition, over Stuckhardt's head, urging the Governor to take sterner measures against the guilty people. Since Hahl was in Micronesia, Deputy Governor Knake arrived in Madang on 16 August, and, after being subjected to further pressure from the settler community, he declared a state of martial law. The full facts were now dragged from the people, the complicity of Bongu, Bogadjim and Bilibili was established, and Knake there and then had six of the leading conspirators executed.

The sequel was particularly disconcerting to the Rhenish Mission which, with its first convert in 1903, had been optimistic that the obstacles of past years were permanently behind them. Initially, the missionaries had refused to believe that they too had been marked for the slaughter, and for a month after the attempt the Bongu and
Bogadjm villagers encouraged them in this belief. Now their peoples’ treachery was revealed. The Reverend Weber on Siar learned that his boat had been drawn high up on the shore the day of the revolt in order to prevent his escaping; Hanke at Bongu and Helmich at Ragetta learned that they were to be struck down on their stations. Everyone was demoralised by the disclosures, for it was obvious that the mission had completely misjudged its position, and that the Madang coast villagers were as alien from them in their thoughts and motivations now as they ever had been. That the revolt took place in the same year as the Herero rebellion in South-West Africa, which was being blamed partly on Rhenish Mission policies, was an added cup of bitterness. In weariness and disgust, the Madang missionaries petitioned their Bam men headquarters to give up New Guinea as a thankless field of thorns.43

The Madang revolt revealed that the imperial government’s approach to security on the mainland was based on false premises. The people were not necessarily ‘docile’ and ‘good-natured’ towards all things European, and the large plantation companies, far from guaranteeing security, had helped to undermine it through their unrelenting pressure on native resources. The government’s response was to extend direct rule to Madang at the end of 1904, with the organisation of the first village groups and the appointment of luluais; by 1907 there were eleven in the Madang district.44 The head tax was introduced the same year.

The Germans then focused their attention on the north coast, a thickly-populated area, where villages of 400 to 500 people promised a valuable supply of plantation labour, and where local acts of resistance had coincided with the Madang revolt. In October 1906, a full district station was established at Aitape on the west side of Berlinhafen, under Hans Rodatz, an early employee of the New Guinea Company. The coastal tribes in the immediate vicinity of the station resisted the new invasion so sternly that Hahl several times had to send Rodatz police reinforcements. Though the Aitape coast technically was subjugated by mid-1911, German control remained incomplete until the war, and Hahl was never able to introduce the head tax to the area. The Germans did secure the dividend they had been looking for in the first place: a steadily increasing number of labour recruits; by 1913, ten per cent of all new recruits in the protectorate came through the Aitape lists.45

But the mountain hinterland behind Aitape remained closed to the
recruiters. In the constant feuding between coast and interior, where a trip to the sea could result in abuse, theft and murder, few inland inhabitants could be enticed to try the German labour lines.

Meanwhile, around Madang in the years after 1904, direct rule was proving to be an inadequate solution to questions of pacification and peaceful racial relations. Instead of beginning a new era of accommodation and co-operation, the failure of the 1904 revolt and the loss of nine men (three more Siar were executed in 1904) led to several years of passive resistance by the Madang people.

The vindictive attitude of the settlers following the affair, and the continuing failures of German land policy, kept the largely-dispersed groups bitter against the European presence. The government had been quick to realise that land was at the heart of the 1904 uprising, and the same year Hahl signed an agreement with the New Guinea Company which provided for a proper survey of the Jomba plains and the excision of reserves for the people of Madang (one hectare per head of population). Moreover, the villagers were guaranteed fishing rights, their dwelling places, and the plantations they occupied at the time of survey. Unfortunately the ‘time of survey’ receded further and further into the future. It still had not been carried out fully by 1910, a situation which the Company in defence attributed to a dearth of surveyors with qualifications measuring up to government standards. Such ‘civilised’ niceties were lost on the Madang villagers, especially as they were regularly accused during these years of trespassing on Company property when they collected produce from trees planted before the Company’s ‘purchases’, and when they used traditional clay deposits which lay in Company plantation areas.

