
When Donald Gilbert Kennedy, last a resident of Bayly’s Beach in northern New Zealand, died in 1976, his passing attracted little attention. True, there was a small item in the New Zealand Herald, ‘War Hero Dies, aged 77’. But in the oceanic archipelagoes of Tuvalu, Solomons and Fiji where he had lived most of his life and where his name had once resonated, his demise went unnoticed. Even the Sydney-based Pacific Islands Monthly, which had followed his career from 1935 to 1954, missed it. Reasons for such an oversight are easy to find: Kennedy’s colonial heyday was well behind him, the places in which he had worked were far distant and he had left behind in them few fond memories. Yet, variously, as teacher, technician, administrator, philanderer, soldier and scholar, he had exerted a marked influence on those peoples among whom he sojourned for half a century. It remains, therefore, ironic that, while he has earned a place in their folklore and is mentioned in their history books, his death did not register in any of the local news reports. This essay is an attempt to explain why it should have done so. It is a memorial—if not a salute—to a man of remarkable talents; one whose flaws of character—however they may be judged—sustained the temperament of the adventurer. It also chronicles a pro-consular career notable both for its geographical span and for the range of activity and experience that it embraced.¹

Kennedy’s abilities as a leader and as a man of extraordinary practicality earned him respect, but his readiness to bully and to dominate begot fear rather than affection among his subordinates. To his colleagues in the Colonial Service he was a prickly individualist, a loner, companionable on occasions, but devious, ‘always on the defensive and at times openly aggressive’. One of them, H.E. Maude, later a distinguished academic, who first met him in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony in the 1930s, and who once saw him fell an ‘insolent native’ (Kennedy’s term) with one punch, considered that

He felt, with good reason, that he was the most capable man in the government service and yet had to watch others, lackadaisical juniors like myself, arriving late on the scene and yet moving up the rungs of

¹ NZ Herald, 17 July 1976.
² For a fuller ‘life’ of Kennedy, see Mike Butcher, ‘… when the long trick’s over’: Donald Kennedy in the Pacific (Kennington, Vic., 2012).
promotion to the top when he had the utmost difficulty in obtaining a transfer from the Education Department to the bottom of the administrative ladder.

No wonder he detested me (and I fancy just about everyone else). I have never held it against him. It was particularly noticeable after the war when I feel he came to realize that he would probably always be an outsider in a service which was essentially composed (in the top ranks) of British public school and university types with similar backgrounds. He had commenced drinking in the ’20s to alleviate his isolation and intellectual loneliness, but he then took to it on a more or less regular basis, and this affected his mental powers, his liver and general mental fitness … . In the end it meant that he could only be given odd jobs where his handicap would hopefully do the least harm.³

Another who worked with him, but in wartime, when the faults of peacetime may become virtues, presented him more enthusiastically. In his mid-40s, tall and strongly built, he was ‘a determined man … with a strong personality … one of those to whom command came naturally, a full-blooded dominant man’.⁴

Both these descriptions recognise in Kennedy a profound self-sufficiency and resourcefulness. These were qualities that, for all that they may have been fostered by isolation also assisted him to cope with it. On the other hand they did not dispose him to acquiesce to the constraints of domesticity, although he had opportunities to do so. On his death he was survived by each of his three wives, his seven children by them, the son of one other liaison, and by a woman who had borne him a daughter who died in infancy.

Kennedy was of Scottish ancestry, a member of a family with putative links to the lairds of Culzean Castle near Ayr, although his immediate origins were more humble. His paternal grandfather, George, was a soldier who was stationed in Ireland from 1868 to 1871, and subsequently in India, where he took his discharge. He then settled in New Zealand in 1884, taking up land at Springhills near Invercargill. Kennedy’s father, Robert, who was born in Ireland in 1869, accompanied his parents. After an unsuccessful spell as a farmer he made a living as a railway ganger, a nightwatchman, an apiarist and a builder. In 1897 Robert married Isabelle Chisholm and the following year Donald, the first of their three children, was born. The family shifted northwards to Oamaru in 1904. There Donald attended local public schools: Tokarahi primary from 1904 to 1910 and, from 1911 to 1915, Waitaki Boys High School.⁵

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⁵ These details derive mainly from Mike Butcher, ‘Notes on the military career of George Kennedy’ and ‘Interview with Ray and Flora Kennedy, 20 Nov. 1988’, and Ray Kennedy to Butcher, 10 Oct. 1988. I am
its celebrated rector—and apologist of Empire—Frank Milner, Waitaki was on the threshold of becoming for nearly three decades the outstanding school in the country, and one that attracted pupils from far afield. (One such, was J.W. Davidson, the academic founder of Pacific history). While Kennedy was not distinguished at Waitaki, Milner did commend him for the ‘persistence and intelligence’ of his work, for ‘his quiet earnestness and self-reliance’ and for having ‘the right disciplinary fibre’. For his part, Kennedy apparently enjoyed his schooldays sufficiently for him to seek a career in teaching.

