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## Conclusion

The arrival of World War II in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate in early 1942 was neither sought nor anticipated by the indigenous population. Local understandings of the outside world were limited. The war had nothing to do with the local inhabitants of the protectorate but was fought between Japan and the Allied nations on indigenous land. The forms of military conduct practised by Western countries were alien to local understanding of warfare. But since Solomon Islands was a British possession, its inhabitants were quickly enlisted in the battle against Japanese occupation.

In Chapter 1, I discussed the various ways islanders contributed to the Allied war effort in the Solomon Islands Campaign. I have shown the foundation the Royal Australian Navy built in the protectorate through the construction of the coastwatching network prior to the war, and the significance of this establishment during the Japanese and Allied occupation of the islands. Under the authority of the navy's network, islanders were enlisted as coastwatchers, scouts and labourers. Islanders were mobilised to perform various tasks, including gathering intelligence on Japanese troops, undertaking search and rescue missions, conducting guerrilla war against Japanese forces, facilitating a communication network between Allied troops and coastwatchers, and providing logistical support for both coastwatchers and the Allied armies. A relatively small number of Solomon Islanders were enlisted in the British Solomon Islands Defence Force, becoming members of Allied military units and participating in frontline combat throughout the Solomons and as far as Bougainville. A more significant number of islanders were recruited into the Native

Labour Corps, forming the backbone of the Allied logistical effort and enduring hardships of war arguably on a par with any military fighting force involved.

In Chapter 2, I explored the reasons why Solomon Islanders were generally 'loyal' to the Allies. Islanders did not simply support the Allies because of any anticipated benefit from their contribution. I argue that 'loyalty' was an Allied concept and a postwar simplification. The reasons that lured or motivated islander participation in the war alongside Allied troops were varied in nature, reflecting the complexities of the politics of colonialism and war. Some of these issues of motivation were inscribed in the cultural system itself. Issues of social obligation to the crown were influenced by existing cultural hierarchies, as well as religious practices, especially Christianity. The structure of the big man prestige system and the allegiance demanded by big men and chiefs fostered an indigenous culture of compliance to local authorities without any active forum for criticising their legitimacy. This structure was supported by the principles of Christianity as taught by missionaries and understood by islanders, and was co-opted by the colonial authorities for administration of indigenous affairs.

The effectiveness of Allied propaganda played a significant role in shaping the perceptions of islanders towards Japanese soldiers. The negative image spread among islanders by district officers and missionaries about Japanese soldiers was very successful in its aim to dissuade islanders from providing any form of assistance to the Japanese. This negative image was reinforced through the behaviour of some Japanese soldiers towards islanders and their property during the course of the war. However, severe penalties were also imposed by coastwatchers and district officers upon indigenous peoples if they chose to assist Japanese soldiers. Corporal punishment and withholding wages were common penalties inflicted on local people who were found to provide any form of military or humanitarian assistance to Japanese soldiers.

Although in some areas indigenous peoples were coerced into favouring the Allies, it is evident that the young male population of the time participated in the war driven mainly by curiosity and a sense of adventure, as well as their interest in witnessing the military prowess and social attitudes of both Japanese and Allied troops. These perceptions were very detailed in nature, enabling islanders to distinguish different Allied troops according

to their nationalities, with an attitude of favouritism developing towards American troops. This attitude is essential for understanding the escalation of sociopolitical initiatives in the islands after the war.

The impact the war had on island societies and understandings of the outside world was extensive. As discussed in Chapter 3, the war provided opportunities for interracial relations that had not been possible during the prewar period. The racial line was bridged when islanders saw for the first time that black American soldiers and soldiers from other Pacific island countries were capable of doing the same tasks as white soldiers. The opportunity for indigenous peoples to perform jobs of the same nature as their white colonial 'masters' drastically changed local reception of white master/black servant relationships. Furthermore, the easygoing and liberal attitude of white American soldiers towards islanders lay in stark contrast to the prewar British conduct towards indigenous peoples. Islanders were able to share food with white American soldiers, sleep in the same tents and eat from the same plates. Little evidence has come to light of racism by white American soldiers towards islanders, and this easygoing relationship with white GIs altered islander attitudes and expectations of the colonial administration. Witnessing an apparent equality between black and white GIs, at least in uniform, work and diet, also impressed islanders. While these wartime interracial relationships contrasted sharply with levels of racism within the United States at the time, they provided an interactive environment for islanders with white people that had not been possible before the war.

The war shifted the British Solomon Islands Protectorate from a neglected colonial backwater into a new era. Impacts of the war were not limited to interracial encounters. There was also an economic boost in the protectorate. The wage rate increased threefold compared to the prewar period, and the selling of crafts and food to both Japanese and American soldiers increased monetary circulation at the village level. The war also shifted commercial practices between islanders, from the traditional forms of goods exchange using the barter system to the selling of goods and services for cash.

The effects of the war were economically and politically far-reaching. Politically, the protonationalist movement called Maasina Rule gained momentum, raising islander voices for the first time in the protectorate. Although the movement only influenced some sections of the indigenous population, it reflected a degree of grievance held by all islanders,

especially a desire for more equality and the representation of islanders in the administration of the protectorate. Hence, Maasina Rule became the voice of islanders in the struggle for increased wages, as well as the demand for the provision of welfare services for indigenous peoples by the administration. Although the movement was unsuccessful, it marked a point in the protectorate's history when islanders gained greater sociopolitical understandings and economic knowledge.

Economically, the military infrastructure left behind became the starting point for economic reconstruction in the protectorate. Roads, bridges, airfields, wharves, permanent buildings and Quonset huts formed a foundation for establishing a modern economy after the war. However, the concentration of this economic restoration initiative on Guadalcanal created long-term problems for social and political development, problems that had they even been foreseen were secondary to the immediate necessity of exploiting development on Guadalcanal. Other islands languished and the population of rural migrants in Honiara began to grow.

Like other islanders in the Pacific, indigenous inhabitants of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate experienced both immediate and long-term impacts of the war. Some of these impacts allowed islanders to benefit from the outside world. Others, although beneficial in the short term for postwar reformation of the economic and political administration of the protectorate, lingered to contribute to the experience of sociopolitical upheaval, culminating 20 years after political independence from Britain in the crisis of 1998–2003. After five years of sociopolitical tension and armed conflict, the nation again found itself in the process of economic, social and political restoration. Although the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands was successful in restoring law and order in the country, there still remain apprehensive feelings among the people, particularly between those of Guadalcanal and Malaita. Acknowledging this lingering distrust and addressing it in a collective manner would help in restoring a sense of national unity and identity, and it was this realisation that gave birth to the idea of creating a national monument commemorating islanders in the Solomon Islands Campaign.

For an ethnically divided nation, the war was a common denominator and a time in which Solomon Islanders worked together for a common cause. The reminder of this cooperative effort through the physical presence of the Pride of Our Nation monument is symbolically helping to restore that cooperative spirit. In order for this understanding to gain momentum,

people need to be aware of the history of islander participation in the war. While the monument is testimony to this legacy, the inclusion of islander wartime histories in the national curriculum is intended to encourage younger generations to appreciate the efforts of their ancestors and perhaps begin to develop a sense of pride and national identity.

The Pride of Our Nation monument serves both a political and psychological end in promoting national unity and creating a venue for rebuilding national identity while recognising the contribution of Solomon Islanders during the Pacific Campaign of World War II. With the inclusion of these histories in the school curriculum, it is hoped that more awareness will be raised among the young and future generations of Solomon Islanders, aiding the purpose of instilling a shared sense of national pride and identity.

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