

# 1. The French Pacific presence to World War II

The image of the French in Australia is a complex mix of impressions. Australians see the French as a cultivated people, with a passion for perfection in knowledge and in the day-to-day elements of life whereby clothing becomes *haute couture* and food *haute cuisine*, a finely tuned sense of the romantic and the amorous, a healthy not to say excessive suspicion of all things Anglo-Saxon, an uncompromisingly juridical approach to life, an almost manic respect for the ambiguities and inflections of their own language, and a strong sense of religiosity associated with the Catholic church. There is a quixotic element to Australians' idea of the French, in whom Latin emotions are perceived to take over and at times inveterate stubbornness can give way to a disarming desire to right wrongs.

At the same time, in foreign policy circles, the image of France is that of a country single-minded in its pursuit of its national interests, to the extent that it can ride apparently roughshod, and unapologetically, over the interests of others. To the more initiate Australian, the French maintain such a pride for their own culture and their civilising mission that they have coined a phrase, *rayonnement de la culture française*, which is untranslatable in other languages but which conveys a sense of the transfiguring radiation of their culture, as if from a divine presence.

And, ultimately, France represents, for most Australians, the notions of *liberté, égalité et fraternité*, a semantic trinity that was first coined by France, to which Australians, often unwittingly, owe the basis of their own national institutions, and to which values France is held, often to higher standards than others.

In the long stretch of the history of France's presence in the South Pacific region, all of these qualities in their contradictoriness and ambiguity are present in abundance. The story is one of courage, endurance, failure, at times brilliant success, stubbornness and, overall, of extensive financial and cultural investment, all of which have led to and characterise its presence there today. To examine this history, even in a cursory way, is to embark on an adventure as gripping as the history of Australia's British ancestors in its region, and just as important for Australians to understand because it has contributed to Australia's own national character and security. This chapter will look briefly at France's presence in the Pacific from the earliest contacts, and consider pivotal events in World War II, which shaped the nature of France's contemporary presence.

## Earliest French contact with the Pacific

The earliest French engagement with the Pacific dated from the speculation about a southern land posed by a French monk, Lambert, in the eleventh century, which encouraged one of the first French explorers, Paulmier de Gonneville, to look for it in 1503. He found a southern land but lost all his records in a shipwreck in the English Channel after an encounter with pirates. His mysterious voyage inspired further efforts by the French, and others, to find the southern land (see Dunmore 1978, 1997 and Sankey 1991).

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Spanish and Dutch led the quest in the Pacific. But Frenchmen were also present, from the 19 French crew of Ferdinand Magellan's expedition in 1520, to voyages by Pierre-Olivier Malherbe, Jean-Baptiste de la Feuillade and Jean-Baptiste de Genes in the seventeenth century. French pirates travelled there in the 1680s, with names like Passepartout ('able to go anywhere'), Hallebarde ('halberd', a lethal sixteenth century weapon), and Vent-en-panne ('reviving wind'). Even then, roving French and British buccaneers had their fallings out, underpinned by their mainly Catholic French and Protestant British differences, a sign of things to come.

By the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, French exploration in the Pacific was characterised by patriotism marked by rivalry with other nationalities, shipwrecks, a missionary spirit and, later, by a certain commercial interest. But this period was not to see the effective establishment of a French presence. At this time, only privately funded French vessels travelled to the Pacific, leading to increasingly commercial activity.<sup>1</sup> The French India Company operated in the Pacific from 1706, establishing a critical new southern route, around the Cape of Good Hope, between America and Africa.

Growing French activity entailed difficulties with the dominant power, Spain, with whom France had to negotiate delicately, demonstrating the primordial effect of European political events and policy, which was to be a hallmark of France's presence in the South Pacific up to the present. Officially sanctioned French trade was interrupted briefly from 1713 when the Treaty of Utrecht ended the Spanish War of Succession, but resumed with renewed hostilities against Spain. By 1720, the French India Company controlled 300 ships and, between 1698 and 1725, at least 168 French ships were known to have sailed the Pacific.

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1 These traders included Jacques Gouin de Beuchesne (1698), Noel Danycan (1701), Julien Bourdas (1701), Nicolas de Frondat (1707) and Michel-Joseph du Bocage de Bléville (who discovered Clipperton Island in 1711, which remains French today).

This period also saw the beginnings of scientific and strategic interest in the Pacific, with voyages by scientists Louis Feuillet (who taught astronomy in Peru 1707–1712) and Amédée-François Frézier (1711–1717). The latter, an army defence specialist sent by Louis XIV to report on Spanish defences, drew the first reliable map of South America.

This was the time of the *philosophes* in Paris, who debated issues of the day in private *salons* informally sanctioned by the King. In 1756 the *Histoire des navigations aux terres australes* (*History of Navigation in the Southern Lands*) by Charles de Brosses, a shareholder of the French India Company, advocated exploration, knowledge and commerce rather than conquest; colonial establishments to provide bases for French fleets; and even suggested penal settlement as a substitute for penal punishment, all features to be taken up in subsequent years. De Brosses first coined the terms ‘Australasia’ and ‘Polynesia’ (see Bachimon 1990, 18). Much of his work was controversially pirated by Englishman John Callander in his 1768 *Terra Australia Cognita*, an act that can be seen as a precursor to future rivalries characterising the opening up of the South Pacific to Europe.

## From exploration to staking French claims

The voyage by Louis-Antoine de Bougainville to the South Pacific from 1766 to 1769 is seen as a turning point for the French. It embodied many of the features of later, and even contemporary, French engagement in the region. Bougainville set out to establish a French South Pacific settlement to compensate France for the loss of Canada (he had been an aide to General Montcalm and negotiated the French evacuation after France’s defeat there), setting a trend whereby French action in the Pacific would be motivated by balancing losses elsewhere (for example in Algeria and Indochina in the twentieth century, see below). He became enmeshed in rivalries back in Europe, provoking concern in Madrid and London after he successfully installed a French colony in the Falkland Islands, which was ultimately withdrawn. His 1766 voyage to the South Pacific, commissioned as a quid pro quo for the Falkland loss, led to his claim for France of the East Tuamotu islands in 1767, and then Tahiti in 1768, parts of what is now French Polynesia, when he established the quaint but symbolic pattern of French explorers making a written declaration of possession for France and burying it in a bottle. Bougainville was accompanied by a number of scientists, typical of French exploration teams. (His crew included many colourful characters, including the Prince of Orange and Nassau, and a woman disguised as a male valet. For interesting accounts of this, see Bougainville 1772, 13, 301 and Cazaux 1995).

Bougainville created the image of Tahiti and the South Pacific as a place of sensuous and free living, which endures in French minds to this day. In his own words, a young Tahiti woman from the canoes surrounding Bougainville's vessels climbed aboard 'and negligently allowed her loincloth to fall to the ground ... Sailors and soldiers hurried to get to the hatchway, and never was a capstan heaved with such speed' (cited by Dunmore who noted that 'On that day the legend of Tahiti was born', 1997, 48–49). He took a Polynesian, Ahutoru, back with him to Paris, who became the motif for the Rousseauist idea of the noble savage, his native islands the new Cythera.

Symbolic of future patterns, fate and British rivalry came into play. The British had beaten Bougainville to Tahiti, as their own Samuel Wallis had anchored there less than a year before; and Bougainville only narrowly missed discovering Australia, the Great South Land. Seventh, after his return in 1769, geostrategists in London and Paris were to see Tahiti as an important logistical staging post in the Pacific quest.

Subsequent French ventures were to reflect the hallmarks established by Bougainville. Jean-François-Marie de Surville in 1769 set off in search of a 'Davis Land', partly to trump the British who had reputedly found it, and discovered what is now the Solomon Islands, but, fatefully missing what is now Vanuatu, New Caledonia, and New South Wales, and missing Britain's Captain James Cook in northern New Zealand by only a few miles (Surville 1981). Yves-Joseph de Kerguelen discovered the islands that bear his name near Antarctica in 1771 and 1773, and he planted a bottled note of possession; the Kerguelen Islands remain a French possession, uninhabited and frequented only by scientists working there.

The next great French expedition to the southern ocean, by Jean-François Galoup de la Pérouse, was as grand, epochal and fateful as that of Bougainville (see La Pérouse 1832). It too was led by an aristocrat in pursuit of the glory of the fatherland, who was on a mission of scientific discovery (but not possession, as La Pérouse believed Europeans had no right to claim lands where inhabitants had worked and buried their ancestors (Dunmore 1977, 93)). La Pérouse landed in Botany Bay on 23 January 1788, only days after the British had arrived, and was charged to report on their activities. Despite rivalries, the British co-operated in providing support where necessary, taking French papers and letters back to France for La Pérouse and giving logistical support. The French chaplain, le Père Receveur, died and was buried ashore at Frenchman's Bay, now in the Sydney suburb of La Pérouse. He was the first French person to be buried in Australia.

La Pérouse's subsequent disappearance, on the way to what was known to be New Caledonia, already discovered by Cook in 1774, became a *cause célèbre* in France. While revolutionary events in France impeded further expeditions,

determination to find out what happened to La Pérouse resulted in a voyage in 1791 by Joseph-Antoine Raymond Bruny d'Entrecasteaux, also accompanied by eminent scientists (see Horner 1996). Their research papers ended up in British hands after capture in the Atlantic, to be returned to France only after the intervention of Sir Joseph Banks, an outcome to be paralleled years later with research by Nicolas Baudin (see below). Amongst the seekers of the truth about La Pérouse were George Bass, Matthew Flinders, Louis de Freycinet, Louis Duperrey and Jules Dumont d'Urville. But it was France's fate to be gazumped by the British once more as it was an Englishman, Peter Dillon, who finally established that La Pérouse had been shipwrecked at Vanikoro, in what is now the Solomon Islands. The story is again one of adventure and rivalry (recounted by Dillon 1829 and, with poetic licence, Guillou 2000).