During 1916 and 1917 he was a probationer at Kaikorai school in Dunedin and also completed the first part of an arts degree in French, Latin and History at Otago University, as well as serving in the territorial army. He never completed the degree. In March 1918 he enlisted for army service and was still in training, newly commissioned as a second lieutenant, when peace was declared in November. During 1919 he taught at the Native College at Otaki, where he acquired a knowledge of Maori and, during 1920, he was at Dannevirke High School, where he was esteemed as a boxing instructor. The following year he intended to give up teaching and study law, but marriage in December 1920 to Nellie Chapman of Waipawa put an end to that scheme. Instead, in 1921, he turned his life in a new direction by joining the colonial service, as an assistant master at the Boys Grammar School in Suva, Fiji. After a year in Fiji he went as headmaster to the Banaban School on Ocean Island in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony. Then, in mid-1923, with his wife and infant daughter, he went to the Ellice Islands to found and direct a new school. Jealous of their Micronesian neighbours, who had a government school, King George V, opened at Bairiki, Tarawa (in the Gilberts) in 1922, the Polynesians of the Ellice (Tuvalu since 1975) had demanded a similar amenity. At first their school occupied the site of a defunct mission school on Papaelise islet near Funafuti but in May 1924 it was transferred to Elisehou on the island of Vaitupu, where food and land were more plentiful.

indebted to Mike Butcher for copies of these and other relevant documents.
7 Details of Kennedy’s career up to 1921, plus Milner’s letter, are in his ‘Application for Appointment to the Colonial Service’, National Archives of Fiji (hereinafter NAF), CSO MP765/21. Other sources include an interview with Nellie Kennedy, 20 Feb. 1986; University of Otago to Laracy, 15 May 1986; *Who’s Who in New Zealand*, Wellington, 1941, p. 204.
For eight years Kennedy directed the Ellice Islands school. For much of that time, as the only palagi (European) official in the group, he also acted as the administrative officer. Indeed, that appointment became fulltime in April 1932, when he took up residence on Funafuti, but it was not formally confirmed until July 1934, whereupon he was also made Native Lands Commissioner. By that time he had not only made a notable impact on the group but was himself ineluctably ‘at home’ in the Pacific. His wife, though, was less pleased with the isolation and hardships of her position. When a second child was due in 1925 the family returned to New Zealand for the delivery. In 1927, for the birth of the third, Nellie again went back with the children, only this time she set up house in Oamaru, and stayed there, except for a brief return trip in 1932. After a separation scarcely relieved by letters and radio messages and by visits from Kennedy during periods of leave in 1929, 1934 and 1938, the couple were divorced in 1944.9

Meanwhile, left largely to his own devices, Kennedy had flourished, seizing opportunities for personal achievement. His school satisfied parents who wished their sons to be taught to speak and read English correctly and to write it in a clear hand, and to be competent in arithmetic. Concomitant with what was, in the circumstances, a high academic standard were firm discipline, stiff regimentalism and the inculcation of a sense of public duty. The Vaitupu school was organised on the English ‘public school’ model, but with Kennedy’s lofty Arnold/Milner-like figure besmirched with more than a trace of Dickens’ ignoble Squeers. There were prefects, the pupils were divided into ‘houses’ that competed academically, at garden work, and at sport; and there was military drill and a large corpus of rules. Breaching any of the latter, Frank Pasefika, himself later a senior administrator, recalled, might mean being punished with ‘half a dozen thrashes with a cricket bat, which gave you a bruised backside for several days’. Kennedy, he added, ‘was difficult to like’. Another former student has recorded similar comments

Mr Kennedy was a very tough man. In his teaching he was all right, but outside the classroom he was a hard man. … [Once, he] took a cricket bat and beat me with it so hard I fell to the ground … . If a boy walked slowly, Mr. Kennedy called him and boxed him. That’s how we learned discipline. Punishment for going to the village without permission was a dozen with the cricket bat.

Meeting Kennedy outside the classroom, boys were expected to cease what they were doing, stand to attention, and salute him. So, too, even, were ‘station labourers and others’ who encountered him.\(^\text{10}\)

Despite the severity of the regime, though, many of the men who had been Kennedy’s pupils looked back to it with nostalgia. They were glad of the opportunity the school offered to acquire a *palangi* education on its own terms, one unalloyed by the distracting ‘cultural’ sensitivities that would come to influence schooling in the postcolonial era. Some of them also relished the chance he gave them to train as radio operators. When on leave in New Zealand in 1925 Kennedy had collected information on and components for building himself a radio transmitter and, in November 1926, he sent out his first message, to a radio enthusiast in New Zealand. He thereby inaugurated more regular contacts with the world beyond Tuvalu than those hitherto offered by mail deliveries at intervals of several months. Considerable ingenuity was required to create the equipment, as Telavi Fati of Namumea later explained:

At school on Vaitupu I was selected as one of the ‘wireless boys’ by Mr Kennedy. We spent much time making batteries. As we had no lead we had to go hunting for empty corned beef and biscuit tins. We would light a fire and throw all our empty cans into it so that the lead could be melted into the ground. When the fire was out and the ashes were cool we would collect the lead.