In response, the Madang people channelled their continuing resentment into a frame of religious belief centred on one of their creation myths, and designed to rationalise the defeat of 1904 in New Guinean terms and exorcise its effects. In a subtly modernised form, the myth explained that colonial rule was the product of a stronger magic ordained by the deities. The white people had been given a superior material culture, including the firearms used to overcome the villagers in 1904, after the New Guineans themselves had rejected it in favour of their canoes and spears. However, the myth held out the hope of a better future, in which the deities would return to distribute the ‘Cargo’ more equitably and enable the indigenous races to fight the whites. In a separate version reported by the Rhenish Mission, the deity had assured several Madang villagers that the whites had misused the guns
and bullets given to them, and that retribution was certain. To have the whites disappear from their lands, the people needed only to shake their heads, or have a certain Catholic priest ‘make a paper’.48

The common belief expressed in these Cargo myths encouraged passive resistance in the area for eight years. Until 1912, the Madang people reacted to continuing deprivations by obeying the government where necessary but obstructing it whenever they could. People in the coastal villages from Sek (north of Madang) to Bongu, and on Dampier and Bagobag islands, which were drawn into the administrative system in 1908-09, had to be forced to complete their labour on the roads even after the head tax was introduced, and ‘wearying’ police expeditions were always taking place to round up absconders. The government luluais, of which there were sixty-seven in the Madang district by late 1911, found it almost impossible to have their authority recognised or German instructions carried out, and most had to be provided with two police assistants in order to get anything done.49

A good example is Nalon, from Bilia, the man who in 1904 had informed the Germans of the plot against them. He had done so from an opportunist, if enterprising, motive, because the revolt had threatened to destroy the privilege he enjoyed of riding to the Rai coast on the New Guinea Company schooner to trade. But his collaboration with the Germans did nothing to solve the crisis which faced Bilia, namely the loss of all its land, nor did Nalon possess any natural leading status in his village. The Bilia made it clear that they hated the whites, and had little but contempt for Nalon as luluai. In the end, his impotence forced the administration to appoint another in his stead. Unlike Nalon, most of the Madang inhabitants avoided contact with the European economy, continuing to reject wage labour for the European plantations that occupied their lands. In 1906, only twenty-six of the 534 mainland recruits of the New Guinea Company came from Madang, and two years later the number had fallen to eight out of 497.50 By that time it was an open secret that ‘away with the white man’ was the catch cry of New Guineans around Madang.

Included among the whites in the minds of the Madang villagers were the Lutheran missionaries, who, despite their despair in 1904, had remained to carry on their work. Yet their influence grew only slowly and their successes remained modest. The first convert did not appear until the end of 1903, and by then the mission’s four schools had enticed only an additional six pupils in four years. No converts came forward in the year of the revolt. After 1904, the Rhenish Mission was hemmed
in from the north as the Catholic SVD Mission occupied Alexishafen, while lack of personnel prevented it from breaking out of the coastal crescent from Bongu to Madang. By 1908, the Rhenish Mission's 63 converts compared very unfavourably with the Neuendettelsau Mission's 1300, and the 1062 of the SVD, while in 1910-11 the number of Rhenish converts actually declined from 109 to 83. In 1906 there had been a dramatic turning point in villages removed from the immediate vicinity of Madang. It had started in Bongu, where the people reported to the missionaries that they had been visited by a strange 'man from heaven', who urged them to burn the images and instruments associated with the pre-contact cults and to carry the good news of peace and friendship to other villages. The Bogadjim and Bilibili people, who had returned to the Astrolabe coast the same year, joined in the movement, and there were scenes of confusion as the women, traditionally barred from the cult ceremonies on pain of death, were shown the richly-decorated masks, the carved bullroarers and whistles, only to cower in anguish and run trembling to hide.

None of this, however, made any impression at the centre of Madang, where the village elders kept up a belligerent opposition to mission teaching and its attempts to reduce the influence of the male cults. Significantly, the Cargo belief had affirmed the intrinsic value of these cults by referring to a deity who claimed to have 'bought' the cults and their secrets from the New Guineans and actually to practise them himself. The missionaries and the few converts were harassed at every opportunity. At Ragetta and Siar (the centre of the most bitter antipathy), sorcery was used to try and induce the death of the leading convert, Malai. The ringleader in this campaign was Sabu, himself a former convert and luluai, who finally forced the Germans to remove Malai to Herbertshöhle for his own good. In 1909 Sabu tried to have the site of the village removed altogether from the vicinity of the mission station. Two years later, in 1911, the Rhenish Mission felt compelled to strike twenty-seven nominal Christians from its lists in the Madang area. Even Malai, who had been the pioneer convert in Madang and the great hope of the missionaries, failed their stern test of acceptability, and he was abandoned when caught in 'pagan' costume, taking part in a 'pagan' dance.

