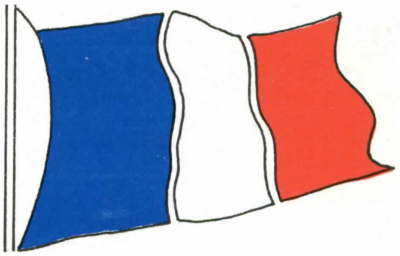
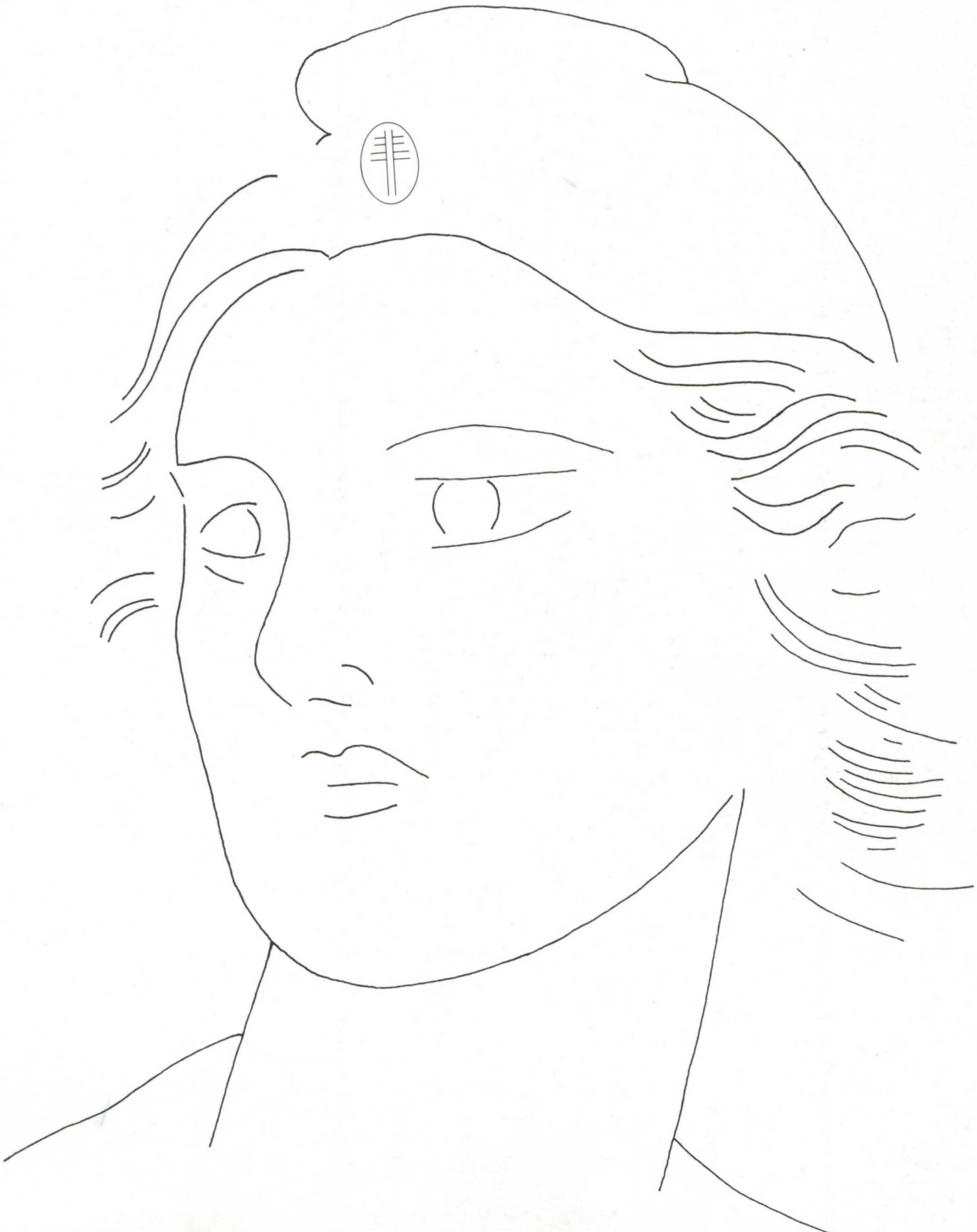
The Cross of Lorraine in the South Pacific

Australia and the Free French Movement 1940-1942

John Lawrey





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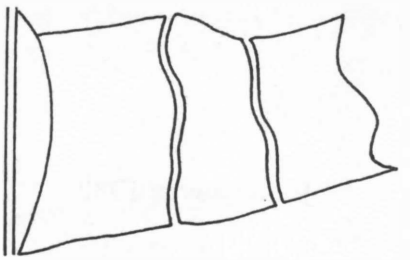

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To The Memory Of

HENRI SAUTOT

Compagnon de la Libération
Governor of New Caledonia
1940-1942

Contents

Maps and illustrations

Maps drawn by Manlio Pancino, Department of Human Geography, ANU.

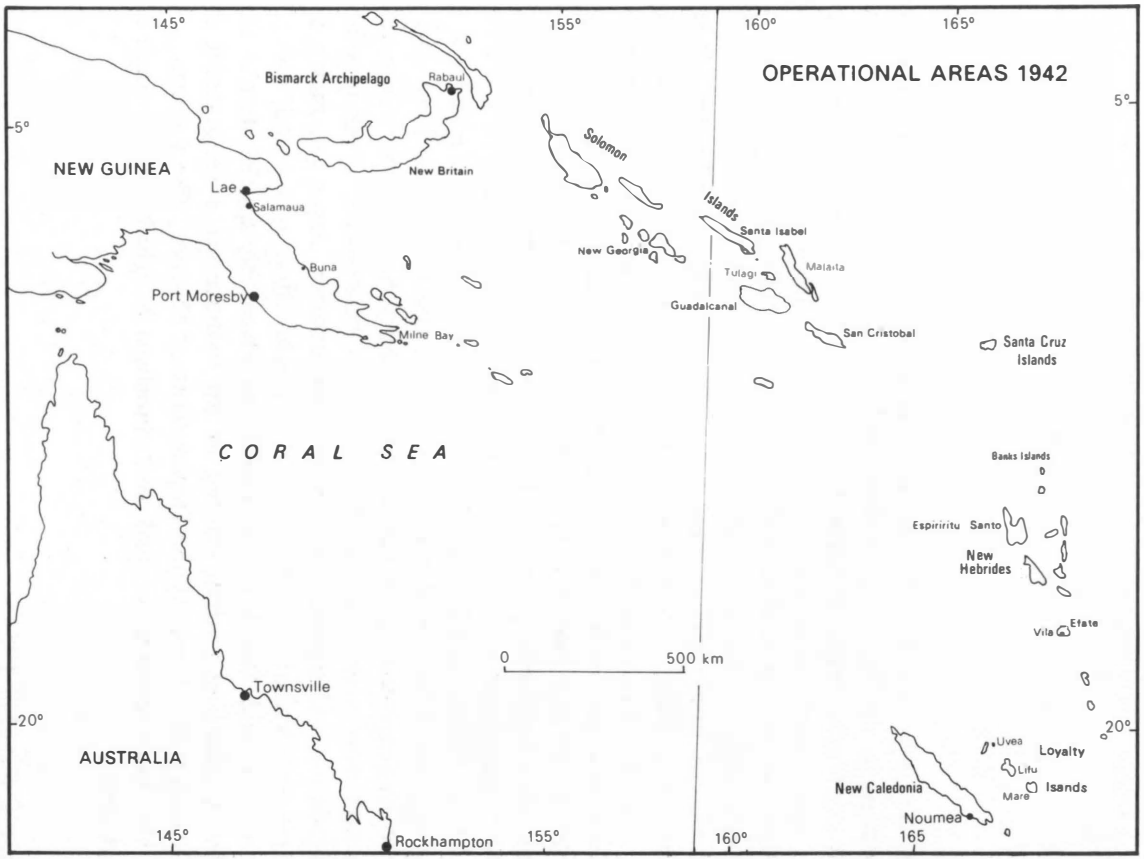
Preface

THIS STUDY ATTEMPTS to set the development of the Free French movement in the Pacific, and Australia's cooperation with it, in the context of the contemporary political and strategic situation. Having, as a very young man, spent more than two years at Noumea between 1940 and 1943 as assistant to the Australian government's representative there, I witnessed and on occasion participated in some of the events discussed. I have striven, however, to keep fallible memory in its proper, subordinate, place; the account now given is founded essentially on the extensive documentation now available to researchers in the Australian, British and United States archives and on such trustworthy French sources as I found accessible despite the 50-year rule still applied to French official records.

The work has been written in the hospitable and stimulating environment of the Department of Pacific and Southeast Asian History in the Research School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University. I could never express adequately my gratitude for the friendship, help and good counsel so generously given me, first as a Foreign Service officer on sabbatical leave and now a second time following my retirement, by all members of the academic and support staff of the Department. Among so many, I must mention particularly Dr Deryck Scarr, who first welcomed me to the Department, and Mrs Jennifer Terrell, to whom my special thanks are due for her skilful and patient editing of the manuscript. I am grateful also to Dr Dorothy Shineberg of the Department of History, The Faculties, ANU, who was kind enough to read and comment helpfully on the draft of the first chapter.

Canberra, October 1981

John Lawrey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Santa Isabel
New Georgia
Tulagi
Malaita
Guadalcanal
San Cristobal
Santa Cruz
Islands
CORAL SEA
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Espiritu Santo
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Hebrides
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Efate
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Townsville
AUSTRALIA
Uvea
Loyalty
Lifu
Mare
Isands
New Caledonia
Noumea
Rockhampton
165

Introduction

ON A HILL overlooking Noumea stands a monument in the form of a tall Cross of Lorraine. The date carved on its base – 19 September 1940 – commemorates the overthrow of the Vichy government's authority in New Caledonia and the territory's adherence to General de Gaulle's Free French movement. This *ralliement* to the French external resistance movement was precipitated by the action of a majority of the local French population and carried through by one colonial official from the New Hebrides, Henri Sautot, who at de Gaulle's instance placed himself at their head. But it could not have happened had not the wartime Australian government become involved, 'unwillingly at first but with increasing zest', as Paul Hasluck has said, in support of the Gaullist movement. This help was manifested by the presence in Noumea harbour during the critical days of an Australian cruiser, HMAS *Adelaide*. Her captain, H.A. Showers, after seeing Sautot landed, negotiated the withdrawal to Indo-China of the Vichy sloop *Dumont d'Urville* and of officials professing allegiance to Pétain, thus putting an end once for all to the Vichy presence in the Pacific. Finally Showers – in consultation with the Australian government's official representative at Noumea, B.C. Ballard, and the honorary British consul, W.A. Johnston – crowned his conduct of his mission by confronting the local de Gaulle committee and giving them a stiff warning against any action that might upset the peaceful solution agreed between himself and the Vichy commander.

This resolution of a problem left in Australia's immediate vicinity by the fall of France marked the beginning of a phase of cooperation between Australia and Free France which set the scene for the part later played by New Caledonia in the first American counter-offensive in the Pacific Ocean war. It was, no doubt, a small affair but, if the complications caused by a 'neutral' Vichy régime in the French West Indies are considered, it was not unimportant, and this rare success by a Commonwealth country in dealing with Vichy made a contrast with the Dakar fiasco which was happening almost simultaneously. The bloodless outcome of the operation was the

more astonishing, and the greater credit to the handful of Anglo-Saxons participating in it on the ground, in the light of the scanty knowledge of the French Pacific with which it was undertaken. It is my purpose here to examine the background and consequences of the *ralliement*.

1 *New Caledonia under the Third Republic*

IN 1941 THE Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett wrote, in the introduction to a lively book on New Caledonia,

> For many years this island has been but a name to most of us. In Australia it was a name that featured once or twice a year as the goal of a tourist cruise to the South Seas; in America a name that appeared on the schedule of Pan-American Airways' Trans-Pacific Air Service; in the rest of the world the name New Caledonia – if it suggested anything at all – vaguely recalled the site of a particularly odious convict prison.[1]

Doubtless he had in mind mainly the English-speaking world, but in France too this remote Pacific colony was now little known and little regarded.

New Caledonia had been annexed in 1853 by Napoleon III's government, 'which had long desired to possess localities overseas capable if need be of accommodating penal stations'.[2] The first convicts did not arrive in the new colonly until 1864, when problems had been encountered in French Guiana, the site of the first attempt to apply the then widely held theory of the merits of penal colonization. The experiment as carried out in New Caledonia cannot be called a success, though hopes of success were obstinately cherished for some time in the light of inaccurate judgements of the foundations of Australia's growing prosperity. Henri Riviere, the vigorous naval officer who played a leading part in the suppression of the Melanesian uprising of 1878, had Australia very much in mind when in 1881 he drew a utopian picture of the prospects of convictism in New Caledonia if its aims were properly and whole-heartedly pursued. He admitted that things were not going well: he calculated that the number of free colonists in 1877 was still only 2,752, occupied largely in providing for the needs of a 'relatively unproductive population' of 3,032 military and civil personnel, 3,836 deportees (the Paris *communards* whose passage left little trace in the colony) and 6,000 convicts. Nonetheless, he thought, it was a foundation on which a prosperous colony could be developed *if* time-expired convicts were unequivocally restored to full civil rights and given scope to develop 'that individualism which alone is powerful and fruitful in the early stages

of a society'. Free colonists should be limited to people with capital ready to make a place for themselves through their initiative and intelligence, not poor folk pursuing the mirage of distant wealth. Perhaps in such circumstances the free settlers could be brought to adopt vis-à-vis the freedmen 'that philosophical indifference which the British have in everyday life' and drop their attitude of smug superiority. The convict population for its part would be morally elevated by dealing with the free element on a basis of friendship and equality. This prediction, he thought, was justified by what had happened in Australia.[3]

All this was a counsel of prefection from Captain Rivière's ever fluent pen and incidentally one more example in the large collection of distorted French perceptions of Australia. (It is hard to avoid the impression that there has frequently been a touch of cargoism in the admiring envy with which the French looked at Australia from New Caledonia.) New Caledonia never had its Governor Macquarie, though the last of the naval governors, Pallu de la Barrière (1882-84), strengthened at first by support from Paris, made a shortlived attempt to play a rather similar role and make the penitentiary a means to the end of free colonization. His downfall was followed by a period of hesitation and timidity as memories of the 1878 revolt slowly faded.

Until transportation was ended in the last years of the 19th century the Penal Administration remained an over-mighty subject, bloated and corrupt, self-serving but living in a symbiotic relationship not so much with the Administration properly so-called as with commercial firms to which it provided a ready-made clientele and with capitalists like John Higginson and above all the Compagnie du Nickel exploiting newly discovered mineral resources, to whom it purveyed convict labour. As Pierre Gascher has said of this distorted economy, 'with the State's aid a kind of economic enclave having no real links with the country had been set up'. Gascher sums it up very well in the conclusion of his study of New Caledonia in the late 19th century:

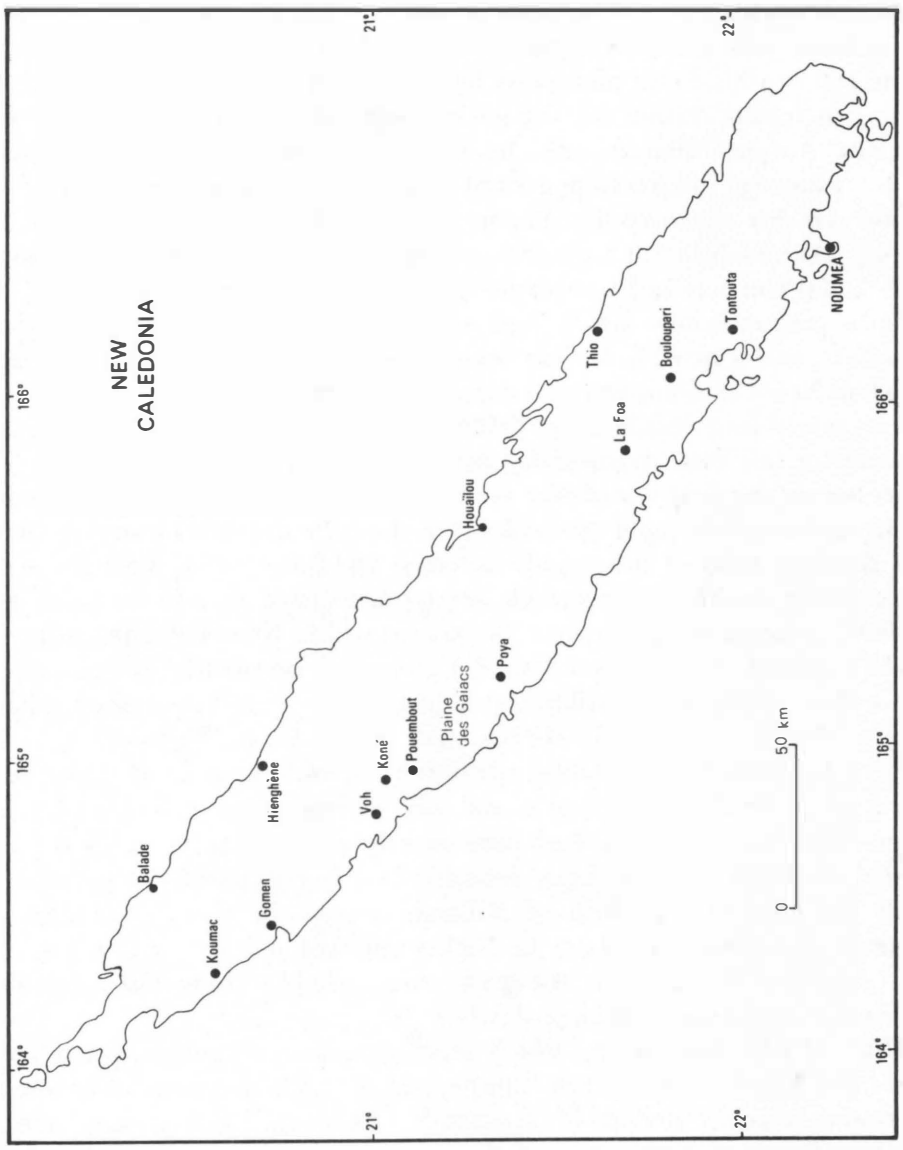
> In 1894, after 50 years of the French presence, the colony had not realized the hopes placed in it. The penal system had been the worst of the evils it had had to suffer. No one had been aware that it deserved better than this poisoned gift. . . However strong the Governor, his action was constantly hindered by the Director of Transportation who, sure of support from home, did just as he chose in promoting the interest of his own service. How could the representative of the State work effectively when there existed a huge fief over which he was denied any oversight. No enterprise of any great scope was possible, and in this regard the fall of Pallu is very significant. Through what aberration were things allowed to go from bad to worse, when so much evidence existed of the dangers of penal colonisation? Crime was making a kingdom for itself.

> Certainly, the *Pénitentiaire* was not solely responsible for the colony's lethargy. . . But its invasive and irreducible presence disturbed the Administration's activity at every point. New Caledonia was being eaten up by this ulcer in its side.[4]

A new doctrine of free settlement from France was preached with some effect by a young and energetic governor, Paul Feillet, whose term lasted from 1894 to his death nine years later. Feillet's efforts brought about the ending of transportation and the settlement on the land of some 500 French families. An authoritarian ruler, he made many local enemies in the course of his campaign to develop a rural (white) democracy, and much of his action remains controversial. But he radically changed the character of the colony. Although in 1901 there were only 8,200 free Europeans compared with 7,800 convicts and time-expired convicts, this proportion reversed the convict predominance which had existed in the first years of his pro-consulate, and a new vigour had been imparted to life in the 'bush'— a term which in New Caledonia includes everything outside Noumea.

For nearly four decades after Feillet's departure New Caledonia remained, however, a less than dynamically developing colony of settlement. The 11 years before the first World War saw a resumption, with nine governors and acting governors in rapid succession, of the *valse des fonctionnaires* which had similarly marked the decade between 1884 and 1894. Agriculture did not prosper, and the most notable development took place in the 'economic enclave' mentioned by Gascher. Nickel, of which New Caledonia was the world's second source (after Canada), began to be smelted in the colony which thus acquired a metallurgical industry of growing importance, unique in the Pacific islands. (In 1870s and 1880s John Higginson and the Société Le Nickel had established foundries, but these soon failed as a result of technical obsolescence and new competition from Canada, and from 1891 New Caledonia had been merely a quarry from which ore was carried to France in the huge subsidized sailing ships of the period.) In 1909 the great trading firm of Ballande set up the Hauts-Fourneaux de Nouméa and three years later Le Nickel followed suit with a new foundry near its mine at Thio on the east coast. Modern New Caledonia was beginning to take shape, though slowly.[5]

The 1914-18 war, during which more than a thousand French citizens from New Caledonia fought in Europe, and the following years of economic depression were a period of stagnation. Farming, stock raising, mining and metallurgy all suffered from the economic climate and the slackening of development efforts. In 1923 the main west coast road still did not extend beyond Poya, barely half way from Noumea to the far north of the Grande Terre, which was linked to the capital only by small coastal steamers.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Tontouta
NOUMEA
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50 km

Retrospectively but convincingly the ethnologist Jean Guiart has drawn a stark picture of the isolated and neglected poor-white population of this northwestern area.

> After the failure of a copper-smelting enterprise at the mouth of the Diahot River Noumea left the north to its loneliness. The penal farming centre at Ouegoa, established to provide food supplies to the mines, was abandoned. With the closing of the mines the market was gone and decadence set in among a tiny European society (49 concession-holders in 1884) subject to the authority neither of gendarme nor of priest, but rather to the law of the jungle, totally illiterate and ostentatiously promiscuous. The only common factors were contempt for the natives and a passion for racehorses. . . It took three quarters of a century until, with the opening up of roads after the war, these people came to themselves, took advantage of the disappearance of social discrimination against them, could go to the doctor, and thought of being married by the missionary at Bonde.[6]

A new turning point was reached in 1925 with the arrival of another notable governor, Jean Guyon, who at once set on foot an ambitious and basically sound development plan. It all took time. The novelist and academician Pierre Benoit, who visited New Caledonia in 1928, gives a depressing portrait of Noumea:

> Noumea! A small town so deeply asleep that it seems dead. For three years its governor has been trying to rouse it from its lethargy. Will he succeed in awakening what it would be ironical to call a sleeping *beauty*? Nothing, in truth, could be uglier than poor Noumea.
>
> Whose fault is it? As soon as we come ashore we meet not only the piles of rubble on the wharves but a serious problem of colonial responsibility. This is an island of undoubted beauty. After the flatness of Australia it looks like an earthly paradise. But what a contrast there is between this natural splendour and the squalid civilization that has been brought to it. Once again, who is to blame? Let us reply bluntly, metropolitan France. I am not setting out to eulogize the New Caledonian French in terms by which they themselves would be surprised. The older among them have no faith in the country's future. The young aspire only to bureaucracy. But the mother country is responsible for this state of affairs. Her new-born daughter received only one appalling gift — the convict prison. No attempt has been made since then to help her to rise above her beginning.
>
> What a town it is — no sewers, a decayed port, no street lights except a few gaslamps which on moolit nights are left unlit for economy's sake. And yet it would be easy to relieve this poverty and give Noumea the role for which it is so suited — that of one of the main harbours in this Pacific where the fate of the world will be decided. A great governor, M. Guyon. . . is devoting himself to this task. Will he receive a hearing in France when he seeks the 50 million francs needed to carry it out? Will the Parliament, in which New Caledonia is not represented, be listening? For the first and I hope for the last time I regret the absence of a deputy.[7]

In the event the funds for Guyon's plan were voted, and on his departure in 1932 he left the colony the richer by 300 kilometres of main roads and various other new facilities including those whose absence Benoit had deplored. In the process he had caused some anxiety to private interests,[8] and indeed the circumstances of his sudden retirement, discussed briefly in the recently published *Memorial Calédonien*, remain rather mysterious.[9] His plan was never completely carried out, but his objective of bringing the bush settlers out of isolation had been achieved. For the rest, the remaining years before the outbreak of war in 1939 were marked notably by the striking development of the metallurgical industry, now concentrated in the hands of the Société Le Nickel, itself controlled by a spectacular constellation of big banking and financial interests in France and Belgium.[10] Whether Le Nickel's contribution to the colony's economy, through export taxes and otherwise, compensated adequately for the lack of a consistent policy of balanced development is another matter.

However that may be, the relationship between metropolitan France and her scarcely-wanted Pacific daughter, Tahiti's ugly sister, was still in 1940 redolent of an ever-simmering family quarrel. No real attempt had ever been made to integrate this distant, ethnically French, group of '*Calédoniens*' (17,000 in 1936) into the mainstream of French life. They were out of sight and mostly out of mind. The colony was still unrepresented in Parliament, though since 1886 it had local representative institutions in the form of a General Council and municipalities in the towns. Expatriation to New Caledonia had brought this French group under the decree-régime of the colonial possessions among which New Caledonia was unique and uneasy. Demands for greater autonomy – for the local white population – were voiced recurrently, but vainly.

In 1940 André Bayardelle, Colonial Secretary of New Caledonia, spoke of the root causes of the Metropolitan-Caledonian malaise in a paper submitted to General de Gaulle after the *ralliement* (though from internal evidence it seems that it was originally destined for readers at Vichy). Discussing an autonomist manifesto circulated by a small group just after the 1940 armistice, he says

> The news of the metropolitan collapse set afoot a movement demanding administrative, financial and economic autonomy, a movement having its roots in long-standing aspirations springing from a consciousness of the colony's economic servitude and the excessively strict administrative tutelage imposed by the metropolitan power. This unjustifiable servitude took no account either of geography or of the legitimate interests of a white population conscious of the sacrifices it had to make for the imperial economy. 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 organize the colony.[11]

Bayardelle recognizes, however, that the autonomist idea 'found no deep echo in the population' and was rapidly superseded by a movement in favour of adherence to the Free French cause. In fact, the predominant feeling, overcoming longstanding resentments, was one of loyalty to 'a certain idea of France'.