The La Pérouse expedition and its aftermath are emblematic of the dangers, risks, mystery and adventure that characterised and motivated European exploration at the time, and demonstrate as well the unusual mix of rivalry and unity of individual French and British explorers in pursuing goals in the region.

The French exploratory presence in the Pacific diminished in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, with the preoccupations of the Revolution and its aftermath. The British remained active, and British–French rivalry intensified. The eponymous Étienne Marchand, a French trader, claimed possession of the Marquesas Islands in 1791, but had been preceded by an American, Joseph Ingraham, only months before.

Baudin, accompanied by 22 scientists, was commissioned in 1798 to circumnavigate Australia, although he, too, was gazumped by the British when Matthew Flinders got to the south of the continent before him (see Baudin Legacy Project website <http://sydney.edu.au/arts/research/audin/project>). His accidental meeting of Flinders at what is now Encounter Bay is another example of fortuitous, amicable, but tardy French interaction with the British (which did not prevent the French from later arresting Flinders in Mauritius). Baudin died before returning to France, and had earlier sent back one of his ships with much of the expedition's research, which was captured by the British in the English Channel and, in a remarkable repetition of La Pérouse's experience, was only released through the intervention of Sir Joseph Banks. But British unease remained, and indeed was heightened by the publication of an account of the voyage by François Péron, using French geographical names instead of British ones (Australia was '*Terre Napoléon*'). French patriotism, and nostalgia was poignantly evident in the description of a meal Péron and his fellow scientist Freycinet shared with Tasmanian Aborigines, when the Frenchmen stood up and sang the *Marseillaise* (Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 55; Plomley 1983).

As if to underline their position as second-comer, free French access to Australia from the west ceased with Britain's taking of Ile de France in 1810, particularly after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815.

In summary, France's exploration of the Pacific in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was characterised by scientific interest, the patronage of the King and government, a strong sense of national mission, a complex co-operative yet rival relationship with the British, who repeatedly beat them to the punch, and remarkable displays of courage and humanity in the face of loss of life, illness and disappointment. European politics and domestic preoccupations in France shaped the timing and nature of French exploration. The French made an invaluable contribution to scientific knowledge and especially in mapping the new lands at this time. While there were private, commercial ventures, notably at the end of the seventeenth century, and a century later, by Marchand, the main motivation was national prestige. This sense of national honour was only sharpened by the dominance of the British, both in Europe and in the new Pacific lands, into the early nineteenth century.

## **Consolidating a regional presence: Rivalry and ambiguity**

France consolidated its presence in the Pacific in the nineteenth century. Its motivations were to establish supply points for its navy; to protect its nationals, mainly missionaries; and to assert sovereignty over its settlements, including a penal settlement in New Caledonia. There were commercial interests, but these were secondary. France's pursuit of these interests was characterised by an overriding pattern of ambiguities, often arising from political circumstances back home. It was one of the first to establish settlements and claim sovereignty over them, yet, once again, it also lost out to the British and Americans on numerous occasions. Its overall approach was one of determined power and ambition, yet combined with hesitation and short-term vision (see Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 62).

Early in the century, and mainly when the restored monarchy was in place, the eighteenth century tradition of scientific discovery continued to drive French expeditions.<sup>2</sup> But these were followed by ventures with more political objectives.<sup>3</sup> By the late 1840s, France had established consular representatives

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2 These included expeditions by Freycinet (1817–1820), Duperrey (1822–1825), Bougainville's son Hyacinthe (1824–1826), and Cyrille La Place (1829–1831).

3 Including by Dumont d'Urville (1826–1829 and 1837–1840), August Nicolas de Vaillant (1836) and Abel Dupetit-Thouars, (1836–1840 and 1842–1843), whose uncle had failed in his efforts to search for La Pérouse (Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 56–57).

in Australia to safeguard its interests there, which comprised mainly looking after a small immigrant French community and providing intelligence for Paris (Aldrich 1990, 201).

## Defending the missionary presence and the Pritchard affair

France's experience in establishing a foothold in the Pacific in the early nineteenth century was a mixed one. It was driven principally by its need to protect the interests of its nationals who were Catholic missionaries. Common challenges in the various French missionary settlements were first, establishing good relations with the locals and, second, securing a place in the face of competing activity by non-Catholic European missionaries who had usually arrived there first and were overwhelmingly British — which raised related political rivalries.

While France had missionary societies (from 1625, a Congregation of the Missions and, from 1663, a *Société des Missions Étrangères* (Foreign Missionary Society) in Paris), early ignorance about the great southern land and, later, the disruptions of the French Revolution to the status of the French clergy, impeded efforts to evangelise overseas, which meant they were relatively late arrivals to the Pacific, and resented by others already there. These tended to be British or American Protestants, present through the London Missionary Society (LMS), with representatives in Tahiti, Tonga and the Marquesas from 1796, and American groups in Hawaii and archipelagos to the east.

The first French attempt at religious activity was in Hawaii, when the chaplain aboard Freycinet's ship *Uranie* baptised the Chief Minister Kalanimoku at his request in 1819 (Dunmore 1997, 127). As a group of American Congregationalists arrived soon after, a local French resident, Jean-Baptiste Rives, urged the Paris Foreign Missionary Seminary to send French Catholic missionaries in 1824. The Sacred Heart 'Picpus' fathers (named after their Paris address) sent six missionaries to Honolulu in 1827, but they were not welcomed by Queen Kaahumanu, who had already been converted by the Americans. She expelled two of the priests, and sought to do the same when another arrived in 1835. The French captain Vaillant, in Honolulu during his Pacific voyage, was able to secure a rescinding of this expulsion order. When two more missionaries arrived in 1837, they were also expelled. Despite efforts by visiting French captain Dupetit-Thouars, this time the expulsion stuck. Captain Cyrille Laplace visited in 1839 and was able to negotiate freedom of religion for Catholics, along with trade rights equal to those of the British and Americans. The Picpus fathers returned in strength, one of whom was Father Damien, known for his work with lepers. Such was

the influence of the French that their consul was appointed finance minister in Hawaii in 1863 and then foreign minister. A provisional government took power in 1893, however, and demanded American annexation of the islands.

The French were to experience similar contention when French Catholic missionaries arrived elsewhere, particularly in what is now French Polynesia, where the LMS had preceded them. These events were recorded by the LMS representative in Tahiti, Rev. George Pritchard (edited by de Deckker 1983; see also Newbury 1980 and Faivre 1953) and came to be known as the Pritchard affair.

Having alienated the LMS early by successfully displacing the group in the Gambier archipelago in 1834, the Picpus fathers landed at Tahiti in 1836, where the LMS had been established since 1797. The priests courted Queen Pomaré, provoking Pritchard's ire, resulting in the Queen expelling them back to the Gambiers. Pritchard was subsequently appointed British Consul, compounding French fears that the British were using religious differences to oust them from the Pacific. The American Consul, a Belgian called Jacques-Antoine Moerenhout, who was sympathetic to the French, informed a visiting French bishop about the priests' expulsion.

French Admiral Dupetit-Thouars, when he landed in Tahiti in 1838, was tasked to 'assert the status of France as a nation "which has the means and the will to ensure that its citizens everywhere are respected"' (Dunmore 1997 136 citing the captain's instructions). He undertook some complex diplomacy to secure a positive result for France, offering Pritchard and Moerenhout asylum aboard his ship should hostilities break out; and seeking from Queen Pomaré a letter of apology to King Louis-Philippe, monetary compensation, and a gun salute to the French flag. The Queen agreed to the terms, blaming Pritchard for the problems. In the end, in a sign of the way things would evermore be done in the French Pacific, Pritchard came up with the cash compensation himself and Dupetit-Thouars supplied the gunpowder for the gun salute, as the Queen did not have these resources. Moerenhout was appointed French Consul, having lost his American appointment after Pritchard had complained to Washington. Dupetit-Thouars subsequently negotiated a favoured-nation trade agreement for France, similar to that arranged by Laplace in Hawaii. And thus French honour was preserved.

But not for long. After Dupetit-Thouars' departure a prohibition order was issued against Catholic preaching and Laplace once again came to the rescue, in 1839, negotiating a freedom of religion clause in the order. Resentments between the British-led Protestants and the French Catholic fathers persisted. Dupetit-Thouars returned to Tahiti in 1842 to reinforce French rights, this time requiring the signing of a document placing Tahiti under French protection.

The Pritchard affair was significant in that rivalry and bitterness between the French and British, which underlay the events, persisted for years, up to the present (see, for example, the injunction of the President of the French national assembly to 'turn the page once and for all on the Pritchard affair', *Assemblée Nationale* hearings on France and the Pacific States 1996).

Elsewhere, similar problems simmered. In the Marquesas, years of resistance by non-Catholic missionaries from 1797 ended in 1838 with a successful implantation of Picpus missionaries at Tahuata, again negotiated by the resourceful Dupetit-Thouars (Dunmore 1997, 140). In Tonga, attempts by the Wesleyans, present from 1822, to resist French Marist activity persisted until 1861 when Marist Father Chevron obtained an edict allowing freedom for Catholics to practice their religion. Despite similar difficulties, by mid century, Catholic missions were established in New Caledonia (from 1843, but see below), Fiji (from 1844), Samoa (from 1845), and New Hebrides (from 1848). In many cases the intervention of officials and visiting French ships was necessary to protect the missionary presence.