The Madang people were astute in playing off mission and Government against each other. If services were regularly attended, it was only to maintain the friendship of the missionaries in case of a confrontation with the regime which the Madang people could not
handle alone. Yet the New Guineans were quick to complain to Hahl, on his occasional visits, of mission coercion to abandon their cult festivities and of physical abuse by individual missionaries, abuses which were not always figments of the imagination. The Rhenish Mission suffered more than once from serious indiscretions by its members. The Reverend Helmich was guilty on one occasion of flogging several Ragetta villagers who were trying to undermine the mission's position, and at another time he outraged the village elders by using an old *meziab* cult instrument to chase pigs.

The worst case was that of the Reverend Weber, who was responsible for the permanent ill-will against the mission at Siar after the departure of Bergmann. Weber was young and impetuous, and a missionary whose commitment bordered on the fanatical. Suitably convinced of his mission to civilise and discipline the New Guineans, he once described himself as 'a policeman on my right side and only on the left a missionary'.

Weber took it upon himself to administer beatings to Siars, and he did not hesitate to chastise the German administration for its defects in front of his congregations. His behaviour was not only foolhardy but dangerous in circumstances where the inhabitants were awaiting only the right moment to reassert themselves. In fact, Weber's acts were the antithesis of most of the ideals for which the Rhenish Mission stood, and in 1909 the mission authorities intervened and dismissed him from his post.

That did not stop events from coming to a head once more in 1912. Plantation clearing had been carried on uninterruptedly since 1904, and by 1912 the Madang people were crowded on all sides by planting interests of various kinds. North of Madang, Sarang plantation had been purchased in 1910-11, and the Mission of the Holy Ghost was now solidly entrenched at Sek, with a plantation of over 1000 hectares and a workforce numbering 520. The mission developed the harbour facilities, ran a sawmill, and was in the process of constructing an extensive system of roads. South of Madang, the New Guinea Company was now free to develop the Jomba Plains after escaping litigation over their ownership. Berghausen, the zealous district officer of Madang, had tried in 1910 to establish the legitimacy of the original Kubary contracts, but his challenge to the Company was thwarted by Hahl, who advised him to drop the legal investigation. To Hahl, viewing this stage of Madang's development, the real question was not the legality of the Company's land acquisitions south of Madang—for the sake of the area's future, that situation had to be accepted—but the question...
of providing sufficient reserves for local villagers so that they could continue to subsist side by side with Germany's planting empire.

But reserves were not emerging quickly either, particularly for the inhabitants of Madang, which remained the area of fastest growth for European business. In 1911 alone, three new plantation concerns opened in the area, and preparations were being made to divide the Meiro Plains among another four in 1912. Negotiations with the Bilia over the Meiro Plains, and with Siar over the purchase of 1200 hectares between Madang and Sek by Norddeutsche Lloyd, suffered from the same delays as had the survey of the Jomba Plains. Both the government surveyor and the Rhenish Mission warned the authorities that this was unsettling the people badly. The Reverend Helmich, perhaps with the trauma of 1904 in his mind, was far from sanguine about the possible consequences:

... The ill feeling of local natives concerning loss of land, which is sometimes veiled and covert, and sometimes openly declared, makes it more and more clear that the resentment against the Europeans is increasing enormously and that the temper of the people is like a boiling crater. Serious consideration must be given as to whether an eruption is to be feared at an opportune moment.

Nothing was ever substantiated about what next occurred, but it appears that a new, wide-ranging plot to kill the Madang Europeans began to be discussed about June of 1912. The lines of the new conspiracy resembled those of the old, with one new precaution added: this time the conspirators would wait for the night before the steamer Koblenz was due to depart, because they knew that the settlers would be drowsy or asleep from the effects of heavy drinking. Villagers would then attack government headquarters and seize the arms, and so be free to kill the Europeans systematically, area by area.