Next thing we would go hunting for empty beer bottles to use as battery containers. We cut them evenly, using a piece of steel wire about a metre long and looped just to fit a bottle. The wire was placed in a fire. Beside the fire we had a basin of water, a small crow-bar and a piece of wood. When the end of the wire was really red we would take it out and put the loop around the bottle for a short while, pulling it tight with the aid of the crowbar. Next we would dip the bottle into the basin of water, then take it out and give it a light tap with the piece of wood, cutting it to the required size.

To make plates for the battery we started with two plates made of brick and with passages carved on them, through which liquid lead could run. These plates were tied together and boiling lead was poured into the passages. When it had cooled a lead plate would be removed from the mould.

Separators made of pua tree were used to keep the plate erect in the bottle …

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\(^{10}\) Koch, pp. 6–7; Pasefika, pp. 20–21.
To put the battery together the wooden pieces were first put in position and then the plate was fitted. Next, on each side of the plate, the bottle was loaded with crushed glass made from the unused sections of the bottle. Finally, the bottle was filled with sulphuric acid. The battery was then ready for charging from a generator …

A 6 volt battery was charged from a 6 volt generator. The charging system was made from a bicycle turned up-side-down and fixed to a piece of board. The generator was fixed to one end of the board and attached by a belt to the back wheel of the bicycle, which did not have a tyre. The fork of the front wheel was taken off and the steering bar was fixed to the board to balance the machine. Charging was done by one or two boys working the pedals with their hands. This would be done for two hours daily to keep up the power in a 6 volt battery.¹¹

Besides his radio work, Kennedy also employed his practical bent in building a schooner, the *Namolimi*; but after returning without Nellie and the children in January 1930 he put an increasing effort into ethnographic study. From early 1928 he had been in contact with H.D. Skinner, an authority on Polynesian material culture, and who, as an officer of the Polynesian Society, encouraged correspondents from remote parts of the Pacific to write for the society’s journal. Kennedy’s writings were notably welcomed by Peter Buck.¹² When he went to New Zealand in 1929 Kennedy donated a large quantity of Tuvalu artefacts to the Otago Museum. But it was as the author of *Field Notes on the Culture of Vaitupu, Ellice Islands*, published in 12 parts in the journal between 1929 and 1932 and as a book in 1931, that he made his main contribution to knowledge. That work contains an exhaustive description of fishing techniques, canoes and houses, and records various customary practices and traditional beliefs. On the other hand, but consonant with Kennedy’s misanthropic tendencies, it ignores the islanders as a functioning community. Maude, who was himself encouraged into scholarly publishing by Kennedy, commented: ‘the book is a superb study in material culture but on social organisation is a nonstarter. He told me that this was because the ancestral culture was dead and forgotten and only the technology remained; but this was not the case.’¹³

By 1932, when he transferred to the administrative service, Kennedy was not only ready for a change but his school was running well. He had an able subordinate, Melitiana of Nukulaelae, to succeed him, and he could still exercise

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some supervision from Funafuti. Indeed, the school continued to operate effectively during World War II, when Tuvalu was occupied by US forces. Because of that continuity, in the period of postwar reconstruction the Vaitupu school was the main recruiting ground for educated indigenous staff for the whole of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony. The school in Kiribati had been disrupted by the Japanese occupation. Subsequently, the over-representation of Tuvaluans in administrative positions in Tarawa during the final years of colonial rule aroused resentment among the more numerous Gilbertese, and contributed to the political severing of Tuvalu from Kiribati before each became independent in 1976 and 1978, respectively.

As an administrative officer, and especially as Native Lands Commissioner, investigating tenure systems and garden productivity, Kennedy travelled regularly through the group. His most significant achievement, begun on Vaitupu in 1926, though, was setting up a bulk purchasing and selling cooperative, the fusi, for handling trade matters. It was widely imitated elsewhere (Maude did so in Kiribati in 1931), but the founding and failure of similar institutions was to become a conspicuously sad tale throughout the Pacific islands. In such company the fusi of Tuvalu has the rare distinction of having operated continuously and profitably since its inception.14

Deservedly, professional achievement also brought some personal reward. In May 1938 Kennedy left Tuvalu on a Carnegie Travelling Scholarship to study for a year at Oxford University for a Diploma in Anthropology. That completed, he returned to the colony in August 1939, and was appointed to Ocean Island. A year later he was transferred from the Gilbert and Ellice to the British Solomon Islands Protectorate.15