IN 1940 New Caledonia and its adjacent dependencies of the Loyalty Islands and the Isle of Pines contained 30,000 descendants of the Melanesian inhabitants on whose country the French colony had been superimposed nearly a century before. They form a background to wartime events but, in the atmosphere of that time, not much more. At the end of a century of incomprehension between whites and blacks, the latter lived a life apart on the native reserves from which they could emerge only with the specific permission of the Office of Native Affairs. They were not French citizens but subjects living under the régime of the native code established formally in 1887 and prolonged each decade until 1928. Decrees taken in that year, in 1932 and in 1937 mitigated the terms of the native code without changing its fundamentally coercive character. In the words of the *exposé des motifs* of the relevant decree of 1907, 'By this régime the New Caledonian native has been placed and remains outside the common law. He is subjected to the discipline of the colonial Administration.'[12]

The native code not only regulated the employment of Melanesians by European employers but incorporated a system of compulsory employment on roads and public works, and provided for the payment of a head tax. All in all, it reflected an increasingly outmoded conception of the indigene as an auxiliary of colonization, and a very unsatisfactory one.

The first phase of this century of misunderstanding is discussed by Henri Rivière who, in May 1878, was ordered by the new governor, Captain Olry, to take his corvette on a tour of the New Caledonian coast and the outlying islands and to 'pay attention to the Canaques'. 'This instruction surprised me. During my two years in New Caledonia there had been so little mention of the Canaques that I might have thought that they did not exist, or existed no longer.'[13] They certainly did exist. The greatest rebellion in New Caledonia's colonial history broke out with a massacre of gendarmes and settlers in the La Foa valley, a hundred kilometres up the west coast from Noumea, on the day *La Vire* arrived in Teremba Bay at the mouth of the La Foa River. Rivière was soon in action ashore. When the revolt had been suppressed he reflected on its origins. Expropriation of native lands and the ravaging of what was left by the colonists' cattle had no doubt been contributing factors, but basically, he thought, there was only one cause, namely, what he saw as the eternal antagonism between conquerors and

conquered. The latter must be absorbed or disappear. Now, the black races of Oceania would not be absorbed by a white civilization for which they felt an ineradicable repugnance: the Canaques would submit and revolt in turn, but it would always be possible to contain such movements and meanwhile

> in normal times it will be humane and politic to leave the Canaques in peace on the territories to which they will increasingly withdraw. They will not hinder colonization by not taking part in it, any more than they would assist it if we sought to involve them in it.[14]

For 15 years after the 1878 insurrection, indeed, there was not much further encroachment on native lands, but from 1893, with an apparently declining Melanesian population occupying more land than it was thought to need, a new policy began to emerge. From 1897 Governor Feillet, the enthusiastic apostle of white colonization, carried through a general and systematic programme of *'cantonnement'* – delimitation of reserves to which the whole Melanesian population would be confined. In this operation the total area of the reserves appears to have been reduced from 320,000 hectares (in 1895) to 120,000 hectares (in 1901).[15] Thus the indigenous population of the Grande Terre was confined to less than one-tenth of the island. (White settlement has never been permitted on the outlying Loyalty Islands and Isle of Pines containing some 200,000 hectares.) Frequently the clans had been uprooted, by punitive measures after the 1878 rebellion and by Feillet's programme, from ancestral lands to which they were mystically attached.

A recent historian of the Melanesian land question, Alain Saussol, regards Feillet as bearing a heavy share of responsibility for what remains one of the territory's major problems.

> No doubt the prejudices of the period may have had an anaesthetizing effect, as did the prevailing certainty that the reserves would be the last refuge of a people destined to die out. Nothing, however, could be more paradoxical than this governor's policy, if it be set against the intentions of a man who aspired to 'civilize' the Melanesians, who constantly proclaimed that he would work to improve their material and moral condition – and in whom this desire was probably not devoid of sincerity. On 6 November 1899 he made a significant speech, reflecting at once his ambitions and his ignorance of Melanesian realities: 'Far from being a despoiler of natives', he said, 'I am trying to be a civilizer of barbarians. The Canaques, I say confidently, feel affection for my best assistants and for me because those who know me well are aware of the affection which I feel for them.'. . .
>
> This prototype of the administrative technocrat had one failing, which he shared with almost all his contemporaries – ignorance of the social and political realities of Melanesian life, which he likened to a feudal system. Hence the aberrations of his native policy. Thus, he said on 3 June 1901, speaking of the Melanesians, 'Having made clear to them henceforth the extent of their territory,

> we shall teach them to make better use of it. It is that, above all, that I call to civilize.' But he did not understand that in confining these precolonial societies he was breaking their mainspring.[16]

It is difficult to dissent from Saussol's conclusion that Feillet's pursuit of his major objective, the promotion of intense white colonization, helped 'to make a gulf between the two ethnic groups, inflicting a trauma on one, guilt on the other, and bequeathing to future generations a burdensome legacy'.[17] At the same time it is well to remember that the pioneer missionary and ethnologist Maurice Leenhardt, a contemporary of Feillet and never an apologist for colonialism, spoke towards the end of his life of the 'irony' of denouncing Feillet for 'spoliation' of the Melanesian population who in some cases at least had actively welcomed the demarcation of their boundaries.[18] More recently still, his son Pastor Raymond Leenhardt has written favourably of Feillet's handling of the so-called Poya war of 1901, when the Governor, returning from leave in France, found the Administration preoccupied with what was thought – probably because of misunderstandings – to be an incipient rebellion among the northern tribes over head tax payments. Forbidding precipitate military action, he resolved the incident by an undoubtedly courageous confrontation, alone and unarmed, with the Melanesian chief Amane.

> This peaceful settlement by direct man-to-man contact was very much in the pattern of Feillet's grand design: the development of New Caledonia through the participation of the Canaques and of carefully chosen settlers. He had turned off the 'tap of dirty water', the convict system which put the Blacks in contact with the worst of the Whites. He had established the head tax which encouraged the natives to work for the Whites in order to settle good farmers brought from France on the lands thus released: in this – like all his western contemporaries – he failed to understand native agriculture, in which the land had to lie fallow for six years out of seven, and thought that the Canaques could only gain from contact with well chosen settlers who would bring them civilization.[19]

One conclusion does not necessarily exclude the other. Feillet seems to have been, with all his faults, essentially a man of goodwill, but the very limited success of his agricultural colonization, on which he had counted for the development of a practical if inevitably unequal cooperation between white and black, made it inevitable that the negative consequences of his activity, based as it was on familiar misconceptions of Melanesian life, would prevail in the years following his departure.

Leenhardt protested consistently against the *reductio ad absurdum* of the Feillet system as it was applied, first during the 10 years of administrative instability following his departure and then under the active Governor Auguste Brunet (1912-14), the author of plans for 'reform' which, had they not been rendered abortive by the outbreak of war, would have imposed a

harsher system of forced labour administered through Melanesian chiefs serving as instruments of the colonial authority. In a letter of March 1914 to contacts in France who he hoped would oppose 'this monstrosity' he wrote:

> you will meet strong resistance. You will be told about the ruin facing settlers deprived of labour, about the natives' inconstant character, about their lack of civilization which makes it necessary to apply exceptional rules to them. People will even try to defeat you on grounds of humanity and morality by proving that the system of labour contracts was instituted in the Canaques' own interest, in order to guarantee the payment of their wages and secure to them the morally beneficial interest of their employers. That is all nonsense, designed to mask the real motive of material interest...
>
> The supposedly inconstant native in fact does not leave people in the lurch if they do not exploit him, and those who speak of the danger of exposing natives to unhealthy influences beyond their employers' control may be asked where the Canaques have acquired a taste for drunkenness and prostitution — in their villages or in the employ of masters who pay them with alcohol and traffic in their women.
>
> I am sure you will agree that it is unworthy of France – which led the world in freeing slaves and which first advanced the principle that no human being may be appropriated, even temporarily, by another – to tolerate any longer the abuses [inherent in the labour contract system] or the régime by which the natives are represented by the Administration alone.[20]

These anomalies of colonialism endured, however, to the end of the Third Republic. The lack of communication between the colonial régime and its subjects on basic matters is summed up in Leenhardt's story of an early 20th century governor and the chief Mindia.

> The chief is the Word [*le verbe*] of the clan. This definition is not my own. I heard it on the lips of an authentic chief, Mindia, one day when a governor, curious about their spectacles, had asked to watch a chief give one of those harangues 'which inflame the people'. Now this governor, careless where native traditions were concerned, had previously sanctioned a series of intrigues of the kind sometimes favoured by a colonial situation. He had reduced to a minimum the chieftainship of Big Chief Mindia, of authentic lineage, in favor of certain newcomers out for titles and spoils. Invited to give their harangues, these pseudo-chiefs, who had been capering on horseback around the chief magistrate, excused themselves one after the other. And at the insistence of the magistrate, they finally said, 'Only Mindia can speak'.
>
> He went to Mindia. And Mindia replied, 'These nobodies say they are chiefs: let them prove it'.
>
> And shrugging his shoulders in pity for the pretenders, he added, 'The chief is the word of the clan'.
>
> I translated 'the Word of the clan'. Mindia refused to besmirch the word, for, as he later explained, 'How could I still harangue my people if they knew that I made light of the word of the clan?'

> The word is as sacred in the mouth of the chief as the altar is sacred in the care of the sacrificer. The word of the harangues and the rites of the altar can not be profaned. The Melanesian needs both to insure his stature.[21]

Such subtleties were not for the average settler or colonial official. Predominant was the view of a Noumea newspaper quoted elsewhere by Leenhardt in 1913:

> The canaque is a man of inferior mentality. Many years will be needed to change this mentality, which is a mixture of childishness and barbarity. He is lazy, like all primitives, because nature has made it possible for him to live with little effort: if he is not constrained to work he will not seek it. He is inconstant. . .[22]

This simple view of the lazy and backward native was still to be met with as late as 1941 when a white Public Works foreman, undertaking to answer a banal question by an Australian newcomer as to 'what sort of people' the natives were, remarked briefly and definitively, 'You have to make them work'.

The dilemma confronting a conscientious heir to the French liberal and scientific tradition working in the context of a seemingly permanent colonial situation is evident at every point of the career of Maurice Leenhardt, to which any observer of 20th century New Caledonia must constantly refer. It is to be seen in a more generalized or abstract form in the words of the Secretary General of his own Societé des Missions Evangéliques de Paris in 1906:

> The very fact of colonial conquest poses a singularly difficult problem. On the European continent we protest against the right of conquest. A day will surely come when our consciences become more sensitive and rebel also against the application of this method to overseas territories. . . Through contact with our literature, with our daily press, the native mind gradually becomes imbued with the idea of France, the daughter of the Revolution. Already natives who know French reflect on the meaning and scope of the three words of the Republican device to be read on our monuments and official letterheads; when a substantial number of Blacks or Annamites come to speak French fluently who can tell what reflections they may be led to make?. . . Under the influence of that spirit of which our language is the vehicle, natives will feel themselves becoming more and more our compatriots, our brothers, and the day will come when they will ask why they should not be our equals.
>
> Should we be alarmed at this prospect? I do not think so, provided that things are done wisely and cautiously.
>
> We shall have carried out our full duty to the natives of our colonies only on the distant day when we have made them our equals in freedom.[23]

This ambiguous statement, remarked the Protestant scholar who quoted it in 1967, ushered in a period when a *modus vivendi* was established between the French colonial régime and the formerly more than slightly suspect Protestant missions, with the latter 'inculcating in the overseas

territories the duty of obedience to magistrates forming part of the Christian ethic, and collaborating with the French administration on the basis of a liberal standpoint which no doubt left plenty of room for "caution" '. In New Caledonia by 1940 caution seems to have won the day. The '*indigénophile*' Leenhardt had by now been cast from the official fold and a Protestant pastor, Lehnebach, mobilized as a reserve lieutenant, was a close confidant of the Vichy Governor Pélicier before transferring to Saigon with the group of Vichy adherents in October 1940. He has been accused of offering to ferment pro-Vichy agitation among the Protestant Melanesians. Jean Guiart, writing in 1959, thought this an unlikely story, such as might have found its origin in accusations by Gaullist partisans who were at the same time reactionary colonialists. There seems little doubt, nevertheless, that it happened. There is Bayardelle's chapter and verse,[24] and a good deal is known from other sources about this unusual pastor's conduct, especially from the testimony of André Surleau, a colonial official who saw Lehnebach in action under Admiral Decoux's strange wartime régime in Indo-China.[25] And just before New Caledonia's *ralliement* to Free France the local Vichy strong man, Commander Toussaint de Quièvrecourt of the *Dumont d'Urville*, was telegraphing to the Naval Ministry: 'New Caledonia situation still difficult. Main danger in natives armed by bush settlers.'[26]

Quièvrecourt's professed fears were not justified by events, since the *ralliement* was effected by armed *white* bushmen, but he did not err in suspecting the existence of a certain *bonne entente* between white and black New Caledonians at this stage.

Here is the heart of the matter, at least for the purposes of the wartime story. It is clear with hindsight and the benefit of postwar scholars' publications – and not least from the picture still being developed of Maurice Leenhardt's work and thought, that Gogol's cloak from which modern scientific observation of New Caledonia has emerged – that the century before 1940 had been marked by misunderstanding, injustice and destablilization of the indigenous society. Nonetheless, in the 20th century at least, cheerfulness keeps breaking through. By 1940 the mid-point of the phase defined by Saussol as that of Melanesian renewal was close.

> Once the traumatic shock of the *cantonnement* had been surmounted, a rebirth of the Melanesian group was achieved in one generation, from 1925 to 1956. It took place on three levels: demographic, . . . economic, with the introduction of coffee-growing in the reserves, and finally political, with access to responsible citizenship.
>
> By its implications, this peaceful revolution was probably the most important phenomenon to have taken place in New Caledonia since the arrival of Europeans. A page was being turned, a new reality was being asserted, bringing profound changes which would gradually call into question the supremacies installed by colonization.[27]

Again, 1925 appears as a turning point. Governor Guyon, mindful of more liberal ideas held in France, was resistant to reactionary pressures from those of the local whites who saw the Melanesians as barbarous nuisances or at best a source of inefficient day-labour, and he energetically promoted indigenous cash-cropping which brought the Melanesians for the first time into substantial contact with the money economy. Guyon's new roads facilitated the extension of health services and education. The Melanesian population, so long and obstinately regarded as irreversibly declining, was clearly seen to be vigorous and increasing in number. Aspirations to equality of citizenship would come later. Maurice Lenormand wrote in 1953:

> Throughout the Melanesian world – in the New Hebrides, the Solomon Islands and New Guinea – there were, after the war, neo-pagan mythic movements, 'cargo cults', coloured by political and social aspirations and marked by an ardent desire for access to European culture and wealth, in the guise of a revival of ancient myths.
>
> In New Caledonia the indigenes, for the most part Christians and in possession of a certain French education, were not prone to such movements, nor did they see any necessity for them, since the 1946 Constitution satisfied their latent, more or less defined aspirations. . .[28]

Lenormand seems to have been writing a deliberately low key in the course of his campaign to secure further political advancement. But there is much in what he says. Politics, for Melanesians as for Westerners, is in any event the art of the possible, which all too frequently is synonymous with making the best of a bad job. In 1940 when colonization – or colonialism – was a generally unquestioned fact of life, that is essentially what they were doing, without chafing unduly under the unequal relationships with the colonial masters. White and black New Caledonians, though still far from the *mutual* acculturation advocated by Maurice Leenhardt, had learned to rub along together fairly well. Leenhardt himself cites 'an old colonist who had seen the recovery of the village of Oudjo [near Koné on the west coast] [and who] said in 1939, "Today I would no longer dare to think of these people what I thought 40 years ago" '.[29]

It is worth noting also that in the 20th century the unskilled labour force had been augmented by the introduction of contract labourers from abroad. In 1936 there were 2,228 Indo-Chinese, 4,342 Javanese and 1,430 Japanese. A 1943 report by the senior intelligence officer in the American command said 'The treatment of Asiatics by the French population and employers is inferior to that given Melanesian natives'.[30] The availability of alternative candidates for laborious toil was clearly beneficial to the Melanesians, in at least a negative way.

The Melanesians accepted unquestioningly the change of French leadership

accomplished over their heads in September 1940 and for the remainder of the war they were, from an Allied viewpoint, 'loyal', friendly and frequently eager to volunteer, like their fathers in 1914-18, for the interesting experience of military or naval service.[31] Burchett and others have remarked on the 'old digger' or *ancien combattant* spirit of native veterans of the first war. Australian wartime observers occasionally heard complaints about the alienation of land, but there was no sharp protest. Rather there was an eager observance of, and participation in, the exciting novelties of the American 'occupation'.

STILL another dimension of ignorance is encountered if we recall the Australian perception of New Caledonia in 1940. The French colony was only 1,500 kilometres from the Australian coast, but such were the centripetal tendencies of the British and French empires that its image was dimmer in most Australian minds than that of Toulon or Tilbury docks on the Orient Line's route to London. So far as it was perceived at all it suffered from its legend as a sort of French Botany Bay on a cannibal island. Popular books such as Julian Thomas's *Cannibals and Convicts* (1886), James Griffith's *In an Unknown Prison Land* (1901) and Beatrice Grimshaw's *Isles of Adventure* (1930) (containing a chapter entitled 'New Caledonia, Land of the Lost') presented a gloomy version of French Pacific colonization to the Anglo-Saxon reader. Wilfred Burchett's more enticingly-titled and sympathetic *Pacific Treasure Island* did not appear until 1941, under the stimulus of the colony's *ralliement* to Free France. In 1930 the Australian historian Stephen H. Roberts published a *History of French Colonial Policy*, packed with standard Anglo-Saxon prejudices and offering English-speaking readers a grotesque and misleading stereotype of New Caledonia and its inhabitants. A serious first hand account of New Caledonian traditional society, Maurice Leenhardt's *Gens de la Grande Terre,* had been published in 1937, but it was the work of a still obscure French ethnologist, and it had not been translated into English.

Lack of interest in the colonial possessions of a country which since the first World War had come to be taken too much for granted as a natural ally in time of trouble was a comparatively new phenomenon. In the 19th century Australian colonial statesmen had been spasmodically stirred to frenzy by the extension of French imperialism to the Pacific, accompanied as it was by the establishment of a new 'convictism' in our region. The effervescence which in the 1880s had prevented any Anglo-French accommodation over the New Hebrides and which led to the conclusion of the Anglo-French condominium there had faded away, however, with Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, to be succeeded by inward looking apathy.

A measure of bad feeling persisted. Though by 1920 the head of the Pacific Branch of the Prime Minister's Department in Melbourne could write 'There is little public interest now in the New Hebrides except among the Presbyterians',[32] opinion at Noumea remained morosely conscious of Australian influence as an obstacle to the fulfilment of what was often seen as the manifest destiny of the New Hebrides to become French. As late as 1974 a Noumea historian was to comment that the 'abandonment' represented by the 1922 arrangement on the New Hebrides would have aroused a stronger protest than it did if public opinion in the colony had not been wearied and depressed by the gloomy economic situation from which it was suffering.

> The Caledonian and Hebridean economies are complementary and, quite apart from some people's hopes of profitable land speculation, it would have been preferable, from the point of view of the populations of both archipelagoes, to see the New Hebrides' natural and human resources united to those of New Caledonia, so that the New Hebrideans would have enjoyed a nationality and a status making possible their acculturation.[33]

Overt Australian government interest in the New Hebrides Condominium was muted in the interwar period, but it had not been discarded. As late as 1937, at the Imperial Conference of that year, Australia offered, with New Zealand concurrence, to assume responsibility for the British share of the condominium – but withdrew the proposal in the following year.[34] It was never put to the French government, which in view of past history would have had serious reservations about it. In the event the New Hebrides formed in 1940 no more than a quite minor irritant in Australian-French relations, though Australian missionaries and planters there continued to complain about French expansion and British neglect.

Before the French armistice of June 1940 Australia's official interest in New Caledonia itself was slight indeed. Australia supplied the coal and coke to fuel the nickel smelter at Noumea, and was thus a major participant in the colony's modest external trade, but with the exception of this major item Australian exports were tiny (total exports were £A271,000 in 1938-39) and there was no special effort to promote them. In 1936, when a Franco-Australian trade agreement embodying mutual tariff concessions was negotiated, it did not apply to New Caledonia. A further agreement concerning commercial relations between Australia and the French colonies was contemplated, but this was never negotiated.[35] Even after the advent of wartime import licensing and the interruption of communications between France and its Pacific colonies local discontent was caused, as Bayardelle remarks, by the continuing obligation placed on New Caledonian importers to order such everyday commodities as flour from a

mother country 20,000 kilometres away. This distorted trade situation was not rectified until special wartime arrangements were made following the *ralliement*. (More permanent tariff revisions were negotiated only in 1947.)

Nor did New Caledonia and other South Pacific islands figure significantly in Australian defence thinking or planning in the interwar period when attention was concentrated on the Singapore base.[36] Even the idea of an aerial reconnaissance system in the nearby islands was still new, and it would not become operational until 1941.

This 20th century detachment reflected a striking change from earlier times, when the Australian colonies had interested themselves in New Caledonia in several ways. The French annexation of the neighbouring island was distasteful to colonial opinion, and on 2 November 1853 the *Sydney Morning Herald* lamented that 'by the laxity of the British government. . . the opportunity of colonising that fine group [had] been lost'. This development was the more to be regretted in that it seemed likely that the withering curse of convictism, so recently shaken off by the Australian colonies, was about to be reimposed in Australia's immediate neighbourhood by a powerful foreign nation.

> In a commercial point of view, the colonisation of New Caledonia, even by the French, may appear at first sight advantageous to the interests of this city, but such a consideration is entirely secondary in importance, and sinks into insignificance by the side of the moral, social, and political consequences attached to the occupation of one of the most splendid islands in the Pacific by a rival nation, whose aims and objects are so dissimilar, not to say opposite, to those which have for many years been earnestly contemplated by the most intelligent colonists of Australia and of New Zealand.

The Australasian colonists, however surly about French activities in the Southwest Pacific, never seriously questioned the permanency of French sovereignty over New Caledonia. The commercial advantages hinted at in the *Herald*'s chauvinistic editorial were already being felt when it was written. From 1842 Australian sandalwood traders had included the Isle of Pines and shortly thereafter the Grande Terre itself in their operations. Merchant venturers like James Paddon and Robert Towns of Sydney and Edward Woodin of Hobart Town traded to the east and west coasts and had explored most of New Caledonia's long coastline by the end of 1849. Their flourishing trade with the coastal New Caledonians left its mark in such forms as the widespread use of Pidgin English (*biche-la-mar*) as a lingua franca and the suspicion with which the French colonizers regarded the people of Hienghène on the east coast, whose chief, Bouarate (or Basset), had visited Sydney and carried on mutually profitable relations with the sandalwooders.[37]

The sandalwood trade died out from the early 1850s, but by that time Paddon had established himself at a permanent base at what is still called Paddon Cove, on an island off Noumea, where he played an important part in the founding of the new colony and in its developing trade with New South Wales.

In its first years as a French colony New Caledonia indeed, as Jean-Paul Faivre has said, 'gravitated into the Australian orbit . . .Australians introduced cattle, the methods and the vocabulary of cattle-raising. . . The exploitation of mineral wealth was originally Anglo-Australian (though the ore had been discovered by Frenchmen).'[38] Men like Hanckar, Tully and Higginson were prominent in the mining industry in the 1870s and many less known and less successful prospectors from Australia took part in the nickel, chrome and cobalt rushes of that decade. In 1884 Charles Lemire expressed surprise at finding as much English as French spoken at Noumea.[39]

By 1940 direct contacts with Australia had declined to a modest level, and only the sudden collapse of France jolted Australia into a new consciousness of its French island neighbour.

2 *From the French armistace to the* ralliement *of New Caledonia*

ON THE MORROW of the French capitulation the first spontaneous reaction of many political and military leaders throughout that great empire, where important forces remained intact and uncommitted, was to continue the struggle. Typical was General Order No. 27 issued at Damascus on 21 June by the French High Commissioner in the Levant, General Mittelhauser. Its conclusion, written in Mittelhauser's own hand, read 'Whatever happens, the Army of the Levant, with the support of the Franco-British fleet and at the side of the British, will carry out its mission with fierce energy'.

Less than a week later Mittelhauser had tamely made his submission to the armistice régime which, though not distinguished for firmness or determination, was firmly determined on one objective – to take the whole French empire out of the war. What had happened? The lamentable battle of Oran had been fought, but that was far from the whole story. General de Larminat, a leading Gaullist who was then serving as Mittelhauser's Chief of Staff, puts it as concisely and correctly as possible:

> Darlan had deliberately chosen to keep 'for himself' his intact and undefeated fleet in order to draw the greatest profit from it on the day when it became possible to tell who would win. . . This defection struck a fatal blow at the spirit of the resistance. At once Noguès at Rabat, Pagès at Algiers, Peyrouton at Tunis submitted 'with death in their souls'. Of course the death of the soul is the least unpleasant to endure.

As de Larminat said, it was all a matter of timing. Mittelhauser, according to the standards that soon came to be applied, was clearly committing an act of rebellion in issuing his General Order No. 27. He could have been court-martialled, but instead he was soon issuing court-martial charges himself, for he had not remained 'rebellious' beyond 27 June. On the other hand the officers of the North African Army, who on 8 November 1942 'rebelled' against the Marshal's government, themselves despised the Free French because the latter had been 'rebels' *before* 8 November. It was all a defiance of French logic or, in de Larminat's phrase, a triumph of French casuistry.[1]

One by one the defiant voices faced out, as their owners made their peace with Vichy, and soon only an acting brigadier, self-exiled in London, remained as a focus of resistance. The present writer heard an ex-Vichy naval officer at the end of the war explaining to some Australian hearers that they seemed to have got their facts wrong. What had happened in 1942, he said, was that 'the Free French rallied to *us*'. But in 1940 the triumph of casuistry was still in the future. In those last days of June talk of resistance *'jusqu'au bout'* was to be heard on many lips, including those of the Governor of New Caledonia, Georges Pélicier. On 24 June, in his opening speech to a special session of the New Caledonian General Council which unanimously adopted a resolution in favour of staying in the war, he declared that, in agreement with all the chief civil and military functionaries of the colony, he had decided to continue the struggle and would refuse to carry out any contrary instructions.[2] He was in fact less resolute than his words suggested. But for the moment he had *no* instructions and New Caledonia was in a special situation. Neither the psychological nor the economic conditions existed for a breach with Australia. The Council's resolution was telegraphed to London, Canberra and Wellington, where it caused much premature rejoicing, and Pélicier engaged in a friendly exchange of telegrams with the Prime Ministers of Australia and New Zealand. The attractive idea that the temporary disaster which had befallen metropolitan France need not prevent a satisfactory practical *modus vivendi* between Australia and New Zealand on the one hand and the French Pacific territories on the other was now dominant, but it was based on an illusion – the illusion that such an arrangement would not necessarily put the Commonwealth countries on a collision course with the Vichy government.