Whether the movement ever got beyond discussion is difficult to say. After the warnings from various sides about the peoples' agitation, the district officer began to get suspicious and searched for signs of disaffection. To his mind, he found them in the unaccustomed vehemence with which the male cults were being performed and the increased interest which villagers were showing in the whereabouts of European living quarters. Extra sentries were posted on Cutter Island and Bilia, and the main watch on the administration building strengthened, all of which quietened the villagers. But the European community since 1904 had lived with the conviction that the New Guineans...
would try again, and the first sign of uncertainty tended to panic them. There was a false alarm on 21 August. In response, the Europeans armed themselves, the police troops were made ready, and suspects were rounded up.

From this point, German sources rely entirely on native witnesses who suddenly began to testify that there had been an anti-white plot, and that several groups were involved. Ironically enough, the ring-leaders this time were supposedly the Bilia people, but the Siar, Panutibun, Ragetta and some Bilibili people were also alleged to be involved. A court was hastily convened, and a great deal of conflicting evidence was brought forward by hostile and friendly witnesses. In the end, the board of officials, which included members from the Lutheran Mission, decided that there was sufficient evidence to substantiate the allegation of a plot against the whites. Pressed on by the nervous settlers, and anxious to remove once and for all the last obstacle to European security and economic expansion, the district officer, Scholz, banished the accused groups from the area, some to the north coast behind Cape Croiselles, the others to the Rai coast, while sixteen of the suspected ringleaders were transported to Herbertshohe. This signalled the final disarray of the Madang people, and the triumph of the planting and trading community.

The Madang 'revolts' are not easy to categorise as revolts. There are a number of features which weaken the argument that the people of Madang were ready to destroy all things European and revert to their traditional existence. Firstly, the 1904 venture had been a very tentative affair. At least two villages defected at the last moment, while the would-be rebels did not even offer token resistance after being found out. Secondly, there is no evidence to prove that the 1912 'conspirators' actually were planning and organising a rebellion. The 'plot' may simply have been an extension of the Cargo myths which had sustained people since 1904, the belief that the time had come for the deities to remove the whites from New Guinea, but to retain for New Guineans the European way of life and access to its wealth. Significantly, a naval report about Madang at the time mentions that the Madang people were redistributing European roles among themselves, choosing who would be police master or magistrate in the new world, who would live in the white people's houses, and who would 'marry' the white women.

On the other hand, conditions around Madang did lend themselves to violence and physical resistance by the villagers. Not only had they
lost most of their land to Company plantations but, unlike the Tolai in the Gazelle, they also lacked the resources to sell to the Europeans and establish a prosperous trading exchange. Violence was more likely in a situation where the people had no prospects of advancing themselves through adaptation to the European economy.

The only exception to the racial confrontations which prevailed on mainland coasts during these years lay in the Huon Peninsula. On its coasts and in the immediate hinterland, New Guineans and the only Europeans in the area, the Neuendettelsau missionaries, had managed to cultivate a tolerant relationship based on mutual respect and reciprocal behaviour. Using two local languages, Jabem and Kâte, the mission was able to expand from its two mainland stations and two converts in 1899, to eleven stations with 1300 baptised converts and 4000 to 5000 nominal adherents in 1908, stretched along the south coast of the Huon Peninsula to Cape Arkona (Bukaua) and Malalo (Salamaua), and deep into the Herzog Ranges. In addition, the mission followed the example of the Catholics in the north of Kaiser Wilhelmsland, and in 1908 purchased the New Guinea Company's remaining 1000 hectares of land at Finschhafen, a move as much designed to keep the Catholic SVD Mission out as to contribute to the Neuendettelsau Mission's upkeep. The absence of large-scale European businesses in the Huon Peninsula after 1892 explains much of the success which the Neuendettelsau Mission enjoyed in race relations.

Its evangelical success was the result of a bold approach to conversion adopted after 1899. For many years Flierl and the Reverend Vetter had talked of organising their preaching work and the new converts in a way that was sensitive to local social structures and, more importantly, to the ideas with which contacted groups interpreted their world. The Reverend Christian Keysser, who arrived in 1899, laid the base for official policy by articulating for the first time the total social philosophy of the Kâte and Hube peoples, and laying down guidelines for working with them. Keysser reasoned that seeking individual conversions was counter-productive, for native culture and social relationships were so integrally connected with the traditional religion that individual converts to Christianity would experience ostracism and social and spiritual isolation within their communities. In the end they would be unable to withstand the pressures from their fellows and must fall back into the old ways. The mission's solution was to move out into the villages and concentrate on substituting a social organisation based
on the Gospel for the old social and religious life. By building Christianity into the new society, no individual should feel isolation within the group. There would be a minimum of dislocation and, the mission hoped, a more fundamental metanoia.