The appointment was a recognition of his abilities, though it was scarcely generous. After 19 years in the colonial service, Kennedy was a district officer with an annual salary of £660 a year. That was only £30 a year more than was received, for example, by his colleague Charles Bengough, BA (Oxon.), 13 years his junior, and with only seven years’ service. Yet, if he was disappointed, it did not show in his performance of his duties. For the first 15 months he was based at the protectorate headquarters of Tulagi. There the main task entrusted him by the Resident Commissioner, W.S. Marchant, was to introduce a form of local government to the people of Nggela and Savo, to counter the apathy and passive resistance which had come to mark their attitude towards the administration. Assisted by two young Nggela men, John Manebona and Stanley Piluniuna, and often by Sgt-Major Sitiveni Sipolo, the senior NCO of the armed constabulary, Kennedy toured the villages of his district, explaining the scheme and setting up

15 *Fiji and WPHC Civil List*, Suva, 1942.
a system of sub-district councils and courts that came to be known in the Pijin lingua franca as *Masini Rulu* (‘Marchant’s system of rule’). Five years later that name would be echoed in the widespread and disruptive nationalist movement *Maasina Ruru* (or ‘Rule’); literally, ‘brotherhood rule’. In October 1941, though, when Kennedy was assigned the additional district of Ysabel, it signified merely a promising experiment in administrative devolution, but one soon to be aborted in the wake of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December. A week after that event Kennedy was commissioned in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate (BSIP) Defence Force. Early in 1942, as a consequence of the redeployment of numerous other officials in anticipation of a Japanese advance on the Solomons, his district was further extended to cover the north-western half of the Solomons, from Nggela to the Shortland Islands.¹⁶

When appointed to Ysabel, Kennedy did not immediately take up fixed residence there, but undertook extensive patrolling of his enlarged domain in the auxiliary vessel *Waiai*. The threat of war soon added urgency to his agenda. During January 1942 he was engaged with the evacuation of Europeans and Chinese, and with the repatriation of indigenous labourers (mostly Malaitan) from the plantation-covered Russell Islands. Arriving at southern Ysabel on the 20th of that month, he transferred his headquarters—together with his precious teleradio—from the government station at Tataba to a camp in the mountain village of Mahaga overlooking Thousand Ships Bay. Among other preparations for the impending war, he also organised an intelligence-gathering network of local informants and messengers who would assist him in his military role of coastwatcher. To the same end he sent the local doctor, George Bogese, on a three-week tour of the island to warn people against helping the Japanese. Then, following a minor dispute with Bogese, who was much like himself in being intelligent, libidinous and domineering, Kennedy abruptly expelled the doctor to Savo Island, and instructed Soro the headman there to shoot him if he caused any disturbance. That was in early March. At base the trouble stemmed from a personality clash, with Kennedy translating his dislike into distrust. Despite having been a teacher, he shared the common colonial disdain of the ‘educated native’. He construed Bogese’s lack of servility as disloyalty. For his part, Bogese regarded his treatment as ‘unjust and unfair’ but allowed that it ‘was due to the general excitement of the time’. Such an explanation is too impersonal to be complete; but, and to Bogese’s further disadvantage, the times were becoming increasingly out of joint.¹⁷


Meanwhile, from Savo, Kennedy patrolled north to the Shortland Islands, reaching there in early April. En route, he stopped at Simbo to investigate reports of looting by villagers and, as he had already done at Nggela, to punish the perpetrators. Notable among these was the Methodist pastor Belshazzar Gina. A more detached consideration of the evidence suggests that besides maintaining a semblance of normal order Kennedy was concerned, at least in the case of the wily Gina, whom another official described as a ‘black Elmer Gantry’, to assert his continuing authority in an unambiguous way. Begetting compliance through fear was a precarious tactic. It did not have an unlimited shelf life and it sat uneasily with an expectation of loyalty to the Allied cause, but it was generally effective. Gina subsequently served as a scout.\(^{18}\)

Continuing his tour, Kennedy fortuitously departed the Shortlands just ahead of the advancing Japanese, but they did capture two members of a three-man medical party he had placed there on 10 April to deal with an outbreak of dysentery and influenza. He then returned to Ysabel. There he arranged for supplies of food and fuel to be collected from evacuated plantations and stored at Mahaga. Next he went to Rennell Island where he set up a secondary base at Kangava Bay, and recruited six men who would serve as his machine gun corps for the next 14 months, as well as a 17-year-old woman, Magiko Sogo, to be his mistress.

Kennedy was thus established at Mahanga as comfortably as he could manage by the end of April. But his respite was brief. During the first two days of May, Japanese aircraft raided the Protectorate headquarters of Tulagi and a seaplane base was established on northern Ysabel at Rekata Bay. When, on 3 May, Japanese forces occupied Tulagi, Kennedy and his followers were left firmly behind enemy lines. That, of course, was the place for coastwatchers to be, observing enemy movements and reporting them by teleradio to bases further south, but to do this effectively they needed the support of the local people. After the disaffected Bogese was apprehended by the Japanese on Savo on 9 May and was induced by threats to lead them to Mahanga, it was time for Kennedy to go elsewhere.

