Evacuation, invasion and destruction

Nobody knows what the future may hold, even from day to day. Go ahead and make arrangements for yourself that you think proper. But don’t forget that if the worst comes to the worst, the British Empire is in your debt, and make your demands accordingly.

— Spearline Wilson to his wife, Jessie, 28 January 1942

Tulagi in 1942

By 1942, Tulagi’s southern third was a tropical botanical garden dotted with spacious bungalows and auxiliary buildings. A Walkabout article from 1937 described the buildings as being surrounded by massed displays of gay crotons, exotic flowering shrubs, and riotous blossoming creepers. White-painted stones fringed the footpaths; the grass was cut short by natives swinging pieces of steel, like lengths of hoop-iron, to keep down the grass-seed … and well-trimmed hedges of hibiscus are on either hand. It was those glorious hedges of hibiscus, gay with flowers five or six inches across in pinks and reds and apricots, and the lovely perfumes of the frangipani that was growing everywhere in large trees, that brought to us the real breath of the Tropics.

1 UQFL, Wilson Papers and Photographs.
2 Weetman 1937, 34.
The permanent population of the whole Tulagi enclave just before the Pacific War was about 600 Europeans, Chinese and Solomon Islanders. The British Solomon Islands had become a ‘copra protectorate’, its economy relying almost totally on growing and processing coconuts. In 1940, the Advisory Council consisted of resident commissioner Marchant as president, Chief Magistrate and legal adviser, Ragna Hyne, Treasurer and Collector of Customs, Pop Johnson, and Government Secretary, Major Eustace Sandars. The nonofficial members were the Anglican Bishop of Melanesia, Walter Baddeley, and three business representatives, Eric P. Monckton (a plantation owner from Shortland Islands), Jack Lotze (manager of Carpenters on Tulagi) and Harold Corry (a plantation owner from Guadalcanal). Roger Keesing and Peter Corris nicely described the Solomons and Tulagi as a world of ‘caricature colonialists, of whiskey, quinine and coconuts’. The British had created a small, mildewed centre of British administrative and commercial power and superiority, quite similar to settlements in other areas of the Pacific and the wider British

3 WPHCG (S), 18 February 1941, MAC, 18 November 1940, 27.
Empire. All of this came to an end as the Japanese invasion became inevitable and Solomon Islands emerged as a crucial turning point in the Pacific War.

Preparing for evacuation

A few Japanese fishermen were already living in the Solomon Archipelago before Woodford took over as Resident Commissioner. Once Tulagi was settled there were always a small number of Japanese living there. Residents became uneasy about Japanese ‘sanpans’ (fishing vessels), which appeared regularly in the 1930s; photographs of one ship and its crew from 1936 have survived.5 As Japan expanded into Korea and coastal China, this Japanese presence in the Pacific Islands increased—part of Nan’yō, the Japanese vision of their rightful place in the South Seas.

Other foreign residents became suspicious that the Japanese residents were there to look at the lie of the land and sea on behalf of their government for future military purposes, and indeed there were Japanese residents who assisted the military advance.6 Terushige Ishimoto, who lived on Tulagi for decades and then moved to Rabaul, was a guide for the 1942 Japanese invasion of Guadalcanal. Kwaiami, another Japanese who had lived on Tulagi and Makira, was with Japanese forces on Malaita.7 The same suspicion was often voiced of prewar Japanese in New Guinea and Australia, although of course these Japanese residents may have been commandeered by military authorities who had discovered their special knowledge of geography, English and Pijin. The Japanese were more numerous in Australian mandated New Guinea than in Australian Papua or Solomon Islands, but even in the mandated territory they were economically marginal and in numbers only a small fraction of that of the more dominant Chinese population.8

5 Hadlow 2016, 157, quoting Reverend John Metcalfe on Choiseul.
8 Iwamoto 1999, 104–22.
This chapter concentrates on the early defence plans and the evacuation—the end of British rule. It does not examine Tulagi under the Japanese or after it was retaken by the Americans in August 1942, although those periods are covered in the photographs in the chapter. War in Europe in 1939 had few initial consequences for Solomon Islands, except when copra and rubber prices rose, which was short-lived once fewer ships were available to transport these primary products. Alarmed by the deterioration of events in Europe, Marchant, almost as soon as he arrived in Tulagi in 1939, began to prepare for invasion. He had been in World War I and knew what was needed. Solomon Islands was clearly in the path of the Japanese southward advance.
In September 1939, the WPHC passed a regulation to form a defence force, which was amended a year later. Resident commissioner Marchant was away from the protectorate between March and September 1941, leaving Pop Johnson in charge. Then, in late 1941 and early 1942, the WPHC passed additional regulations to enable the repression of sedition, detention of suspect individuals, forced but paid requisition of property and special court provisions. Marchant was appointed lieutenant-colonel and Eustace Sandars commanding officer of the BSIP Defence Force, supported by district officers. Sandars had arrived in the protectorate in 1928 as a subinspector in the armed constabulary, progressing quickly to

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Plate 8.2 Japanese fishermen on Tulagi, 1936
Source: BM, Robert Lever Photographic Collection.

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9 Anonymous 1941, 114; Armstrong 1944, 78–83; Maude and Johnson 1945, 97.
become a district officer and a senior member of staff. David Trench and Martin Clemens were his defence force deputies, with Donald Kennedy and Michael Forster also involved—all with the rank of captain.¹⁰ The number of deputy commissioners of the WPHC was expanded to include the BSIP Defence Force captains, who were also appointed special commissioners—able to hold courts with limited jurisdiction in criminal matters. The other captain was Spearline Wilson, another World War I veteran and the officer in charge of the possible future evacuation. He sent his wife and family to Sydney in 1939 for the sake of the children’s education and also as a precaution against the possibility of war.

Plate 8.3 Martin Clemens and men from the BSIP Defence Force
Source: UQFL, Wilson Papers and Photographs.

Solomon Islanders knew the war was coming, even if they did not fully understand why or the full extent of what was about to occur. Jonathan Fifi‘i, who was on Tulagi until just before the war, said:

We heard that Japan was at war with England. People were saying that that war would come to us in the Solomon Islands. Solomon Islanders asked, ‘What is the war about’? Why are they fighting’? The Europeans said, ‘Japan wants to take control of lots of areas that are under the King. The war isn’t far away. The Japanese are going to come here’.¹¹

¹⁰ Baddeley 1942.
¹¹ Fifi‘i 1989, 41.
Looking back, it is easy to see the changes as Japan expanded its area of influence. Taiwan was under Japanese rule from 1895 until 1945 after China lost the first Sino-Japanese war and ceded control of the island, which became Japan’s first overseas territory. When World War I broke out, on behalf of the Allies, Australia captured Rabaul (capital of German New Guinea) and the Japanese captured German Micronesia. After the war, Japan was awarded Micronesia and Australia was awarded German New Guinea, both as League of Nations mandated territories. In the 1930s, Japan began to expand militarily, annexing Manchuria in 1931, and the next year began to develop military defences in Truk (Chuuk) in the Caroline Islands, walking out of the League of Nations in 1934 after censure. Chuuk had the best anchorage in Micronesia, and Dublon Island in Chuuk Lagoon became Japan’s Pearl Harbor for its fleet—a strategic base from which to cast covetous eyes on South-East Asia. In 1937, Japan invaded coastal China, initiating war in the Pacific. The WPHC authorities and the British Colonial Office watched with concern but, as with German aggression, they chose appeasement, not confrontation.

In World War II, Japan was an ally of the Axis powers, Germany and Italy. With the capture of South-East Asia in mind, Japan decided to make a preemptive strike to destroy America’s Pacific fleet. The leadup to the loss and then recapture of Tulagi and Guadalcanal began on 7 December 1941, when Pearl Harbor, the American military base at Hawai`i, was bombed by the Japanese, bringing the United States into World War II. Pearl Harbor was the headquarters of the US Pacific Fleet and was the largest US military base beyond the American mainland.