The establishment of a French missionary presence in New Caledonia was difficult. A formal agreement was signed by the Melanesians, accepting French sovereignty, soon after the arrival of the Marist missionaries at Balade in the north, on 1 January 1844. But the settlement was abandoned from 1847 until 1851 after attacks by Melanesians (recounted in Delbos 2000, Chapter 1), but also because of concerns in Paris about alienating Britain after the Pritchard affair (see Colonisation, below). Later missionaries survived only after France's declaration of possession of the archipelago in 1853, and further contact by French ships. Earlier attempts by the LMS to establish a foothold in New Caledonia in 1840 and 1841 had not succeeded. LMS' Samoan teachers refused to land on Grande Terre, the main island, because of the ferocity of the locals; and the Isle of Pines settlement in 1841 was troubled. The LMS was more successful in establishing a presence in the Loyalty Islands from 1841, providing a further complication for the French in later years.

Similarly, in New Zealand, in 1832, English missionaries had resisted possible French influence with the arrival of Laplace and other French explorers, and a Wesleyan group had unsuccessfully sought to oust French priests. Marist Bishop Pompallier arrived in 1838 to find Protestant missionary societies ensconced, but met little overt opposition mainly because of the size and disparate leadership of the islands (Dunmore 1997, 142). Despite his strong influence in the north, where he conducted himself as a *de facto* government, the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 ensured British political dominance. The French were, again, gazumped by the British.

The Marists were more successful in establishing ascendancy over the British in the islands of Wallis (named after the British adventurer Samuel Wallis) and Futuna in 1837. But, nonetheless, they too met a brutal reaction from the local inhabitants. Their Father Peter Chanel was to become the first Roman Catholic Pacific martyr, and later, saint, in 1841, at the hands of the King whose son he had converted. Remorse for this act was to see the entire population convert, which strengthened France's political influence there.

French Marists were to be less successful in the Solomons, where they tried to settle in various locations from 1845 but, by 1855, had given up. They did not attempt a presence in Papua New Guinea until 1881, on Thursday Island, and 1885, at Yule Island near Port Moresby, although they were in constant dispute with the British including through the Governor of Queensland who, in 1896, referred the differences to London and Rome.

The pattern of these experiences explains much about perceptions and contributions of the French in the Pacific in the first half of the nineteenth century. Overridingly, the Catholic religion came to be identified with French interests, and Protestantism with British or at least, in French eyes, Anglo-Saxon interests. While France succeeded in establishing its own presence in some settlements (French Polynesia, New Caledonia and Wallis and Futuna), it lost out in other places (Hawaii, New Zealand, for a time in French Polynesia, Papua New Guinea), in most cases to the British. The religious animosities and resentments on both sides underlie the emotion often attaching to French perceptions of Anglo-Saxons in the Pacific, and vice versa, persisting until this day. The assertion of a political interest in order to protect its nationals became a deep-seated rationale for its presence, and one which, it will be seen, has also persisted until today.

## Colonisation

French acts of possession in the South Pacific were thus not unalloyed assertions of empire. France in the nineteenth century was motivated by a mission to bring what was seen as 'civilisation' or religion to the rest of the world and to protect its own nationals, as well as by national pride and a desire to rank with other rival imperial powers. Despite the difficulties of establishing and supporting the missionary presence in the face of rivals, France was the first to establish possession, 30 years in advance of other empire-builders (1842 in Tahiti, 1853 New Caledonia, 1858 Clipperton, and 1886 Wallis and Futuna; compared for example to Britain in Fiji, 1874, Tonga 1885 and Solomons 1890; Germany in New Guinea, 1885, and Samoa 1899; the United States in Hawaii, 1898, and Samoa 1899). France was also seen by other colonising powers as a force to fear

and to counter. France, however, had also encountered failure along the way. Its failures can be attributed variously to the greater strength of its rivals and poor timing arising from preoccupations at home, but also, as will be seen, to indecision and hesitation. Fewer population pressures in France at this time, as opposed to elsewhere in Europe, and the country's engagement elsewhere (including Algeria), reduced the urgent practical need for it to establish settlements in the Pacific.

Apart from being beaten to the punch, as by the British in Tasmania and New Zealand, and by the British and Americans in Hawaii, the French sought on numerous occasions in Fiji, Tonga and Samoa to support Marist missionaries, without asserting its naval presence and, indeed, the suggestion of a French protectorate in Tonga was never realised. Despite proposals for French protectorates from French advisors and missionaries in the Easter Islands in 1885, and in the north of the Cook Islands, in 1888, annexation did not occur. This was largely because of indecision in Paris, perhaps informed by hesitancy about the relative lack of return for such distant engagement.

Indecision, competing interests and preoccupations, and half-heartedness in the capital also dictated the French approach to the possessions that they did establish. Working against French expansion in the Pacific were the extreme and constant political instability and changes of government in the motherland that characterised most of the century (certainly 1815–1880); the continual priority of European politics; the importance of colonial undertakings in Africa and Indochina; the reticence of authorities towards Catholic missionaries at the end of the century; and, the relative weakness of French commercial activity in the region.

Even where France did establish sovereignty, it did so only progressively and often after bartering with Germany and Britain: a Germany which successfully established its commercial enterprises from Apia to Fiji through to the Carolinas from 1857; and a Britain lobbied by its own colonies in Australia and New Zealand to entrench itself more deeply in the region. Just as European power relationships dictated the pace of French action in the Pacific when it was a Spanish lake, so the political chessboard in Europe affected the pattern of French annexations in the Pacific.

In what is now French Polynesia, while the Marquesas were annexed in 1842, Tahiti remained a protectorate until 1880, and Paris did not confirm a declaration by Dupetit-Thouars in 1842 in the wake of the Pritchard affair, which also had engaged American interests. The Gambiers were only annexed in 1881. French sovereignty in the Leeward Islands was set aside by agreement with the British in 1847, challenged by the Germans in 1879, proclaimed in 1880, and recognised internationally over Bora Bora, Huahiné and Raiatea only

in 1888. Of the Australs, France formally annexed Rapa only in 1888, Remataru in 1900 and Ruratu in 1901, to avoid difficulties with Britain (for the same reasons France held back on annexing the Cook and Easter Islands, in the end losing out to Britain and Chile respectively, see Dunmore 1997, 203–04). As will be seen, the New Hebrides remained an arena of French–British rivalry well into the twentieth century. And, in New Caledonia, France’s initial hoisting of the *tricolore* when first landing missionaries in 1843 was speedily negated by the capital, wary of putting the British further offside after the strains of the Pritchard affair in Tahiti. Official annexation of the main island, Grande Terre occurred only in 1853, and effective control of the Loyalty Islands, where the LMS was active, by 1865.

## New Hebrides

France’s administration of the New Hebrides was shaped by the complex British–French relationship, yet more indecision, and a liberal amount of innovation.

As in Wallis and Futuna, France repeatedly declined several appeals for a French protectorate over the New Hebrides islands (proposed by the Irish trader John Higginson from 1875). The French presence consisted primarily of missionaries and large-scale planters. Britain and France, in the face of heavy lobbying by their interest groups concerned about eventual dominance by the other, agreed in 1886 to set up a Joint Naval Commission to administer the archipelago from 1888. Having no civil law to back them up, the two French and two British officers, who comprised the Commission in its early years, were largely ineffectual. Their Commission evolved into a Condominium of the New Hebrides in 1906, to administer a joint protectorate.

The Condominium arrangement was a creative solution at the time to accommodate the flagging imperial aims of both parties, who were working increasingly together back home to meet the growing German imperialist threat. The system involved ingeniously duplicative arrangements: two sets of administrators, each responsible for their own citizens; two languages; two forms of Christianity; three sets of laws applicable respectively to the indigenous people, French and British settlers; two educational systems; two police systems; and, two sets of currencies and systems of weights and measures. Although there were periods during which the British and French Commissioners did not speak to one another, and differences were addressed by a mixed tribunal whose head, at one time, was a deaf Spanish count (see Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 76), it proved remarkably effective over 80 years and was one of the first examples of experimental forms of government in the Pacific.

The two commissions in practice administered their own nationalities (the French, their planters, the British, primarily missionaries). The numbers

involved were minuscule. Jean Chesneaux and Nic Maclellan note that the British population was only 55 (compared to the French population of 151) in 1897, 228 (401) in 1906, and 298 (566) in 1910 (1992, 77) although, by 1939, the French population was 10 times bigger than the British and centred on the island of Santo. The administration of the Melanesians took a very low second place.

But, ironically given the unique Condominium arrangement, it is in the New Hebrides that Anglo–French ambiguities of rivalry and co-operation were most acutely evident. France took its responsibility for the influence and protection of nationals far more seriously than did Britain, using land claims of French nationals to create the grounds for an eventual takeover, and employing French nationals wherever possible, even in lowly positions. Despite, or perhaps because of, these efforts, British influence became more widespread (Henningham 1992, 26–27). Because most planters were French, land disputes arising from different indigenous concepts of land ownership added to anti-French tensions amongst the local people. Although the dual, parallel nature of the Condominium arose from different concepts of the state, at times of catastrophe (for example, the 1913 eruption of the Ambrym volcano) the administrations worked well together. In an example of co-operation on the ground, after the 1929 depression, the French State subsidised the price of copra to aid its planters, but the British did not, and often local British residents channelled their goods through a compliant French neighbour (Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 77–78). Until the 1960s, the Condominium arrangement worked reasonably well.

## French Polynesia

The progressive French annexation of what was to become, in 1880 with the appropriation of Tahiti, the *Établissements français d’Océanie* (French Pacific establishments, EFO), was not only the subject of international negotiation already referred to, but also of internal resistance.

From the early years of the nineteenth century, France had come to see Tahiti strategically, as an important staging post for its navy (based in South America), and a stopping-off point for what it hoped would be profitable trade, over and above the romanticised image of the island that it perpetuated, particularly once the long-planned Panama Canal was constructed. Government subsidies encouraged French whaling after 1819. In 1816, French lieutenant Camille de Roquefeuil bought sandalwood in the Marquesas, noting that ‘In order to keep up a good understanding, it had been necessary to admit some young girls, who had expressed a desire to become acquainted with our people’ (quoted in Dunmore 1997, 155). But such a warm welcome was not to last.