For two months, accompanied by five north Ysabel policemen and the six Rennellese, he patrolled Ysabel and the New Georgia–Vella Lavella area. Eventually, on 8 July, he established new headquarters on the channel between New Georgia and Vangunu, at Seghe, the site of a plantation owned by Harold

Markham, an Australian veteran of World War I. Seghe was a brilliant choice. As Kennedy later reported, it was ‘a valuable strategic harbour’ with ‘military possibilities unknown to the enemy’:

it had not, in pre-war days, been visited by the Japanese fishing craft which did much survey work around many of the islands. Furthermore, the Admiralty Charts, which would, presumably, be the only source of Hydrographic information available to the enemy, showed Seghe Channel as being obstructed by ‘foul ground’ at either end and noted that the area was only ‘partially examined’.

Kennedy, however, had explored the channel several times. He knew that, far from being blocked, it possessed ‘an abundance of natural reef protection around navigable deep-water channels’. Though secluded, it offered relatively easy access to the Japanese shipping routes in the Slot (between New Georgia and Ysabel) and Blanche Channel and would be ‘extremely difficult to approach by surprise’.19

Also fortunate was the timing of the shift to Seghe. Kennedy was ensconced there when, on 7 August 1942, US forces invaded the Solomons, capturing Tulagi and a nearly completed airfield on Guadalcanal. Seghe, just 240 kilometres, or 40 minutes’ flying-time away, was on the flight path of the Japanese aircraft sent south from Rabaul over the next six months in a monumentally desperate and bloody effort to dislodge the Americans. Consequently, Kennedy’s regular teleradio reports on Japanese military movements and activities made a vital contribution to the early warning system that helped the Americans resist that assault. Within the first few weeks, according to General Roy Geiger, the air force commander on Guadalcanal, his reports had ‘resulted in the destruction of more than forty enemy aircraft’.20

John Lundstrom, the historian of the air war for Guadalcanal, offers some more explicit details:

Coastwatch alerts punctuated the morning of 21 October [1942]. Finally, at 1040 CACTUS received notice from Kennedy on New Georgia that 10 minutes before some thirty-five enemy planes in three groups had passed over … in the ensuing action Ota Toshio (34 kills), the top Imperial Navy ace, was shot down and killed.

20 Geiger, quoted in Kennedy ‘Report on Coastwatching’.
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At 1050 on 23 [October 1942] CACTUS radar and the invaluable Kennedy on New Georgia simultaneously announced enemy planes. Bauer scrambled twenty eight F47s and four P-39s, the last of which barely got off when Condition RED sounded at 1114.

In that action the Japanese lost six fighters and one bomber, while one US F47 was heavily damaged.\(^{21}\)

Similarly, aided by a force of indigenous scouts, Kennedy reported on seaborne traffic and on troop movements, and also rescued downed American airmen. Much of the Japanese activity emanated from Viru Harbour, only 14 kilometres from Seghe, which the Japanese occupied in October 1942. The following are typical messages from Seghe:

One barge passed Vakabo island heading SE through Marovo Lagoon about midnight ninth. [sent at 0355 on tenth, month unknown].

Scout reports about thirty Japs at Sombrero Gatukai have wireless in village church which is larger of two isolated houses in clearing on hill. Japs live in other village houses. Fifteen at Penjuku all moved to camp about one mile to south in garden clearing on low hill near shore. Sombrero endangers Dumbo. Can it be wiped out please. [sent at 1345, 28 May 1943].

Capt. J.E. Swett USMC, shot down off Lingutu Entrance a.m. eleventh now here. Unhurt. Am sending over in about half hour. [sent at 1955 on twelfth, month unknown].\(^{22}\)

Kennedy was better placed to call for American assistance than coastwatchers located further to the north, and possibly encouraged by that, especially once Catalina seaplanes began landing at Seghe Channel in December 1942, he adopted a singularly aggressive stance towards the Japanese. Not content with passively observing, he went beyond his intelligence role to engaging them actively. Certainly, it was a modus operandi well suited to his temperament. But he also rationalised it on the ground that it helped him retain the confidence and cooperation of the of the islanders, on which he—like all coastwatchers—depended: ‘these people realised that while I was able to fight and able to lead them and to win in the little skirmishes we had … they were on the right side’.


\(^{22}\) Kennedy, radio messages, Mar. 1942 – June 1943, copies in my possession by courtesy of Mary White (born Macfarlane, subsequently Campbell, Kennedy and White). Original documents, coded and uncoded, in University of Auckland library.
It was not that he recklessly went looking for the Japanese but, rather, that he aimed at the total annihilation of all who penetrated what he called his ‘forbidden zone’. Enemy patrols and barges that strayed too close to Seghe were wiped out. In the best known of these incidents, on 19 May 1943 Kennedy’s force, aboard the former Seventh Day Adventist mission schooner Dadavata, destroyed a party of a dozen Japanese who were passing through the Marovo Lagoon. Braving machine gun and grenade attack, the Dadavata rammed their whale boat, and its occupants were shot in the water.23