Australia at this time was in a quasi-colonial situation, locked firmly – and voluntarily – into the British imperial system. Rather than a foreign policy of its own it had a recognized but sparingly exercised right to comment on the policies developed by the United Kingdom on behalf of the empire as a whole. In war even more than in peace Australian policies had to be harmonized with those of the United Kingdom.

British policy toward France following the military capitulation was confused and ambiguous. The *débâcle* had been so sudden, so traumatic, that its full scope and consequences could scarcely be perceived all at once. For the whole British empire, and not least for Australia, it was as if a known and valued world had come abruptly to an end. Even those who were conscious of the tragi-comedy of French politics in the 1930s were not aware of its full significance.

The landmarks on the road to disaster are depicted clearly enough in a paper prepared in the Department of External Affairs at the end of 1940

as part of Prime Minister Menzies's brief for his forthcoming visit to London.

> Looking back on the first six months of the war, it is evident now that too little effort was made to appreciate either French popular sentiment or the difficulties of the Daladier government in holding civilian morale. . . It was overlooked that for years there had been a steady infiltration into French opinion of ideas leading away from association with Britain and tending rather to emphasise France's position in Continental Europe. . .
>
> So far as contact between governments was concerned, Anglo-French relations showed more harmony after M. Reynaud came into office in March 1940. . . It is known now, however, that M. Reynaud's highly personal administration covered dangerous disagreements among the French military and political leaders. It was enabled to stand only so long as external pressure did not bring these antagonisms to the surface. . . on the fall of Reynaud we found that we had to deal with men of very different outlook. . .
>
> During the period immediately following the Franco-German Armistice British policy towards France was based on three main points:
>
> (a) That a formal and complete rupture with Vichy should be avoided;
>
> (b) That on no consideration could the French fleet be permitted to pass into enemy hands;
>
> (c) That every effort should be made to enable the French Colonial Empire to continue the prosecution of the war.
>
> Point (b) was to some extent disposed of by the operations at Oran and Dakar. *Between (a) and (c) however, there is a latent contradiction in objectives which has not yet been satisfactorily resolved. . .*[3]

The contradiction just mentioned is neatly illustrated by the words of a British Colonial Office official who wrote on 26 June:

> The relations between Sir Harry Luke as High Commissioner for the Western Pacific and the French High Commissioner who lives at Noumea in New Caledonia are very friendly, and there is every reason to think that in that area the French will carry on cheerfully with ourselves, whatever a French government in France may do.[4]

Australia's policy towards New Caledonia in the period immediately following the armistice involved a similar latent contradiction – soon to come to the surface – since it aimed, in the words of the paper just quoted, at 'co-operation with an administration owing nominal allegiance to Vichy, but prepared in practice to co-operate as far as possible with the British empire'. In reality there could be no such things. As a favourite French saying has it, a door must be either open or shut. Unless action was taken – and in practice only Australia could take it – to embrace New Caledonia firmly in the Allied system, Vichy would draw it into a more or less malevolent neutrality presenting obvious openings for the insidious Japanese influence already at work in Indo-China. The contradiction was to be sorted out to the benefit of the Allies and eventually of France, though not without difficulties and misunderstandings.

As negotiations for a Franco-German armistice began, press reports suggested that Germany might insist on a privileged position for Japan in New Caledonia and the New Hebrides as part of the peace terms. These reports were unfounded, but they had the effect of focusing the Australian War Cabinet's attention on the French Pacific. On 18 June War Cabinet considered measures to be taken against the eventuality of a Japanese occupation of New Caledonia and the New Hebrides. The main possible courses of action which presented themselves were:

> to seek to move the United States Administration to issue a declaration designed to deter Japanese action, as it had done in the case of the Netherlands East Indies;
>
> or
>
> to effect a preventive occupation of the French Islands by Allied forces.[5]

Over the next few days these possibilities were canvassed with the United Kingdom government. When War Cabinet met again on 25 June it was aware that the United Kingdom had already tried and failed to secure an American deterrent declaration. Neither government favoured a preventive occupation of the islands, in view of the limited resources available to them at the time and of the possibility that such an occupation would serve the Japanese as a pretext for action against the Netherlands Indies. In the circumstances War Cabinet confirmed its cautious policy of seeking a *modus vivendi* with the existing French authorities in the islands. Prime Minister Menzies had already sent a friendly acknowledgment of Governor Pélicier's telegram, adding 'We would be glad to know of any way in which we could render you practical cooperation at this time'.

On 26 June Pélicier telegraphed again, thanking Menzies and asking for the release, which was quickly arranged, of four French ships loading supplies in Australian ports.[6] The prudent and limited holding operation on which the Australian government was embarking appeared to have some prospects of success. Pélicier, for his part, was clearly satisfied that he had kept the Australian government effectively in play while postponing any awkward decisions about his own relations with Vichy.

Had the Australian government been more closely informed about the personalities directly involved in the New Caledonian situation it would scarcely have faced the immediate future with equanimity. Governor Pélicier himself was merely playing out time until the end of his term, which he hoped would be short. Meanwhile, he was on bad terms with his civilian deputy, Secretary-General André Bayardelle, and with the elected General Council. He lived in isolation, surrounded by a small clique of military confidants including notably the elderly and ineffective Military Commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Denis, and the mobilized Protestant pastor Lieutenant

Lehnebach, whom he had put in charge of censorship. Even as he spoke in buoyant terms (but 'haltingly' according to Bayardelle) to the General Council on 24 June some of his hearers had good reason to suspect that his intentions were far from firm. He was not a man to take any dynamic action. Bayardelle, for his part, in close touch with the Japanese consul and with two General Councillors who were directors of Japanese-controlled mining companies, was planning a post-armistice trade arrangement by which Japan would be given access to New Caledonian nickel matte in return for supplying a market for the colony's coffee and copra. After a private talk with one of these two Councillors he had already suggested to Pélicier that the latter should seek from the Minister of Colonies a virtually unlimited delegation of authority to govern the colony 'in the vital interests of the country'. The Governor, after consulting his own cronies, decided to take no such action. He believed, not unreasonably, that his wily deputy was offering him enough rope to hang himself. Bayardelle's exact motivation is not entirely clear, but it seems likely that he saw himself in the role of a Pacific satrap collaborating with the Japanese as Admiral Decoux was to do in Indo-China.[7]

The General Council itself, a predominantly conservative assembly of 15 representatives of mining, commercial and farming interests, was also stronger in word than in deed. Governor Sautot was later to write

> In June 1940 the General Council seemed to have taken a clear position in favour of non-submission and continuing the struggle alongside our British Allies. It was in that sense that it adopted a unanimous motion at its famous session of 24 June. But that motion seemed more theoretical than practical, for when it came to the point of a decision to rally to General de Gaulle, the fine unanimity of 24 June fell to pieces. . . When on 19 September I achieved the *ralliement* of the colony with the support of the population I found the local assembly far from inclined itself to rally to the leader of the Free French. A number of its members remained in sympathy with the old Marshal. . .[8]

At this point a self-constituted man of destiny stepped on to the scene. His name was Michel Vergès, a notary of Noumea and a man of marked eccentricity and unbridled ambition. ('Psychologically the man is not quite normal', Governor Tallec wrote in 1945.)[9] He was known to have autonomist sympathies, and on the day of the General Council's historic meeting of 24 June he produced a 'manifesto to the population' signed by himself and two associates which called in effect for the establishment of a sovereign assembly to take over the Governor's powers for the duration of the war. In this turgid and ill-drafted document there was no mention of General de Gaulle and there can be no doubt that at this stage Vergès saw himself as the territory's war leader.

On 27 June Vergès showed his 'manifesto' to Bayardelle who, far from discouraging him – for it suited his own purposes well enough – advised him to gather public support that would give more weight to it than if it were simply the product of two or three people with no special mandate. Next day Bayardelle informed Pélicier of Vergès's 'programme', affecting to believe that 'its terms could not be considered aggressive toward either the Administration or the General Council'. Pélicier thought otherwise, and was in fact furious, but he did nothing about it. Vergès set about collecting signatures for his 'petition' in Noumea and up-country.

The first half of July was marked, in Bayardelle's words, by '*un calme plein de menaces*'. Tensions were building up. The Australian government, ignorant of these local complications, began to develop plans for economic cooperation with New Caledonia. The first step was to provide a safe market for the colony's main export, nickel matte. In mid-July the local director of the Société Le Nickel (SLN), Paul Vois, visited Australia and made arrangements for an initial sale of 5,400 tons of matte per year – sufficient to ensure the continued operation of the Doniambo smelter.

Nickel was, of course, a strategic metal, of increasing importance to the Japanese armament industry, but even more urgently needed by Germany. From the moment of the Franco-German armistice the British government expressed anxiety lest New Caledonian nickel might reach Germany via Japan and the Soviet Union. At this stage no one in the British empire, and least of all Australia, wished to provoke Japan by denying to it a reasonable supply of nickel for its own use, but there was the additional complication of the 'moral embargo' already being applied by the United States against the export to Japan of a wide range of strategic materials. The world's leading producer of nickel was the International Nickel Company of Canada (INCO), a company registered in Toronto but having a large participation of American capital. The United Kingdom and Canadian governments thought it politically inadvisable to facilitate any export of nickel to Japan that was not favoured by the State Department, and in 1939 arrangements had been made to cut off shipments of North American nickel to Japan as well as the Soviet Union. In 1940 Japan was no longer receiving nickel from any source except New Caledonia, from which it was importing low grade nickel ore at the rate of about 40,000 tons a year. That was of no great importance, but the severance of communications between France and New Caledonia opened up new possibilities of procuring the matte (with a content of 77 per cent nickel) of which New Caledonia produced more than 7,000 tons a year for refinement at Le Havre. That was a very different matter. The British authorities, concerned that the sale of the New Caledonian matte should be in harmony with their blockade

policy, developed an ingenious scheme whereby INCO would be asked to buy and refine the matte from Noumea and return a 'safe' quantity (perhaps 2,000 tons per year) to the SLN for sale to Japan. (Japan itself possessed no suitable refineries.) INCO, in the event, declined to carry out this plan because of the 'moral embargo', and no New Caledonian matte ever reached Japan. (A shipment of 600 tons which had reached Suez at the time of the armistice was diverted by Vichy to Japan but for some reason did not get beyond Saigon.) The export of nickel ore continued into 1941 when it was finally suspended. The Japanese, of whose reactions much had been apprehended, took it all fairly calmly.

When the INCO plan proved impracticable the British government fell back on the idea that the SLN might contract to sell not more than 2,000 tons a year directly to Japan, securing guarantees that it would not be re-exported. As for the remaining production, they hoped that it would be possible for Australia to build up a strategic reserve, and the United Kingdom would itself consider the possibility of a pre-emptive purchase. Fortunately – it would be unjust to say fortuitously, but security against Japan was not the primary motive – pre-emptive action had already been taken by Australia.[10]

When Paul Vois visited Australia in July, the Commonwealth government had itself no urgent need for New Caledonian nickel; it could be used only as a contribution to a British empire strategic stockpile. Nor was Australia confronted by any apparent need to take independent action to limit supplies of nickel to Japan. It rather had in mind the objective of keeping New Caledonia in the Allied orbit by providing necessary support for its economy – and that meant buying nickel, New Caledonia's most important export and source of foreign exchange. It was a matter of enlightened self-interest – New Caledonia had to depend on somebody's support, and better Australia's than that of some ill-disposed power – but goodwill was not lacking and in fact shows conspicuously throughout the Australian authorities' proceedings. The government's prudent and limited action did not reflect a conspicuously anti-Japanese or even specifically anti-Vichy stance. The agreement with Vois was made in the context of its continued efforts to collaborate with Governor Pélicier, the fatal ambiguity of whose attitude had not yet become clear. To that end it had decided on 11 July to send a representative of its own to Noumea to handle Australian aid and cooperation on the spot.

Throughout July the New Caledonian population was increasingly conscious and resentful of the Governor's paralytic attitude, typified by his decision to hold no ceremony to mark the national holiday of 14 July. On that day an unofficial ceremony was in fact held, but when a procession

appeared before Government House and sang the Marseillaise Pélicier had absented himself, obviously to avoid having to make any public statement. Finally the General Councillors, 'tired of waiting for the Administration to take the initiative', exercised their right to demand a special session of the Council, which opened on 22 July. On the previous day the Governor, to his intense embarrassment, had received from Vichy a telegram instructing him to promulgate in New Caledonia Pétain's new 'constitutional laws' of 10 July. This was the death knell of republican government, and Pélicier did not dare to sound it in public, before the General Council. Instead he put the instruction aside, and at the opening of the Council session repeated in misleadingly firm terms the line which he had taken on 24 June:

> From a political standpoint the situation is unchanged. It is as you know it — continuation of the alliance with Great Britain and with the great Dominions which are our neighbours. This cooperation has been fruitful. I take pleasure in paying tribute to the Prime Ministers of Australia and New Zealand and to the British High Commissioner in the Western Pacific, Sir Harry Luke, for the efficient help which they have constantly given us in difficult circumstances. I should like them and Her Brittanic Majesty's Consul to accept the expression of our gratitutde.
>
> Mr Johnson [the British Consul] has authorized me to state that he is in complete agreement with me concerning our relations with our neighbours. Moreover he has informed me that an Australian official is to come here soon to discuss our commercial exchanges with the Commonwealth.
>
> As for me, my position is clear. France has formally entrusted me with responsibility for the destiny of New Caledonia. In that I shall not fail. I will defend the interests of New Caledonia to the end. I consider myself responsible for the Colony, and I assure you that I shall do nothing that might run counter to the interests which it is my duty to protect.[11]

What Pélicier did *not* say to the Council was that, having been informed of the Australian government's proposal to dispatch a representative to Noumea to discuss aid and cooperation, he had requested that the representative's arrival be delayed until after the end of the Council's regular session on 15 August. He feared that the Council would insist on a personal appearance before it of the Australian representative, and this he was unwilling to contemplate. Curiously, this request, transmitted through Luke, does not seem to have caused any serious misgivings in Suva or Canberra.[12]

For the moment the General Council was prepared to give Pélicier the benefit of the doubt.

The Governor quickly had cause to regret his brave words, for later on the same day he received a circular telegram from the Vichy Minister of Colonies, M. Lémery, warning him against just such action as he had been proclaiming:

> Information reaching me from certain colonies shows that some governors, through intolerable slackness, have not carried out or have not personally supervised the strict application of government's instructions concerning breach of Franco-British diplomatic relations. Such slackness will be punished most severely. Acknowledge by telegram.

In reply he protested that the maintenance of commercial relations with Australia was the only possible means of averting 'famine and grave disorders leading to foreign interference and loss of colony to France'. He added, doubtless at Bayardelle's instance, that the colony's isolated situation might lead him to 'develop commercial relations with other adjacent countries'. But from that moment, according to Bayardelle, he became increasingly concerned to avoid open defiance of Vichy while trying to meet the wishes of the population – 'an impossible acrobatic feat', as Bayardelle says.[13]

The General Council devoted the rest of its extraordinary session to an examination of Vergès's programme, which had now been submitted to it as a petition with 1,100 signatures. On 26 July it unanimously adopted a resolution calling for the creation of a representative assembly whose composition and powers would be settled by a referendum. This decision, like that of 24 June, was beyond the Council's competence, and logically, being now in no doubt of Vichy's attitude, Pélicier ought to have annulled it. Instead he reported it to Lémery, who replied predictably forbidding any such measures.

An ordinary session of the General Council followed immediately on the extraordinary session and provided the occasion for the sharpest confrontation so far between the Governor and the population. Pélicier attempted to limit the discussion to economic affairs, but himself made this impossible by publishing in the *Journal Officiel* of 29 July an order promulgating the Vichy constitutional laws. He had made the worst of both worlds, since several Councillors were well aware that he had had this measure on his desk for a week but had refrained from consulting the Council or making any public statement of his position. On 2 August the General Council passed unanimously and without debate a resolution by which it expressed disapproval of the Governor and noted 'the contradiction between his statements and his actions'. It concluded: 'The General Council, in order to confirm its position of 24 June and to avoid any confusion, decided to get in direct touch with General de Gaulle'.

In this sudden acknowledgement of General de Gaulle's position as the focus of French resistance the Council was merely reflecting a rapidly evolving New Caledonian opinion which was soon to take matters out of its hands. As it was meeting an angry crowd was demonstrating against the promulgation of the Vichy constitutional laws.

This day of turbulence marked a turning point. A vague plan for autonomy and a representative assembly had been all very well in the post-armistice confusion at the end of June, but it was already clearly outmoded. The Vergès petition had gathered a large number of signatures – many of them, doubtless, given lightly enough – but to those who looked carefully at it, especially in the quiet bush districts, it seemed more and more to be irrelevant. For them it was no longer a question of metropolitan exigencies and New Caledonian aspirations, but rather of a choice between the pseudo-government of Vichy and the genuine patriotism which de Gaulle, and de Gaulle alone, seemed to represent. A contemporary account by one of them, Georges Baudoux of Houaïlou, gives the tone:

> Having read and re-read [the manifesto] and weighed every sentence, we perceived that it was not consistent with our Gaullist ideas. Indeed, General de Gaulle, whom we already regarded as our leader, was not mentioned at all. . .
>
> We learned that Noumea was in turmoil over the famous manifesto. We followed the local news on the radio, but of the outcome we were looking for – official *ralliement* to General de Gaulle – no sign appeared. Finally we came to speak with indifference of these manifestations. . . We understood that all the fuss meant nothing, that it was the work of a few agitators, partisans of the plan for disorder dreamed up by the man Vergès.[14]

The Council itself – or rather a majority of it – was less resolute than it had sounded on 2 August. The dispatch of its telegram to de Gaulle was delayed from day to day as the Councillors continued to argue over its exact terms. On 9 August Johnston reported to Luke that he felt sure it would not be sent. Nor was it. The Councillors could not bring themselves to make a final break with Vichy.

There was, however, one man who was not prepared to hesitate. He was Raymond Pognon, an elderly but vigorous and widely respected former president of the General Council. So far he had been quietly observing events, but on 3 August he wrote direct to General de Gaulle in London suggesting that the time had come to start afresh by forming a de Gaulle committee to organize the colony's *ralliement* to Free France. This letter was to play its part in forming de Gaulle's attitude, and it is memorable as the first direct move to bring about the *ralliement*. Pognon was an unobtrusive man, but he was an extraordinarily sharp judge of people and events and was to be the brain of the de Gaulle committee hastily formed in September. He spoke excellent English, was unfailingly helpful to Australian and Allied representatives, and was sometimes accused of being a paid Australian agent. He was nothing of the sort but he played a part which deserves to be remembered.

The specifically Gaullist body of opinion mentioned by Georges Baudoux was still leaderless and unorganized, but it was rapidly growing stronger.

Pélicier's censorship kept news of de Gaulle from the local press and radio, but short wave radio news from abroad redressed the balance. Though already an object of suspicion to Vichy, he wrote on 5 August a conciliatory letter to the President of the General Council proposing the creation of a Consultative Assembly, on a corporative basis, to deliberate on all important matters falling outside the Council's own competence. On the same day Lémery sent him a telegram containing a minatory message to be communicated to the population of the colony. Any attempt by a distant colony to continue the war, it warned, would be treason. After some hesitation Pélicier had Lémery's message read to the General Council, which received it without comment. It adjourned on 7 August after deciding to put to further strudy the Vergès plan which it had approved on 26 July. Nothing further was heard of this plan – the author of which was already preparing to place himself at the head of the Gaullist movement in the colony. The Governor retreated into an uneasy silence. On 18 August a stick of dynamite exploded harmlessly but ominously in the garden of Government House. Thenceforth Pélicier was receptive to the suggestion that his life was in danger and that his departure from the colony was the only possible means of avoiding worse incidents. Before abdicating his increasingly untenable position, he passed the buck for the last time by asking Vichy to send a warship to Noumea. It may be that Vichy had already decided on this measure to shore up its visibly shaky régime in New Caledonia, for the sloop *Dumont d'Urville*[15] arrived remarkably promptly from Papeete, on 23 August, and her commander began at once to play an active part and to correspond with Vichy by radio. The local power situation was now radically altered and the possibility of a peaceful transition to a Free French régime was drastically reduced. The *Dumont d'Urville* was a small but useful ship with a well-trained and disciplined crew, and Commander Toussaint de Quièvrecourt, unlike Pélicier and Denis, was a resolute man prepared to go to great lengths to uphold the Vichy power.

Meanwhile the Japanese had been intensifying their efforts to obtain from New Caledonia supplies of nickel to replace those now unobtainable from Canada. On 2 August the Australian High Commissioner in London reported that the Japanese government was understood to have instructed its consul at Noumea to try to secure the whole New Caledonian output of the metal.[16] It was presumably equally active at Vichy, since on 25 August the Minister of Colonies instructed the Governor that all production of nickel matte and metal ores should be reserved for Japan. Pélicier passed this instruction to the acting head of the Mines Department, George Dubois, who in turn consulted Albert Rapadzi, now director of the SLN in New Caledonia.[17] These two men were New Caledonians, close friends, comrades

of the first World War where they had served together at Verdun – and convinced Gaullists. They had, as Rapadzi recalled later, no intention of collaborating in the execution of Lémery's instruction – and in any event the latter had overlooked the point that the Doniambo smelter, if deprived of Australian coal, had no alternative source of supply. Pélicier did not press the matter. But as news of the Vichy instruction leaked out it helped to harden local opinion. It had no other effect, though as late as 17 September, on the eve of the *ralliement,* Quièvrecourt was reporting to Vichy that arrangements were 'under way with Japan to export nickel and chrome under favourable conditions'. (This can hardly be explained unless as an echo of his conversations with Bayardelle.)

On 25 August Quièvrecourt issued an Order of the Day asserting that the 'unhealthy agitation' to be observed at Noumea was the work of a very small group of people subsidized by foreign powers and that by a happy chance he had acquired proof of its real aim – annexation of New Caledonia by Australia. New Caledonia, he continued, had been given to France by the Navy, whose duty it was to preserve it for her. He warned the crew against attempts to suborn them and appealed to their good sense in helping him to fulfil this task.[18] This document was soon circulating ashore, where generally it had no effect beyond strengthening popular hostility to Quièvrecourt and the Vichy Administration. Meanwhile Quièvrecourt was reporting to Darlan that the *Dumont d'Urville*'s presence had not brought about any change favourable to Vichy – rather the contrary. The Governor's attitude, he went on, was weak and equivocal. He had failed to annul pro-de Gaulle decisions of the General Council, although he had power to do so. He was visibly letting things slide.[19]

The Ministry of Colonies was now finally disenchanted with the Governor, and on 28 August a Vichy decree appointed Lieutenant-Colonel Denis Acting Governor in his place. On the same day the General Council, by now subject to strong pressure from the local 'movement' which was about to eclipse it, had met, together with Vergès and his two co-signatories of the June manifesto, and adopted a lengthy resolution demanding the Governor's departure, failing which it threatened to resign. Later in the day Pélicier told Bayardelle, Quièvrecourt and Denis that he was drafting a telegram asking to be recalled. But apparently Vichy had already acted to remove him. On 4 September Pélicier left Noumea for San Francisco and oblivion by the Pan American Airways flying-boat.

On 5 September Quièvrecourt reported to Vichy that the situation in New Caledonia was 'still difficult'. The Acting Governor's policy, continued Quièvrecourt, was cautious but slack and inadequate. He suggested that 'an eminent Catholic personality, if possible an admiral', should be sent out by

air to take over the government.[20] It was an intelligent suggestion, thoroughly in keeping with the spirit of the time. At Vichy there was no lack of shore-bound admirals, and it is quite conceivable that, had Quiévrecourt's proposal been accepted, one of them might have played in the South Pacific a role similar to that of Admiral Robert who later made things so difficult for the Americans in the Caribbean. He would certainly have been able to divide and confuse local opinion. Vichy, however, took no action, presumably because New Caledonia was not high enough on its scale of priorities at this stage. The record of a brief and low keyed discussion of New Caledonia in the Franco-German Armistice Commission a few days later seems to betray a sense of resignation about the possibility of New Caledonian adherence to the Allied cause. The Germans showed no special interest in the colony and Vichy was apparently leaving it to its men in the field to do what they could with their own resources.

To such an extent had local action become concentrated on the immediate aim of getting rid of Governor Pélicier that his departure was followed by a momentary détente at Noumea. The last thing the General Council wanted was any unpleasantness, and it relapsed into inactivity. The population at large was ready to wait and see how Lieutenant-Colonel Denis handled his new and astonishing appointment. The apparent calm was misleading. Noumea, under the vigilant surveillance of Commander de Quiévrecourt with his direct line to Vichy, was in the eye of a storm that was bound to break soon for, throughout the island, pressure was continuing to build up in favour of *ralliement* to de Gaulle.

On 7 September Noumea's two newspapers published an appeal for the creation of a de Gaulle committee signed by Pognon, who had now received an encouraging telegram from the General. (After this message had been held up for several days by the censor – Lieutenant Lehnebach was still at his post – news of its arrival had leaked out and Denis, irresolute as ever, had handed it over to Pognon on 6 September.) At last, direct contact had been established with de Gaulle, and the groundswell of Gaullist sentiment began to look more like a tidal wave that would sweep the Vichy partisans away. As Bayardelle put it: 'By mid-September the *ralliement* of the Colony had become inevitable. Its execution was now conditional only on the resistance that could be made by the Governor with the forces at his disposal.'[21]

There was the rub. The Gaullists were an overwhelming though still amorphous majority, but Governor Denis's forces were by no means inconsiderable. There was a body of pro-Vichy regular officers with a certain hold over the garrison; there was the gendarmerie; above all there was the *Dumont d'Urville* and her intransigent commander, Vichy's watchdog.