Foreign residents in the Tulagi enclave and more widely in the protectorate watched preparations with sinking hearts. Prisoners helped build a maze of trenches and gun sites on Tulagi (see Map 8.1). Military squads were trained, including a Chinese squad. In preparation for the upcoming war, Gavutu became an Australian naval base, a side product of which were the first aerial photographs of Tulagi Harbour. Sir Charles Burnett, Inspector-General of the RAAF, visited Tulagi by seaplane in May 1939. After discussions with Marchant and an inspection, he recommended that Australia establish an advanced operation base near Tulagi. Wing-Commander John Brogan, an Australian armed forces divisional works officer, and Group Captain John Margrave Lerew, who was the new
commanding officer of No. 24 RAAF Squadron, arrived in July 1940. They chose Gavutu and its smaller neighbour Tanambogo Island (5.2 hectares) as their base. They then located a similar site at Port Vila in the New Hebrides and returned to the Solomons with a French surveyor named Louis Page. The plan was to clear mangroves and jungle on Tanambogo, which was accomplished in 10 days by Kennedy and a team of Malaitan labourers working from dawn to dusk. Brogan, Lerew and Page also mapped out the site for a naval base on Gela Sule, across the harbour. The next stage of the operation was to construct a link between the two islands, expanding the slender natural causeway that already existed. Then, beginning in March 1941, Levers supervised a new project that employed 32 Gela Islanders, organised by Jack Svensen, to enlarge the causeway to 22.8 metres long and 2.4 metres wide. The new Tanambogo base contained an administrative block, stores building, kitchen, sergeants’ mess, quarters for the airmen, a store for marine equipment and a large T-shaped underground shelter.

Gavutu was also upgraded. A bomb storage area was dug on the north side and a fuel dump created on the south side. Gavutu later housed 409,000 litres of high-octane aviation fuel, with supplementary reserves held on Gela Sule. A radio station was built on the top of the island, enabling communication with Townsville, in Queensland, and a large tank was constructed nearby, allowing a gravity-fed water supply. Tanambogo also had a camouflaged radio transmitter, and a remote-controlled direction-finding station was set up on tiny Gaomi Island, off Gavutu. Levers’ medical clinic was expanded into a small hospital and the base had its own barge and a crash boat for rescues.13

In July 1941, the RAAF moved some of its Port Moresby–based Catalina seaplanes to Gavutu, although most of the personnel did not arrive until after February 1942. Australia’s Department of Air took over weather reporting, which linked weather stations between Netherlands New Guinea and New Caledonia. The first commanding officer, Major J. Edmonds Wilson, arrived at Gavutu in September 1941, along with Sargent T.E. Hore, to set up a weather station that relayed information back to the Port Moresby–based Catalinas. Arrangements were also made to transfer some of the commandos from Australia’s No. 1 Independent Company, then in Kavieng, New Ireland, to Tulagi. This company was scattered through

13 Jersey 2008, 10–12.
the islands between Buka and the New Hebrides with the intention of training local defence forces and remaining behind after the evacuation to assist the Coastwatchers—the ‘invisible army’—to gather intelligence. The company arrived in early November, using a Sutherland seaplane, their own motorised 80-ton lugger *Induna Star* and a regular voyage of BP’s *Malaita*. The commandos erected three Vickers machine guns on swivel mountings for antiaircraft use. They also began to train the BSIP Defence Force. The local officers were commissioned as second lieutenants on 16 December 1941, 10 days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The commanding officer, with the rank of major, was 43-year-old Vivian Fox-Strangways, who came from an aristocratic military family that included the Earls of Ilchester. Resident Commissioner-designate of the Crown Colony of Gilbert and Ellice Islands, he was diverted to Tulagi once the Japanese began to invade the outer Gilberts in January 1942. Fox-Strangways was not happy with defence force standards, although as his soldiers had all functioned effectively within the armed constabulary, he may have underestimated their efficiency, particularly for bush patrols. There were also two American naval men based as observers at Gavutu, lieutenants George H. Hutchinson and Samuel P. Weller. The Japanese advanced south so fast that little training occurred. After a month, Fox-Strangways was ordered back to Australia and some of the officers left the protectorate or joined the Coastwatchers. By March 1942, the defence force was no longer functioning. It was reformed later in the war, serving honourably, based on experienced constables. Initially, Solomon Islanders were routinely denigrated as unsuitable for modern warfare. In fact, they turned out to be very effective and excellent practitioners of jungle warfare.

The seaplane base, the arrival of the commandos and the existence of the small defence force both calmed and alarmed Tulagi’s residents. It offered some protection, but also signalled that the Japanese were heading south. Commercial interests would have been pleased by the activity as the Gavutu air base and the brief commando presence tapped into their local supply network. Levers continued to operate its store on Gavutu

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14 The Coastwatchers were prewar planters, officials and missionaries, mainly from Australia and New Zealand, and Solomon Islanders, who went into hiding during the Japanese invasion and formed a secret communication system to monitor enemy shipping and planes for the Allies. They also rescued Allied personnel who were stranded. There were about 100 Coastwatchers in the South Pacific. Many were stationed in Papua New Guinea, with 24 in Solomon Islands, including two in Bougainville. Their activities were crucial to alerting the Allied forces of approaching Japanese bombing raids. Horton 1970; Lord 1977; Moore 2013, entry for Coastwatchers.
and other supplies were readily available from BP on Makambo and from Carpenters at Tulagi, plus the Chinatown stores. BP’s ships continued to bring in regular supplies from Australia.

A ‘scorched earth’ policy was adopted: everything that could be of value to the Japanese was to be either removed or destroyed. The initial evacuations from Tulagi began in mid-December 1941—first, the women and children, followed by nonessential government and commercial company staff and equipment. Fears intensified after the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December, which brought the Americans into the war. Marchant knew via the BBC on 8 December that the Japanese had also landed on the Malay Peninsula. On that day, he sent a launch to Bungana to extinguish the lighthouse. Two days later, Bishop Baddeley arrived at Bungana to discuss evacuation plans with the Sisters of the Cross, asking that the entire school move to Taroaniara the next day. About 9 pm on 14 December, Marchant sent for Wilson because rumours were circulating that Japanese vessels had been sighted between Truk and Solomon Islands.

Marchant had heard that residents of Chinatown were becoming uneasy; it was much worse than that and panic had set in. The details below have been pieced together from a short account by Spearline Wilson, Marchant’s brief diary entries, a report by Bishop Baddeley, government documents and secondary sources.\(^{15}\) There were planned procedures and alarm signals to deal with attack and invasion, which everyone knew, but they counted for little once panic began. The first panic was quite premature, caused by Jack Lotze. Wilson described it this way:

> On going down to the wharf in the first instance, I realized that a considerable panic was in progress amongst Europeans, Chinese and natives. Chinese Government employees had fled, Natives, Government and otherwise, had rushed the wharf, making it problematic whether evacuation boats could have got away if necessary, and a number of Europeans were in a very excited state.

> I met Rev Father Wall on his way to the hospital, to assist in quieting patients who were said to be breaking out. On my explaining the real situation … he agreed to work with me, and sent Father MacMahon round to the hospital. I next saw Mr. Lotze, in a state of great excitement. He said he had heard a most alarming story, and was on his way to try and persuade Mr. F.E. Johnson to escape

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\(^{15}\) UQFL, Wilson 1942, Notes on the Evacuation of Tulagi, 6 February; Marchant Diary, 2 Jan 1942 to 6 May 1943, NASI BSIP 5/IV/1; Baddeley 1942.
with him on the ‘Balus’. I talked him into a reasonable condition of mind, and then myself, Father Wall and Lotze went down to Chinatown.

The place was completely deserted, except for Him Choy [Ye Cai], who had tried single handed to stop the panic. On failing to do this, he was on his way to report to the Government. At this stage Lotze went ahead on his bicycle.