While aiming to secure indigenous morale and loyalty through military success, Kennedy also employed intimidation for the same purpose. The standard punishment for anyone he suspected of disloyalty or insubordination was to be lashed across a 44-gallon fuel drum and flogged. There were several notable cases of this, among numerous others, the one involving Belshazzar Gina being typical. Well-educated, self-assured and a cousin Bogese, he was always mistrusted by Kennedy. Thus, in March 1942, Kennedy accused Gina of encouraging looting in the township of Gizo, and took reprisals by burning houses on Simbo. Gina denied the charge but he was convicted of having stolen a rifle. His biographer, however, suggests that this may also have been a means of recruiting him to Kennedy’s service. Kennedy refrained from punishing Gina physically on that occasion, but took him back with him to Ysabel and, in April or May (the sources are contradictory), entrusted him with a mission to Ranongga to retrieve two abandoned European vessels, one of which was the Dadavata. Gina managed this successfully, but was disappointed when Kennedy showed no appreciation of his efforts. ‘He just [took] me as an ignorant person’, Gina later recalled, but eventually he also conceded that Kennedy ‘was the right man at the right time’. Following the move to Seghe the relationship between the two men, the dissolute disciplinarian and the evolué native, became even more ambiguous. Gina was entrusted with several important scouting missions. In October he reported on the Japanese occupation of Gizo and Viru, and provided information which assisted the Americans to launch air strikes against their positions, but he still failed to rise in Kennedy’s esteem. Soon afterwards, he descended even further. In January 1943 Gina was sent on a reconnaissance mission to Viru. By his own account, recorded by his son in 1977, he displayed considerable courage in this, and earned Kennedy’s praise. Kennedy’s account of the episode, recorded in 1969, is rather different. According to him, Gina reported the location of approximately nine unguarded barges on the opposite side of the harbour from the Japanese camp, and Kennedy set out to destroy them. He and his ‘army’ had almost reached the barges when Ishmael Ngatu, the chief of Patutiva village,

sent word that they were running into a trap, that not only had Gina not been to Viru but that the barges were well protected. Consequently, the attack was aborted and Gina was severely flogged for his alleged treachery. He was then kept under house arrest at Seghe until September, when he accompanied Kennedy to Guadalcanal. There, away from the battle lines, the colonial authorities were apparently inclined to judge him by his abilities rather than by his alleged misdemeanours. Instead of being punished further, Gina was co-opted into the administrative service—and began a new career as a government official.24

Ironies and ambiguities similarly attend other well-known instances of Kennedy’s harsh rule. On 18 May 1943 Kato Ragoso, the first indigenous pastor of the Seventh Day Adventist mission and a man of considerable influence, was at Nono, visiting refugees from Viru, when he learned of ten Japanese who had trespassed into the Marovo Lagoon in a whaleboat. His immediate thought was to warn his family. By 4am he was with them at Telina, not far from where the Japanese were camped, when Kennedy arrived in the Dadavata. Apparently annoyed that Ragoso had left it to his scouts to tell him about the Japanese (though he had scarcely had time to do otherwise) Kennedy took the opportunity to assert his own authority by punishing the pastor for a presumed lack of cooperation. He arrested him, and took him to Seghe, where he was given a beating from which, although he lived until 1976, he never properly recovered.25 Meanwhile, from Telina, Kennedy went in search of the Japanese. On the evening of 19 May he caught up with them in the vicinity of Vangunu. Besides the Japanese, the only other casualty in that encounter was Kennedy himself. He received a slight wound to the right thigh; ‘just missing the family jewels’, he would later joke. It came, though, from a bullet fired not by the Japanese, as was generally believed until the actual perpetrator confessed in 1987, but from the engine room by his own lieutenant, Bill Bennett. Some time before, Bennett and his uncle, Joel Biskera, had been put over the 44-gallon drum and flogged by Kennedy for failing to ‘find him a girl’. So, in the confusion of the skirmish, and with Kennedy drunk, it was time for a vengeful victim to settle a personal score. But for the awkward angle of fire, Bennett would have killed him. Instead, Kennedy remained to fight, although with the Japanese patrols coming closer from early June—and with the Americans preparing to advance northwards—his task at Seghe was nearing completion.26
The Rennellese were flown out soon after the ‘Battle of Marovo’. They numbered five of the six members of Kennedy’s ‘machine gun corps’ (one, Timothy Togaka, having died from a beating at Kennedy’s hands), and Magiko, who was pregnant to him. She subsequently gave birth to a girl named Catalina (who died in 1945). Meanwhile, two companies of US marines landed at Seghe on 22 June 1943 and had captured the Japanese positions at Viru Harbour and Wickham Anchorage. The main force arrived on 30 June and proceeded to convert Markham’s plantation into an airfield. The same day, further north, operations aimed at Munda began with landings at Rendova and on Zanana Beach in New Georgia.