Noumea was on a narrow peninsula with land access by one road only, and a determined defender could make an attempted *coup de force* a very unpleasant business. If things reached a point where French blood was being spilled – and the possibility was not to be excluded; a few days later a Vichy sub-lieutenant fired on de Gaulle's *parlementaires* at Dakar – no one could foretell the consequences. The balance of force, however, was about to be decisively redressed.

Events in the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides had increasingly highlighted the anomalous situation prevailing in New Caledonia. At the moment of the French armistice, as we have seen, contemplation of the friendly relations between the two High Commissioners at the head of the Condominiums's bizarre administration, Sir Harry Luke and M. Pélicier, had given much pleasure in Whitehall, but in international relations such formal friendships are fragile, and this one was not to stand the test of time. Of more practical significance was the fact that the British and French Resident Commissioners at Vila, R.D. Blandy and Henri Sautot, were both men of goodwill and on excellent terms with each other. Sautot was to become the spearhead of Gaullism in the Pacific and to take over the administration of New Caledonia in an operation distinguished by his own courage and Blandy's clearheaded cooperation. But first Sautot set about achieving the *ralliement* to de Gaulle of the French element in the New Hebrides.[22]

At first sight no one was less like a spearhead than Henri Sautot, and no one could have had less apparent affinity with the austere and dedicated de Gaulle. He was small, fat and jovial, with an impressive ginger moustache which had earned him the nickname *'Pommes-paille'*. He was not a romantic or seemingly heroic figure. But even today it is not easy to think without emotion of his steadfastness in 1940. No one shared more instinctively and surely de Gaulle's *'certaine idée de la France'*. A Lorrainer, born in 1885, he had been French Resident Commissioner in the New Hebrides since 1933. Although he spoke no English he had a sense of the *entente cordiale* unusual in the Pacific islands and was liked and trusted by nearly everyone in the tiny but turbulent bi-national community of Vila. He was not given to deep thought and did not need it. He as an old fashioned, utterly sincere and devoted French patriot. When he heard de Gaulle's appeal he answered it unhesitatingly.

On 24 June, after consulting several leading members of the French community at Vila, Sautot called a meeting of all 400 French residents at which he proposed adherence to the movement launched by de Gaulle in his famous broadcast of 18 June. He received unanimous support, but it was agreed that before telegraphing to de Gaulle in London he would

await the decision of the French High Commissioner at Noumea who, his compatriots at Vila hoped, was about to announce the *ralliement* of New Caledonia to de Gaulle. (In fact, no one in authority in New Caledonia had so far given a thought to de Gaulle's Free French movement as such.) On learning of Sautot's action, Pélicier instructed him to proceed to Noumea for consultation by the Messageries Maritimes' inter-island steamer *Polynésien,* then at Vila. Sautot flatly declined either to go to Noumea or to allow the *Polynésien* to leave New Hebridean waters. He then organized a second meeting, this time gathering all the French residents of the New Hebrides, which was held on 20 July. Of the more than 600 people present only three – the French judge of the Joint Court, M. Doley, the clerk of the French Court and a French lawyer, M. Gomichon des Granges – declined to support the de Gaulle movement. (These three were later transported via Australia to Indo-China, whence des Granges later returned disillusioned.) On 22 July Sautot telegraphed to de Gaulle to inform him of the French population's 'unshakable commitment to fight with him until final victory'. A few days later de Gaulle replied warmly welcoming the adherence of the French population of the New Hebrides and confirming Sautot as Resident Commissioner.

In informing his superior officer, High Commissioner Pélicier, of the French Administration's adherence to de Gaulle, Sautot concluded: 'In the event that you do not consider it necessary to follow our example, I regret that I shall no longer regard myself as your subordinate'. On 26 July Pélicier replied that he had reported Sautot's action to Vichy and was now instructed to inform him of his dismissal from the French Colonial Service. Three days later he demanded the names of all French officials in the New Hebrides rallying to 'a seditious person'.

Blandy had, in all good faith, given Sautot to understand that officials who cooperated with the British would be protected from hostile action by Vichy and would suffer no loss of salary or pension. Such was the sense of earlier Colonial Office instructions. Blandy telegraphed to London for confirmation of these assurances and Sautot held a referendum of the 42 French officials in the New Hebrides, of whom 21 proved to be for de Gaulle, seven against and 14 'ambiguous'. The seven opponents included several senior officials and it appeared, as Blandy noted, that Doley and des Granges already had a following. Second thoughts were having an insidious effect. It was therefore with 'the greatest consternation' that Blandy received the Colonial Secretary's reply and Luke's instruction to transmit it to Sautot, for it was in effect a repudiation of earlier British assurances (on the grounds that 'the Administration had not come in as a whole') and thus, in Blandy's words, 'a death sentence to the de Gaulle

movement in the New Hebrides (and probably in New Caledonia also) and indeed to any possibility of future good relationship between British and French'. He protested vigorously to London, and on 15 August was authorized to assure Sautot of the British government's support for co-operating officials. In the meantime Sautot had been confirmed by de Gaulle as Resident Commissioner and asked to do what he could toward the *ralliement* of New Caledonia. For the moment he could not do much, since he had no secure means of communication with the neighbouring colony and the Gaullist movement there had not taken shape. But the first step to the *ralliement* of the French Pacific had now been taken. In cooperation with the Australian authorities the Condominium administration now undertook modest defence measures, including notably the development of a flying-boat base at Vila which was later to be extremely useful.

Until the early days of September, the only Australian and British officials to gain any real insight into the complicated New Caledonian situation were Ballard, who had arrived at Noumea on 23 August, and Blandy at Vila. The Australian and British governments were, until the eleventh hour, in disagreement as to the policy to adopt, and both were basing their attitudes on misunderstandings. Much hard work and hard talking by Ballard and Blandy, reinforced finally by Luke, was needed before the Australians were induced to yield to British urgings that they provide support for a *coup de force*. The British obstinately maintained their over-optimistic assessment that such a coup could be accomplished with the same ease as was counted on in French West Africa.

The evolution of Australian (and British) policy is amply documented.[23] Here it is necessary only to mesh the developing Anglo-Australian-Free French policy with the action taken at Vila and Noumea by the men charged with its execution.

On 9 August Luke, conscious of growing unrest at Noumea, suggested to the British Colonial Office that it would be well for de Gaulle to take some positive action, such as the dispatch of a French warship with officials to take over the administration. 'Otherwise the influence of the Pétain Government may prove too strong.' The Australian government vigorously opposed this suggestion – not because there were no means for carrying it out, but because it believed that the local disturbances were probably 'the work of a few extremists', and that the Governor desired 'to move in same direction as population'. It preferred to wait until Ballard arrived at Noumea and submitted a considered report.[24]

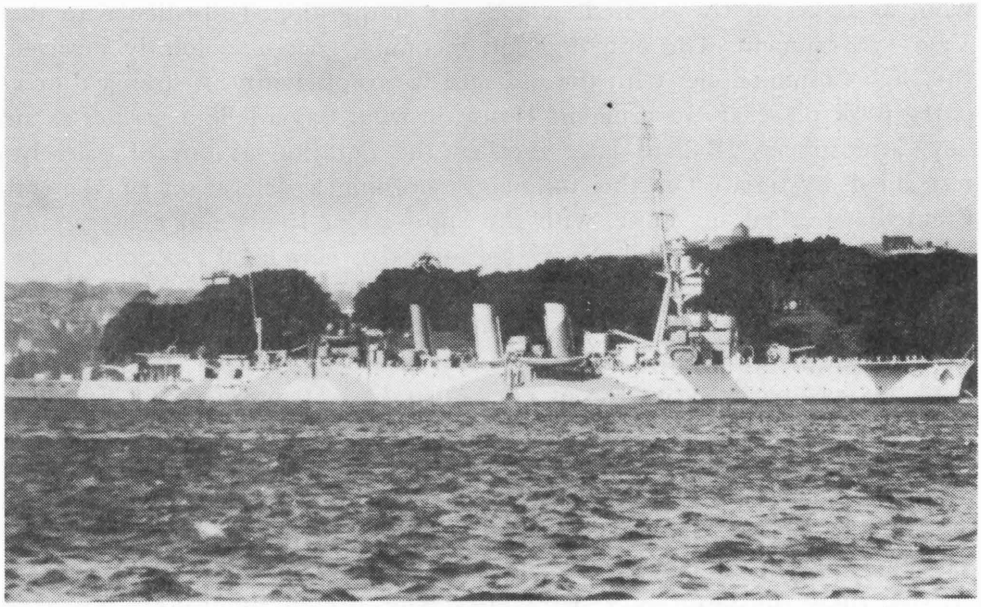
The United Kingdom government made no further move until the last days of August, and then at the instance of General de Gaulle himself, who had meanwhile received Pognon's letter, had become aware of the

disturbing presence at Noumea of the *Dumont d'Urville* and had decided that it was time to intervene. De Gaulle suggested specifically that Sautot might be conveyed from Vila to Noumea in a British warship to deal with the situation. The British War Cabinet, which considered de Gaulle's request on 29 and 30 August, was disposed to help in the way he had suggested. Since, however, New Caledonia was within the boundaries of the Australian naval station, it was necessary to invoke the cooperation of the Australian government and ask it to make available one of HMA ships for the operation. British ministers rightly foresaw that the Australian government was likely to be unwilling to make an overt breach with the Vichy government, but they were anxious to press forward.[25]

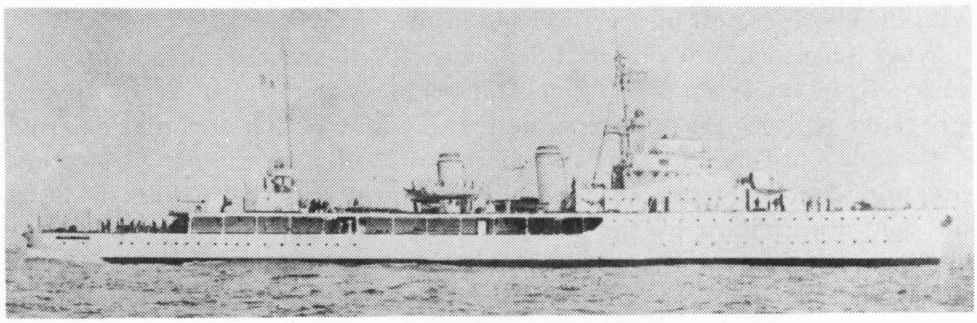
The joint operation against Dakar was in the final planning stage and there were high hopes in London of important secessions from the Vichy empire. These hopes were to prove unjustified, but the United Kingdom was right in assessing that direct action in New Caledonia would not in itself seriously increase the risk of conflict with Vichy. Moreover it was well informed concerning the *Dumont d'Urville*'s communications with Vichy and feared that drastic measures might shortly be taken to remove New Caledonia from the reach of British and Allied influence. On 30 August it suggested to the Australian government that HMAS *Adelaide*, understood to be the only ship in the area sufficiently powerful to overawe *Dumont d'Urville,* should go to Vila to embark Sautot and proceed thence to Noumea with instructions to bring about as quickly as possible the return of *Dumont d'Urville* to Papeete.[26]

Meanwhile the Australian government was instructing its representative at Noumea in a very different sense. The last thing the Commonwealth government desired, Ballard was told on 29 August, was a local revolution or the overthrow of the French Administration by extremists. It believed the best solution to be an administration owing nominal allegiance to Vichy but sympathetically inclined to the wishes of the local populace in regard to continuing the war effort. Ballard was instructed to try to induce the leaders of the local 'movement' to accept this view.[27]

This highly conservative instruction formed the basis for Ballard's discussion of the situation with Luke, who at noon on 30 August arrived at Noumea in the Western Pacific High Commission yacht *Viti* in response to an invitation which he had elicited from a somewhat reluctant Pélicier. The overt purpose of his visit was to talk with his fellow High Commissioner about measures for the maintenance of the New Hebridean economy, but of course he wished also to make the best assessment possible of the increasingly bewildering local situation in New Caledonia. On his arrival he found that Pélicier had that morning handed over his powers to Denis



HMAS *Adelaide* (RAN photograph).



Vichy French sloop *Dumont d'Urville* (reproduced by permission of Jane's *Annals*).

who, as Luke rightly assessed, would give unquestioned obedience to the Vichy government. The outgoing and incoming governors jointly received the High Commissioner with the outward forms of civility. A strange dinner party took place at Government House in what Bayardelle describes as an 'icy' atmosphere. (Ballard later recalled the occasion as one of scarcely-restrained hysteria.) On the following morning a delegation of General Councillors called on Luke, with the approval of Denis and Pélicier, and outlined vague plans to ask Vichy to authorize new local elections. Luke sailed away to Vila still unaware of his government's new forward policy and himself unconvinced that any urgent British action was necessary.

The British government's request for HMAS *Adelaide* to be made available was received coldly in the Australian Department of External Affairs, which on 2 December was proposing to return a negative reply. At this point, say the editors of the Australian documents, 'there appears to have been some disagreement about Australian policy'.[28] That is perhaps an understatement. In any event, options were kept open. On the same day the captain of HMAS *Adelaide* was instructed to proceed to Vila, arriving there on Saturday 7 September. The 'present intention', Showers was told, was that he should embark Sautot and convey him to Noumea, but the situation might alter before his arrival, and he was to get in touch with Blandy 'for latest information and instructions'.[29]

When Luke reached Vila on 3 September there awaited him a request for advice from the Australian Prime Minister, in terms which clearly invited a negative reply.[30] He at once suggested to Canberra that action be deferred if possible until he had time to report more fully on the New Caledonia situation. A copy of this warning telegram in the External Affairs file bears the significant minute by the Minister, John McEwen: 'See that P.M. Knows of this before he re-drafts cable I handed him'.[31] On the following day Luke added that he deprecated the conveying of Sautot to Noumea unless he went there on appointment by de Gaulle as Governor.

> I understand that de Gaulle has this appointment in mind when New Caledonia has openly and formally declared for him but it is in my opinion important that Sautot should not be taken to Noumea in a British man-of-war without credentials from de Gaulle.

On the same day he repeated to Canberra his reports to the Colonial Office on his visit to Noumea. They were not calculated to precipitate any urgent action.[32]

There was some further slight hesitation in Australia. Late on 4 September it was known in the Department of External Affairs that Menzies, who was in Melbourne, was still not satisfied with the draft message submitted to him and would take no decision until he knew more of Luke's

appreciation.[33] On 5 September, however, after consulting the Minister for the Navy, A.G. Cameron (his coalition partner and McEwen's Party leader), he called off the operation, though with the proviso that the original instructions to Showers might 'possibly' be reinstated in the event of Sautot's appointment by de Gaulle as Governor of New Caledonia.[34]

Meanwhile the United Kingdom High Commissioner at Canberra, Sir Geoffrey Whiskard, was asking the Dominions Office whether he was to press the Australians to adopt the forward policy advocated by the United Kingdom on 30 August or whether London acquiesced in Luke's apparent view that there was no hurry. He remarked that it was difficult to get or keep in touch with Ministers engaged in an election campaign (a general election was to be held on 21 September) and that the attitude of the Department of External Affairs was dominated by fear of affording Japan an excuse for intervention.[35] In fact, he was not called on to intervene.

The British government reacted sharply, by direct telegram to the Australian government. It had 'reliable' information (in fact, as it revealed a little later, intercepted Vichy telegrams) indicating that the idea of a nominally pro-Vichy but actually pro-British régime was quite impracticable; de Gaulle was ready to notify Sautot's appointment to him; there was no advantage in deferring a decision.[36]

The Department of External Affairs remained obstinate. On 8 September its Secretary, W.R. Hodgson, found the British insistance 'completely inexplicable'. 'At the moment', he telegraphed to Stirling, the External Affairs liaison officer in London, 'position in New Caledonia is satisfactory from our point of view, and to stage a de Gaulle revolution on lines indicated is just playing into hands of Japanese without benefiting Allied cause'.[37] Once again the Department's view – and, one must presume, that of its ministerial head, John McEwen – did not prevail. Within the next 24 hours Winston Churchill's personal assistant, Major Desmond Morton, had strongly reaffirmed the British view to Stirling;[38] Luke, now back at Suva, signified support for the proposal,[39] under the influence of new (and, as it proved, unduly optimistic) reports of local Gaullist plans, and the Commonwealth's own representative on the spot, Ballard, had sent a report very much in tune with British thinking. He feared that the hope of obtaining a complaisant Vichy governor could not be realized.[40] That was enough to tip the scale.

On 9 September the Australian government concurred in the plan to instal Sautot at Noumea. It had arranged for the governor-designate himself to travel to Noumea in SS *Norden,* a Norwegian tanker then at Vila, and made *Adelaide* available to escort him.[41] It is evident that this decision was taken personally by Menzies, in the light of the three reports just mentioned.

Now at last Free French headquarters and the British and Australian governments had agreed on a policy. The task of carrying it out was passed to a handful of men in the field.

3 *The* ralliement *and its aftermath*

CAPTAIN SHOWERS, SAILING *Adelaide* to Vila in the first week of September, was a real-life Horatio Hornblower precipitated into a hazardous detached mission by a policy decision taken in ignorance of the actual situation where he would be operating.

HMAS *Adelaide* was the oldest cruiser in the Australian Navy, built to a 1908 design and launched in 1922. She was the first of her class to be built as an oil burner, her archaic design having been modified somewhere along the line, with rather unsatisfactory results. Her main armament comprised six-inch guns which, as one of her wartime officers said later, were 'one stage removed from muzzle-loaders'. While more modern Australian cruisers were being employed in the Mediterranean and Atlantic she alone had been kept in home waters on convoy escort and trade protection duties. She was nothing to wonder at, but she was the only available warship capable of meeting the *Dumont d'Urville* on at least equal terms. Showers himself was of the first generation of graduates of the Royal Australian Naval College to reach the rank of Captain and perhaps of the last generation of senior officers trained and brought up to consider themselves as Australian and at the same time British. His admirably agile tactical sense was to be seen in his day to day handling of the difficult situation awaiting him at Noumea and particularly in his direct confontation with Commander de Quièvrecourt of the *Dumont d'Urville*, when he was able to prevail without any armed collision. Quièvrecourt, unwilling to have any dealing with French 'rebels', was obliged to recognize Showers as an *interlocuteur valable,* the qualified representative of British power, and Showers was equal to the occasion.

Arriving at Vila on 7 September, Showers found Blandy gloomily contemplating the prospects of the adventure into which he would probably have to launch his French friend and colleague, Henri Sautot.[1]

Blandy, coming to his Vila post from Noumea on 3 September, had been startled to learn from Canberra of the British government's wish to proceed at once with the operation to overturn the Vichy régime in

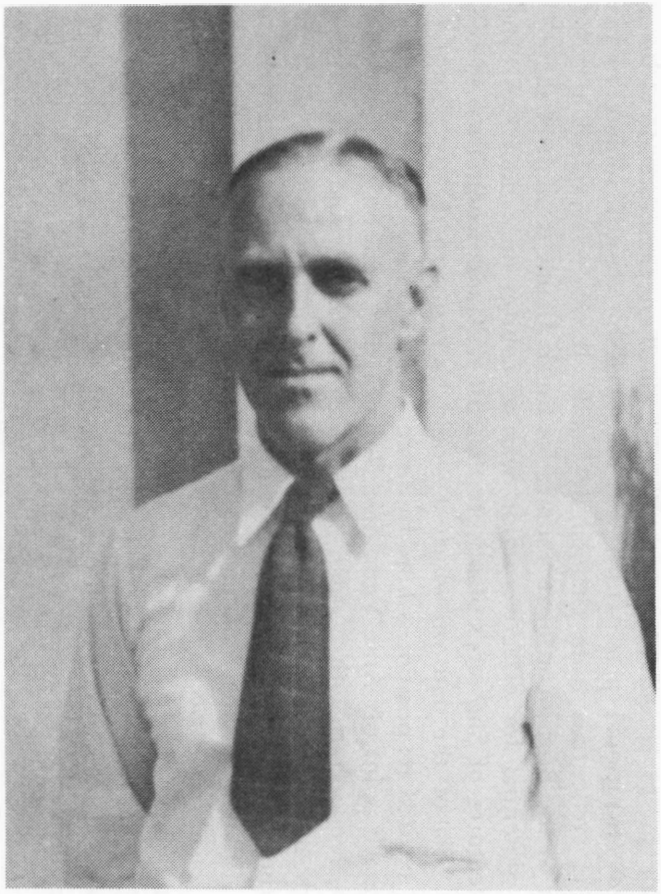
New Caledonia. He had received at the same time the text of the first version of Showers's instructions which, as he noted, 'showed a most faulty appreciation of the true position', since so far as could be seen the Vichy authorities were by no means in so weak a position as to be brushed aside by the peaceful confrontation envisaged in London and Canberra. Soon a ketch flying a Cross of Lorraine flag brought to Vila representatives of 'the de Gaulle committee' – which in fact existed only in name – with accounts of absurd plans to 'capture' the *Dumont d'Urville*. Blandy was sceptical, fearing that nothing had been carefully organized locally, but the call for support for the Gaullist movement had its effect on Luke and helped to strengthen London's determination.

At this stage Sautot himself knew nothing, since despite his many excellent qualities he was notoriously unable to keep a secret and Blandy determined to consult him only at the last moment. That moment came quickly enough. During the weekend of 7-8 September it became increasingly clear from the telegrams flowing in to the British Residency at Vila that neither the British government nor High Commissioner Luke were to be deterred by any practical balancing of tactical probabilities. The operation was to go ahead, subject only to the Australian government's concurrence. Sautot was accordingly informed and, as Blandy had expected, his courage and devotion proved as reliable as his indiscretion. He readily agreed to play the role allotted to him by de Gaulle, but he was as readily brought to agree that careful preparation on the spot was essential. Blandy telegraphed to London in this sense.

On Monday 9 September the Australian government informed Blandy that it agreed to the proposed operation, and had arranged for the Norwegian tanker *Norden* to go to Vila to fuel *Adelaide* and to convey Sautot to Noumea. Blandy at once telegraphed again to the Colonial Office and to Luke in Suva emphasizing the need to secure in advance the active cooperation of the New Caledonian Gaullists. Neither the London authorities nor the High Commissioner thought it necessary to take any action on his recommendation. Luke sent Blandy another message suggesting that the moral effect of *Adelaide*'s presence and the favourable feeling of the population were sufficient guarantees of success.

By now, while the problem of securing a safe bridgehead for Sautot at Noumea remained untouched, and Showers for his part was determined not to land Sautot there unless the latter's Gaullist supporters were in a position to send out a boat to pick him up, a new and compelling reason for quick action had emerged. On 9 September the officials at Vila learned that the Vichy sloop *Amiral Charner*, a sister ship of *Dumont d'Urville*, was believed to be on her way from Saigon to Noumea and would arrive in a

Captain H.A. Showers, RAN.



B.C. Ballard,
Australian Government Representative at Noumea.

week or so. In consultation with Blandy, Showers therefore drew up a detailed operational plan which was approved by Sautot subject to his receiving credentials from General de Gaulle. It was telegraphed in naval cypher to the British consul at Noumea for the de Gaulle committee there – whose potential for effective action was of course quite uncertain. The main features of Showers's plan were that the de Gaulle committee should notify Vila of the date on which it would be ready to receive Sautot – having secured its position ashore by force – and that it should send a boat to a named point off Anse Vata, near Noumea, at 9 a.m. on the appointed date to rendezvous with *Norden*, which with *Adelaide* would have entered through Boulari passage south of Noumea, keeping at maximum distance from the shore batteries. This 'de Gaulle boat' was to establish its identity in the following homely manner: when 300 metres from *Norden* it was to throw overboard two kerosene tins, and when 200 metres from the ship it would throw overboard two more tins and break out the Cross of Lorraine flag. Showers had decided on kerosene tins as marks of recognition since they were articles of current use in the islands, especially in motor launches, and would adequately reflect the sun.

On 13 September the de Gaulle committee signified its approval of Showers's plan, and two days later it set Thursday 19 September as the date for its execution. On the same day General de Gaulle confirmed his instructions for Sautot, while specifying that the operation was to be conducted as a *French* operation in form and manner, with merely contingent support from *Adelaide*, and that there must be no bloodshed. On the evening of 16 September Sautot embarked in *Norden* which sailed for Noumea accompanied by *Adelaide*.

As *Adelaide* and *Norden* were preparing to sail from Vila, the de Gaulle partisans at Noumea set about mobilizing the local support needed for a *coup de force*. Who were these Gaullist leaders? General de Gaulle's accredited representative was Raymond Pognon, who only a few days before had, with the General's approval, set on foot measures to form a real de Gaulle committee. But it was not yet a reality. For the moment, the notary Vergès was equally prominent. Having seen that the Gaullist bandwagon was now beginning to roll, he characteristically determined to occupy the driving seat. No one was in a mood to stop him, and a group of men of goodwill including Georges Dubois, Edouard Moulédous, and others who would not normally have recognized Vergès as a leader, cooperated with him for the immediate good of the cause. In all fairness to Vergès it must be said that his finest hour had now struck and that all that week his manic energy was deployed to good effect. The first plan was for a group of picked men to kidnap Acting Governor Denis during the night of 18-19 September,

leaving a vacuum which could be filled promptly by Sautot when he arrived at Noumea on Thursday morning 19 September. Inevitably, since nearly a hundred people were privy to the secret, it did not remain secret long. The town was full of rumours of Sautot's imminent arrival. Colonel Denis, in constant consultation with the commander of the *Dumont d'Urville*, began to take steps to meet the trouble that was obviously brewing. He drew up a black list of unreliable elements and prepared to impose a state of siege. In mid-week, therefore, the conspirators decided to organize a mass demonstration in Noumea designed to force the resignation of the irresolute Colonel. For this the support of the bush was essential. There was no longer any question of secrecy. The word was spread throughout the up-country villages on the night of 17-18 September. Though the scepticism of officials in Vila had been justified, Gaullist feeling in the interior had by now reached such a pitch that no detailed planning was necessary: only a spark was needed for it to take fire. A contemporary narrative by Georges Baudoux reflects the feverish atmosphere of the ensuing 24 hours. He was at Houaïlou on the east coast.