The immediate product of this approach was a mass movement around Sattelberg in 1904, when, amid scenes of the greatest drama, villagers brought cult objects and burnt them on pyres, and veteran sorcerers came forward to confess their past deeds. A severe earthquake in September 1906 rendered fortuitous assistance to the missionaries' campaign on behalf of the supernatural. Crowds of 700 to 800 attended the baptisms as the movement spread, and strong millennial expectations accompanied it.63

The absence of any developed business on the southern mainland (though the New Guinea Company was holding on to more than 4700 hectares of land at Lae) meant that until 1906-07 the administration did not concern itself with the area, leaving it to the peaceful ministries of the Neuendettelsau Mission. The mission had created a secure base along the coasts and in the hinterland of the Huon Peninsula, from which it could open up the interior ranges and the vast trough-like valley of the Markham River, that disgorges itself at a furious rate into the sea at the head of the Huon Gulf. The mission's way inland had been barred continually by the predatory raids of the Wampar, or Lae Womba as they were called by the Germans, a warrior people of almost legendary ferocity whose ancestral home was on the Watut, a south-western tributary of the Markham. Late in the nineteenth century, they began pushing east towards the Markham mouth, driving groups, especially the Ahi people, before them, settling the territory north of the river, and then preying on the Lae people, who were a mixture of Kawa speakers from Bukaua and Ahi refugees from the south bank of the Markham.64

A government police expedition ventured up the Markham in 1905 to contact the Wampar and demonstrate the dangers of trifling with Europeans. But the Wampar got in the first blow: they attacked the party as it bivouacked overnight on the banks of the river, and the expedition was forced to retreat with three Europeans and three police soldiers seriously wounded.

Success encouraged the Wampar to intensify their raids, striking ever closer to the coast, and in three attacks on scattered Lae villages in 1907 they killed over 100 people, a result probably made easier by the loss of many young Lae men from the warrior ranks to the plantation
recruiters. The Lae, scattered and dispirited from constant raiding, were finally reduced to sleeping on the beach at Cape Arkona to the east, and they refused point-blank to return to ‘place belong plenty fight’. Their old settlements were scenes of desolation, with houses razed to the ground, gardens laid waste, trade boxes smashed open and their contents strewn around. Two further expeditions were organised by the Germans, but their power of retaliation was restricted by the modest size of the mainland police force and the demands being made on them by unrest in Aitape and on the north-east coast. Lack of finance ruined any idea of a permanent station in the area in 1907-08.

The Neuendettelsau Mission, whose interests in the security of the Markham Valley were the most immediate, was striving meanwhile to make peaceful contact with the Wampar. In April 1909, the Reverend Stefan Lehner, accompanied by the ethnologist Paul Neuhauss and two other missionaries, mounted a party to penetrate up the Markham into Wampar territory. For three days they made their way upstream, struggling against the current and constantly on the watch lest their guides and bearers desert in their terror at entering the enemy’s lair. No Wampar were sighted but Lehner left a gift of red cloth, tobacco, a knife, an axe and a necklace of dogs’ teeth on a tree branch before the party returned to the coast. Two weeks later, the Lae excitedly presented the missionaries with a wooden sword from the Wampar, who had offered to make friendship. It was the turning of the corner. Some days later, the Wampar and the Lae held a giant feast at which they exchanged ‘hostages’ as sureties for the peace. In June, Lehner was able to visit the area and exchange gifts with the watchful but jubilant warriors. Two years later, in 1911, the Neuendettelsau Mission founded its first station among the Wampar.65

Unfortunately, the new peace and goodwill did not prevail throughout the Markham Valley. Attacks on the coast had ceased, but unrest continued in the valley itself, with repeated clashes occurring between the Wampar and the Azera, a larger offshoot of the same people. In January 1911, a European Bird of Paradise hunter, Richards, was killed by Wampars in the Garagos-Wampit area west of the Markham mouth. Richards was the victim of his own mistiming. The village in which he sought overnight accommodation was in the midst of celebrating a feast to the ancestors, and, since Richards neglected to offer a friendly gift on his arrival, the villagers took him for an intruder and a harmful spirit. The logical conclusion in terms of their own culture was to cancel out his influence by killing him.66 Two years
before, on the middle Watut, people from Babwaf village who had never seen a white person, attacked Wilhelm Dammköhler, the old New Guinea hand, successful explorer and prospector who was searching for alluvial gold. Dammköhler died from arrow wounds. His companion, Rudolf Oldörp, fearfully wounded, lived to tell the story by dragging himself onto a raft and sailing down to the mouth of the Markham.