With these developments Kennedy’s war, for which he was awarded the DSO and the Navy Cross (US), was clearly over. He was redundant, and felt a sense of deflation that, taken with the effects of alcoholism, strain and loneliness, led his superiors to fear for his mental health. He was clearly in a run-down state when he left the Solomons on 13 September for vacation leave in New Zealand. But he recovered quickly. In November he wrote a valuable, if somewhat sanitised, report on his coast-watching career. In it he generously acknowledged ‘the very great amount of help received from the native communities’, not least from his scouts, whose exploits included rescuing 22 US pilots, capturing 20 Japanese pilots and two sailors and killing ‘about 120’ soldiers. Then, in February 1944, refreshed if not reformed (he still drank heavily), he resumed his administrative career in the Solomons as acting district commissioner, central, based in the new capital of Honiara on Guadalcanal. From there he was soon called upon to investigate the stirrings of a political movement in Nggela which harked back to Marchant’s experiment in local government of 1941. Kennedy recommended conceding the petitioners more autonomy, but that advice was not accepted. Within a year the discontent on Ngella had merged with the more powerful stream of nationalist resistance flowing from Malaita in the independently named ‘Maasina Rule’ movement, which lasted until 1952. By then, Kennedy had moved on.

In July 1944 he returned to New Zealand. There he married a vivacious young war widow named Mary Campbell, whom he had first met in London in 1938. He also found time to complete a book, *Te Ngangana a te Tuvalu: a handbook*...

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27 Boutilier, pp. 343, 350.
on the language of Tuvalu, which she typed for him. Then, in December, after hospital treatment for alcoholism, he was appointed to Fiji. But his enjoyment of the comfortable routines of a headquarters position did not last long. In August 1945, ‘by reason of his long experience’ in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands and ‘at the request of the Banabans themselves’, he was assigned to arrange for the resettlement of the Banaban people of Ocean Island, who had been deported by the Japanese to Nauru, Tarawa and Kosrae in July 1943. Kennedy left for Kosrae in the Carolines in late September 1945 to collect his charges from a camp at Lele Harbour. Then, on 9 December, he left Tarawa aboard the phosphate vessel Triona with 1,003 migrants (703 Banabans, plus 300 of their Gilbertese relatives), all destined for a new life on Rabi in Fiji.

Although Maude had bought Rabi for the Banabans in 1942 as a prospective second home, on account of the damage inflicted on Ocean Island by phosphate mining, the resettlement was an unhappy venture. The migrants were suspicious (justifiably so) that the colonial government, in collusion with the mining company, intended not only to keep them on Rabi permanently but to extinguish their residual rights on Ocean Island. More immediately, they were discomfited by the climate, cooler and much wetter than what they were used to; dismayed by the lack of preparations made to receive them; disconcerted by having to resort to subsistence agriculture, an art they had lost; frustrated by road making; and insulted by being pushed into plantation work, and being shown how to cut copra by Solomon Islanders, whom they considered their inferiors. Most of the Banabans were accommodated in tents at Nuku. About 40 of them died during the first six months. The only solid house on the island was occupied by Kennedy and his new wife, and it alone had electricity, hot water and a septic tank.

There Kennedy made it his primary task as ‘Banaban adviser’ to draw up a constitution for a new society. The members of this were ‘formally constituted as an association of families linked by Banaban identity, which elected a council and the management of a cooperative society’. While the scheme was accepted by the new settlers it did little to ameliorate their plight. For this they found it convenient to blame Kennedy and, although he was not the cause of their difficulties, a robust pragmatism diluted his sympathy for them, and did nothing to deflect their growing hostility. He was disappointed by ‘people

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31 H.E. Maude, memorandum on ‘The future of the Banaban population of Ocean Island’, 2 Sept. 1946, FNA, CSO F37/269; Albert Ellis, Mid-Pacific Outposts, Auckland, p. 238; Woodburn, pp. 198–201.
almost wilfully blind to their wonderful opportunities and tending ever more strongly to hark back to old suspicions and complaints’. In contrast, their leader, Rotan Tito, Kennedy’s ally before being relegated to ‘agitator’, shared their grievances, and even condoned challenges to his authority, such as the unsanctioned slaughtering of cattle. By the end of May Kennedy was predicting a breakdown of order on the island, and had even called for police assistance. His appeal prompted two official investigations, but no show of colonial force. Instead, three months later, to mollify the Banabans with an act of expedient irenicism, but ignoring their main—and enduringly troublesome—concerns, their first adviser was removed from his position, and replaced by another.33

For Kennedy it was an ignominious end not only to an unusual venture, but also to his career. Strongly self-reliant, he had never cultivated the friendship or admiration of his colleagues or superiors, any more than he had the affection of his subordinates. If he had their respect it was hard-earned and often grudgingly given, and his truculent character, womanising, and over-indulgence in whisky made it difficult to sustain. Already in late 1943, when he was ‘of a seniority at which prospects loom ahead for those who are both fit and competent’ it had been suggested that he be ‘retired from the Service’. And so it soon came to pass. From 31 September 1946 he was granted vacation leave and, on 25 April 1947, he retired as ‘District Officer, BSIP’. It was a lowly rank on which to finish after 26 years of service. Even so, he was still under 50 years of age, and his future prospects looked to be not uncomfortable.34