> All day Wednesday I hasten to & fro. I telephone the Public Works drivers to make sure that they will take as many men as possible on their trucks. One of them asks, 'Who'll pay for the petrol?' I reply, 'Fill up, de Gaulle will pay!' The bushmen begin to move off, ill-shaven men with huge moustaches. They are off to Noumea to kick out Denis and install Sautot. I see them passing on the road with their rifles and full cartridge pouches. At 7.30 p.m. all my men are in readiness. Happily we go off to meet our fate. We arrive at La Foa [on the main west coast road to Noumea] at 11 o'clock. A vast crowd. There are bushmen from every corner of the east & west coasts. All are men of fierce aspect, dressed in dungarees, unbuttoned coats, collarless shirts, big boots and wide-brimmed felt hats, crowns pinched in front. These are the bushmen – resolute men, bold men, real Frenchmen, patriots. The land is awake and stirring. Drink heartens them further. Everyone is talking at once in the overcrowded bar. You can hear nothing. I say to myself that the game will be won by the strength of the bush.[2]

All night hundreds of bushmen streamed toward Noumea. Assembling in the small hours of Thursday 19 September at Paita, 30 kilometres from the capital, they learned that Denis had ordered the arrest of their leaders and had set up a roadblock five kilometres outside Noumea. Vergès, showing on this occasion remarkable commen sense, suggested that as a first step they should leave their weapons behind and seek to pass the roadblock unarmed by *en masse*. The leaders would remain for the moment at Paita to avoid being arrested individually. It was so decided, and the gambit was successful. Baudoux and his friends arrived at the head of a convoy of 100 trucks and cars at the roadblock, where they found some 20 gendarmes backed by troops. They were searched but allowed to proceed. By 8 a.m. the

bushmen were swelling a cheerful but determined crowd in the centre of Noumea, where they were met by Pognon and Paladini, who had somehow escaped arrest. *Adelaide* and *Norden* were already reported off Noumea.

The situation was still in the balance. The Vichy authorities had not been neutralized. The roadblock was still in position at the fifth kilometre post. It was clearly unsafe for Sautot to come ashore. But the next two hours were decisive. It is impossible to sort out the exact sequence of events but it seems that a rumour that Vergès and other leaders had been held up at the fifth kilometre resulted in a mass exodus from Noumea to the roadblock, where Pognon (who was on Denis's black list) was arrested by its commander, Lieutenant Perraud. This was too much. Surrounded by a menacing crowd, Perraud sent a message to the Governor, who ordered the roadblock to be dismantled. Vergès and the leaders of the popular movement proceeded to Noumea and confronted Colonel Denis in his office, insisting that he either rally to General de Gaulle or resign. Finally Denis agreed that Sautot could come ashore. It was now nearly 11 o'clock. *Adelaide* was still standing by.

Showers had been asked through the British consul to arrive if possible by 7 a.m. on 19 September and, although a squall had obscured the leading marks, he was able to enter Boulari passage in company with *Norden* at 6.15. As the de Gaulle boat was not in sight, he closed Noumea harbour and was hailed at 7.30 by a boat which was recognized as belonging to *Dumont d'Urville*. (He subsequently learned that the shore batteries had already been given orders, which they did not carry out, to open fire on *Adelaide*.) Having closed *Norden* to make sure that she was not boarded by the *Dumont d'Urville* party, he approached the inner harbour more closely and sighted *Dumont d'Urville* moored stern to the wharf with guns trained fore and aft. The shore signal station, puzzlingly, flew the de Gaulle ensign but at the same time displayed the signal 'You must not enter harbour'.

Under the existing plan *Norden* was to sail at 9.10 a.m., but Showers decided to delay her departure until the arrival of a boat which had been sighted coming from the shore. It proved to bring a message from the de Gaulle committee that the Vichy element was still in control of the port, the town and the approach road. Showers decided to stay at Noumea until 4 p.m. in case the situation should change, but since it was desirable to delay *Norden* no longer, he transhipped Sautot to *Adelaide* at 11 a.m. Considerations of discretion were now secondary, and indeed one of Sautot's prized possessions from that time was a photograph of himself standing on *Adelaide*'s deck wearing a British-type tin hat. *Norden* proceeded to sea, and almost at once a launch approached from Noumea wearing the Cross of Lorraine and giving the crude recognition signal. By this time, as we know,

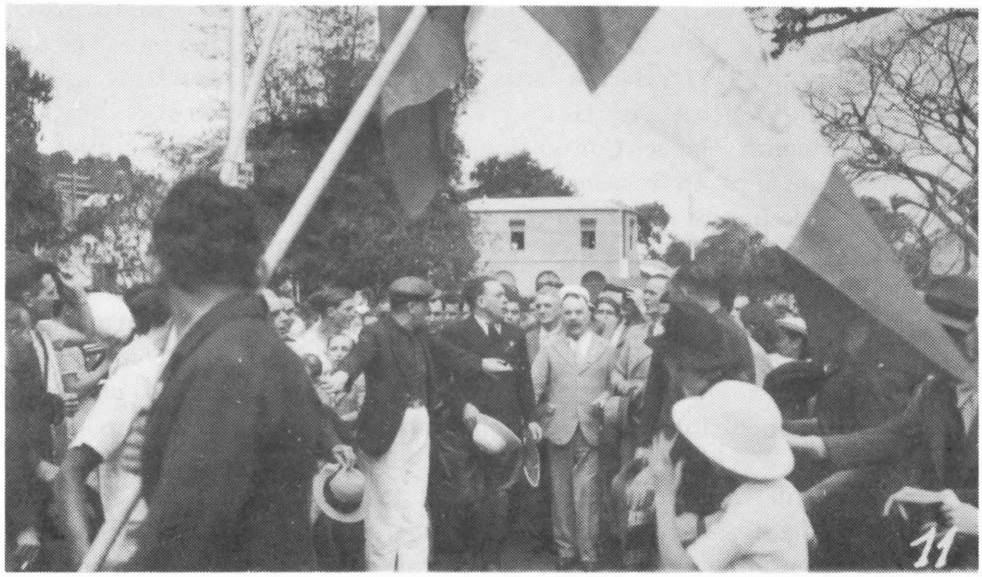
Governor Denis had yielded to the force which the Gaullists had finally brought to bear upon him. Sautot transferred to the de Gaulle committee launch from which he landed at the main quay and proceeded on foot through the town to Government House accompainied by a large and enthusiastic crowd singing the Marseillaise. For the remainder of the day and the following night *Adelaide* continued to patrol off the harbour entrance 'with the object of inspiring confidence ashore, exercising restraint on *Dumont d'Urville* and maintaining mobility if *Amiral Charner* arrived'.

Ashore, all was confusion, as Ballard and Johnson told Showers when they visited *Adelaide* on 19 September. The mass of the population was clearly with Sautot, who peacefully superseded Denis at 3 p.m., but the town was full of armed bushmen who were feeling their oats after breaking the state of siege, and the possibility of unfortunate incidents seemed very great. Fortunately nothing untoward happened, partly no doubt as a result of the prudent restraint displayed by the captain of the *Dumont d'Urville* who, with his force intact and well-disciplined, kept it out of harm's way.

The night having passed quietly, Showers found an anchorage near Ile Nou from which he could keep *Dumont d'Urville* under observation and despatch landing parties if necessary. During the morning of 20 September he received a request from Sautot that *Adelaide* remain at Noumea for a further 48 hours in view of *Dumont d'Urville's* continued presence. On the following morning he received a letter from Quiêvrecourt protesting against his presence in French territorial waters, which was asserted to be a violation of the Thirteenth Hague Convention of 1907 (regulating the duties of belligerent warships in relation to neutral countries). Showers at once replied that the provisions of the Hague Convention were not applicable and declined to receive the protest, which Quiêvrecourt then reaffirmed, as he was bound to do.

Showers was now entering on the most delicate phase of his mission. In the small hours of 21 September the Australian Naval Board instructed him to inform *Dumont d'Urville* that she could not be allowed to influence the free decision of the New Caledonian inhabitants; that if she attempted to use force, it would be answered by force, but that she would be accorded facilities for fuel and supplies if she were to proceed to Indo-China. At 8.20 a.m. Ballard and Johnson came on board *Adelaide* and told Showers that Sautot himself had as yet no plan for dealing with the *Dumont d'Urville*. He accordingly arranged to see the new Governor ashore, and submitted for his approval a draft letter to Quiêvrecourt offering the latter provisions and free passage provided he proceeded to sea that day en route for Indo-China. Sautot agreed and sent the letter, but Quiêvrecourt refused to receive it. Showers himself, however, took advantage of a visit by an officer from

Gaullist demonstration, 19 September 1940.



Governor Sautot flanked by members of de Gaulle committee, 19 September 1940.

the *Dumont d'Urville* bearing one of Quièvrecourt's protests to inform him that the latter would receive a friendly welcome if he cared to call on him on the following morning; that force would not be used except in reply to force; and that under certain conditions an attempt would be made to arrange for the supply of provisions to *Dumont d'Urville.* The offer to call was accepted and Showers, having now found an apparent basis for discussion with Quièvrecourt and having received a signal indicating that *Amiral Charner* could not arrive for another week, shifted berth to the outer harbour north of Ile Nou, a position threatening *Dumont d'Urville* less directly. Quièvrecourt, having called on Showers and heard his conditions at first hand, moved the *Dumont d'Urville* to an anchorage in the inner harbour out of direct touch with the shore. From this point it seemed clear that Quièvrecourt's main concern was to obtain safe conduct from New Caledonia for the remaining Vichy adherents and that he had practically abandoned any idea of forcible intervention. On 22 September he reported Showers's conditions to Vichy adding that in his opinion any incident would result in an attack by *Adelaide* on *Dumont d'Urville.* He therefore proposed to try to gain time to 'arrange the situation of the career officers', but requested urgent instructions. In another signal sent next morning he reported his impression that even in the event of successful Vichy intervention 'Great Britain' would be prepared to retake by force any colony seeking to rally to de Gaulle. It would accordingly be necessary to deploy strong Vichy forces. He pointed out that he himself was short of provisions.

Ashore, however, the situation was still precarious. Sautot's first thought had been to intern the dissidents temporarily on board the Messageries Maritimes liner *Pierre Loti*, which was immobilized at Noumea with engine trouble. But the Vichy adherents on board the *Pierre Loti* were not effectively prevented from communicating with the shore, and during the weekend of 21-22 September a plot was hatched, apparently under the leadership of Denis's former deputy Captain Michel whom Sautot had rashly retained as acting O.C. troops, to release Denis from internment outside Noumea and kidnap Sautot himself. Inevitably news of this project leaked out, the counter-revolution was easily suppressed and Captain Michel was sent to join his friends on board the *Pierre Loti.* But careful reporting of events by Showers and Ballard had caused apprehensions in Canberra, still preoccupied with the supposedly impending arrival at Noumea of *Amiral Charner.* On Monday 23 September Ballard was instructed that the situation 'appeared to be deteriorating and required prompt measures to eliminate those factors which were jeopardizing the stability of the colony and its whole-hearted adhesion to Free France'. He was instructed, therefore,

to suggest to Sautot that the latter should ask Showers for protection, which would immediately be accorded, against any attempt to interfere with the internal control of New Caledonia and against any vessel hostile to Free France.[3] This well-meant instruction did not seem to Ballard and Showers to be helpful. Such a guarantee of protection, if it became publicly known, as it infallibly would, would jeopardize Showers's negotiations with Quièvrecourt, then at a promising stage. Showers had already been asked by the Naval Board to report whether there were prospects of Sautot's gaining control within the next few days and whether the use of force against *Dumont d'Urville* would resolve the situation. He replied, in a signal drafted jointly by himself and Ballard, that the prospects were most hopeful. It was essential, he submitted, to prevent the arrival of *Amiral Charner,* and the situation would not be stable until *Dumont d'Urville* left, but he considered the use of force inadvisable because of the great risk of nullifying the progress he had already made. Later on the same day he was able to report further progress. Quièvrecourt had sent him another letter, which he rightly interpreted as encouraging, seeking renewed reassurances that his ship would be provisioned if it left New Caledonian waters, and the British consul had been able to give Quièvrecourt the guarantees he had sought that the persons and property of dissenting military personnel would be protected. Accordingly he and Ballard decided against any excess of zeal in executing Canberra's new instructions to issue a virtual ultimatum to Quièvrecourt. Though not privy to the latter's exchanges with Vichy and Sigon, they assessed correctly that he was sufficiently conscious of the consequences of any attempt to use force.

On the morning of 24 September the pattern carefully built up by Showers, Ballard and Johnson over the past five days fell neatly into shape. Showers received the following letter from Quièvrecourt:

> I thank you for the measures which you have taken on behalf of the military personnel of the colony who have remained loyal.
>
> I request you to be good enough to assure me that none of the officers will be interned or left at Noumea against his will and that the *Pierre Loti* will sail for Saigon with all the personnel to be repatriated. If I am granted this assurance, I consider that the presence of my ship at Noumea is no longer necessary and I will sail as soon as I have been able to embark the 18 days stores which are vital to me to reach Indo-China without a stop. . .
>
> I will inform you later as to the time of my sailing. . .

Quièvrecourt and Showers later exchanged final calls, the former declaring himself satisfied with the assurances he had received and confirming that he would sail for Saigon on receiving his provisions. As soon as this could be arranged – which, because a local holiday was being celebrated on 24

September with more than usual gusto, was not until the afternoon of 25 September – *Dumont d'Urville* put to sea, 'in a most seamanlike manner', noted Showers. Before she left, Showers communicated to Quièvrecourt a warning that no French ship arriving in New Caledonian waters could be allowed to influence the free decision of the inhabitants and that the British naval authorities were prepared to use force if necessary to ensure the protection from sea attack of General de Gaulle's régime in New Caledonia.

The Gordian knot was now unloosed, and the sword had not been drawn between those who had so lately been allies. *Amiral Charner* never reached Noumea. On 27 September the British authorities passed on to Canberra a report that as a result of messages from Quièvrecourt both the Vichy sloops had been ordered back to Saigon. It was the effective end of any Vichy attempt to maintain control of the French Pacific possessions, but despite the *Dumont d'Urville*'s departure Showers's mission was not over. Ashore the situation again threatened to disintegrate. On the morning of Thursday 26 September, giddy with success, a faction of the de Gaulle committee led by Vergès took it upon themselves to arrest Secretary-General Bayardelle and embark him forcibly in the *Pierre Loti*. The Commissioner of Police at once reported this high-handed action to Governor Sautot, protesting that at this rate he would soon be unable to maintain order. At that moment Sautot was receiving Showers, Ballard and Johnson, who had now been instructed firmly to convey to him without further delay assurances of British support in the event of any attack on New Caledonia. They took the opportunity to protest against Vergès's action: obviously if some members of the de Gaulle committee were going to behave like a revolutionary Committee of Public Safety the Showers-Quièvrecourt agreement would be undermined with upredictable consequences. Sautot, for his part, felt strongly that authority and responsibility to keep order now belonged to him alone, and he ordered Bayardelle's release. Following further consultation with Ballard and Johnston, Showers decided that the only way to curb further excesses by the committee members was for him to inform the committee of the assurances exchanged between himself and the captain of the *Dumont d'Urville* which had brought about the ship's departure. On 27 September he sought and was readily granted Sautot's permission to do this. While he was with the Governor, Bayardelle presented himself and made a lengthy statement. In Showers's own words:

> He took an hour and a half to say the he was loyal to de Gaulle and desired to serve the cause anywhere but in New Caledonia where his life was in danger – a fact which necessitated his asking for my protection from the mob which was

> ruling the place. He then stood up, thumbed the table, and addressing the Governor said in English 'And I tell you now, in two months' time either a Britisher will be sitting in that chair or there will be revolution'.

At 3.30 p.m. on what must have seemed to Showers a very long day he arrived at Government House to meet the de Gaulle committee. The committee itself appeared 10 minutes later, having with difficulty been diverted from plans for further arrests. In a carefully prepared statement made in the Governor's presence, Showers explained to them that his original mission had been to provide contingent support only for the movement to establish a Free French régime in New Caledonia. Once that régime had been set up, he had concluded with Quièvrecourt a 'gentlemen's agreement' containing adequate assurances against the use of force by the latter. He proceeded to explain in detail the mutual assurances leading to the peaceful departure of the *Dumont d'Urville* for Saigon. Showers concluded:

> And now, gentlemen, Captain de Quièvrecourt having shown by his departure from New Caledonia his intention to honourably observe the assurances that he gave to me, I have the honour to request you to use all your influence towards facilitating the performance by your Governor and Administration of the assurances given to the Captain of the *Dumont d'Urville*, (which, by virtue of my intervention, involve the honour of the British Empire and that of the British Consul at Noumea). In this connexion you can be of great assistance by using your best endeavours towards restoring harmony among all sections of the community, and especially by dissuading your followers from all provocative or retaliatory speech or action.
>
> Finally, gentlemen, I have very great pleasure in placing before you a copy of Captain de Quièvrecourt's final letter to Captain Michel, the Senior Military Officer in the S.S. *Pierre Loti*. This copy was forwarded to me by Captain de Quièvrecourt, and leaves no shadow of doubt in my mind that he intends to honourably fulfil all his assurances.

In reply Vergès gave firm assurances of the de Gaulle committee's complete cooperation. For the time being, they were carried out. The *Pierre Loti* duly repatriated the dissidents and on 4 October, when it was clear that no Vichy ships were on the way to New Caledonia, *Adelaide* sailed from Noumea. It now remained for Sautot to consolidate the Free French authority in the colony and organize economic and defence co-operation with Australia.

The new Free French Governor had little enough to work with, and at every point Australian cooperation and assistance were essential. His assets were the production flowing from the nickel smelter at Doniambo and the unorganized goodwill of the population at large. The bishop and the Roman Catholic clergy, though generally devoid of enthusiasm for the Free French movement, remained honourably neutral. On the negative side of the balance

sheet were a complete lack of regular infantry and artillery officers; a shortage of reliable civil officials and even of gendarmes, the majority of whom had opted for repatriation; the illwill of certain business firms; and the resentment nurtured on the one hand by some members of the General Council and on the other by a faction of the de Gaulle committee led by Vergès, who had hoped to seize power for themselves. And always there was Bayardelle, who had now decided to be a Free Frenchman and continued in office as Secretary-General of the colony. (Ballard remarked on 30 September that he had never been able to get from the former régime a clear assessment of the colony's credit needs 'probably owing to the Secretary-General's intrigues'.)[4]

Sautot now set about cobbling together a civil and military administration. Georges Dubois, who was a reserve captain, was mobilized as temporary commander of the troops, to be replaced a little later by the regular Major Félix Broche, who had helped to rally Tahiti to Free France. A retired surveyor, Nicolas Ratzel, became Sautot's personal assistant and contributed valuable local knowledge. Vice-consul Frank Puaux, having walked out of the Vichy Consulate-General at Sydney, came to Noumea and was appointed director of economic affairs in succession to Jan Bourgeau, who himself replaced Bayardelle when the latter finally left for London in March 1941. With de Gaulle's concurrence Sautot dissolved the General Council, which had visibly outlived its usefulness, and appointed a wartime advisory council headed by Pierre Bergès. The Vergès faction of the de Gaulle committee continued to intrigue but was firmly put in its place by the end of 1940. Rapadzi was invaluable as director of the nickel industry though, as he ruefully recalled recently, he was occasionally daunted by Sautot's habit of summarily interning needed but pro-Vichy technicians on his staff.[5]

Following the *ralliement* the Australian government began to study ways and means of carrying out the responsibility which it had accepted to extend economic aid and cooperation to New Caledonia in accordance with the Churchill-de Gaulle agreement of August 1940.[6] Inevitably there were frictions, delays and difficulties in the first weeks, and ill-disposed elements remaining at Noumea were quick to magnify them. There was a good deal of grumbling, not all of it unjustified, to the effect that Australia was not coming quickly enough to the colony's aid. In November Ballard, who had been reporting on the need to dispose of New Caledonia's production of coffee, canned meat, hides and above all chrome ore, was called to Australia for consultations, and an interdepartmental committee studied the question of implementing the government's decision. In mid-December it submitted comprehensive recommendations to Ministers.[7]

Meanwhile the Australian Navy was becoming increasingly perturbed about the New Caledonian situation. It feared that there was an imminent threat of a Japanese takeover or a Vichy counter-coup, and that the stability of Sautot's régime was threatened by a 'group of mercenary opportunists' prepared to sell out to the Japanese. On 30 December the elderly but forceful Minister for the Navy, W.M. Hughes, submitted to the War Cabinet an agendum dramatically entitled 'New Caledonia – importance of taking immediate action to prevent it falling into Japanese hands'. He proposed a wide range of economic measures to strengthen New Caledonia and asserted that if they were not taken immediately the colony was likely to be 'acquired' by the Japanese 'within the next three months'. He suggested that any proposal to send troops abroad from New Caledonia should be discouraged and if possible additional Free French troops should be brought there to strengthen local defences.[8]

This unilateral War Cabinet submission was a misguided exercise. The Silent Service does not appear to have consulted any other authority, and it admitted that the items of 'intelligence' on which its apprehensions were based might 'appear of small importance in themselves'. It was a textbook example of the need to handle very carefully the scraps of gossip and rumour that have always made up so much of the raw material of what is called 'intelligence'. On learning of Hughes's submission the Minister for External Affairs, now Sir Frederick Stewart, pointed out to the Prime Minister that the Australian, British and New Zealand governments had already agreed in principle to assist the dispatch to the Middle East of a force from the French Pacific territories and that if Australia now opposed this action, to which the New Caledonians attached importance, a most unfavourable impression would be created and much harm would be done to the Free French movement. As for the economic measures recommended by Hughes, these were already being considered by the competent authorities, who had made an interim report to Ministers.[9]

The War Cabinet, meeting on 7 January 1941, declined to get more excited than was necessary. It approved the grant of financial assistance to the Free French forces in the Pacific but referred to the Chiefs of Staff the question of whether in their opinion the proposed expeditionary force should be retained in New Caledonia.[10] The Chiefs recommended that:

(a) the first action should be to determine the exact state of defence arrangements already in being in New Caledonia, and to make plans to cooperate with local defence forces;

(b) for this purpose, de Gaulle should be asked to issue instructions to Sautot to enter into staff conversations immediately with Australian defence authorities;

(c) pending the outcome of conversations and consideration of resultant report, no large contingents should sail from New Caledonia for service overseas with the exception of the first contingent of 600 men who were practically ready for embarkation.

The War Cabinet so approved on 20 January. De Gaulle, approached through the United Kingdom government, readily agreed to staff conversations between Australia and New Caledonia and to the retention in the colony of troops other than the first contingent of New Caledonians and Tahitians forming the First Pacific Battalion.[11]

An Australian military mission headed by Lieutenant Colonel R.E. Fanning went to New Caledonia in February and spent several weeks discussing joint defence measures with the local authorities. It recommended the establishment in New Caledonia of an advanced operational air base, including flying-boat and land plane facilities, which 'would contribute materially to the defence of Australia in the event of war with Japan'; the supply of two six-inch coast defence guns for Noumea with associated searchlights; and the provision of arms, ammunition and equipment for the local forces.

On 17 April the mission's recommendations, endorsed by the Defence Committee, were considered by the War Cabinet.[12] It was a unique occasion in that a French officer was present. By previous agreement Sautot had sent Captain Dubois to Australia to represent him at discussions resulting from the mission's talks. Dubois was instructed to maintain the guiding principles that New Caledonia would not be held directly responsible for the cost of defence measures undertaken in the common interest, and that no impression was to be given that French sovereignty was being compromised by an Australian military control.[13]

There were still lingering doubts in some Australian quarters as to the stability of the Free French régime in New Caledonia, and Dubois found himself being closely questioned on the local situation. With Ballard, who had gone with him to Australia, he was able to reply firmly and convincingly. As he put it in his report to Sautot, he understood from Ballard that the Minister for Air had asked for a visit by a French expert on the New Caledonian political and military situation. The purposes of the consultation as seen by the Australians had not been spelled out to him, but he assessed them as being essentially the following, reflected in the questions put to him:

(1) to know the exact political situation, the Australian authorities being fearful of major disaffection or even a political change in favour of Vichy;

(2) to secure agreement on the need for the immediate installation in New Caledonia of an advanced air base integrated into a general reconnaissance system for the defence of Australia and the neighbouring islands *and under the orders of the RAAF*;

(3) to make sure there would be no hostile reaction by public opinion in New Caledonia to the establishment of this base with permanent RAAF personnel;

(4) to make sure that forces adequate for effective defence existed and would be maintained in New Caledonia.

Dubois was right. John McEwen, now Minister for Air, was keenly interested in integrating New Caledonia into the regional air defence system and anxious to be sure that a firm infrastructure existed for this effort. In a series of meetings with Ministers (including McEwen) and officials, and before the War Cabinet itself, Ballard and Dubois maintained in unison that the political situation had definitely stabilized in favour of Free France, despite superficial tremors provoked by a minority of disaffected people who lacked cohesion, arms and, as Dubois said, *dynamisme*. Dubois noted that Hughes, reflecting naval trepidations, hectored him with supplementary questions. How many troops were under arms? What was the European population? How many natives? Were the troops in barracks reliable? Was he *sure* the dissident minority was not armed? (He was.) The Frenchman was steadfast and War Cabinet was impressed. It recorded its agreement with the view that the Free French régime was 'fully established and stable' in New Caledonia. Ministers, led by McEwen and the Minister for the Army (P.C. Spender) readily agreed with Ballard and Dubois that political stability must be underpinned by a sound economic situation. Economically, said Spender, New Caledonia should be regarded 'as part of Australia'. War Cabinet indeed agreed formally, after hearing from Ballard of certain petty and vexatious export licence difficulties, that 'New Caledonia should be treated on the same basis as an Australian State or Territory insofar as purchases from Australia are concerned, and that export licences should be granted in accordance with this principle'.

Ballard now reviewed – '*magistralement*', says Dubois – problems of ensuring markets for New Caledonian exports. War Cabinet could not take immediate decisions on all of them, but recorded the opinion that:

> from a political point of view it was important that outstanding economic questions should be immediately dealt with and finalised, otherwise considerable harm might be done to the cause of the Free French in New Caledonia. It was agreed, in principle, that an assurance be given that the economic questions that were outstanding between the Commonwealth and New Caledonian Governments would be sympathetically considered and settled without delay.