On reaching the W.R.C. [W.R. Carpenter and Company] wharf, I found the ‘Balus’ alongside, with a party of natives throwing stores on board. A number of Europeans were on the Bridge, including Lotze and Judd from Carpenters. J.C.M. Scott and A. Glen from B.P.s and Smith from Hollis Bros. They were apparently about to set out for an unknown destination.16

Wilson managed to get Lotze and Scott back on the wharf and used Carpenters’ phone to call government secretary Kidson. He also located the Chinese community, which had fled across the harbour to Gela Sule, and got them to return to their homes. After that, everyone calmed down until well into January 1942.

Christmas passed uneventfully. The last steamer had gifted Tulagi with all its freezer stores, which kept them supplied with meat, fruit and vegetables. Johno Johnstone from Hollis Brothers’ New South Wales Fresh Food and Ice Company acted like Father Christmas, giving Wilson a frozen turkey and a bottle of whisky, while his ‘yellow friends’ (the Chinese) presented him with a bottle of German wine. His comments on New Year’s Day 1942 on events in the islands is probably typical:

I must say that this war took me by surprise in the end. Like most people, I did not think the Japs would move until Germany had a certain victory. We have certainly had ourselves hoodwinked on this occasion. Actually, it is probably the worst of our underestimations.17

Rabaul on New Britain (the capital of Australian New Guinea) was within a League of Nations mandated territory, which meant that Australia could not legally fortify the town. Tulagi’s residents would not have known that Australia had already surreptitiously strengthened the Rabaul garrison, which included the New Guinea Volunteer Rifles along with the 2/22nd

16 UQFL, Wilson 1942, Notes on the Evacuation of Tulagi, 6 February.
Infantry Battalion and the No. 24 RAAF Squadron. Australia had also discussed fortification with the Americans. A joint effort was made to expand Vunakanau airfield near Rabaul to take B-17 bombers, and the United States had readied a ship in San Francisco, carrying defence equipment. They were too late. The final evacuation of Rabaul began on 11 December 1941 and the Japanese began to bomb Rabaul on 4 January 1942. By Friday, 23 January 1942, Rabaul was in Japanese hands. A scorched-earth policy was implemented at Samarai, the Australian Papua port in China Strait at the far east of the New Guinea mainland. Only the Anglican church there was spared. South-east, in the BSIP, the expatriate population did not need the fall of Rabaul or the evacuation of Samarai to alert them to the coming invasion. Most had already fled or were on their way out. They packed only essential possessions and paid off their servants, sending them back to their home islands. After Christmas, Marchant took the *Tulagi* on a trip around the Gela Group, looking for the best places to hide. The hospital’s nursing staff had already left, which led Wilson to quip that the doctor, Crichlow, and the pharmacist, Stackpool, were now doubling as sister-in-charge and nurse.

BP’s *Malaita* left Sydney on 8 December, the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Carrying 76 passengers, seven of them Solomon Islanders returning home, the ship travelled via Queensland ports, Port Moresby and Samarai, arriving at Makambo at 10 pm on 13 December. The *Malaita* left two days later, returning to Tulagi on New Year’s Day. Six passengers disembarked, three of whom booked on the next *Morinda* voyage to Sydney. The *Malaita* cleared Makambo on 2 January, calling at protectorate ports as the ship proceeded to Bougainville, reaching Rabaul on 6 January. Fifty-six passengers boarded at Rabaul, including 28 captive

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19 In the event, it was not needed. The Japanese were turned back at Milne Bay and never reached Samarai.
21 UQFL, Wilson Papers and Photographs, A.H. Wilson to F.A.G. Wilson, 1 January 1942. News of the bombing of Rabaul was received on 31 December.
22 In *Hell’s Islands*, Stanley Jersey (2008) mentions some other evacuation dates, which are not in Marchant’s diary. He discounts an account by Father Wall that *Trienza*, a Phosphate Commission vessel, helped evacuate Nauru’s foreign population, assisted by the Free French destroyer *Le Triumphant*, taking them to Port Vila, then travelling back to Tulagi to evacuate civilians, and remaining there for three days. As the evacuation of Nauru did not occur until 23 February, Wall has his dates wrong. Jersey relies instead on Ken Hay’s 1942–43 diaries, which say that his wife and other European women left a few days before 16 December. Jersey suggests that the evacuation occurred on 12 December and that perhaps *Trienza* was sent on a special voyage. See Australian War Memorial, Dalrymple-Hay 1942–43, Typed Transcript of a Diary as a Coastwatcher.
Japanese civilians who were locked in the hold and their 19 guards. The ship steamed south, taking on two passengers at Bougainville, four at Faisi, 21 at Gizo, one at Isabel, three at Russell Islands and 11 at Tulagi. Despite an attack from a Japanese seaplane off Bougainville, which caused no damage, the ship ferried 98 passengers to Sydney, arriving on 26 January.\textsuperscript{23} BP’s ships had been blacked out at night since 1940 and all had guns fitted for defence.\textsuperscript{24}

Raids and evacuation

On 9 January 1942, a Japanese seaplane passed over Gavutu and the next day Japanese bombers were spotted over Buka, flying south. Two BP ships evacuated residents from Tulagi. The \textit{Morinda} arrived on 11 January and left for Port Vila on 14 January. The \textit{Malaita} left Tulagi the next day—the last ship to depart before the bombing began. At 12.35 pm on 22 January, a Japanese four-engine ‘Mavis’ seaplane dropped five bombs into the harbour, which were meant for Gavutu, and then machined-gunned weapons posts, strafed the \textit{Kurimaru} and narrowly missed a Catalina seaplane as it took off to escape. The Japanese pattern often involved a circuit out of Rabaul, first flying south-east to bomb Ocean Island, the headquarters of the Crown Colony of Gilbert and Ellice Islands, before heading for Tulagi.\textsuperscript{25} Coastwatcher Paul Mason on Bougainville was usually able to give sufficient notice of any Japanese aircraft heading south to allow the pilots to shift the Catalinas to Marau Sound or Aola on Guadalcanal. The Catalinas had the capacity to make long trips and occasionally they followed Japanese seaplanes back to Rabaul, attacking as the planes landed. They had amazing capacity and could fly for up to 19 hours at 90 knots (167 kilometres an hour).\textsuperscript{26}

The 22 January raid on Gavutu terrified the remaining population of Tulagi. At dawn the next day, the Sisters of the Cross on Taroaniara saw canoes from Tulagi passing by, being paddled to home villages. There was no bombing on 23 January. On 24 January, Marchant ordered Pop Johnson, Nathaniel Crichlow, William Blake and Ragna Hyne to take the most valuable government records to Auki. Some other records were

\textsuperscript{23} Jersey 2008, 17.
\textsuperscript{24} UQFL, Wilson Papers and Photographs, F.A.G. Wilson to Mary, 4 April 1940.
\textsuperscript{25} Knox-Mawer 1986, 102.
\textsuperscript{26} Jersey 2008, 14; Horton 1970, 25, 46.
destroyed. The official final evacuation of Tulagi began on Saturday, 24 January, mostly to Auki.\textsuperscript{27} Aiming to keep Lotze calm this time around, just after midnight on 24 January, Wilson woke the Carpenters’ manager and advised him to go to see Marchant, which he did. However, later in the night, Lotze deserted his house and the business and went into hiding with his Solomon Islander labourers and Smith from Hollis Brothers. At 7 the next morning, Wilson failed to persuade one of Hollis Brothers’ Chinese employees to keep the freezer engine operating. Marchant ordered Wilson to marshal Chinese women and children, most of whom had again fled to Gela Sule, from where they were encouraged to return by Wilson, Yip Choy and Quan Park. By daybreak on Sunday, 25 January, the Chinese were back on Tulagi. Marchant mentions that they were evacuated but does not say to where. Most ended up on Makira under the care of district officer and Coastwatcher Michael Forster.