In 1909 Hahl had refused to send an expedition to avenge Dammköhler's death, since he did not have the money to intervene in places which could not yet be brought under permanent control. By 1911 this had changed: large punitive expeditions were now penetrating west of the Markham in the interests of permanent security. When war broke out in 1914, a census patrol had already been made of eighty villages in the north of the Huon Gulf.67

At that stage, the Huon Gulf was the only region where the Germans could boast of a limited control further than ten to fifteen kilometres inland. Most of this was the product of the Neuendettelsau Mission's peaceful labouring in the area since the 1880s, for while government expeditions impressed villagers with the power and efficiency of the Reich, it was the missionaries who inspired trust and acceptance of many of the white people's ways. The mission's policy of communal conversion brought about a veritable revolution in living patterns in some areas. By 1914 the Kâte people in the vicinity of Sattelberg had, of their own initiative, introduced new legal sanctions and procedures into their social system, and were restructuring the division of labour within the larger, regional parish community that had been formed. By 1914, also, the mission had a permanent missionary at Lae, had pushed its way to the 1000-metre-high Cromwell Mountains deep in the Huon Peninsula, and was making preparations for a mission presence among the cannibalistic Azera people, over a hundred kilometres from the Huon coasts.

As for the rest of the protectorate, one can only assess Germany's final hold over the multifarious communities of New Guineans by looking at the stages of contact region by region. From this point of view, the Bismarck Archipelago seems to fare better than Kaiser Wilhelmsland. At the outbreak of war, the Gazelle Peninsula (excluding the area beyond the Varzin and the outer Bainings) and northern New Ireland were, to all intents and purposes, areas where physical security was no longer the first consideration of settlers and administration. Large district confederations were being formed, and were concentrating on the demands of economic development—public works,
education, agricultural improvement, and technological innovations like copra driers, wagons and horses. Elsewhere in the Archipelago, rather crude frontier conditions were the order of the day, conditions which meant that the Government still accepted with resignation the occasional murder of careless Europeans. The worst was over in the older areas of conflict like the Admiralties and northern Bougainville, but security of life and of property here were not yet guaranteed. Meanwhile, there were vast areas in New Britain and Bougainville which were completely uncontacted at the outbreak of war.

On the mainland, north of the Huon Peninsula, the nominal control which the Germans claimed over the entire coastline amounted to little more than a record of formal contact and a thin veneer of direct rule. The authority of the Reich was hardly acknowledged beyond the coastal enclaves of European settlement—Aitape, Potsdamhafen-Monumbo and Madang—and their immediate hinterlands.

At Madang, racial relations altered dramatically after the exile of the 1912 'conspirators'. Having achieved nothing by active or passive resistance, the Madang peoples tried a new tack towards the millennium which they believed was imminent. This time they chose limited co-operation with the new culture. Their strategy was reflected in a startling increase in recruitment for European plantations (from 619 in 1910 to 1955 in 1913) and in a more forthcoming attitude to the Lutheran Mission. Conversions were made thick and fast. The Siar-Ragetta people returned from exile in 1914, after the Australian occupation, and immediately started to fill the churches; fifty people soon reported for baptism. The number of Christians in the area of Madang (including villages inland) multiplied thirteen times in the five or six years after 1914.68

Conversion offered a new rallying point and created a new hope: the hope that through conversion New Guineans might gain access to the white people's material wealth and self-confidence. Conversion was also a new, more subtle form of resistance to social disintegration, and carried with it the desire to show Europeans that New Guineans were not just primitive savages. In all this there were explicit millenarian overtones, for these villagers of the Madang area conceived of the new religion as the ritual equivalent of their traditional beliefs and the long-sought-for secret to the Cargo. After 1914 this led to the development of a 'secular' political organisation with its own cult leader.69

Madang and the Huon Peninsula were exceptions to the general
situation on the mainland. The Sepik district, with nearly one-quarter of the total population of the protectorate, was quite uncontrolled in 1914, except for the immediate vicinity of the Aitape station. Still an uncertain quantity was the north-east coast, where hostile tribes had been pushed back into the mountains as the Germans occupied the coast. Completely unknown, though suspected, were the vast populations and the sophisticated agricultural systems of the New Guinea Highlands.