On specific defence measures, War Cabinet agreed to the establishment of the Air Advanced Operation Base (AOB), to the establishment of the coast defence battery at Noumea, the conveyance to the Middle East in an Australian convoy of the French expeditionary force's first contingent, and the provision, within the limits of available resources, of arms and equipment (including communications and transport) for local defence (about 1,200 men under arms) at sufficient strength to deter anything less than a major attack on New Caledonia. Care was taken to reserve de Gaulle's position as leader of the Free French by specifying that official confirmation of the air base arrangement would be obtained from the Governor of New Caledonia, acting with de Gaulle's concurrence, and that expenditure on approved defence measures would not be charged directly to New Caledonia but would be borne in the first instance by Australia, subject to eventual financial settlement between the Free French movement and the governments of the British empire.[14] (The Australian government was already aware from London that these were the basic principles which de Gaulle wished to be applied, but it did not yet have details of a new financial agreement which had been concluded between the United Kingdom and de Gaulle.)

All this was mutually satisfactory, so far as anything could be satisfactory against the alarming background of the Allies' poverty-stricken situation in April 1941, and Dubois recorded his general impressions for Sautot as follows:

> (1) Australia thinks only of making war; it is not interested and has never been interested in mortgaging New Caledonia's future:
> (2) Australia is disposed to examine New Caledonia's economic problems as sympathetically as possible.[15]

Now defence and economic cooperation between Australia and New Caledonia seemed to have placed on a sound footing. On 20 May Sautot notified Ballard of his agreement to the War Cabinet's decisions, which he had submitted for de Gaulle's personal approval. The flying-boat base was established on the Ile Nou, with a small permanent RAAF detachment, and Noumea became a link in the reconnaissance line maintained by No. 11 squadron, RAAF, from Port Moresby through Honiara (British Solomon Islands) and Vila to Sydney. Two six-inch coast defence guns were obtained from New Zealand and installed on Ouen Toro hill at Noumea, a small Australian artillery detachment remaining to train local troops in their use. Shipping and other facilities were provided for the French Pacific Battalion which, augmented by its Tahiti component, sailed from Noumea for Sydney on 5 May. Sent initially to Syria, where it arrived too late to take part in the unhappy campaign made necessary by Vichy's pro-German policy in the Middle East, it subsequently performed excellent service in

North Africa (notably at the battle of Bir Hakeim in Libya) and in the Mediterrranean campaign for the liberation of France.

All this added up to action on a very small scale. The moral effect of these defence measures far exceeded their material significance. But of lasting importance was the work now set in hand by the RAAF to survey and begin the construction of three landing fields, for which sites were selected at Tontouta, 53 kilometres from Noumea on the west coast, at Plaine des Gaiacs, 200 kilometres further north, and at Koumac near the northern tip of the island. All three were to play a useful part in the first year of the Pacific war.

New Caledonia's economic outlook was now improving as a result not only of Australian assistance but of a rising demand for its nickel matte and chrome ore which were of direct importance to the growing American rearmament programme. Whereas in 1940 the demand for these commodities had been limited (except, of course, in Japan), the United States was now ready to buy as much as it could get, and plans were made accordingly to increase production of nickel matte. Ballard had reported, before his visit to Australia in April, that the New Caledonia authorities and the SLN were showing signs of dissatisfaction with existing arrangements whereby Australia assumed responsibility for the purchase on its own account, and subsequent resale, of the colony's nickel, undertaking in return to provide for essential import requirements. That had been all very well when nickel was hard to market, but now when it was an increasingly scarce commodity it was understandably thought equitable that New Caledonia should benefit directly from the valuable dollar exchange accruing from nickel sales. This question of the mechanism of marketing nickel did not figure in the War Cabinet discussion of 17 April. Although, as we shall see, it was causing a certain amount of anxiety at Free French headquarters, that was not known in Canberra where the problem was not regarded as difficult and was already being effectively resolved on a lower level.[16]

This year of 1941 presents, indeed, a recurrent picture of matters which seemed simple in the Pacific but became complicated in the overheated atmosphere of General de Gaulle's headquarters. In June de Gaulle approved by telegram from Cairo the defence arrangements made by Sautot with Australia, but in doing so imposed conditions reflecting his chronic mistrust of British (and Australian) motives. The employment of Australian aircraft in New Caledonia was to be subject to the approval of the local French commanding officer 'since he is concerned with the island's defence'; the number of Australian liaison officers was to be limited, and they were to have no control over the organization of the French forces or the distribution of Australian equipment.[17] No serious attempt was ever made to enforce the

absurd provision about the use of aircraft. (For some time to come the only aircraft involved would be RAAF flying-boats calling at Noumea on reconnaissance flights.) The General's grudging approval betrayed, however, not only his hypersensitive personal outlook as the self-appointed guardian of French sovereignty – ingratitude becoming a duty – but a near-paranoid atttitude pervading Free French headquarters in London. It had already caused some trouble and would cause much more. The Cairo telegram foreshadows Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu's unfortunate mission to the Pacific.

4 *The view from Carlton Gardens*

FOR THE FREE French in the European theatre the *ralliement* of the Pacific territories was one of the few cheering events in a singularly gloomy autumn. As one of them, General Koenig, recalled later:

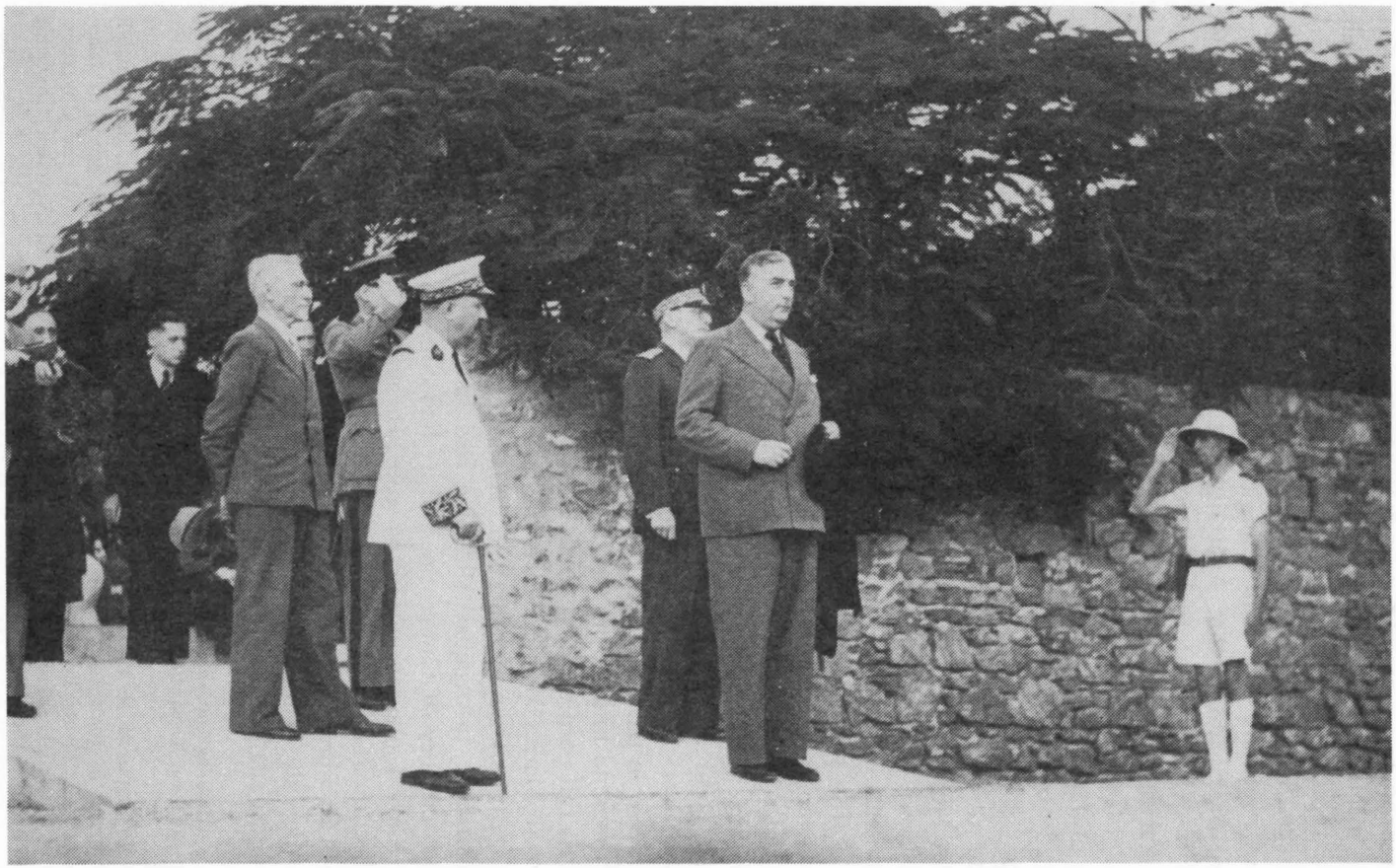
> The *ralliement* of Tahiti came at the same time as the Dakar failure and the defection of Gabon. The Dakar failure was not de Gaulle's fault – not necessarily. There had been a grand design; we were to have gone straight on to Morocco, in the hope of changing the face of the war. Well, it didn't happen as we would have wished, and it wasn't much fun. De Gaulle pulled a long face. Free France had started badly, or rather it was not getting started at all. Then came the news of the Pacific *ralliement*. It was the dramatic event needed to give us new hope. The size of the population didn't amount to much but, spread over such a big surface, it was conspicuous. So we were pleased. . .[1]

For New Caledonia itself, the *coup de force* of 19 September 1940 was decisive. The colony's commitment to General de Gaulle's leadership and to the Allied effort was never thenceforth to be called seriously into question. The population, overwhelmingly pro-Ally, had become overwhelmingly Gaullist and was to remain so. The only threat to de Gaulle's personal prestige was to come from the actions of his own envoy, Rear-Admiral d'Argenlieu, and was transient. Above all, the population was sturdily French, looking toward a restored French Republic. But this picture was not clear to the General as he surveyed the distant Pacific from his headquarters at No.1 Carlton Gardens in London, to which he returned from Africa on 17 November. The colony's *ralliement*, though undertaken with the General's blessing, had been achieved entirely by local French effort, with decisive though circumspect Australian assistance, and some of the Frenchmen involved were known vaguely as 'autonomists'. No one in London possessed any first hand knowledge of the colony, and its sudden presentation as a gift to the Free French movement must have seemed to de Gaulle a phenomenon by no means free from suspicious elements. He clearly determined at an early stage to look the gift horse very carefully in the mouth.

As the Free French régime consolidated itself in New Caledonia in the last months of 1940 General de Gaulle in London was in a very weak position. The false dawn of the weeks following the armistice, when the intention to continue the struggle had been expressed by leaders in many parts of the French empire, had long faded away. Indo-China, Madagascar, the Levant, the French Antilles, all North Africa and the strategic point of Djibouti had remained under the sway of Vichy. French Equatorial Africa had rallied to Free France, but even that had been a close-run thing, and the fiasco of Dakar had confirmed the important West African territories' continued alliegance to Pétain's *Etat Français*. It was clear that only scattered fragments of the empire would provide a scanty territorial base for de Gaulle's unilateral pretension to represent French *légitimité*. He was correspondingly concerned that his trusteeship of these territories should be marred by no suspicion that he had allowed any weakening of French control over them, any improper foreign interference. His instinct was to impose a firm centralized control, but the task of doing so was made immensely difficult by the extreme scarcity of men and of knowledge at his disposal.

There had been no direct contact with New Caledonia since its *ralliement*. In all the circumstances, it is not surprising that misunderstandings began to develop as René Pleven took up his new responsibilities as commissioner for the colonies in the French National Committee. By the early months of 1941 Pleven was clearly suspicious that the French Pacific territories were not receiving a fair deal in economic matters from Australia and New Zealand and even that Governor Sautot might not have been sufficiently prudent in safeguarding French interests and sovereignty. The solution which occurred to him and to de Gaulle was the traditional one of centralization. On 22 February the Dominions Office requested the United Kingdom High Commissioner at Canberra to discuss with the Australian government the 'somewhat delicate problems' arising from the divergence between the French system of high centralized control from Europe and 'our system of decentralization coupled with the Dominion responsibilities for the Free French colonies in the Pacific'.[2] General de Gaulle, said the Dominions Office, considered a high degree of centralization vital, partly because no other system was known to the few colonial administrators at his disposal and partly – and more importantly – because it was the best answer to charges that the Free French movement was merely a smokescreen to conceal British designs on the French colonial empire. Politically, the United Kingdom found de Gaulle's contention valid and it thought the main objective must be to minimize its administrative disadvantages. Now, the assumption of the Dominions of 'certain responsibilities' toward the Pacific

colonies, though invaluable, might easily run counter to the principle of centralization unless de Gaulle was enabled to express his approval or otherwise of any contemplated operation – whether financial, economic or military. In these circumstances the General desired that any proposals by Sautot that would previously have been referred to Paris should now be cleared with Free French headquarters. This last point, in a rather insipid message, which the High Commissioner communicated in its entirety to the Australian government, was so obvious that at first sight it seems pointless to express it in a telegram. In any event it seems to have been taken in Canberra as a statement of the obvious, or perhaps as a piece of French formalism to which the Australian government was quite prepared to adapt, though satisfied itself to conclude arrangements locally with Governor Sautot and leave him to exercise his proper function of clearing his decisions where necessary with General de Gaulle. As we now know, however, the Dominions Office's telegram reflected deeper concerns held in London but obscured by the excessively tactful language in which it was couched. Not only did General de Gaulle fear that Sautot might overstep the mark in his dealings with Australia but some United Kingdom officials themselves were concerned lest, perhaps through 'lack of diplomatic experience' (a possibility suggested by a functionary in the French Department of the Foreign Office), Australia and New Zealand might handle their role clumsily.[3] One Foreign Office minute of 6 May 1941 refers to the Australian government's 'policy of trying to get more political control in French Oceania [sic] which is so much resented by the Free French there and at headquarters'. The fact that this view came to be held in the Foreign Office at that stage suggests a less than vigorous rebuttal there of Free French complaints. The air had been cleared to some extent by a personal conversation which fortunately took place on 7 March 1941 between General de Gaulle and the Australian Prime Minister, who was visiting London. The two leaders made an excellent impression on each other. Menzies described de Gaulle as 'a man of considerable ability, dignity and force and . . . well regarded by Churchill . . . a rallying point for French opinion'.[4] De Gaulle telegraphed to Sautot that he was 'deeply touched by the sentiments expressed for Free France and French interests by Mr Menzies', who had told him that 'New Caledonia and the Hebrides could count on the fullest economic support from Australia'.[5] In deference to de Gaulle's wish to maintain the most constant and prompt means of communication with Sautot, in conformity with the centralized French system, Menzies assured him that, always provided he kept the Dominions Office informed on important matters, he might have direct access to the Australian High Commissioner in London and through him to the Australian



Australian Prime Minister R.G. Menzies at Noumea, May 1941
(on return journey from London where he had met General de Gaulle).

government. (This system of consultation was in fact Pleven's idea designed to make the best of a bad job: if the Dominions had to be involved at all, which he thought undesirable, at least the French could communicate with them direct.) De Gaulle asked whether Australia would be prepared to enter into private military talks concerning the defence of New Caledonia. Menzies agreed at once, adding that Australia had not itself suggested such talks because it did not want to lend any colour to enemy propaganda about alleged Australian domination of New Caledonia. He suggested to Canberra that Ballard should take the matter up with Sautot, but his information was out of date. As he was speaking with de Gaulle in London, arrangements had already been made in Australia – with de Gaulle's approval – to send a military mission to report on the defence of New Caledonia. Though following this meeting de Gaulle constantly maintained a high personal regard for Menzies, his suspicion as to what exactly was going on between Australia and New Caledonia, in defence matters at least, may possibly date from this moment. At any rate he was taking his own steps to inform himself of the situation in the Pacific territories. A senior colonial official, Governor-General Richard Brunot, was already on his way to the Pacific to carry out a tour of inspection on behalf of Free French headquarters.

De Gaulle's reasons for choosing Brunot to undertake this task must be to some extent a matter for conjecture. His envoy was an experienced colonial officer and personally acquainted with Sautot, but he had also been involved in partisan politics of the Third Republic in a way that would hardly commend him to the General and it is unlikely that he ever enjoyed the latter's full confidence. (An avowed Socialist, he had served as Private Secretary to Marius Moutet when the latter was Minister of Colonies in the Popular Front government of 1936.) His adherence to Free France had been undistinguished. In August 1940 he had been the administrator of the mandated territory of Cameroun, and he had come over with that territory without himself playing any active role. He was now a spare man at Free French headquarters and some have unkindly suggested that there was a plan to send him on a mission as far from London as possible. However that may be, de Gaulle shows no surprise in his own impassive account of the resounding failure of Brunot's mission to the Pacific:

> As early as the spring of 1941 I had thought it well to send out on a tour of inspection Governor-General Brunot, who had become available since Leclerc had rallied Cameroun. But Brunot had clashed, often violently, with officials who imputed to him, not without a show of reason, an intention to install himself in their place with his friends. Papeete had been the scene of tragi-comic incidents involving the arrest on M. Brunot's orders of the Governor, the Colonial Secretary and the British consul; while at Noumea Governor Sautot breathed distrust of the inspector. . .[6]

In fact, as de Gaulle knew, Brunot had attempted unsuccessfully to secure Sautot's replacement by himself. In Noumea, however, he had behaved with a measure of circumspection which made it possible to avoid an open breach with Sautot or the colonists, whose extreme suspicions of 'metropolitan politics' prejudiced them against Brunot. The comic opera which he later conducted at Papeete, and which led to his recall and premature retirement, does not concern us here, but the whole series of rocambolesque events confirmed de Gaulle's view that exceptional measures were called for.[7]

Meanwhile, in London, Free French temperatures had been rising again. In April a mini-crisis, almost completely unknown to those of us who were actually in Australia or the Pacific, began to develop. Pleven, as we have seen, was dissatisfied with Pacific prospects, but at this point a large pinch of poison was added to the unwholesome brew by Bayardelle, newly arrived from New Caledonia. That enigmatic functionary had finally left Noumea in the last days of February. Just before his departure it had been reported in Noumea that a former member of the General Council, who was also a director of a Japanese mining company, had been heard saying to him that 'he counted on him to carry the Japanese business through'. The frequency with which such incidents had been occurring prompted Ballard to warn Canberra, which in turn warned the United Kingdom authorities, that it would be well to treat Bayardelle with some caution: whether or not he was in corrupt collusion with the Japanese, as some people believed, all his activity certainly favoured their interests rather than those of the Allies.[8] Indeed, as soon as he reached New York on his way to London he sent de Gaulle a report suggesting that measures to deny nickel and chrome ore to Japan were hurting the colony and threatened to provoke Japanese reprisals or even a *coup d'état*. [9] It was one of the first shots in his campaign against Sautot, but what he had to say harmonized very well with Pleven's suspicion that New Caledonia was being denied legitimate profits from trade with Japan. Earlier, Pleven had had his suspicions of Bayardelle himself, but these were rapidly allayed. On 23 April, confirming Sautot's view of Bayardelle, Brunot telegraphed from Noumea: 'Essential stop immediately rumours spread by Bayardelle that he has gone to London only on mission and may return and even replace Sautot. Sautot confirms, of course without definite proof, all that Pleven and I had supposed before my departure especially regarding Japanese. All are afraid even of Bayardelle being employed in London where he could intrigue.' Pleven sent a reassuring reply on 2 May, saying: 'Behaviour of person in question up to now satisfactory'.[10] As soon as Bayardelle reached London he predictably set about assuring his own future by making mischief for others. On 24 April

he showed his hand to a member of the British Liaison Mission to the Free French, Somerville Smith, who wrote to the Dominions Office:

> This is to warn you that the French are going to ask formally that from now on all questions of supply, of export and of finance, connected with those Colonies, should be settled from London.
>
> The French are profoundly dissatisfied with the shipping position, with the copra position and with the line taken by the Australian Government in connection with the dollar proceeds of exports of nickel, as revealed in the attached telegram. They are bound to be discontented over the attitude of New Zealand towards Tahiti.
>
> I had a first talk this morning with Bayardelle, General Secretary of the Government of New Caledonia, who has just arrived in this country. I gathered from him that feeling on these points among the population was intensified by the fact that it was generally believed that Australia was responsible. Anti-Gaullists are never tired of repeating that Australia is now in a position to treat them like poor relations, and is doing so. Ballard apparently is notorious for lack of tact. . .[11]

The telegram to which Somerville Smith refers had been sent by Sautot from Noumea on 18 April. It complained that Australia was denying to New Caledonia the dollar exchange which ought to have accrued to the colony from its exports of nickel matte and that the Commonwealth was imposing 'unacceptable' controls on the New Caledonian economy. The explanation of this telegram's unwontedly plaintive tone was in fact very simple. It was sent at a time when Brunot, fresh from London, had begun to take a powerful part in the administration of the colony, and as Ballard recalls, had arranged to place his own personal assistant, a certain Captain Fatoux, in charge of the Department of Economic Affairs which handled foreign exchange questions. It may be presumed that Fatoux drafted the message and that Sautot, unwilling to give Brunot grounds for criticism, had hesitated to tone it down. De Gaulle's envoy in New Caledonia was simply echoing Pleven's interpretation of the new Churchill-de Gaulle agreements and their application to the Pacific territories. But this could not be known in Whitehall. The impression rapidly gained ground there that the complaints coming from the Free French headquarters reflected a really serious situation in the French Pacific.

On 25 April Desmond Morton, as chairman of the secret Committee on Foreign (Allied) Resistance, thought the problem sufficiently serious to engage the attention of the full committee, and not merely its sub-committee on economic problems. He had received from Pleven an 'urgent plea' on the lines of Somerville Smith's letter mentioned above and believed that a political problem was fast developing. Pleven had represented to him that Ballard, as the Australian government's representative at Noumea, was 'creating a most unfavourable impression including the belief, however

ill-founded, that Australia merely desires to exploit New Caledonia in Australian interests'. The Free French were urging nothing less than that economic cooperation with the French Pacific colonies should be taken out of the hands of the Dominions governments concerned and reserved to the United Kingdom, and that urgent steps should be taken to purchase all or part of the Pacific copra crop. (The small but annoying problem of copra disposal was at that moment being sorted out on a Pacific-wide basis; it need not detain us here, though it appears to have been grotesquely inflated in the minds of some people at Free French headquarters.) Morton felt that the committee should consider whether it should recommend these or any other measures to remedy 'the present state of acute dissatisfaction on the part of the Free French'.[12]

Over the next few days a teapot tempest raged in Whitehall. The Free French, invited to amplify their complaints, did so in a memorandum of several thousand words, asserting that New Caledonia's economic interests had been sacrificed to those of the British empire, in that (notably) the Free French had been induced unduly to limit New Caledonia's trade with Japan in nickel and iron ore, and the British government should see that French producers were compensated accordingly.[13] Voluminous minutes flowed from the pens of officials in the Foreign, Dominions and Colonial Offices and the Ministry of Economic Warfare. There was clearly some tendency in the Foreign Office to suspect that the Free French had grounds for complaint and should be appeased. It is agreeable to record that the Dominions Office kept its feet firmly on the ground. 'The odds are', noted one official discerningly, 'that it is the ill-famed M. Bayardelle who is largely responsible for this agitation and I hope therefore the committee will be firm'.[14] The Ministry of Economic Warfare pointed out that some of the Free French statistics originated in Tokyo, that the Pleven memorandum correspondingly inflated the size of 'normal' trade between New Caledonia and Japan and that the high prices offered by Japan to the New Caledonian 'small miners' were available only because the British empire had renounced nickel sales to that country.

> We are now asked to embrace this South Sea bubble, production and prices and all, and we are asked to do this in a memorandum whose theme is that we have discriminated against Free French territories to our own advantage.[15]

Indeed Bayardelle's hand is clearly to be seen in all this pointless fuss which René Pleven, the future Minister of Colonies of the Fourth Republic, had so lightly been persuaded to make. It led nowhere. The Dominions Office saw it as politically and administratively quite unthinkable for the United Kingdom to agree to bypass the Dominions in the way suggested from Carlton Gardens. The incident seems to have fizzled out with soothing

explanations on current issues and promises by the United Kingdom to take up with the Dominions any new matters in which the Free French might feel there was discrimination against the French territories. That was the solution suggested by the Dominions Office. No significant echoes of the misgivings felt in Carlton Gardens seem to have reached Canberra. (Of course the solution of the foreign exchange question at this point removed a principal Free French grievance.)

The Australian government and the allegedly tactless Ballard would indeed have been justifiably startled to learn the low opinion of their conduct held by Free French headquarters. On 25 April, as Pleven's complaints were being circulated to the Morton committee with its chairman's comprehensive comments, the Acting Prime Minister of Australia (A.W. Fadden) was writing to the Minister for External Affairs (Sir Frederick Stewart) emphasizing the need to keep up the momentum of Australian assistance to New Caledonia and requesting proposals for the solution of current economic problems. Referring to the War Cabinet meeting which had taken place on 17 April, Fadden said:

> You will be aware that the feeling of War Cabinet was that, in view of the relative importance of the preservation of the integrity of New Caledonia to the defence of the Commonwealth of Australia, it was desirable that in the adjustment of these outstanding economic questions, the Commonwealth should approach the problem in a generous spirit even if such would mean the final acceptance by the Commonwealth Government of some financial liability in connection with these problems. . .
>
> In view of the present international situation and the moral effect that the position in Greece and in the Mediterranean generally may have had in communities which have had confidence in an ultimate British victory, I am particularly concerned that the people of New Caledonia should have no cause to feel that the Commonwealth Government has broken faith with them.[16]

So much for 'lack of diplomatic experience'.

On the same day Georges Dubois, whose steadfast bearing and obvious good sense had so impressed the War Cabinet, anxious for reassurance as to New Caledonia's loyalty to de Gaulle, was attending the Anzac Day parade in Sydney before returning to Noumea to report to Sautot that he had encountered no difficulty whatsoever in upholding the principles set forth in the latter's instructions to him – principles indistinguishable from those being asserted as vigorously as superfluously by Free French headquarters in London.