On Sunday, Lotze and Scott were located hiding in Port Purvis, where they had sailed Levers’ Kombito up a creek into the mangroves. Charles Widdy—Levers’ manager at Gavutu (1939–42), later Solomon Islands Labour Corps commander and a wing-commander during the war—Lotze and Scott were on board. Their only interest was catching up with the 300-ton labour-recruiting vessel Kurimarau, which had evacuated civilians from Rabaul and was heading for Australia. Wilson was given permission to requisition ammunition from Carpenters’ store. The Morinda was not due for another two weeks, which panicked the remainder of Levers’ staff. Scott, Lotze and Glenn all left to join Widdy on the Kombito, still hoping to take passage on the Kurimarau when the ship reached the Russell Islands.

District officer A.N.A. (Nick) Waddell closed the Shortland Islands government station on 25 January and retreated to Gizo. Marchant had ordered Waddell to evacuate all Europeans—first to Gizo and then to Batuna on southern New Georgia. When a Japanese aircraft carrier was reported to be off Choiseul, they fled in small boats to Tulagi—a slow, lengthy trip. One group on the Fauro Chief decided to sail straight to Australia, miraculously making their way through the Great Barrier Reef and reaching Mackay, in Queensland, on 11 February.\textsuperscript{28} As much as

\textsuperscript{27} Cross 1979, 56. Many of the expatriates escaping Tulagi had to wait, as the Morinda, their transport out of the protectorate, did not arrive until 7 February.

\textsuperscript{28} Jersey 2008, 28–34.
possible of the contents of BP’s Gizo warehouse was distributed, then the town was set alight.29 Widdy returned to Gavutu.30 The expectation of attack was palpable.

On Monday, 26 January, a Japanese reconnaissance plane flew over Tulagi, which caused all remaining civilians to leave for the Russell Islands. The defence force left Tulagi for Malaita on 27 and 28 January. On 28 January, Faisi and Gizo were evacuated and all remaining stores destroyed. Malaitan labourers on Guadalcanal plantations were contacted and returned to their home island. Forlorn Tulagi, still in British hands (just), waited for the end. On 29 January, a Japanese plane strafed Tulagi. Marchant and his headquarters staff left for Auki on Sunday, 31 January, with some essential records, which were later transferred to the bush camp at Furi’isango in the hills behind Auki. Bishop Baddeley had collected up the Patteson mat and the Selwyn staff (both important relics from early bishops) and the Siota altar silver, which were transferred to Tantalau village on Malaita for safekeeping.31 Spearline Wilson ensured that the furniture, regalia and ritual items from the Masons’ lodge on Tulagi were shipped to Malaita and hidden in the bush behind the district officer’s house at Auki.32 Evacuees from the north-west arrived at Tulagi on 2 February. The Australian Government chartered the Morinda for a special evacuation voyage, leaving Sydney on 31 January and sailing straight to Tulagi. Trench and Clemens were aboard, returning from leave. The remaining foreign residents from Bougainville and all around the BSIP who wished to leave had made their way to Tulagi on a fleet of cutters and schooners. The ship arrived on 8 February, departing the next day. Spearline Wilson joined this final voyage, leaving Blake as the evacuation officer. The Morinda arrived at 10.20 am, which was bad timing, as the Japanese bombers usually arrived mid-morning each day. The military sent their crash boat—accompanied by Levers’ Kombito, skippered by Ernie Palmer, with Father Wall also aboard (who was then based at the RAAF base at Gavutu)—to warn the ship to hide in Mboli Passage. Before the manoeuvre was complete, a Kawanishi seaplane arrived, sighted the ship and began a bombing raid. Captain S. (Stinger) Rothery was able to swing the Morinda wide of the bombs and strafing.

29 ibid., 25–27.
30 Taroaniara became the Melanesian Mission’s headquarters again in late 1942, once the Japanese were expelled from the Gela Group.
31 Baddeley 1942, 4.
32 Information from Alan Lindley, 1 May 2016.
Luck was with the Tulagi evacuation as the *Morinda* was carrying tons of explosives and aviation fuel; and the plane did not use its machine guns on the small boats milling in Tulagi Harbour.

Blake’s authority was ignored by Lieutenant Don Macfarlan, the naval liaison officer appointed to work with resident commissioner Marchant. Macfarlan ordered the *Morinda* to dock at Gavutu, although the evacuees were waiting at Makambo or on their boats. Pandemonium ensued as they quickly reloaded their possessions and set off in a small armada towards Gavutu. Blake managed to shift some government records from Makambo to Gavutu on board the *Tulagi*, but when he arrived at Tanambogo an argument about evacuation was taking place, when they should have been following the prearranged plan. After the ship’s narrow escape, Captain Rothery was contemptuous of a message he received from Tulagi, asking why he had docked at Gavutu before officially entering the port of Tulagi. He was also worried when he heard from Father Wall that there were 200 people waiting to board—far exceeding his passenger licence number. Most of them had no tickets and the government officials made no promise to pay. Pop Johnson’s account presents the official version. Dick Horton, District Officer for Guadalcanal, recounted the saga differently, but of course his version was secondhand. Rothery decided he was in control and would sail at 5 pm. Finally, the Tulagi government said it would authorise transport of the unticketed evacuees. Johnson claimed that Rothery denied him and other officials the right to board, but then allowed on board military personnel who had escaped from New Guinea. Finally, the captain was persuaded to sail to the Tulagi wharf, where some of the cargo from Makambo was waiting. However, the prisoners, who usually did the loading, had already been released and the ship’s crew refused to assist, presumably because it was against union rules. Loading commenced using commandos, SSEM staff and some of Levers’ labourers.

This continued by hand well into the night. The derricks were mounted on the other side of the ship and the captain would not allow them to be moved. Because a blackout was in force no one really knew what was loaded and the Kieta (Bougainville) government records were left on Makambo wharf. Rothery insisted that he would only carry the number of

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33 Once Tulagi was evacuated, Macfarlan became a Coastwatcher at Berande plantation on Guadalcanal.
passengers specified under the *Navigation Acts*, although in an emergency it was usual for this regulation to be waived. He said that without an extra lifeboat he could not exceed the quota, and none was available. Rothery counted heads and only allowed women and children and men with wives to board, leaving 23 Chinese and European civilians behind. This was the last ship leaving for Australia. A desperate rabble of 120 planters, missionaries, officials and three Japanese internees (long-term residents of the protectorate) with their six guards, as well as some military personnel from Bougainville, scrambled on board. At 9.10 pm, once the *Morinda* was laden with the legal number of passengers, their boxes and suitcases, government files, weapons and ammunition, Macfarlan ordered the ship to sail. On the way to Sydney, four extra passengers who had managed to evade the eyes of the captain were discovered. Two words come to mind: shemozzle and incompetence. The Resident Commissioner reported Macfarlan and Rothery to the Australian Prime Minister, to no avail.35 However, Horton clearly disagreed with Johnson’s version of events:

> The evacuation had been very nearly too late: it had been badly planned and badly organized, and the fault lay with the Government, whose attitude was inflexible and quite out of keeping with the facts. Even a modicum of foresight and planning would have avoided a situation which very nearly had most serious results and whose repercussions left a most unpleasant legacy.36

### The Chinese

One of the myths of Solomon Islands history is that all the Chinese were left behind when foreign nationals were evacuated. Certainly, they were treated badly, but some of them chose to stay, and about one-quarter, including Quan Park and Yip Choy and their families, boarded ships travelling to Sydney or Nouméa during the first wave of the exodus.37 One group of 24 people, including 22 Chinese, joined Isabel planter Charles Bignell, who sailed his schooner *Valere* to Santo and Port Vila. Another group escaped on *Hygenia II* just ahead of the Japanese.38 Most of the Chinese children were evacuated. Considerable numbers of the Chinese adults hid in villages for the duration of the war, some initially in the

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37 Bennett 1987, 288.
38 Clarence 1982, 146.
Western District, but mainly on Makira under the supervision of district officer Forster. Johnny Chan Cheong, the Sasape boatbuilder, fled with his family deep into the jungle of Isabel, helping the Allies whenever he could. Quan Hong spent the war years on Makira. His younger brother Kwan Ho Yuan (Quan Haoyuan), along with Kwan Cho (Quan Zhu), sailed his trading ship *Auki* to Isabel, only to have it commandeered by the British Government. Kwan Ho Yuan accepted an offer from acting military governor David Trench to operate a tourist artefact shop at the American base that became Honiara, leaving his family on Makira. He worked as a middle man between the Americans who were keen to take home grass skirts, weapons and carvings and local villagers and members of the BSIP Defence Force and the Labour Corps who made the items in their spare time. The Gizo-based Chinese hid on Rendova, Ranongga and Choiseul until they were rounded up by the Coastwatchers, who arranged their transfer to Makira.