In the Marquesas, initial resistance by chiefs Iotete (1842) and Pakoko (1845) extended into guerilla activity leading to French military intervention in 1870 and 1880 (Toullelan 1990, Dening 1980). The population fell from 60,000 in 1840 to 3500 in 1902 (Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 70). In Tahiti, Queen Pomaré IV only reluctantly signed the French protectorate agreement in 1842 and led resistance from 1844, her forces reoccupying Tahiti in 1846. Tahiti's population had also suffered from new diseases and bloody conflict, falling from 70,000 in the 1770s to 10,000 in 1842 (Dunmore 1997, 181). Events in Tahiti had been complicated by the timing of decisions back in Europe, with Britain agreeing in 1842 to the French protectorate, notwithstanding lobbying against it by their inveterate Consul, Pritchard, leading to French Parliamentary ratification of the plan in January 1843. Rebellions occurred in the Tuamotu group, on Anaa in 1852 and the Australes at Rapa in 1887. The Leewards war was to last 10 years from 1888 to 1897 in response to French annexation attempts at Huahine, Bora Bora and Raitea. It took three warships and a force of a thousand men to bring the hostilities to an end. Underlying much of this resistance was the Protestant allegiance and identity of the people, some of whom looked to the British to take the place of the French.

By the early twentieth century, France had consolidated its position. From 1885 the administration consisted of a governor, and an elected general council of 18 members, 10 from Tahiti and Moorea, two from Marquesas, four from Tuamotus, one from Gambiers and one from the Australs and Rapa. Electors were French citizens.

France's control was complete to the point of local inertia. The population rose in Tahiti from 6400 in 1881 to 11,682 in 1902, albeit with very few (around 1000) immigrants from France (Dunmore 1997, 206). The attention of the colonial power was only mobilised when major events occurred which, once again, engaged broader national interest emanating from European political developments. Examples include a German raid against Papeete in 1914, the departure of a Tahitian battalion for World War I, and differences with Mexico over the annexation of Clipperton (for which the King of Italy, of all possibilities, was appointed arbiter in 1931, and who confirmed the French position).

An area of continuing vexation throughout the latter nineteenth century was land ownership. Polynesian practice entailed individual usage of land, within a collective lineage ownership. Protestant missionaries had enshrined these principles in the Pomaré Code of 1842, which were directly contrary to the Napoleonic principles of individual ownership. In 1863 France established an agricultural fund to do a land survey, enabling land transfers to planters and agricultural producers (Europeans, Chinese, or locals). European (overwhelmingly male) marriage into land-owning indigenous families further boosted the de facto European land transfer, leading to an influential class of

'*demis*', or mixed-blood people (see Panoff 1989). While Europeans were not numerous (600 in Tahiti and Moorea, in a total population of around 6000), one resident official, Gauthier de la Richerie, asserted in 1862 that sooner or later all the lands would be assigned to whites through fraudulent practices such as trading land for liquor (Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 72–73). With Pomaré's signing of the Annexation Treaty in 1880, the High Court oversaw land transfers until around 1935 when it ceased, by general indifference perhaps, as memories of the bloodshed of the early nineteenth century dissipated.

But French development plans in the EFO stalled. Its projects for large-scale productive plantations of cotton, sugar and coffee failed. The most profitable exports were copra, vanilla and mother-of-pearl produced, ironically, by small-scale local operations, but controlled by the big French trading houses. By the end of the century, oranges were also being exported to California and Australia. Phosphate was mined on Makatea Island from 1907. But dreams of Tahiti as a strategic commercial stopping point were foiled, when a private French venture to build the Panama Canal failed in the late nineteenth century, only for an American company later to succeed in the endeavour (Heffer 1995, 148–52). The canal's opening, in 1914, meant effective US control of the eastern access to the South Pacific. Less traffic was generated through Papeete than the French had expected, and shipping was dominated by the British.

Perhaps because of its strategic location in the centre of the Pacific, the EFO maintained links with its Pacific neighbours, Hawaii, the Cook Islands and even California. English was spoken as much as French as late as 1888 (when Robert Louis Stevenson visited) (Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 74–75).

The EFO were drawn into World War I during which 1088 Polynesians fought for France, and 205 lost their lives. A German ship, surreptitiously helping itself to phosphate on Makatea, was captured by the French warship, the *Zélée*, at the beginning of the war. In September 1914 two German cruisers appeared off Papeete and shelled the town, sinking the *Zélée*, before sailing away. Another German vessel went aground in Maupihaa, west of Tahiti in 1917.

European interest in visiting the EFO, hitherto confined to prominent individuals such as Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse and Robert Louis Stevenson, grew after World War I and was actively promoted from 1924. A colonial exhibition in Paris in 1931 heightened awareness of the colonies. The making of films (*Tabou* in 1928, *Mutiny on the Bounty* in 1934) perpetuated the romantic Polynesian myth, and boosted interest in tourism.

## New Caledonia

The French claim to New Caledonia, like that of French Polynesia, was characterised by difficulties with the British, and by internal resistance. In January 1843, Dupetit-Thouars dispatched Commander Julien Lafferrière to raise the French flag, and establish Bishop Guillaume Douarre and his missionaries at Balade, in the northeast of Grande Terre, New Caledonia's largest island. Robert Aldrich (1990, 24) noted that a cession of land was concluded with local chieftains, but that 'this did not effectively constitute a claim'.<sup>4</sup> But strains with the British over the Pritchard affair in Tahiti led the powerful new French Minister for the Navy, François-Pierre Guizot, architect of the new *entente cordiale* with the British back home, to recall Dupetit-Thouars and to have the flag at Balade lowered. In any case, Douarre and his missionaries were forced to desert Balade within 12 months owing to hostility from the local people.

The motivation for the eventual declaration by Rear-Admiral Auguste Febvrier-Despointes of French possession of New Caledonia, at Balade, on 24 September in 1853, was twofold: the establishment of a strategic base and penal settlement in the western Pacific; and forestalling British annexation (Aldrich 1990, 24–26; Dunmore 1997, 188), and indeed, a British hydrographic vessel was in waters off Isle of Pines at the time. By this time, France and Britain were allies in the Crimean War and there was no negative British reaction. Within a few days of the Febvrier-Despointes announcement, the chief of the Isle of Pines declared allegiance to France. Effective control over the Loyalty Islands, where the LMS were entrenched, only came later, Maré and Lifou in 1864 and Ouvéa in 1865 (Aldrich 1990, 26). In 1854 Captain Louis Tardy de Montravel established a settlement at a harbour called Port-de-France, which became Noumea in 1866.

As in the EFO, from where New Caledonia was administered until 1860, colonisation was a slow process, and met significant local resistance. Only 100 white settlers were in New Caledonia by 1860, mainly French but also British. The first governor of New Caledonia, Admiral Charles Guillain, oversaw the introduction of 250 convicts in 1864 and the settlement remained a penal colony until 1897. It hosted 25,000 convicts in that time, as well as 4526 deported members of the Paris Commune (the *communards*) after their 1871 uprising against the French Government in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War, and over 1000 Algerian Kabyle insurrectionists in 1871. In 1880 there was an amnesty for political prisoners, and only a small group, of close to 140 individuals, chose to remain.

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4 A view not shared by all. In March 2009, Kanak leader Roch Wamytan referred to the January 1844 treaty with the customary chiefs as the basis for French nationality, not the later declaration of possession of 1853. Personal communication, 2009.

As convicts served their time and were freed with a grant of land, and as large French companies such as Ballande of Bordeaux were given land on Grande Terre, while the indigenous Kanaks were pushed towards the north and centre, indigenous discontent increased. Ownership rights were alien to Kanak concepts of land as a tribal home. An effective policy of cantonment of the Kanaks, relegating them to reserves, was introduced in 1876. By 1878 tensions erupted in a rebellion led by Chef Attaï, sparked by the encroachment on indigenous lands by European-owned cattle. The rebellion focused on settlements at La Foa, Bourail and Bouloupari on the western coast north of Noumea. In the conflict, 200 settlers and 1200 Kanaks (some engaged in intra-tribal battles) were killed, including Attaï, (see Leenhardt 1937 and Latham 1978).

Immigration from the motherland was promoted, especially by the active Governor Feillet (1894–1903). Several large families and numerous smallholders established themselves, to be known as '*broussards*' (bush dwellers). Feillet's long governorship was an aberration. He was succeeded by nine governors, or temporary occupants of the position, from 1903 to 1914, in constant rotations that were dubbed the *valse des gouverneurs* (Aldrich 1990, 314). By 1913 Kanaks were relegated to 120,000 hectares, or seven to eight per cent of the surface of the main island, with the Europeans in the bush owning or renting three times more land with a population five or six times smaller (Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 66). As in the EFO, successive attempts were made at large-scale cultivation of rice, maize, coffee and sugar, with little success. The Kanaks succeeded with small-scale coffee production in the 1930s. Cattle-raising, too, was successful, and both persist today.

In 1874, French engineer Joseph Garnier discovered nickel on Grande Terre. By 1877 a processing plant was established at Pointe Chaleix in Noumea and, in 1880, the Société le Nickel (SLN) was set up by John Higginson, funded by Baron Rothschild. The foundry was not successful at the time, in the face of new technical expertise and competition from Canada (Lawrey 1982). Ballande, a businessman from Bordeaux, set up the Hauts-Fourneaux de Nouméa in 1909. He established a foundry at Doniambo, just outside Noumea, in 1910 and another at Thio in 1912 (Jeffrey 2006, and <<http://www.sln.nc>> accessed 21 October 2008). Ballande and SLN merged in 1931.