From Fiji he had gone with Mary to live on ‘Glen Aros’ station, an old-established farming property she had inherited from her parents in the prosperous Hawke’s Bay district of New Zealand. The life of a country gentleman beckoned. There Kennedy interested himself in animal genetics, and took to cattle breeding with such aplomb that in 1950 his bull Emperor of Glen Aros won the ‘champion of champions’ award at the local agricultural show. That was also a swansong. Shortly afterwards he was carried from Glen Aros in a drunken coma, and never returned. He and Mary were divorced in 1952. Meanwhile, according to her recollection, early in 1951 he visited New Guinea to advise on an Australian scheme to set up a military intelligence network there. Again the bottle prevailed. The mission was aborted, and the report was never written.35


34 Fragment of letter by Assistant High Commissioner, [1943], WPHC archives, BSIP, FC 2; WPHC Gazette, Suva, 1949.

35 Interview with Mary White; White to Laracy, private communication, 19 May 1986; Pacific Islands Monthly, Jan. 1950, p. 24. The proposal for a security intelligence service apparently came to nothing. An
Faced now with the problem of what to do next, and where to go. Kennedy sought refuge among some of his former subjects, on the island of Kioa in Fiji. En route from Tarawa to Rabi with the Banabans in 1945 he had visited Vaitupu, and had advised the people there to consider resettlement in order to avoid overpopulation. The idea was well received. In June 1946, therefore, he and Maude, bought the island of Kioa in Fiji on their behalf. Between 1947 and 1963 a total of 217 people shifted there from Vaitupu. About half that number had already come when Kennedy arrived in September 1951. He was invited to stay on as adviser to the fledgling community, and forthwith initiated an ambitious development program involving clearing bush, planting coconuts, grazing cattle and making a road. Not unreasonably, some of the settlers began to fear that Kennedy was aiming to develop Kioa as an estate for himself so, a year later, they expelled him from the island. But he continued to haunt them.\textsuperscript{36}

In 1953 he notified the Kioans that he had purchased the small island of Waya, near Kadavu, for himself, and invited any of them who so wished to join him there. Four families, numbering about 16 people, accepted. Among them was a couple named Paka and Samo and their granddaughter Emeline. Their daughter, Mainalupe, had been Kennedy’s housekeeper on Vaitupu and, in 1936, he had produced a son named Donald Lipine Kennedy by her. Subsequently, Mainalupe married a man named Kaisami, and they begot Emeline. Aged 11 when she shifted to Waya, Emeline became Kennedy’s common-law wife soon after she turned 16 in 1958, and in 1959 gave him a son named Archie Bairn Kennedy. After the last of the Kioans returned to Kioa in 1963, those three had Waya largely to themselves for a decade. In 1973 declining health led Kennedy to sell his island, marry Emeline and return to New Zealand. He died three years later, aged 77. He had fathered eight children by five different women, produced a useful corpus of scholarly writing, and he had left his name deeply embedded in the folklore no less than in the colonial history of the several island groups through which he ranged during the course of 50 years.\textsuperscript{37}

Kennedy’s was a career energetically pursued and was not without its successes, yet was scarcely calculated to edify in staid, conventional ways. Within the


colonial administrative service he became an embarrassingly disreputable figure, one readily dismissed as having brought discredit on it. For instance, one of his former colleagues, Colin Allan, who later became Governor of the Solomon Islands, thought that it would be preferable to leave Kennedy’s story unwritten rather than have some of the details of his personal behaviour offered to a general readership. To do that, though, would be wilfully to reduce the quality of understanding attainable in regard to various significant events in which he was involved. Besides, given the way his character coloured his career, it would be to countenance a more than usually specious distinction between public and private matters. A balanced assessment of the man requires an uninhibited consideration of the tangled threads of merit and demerit that animated him. In any case, those closest to him saw no problem. His second wife wrote that:

He was an extraordinary character—utterly charming, with a great presence and a tremendous sense of humour, extremely erudite and interesting with it. A very clear thinking and brilliant brain, but almost paranoiac. If he thought his authority or pride were touched in any way he became violent. And, of course, being an alcoholic didn’t help. His years of isolation in the G.&E. made it difficult for him to adjust to civilised living where his authority could be questioned.  

Such comments, even allowing for the mellowing effect of time, betray a sympathetic recognition of complexity rather than any disdain. They suggest that the drama of Kennedy’s life, the ambiguity of his personality and the strong responses he elicited might supply the ingredients of an entertaining story for the cinema screen. Possibly it could be told with due panache by his stepson Martin Campbell, director of the James Bond adventure Golden Eye.  

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38 Mary White, personal communication, 19 May 1986; interview with Sir Colin Allan. Himself a New Zealander, Allan was a generation younger than Kennedy and was academically well qualified.