After the war, the British decided there would be no compensation payments for any prewar residents or companies, which ruined the Chinese traders and European owners of small plantations and businesses. Quan Hong was typical. He began a business in Gizo in 1927 and built up his holdings to include four branch stores and three trading vessels used throughout the Western and Central districts. When the Japanese arrived, he lost everything. He and his family escaped to Rendova and then to Kirakira on Makira. After the war, he was refused permission to set up again in Gizo and returned to Hong Kong and Canton (Guangzhou) to establish a business, arriving back in Honiara in 1951.

The temporary BSIP headquarters on Malaita

Scott had surrendered the keys to BP’s Makambo base to Ken Hay, a plantation manager, who was given permission to act as the company’s last remaining representative. Hay helped himself liberally and transported loads of supplies to Guadalcanal, where he was generous with his distribution. He and Macfarlan spent most of April shifting the stores to three locations inland on Guadalcanal. Marchant also had to deal with

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41 Australian War Memorial, Dalrymple-Hay, 1942–43, Typed Transcript of a Diary as a Coastwatcher.
government officers who wanted to resign and enlist in Australia. In late February, district officers Dick Horton, Henry E. Josselyn and Martin Clemens all wanted to leave Auki to enlist. Marchant refused permission, because protectorate duties continued and the Coastwatcher system was being established. Horton insisted on resigning, much to Marchant’s annoyance. In late February, Marchant was still trying to organise for key protectorate documents from the Secretariat, Treasury and Lands and Surveys Department to be evacuated to Port Vila and on to Australia. He succeeded in early March, just as heavy bombing of Tulagi began. The BSIP archives ended up in Sydney, under the care of Pop Johnson and Spearline Wilson for the duration of the war.

There were many more tasks to accomplish and Marchant needed all the staff he could muster. Carpenters’ and BP’s marine stores were blown up—probably far too soon, as this early move was later regretted. The Tulagi radio transmitter was transferred to Auki and a dummy structure substituted, which the Japanese kept attempting but always failing to bomb. Charles Bengough ran the Auki office and the radio link, continuing after Marchant and his party retreated to Furi’isango on 13 February. Father Jim Wall rescued the remaining official records and the mail sacks deserted on Makambo wharf. They were taken to Auki, from where Josselyn bravely set off in a small boat to sail them to the New Hebrides, and eventually reached Sydney with them. Josselyn did not return until 7 August, when he and Widdy acted as guides for the US 1st Marine Raider Battalion, sent to retake Tulagi. District officer Clemens was sent to the Eastern Solomons District to organise the evacuations to the New Hebrides, after which he was based at Aola on Guadalcanal until the Japanese arrived in June. He then shifted to the mountains around Gold Ridge, providing valuable Coastwatcher information.

The Eastern Solomons District escaped the war. District officer Forster remained on Makira—shepherd to the Chinese who were evacuated there. District officer Colin Wilson remained on Vanikolo until 1944. Several gold prospectors, Fred Campbell and his young sons Jack and Pat, Bert Freshwater and rotund Ken Hay chose to stay put at the mountain fastness of Gold Ridge. Kelemende Nabunobuno, one of the employees of the

42 Lieutenant-Colonel Bengough was killed when his aircraft was shot down at sea in August 1943. PIM, 17 February 1945, inside back cover.
44 Clemens 1998.
45 Moore 2013, entries for Frederick Melford Campbell, Jack Campbell and Kenneth Dalrymple-Hay.
Guadalcanal Sluicing and Dredging Company, also remained at Gold Ridge. Courtesy of Hay and his access to the BP store at Makambo, these men lived in luxury, not wanting for material possessions, food or alcohol. They were able to watch the Japanese and American invasions and listen in on the radio to all the Coastwatcher and government information. It must have been like sitting in the back seats in a big theatre, watching the events far below.

Marchant also had to contend with various Europeans, missionaries, planters and Chinese merchants who had opted to stay but soon realised their error and wanted to leave the protectorate. He continued to move between his Malaita base and Tulagi, trying valiantly to control the situation from a distance, giving headmen and the native courts special powers. He offered to pay indigenous leaders 5 per cent of any loot they could locate. On 18 March, Marchant readied 10 protectorate youths and one from the New Hebrides to travel to Fiji for entry to the Central Medical School to train as native medical practitioners and to attend the Wireless School and Queen Victoria School. Transport proved slow to arrange; they did not depart until mid-April.

Heavy bombing began on 18 March. Marchant was not happy when he visited Tulagi again on 20 March:

> Found my house had been broken into—linen cupboard, office, bed room. All linen taken also some blankets. All this must have happened since Davis boarded up the bedroom door of 17th Apr as this was wrenched open.

During March and April, the Japanese regularly bombed Tulagi, Makambo and Gavutu–Tanambogo. Initially, the attacks concentrated on Tulagi, aimed at the mock radio station and the hospital. Strangely, they ignored the recently established RAAF base on Tanambogo. However, it was not long before the Gavutu–Tanambogo air base was under attack. Some of the bomb craters left behind were huge: one on Gavutu measured 12.8 metres wide by 2.4 metres deep. Limited protectorate services continued. On 6 March, Dr Thomson went to Gavutu to visit a patient, travelling there with district officer Bengough. The Shortland Islands fell to the Japanese on 30 March. On 4 April, Marchant and his temporary

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46 Jersey 2008, 45.
government retreated permanently from Auki inland to Furi’isango. At the end of April, there were reports of a large concentration of Japanese ships heading for the Solomons. On 18 April, Coastwatcher Donald Kennedy reported that a Japanese seaplane carrier, an escort frigate, a corvette and six Zeroes fitted with floats were in Thousand Ships Bay, Isabel, just under 100 kilometres from Tulagi. On 30 April, the Japanese dropped 26 bombs on the core islands in the enclave, damaging two Catalinas. One was towed into hiding at Aola and, remarkably, the next day Terry Ekins flew his Catalina to Rathmines on Lake Macquarie in New South Wales, without the use of the navigation instruments, which had been damaged in the attack.

In late March, Anglican Bishop Baddeley and the Bungana refugees left Taroaniara via Mboli Passage, initially to Siota and then to the hospital at Fauaabu, west Malaita.50 As many as possible of the schoolgirls were sent to their home islands and villages, while the religious sisters moved to Aesasale, an Anglican village high in the central Malaitan mountains.51 In late August, they moved to Qaigeo, a coastal village, and then to Fiu, Auki and to Aola on Guadalcanal, where they boarded USS Barnett to travel to the New Hebrides.52

Bishop Walter Baddeley described the evacuation:

So we returned to Taroaniara, and then throughout the day at intervals we had a grandstand view of the dive-bombing of Tulagi—principally the wireless station, which we knew had not been inhabited or used since late January, three months before! During the afternoon the main body of the small garrison at Gavutu evacuated the place and crossed the Boli Passage en route to the schooners which had been prepared for their get-away—there being no intention of any definite effort to hold Tulagi-Gavutu, or even to delay the enemy. So at 5 p.m., most regretfully, I left Taroaniara for Siota, with a view to being ready to cross to Mala. Gordon, who has been No. 1 engine-boy on the Southern Cross for the past nine years, readily offered to stay on at Taroaniara and do such caretaking as was possible—two other lads remaining with him. At Siota several other volunteers offered to do the same. So at 7 p.m.—with the sky all lighted up with the burning oil dumps and stores at Gavutu and Tulagi—we set out for Government Headquarters at Auki.