Besides Higginson and Ballande, other influential families included Bernheim (who endowed a private library to the people of Noumea, which is still operating), Marchand, and Barrau (Aldrich 1990, 148). SLN and the large French importers dominated the economic life of the colony in the early twentieth century. Many smaller mines were established creating wealth for a few families, including the Pentecosts and Lafleurs, who remain politically and economically dominant to this day. By the turn of the century New Caledonia was the world's largest exporter of nickel and cobalt and second largest producer of chrome.

Not all of the leading figures were French. Higginson was originally Irish and James Paddon, a British trader from Australia, was a founding business trader in the colony from 1854. In the mid-nineteenth century, spoken English was more understood than French amongst the Kanaks, largely because of the work of the LMS. The first census in 1860 showed that the majority of the 432 Europeans were Anglo-Saxons (Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 68). The Australian influence in the livestock sector has left words such as 'station', 'stockman', 'stockwhip' and 'store', in current usage by the French in the bush even today.

A consultative General Council (*Conseil général*) was created in 1885 but was comprised solely of whites from the bush or Noumea. From 1887 the *indigénat* system was introduced, and applied until 1946, institutionalising discrimination against Kanaks. Kanaks were forbidden to leave their reserves without permission, had to pay a per head tax, and were required to provide labour for road and other public works. 'Chiefs' and 'lesser chiefs' were appointed by the French administration and were tasked with providing workers for the settlers or the mine.

Development differed between Grande Terre, and the Loyalty Islands and Isle of Pines, which were predominantly Kanak and Protestant, and where no alienation of Kanak land had been allowed. The English-speaking LMS was replaced from 1891 by evangelical missions from Paris and the Bible was translated into local languages from 1922. A French Protestant pastor and ethnologist, Maurice Leenhardt, took a great interest in the Kanaks, at times in conflict with the French administration.

As in the EFO, it took major events such as the 1878 uprising and World War I for the metropolitan power to take much notice of New Caledonia. Three battalions of indigenous infantrymen fought for France (1107 Melanesians and 1006 Europeans fought in Europe, including at Gallipoli, of whom 456 were killed). Melanesian involvement in fighting for France contributed to a further Kanak revolt in 1917 by Grand Chef Noël. Eric Waddell attributes the rebellion to a reaction against the colonial drive to recruit 'volunteers' for the European war (2008, 38). Chesneaux and Maclellan suggest that it was French losses in the war, with the knowledge that France could be defeated, that contributed to Noël's revolt (1992, 67). In the event the rebellion was easily controlled. Those Melanesians who had served in World War I were able to become French citizens, although this did not entail the right to vote (complete suffrage in New Caledonia was not attained until 1956, see Gohin 2002, point 16; and below). In 1935 these Melanesians were being included on all civil registers.

Between the wars New Caledonia reverted to its colonial torpor. John Lawrey quoted novelist Pierre Benoît who visited Noumea in 1928 and described it as 'A small town so deeply asleep that it seems dead' (1982, 7). It was enlivened by

the arrival of an effective Governor, Georges Guyon, whose administration ran from 1925 to 1929 and who developed infrastructure and education, doubling those who attended school by 1939 to over 7000, of whom 3117 were Kanaks (Dunmore 1997, 223).

The success of nickel production fluctuated in line with the vagaries of world demand, as it continues to do today. The 1929 depression affected nickel prices and disrupted construction of a planned railway, which ceased after the first stage was completed from Noumea to Paita in the north. But, despite the depression, nickel and chrome production increased until the eve of World War II. In 1939 nickel production reached 370,500 tonnes (over eight times the production recorded in 1925), and chrome reached 52,388 tonnes. Since Japan was a major customer, production was temporarily disrupted in the early 1940s (see below).

With vacillating fortunes, the import of foreign labour, necessary to work the mines, also fluctuated. Indonesian, Japanese and Vietnamese workers were brought in to work on the mines early in the century. By 1929 they numbered 14,535, more than the number of European residents at that time (Ward in Spencer 1988, 82). Many of these labourers left when their contracts expired but, by 1931, there were more than 7000 Asian residents in New Caledonia out of a total population of 57,300 (Aldrich 1990, 286 and ISEE 2008; Table 4.1a, Chapter 4).

With the growth in prosperity punctuated by the Depression, a call for autonomy and dominion status was made in 1932, interestingly by a European resident, Edmond Cave, a member of the General Council, but did not gather momentum (Aldrich 1990, 314). Dunmore (1997, 223) noted that this call reflected the growing identification with New Caledonia, as opposed to France, by those Europeans who had been born there (12,600 of a total European population of 17,400 in 1936). The Melanesian population by this time was stabilising rather than declining. At the turn of the century, the entire population numbered around 50,000, and was mainly rural, with only 7000 living in Noumea. The numbers of Kanaks dropped from close to 45,000 in 1860 to 27,100 in the 1920s, and rose again to approximately 30,000 in 1940 (Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 66; Barbançon in de Deckker and Faberon 2008, 120; Aldrich 1990, 286; Lawrey, 9; and, Table 4.1a, Chapter 4).

In contrast to the EFO, in the nineteenth century New Caledonia, with its dependence on French shipping and market for its nickel, its internal preoccupation with its role as a penal settlement, and with its near neighbour the large Anglo-Saxon continent of Australia, had few links within its South Pacific islands neighbourhood. These were limited to summary links between Melanesian residents and those in the nearby New Hebrides islands, and contacts between French residents in each place.

## Wallis and Futuna

Franco–British rivalry and indecision were features of French annexation of Wallis and Futuna. French missionaries had arrived in the islands from the 1830s but France did not respond to local requests for protectorate status in the 1840s, nor in the 1860s. The Queen of Wallis, Amélie, supported the French missionaries, and efforts by British evangelists to establish a presence were abandoned. France finally established a protectorate in 1886 in Wallis, and in Futuna in 1887, and then only in response to apparent efforts by the British to cultivate Amélie by inviting her to Fiji. But France only formalised annexation arrangements in 1913.

The strong traditional focus of the islands, and their overwhelming response to Catholicism, meant that it was not necessary for France to exert much colonial effort to administer it. Rather, a pattern developed of synchrony between the few colonial administrators present, the Catholic Church hierarchy, and monarchs of the three traditional kingdoms, which persists today (Aldrich and Merle 1997, Cadéot 2003, *New Pacific Review* 2003, Faberon and Ziller 2007, de Deckker in Howe et al 1994, 269).

## Summary of French experience to World War II

France's activities in the Pacific from the very earliest days were motivated by national prestige, a quest for scientific knowledge, and religious proselytisation. Rivalry with other European powers, mainly the British, and the experience of repeatedly being usurped by other powers in the region, sharpened France's sense of national assertion. Commercial activity came consistently second to nationalist objectives. Domestic political challenges and alliances at home in Europe, which were complex and, at times, explosive, demanded primary policy attention and shaped the pace and energy with which France established its footholds in the Pacific. Increasingly, France became aware of the strategic importance of its Pacific colonies, particularly the EFO and New Caledonia, in serving its national purpose.

Hallmarks of the French presence included, at times, extraordinary leadership, courage, and sense of style in its commanders as much as its early privateers; in general, sophistication and deft diplomacy in a context of international rivalries; a commitment to personal hardship and sacrifice for national honour; but only sporadic application, in the Pacific, of the national sense of brotherhood, freedom and equality which evolved in the home country from the late 1700s;

a determination to suppress local opposition, backed by military strength; and, by the beginning of World War II, an element of administrative inertia even as innovative solutions, for example in New Hebrides, were being implemented.

All of these features were to inform later French policy approaches. For their part, the local people in the French archipelagos suffered loss of life and diminished populations, and fought back, particularly strenuously in New Caledonia and the outlying areas of French Polynesia.

## World War II and its legacy

*'La fin de la guerre est aussi la fin de l'Empire colonial'?*

'The end of the war is also the end of the colonial Empire'? (Faberon and Ziller 2007, 348)

World War II challenged the political and economic role of the French in the Pacific, as it did elsewhere. The rapid defeat of the French Government in Paris and the participation of citizens from the Pacific overseas territories in combat in Europe (including the 'Guitarist' battalion, comprising 387 Kanaks and 318 Tahitians and New Hebrides locals, of whom a third died, Daly 2002) traumatised the French and local communities in the Pacific, underlining the vulnerability of their French administrators. Closer to home, the Pacific theatre itself, where other powers were the main protagonists, introduced violence and destruction of a scale unparalleled in the history of the local people. The early role of Australia, asserting its diplomatic authority independent of Britain for the first time, and the massive influx of American forces stationed in the French territories, exposed the local people to alternative administrative influences and, particularly in the case of the Americans, with relatively larger national and personal wealth than the French rulers, and new practices of economic and racial egalitarianism. It was the war and its aftermath which catalysed local independence movements in the region, including in the French territories. The wartime experience initiated a habit of regional consultation and co-operation with Britain, Australia and the United States.

## Effect of World War II in New Caledonia: Relations with Australia

In New Caledonia the early days of World War II saw not only persistent suspicions of Anglo-Saxonism, but also fine examples of Anglo–French regional teamwork in adversity, reflecting similar co-operation for survival in Europe, and a new engagement by Australia. As the war progressed, the previously dependent links with Britain were loosening and Australia arguably made its first independent foreign policy decisions specifically related to New Caledonia (see below, and analysed in Fisher 2010c). As Australia became more involved in the region, the existing, deep-seated anti-British sentiment of the French and Caldoche (long-term European residents) was increasingly extended to Australia as well.