In the area concerned, in fact, all was going rather well. But de Gaulle was still sceptical. As he summed up the Pacific situation in his memoirs:

> [French authority] had to be exercised on the spot in a satisfactory manner. This could be no easy task in view of the extreme remoteness and scattered nature of our islands, their lack of resources and the character of their population,

> who were indeed much attached to France – as their *ralliement* had shown – but who at the same time were turbulent and receptive to intrigues stirred up by local and foreign interests. Moreover many of the best servicemen had left Oceania on my orders to fight in Africa in the Free French forces. . . This Pacific contribution to the battles for the liberation of France was highly significant but it made the direct defence of our possessions more difficult. Finally, the economic life of these distant territories was disorganized by the state of war. In sum, there was a clear need for as strong and centralized an authority as possible in Oceania.[17]

This assessment was sadly misguided, but it is comprehensible that de Gaulle, beset by recurring and bitter disputes with his British allies and justly apprehensive of American attitudes to the French empire in general and his own movement in particular, wished to have on the spot a loyal, trusted and able representative. The matter was made more urgent by the need to sort out Governor-General Brunot's increasingly incomprehensible conduct in Tahiti, to which he had transferred his activities early in June.

On 9 July from Cairo, where he was in the midst of a blazing row with the British over Syria and Lebanon, de Gaulle telegraphed to Free French headquarters directing that Captain Georges Thierry d'Argenlieu take up immediately the post of High Commissioner for France in the Pacific, his mission being 'to restore finally and without half-measures the authority of Free France in the Pacific, to put to work for the war all our resources there, and to ensure in unison with our allies the defence of the French territories against all possible (and perhaps imminent) dangers'. The High Commissioner was authorized to take 'such steps as he might consider necessary in regard to persons. . .'. That, at least, is the text published by de Gaulle.[18] According to another French author the enigmatic dots cover the omission of a sentence saying more specifically 'if he considers it desirable he may replace Governor Sautot at Noumea as Governor of New Caledonia'.[19] However that may be, there can be no doubt that serious doubts were already held at Free French headquarters as to Sautot's continued fitness for his task.

De Gaulle's chosen senior representative in the Pacific was a singular man indeed. D'Argenlieu, born at Brest in 1889, had followed a family tradition in entering the Navy, and had served afloat as a lieutenant in the first World War. In 1920 he took holy orders and later became head of the Paris province of the Carmelite order. Mobilized in 1939 as a rather elderly lieutenant-commander, he took part in the defence of Cherbourg, was captured, escaped and joined de Gaulle who rapidly promoted him to Captain. He was an unflinching opponent of Vichy and most people, including that acute observer S.M. Bruce, found him impressive.[20] He had been de Gaulle's principal negotiator at Dakar where he had been wounded by a

Vichy sub-lieutenant. De Gaulle, who rarely put people on pedestals, had a quite extraordinarily high regard for the new High Commissioner. As he wrote later:

> I had confidence in d'Argenlieu. His high-mindedness and his firmness put him morally in a position to dominate intrigues. His qualities of leadership gave me the assurance that our resources would be used vigorously but rationally. His aptitude for diplomacy would find good use.[21]

It is one of the continuing mysteries of de Gaulle's career that he obstinately maintained for many years an almost unique confidence in this man who served him zealously but can be seen in retrospect to have done much more harm than good to the cause of French nationalism which the General himself pursued so long and skilfully. It is the stranger in that d'Argenlieu, far from being the paragon of moral and diplomatic qualities suggested in the passage just quoted, was in fact a rather limited man, embodying many of the unamiable characteristics which have often been imputed to de Gaulle himself – especially pride, vanity and above all rigidity – but which if taken alone would furnish a pitifully inadequate explanation of the General's many successes. If de Gaulle possessed these qualities he knew when and how to trancend them. As is well known, he could be maddeningly obstinate, but on occasion he could be flexible, and his career included some startling changes of course. D'Argenlieu was, as General Patch wrote later, 'vain, meticulous, devious and ambitious', but he lacked de Gaulle's breadth of vision. The distinguished French journalist Jean Lacouture put it very well when surveying the failure of d'Argenlieu's later mission in Indo-China: 'd'Argenlieu, a man of small stature and lofty pride, was never anything more than an executant of de Gaulle's policies'.[22] His all too literal interpretation and execution of de Gaulle's instructions frequently led him into excesses of zeal which might have been thought calculated to annoy the intolerant General. But they did not, or at least not until very much later. ('Rémy' describes de Gaulle in 1947 as wishing aloud that 'that monk would go back to his cloister').[23]

Perhaps the explanation of de Gaulle's partiality to d'Argenlieu is to be found in the undoubtedly firm and loyal encouragement he had received from him during the dismal retreat from Dakar when the General, as he recalled later, was 'learning to the full just what reactions fear can cause both in opponents revenging themselves for having been afraid and in allies suddenly dismayed by defeat'.[24] Anyway de Gaulle's confidence in him and in his ability to unscramble what seemed to him the difficult internal and external situation of the Pacific territories was unshakeable.

At this point Sautot learned of Brunot's intrigue to have him replaced on the grounds that his health was failing. On 23 July he sent de Gaulle a long

and emotional telegram asserting that his health was completely restored, that he remained devoted to de Gaulle but that he would oppose Brunot's return to Noumea, by force if necessary. If the worst came to the worst he was prepared to hand over his functions to a 'clean' man but not a 'disreputable politician' like Brunot. He demanded to be informed whether he still had the General's confidence. He implied clearly that the French population of New Caledonia and the New Hebrides was making common cause with him.[25]

Here was a pretty mess. On 30 July de Gaulle sent Sautot a soothing telegram from Brazzaville to the effect that he had appointed d'Argenlieu as High Commissioner with full civil and military authority but with the special task of putting the Pacific colonies on a better defence footing. He assured Sautot of his confidence, asked him to be calm and told him that steps were being taken to curb Brunot.[26] Indeed, he had already sent a second message to d'Argenlieu from Beirut on 26 July, saying:

> Go at once to the Pacific, where the situation must be restored. When you have formed an opinion on the spot you will take or propose all measures you consider useful. Please telegraph on my behalf to Sautot that he has my confidence but that he should stay calm but above all *pas de zèle*. Please tell Brunot from me that he is to keep quiet until your arrival.[27]

D'Argenlieu duly telegraphed to Sautot on 5 August but his message was not of a nature to reassure Sautot fully.[28] It gave the impression that Brunot's allegations were indeed the source of the changes being made, though Brunot was now himself discredited, and d'Argenlieu repeated the General's assurance of confidence in Sautot, which was beginning to have a rather hollow ring. Sautot in fact took it well, but he was then under the impression that d'Argenlieu's headquarters would be at Papeete.[29] When, later in August, he learned that d'Argenlieu was in fact coming to Noumea with a large staff he was inclined to suggest to de Gaulle that Noumea was too small to hold both a High Commissioner and a Governor and to submit his own resignation. On 25 August the Administrative Council of New Caledonia unanimously decided to submit to de Gaulle that d'Argenlieu's appointment was welcome but that it should be subject to the following conditions:

(1) the authority and prerogatives of Sautot as Governor of New Caledonia should remain unimpaired;

(2) the functions of the High Commissioner should be confined to matters of defence and external relations;

(3) no part of the expense of the High Commissioner's organization should be borne by New Caledonia;

(4) the authority of the Council in economic matters should remain unimpaired;

(5) in no circumstances should Bayardelle return to New Caledonia.

Talking to Ballard next day, Sautot seemed satisfied with this solution. While obviously hurt, reported Ballard, he was prepared to put the national issues involved before his personal feelings, but he repeated that if de Gaulle wanted to combine the two offices he was quite prepared to offer his own resignation.[30]

Meanwhile the Australian government and British representatives at Suva and Vila, already concerned at Brunot's now widely known campaign against Sautot, and thinking – probably rightly, despite repeated denials from Carlton Gardens – to detect the continued influence of Bayardelle, unanimously protested against what seemed to them to be a plan to supersede Sautot, however it might be presented. On 9 August Menzies, having learned from Bruce that d'Argenlieu had notified him of his appointment as High Commissioner with headquarters at Noumea, telegraphed to express concern. Ballard, he said, had reported that the administration of New Caledonia was running satisfactorily and that the political position, unlike that of Tahiti, was quite stable. Sautot was popular and d'Argenlieu's appointment would be a blow to his prestige and to New Caledonian pride.

> Our aim, apart from maintaining economic position, has been to promote political stability in French Oceania and in our view the appointment of high officials from outside who are not conversant with local conditions and with the characteristics of a people who differ greatly from those in metropolitan France and other parts of the French colonial empire does not assist us in this objective.[31]

Similar protests reached London from Luke in Suva and Blandy in Vila. They were not based on d'Argenlieu's personality, the less amiable features of which were still to be revealed, but on the damage to Free French morale in the area held likely to result from Sautot's demotion or supersession. Unfortunately, but no doubt inevitably, they were counterproductive, in view of de Gaulle's attitude. On 12 September Professor René Cassin wrote in bland terms to Somerville Smith referring to Menzies's representations:

> General de Gaulle indeed received from M. Sautot a telegram offering his resignation as Governor but he instructed me to reply to him that he retained his confidence in him.
>
> Captain d'Argenlieu's role is much wider than that of local government and, while possessing wide civil functions, he will be concerned especially with the defence organization of the French possessions in the whole Pacific area, as is shown by the assignment to that duty of almost all the staff accompanying him.
>
> In these circumstances Governor Sautot's situation in his island remains intact. No one forgets the signal services which he has rendered to Free France and to the cause of the alliance with the peoples of the British Commonwealth.[32]

On 22 August Bruce reported to Menzies that there was no question of annulling d'Argenlieu's appointment but that profuse assurances on the lines indicated by Cassin had been given by Free French headquarters.[33]

On 8 September, indeed, Sautot told Ballard that he had received a 'comforting' telegram from de Gaulle but he was clearly apprehensive at the impending arrival of the High Commissioner and a large staff and at the prospect of being subjected to the day to day supervison of which he had had a distasteful experience during the Brunot mission. He settled down uneasily to await their arrival.[34]

A letter addressed to Sautot by d'Argenlieu from Honolulu on 16 September gives a significant foretaste of the spirit in which he was approaching his mission to 'restore the authority of Free France'. Among the military questions to which he would be giving his attention, he said, would be that of an agreement between Australia and Free France on military assistance to New Caledonia. 'We have never known in London what action was taken on our message of June last in this regard.' Clearly a new look was about to be taken at the whole subject of the French territories' relations with their 'Anglo-Saxon' neighbours.[35]

It was already plain to de Gaulle in London that the most redoubtable of these neighbours was the still neutral United States. War clouds were obviously gathering in the Pacific, to which the Americans would have to give increasing attention, and it was in the Free French interest to organize cooperation with the Americans on a more systematic basis than that of the 'episodic and local arrangements' which they had hitherto been prepared to make with this or that French authority. In de Gaulle's own words, 'in proportion as the United States saw war approaching, Washington showed more attention to us. . . The United States' entry into the war made it necessary for them to cooperate with Free France.'[36] He was right to discern a situation offering favourable possibilities, and d'Argenlieu's mission was essentially to make the best use of it. Unhappily, as we shall see, the Admiral was to attack the question with his usual excess of zeal and in doing so to cause much unnecessary offence to the Americans and the other Allies.

At this stage, though, one of the complications in the problem of Free French relations with the United States was the Americans' obstinate belief in the importance of safeguarding their links with Vichy. On the eve of d'Argenlieu's assignment to the Pacific, Pleven, at the conclusion of a visit to the United States, had reported himself 'shocked by the disastrous effect of Vichy policy on the position of France in America'.[37] He was not exaggerating.

5 *Vichy, the United States and the French Pacific Territories*

IN THE PERSPECTIVE of the 37 years which have passed since the demise of the Vichy régime, little good can be said of it. The apologiae produced by its surviving partisans, the obvious difficulties which can be seen to have confronted it, even the undoubted goodwill of some who in 1940 allowed themselves to be swayed by Marshal Pétain's enormous prestige – none of this can change, or excuse, the facts that the armistice régime began by wilfully abstracting from the armed struggle thousands of trained soldiers, important naval forces and vast territories that remained outside the Nazi grasp; that it sought to destroy republican government in France, and that under the guise of 'neutrality' it pursued policies marked by an increasing content of complicity with the Axis powers.

Vichy's foreign policy from 1940 to 1942 was essentially a gigantic confidence trick, a diplomacy of bad faith practised by a government with no real power base or bargaining counters except the constantly implied threat of behaving even more malevolently if it were not handled with kid gloves. It worked. The United States Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, said on 21 January 1942 (as reported by the new Free French delegate in Washington, Adrien Tixier) that while the United States had no sympathy for most of the men of the Vichy government nor for that mediocre régime in general, it wished above all to avoid the intervention of the French fleet against the Allies and the use of North African bases by the Axis. During the past months this policy, he claimed, had borne fruit. Vichy had not yielded up the fleet nor the bases. 'It seemed to be putting up a greater resistance, thanks to United States pressure.'[1] (During the preceding months, in fact, Darlan had been energetically pursuing efforts to achieve a thoroughgoing alliance with Germany.)

The Secretary of State's contention was hotly refuted by Tixier and later by de Gaulle himself, who wrote for Hull's eyes a note seeking to recall him to the larger issues involved:

> The consideration shown by the United States for those French authorities whose *raison d'être* is to prevent France from fighting constitutes for the French

> nation a most dangerously demoralizing factor. It is the more harmful in that it is the opposite of the attitude – at least equally discreditable – adopted by the United States towards the only Frenchmen carrying on the war alongside the Allies. . .[2]

It was all to no avail, though Hull was deluding himself in thinking that the United States exercised any significant influence on Vichy policy.[3] The Pétain government kept the fleet and the bases out of German hands for reasons of its own: old-fashioned imperialism, fear of the effect which all-out collaboration might have on French public opinion, but above all because it could never get a good enough deal from the Germans. For Hitler the Vichy government was a convenience, a labour saving device: he was never prepared to recognize it as a partner in full collaboration.

Adrienne D. Hytier, an author who strives to be scrupulously fair to the men of Vichy, remarks on the 'stubborn will to collaborate' with Germany which prevailed at Vichy at the end of 1941 and early in 1942, when Admiral Darlan, in a talk with Admiral Raeder, looked forward explicitly to the time 'when France would be on Germany's side' and there would be a 'European navy'.[4] More recently, examining Vichy policy in the light of German as well as French records, Robert O. Paxton has described Darlan's 'visions of a French naval and imperial power within a new continental system', a vision which was dissipated only because Hitler and Ribbentrop were unwilling to pay any significant price for total French association with the Reich.[5] Secretary Hull, however, remained obstinately convinced of the value of seeking to keep Vichy in play, witness his warning to Roosevelt of 'ominous and serious developments' likely to follow de Gaulle's seizure in December 1941 of the tiny colony of Saint Pierre and Miquelon, off the Canadian coast, about which in fact Vichy could and did do no more than lodge empty protests.[6] Hull would not recognize that this emperor had, in fact, no clothes – that, as an American diplomat said later, the Vichy régime was 'a banana republic without any bananas'.[7] It had neither the will nor, finally, the power to satisfy American desiderata.

Vichy policy toward the French Pacific territories is an interesting case study of the Pétain régime in action, but it was one instance in which Vichy encountered a stiff American reaction.

We have already surveyed the abortive Vichy attempt in 1940 to preserve nominal control of New Caledonia at the expense of facile concessions to the Japanese. Until December 1941 there was a lull, broken only by minatory noises from the nearest 'legitimate' French authorities in Indo-China and for a time by the occasional disruptive efforts of Vichy's acting consul-general in Sydney, M. Trémoulet. At the end of 1940 there were rumours of a new Vichy expedition against New Caledonia, but it

seems doubtful whether such an expedition in fact set out from Saigon. A story occasionally heard that one of the naval vessels on the Indo-China station sailed for Noumea but was intercepted by HMAS *Australia* is clearly unfounded.

Then came Pearl Harbor. This unparalleled disaster to American arms, and the Japanese assault on the Philippines, seemed to Vichy to presage a decisive Japanese victory in the Asia-Pacific region. It occurred simultaneously to Darlan and to Admiral Decoux at Hanoi that the new situation might well present an opportunity to fish in the troubled waters of the Pacific. By a decree of 19 December 1941 Pétain appointed Decoux 'High Commissioner for France in the Pacific' and purported to invest him with authority over all the French territories in the area. At the same time Darlan instructed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to consult the Japanese embassy at Vichy

> to see whether it might not be appropriate to extend the agreement for joint defence of Indo-China to the Pacific colonies. If so, French aircraft and a detachment of French troops could take part in the event of action against New Caledonia.[8]

The same idea had presented itself to Admiral Bérenger, commanding the French naval forces at Saigon. On 21 December he telegraphed to Vichy:

> The impending fall of the Philippines and Singapore will radically change the situation in the Pacific, the China Sea and even the Indian Ocean. In order to safeguard our interests and keep up with events I should like to draw your attention to the real possibilities, which of course all depend on the agreement and support of the Japanese government. . .[9]

One of the proposals which Bérenger proceeded to outline was for the recapture of New Caledonia by the Vichy French, who would offer the Japanese preferred access to the island's nickel 'which they need so much that they will occupy New Caledonia themselves if we do not do so ourselves'. He was preparing forthwith, he added, a plan for the reconquest of New Caledonia, which seemed to him to be quite practicable using only the forces available in Indo-China. (Later Decoux and Bérenger decided that reinforcements from Madagascar would be needed.)

The Vichy Navy Ministry appears initially to have been attracted by Bérenger's scheme. On 30 December it approved the preparation of an operational plan, warning at the same time that its execution would be subject to a further decison taking account of the political and strategic situation, and instructing him to keep in touch with Decoux, who would be receiving separate instructions.

Decoux himself, in his apologia for his stewardship in Indo-China, where he gives a misleading impression of firmness in dealing with the Japanese,

passes lightly over his ephemeral Pacific appointment, saying only:

> At the beginning of 1942 I had to concern myself with the situation in New Caledonia, our great island in the South Pacific, which seemed likely at any moment to be included in the Japanese operational area. In agreement with the naval commander in Indo-China I thought briefly of sending out a small naval squadron which, arriving in New Caledonia before the Japanese forces, would have affirmed our permanent sovereignty, acting in the name of the Marshal's government, the only French authority recognized by Tokyo. The development of the strategic situation in the South Pacific, an unfavourable reply from the Vichy Ministry of Colonies and finally, and especially, the Americans' arrival in force at Noumea, caused this idea to be abandoned very quickly. From that moment New Caledonia was sheltered from any danger.[10]

This was hindsight. Decoux was evidently delighted with the new hat which Vichy had invited him to wear, and he had no intention of regarding his new appointment as a merely symbolic one. He prided himself on being an old Pacific hand, having served two commissions on the Pacific naval station, one of them (1925-27) as commander of the small naval forces in the area. He was a reactionary anti-republican who believed that the Pacific territories had been woefully mishandled by the 'demagogues' of the Third Republic; he dreamed of conferring on them the blessings of Pétain's 'national revolution', and to this end he was quite prepared to accept a Franco-Japanese relationship in the Pacific analogous to that which already prevailed shamelessly in Indo-China. On 23rd January 1942 he telegraphed to Vichy an appeal for approval 'in principle' of the naval operation proposed a month earlier, which he considered should be undertaken 'as soon as the Japanese zone of action came sufficiently close to New Caledonia'. Rabaul seemed likely to fall shortly: the question, he submitted, was urgent. On the evening of the same day, apparently looking forward to the approval of his plan, the 'High Commissioner' chose to lecture the Pacific colonists direct in a lengthy radio broadcast blending threats, cajolery and adulation of the aged Marshal in a style sadly characteristic of the régime he served:

> Of course, to err is human. But perseverance in error becomes criminal. You have erred; you have excuses for that. There would be no excuse if you waited any longer to change your ways. The Marshal, in his great wisdom and immense goodness, will be able to tell who are the criminal instigators of dissidence and, having punished them, will open wide France's doors to her lost children. What, therefore, is your duty now? It is not, of course, to engage at once and individually in conflict with the authorities which, though illegal, dominate you by force at least.
>
> You must, however, attempt to group all sound and loyal elements and hold yourselves ready to take advantage of any propitious circumstances to shake off the odious yoke which you bear. Try by every means to get in touch with us and keep us informed; be ready to welcome and help those who, I hope, will shortly restore to your isles the undefaced [i.e. of course undefaced by the Gaullist Cross of Lorraine] and glorious flag of eternal France. . .[11]

This tirade seems the more astonishing in that Admiral Decoux had after all some first-hand acquaintance with New Caledonia and the New Caledonian French. In his memoirs published in 1953 he describes the latter as 'vigorous, active, headstrong, very patriotic but attached above all to "their island" '.[12] At the time, however, carried away by his zeal for the Pétainist 'national revolution', he appears to have deluded himself that he was going to be able to teach the errant colonists a sharp lesson. For a moment at Noumea, where there was yet no sure sign of massive reinforcement or direct American support as the fate of the Allied cause hung in the balance, people wondered whether the Admiral might yet be able to execute the *in absentia* sentences freely handed down by the Saigon courts in the preceding months.

Such fears were unjustified. On 23 January 1942, as Decoux was preaching Pétain's gospel from Radio Saigon, several more important things were happening. A hastily-assembled American task force was sailing from New York, bound for New Caledonia. (But for security reasons the French were not informed until much later.) The State Department had already been aroused by earlier signs of Decoux's Pacific ambitions, and on the day of the notorious broadcast the Vichy Ambassador at Washington, Gaston Henry-Haye, was being warned against any attempt to extend Decoux's influence into the Pacific or Indian Oceans. Henry-Haye undertook 'on his own initiative to emphasize with his Government the importance of maintaining the present *status quo* of French possessions in the Pacific'.[13]

Colonel J. Legrand, in his refutation of Decoux's apologia, suggests that this expression of American anxiety was not relayed to Vichy until 27 January.[14] However that might be, the Vichy government took, on 26 January, a decisive step to restrain the 'High Commissioner'. Through the Naval Ministry it warned him that, while the Japanese embassy in France was eagerly collecting maps and information on New Caledonia and Japan's early intervention there seemed certain, Vichy had no intention of being drawn into belligerence on the Japanese side. It went on:

> Already the United States government is alarmed at the idea of a Franco-Japanese operation in New Caledonia. The French government's policy must be to spare no effort to remain aloof from the Pacific conflict, in which an attempt to retake the colony would certainly involve us. The operation would bring us into conflict with the Australian troops assigned to its defence. The ensuing Japanese pressure would alienate from us the majority of the 15,000 loyal French, of whose close links with the neighbouring Commonwealth you are aware. Even though we attained mastery of the island we should be incapable of supplying it, and we should not forget that it was mainly the supply problem which led to its dissidence. Finally, the United States would not fail to retaliate by taking severely coercive measures such as seizing our American colonies and suspending the seaborne traffic currently permitted between the Antilles and North Africa. They might, moreover, encourage the Chinese to pursue their plan for a blow against Tonkin, whereas we have precisely

> been seeking to have them exert a moderating influence in this regard.
>
> These considerations, together with the Navy's inability to provide, even on a limited scale, the reinforcements needed for the recovery operation, support our decision not to act in present circumstances but to await more favourable developments before restoring our sovereignty in the Pacific.

This prudent instruction did not reach Hanoi in time to prevent Decoux from despatching a long telegram tortuously expounding the supposed advantages of a Franco-Japanese coup. But Vichy had had enough. No more was heard of it, despite the Admiral's best efforts to deserve the Order of the Rising Sun (first class) with which he was invested on 25 January.

On 5 February the American consul at Noumea, reporting to Washington that an Australian officer had mentioned to him an intercepted Japanese message asserting that Decoux had agreed to cooperate with the Japanese in taking possession of all French territory in the Pacific added:

> In this connection d'Argenlieu recently gave me to understand that he believed the State Department had come to some agreement with Vichy whereby no protection would be given by the United States to French possessions in the Pacific. He inferred that this belief was also shared by General de Gaulle.

The State Department immediately instructed him to assure d'Argenlieu that no such agreement existed, remarking that it had assumed that the latter would already have received indications to the contrary from London.[15]

Indeed d'Argenlieu was, or ought to have been, well aware that American help was on the way. As early as 25 January Free French headquarters had transmitted to him a message from Washington in this sense and had instructed him to continue to assist and cooperate with the Americans.[16] In the absence of any testimony of his own,[17] it seems likely that he was seeking to extract an unequivocal statement of American respect for the French National Committee's authority in the area. Four days later Tixier sought such a statement from Assistant Secretary of State Berle, remarking that while he himself knew Decoux's claims that 'the United States recognized him as the authority in the Pacific' to be unjustified, their public expression was calculated to have undesirable effects. He was persuaded to put aside for 'a couple of weeks or so' his request for a public declaration of American intentions. On 17 February d'Argenlieu tried again. Consul MacVitty telegraphed from Noumea:

> The High Commissioner, in connection with the probable defence of New Caledonia by United States forces, requests that he be assured that the American Government recognizes that French sovereignty of the French Pacific possession is exercised by General de Gaulle's Comité National Français. Also whether an attack by Vichy adherents from Indochina in joint action with the Japanese would be resisted by the American forces.