50 Cross 1979, 48–53.
51 A detailed account is provided in ibid., 62–81.
52 ibid., 87–94.
It was a rough passage of nearly seven hours. I admit that I sat with my head over my left shoulder, for I imagined there might be Jap destroyers in Indispensable Straits to cut off any who might be making a get-away from Gela. But nothing untoward happened, and as we entered the passage at Auki, I uttered a profound and reverent ‘Thank God for that’. At this moment, Mr Bullen, who had travelled with me, ‘came to’ and exclaimed, ‘Yes, I thought she (the Patteson, that is) was going right over twice out there in the middle’. I fear I had had no place in my mind for rough seas: he apparently had had no care for Japs!53

The RAAF base at Gavutu–Tanambogo continued to operate until 2 May, when, mostly destroyed, it was abandoned to the imminent arrival of Japanese land forces. On the same day, there were heavy raids on the Gavutu–Tanambogo base and that night permission was given to withdraw. Detonation of all structures commenced, using 44-gallon drums of aviation fuel with gelignite strapped on.54 The noise of the explosions was heard and the glow of the fires as they destroyed the base were visible from the west coasts of Guadalcanal and Malaita. All the charges were detonated and the last 53 military servicemen slipped away to the Balus, which was hidden in mangroves in Mboli Passage. The next day, they headed for Aola and south to Maura Bay, Makira, then moved on to Santo and Port Vila on Efate, both in the New Hebrides. The last of the RAAF staff left Tulagi Harbour just as four Japanese warships sailed in.

The 3rd Kure Special Naval Landing Force of the Japanese Army left Rabaul on 29 April, using the cruiser-minelayer Okinoshima, under the flag of Rear Admiral Kiyohide Shima. They successfully captured the Tulagi enclave on 3 and 4 May without any resistance. On 4 May, a US and Australian aircraft carrier task force on its way to Port Moresby launched an air attack on the Japanese at Tulagi, from USS Lexington and USS Yorktown. They caused damage but could not halt the takeover. The destroyer Kitutsuki was sunk in Tulagi Harbour and destroyers Yuzuki and Okinoshima were badly damaged, as were several landing craft and seaplanes.55 West of the Solomons and south-east of the tail of New Guinea, between 4 May and 8 May, the Battle of the Coral Sea was fought.

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by American, Australian and Japanese ships and planes. It was the first sea battle fought entirely by aircraft with the ships all out of sight of each other. The battle is usually said to have been a tactical victory for the Japanese and a strategic victory for the Allies; the Japanese advance was checked and major aircraft carriers were damaged. The battle also strained the Japanese advance through the islands to the east, where they were involved in occupying the Solomon Archipelago.

The Japanese took over the smouldering wreck of what had once been a proud British port town. Having captured the Tulagi enclave, the Japanese established a seaplane base at the RAAF facilities on Gavutu–Tanambogo and in early June began to build an airfield at Lungga Point on Guadalcanal.

Meanwhile, the BSIP Government in exile was operating from Malaita. One task was to train Solomon Islanders as wireless operators. In 1942, Methodists Jacob Leti (Letesasa) and Simione Makini were sent to the new Wireless School in Fiji to attend a two-year course, as were another two from the Methodist system, Esau Hiele and Jobi Tamana. Leti and Makin failed to meet educational entry standards and were sent for two years to the Queen Victoria School at Nasinu, Fiji, before proceeding to the Wireless School. Makini qualified at the end of 1944 and was sent back to work for the BSIP administration. Leti was diagnosed with tuberculosis and sent to hospital in Fiji. Hiele proved a quick learner and soon mastered the new AWA equipment, and was then transferred to Gizo to take over the government wireless station there. Tamana was less successful and was discharged. Three more Solomon Islanders were sent to Fiji for training: Silas Sitai, Hugo Gigini and David Sade. Mark Rusa and Alec Lianga were recommended for training, as was Bill Bennett, who had already been trained in basic Morse code and wireless technology. Sitai did poorly and Bennett was considered intelligent but verbose (perhaps an indication of his future calling as a radio announcer). All three eventually passed the course and were sent home in March 1946. Many of these names are recognisable as members of the elite Solomon Islands families of the 1960s and 1970s.56

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56 Hadlow 2015, 194–95; Hadlow 2016, 160–62; WPHCG (S), 15 February 1939, MAC, 7 November 1938, 9, 6 April 1940, 52, MAC, 27 November 1939, 52, 14 October 1940, MAC, 1 July 1940, 214.
Around 100 Europeans and a similar number of Chinese remained in the protectorate after the Japanese invasion. The official contingent in Marchant’s headquarters party consisted of Lieutenant Tom O. Sexton from the Royal Australian Navy Volunteer Reserve and Lieutenant H.W. Bullen (formerly of the Melanesian Mission) from the BSIP Defence Force, as wireless and cipher officers, and the protectorate officers who joined the Coastwatchers, although they were usually based at outposts. Also present for various periods were the Catholic Bishop and some of the priests and sisters, the Anglican Bishop and 15 of his staff (both men and women), Northcote Deck and five of his SSEM staff and a few of the planters. Sexton was replaced with Captain Robert Taylor (the Tulagi wireless operator), who had been on leave, and they were also joined by Sergeant Clifford R. Kurtz from the US Army. With them was their team of Solomon Islander support staff, without whom nothing would have been possible. In early May, several boats set off south to Port Vila, where their passengers were able to board the Manoora for Sydney. The Chinese in the party were refused boarding and returned to Malaita. They stayed there or on Makira for the remainder of the war.

Solomon Islanders

The Japanese remained in control of Tulagi for three months until American retaliatory raids on 7 and 8 August 1942. They had dug tunnels into the higher reaches of Tulagi and Gavutu, which they defended. During the final land onslaught, Japanese were incinerated in the tunnels when the Americans advanced with flame-throwers. Still unresolved is the question of the Japanese gold bullion, said by some to have been ransacked in Asia on their way south and stored in caves on Tulagi. It was real enough for prime minister Solomon Mamaloni, desperate to find funds for his ailing government in April 1996, to send police to search for it. Other Solomon Islanders have spent many years searching for the elusive booty.

57 Baddeley 1942, 2; Hadlow 2015, 174.
Plate 8.4 Members of the Japanese garrison on Tulagi, 1942
Source: US National Archives and Records Administration.

Plate 8.5 A camouflaged Japanese truck on Tulagi, August 1942
Source: US National Archives and Records Administration.
Plate 8.6 A Japanese 13 mm gun on Tulagi
Source: US National Archives and Records Administration.

Plate 8.7 A Japanese plan of their flying boat facilities at Gavutu–Tanambogo
The Japanese characters on the right say: ‘Tulagi Islands Flying Boat Buoy Locality Map.’
Source: US National Archives and Records Administration; translation by Morris Low.
How Solomon Islanders coped with the war has been covered in general in several publications, most recently in an account by Anna Kwai. The administration used small government vessels such as *Hygenia II* and the auxiliary cutter *Wai-ai*, as well as the abandoned evacuation fleet in Tulagi Harbour, to return 1,500 labourers to their home islands. After this was accomplished, the fleet was sailed to Marau Sound and hidden in the mangroves, where most of the vessels survived the war. The Gela people continued to cooperate with the remaining military forces on Tulagi and Gavutu–Tanambogo, helping to unload supplies. Once the Tulagi and Anglican headquarters in the Gela Group were deserted, the locals also began looting and then storing materials out of sight. Marchant recorded:

> Houses on Tulagi have been entered by Gela natives & wanton destruction of personal belongings carried out. It is not clear how much was stolen, but boxes opened & contents strewn on floor—it appears they were looking for money, liquor & clothing. Govt. Store also broken into with similar result.