Australian and French Pacific perceptions were already mutually negative. French annexation of New Caledonia in 1853 had been coldly received in Australia, the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 2 November 1853 lamenting that ‘by the laxity of the British government ... the opportunity of colonising that fine group [had] been lost’. Australia was opposed to calls for French annexation of the New Hebrides, which many saw as within Australia’s sphere. By the late nineteenth century, views on New Caledonia were shaped by the feeling, curious for a country itself built by convicts, that a loathsome penal settlement continued to operate in the neighbourhood, just as Australia had ridded itself of this curse. The unease was expressed in concerns that escaped convicts would make their way onto Australia’s fair shores (Aldrich 1990, 224–25).

Australian perceptions of a menacing France were reciprocated by a French belief that Australia wanted to displace it in New Caledonia to conserve its economic interests (Pons 1988, 156). Against their own value systems, some French people, even officials, had a disdain for Australians typified in the report of one French diplomat who in 1936 described Australians as lacking taste, having never ‘seen a fine piece of furniture, a beautiful painting, a truly elegant woman, ... [nor] eaten a decent meal. In the things that interest us, the Australian public is uneducated and uneducable’ (Aldrich 1990, 309). This was reflected in the title of the memoirs the Comtesse de Chabrillan, wife of one French consul, ‘*Deuil au bout du monde*’ or ‘Mourning in the back of beyond’ (Chabrillan 1877).

But, despite all the acrimony in the Australian press, as Lawrey indicated, ‘Australasian colonists ... never seriously questioned the permanency of French sovereignty over New Caledonia’ (1982, 18). This belief was shaken temporarily when France fell to the Nazis in 1940.

## Australia's role in installing the Free French Governor

When Paris fell in June 1940, the French Governor in New Caledonia, Georges Pélicier, was a senior colonial civil servant who, like many of his peers, saw Noumea as a brief career stepping stone, and had not engaged in the society he administered. When a central government was set up at Vichy, he was in the difficult position of determining whose interest he was to serve. Some of the Caldoches sought to benefit from the situation and to advance local autonomy. A local lawyer, Michel Vergès, promulgated a manifesto seeking a sovereign assembly to take over the governor's powers, and was promptly arrested. Pélicier's own Secretary-General, André Bayardelle, seemed to agree with Vergès, noting that the colony was too much subjected to the Ministry of Colonies 'whose initiatives were frequently untimely and cancelled out the best efforts of governors to organise the colony' (cited in Lawrey 1982, 8). At one point, a local left-wing representative called for New Caledonia to be placed under joint Australian–American protection (Burchett 1941, 197).

After a few weeks of judicious dithering, during which Pélicier even announced that New Caledonia would continue to fight at the side of Great Britain, on 29 July, responding to pressure from Vichy leader Marshal Philippe Pétain, Pélicier gazetted Vichy's constitutional laws (although he resisted pressure to cut off relations with Britain and New Caledonia's principal supplier, Australia, Lawrey 1982, 28 and Munholland 2005, 38). Many Caldoches angrily demonstrated against these laws. In the event, the General Council unanimously adopted a resolution calling for a representative assembly, expressed its disapproval of the governor, and its resolve to contact General de Gaulle. In his declining days at the helm Pélicier called for the Vichy government to send a warship to Noumea, and the *Dumont d'Urville* arrived from Papeete in late August, captained by a confirmed Vichy supporter, Commander Toussaint de Quièvre-court. De Quièvre-court immediately reported to Vichy that the local agitators were subsidised by Australia, whose real aim was to annex New Caledonia (Lawrey 1982, 31). On 5 September, the vacillating Pélicier, after suffering a bomb attack at his residence and the mounting anger of the masses, quietly slunk out of town with his family (an event recounted colourfully in Burchett 1941, 205). His post was taken over by the commander of local French forces, Maurice Denis.

Meanwhile, de Gaulle, then an exiled French military officer struggling to put together an alternative government in the wake of the German invasion and collapse of French resistance, moved into action. In an early indicator of his strategic vision of the role and importance of the French overseas possessions which was to characterise France's approach through many of the post-World War II years, he made his famous 18 June *appel*, or call for the support of the Empire. As Kim Munholland noted,

Beginning as an improvised coalition of those who ... chose to continue to fight at the side of Great Britain, the Free French under de Gaulle's leadership became a political movement devoted to a defence of the French Empire from its perceived enemies and served as a Gaullist instrument for the recovery of French grandeur, prestige, and influence after the humiliation of 1940. (Munholland 1986, 547)

As such, the *ralliement*, or winning-over, of the overseas territories had great symbolic value. It also had real value, in the need, which De Gaulle also saw, to promptly neutralise potential Vichy colonial and naval power overseas (Gorman 1997 and Floyd 2007, 10). Martin Thomas, in his military history of the *ralliement* in the empire, argued that 'Control of the French empire was vital to the competing French leaderships of 1940–1944, since the empire was a physical embodiment of what limited independence remained to the Vichy regime' (Thomas 1998, 5).

De Gaulle moved early to secure the support of the New Caledonia outpost to shore up his fledgling leadership. He asked the British to assist him to replace Pélicier with a pro-de Gaulle figure. The person he had in mind was Henri Sautot, a small man with a ginger moustache affectionately known as '*Pommes-paille*' ('Straw-potatoes'), who was French resident commissioner in nearby New Hebrides. There, he had rallied the local French population speedily to the Gaullist cause. He had also worked with Australia to build a strategically important flying boat base at Vila.

Australian involvement in the installation of de Gaulle's man, Sautot, was vital. At this time, Australia's foreign policy institution was in a fledgling state. Although Prime Minister Menzies had signalled in early 1939 that Australia had its own primary responsibilities and needed its own diplomatic sources in the Pacific (Menzies 1939), in practice Australia had established diplomatic representation in only three places by mid 1940, in London, Washington and Ottawa (Foreign Affairs and Trade 2000).

To this point, at least from the armistice in June 1940, Australia had not been a disinterested bystander. On 18 June, the War Cabinet had discussed events in New Caledonia, discussions that were marked by concern that the Japanese presence in New Caledonia, associated with its ongoing purchase of nickel, posed a threat to Australian security, particularly with the Australian navy having left for the Mediterranean. This appears to be the first discussion of events in New Caledonia by the Australian Cabinet (DFAT Historical Document or HD No 399 18 June 1940). There was a broader concern about Japanese intentions in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), Indochina, and Hong Kong (DFAT HD No 408 19 June 1940). The Department of External Affairs identified early that, of all the French possessions overseas, including Indochina, it was most concerned

about New Caledonia. It counselled caution, and the continuing support for the Bordeaux (later Vichy) government, unless an effective resistance could be organised (DFAT HD No 440 26 June 1940). One of the early options Canberra considered, if only briefly, was an Australian takeover of New Caledonia (and then the New Hebrides), to forestall Japan, an option considered unattractive as it could provide a precedent for Japan to do the same in the Dutch East Indies (DFAT HD No 400 18 June 1940).

Immediately after the armistice, Australia (along with New Zealand) had sent a message of sympathy to Governor Pélicier. Pélicier responded by stating 'our firm resolve to co-operate with the French community throughout the whole world for the liberation of France, for which it has decided to continue the struggle by the side of the British Empire', and seeking supplies from Australia (DFAT HD No 427 and 439 24 and 26 June 1940).

Australia drew its concerns about the vulnerabilities of the French Pacific islands to the attention of Britain and the United States. London responded by expressing concern at Japanese nickel purchases from New Caledonia, and suggesting Australia send a representative to Noumea (DFAT HD No 438 25 June 1940). Washington was not responsive (DFAT HD No 464 28 June 1940). On its own initiative, Australia negotiated with the director of SLN, France's nickel producer, to purchase nickel matte, in July 1940, in order to encourage the colony to cease exporting to its major purchaser, Japan, with the primary aim of heading off on-shipment to Germany. This act was described by Lawrey as 'a matter of enlightened self-interest', since Australia had no need of nickel supplies and was acting solely to maintain a market for New Caledonia and keep it in the 'allied orbit' (Lawrey 1982, 25–26). But the action was later to backfire when the locals (incorrectly, as it turned out) accused Australia of acting unfairly as a middleman.

Australia continued to be concerned about the potential for the Japanese to benefit from the situation. It had sent an Australian called Oughton, to negotiate the purchase of chrome from New Caledonia, similarly to ensure an alternative market to Japan for the territory's chrome. Oughton, among others, reported that the Governor was showing exaggerated respect for the Japanese Consul by granting a license for the sale of nickel to Japan (DFAT HD No 70 13 August 1940, Munholland 2005, 41).

In July, the Australian Government decided to appoint Official Representative to Noumea, posting Bertram C. Ballard in the position. Ballard was a French-speaking lawyer who had been based in Vila from 1934. He was tasked to keep the Australian Government 'fully informed on political and economic conditions in New Caledonia' and assess the attitudes of 'officials, the General Council, and

Caledonians' towards both Vichy and General de Gaulle's movement' (DFAT HD No 45 undated). Ballard's office in Noumea became Australia's fourth diplomatic mission overseas, preceding its first mission in Paris by five years.

Responding to a request from de Gaulle, and because the area fell under the auspices of the Australian Naval Station, the British asked Australia to make available the aged naval vessel HMAS *Adelaide* to install Sautot. Having just dispatched Ballard, Australia took its time to respond. The situation was complex, as one of Ballard's reports showed. He described the atmospherics of a dinner party attended by the outgoing Pélicier, the incoming Denis and the visiting Fiji-based British High Commissioner for the Pacific, as 'scarcely-restrained hysteria' (Lawrey 1982, 38). Wilfred Burchett, then a freelance journalist but later to become one of Australia's well-known war correspondents, referred to the 'glacial frigidity' of this dinner and the 'Gilbertian' situation at Government House in a book he wrote about New Caledonia in the lead-up to the war (Burchett 1941, 204).