The nominal peace on the coasts was regularly disrupted by the invasions of mountain tribes. One of the unforeseen effects of coastal pacification, and of the recruitment of able-bodied warriors, was increased aggression from inland or mountain tribes, which the Germans found hard to counter. The hinterland of Aitape, the territory inland from Potsdamhafen and Bogia, and the Rai coast ranges were the most troublesome. Hahl did make an effort to influence the Sepik interior by establishing a staging point for recruitment at Angoram on the lower length of the river in 1913. And on the Rai coast the regime tried to stop mountain people preying on coastal villages in a series of fiercely-fought battles in 1910, but the final effect was only to drive the offending tribes deeper into the Finisterre Range.

In all these attempts to impose a physical control over the communities of their far-flung protectorate, the Germans relied heavily on the colonial police force. If Hahl was unable to secure law and order in the German manner when and where he wanted it, part of the reason was the deficiencies of his police force. Though the largest in the Pacific empire, numbering nearly 1000 men by 1914, the New Guinea police remained too small to handle unrest throughout the protectorate, particularly when unrest occurred in different areas simultaneously.

In 1904 the Bainings massacre and its repercussions highlighted the ease with which a surprise New Guinean attack might overcome even a major centre of European settlement where a station's complement of forty or fifty police was absent on security duties in other parts. The Madang revolt the same year very nearly succeeded, in spite of the fact that the police were on active sentry duty. Again, in late 1910, when news of the Ponape insurrection reached New Guinea, most of the better-trained police were in Morobe, Madang or Aitape, or on the Anglo-German border expedition, and fewer than 100 of the newest recruits and inferior soldiers could be mustered as reinforcements for the besieged colony. The most serious deficiency was revealed in 1913, when the entire expeditionary force had to be mobilised to deal with
an uprising in southern New Ireland, and many of the local police contingents were also drawn in, leaving the rest of the protectorate practically bereft of military protection.

The inadequacy of numbers was overcome in some places by recruiting local auxiliaries to assist in punitive operations. Auxiliaries played an important role in the 1893 war in the Gazelle Peninsula, in Bougainville and in various campaigns on the mainland, but their employment was always a risk since they could not be controlled effectively in the jungle, and indiscriminate killing was the occasional result. The conditions under which the police were used also impaired their effectiveness as agents of law and order. When a German district officer was opening up new country, the police were often the first people to go into an uncontacted village, thereby setting the standard for subsequent relations, and there are documented cases of intimidation, rape and pillage by native police, and of their use as press gangs to obtain labourers.70

This was a particular risk with the expeditionary troops, a contingent of over 100 men developed out of the existing force as an instrument to help open up new territory and lay the groundwork of ‘pacification’ for civilian administrations. In Hahl’s 1914 three-year plan, the expeditionary troops were envisaged as an increasingly essential arm of the government, as a ‘vigorous’ means of bringing the vast interior within the German orbit. Though this hardly constitutes the establishment of a standing army, it is clear that Hahl’s plan would have leaned ever more heavily on military pressure and forceful pacification. Only time would have told how such a program would have been received by the New Guineans, especially in the Highlands.

The problems of imposing control aside, time ran out for the Germans in 1914. At that stage, relations on the mainland remained poised on a thin line between uneasy peace and open war. The Germans had reached a stage of partial control best defined by a later military observer as:

Where the luluais will respond to a summons to appear at a government station, but where it is not altogether advisable for traders and others to wander about without protection, where tax payments are made only here and there, and at irregular intervals, and where the people are prone to disregard orders received from the District Officer through their luluais.71

Where every village was a law unto itself, and few larger, regional ties existed, the Germans could not be sure of any areas except the very
oldest coastal settlements occupied by the planters and missionaries. Security depended on the acquiescence of New Guineans in the presence and practices of Europeans. Even in a place like the east coast of the Gazelle Peninsula, where the Germans were most dominant, peace was less the product of superior Western technology than the voluntary realisation by the native people that they stood to gain most, with minimal discomfort, from economic co-operation with the colonial economy.
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