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60 Jersey 2008, 46.
Most of the Gela people moved inland for the duration of the war. A small group of loyal parishioners remained in villages near the Siota and Taroaniara bases, although they could only watch when the Japanese pillaged the mission furniture, burnt books and smashed china. The British lamented that some of the villagers on Guadalcanal, Savo and in the Gela Group were selling food to the Japanese after Tulagi was evacuated. George Bogesi, a native medical practitioner from Isabel, stationed on Savo before the invasion, was reported to have approached the Japanese for payment for medical care he provided to survivors from a Japanese destroyer. He was interrogated and taken to Tulagi, where he acted as interpreter and tended wounded Japanese. Marchant believed that Bogesi had acted as ‘scribe/cook to the Jap. Commandant’. It seems likely that his medical skills were more in demand than his cooking. Later, Bogesi helped locate some of the Coastwatchers, probably out of hatred for one of them, Donald Kennedy. The Japanese took Bogesi to Rabaul, returning him late in the war. The British prosecuted him for treason and imprisoned him in Australia. Like many Solomon Islanders, he was ambivalent about his role and his relationship with the British and the Japanese. After all, both groups were invaders.

The constant bombing from air and sea, and the incursions by foreign troops on their lands, were disturbing and dangerous for Solomon Islanders, but large numbers of men joined the BSIP Defence Force and the Labour Corps. The question of collaboration has been raised, as it was wherever the Japanese advanced through Asia and the Pacific. The British arrogantly expected loyalty in their absence, when they had done little to deserve it, given the colonial relationship that existed with Solomon Islanders. While the Allied military tacticians may have felt confident, victory was by no means assured and the villagers could not predict the future of the war. Most sources report that Solomon Islanders remained loyal to the British. The biggest change was that they had seen their ‘masters’ turn and run in fear, after decades of assertions of superiority. The situation was similar all through the war-torn Pacific. European superiority could never be assumed again and no matter how much the colonisers tried to reinstate their old regime, something had changed. In the Solomons, the Maasina Rule years (1944–52), when Malaitans and others on neighbouring islands confronted the British with their own vision of a different future, were evidence of this change.

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62 Baddeley 1942, 5.
64 Marchant 1942–43: 27 May 1942, see also entry for 19 May 1942.
66 Moore 2013: entry for George Bogesi; Marchant 1942–43: 19 May 1942; Laracy 2013, 229–42.
Plate 8.9 A devastated Gavutu Island and the causeway to Tanambogo Island, 1942
Source: US National Archives and Records Administration.

Plate 8.10 The causeway between Gavutu and Tanambogo islands, 1942
Source: US National Archives and Records Administration.
Plate 8.11 Smoke from the American bombing on Tulagi, 7 August 1942
Source: US National Archives and Records Administration.

Plate 8.12 This photograph was taken after the Americans bombed Tulagi on 7 August 1942
The roof of the Tulagi Club and its adjacent tennis courts are visible to the left of the main fire, just behind the smaller area of smoke at the Point. The main fire is in the single officers’ quarters. The cricket ground is visible to the right of the main fire and the Resident Commissioner’s house can be seen in the upper right. Some of the hospital buildings are visible in the bottom right of the photograph, with a Red Cross symbol on the roofs.
Source: US National Archives and Records Administration.
Ironically, the aerial photographs of Tulagi taken by the Australian defence forces just before the war and American photographs of Tulagi, Makambo and Gavutu–Tanambogo under bombardment are some of the best taken of the Tulagi enclave. War photography reveals greater detail of Tulagi than is readily available from written records. For example, a pre–American invasion aerial photograph is annotated with ‘Blue Beach’, a planned landing place, and is marked to show the Japanese antiaircraft batteries at the wireless station and the single officers’ quarters, adjacent to the cricket ground. The photograph reveals the expansion of settlement in this area of the outer coast, which by 1942 was probably more significant than the original settlement on the inner coast. Tracks crisscrossed the small island and extensive clearing and reclamation had been completed to create extra

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67 Ever increasing numbers of wartime photos are available on the web, mainly searchable under ‘Tulagi, 1942’.
facilities on the outer side of the island. Another photograph, of American marines wading ashore in a relaxed manner, suggests they were not in the first wave of arrivals. It shows the central ridge and the still undeveloped north-western end of the island. Other photographs taken on or just after the 7 August bombardment show the remains of Chinatown’s wharves, the police, prison and hospital compounds and the Gavutu–Tanambogo and Makambo complexes. There are also photographs of buildings blazing after the American attack.

Once the Americans retook Tulagi in early August 1942, the harbour became a base for the American fleet and various facilities were rebuilt. A Gela district officer was stationed there and, in a rudimentary way, the business of the BSIP Government continued, although the accommodation available to young district officer Cyril Belshaw when he arrived in 1944 was little better than that which Charles Woodford, the first Resident Commissioner, constructed in 1897. From August 1942, the Americans and Australians, assisted by New Zealanders and some Pacific Islander troops, continued to pursue the Japanese north. By 1943, they were heading towards the Philippines along the north coast of New Guinea. Manila was recaptured in February 1945, Japanese cities were bombed and in August two atomic bombs were dropped, causing the Japanese to surrender. Isolated groups of Japanese remained on some western Solomon Islands until the end of the war. The last few soldiers hidden deep in the mountains did not surrender until the 1960s. No attempt has been made here to cover the military history of the Tulagi enclave. There are many excellent books about Solomon Islands during the Pacific War. The photographic essay below provides a short summary of the American occupation of Tulagi and Gavutu–Tanambogo.

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68 Christ 2007.
69 Information from Cyril Belshaw, 20 January 2009.
Plate 8.14 The remains of Chinatown, with Makambo in the background, August 1942
Source: US National Archives and Records Administration.

Plate 8.15 Japanese and Korean prisoners-of-war on Tulagi, August 1942
Source: US National Archives and Records Administration.
Plate 8.16 An American machine-gun post on Tulagi
Source: US National Archives and Records Administration.
Plate 8.17 An American cargo ship at Tulagi wharf, 1944
Source: US National Archives and Records Administration.

Plate 8.18 Tulagi cricket ground turned into a tent town for the Americans
Source: US National Archives and Records Administration.
Plate 8.19 The US Navy Marine Corps Cemetery on Tulagi, on the edge of the former cricket ground. After the war, bodies were exhumed and returned to the United States.
Source: US National Archives and Records Administration.

Plate 8.20 The marines’ shower on the beach, Tulagi, May 1943
Source: US National Archives and Records Administration.
Assessing Tulagi

Racial segregation on Tulagi was obvious in the separation of Chinatown and the segregated wards in the hospital. The glaring anomaly in the European hierarchy was Dr Nathaniel Crichlow, who was of mixed Chinese and Scottish ancestry. Crichlow, despite his heritage, did not speak Chinese and seems to have been regarded as British (or rather, Scottish). His relationship with the local Chinese is unclear. There were others in this in-between class. Appointed in the mid-1910s, Naphtali Kaisawani was a Fijian sergeant-major in the police, well-educated and

70 WPHCA, No. 800 of 1914, RC C.M. Woodford to HC WPHC, 3 April 1914, No. 2954 of 1926, Dr N. Crichlow to Government Secretary, 27 May 1926, HC WPHC to RC R.R. Kane, 15 October 1926; BSIP AR 1937, 20; Price 1977.
71 Bennett 1987, 184, 210, 398, 403; Golden 1993, 410; PMB, Sandars, Papers on the Solomon Islands, 21. Crichlow retired just before the Pacific War began, returning to Trinidad, where he became health officer for Trinidad Airport.
fond of Sherlock Holmes novels. There were also other senior Fijians, mainly native medical practitioners from the 1930s on, who had high status in their own society. They were soon joined by the first Solomon Islanders trained as native medical practitioners. In the absence of European doctors, these men often had to perform medical examinations on and give advice and treatment to the expatriate community. Another ‘in-between’ man was Terusige Ishimoto, a Japanese tailor based in Chinatown, who was fascinated by Martin and Osa Johnson’s motion picture camera and was himself the owner of an Eastman Kodak camera and a high-quality German camera. Osa Johnson describes Ishimoto’s visits to her house in 1917. Presumably, he was one of the five Japanese noted as living in Tulagi in the early 1920s, and the one who developed photographic film commercially. He was certainly still there during the early 1930s, although by wartime, he was the Rabaul manager for a Japanese shipping company, Nanyo Boeki Kaisha (South Seas Trading) Limited.