Canberra continued to bide its time. The Australian Government did not want the French administering power to be overwhelmed by protesting Caldoches, with the possibility that Australia would be asked to fill the breach, and the potential for misinterpretation and consequences elsewhere, notably in French Indochina (DFAT HD No 83 29 August 1940; see also Daly, 3). Thus Australia was concerned to ensure a working French administration in New Caledonia. There were also signs that the British were not fully aware of the complexities of the situation on the ground (see Fisher 2010c, 27). In the event, Canberra took a decision to act only after Ballard assessed that a complaisant Vichy governor was not likely and that the people would 'welcome and follow' a governor appointed by de Gaulle (DFAT HD No 110 8 September 1940).

Australia's hesitation to agree to London's request was one of the first indications, if not the first, that the Australian Government, evaluating its own, as distinct from British, interests, saw advantage in a stable French-administered allied entity on its eastern flank (Fisher 2010c).

The *Adelaide* duly escorted a Norwegian ship, the *Norden*, with Sautot aboard, consistent with de Gaulle's characteristic instructions that the operation was to be conducted as a French operation with merely contingent support from the *Adelaide*. In the early hours of the morning of 19 September 1940, the vessels approached the southern passage through the reef near Noumea. They were awaiting the agreed signal that it was safe to transfer Sautot to Noumea. This involved the quaint arrangement that the Gaullist boat to receive him off the main beach, *Anse Vata*, would throw overboard two kerosene tins when it was 300 metres from the *Norden*, and two more when 200 metres away (Sautot 1949, 39; Lawrey 1982, 44). Meanwhile, despite all attempts at secrecy, Sautot's planned

arrival was well known in New Caledonia. Sautot himself explained, without surprise, that one of the Gaullist committee had confided the information to his mistress who, although a loyal Gaullist herself, could not restrain herself from spreading the information (Sautot 1949, 42). Ashore, the French *broussards*, or rural Caldoches, had descended on the capital from their stations and towns in the bush, to welcome the new governor. Denis, after a pitiful show of indecision during which he twice dissolved into uncontrolled sobbing, finally escaped the crowd through a back window at Government House, ultimately to be detained in the village of La Foa (Burchett 1941, 212–13).

In the event, the two vessels lumbered into Noumea harbour to see the *Dumont d'Urville* moored with guns trained fore and aft. It was later discovered that shore batteries had been given orders to open fire on the *Adelaide*, orders which were not carried out (Lawrey 1982, 46). At this point the *Adelaide's* commander, H.A. Showers, cast diplomacy to the winds and transferred Sautot from the *Norden* onto his vessel, and the *Norden* set sail back out through the harbour. Members of the Gaullist Committee approached in their boat, gave the kerosene tin signal, and took delivery of Governor Sautot. The *Adelaide* continued to patrol, wary of the *Dumont d'Urville*, whose captain showed prudent restraint, especially since some of the *broussards* in the capital were fully enjoying their victory in the streets. There were also reports that a second Vichy vessel, the *Amiral Charner*, was on its way from Indochina to Noumea. The following day, de Quièvre court formally protested the *Adelaide's* presence and threatened a showdown. With both Showers and the Vichy captain referring time-consumingly to their capitals, tensions persisted for several days. But Showers initiated a personal meeting with the French captain and negotiated the departure of Vichy-sympathising officials on a merchant vessel, and the *Dumont d'Urville's* departure for Saigon. In view of this, the Vichy government ordered the *Amiral Charner*, en route to Noumea, back to Saigon.

The Australian Government extended economic aid and co-operation pursuant to an agreement between Churchill and de Gaulle in August 1940. But this activity was fraught with difficulties and frictions, as locals grumbled about Australian delays. At one point, Free French accusations that Australia was abusing its position as middleman in purchasing nickel (the device constructed to assist New Caledonia while preventing nickel purchase by the Germans) were being made surreptitiously to London at the same time as the Australian War Cabinet was resolving to exercise 'a generous spirit' in assisting New Caledonia in its economic problems (Lawrey 1982, 68). These kinds of differences, imbued with emotion and potential for misunderstanding, were to characterise future dealings between New Caledonia and Australia in the latter half of the century.

Australia played another role in New Caledonia at this time. While the Free French Government had been established in Noumea — a not inconsiderable

achievement, especially in view of de Gaulle's failure to do this elsewhere (in Indochina, Madagascar, the Levant, the French Antilles, all of North Africa and Djibouti, see Thomas 1998, 1), the Australian Government knew the new neighbouring regime was fragile as Australia prepared for Japan's entry into the war. In February 1941 an Australian military mission visited New Caledonia. It recommended setting up an advanced operational air base there, to 'contribute materially to the defence of Australia in the event of war with Japan' (Lawrey 1982, 55), supplying two, six-inch coast defence guns for Noumea and arms, ammunition and equipment for local forces. The War Cabinet meeting, which approved these recommendations, exceptionally included a French officer, sent by Sautot, whose task appears to have been, in true Gaullist tradition, to assure the Australians that the Free French were in effective control in order to head off Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) control of any air base established in New Caledonia (Lawrey 1982, 56). It was curious that Australian Prime Minister Menzies met de Gaulle in London to secure agreement to these arrangements only in March, some weeks after the mission had arrived in Noumea. So it is not surprising that writers at the time (Lawrey 1982, 64) record some continuing suspicion on de Gaulle's part about Australian activities. For all his efforts, Sautot was to pay a heavy price for his co-operation with Australia and, later, the Americans (see below).

These activities were a measure of the strength of Australia's concern to shore up New Caledonia. The Army Minister, P.C. Spender, even pronounced, perhaps unwisely, that, economically, New Caledonia should be regarded as 'part of Australia'; and, for the purpose of granting export licences, should be 'treated on the same basis as an Australian State or Territory insofar as purchases from Australia are concerned' (see Lawrey 1982, 56).

A flying boat base was duly established on the Ile Nou with a small RAAF detachment, two guns were installed on Ouen Toro hill in Noumea (where they remain today as a memorial), and a small artillery detachment remained to train local troops in using them (Smith 2001). Australia provided shipping and support for the French Pacific Battalion, which, with its Tahiti contingent, sailed for the Middle East in May 1941. The RAAF surveyed and began construction of three landing fields, at Tontouta (which is now the international airport), Plaine des Gaiacs in the north, and Koumac on the northern tip of Grande Terre. And, from December 1941 to July 1942, an Australian company led by D.G. Matheson was sent to New Caledonia to prepare for guerilla activity and to deny the enemy useful assets such as nickel mines including, if necessary, by demolition. They were based in Bourail, north of Noumea (Garland 1997, Chapter 2). They trained local Home Guards including Melanesians, (of whom they spoke highly in their reports) and later, US infantrymen (see Appendix in Lawrey 1982, 123–24).

Australian soldiers thereafter were primarily active elsewhere in the Pacific and in Europe, while the Americans and New Zealanders worked out of New Caledonia.

De Gaulle's reflexive policy approach, imbued with suspicion about British (and for his followers in Noumea, Australian) designs on France's colonial empire and informed by the prevalence of the Vichy regime in many colonial capitals (see Thomas 1998), was to centralise his authority. He had already imposed controls relating to national pride, such as that Australian aircraft were to be employed only subject to local French approval and the numbers and roles of resident Australian personnel were to be limited, leading to a feeling in Australia that his attitude saw 'ingratitude becoming a duty' (Lawrey 1982, 58–59). An instruction soon came to Canberra from London that all dealings with Sautot, which would have previously been referred to Paris, should be referred to de Gaulle's headquarters in London, not simply as a safeguard for Sautot but to underline to Australia, which London saw as diplomatically inexperienced, not to take advantage of the situation to arrogate to itself more political control in Oceania (Lawrey 1982, 62).

It is interesting that what led London to impute 'diplomatic inexperience' to its former colony was in fact the latter's asserting its own interests and assessments at the time, perhaps more a mark of diplomatic coming of age. Australia's measured and calculated diplomatic activity from its early watchfulness over the nickel market with Japan, its establishment of its own representative in Noumea, its role in installing Sautot, and its follow-up military shoring up of New Caledonia's defences in its own interests, as distinct from those of Britain, were all the more impressive in that it took place well before the fall of Singapore and Pearl Harbour.

## Effect on Australian–French–New Caledonian links and embryonic Australian diplomacy

The development of Australian–French–New Caledonian relations at the beginning of the war set the pace for future relations and perceptions, notably the suspicions and counter-suspicions of future years. While some Australians had called for British hegemony in the Pacific to protect Australian security interests many years before, it was only at this time that Australia, for the first time, appreciated the strategic importance of effective *French* administration of its near neighbour, New Caledonia, as a direct element in its own security (this strategic significance and consequence for policy was enunciated by Burchett at the time, 218 *et seq*). Australia's constant evaluation of its own, as opposed to British, interests, throughout these uncertain days was a critical developmental step. The pre-eminence of British interests for Australia until then was no

doubt weighted against the fact that the United States at this stage had not entered the war and still had not recognised the de Gaulle government, even by the time General Alexander Patch arrived in Noumea in 1942. The Australian Government's establishment of one of its first diplomatic missions in Noumea in August 1940 reflected the significance of having its own links with New Caledonia, and the latter's important role in the development of Australian diplomacy and foreign policy in their earliest years. Australia's experience of its dealings with New Caledonia at the time, with its complex layers of formal links to central French headquarters (at this time in London but later Paris), to Noumea, and on the ground with local Caldoches and Kanaks, and its relations with Tahiti on a secondary level, was to leave an indelible imprint on Australian policy-making circles (see Fisher 2010c, 31). It represented one of Australia's first involvements in regional multi-lateral co-operation, with Britain, France, the United States, and New Zealand, which was to build into the formal institution of the South Pacific Commission (later called Secretariat for the Pacific Community) based in Noumea. From this point, Australia's relationship with France in the Pacific, particularly New Caledonia, would be run from Canberra, and not from London.