European racial attitudes were very Darwinian. Chinese and Japanese were viewed as inferior, as were Solomon Islanders—their complex societies underrated and seldom appreciated. The skin colour of Solomon Islanders varies from the honey brown of the Polynesians to the jet black of the people of the northern Solomon Islands, which Europeans used as a racial grading system. Pessimistic Darwinian beliefs depicted Solomon Islanders as a dying race and as a people who needed to be ‘pacified’ and Christianised. Generally, Solomon Islanders were seen as cannibalistic headhunting savages, hard to teach and incapable of being ‘civilised’. Their loyalty to their extended families was never really understood. Their kinship concepts—particularly when brothers and sisters are not distinguishable from cousins—were not appreciated, nor was wantokism, the allegiances between speakers of the same languages.

How did expatriate men and women in the Tulagi enclave view Solomon Islanders? And did they view Solomon Islander men differently from the women? Not all Solomon Islander males were tough warriors uninterested in their appearance. All foreigners must have noticed a propensity of some young Solomon Islander men to be ‘dandies’, overly concerned about their physical presentation, while still being masculine. There are many

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72 Knibbs 1929, 20–21.
73 Johnson 1945, 112; Muhlhauser 1924, 204; Lord 1977, 25–26. Another of the Japanese, Ito, was written about by MacQuarrie 1946, 66–84.
references to their large brushed-out coiffures, with a hibiscus flower stuck in the side. Men were often accused of applying peroxide to produce blond hair, although it is actually a genetic characteristic of Solomon Islanders. They were well-muscled and charming, so there would have been sexual attractions. Islander women and girls were demure, not boisterous like the males, yet they were still certain of their place in society. The boys, not the girls, were mainly the ones who received a modern education in mission schools and were literate. Females usually stayed in the village and remained separate from colonial society. Sometimes foreign women were outraged by the way Solomon Islander women were treated—particularly when they were isolated during menstruation and childbirth—and invoked the sisterhood to give them a right to intervene, which was not usually appreciated. Gender taboos were not understood, and when foreigners broke them, they did not realise the religious and social consequences.

Racism and colonialism were more powerful forces than sexism and gender in the lives of Solomon Islanders. In colonial society, the gender-power relations meant that interracial sex was acceptable if it was a European male with an Islander female. There were some quite celebrated relationships, and clearly the planters and traders, and some government officers, thought it normal to cohabit with local women. That Fred Campbell could sit on the Advisory Council and have an indigenous wife and children, or senior public servant Jack Barley could father several indigenous children, shows there was a degree of acceptance. Heterosexual relationships between expatriate males and local women always existed in the early Pacific communities, and in colonial and early twentieth-century Australia, where European men on the frontier had relationships with Indigenous women, both for sexual pleasure and to raise families.74

White women would have been ostracised if they had taken male Solomon Islander lovers. When white women arrived, did they ruin the cross-racial sexuality of empire? Did their presence cause a deterioration in race relations? Accusations that they did have been voiced for New Guinea and pre-cession Fiji. It has been argued that, once substantial numbers of European women lived in Fiji, their presence and their desire to establish domestic and family circumstances as close as possible to those from which they came, made European–Fijian friendships, associations and

miscegenation disreputable. Some earlier historians of Fiji and Papua New Guinea have concluded that European women interacted well with the indigenous peoples and felt a sense of mission in regard to health care and bringing ‘civilisation’. Interracial relations were complex and, in the Tulagi years, were influenced by pseudoscientific justification, practical experience and individual personalities. Racial attitudes are also mixed up with domestic relationships and the quite different cultural norms of the various groups. The racial superiority of Europeans was never questioned by Europeans, although from a Chinese or Solomon Islander perspective, it was presumably not accepted or even understood. European women were probably much closer to Solomon Islander women than men, but few indigenous women spoke Pijin and they were not usually employed as house servants. As Tulagi’s expatriate women were mainly ‘appendages’ of their husbands and their jobs, not many were really independent or free to mix across racial, class and social divides.

How did Solomon Islanders view the Tulagi enclave and what was its effect on the protectorate after the Pacific War and on the independent nation since 1978? Tulagi was the headquarters of the colonial system and the bottleneck through which protectorate decisions passed. There was resentment about land alienation, the exploitative labour and taxation systems and the overriding of existing behaviours by protectorate regulations. There was relief from diseases such as yaws, although other prewar medical intervention was quite limited. There was relief from the tyranny of some leadership systems, such as the ramo on Malaita—warrior bounty hunters and assassins. We know that Melanesian clergy, police, medical staff, some government headmen and others engaged with Europeans in privileged ways and could enjoy high status among Solomon Islanders that was relatively new and novel. We know that such people could wield considerable power among Melanesians and Polynesians in the protectorate. At the same time, not all were respected and sometimes they came to be alienated from or resented by their home communities due to their close association with and perceived subservience to Europeans. Many of these individuals were the forebears of Solomon Islander elites and can still be linked to elite Solomon Islander families of today. The Tulagi enclave was a learning experience for Solomon Islanders.

75 Young 1984; Young 1988. See also rejoinders and reviews in Knapman and Ralston 1989; Hoe 1984; Haggis 1990; Bulbeck 1993.
and a means of understanding the colonial regime. Although small when compared with other Pacific territories, the enclave constituted the ‘bright lights’ of the prewar BSIP.

The Tulagi enclave prospered on a sheltered harbour, augmented late in the piece by Taroaniara and Tanambogo. In many ways, the enclave was unusual due to its small size and being spread over several islands. Particularly in the interwar years, Tulagi held an important place as a port town in the British Pacific. However, there were also similarities to north Australian colonial urban centres and to Port Moresby, Samarai and Rabaul in New Guinea, as well as Port Vila, Levuka, Suva and Nouméa. The class and racial hierarchies were maintained by geographic and social separation. Tens of thousands of Solomon Islander males passed through Tulagi at the start and end of their indenture agreements, availing themselves of the cheap trade goods in Chinatown. Numerically, although their presence was usually fleeting, more Solomon Islanders passed through Tulagi than anywhere else in the protectorate. There were tensions at Tulagi—more intense than in any other areas of the protectorate. These must have been constant points of discussion around the kitchen fires in the villages of Solomon Islands.

The Tulagi enclave was an artificial and restructured environment— islands extended, swamps filled, with paths, stairs and buildings in physical and symbolic places. Tulagi was physically altered to make it more serviceable and Gavutu and Tanambogo were joined. On Tulagi, The Cut through the island was the main physical change, the bridge over the top creating a special communication route that linked the homes of the higher echelon of administrative staff. The racial separation of Europeans, Asians and Solomon Islanders enabled the imposed colonial authority structure to emerge and operate. Part of the deliberate physical structure was practical—the need to improve communications and health—but Tulagi was also a classic imagining of the British Pacific, where power was exercised by using superior geographic sites, pleasing structures and tropical surrounds. Then, in 1942, after 45 years, old Tulagi came to an end. After a short hiatus, Honiara emerged as the next port, and capital of the protectorate.
This text is taken from *Tulagi: Pacific Outpost of British Empire*, by Clive Moore, published 2019 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.