The Sautot episode and the Australian advance defence mission are also important as they boosted the image of Australia, albeit one tinged with suspicion, in the eyes of many of the resident population, building on the identification the European residents were beginning to show towards a sense of their own interests in their own region and with their own geographic neighbour.

Finally, the installation of the Free French Government in New Caledonia represented one of the first successful 'rallyings' of French colonies to the Free France cause. Whereas Thomas argues that the various responses by France's other colonies to de Gaulle's call for support can be explained by a number of exogenous factors, the early response by the Pacific collectivities strengthened their status and place in the post-war Empire, even if Australia's role in it was for the most part conveniently forgotten.

## Effect of World War II on independence movements in French territories: US 'invasion'

But, for the people of France's Pacific colonies, it was the American presence during the war that radically changed their expectations. Senior French officials in the early 2000s privately confided that it was the Americans during the war, not the French, who brought the French Pacific islands into modernity (Personal communication 2002).

And the American presence in the French Pacific was not small. Noumea as the main base, and the New Hebrides air bases at Efate and Espiritu Santo, served as bastions of the US counteroffensive after the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway. 22,000 US personnel were based in New Caledonia, with 2600 on Wallis, 4300 at an air base constructed in the New Hebrides and over 4000 at a refuelling base at Bora Bora and a meteorological station at Raiatea in French Polynesia (Dunmore 1997, 234 and de Deckker 2003a, 63). The United States used the uninhabited French possession, Clipperton, as a meteorological and radio base (Aldrich 1990, 30).

## Effect of US presence in New Caledonia

The impact of the American presence in Noumea was huge. At one point in 1942, over 100,000 American and New Zealand personnel were there. They outnumbered the population of New Caledonia at the time (60,000) and boosted the population of Grande Terre by nearly 100 per cent. Around 1 million US soldiers were said to have transited there during the war (see Lawrey 1982, 98 and Le Borgne 2005, 18).

The Americans were arguably more respected than the French administration in the early war years, mainly owing to the dubious behaviour of the French High Commissioner appointed by de Gaulle. Governor Sautot's easy manner with the Americans and Australians had created concerns for French leaders, so far away in the formal European environment. De Gaulle appointed High Commissioner Georges Thierry d'Argenlieu to keep Sautot's feet to the fire and ensure that French sovereignty would be appropriately defended. D'Argenlieu was an entirely different character to Sautot. He was a former World War I naval officer who had become a Carmelite monk and headed the Paris Carmelite province until his mobilisation in 1939. He proved to be zealous to the point of obstruction in asserting French rights, focusing on form rather than substance and at one point delaying allied construction of needed airfields. He also devoted his energies to ousting the much-loved Sautot, finally arresting him and sending him to New Zealand, and then London, at a time when New Caledonia was under direct Japanese threat (Sautot 1949, 176). He promoted suggestions that Sautot supporters were Australian agents (Lawrey 1982, 109–10). At the time both the Australian High Commissioner in London and the Prime Minister had been concerned at d'Argenlieu's appointment, since he 'had no knowledge of the Pacific' and his colonial experience had been in the West Indies (DFAT HD August 1941) — it was this kind of background which was to create difficulties for French officials in the region 40 years later. Munholland (2005) attributed to these experiences of rigid French policy adherence the seeds of future differences between France and the United States after the war. Another observer from the time, Jean le Borgne, wrote of de Gaulle's misunderstanding

of the humiliation of Sautot inflicted by d'Argenlieu (2005, 18). Sautot's own account is a harrowing tale of devotion to a cause and deeply felt betrayal and misunderstanding (Sautot 1949).

For their part, French concerns about American long-term designs were not entirely without foundation. The strategic importance of New Caledonia was made very clear early in the war. Anthony Eden referred to New Caledonia as a place of the highest strategic importance. Roosevelt, who was interested in the contribution New Caledonia could make as a US commercial aviation lay-over point in the South Pacific from 1935, repeatedly asserted in 1943 and 1944 that New Caledonia should not remain French after the war, but rather should be a trustee territory of the UN (Lawrey 1982, 121; Weeks 1989, 189). The US Navy General Board, and a US senator touring the region, noted the strategic importance of New Caledonia for the Americans and recommended cession by the French to the United States (Munholland 2005; Weeks 1989, 191). By the end of the war a group of New Caledonians themselves proposed that the colony become American (Mrgudovic 2008, 74). There never was, however, a coherent US strategy for the annexation of New Caledonia, and the United States lost interest in the idea at the end of the war (Weeks 1989, 185 and 196).

The local people responded warmly to the Americans' pragmatism and democratic values. In contrast to the French, who extracted free labour from the Kanaks under the *indigénat* scheme, the Americans paid local labourers. Notwithstanding racial segregation in the US army, the behaviour of white and black GIs, as equals and at ease with each other, made an impression. The US military command favoured the study of indigenous languages, in contrast to the French approach (Chesneaux in Spencer et al 1988, 61). According to John Lawrey (1982), who was working in the Australian diplomatic mission in Noumea at the time, the impact of the numerous hale and hearty, well-equipped Americans, cheerily sharing their rations of chocolate and chewing gum, was overwhelming. The economy of the archipelago was boosted hugely by US consumption. The fact that it was the Americans, not the French, who supplied the military materiel to defend the archipelago, weakened the authority of the French, for whom the inflexible d'Argenlieu, as described, was a poor representative. The practice at the end of the war, of dumping vast quantities of equipment in local waterways (this occurred in Wallis, New Hebrides at aptly named Million Dollar Point, and New Caledonia) rather than export it or leave it for local use or perhaps misuse, simply reinforced the wonder at American wealth and profligacy. One US jeep escaped this fate and is still used, today, in Noumea, on significant anniversaries of the war, when it is driven around by a jubilant group of Caldoches in the guise of World War II officers and a blonde Monroe-look-alike nurse in vintage uniform.

## The war and Americans in the EFO, New Hebrides and Wallis and Futuna

As in Noumea, in the EFO, the confusion following the fall of Paris in 1940 saw demands for more autonomy, which persisted throughout the course of the Pacific war. In Papeete, the Free French Committee organised a referendum, with the results falling overwhelmingly in favour of Free France over Vichy. One of their number, a returned local serviceman from World War I, Pouvanaa a Oopa, led a push for more autonomy and independence. An attempt was made to arrest him in 1941 but not carried through (Chesneaux and Maclellan 1992, 80; Faberon and Ziller 2007, 314). During the war he was a vocal critic of the local administration and rationing system (Dunmore 1997, 243) and this boosted his political profile.

While the American presence was not as pervasive in the EFO as in New Caledonia, the wealth and economic boost they represented changed Bora Bora, where they ran a fuel depot. The island was mythologised and represented as Bali Hai in the James Michener novel *Tales of the South Pacific* (1946), which was later turned into a Hollywood film, *South Pacific*, leaving a lasting legacy as a tourist paradise. The values the Americans represented, of racial equality and modernism, complemented the push for autonomy already underway and vocalised by Pouvanaa and his followers.

In the New Hebrides, during the course of the war, 100,000 Americans passed through Efate where they had established an airstrip, huts and recreation base. The main impact of the American presence was the revival of an existing cargo cult on the island of Tanna, the John Frum movement. The tiny island of Uvea in the Wallis group hosted two airfields. Such was the attachment of the islanders to the influx of well-off US soldiers that a call was made (but not taken up) for annexation before the Americans left in 1946.

The effect of the American presence and management of the war from the French colony, New Caledonia, had broader repercussions for the French Pacific colonies than social change. One consequence of the Pacific war for France was recognition of the strategic role of the French Pacific presence in regaining national prestige. The early rallying to de Gaulle by the French territories there left an important legacy, one that de Gaulle had doubtless foreseen in his early efforts to secure their support. The war resulted in the dominance of the Americans in the Pacific as a whole, not simply in their continental littoral presence but with island territories of their own, mainly north of the Equator. This prevailing strength was to make the Pacific Ocean an 'American lake' for most of the rest of the century (Heffer 1995, 250). For France, struggling to re-establish its national prestige within the western alliance, its Pacific presence

was a strategic instrument as French leaders sought to entrench France's right to a seat at the high table of the United Nations (UN) Security Council in the wake of the war.

A second effect of the US role in France's territories during the war was that it catalysed demands there for more political rights from France. But now the demands were being made of a France for whose credibility the American experience called into question, not only its military capacity to defend its colonies but the values of liberty, fraternity and equality that France professed to represent (Mrgudovic 2008, 75). De Deckker (2003a, 63) directly attributed to the influence of the Americans the introduction of voting rights in the Defferre law of 1956 (see next chapter; also Le Borgne 2005, 18). There is little doubt that, in New Caledonia, the budding demands for more autonomy, which had already been noted in proposals amongst the European residents in the Cane (1932) and Vergès (1940), were compounded by a growing Kanak demand for change arising from their contact with Americans, and arguably Australians and New Zealanders, during the war. In Tahiti, Pouvanaa's demands were more extreme and curtailed immediately by the French. But, notwithstanding the social impact of the Americans and the calls for greater autonomy, it is undeniable that all through the war and beyond, the prevailing culture in all the colonies remained French.

A third determining feature of the Pacific war for the French territories was its reinforcement of the primacy of New Caledonia over the other French colonies in strategic and regional importance. Its location, relatively developed infrastructure and sophistication, and responsiveness to modernity, underpinned successful US-led prosecution of the Pacific war.

Another enduring characteristic of the American presence in New Caledonia in the Pacific war was the habit of co-operation and consultation between the Free French in London and Noumea, the British, the Americans, New Zealanders and Australians, even though such co-operation was fraught with misunderstanding, prejudice, and the need for delicate diplomacy. This wartime co-operation was to lead the way for a postwar regional multilateral organisation, the South Pacific Commission, with its seat in Noumea, ironically in the former US headquarters.