Two days later he was authorized to convey to d'Argenlieu the carefully limited assurance that 'in all matters connected with the defense of New

Caledonia [the United States] Government is prepared to recognize that the French National Committee has authority over the Island'. He was to add that the United States had already warned Vichy against any interference in the Pacific.[18]

On 22 February Tixier returned to the charge in Washington, asking the State Department, on instructions from de Gaulle, that the National Committee's authority over the French Pacific possessions should be explicitly recognized. This time the Americans were more forthcoming. They responded by preparing and sending to Noumea 'for whatever use [the High Commissioner] may choose to make of it' a statement reaffirming the 'local authorities' policy but with a new emphasis befitting the United States' belligerent status, and obviously more satisfactory to the Free French:

> The policy of the Government of the United States as regards France and French territory has been based upon the maintenance of the integrity of France and of the French Empire and of the eventual restoration of the complete independence of all French territories. Mindful of its traditional friendship for France, this Government deeply sympathizes not only with the desire of the French people to maintain their territories intact but with the efforts of the French people to continue to resist the forces of aggression. In its relations with the local French authorities in French territories the United States has been and will continue to be governed by the manifest effectiveness with which those authorities endeavour to protect their territories from domination and control by the common enemy.
>
> With the French authorities in effective control of French territories in the Pacific this Government has treated and will continue to treat on the basis of their actual administration of the territories involved. This Government recognizes, in particular, that French island possessions in that area are under the effective control of the French National Committee established in London and the United States authorities are cooperating for the defence of these islands with the authorities established by the French National Committee and with no other French authority. This Government appreciates the importance of New Caledonia in the defense of the Pacific area.[19]

This statement, made public in Noumea on 28 February and in Washington on 2 March, evoked a protest from Vichy which the Acting Secretary of State, Sumner Welles, summarily rejected, saying to Henry-Haye on 5 March

> It was inconceivable that the Vichy Government would expect us to discuss with it arrangements covering military and naval co-operation with the French in French islands in the Pacific over which the Vichy Government had no control whatever and much less to discuss those questions with the French Commissioner in Indochina who was engaged in a policy of all out and open collaboration with the Japanese.[20]

All this was satisfactory enough to the Free French, so far as the Pacific was concerned. But a residue of suspicion remained from the United States' generally reticent attitude toward the French National Committee. As the

first Allied commander of the South Pacific area, Vice-Admiral Ghormley, was to write on 2 August 1942 to Major-General A.M. Patch, commanding the first American task force in New Caledonia, who had been at odds with d'Argenlieu:

> One thing we must both remember, the Free French resent very much that our Government through some of its diplomatic leads, plays both ends against the middle more or less. We might call that the 'grand diplomacy', that is, they do deal[s] with Vichy and they do deal with the Free French. The Free French resent this. In other words, this is a very ticklish situation.[21]

It was indeed. D'Argenlieu's conduct as de Gaulle's envoy in the Pacific represented a *reductio ad absurdum* of Free French misgivings, and it was the source of serious inter-allied differences as the Americans became involved on the spot in a way quite unforeseen only slightly earlier.

6 *The American involvement in the South Pacific*

IN THE LATTER part of 1941, but still some time before the United States' entry into the war, Australia's efforts in cooperation with the Free French to strengthen New Caledonia's air defences were seen to mesh with new American plans to strengthen the defences of the Philippines.

As late as July 1941 the United States had no plan for large scale reinforcement of its Philippines dependency in the event of war or imminent threat of war with Japan.[1] The contingency plan known as RAINBOW 5 drawn up in April 1941, in the light of British-American staff talks held at Washington between January and March, provided for a holding operation only in the Philippines area. In land, sea and air forces the Army and Navy commands at Manila would have to make do with the resources which they had.[2] In February the War Department had discouraged aspirations by the Air Corps to promote airfield development in the Pacific, on the grounds that 'neither the War or the Navy Department [had] any plan for operations that would require the movement of long-range army bombardment aviation to the Orient, nor [could] the need for such a plan be foreseen'.[3]

From July the situation changed with great rapidity. The United States' political attitude to Japan was stiffening and a complex of factors was leading to a new determination to reinforce and defend the Philippines and if possible to make it a springboard for a counter-offensive against Japan.[4]

At the operational level, the new approach to the defence of the Philippines was based to an appreciable extent on a new conception of the use of long range bombers to supplement the weak American and British Commonwealth naval forces in the Far East and neutralize Japanese offensive capacity. The American high command, traditionally extremely conservative on the uses of strategic aviation, became extraordinarily air-minded as it contemplated the possible role in an island war of the Army Air Forces' excellent new bomber, the B17 Flying Fortress, now coming off the production lines in fair numbers. In August the Secretary of War approved an upgrading of the Philippines' priority for modern aircraft.[5] The only practicable way of

delivering heavy bombers, as they became available, was to fly them to their destinations; and in the Pacific there was a notable lack of airfields capable of accommodating B17s in transit or of serving as bases from which they could protect sea communications with the Philippines. The first Fortresses flown to Manila went by way of Midway and Wake islands, far north of the equator, a perilously exposed route in the event of war. A safer alternative route was urgently needed and the War Department, reversing its previous decision, now gave a very high priority to the development of South Pacific ferry routes.

Through the British Joint Staff Mission in Washington (on which Australia was represented by the three service attachés at the Australian Legation) the War Department requested cooperation by the British, Australian and New Zealand authorities in the development of facilities for the transit of heavy bombers through the South Pacific islands and Australia. The Australian government, gratified by this active American involvement in its area, replied on 26 September that it would be glad to reconnoitre and survey any sites which the Americans wanted to investigate in the Solomons, the New Hebrides and New Caledonia. It recommended strongly that any trans-Pacific reinforcement route should pass through New Caledonia, where three aerodromes were already being developed by the RAAF, whereas in the Solomons and the New Hebrides a start would have to be made from scratch. In New Caledonia there were, or soon would be, fuel stocks, radio communications and repair facilities. Moreover, regular passage of American aircraft through New Caledonia would have a helpful effect on the morale of this Free French territory.[6]

On 15 October the United States government submitted a formal request for cooperation in the development of the Pacific landing fields to the British, Australian and New Zealand governments and to the Netherlands government in exile in London.[7] It did *not* approach the French National Committee in London. The State Department, in accordance with its policy of dealing only with local authorities in the various parts of the divided French empire, instructed the American consul at Noumea to take the matter up with High Commissioner d'Argenlieu (who in fact had not yet reached Noumea from Tahiti).

On 22 October, MacVitty pointed out to the State Department that three airfields, one of which was near completion, were already being constructed in New Caledonia under arrangements made by the Australian government. He suggested that the War Department's needs would be best served by cooperating with Australia in improving the projects already started.[8] The State Department, still anxious to keep its contacts with the Free French to a minimum, readily agreed and the matter was passed

back to the Commanding General of the Hawaiian Department (Major General Walter C. Short) to be taken up with technical authorities in Australia.[9] But in practice this deliberate avoidance of contact with the French National Committee at the policy level or even, for the time being, at the level of its representative in the Pacific, was bound to lead to complications. Captain d'Argenlieu, who was very shortly to be promoted to Rear-Admiral, was on his way to Noumea with firm instructions from de Gaulle to assert or, as the General put it, to *re*assert Free French authority there. One of his first assignments, as we have seen, was to sort out the defence arrangements already made with Australia, about which de Gaulle complained that he had not been adequately informed. Any new move by the Americans, especially one that might appear to be covert, was sure to provoke d'Argenlieu. It was a tempting idea to use the Australian backdoor to secure a base in New Caledonia, but with the sensitive Free French things were not so simple.

The Hawaiian Department, lacking political guidance, did not look before it leapt. It sent two officers (one from the Air Corps and one from the Engineer Corps, which at that stage was responsible for Army airfield construction) to carry out a reconnaissance on the ground. All the arrangements for this investigation were made through the New Zealand and Australian Service authorities. From d'Argenlieu's point of view, to use a favourite expression of his, this was a *maladresse*. On 1 November the Department of External Affairs, assuming wrongly that 'appropriate action' had already been taken by the American consul at Noumea, instructed Ballard to inform d'Argenlieu that Australia was cooperating fully in the air route project and to express the hope that he would do likewise in respect of New Caledonia and the New Hebrides. For his own information, Ballard was told that two United States Navy flying boats, one of which was carrying the Director of Works from RAAF Headquarters, would arrive at Noumea from New Zealand shortly to investigate the possibility of strengthening the airfields sufficiently to take heavier United States aircraft.[10] The aim was to have this work done ostensibly for the RAAF, without the neutral United States figuring as a party principal. The reconnaissance team arrived early in November without securing advance approval from the French authorities and, although they were able to carry out their task, d'Argenlieu, as MacVitty reported later,[11] showed deep resentment of the Hawaiian Department's unilateral action.

The American officers' main recommendation was that Plaine des Gaiacs, between Pouembout and Poya on the west coast, should be developed as the main landing field for heavy bombers, with Tontouta, closer to Noumea, as an emergency field. Technically this was sound advice and was a gratifying

vindication of the development efforts previously made by the RAAF and Australian civil engineers (with excellent cooperation from the colony's Director of Public Works). But politically the Americans seemed to be painting themselves into a corner.

The reconnaissance party's findings, as reported to the War Department by General Short on 22 November, reflected bewilderment at the unfamiliar situation encountered during this sudden foray into French territory.

> The local situation in New Caledonia is at the present time rather confused. The population is apparently overwhelmingly Free French, but there has been considerable intrigue among the various local people to secure leadership. The Australians have a very small garrison (about 100 men) which includes their air corps personnel, in the vicinity of Noumea. The population at the Noumea end of the island is predominantly native, and a large part of the French and other racial groups are in this vicinity. According to a very hurried estimate, about 90% of the population on the other end of the island is Japanese and amounts to about 20,000 people. Since the new site is located in the part of the island where the Japanese population is predominant, very careful consideration must be given to the interior defence of this field. . .[12]

The true number of Japanese present in New Caledonia (as MacVitty had reported on 4 November in a lengthy despatch replying to a War Department questionnaire on the military situation in New Caledonia), was 1,430,[13] but the 20,000 phantom Japanese in the Hawaiian Department's report were to haunt War Department thinking for some time. Whether they were exorcized in time to prevent them from being a significant element in the later American decision to garrison the island with American troops does not appear clearly from the records, but at this stage, as in most countries, liaison between the military and civil authorities was imperfect, and neither knew very much about New Caledonia. General Short pointed out to Washington that interior defence was a complicated problem on which he was in no position to make a snap recommendation.

> a dependence upon the Australian government, to defend an installation of the United States in a territory where both are aliens will present an anomalous situation. It is therefore recommended that very careful consideration be given to this matter in the War Department before a decision is reached as to whether the Australians should be requested to defend this installation [Plaine des Gaiacs] or the responsibility for defence assumed by United States forces.[14]

De Gaulle, doubtless alerted by d'Argenlieu, now instructed the Free French Delegation in the United States to negotiate with the American authorities to secure acceptable conditions for the use by the latter of facilities in French territory on the trans-Pacific air route. On 12 November he informed the United Kingdom that he had asked the Delegation to secure exact information as to the United States proposal and had informed d'Argenlieu that pending further instructions he could authorize American

officials 'to trace emplacements and to prepare technical plans'. The United Kingdom authorities understood de Gaulle's attitude to be that all questions of principle should be negotiated direct between the Free French Delegation and the United States government, and they warned Canberra that for their part they would think it difficult and impolitic to seek to prevent such an approach.[15] On 21 November de Gaulle set out his conditions for cooperation in a message transmitted to d'Argenlieu via the British and Australian authorities, who were thereby put on notice. They comprised an elaborate set of safequards for French soverignty, authority and long-term interests, providing *inter alia* that the command of aerodromes should be in the hands of French officials.[16]

D'Argenlieu appears to have already received instructions direct from London, since on 21 November he told MacVitty that he considered any improvement of the airfields should be the subject of an agreement between Free France, Australia and the United States and that *he was averse to any work being done until such an agreement was made.* He insisted that the matter should be handled in Washington and not at Noumea.[17]

This stand by the High Commissioner reflected his rejection of the view put to him by MacVitty and Ballard in the previous few days, viz. that no new principle was involved in the United States War Department's plan to cooperate with the RAAF in strengthening Plaine des Gaiacs aerodrome to take B17s. D'Argenlieu had already given similar approval for Tontouta which, however, was thought unsuitable for the B17s. D'Argenlieu remained adamant. He suggested that a radical change of plan for Plaine des Gaiacs might result in an undesirable delay: he wanted to have a field ready to be used by at least some types of aircraft as soon as possible.[18] It was a rather rigid interpretation of his instructions, but d'Argenlieu was always inclined to be more royalist than the king.

Secretary of State Hull could be rigid too. On 27 November the State Department told MacVitty firmly that the Australians were 'proceeding with construction at Noumea in accordance with the general plan', that the Commanding General of the Hawaiian Department was in charge on the American side and had been authorized by 'all other governments' to deal directly with local authorities. 'We feel that he should deal directly with the Free French government in Noumea or some particular person designated by it. It is the State Department's policy to deal with local Free French authorities in the territories which they administer.'[19]

It was no use. On 1 December d'Argenlieu told MacVitty that he proposed to await confirmation that an agreement had been concluded between the War Department and the Free French Delegation at Washington. Until he received it he had instructions not to permit any new work on the airfields

to be undertaken by either the Australians or the Americans. D'Argenlieu requested that the Hawaiian Department be instructed not to send any equipment or personnel to New Caledonia without consultation with him.[20] Lieutenant Sauer of the Engineer Corps was already carrying out a survey on the spot, which he was allowed to continue, but no construction work was to begin until agreement had been reached in Washington. The American consul was now in a singularly unhappy position. The Army authorities at Honolulu did not seem to have grasped the idea that New Caledonia was, after all, foreign territory. He wrote on 3 December

> It is my opinion that the Hawaiian Department, in ignoring the fact that New Caledonia is under a foreign Government by sending personnel and equipment here without advance permission, has greatly complicated the situation. . . As an instance of the ignoring of the rights of a foreign government, the Department is informed that Lieutenant Sauer, shortly after his arrival received a telegram from the District Engineer's office at Honolulu to the effect that equipment and personnel for a complete radio communication station was being sent here, and instructing him to have this station erected and placed in operation without delay.[21]

From 21-23 November the new commander of the United States Army Air Forces in the Far East, Major General L.H. Brereton, visited Melbourne from Manila to discuss the ferrying project with the Chief of the Air Staff, and a few days later a representative of the District Engineer at Hawaii also discussed the New Caledonia sector with RAAF Headquarters. General Brereton, of course, was mainly concerned with operations west of New Caledonia, but the Australian Chief of Staff (Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Burnett) thought it well to emphasize to him the special value which Australia attached to New Caledonia. On 23 November he said in a letter to General Brereton:

> When considering the strategic aspect from the point of view of Australia/New Zealand/Netherland East Indies and the Philippines which, to my mind, form to a great extent one problem, the position of New Caledonia has, I have no doubt, been considered by U.S.A. authorities.
>
> From Australia's point of view, we would welcome assistance by heavy bombers in this area, and if U.S.A. are in agreement, action should, I think, be taken to co-ordinate plans and institute an Advanced Air Base in New Caledonia. The Australian Air Force has already an Advanced Flying Boat Base in existence, and is preparing an aerodrome for medium bombers (Hudsons) some 30 miles from Noumea, the capital. I understand that this aerodrome is insufficient for B17s but a survey of the neighbouring ground has been made. This latter aerodrome will take some time to convert. There is also the question of control, if it should be used by U.S.A. aircraft.[22]

In the light of this emphasis on the strategic unity of the area including the island chain around Australia, the reasons given later by the American Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral King, for his wish to include the Solomon Islands in General MacArthur's Southwest Pacific area seem the

more astonishing. (He 'felt it was essential to engage the attention of Australians to the defence of the approaches to their country and shake them out of their isolationist attitude'.)[23] D.M. Horner, however, has pointed out that in early January 1942, the United States naval attaché in Australia was reporting to Washington that

> the major idea among Australian chiefs of defence departments, except the Navy, is that the first mission of defence personnel and equipment is to protect areas not at present threatened, instead of forwarding them for offensive operations in areas already under attack or threatened.[24]

At this time the full extent of the Army Air Force's requirements in New Caledonia were being made clear to Australian authorities by the American representative from Hawaii, Lief Sverdrup. It was a question of providing a 5,000-foot runway at Tontouta by 15 January 1942 for ferrying purposes and constructing an even larger operational base at Plaine des Gaiacs. He explained that he was also under instructions to seek bases with 7,000-foot runways in the New Hebrides and the Solomons, but he first had to dispose of the difficult New Caledonian situation (5,000 feet was the minimum length of runway required for the original model of the B17 Flying Fortress: new models being developed at the outbreak of war needed 7,000 feet). The Australian authorities viewed the American involvement in the South Pacific area with enthusiasm and were eager to cooperate in this formidable project. At the same time, they were aware of the possible complications. In view of New Caledonia's importance to Australia they were anxious to keep in close touch with any defence arrangements there, and they did not see how they could do this if everything was to be left for negotiation with the Free French Delegation in Washington. They recognized that any suggestion that American authorities should conduct negotiations through Australian channels was not feasible because, as the Secretary to the War Cabinet had written on 17 November, 'although the United States might be prepared to do so, the Free French would not'. In the circumstances the best solution seemed to them to have negotiations *in Noumea* between the Americans and the Free French authorities there, where the Australian point of view could be most effectively put. This was very much like an Australian version of the State Department's local authorities policy, and as such was highly objectionable to General de Gaulle. There was no evil intent. Australia had no wish and no motive to quarrel with the French National Committee. But Canberra had become used to its easy-going relationship with Governor Sautot, whose predominant concern was to cooperate as effectively as possible in the Allied war effort. It was not realized that from now on it was going to be even more difficult to deal with d'Argenlieu in Noumea than with the notoriously prickly de Gaulle in London.

In Washington an Army view on New Caledonia was formulated in the War Plans Division on 4 December and passed informally to the State Department. It was short and simple:

> (a) The Army desires to use the airdrome at Plaine des Gaiacs, New Caledonia, and through the Division Engineer, Hawaii, has contracted with the Australian Government to improve the field.
>
> (b) The population of that portion of the Island (100 miles north of Noumea) is estimated at 20,000 of which 90% are Japanese. The field is believed to be very near the shore. It is within the sphere of Japanese influence and could easily be reached by Japanese raider or aircraft.
>
> (c) To avoid dispersion of forces, the Army is opposed to providing the necessary defensive garrison.
>
> (d) The Army desires the Australian Government to assume responsibility for defense.[25]

At this point the War Department had just become aware of the ultimatum delivered to MacVitty by d'Argenlieu on 1 December, but the full impact of the French National Committee's attitude clearly had not yet been felt. The War Department still preferred to operate under cover of a new Australian-French agreement and expressed this view in a telegram of 5 December requesting a further report from General Short in Honolulu.[26] Two days later the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and d'Argenlieu's narrow, though legitimate, concern became insignificant.

The way out of the deadlock was provided by de Gaulle himself. On the day after the outbreak of war he telegraphed to d'Argenlieu, who had already been given jurisdiction over all Free French diplomatic representatives and colonial authorities in the Pacific and Far East, instructing him to inform Allied authorities in the area that the French National Committee was

> placing at the disposal of the Allied Forces all the facilities that may be offered by bases in the New Hebrides, Tahiti and New Caledonia. You will consult with these authorities concerning the measures to be taken for the defence of our own possessions. As soon as a state of war exists between Great Britain and Japan you will consider yourself at war with the latter.
>
> You will henceforward resist by every means all possible attacks by Japanese Forces. You will inform me of the decisions taken.
>
> I am communicating above instructions to the British, Chinese, American, Australian, Netherlands and New Zealand Governments as well as to our representatives in the Pacific and Far East.[27]

On receiving this notification the State Department promptly wrote to the Free French Delegate in Washington, Adrien Tixier, asking him to ensure that d'Argenlieu was specifically requested to permit the Australians and Americans to go forward with any construction of airfields which they might be in a position to carry out.[28] On 14 December the Hawaiian

Department reported to Washington that all objections to the construction of airfields in New Caledonia were now settled.[29] This was true – in principle. Some difficult discussions with d'Argenlieu lay ahead as he came to feel himself increasingly ill-used by the Australians and Americans, but at least he did not hold up the essential work on the airfields which were soon to play their part in the conflict.

In the first days of the Pacific war, with the Japanese thrust constantly gaining momentum in Southeast Asia, the outlook for New Caledonia and the South Pacific communication route remained momentarily uncertain. On 9 December the State Department took a non-commital attitude with the First Secretary of the Australian Legation in Washington, Alan Watt. Since New Caledonia was so close to Australia, Watt was told, and since any landing there by Japan would obviously constitute a threat to Australia, the Americans must assume that Australia would take responsibility for its defence. The United States would naturally do 'all that might be feasible in all the circumstances' to contribute to the protection of New Caledonia, but the immediate and primary responsibility rested with Australia and the State Department did not know what American assistance, if any, would be feasible.[30] The Australian Minister, R.G. Casey, suggested to Canberra that Australia should take any futher necessary military steps at once on its own initiative. If, he said, he could be given details of action taken and advice as to any specific form of American aid required, he would be in a better position to press the matter, but he could hold out no real hope that the United States would be able to give effective assistance (other than the supply of construction materials for airfields) until the strategic position in the Pacific had improved.[31]

There was little enough that Australia could do from its available resources. The Chiefs of Staff had indeed recommended, in an appreciation submitted to the War Cabinet on 11 December, that 'the joint United States-Australian proposals for the establishment of an operational base for United States and Australian aircraft at New Caledonia should be given a high priority and measures should be taken for the protection of such a base'. A minimum of a brigade group was considered necessary for this purpose.

The capture of any of the outlying islands (New Guinea, Timor, New Caledonia), said the Chiefs of Staff, would provide the enemy with a base for the development of attacks against the mainland of Australia. As for New Caledonia in particular, its occupation would deny Australia and the USA a link in a chain of communications and a valuable base for the protection of sea communications. Further, it was important for us to deny to Japan the nickel deposits of New Caledonia.[32]

War Cabinet, however, was unwilling immediately to reinforce outlying bases on the scale considered necessary, though it approved the despatch of one independent company to New Caledonia. It called for a supplementary appreciation, with special reference to the defence of (a) the Newcastle–Sydney–Kembla–Lithgow area of eastern Australia; (b) Darwin, and (c) islands to the northeast of Australia. The Chiefs of Staff were constrained to recognize, in their new appreciation submitted on 15 December, that, after provision was made for the vital mainland areas, land forces adequate for a serious defence of New Caledonia could not be spared, though the island's threefold importance continued to be acknowledged. Nor were the necessary air forces available to meet strong carrier-based Japanese aviation. Arrangements were in hand for No. 3 Independent Company to leave Sydney on 16 December 'to enhance the morale of the Free French Forces and for demolition purposes'. War Cabinet agreed that the question of New Caledonia's defence would be kept under review 'so that when existing priorities are completed a garrison should be sent there if the situation has not changed for the worse'.[33]

Horner, considering Australian strategy in the first weeks of the Pacific war, has highlighted the 'crippling limitations' – lack of naval and air forces, of engineer organization and equipment and of trained ground forces – which led inexorably to the decision not to reinforce Australia's north-eastern approaches.

> There is no reason to believe that such a course [reinforcement of island bases] would have delayed Japanese operations against the mainland had that been their intention. It would only have reduced the forces available in Australia for defence against a Japanese attack.[34]

No one could reasonably dissent from this, though the feelings of d'Argenlieu in Noumea, offered a reinforcement of *300* men and denied knowledge of high-level allied discussions, can be imagined.

In Washington, however, thinking had already begun to move in the direction of New Caledonia's integration into American strategic planning, which was to lead inevitably to the reluctant assumption by the United States of responsibility for garrisoning the island. On 10 December the Australia desk officer in the State Department, thinking over the cheerless conversation with Watt on the previous day, minuted

> I don't believe we can assume anything about what our Army and Navy may be doing to aid in the defense of New Caledonia. It seems evident . . . that our Army and Navy do not have information on the state of New Caledonia's defenses. I believe we ought to call somebody's attention to the fact that according to our latest information Australia has not taken over its defense. The loss of New Caledonia to the Japanese would, of course, constitute a considerable blow to our whole war effort.[35]

'Somebody' was, inevitably, the War Plans Division of the War Department, whose attention was directed to the problem on 11 December.[36] Brigadier General Dwight D. Eisenhower had just been appointed Deputy Chief of the War Plans Division with responsibility for Pacific and Far East planning. On 14 December he reported to the Chief of Staff, General Marshall, who gave him an outline of the dismal military situation in the Pacific, concluding with the question: 'What should be our general line of action?' Eisenhower asked for a few hours to formulate his recommendations. It was painfully clear to him that the Philippines themselves could not be reinforced directly by land or sea forces. It would not be possible to send any major reinforcements until the United States Navy had been sufficiently rehabilitated to enable it to operate safely in the Philippines area. There was no telling how long this would take. Meanwhile some vitally needed items might be shipped by submarines and blockade runners and, if the necessary lines of communication could be kept open, something could be transported by air. For this purpose Australia was the nearest suitable base to the Philippines. If Australia were to be used as a base it was essential to procure a line of communications leading to it. This meant that the United States must instantly move to save Hawaii, Fiji, New Zealand and New Caledonia as well as making certain of the safety of Australia itself. Presenting his conclusions to Marshall, he said

> It will be a long time before major reinforcements can go to the Philippines, longer than the garrison can hold out with driblet assistance, if the enemy commits major forces to their reduction. But we must do everything for them that is humanly possible . . . Our base must be Australia, and we must start at once to expand it and to secure our communications to it. In this last we dare not fail. We must take great risks and spend any amount of money required.

The tone of the Chief of Staff's brief and instant agreement led Eisenhower to think, correctly, that he had been set the problem as a check to an answer which Marshall had already reached for himself.[37] The Chief of Staff and Secretary of War Stimson had already been speaking on the same lines; and President Roosevelt, overriding naval objections, had that day approved their concept of 'aggressive defence' and an all-out attempt to reinforce MacArthur.[38] This moment, with the enemy triumphant everywhere and the Philippines already doomed, marked the beginning of an immense and – despite all the confusion and apparent muddle inseparable from swift action over such a vast field – a strikingly effective American effort in the Pacific that was to begin to roll back the Japanese while they were still in the first flush of their success in the Philippines and Southeast Asia.

On 17 December Casey was instructed to explain to the United States authorities Australia's inability to provide in a reasonable time the

considerable forces needed for the effective defence of New Caledonia. There was nothing for it but to ask the Americans to provide a garrison for the island.[39] This was a startling suggestion at that stage, since the Americans, while now prepared to commit themselves to a crash programme of reinforcing the Allied effort in the Dutch East Indies and above all the Philippines, had as yet no thought of spreading large contingents of ground troops around the Pacific. The whole thrust of American strategic policy was directed toward supporting the main effort against Germany. The hasty efforts now being mounted in the Far East were an essentially temporary departure, in desperate circumstances, from an order of priorities on which Eisenhower himself was to insist with renewed force when, a little later, it became clear that the Allies were powerless to keep any part of the ABDA area out of the Japanese 'co-prosperity sphere'.[40] The decision to commit American ground troops to the defence of Australia was not to be taken until 14 February 1942, and then in the context of underpinning efforts in the ABDA area.[41] New Caledonia, however, was a special and urgent case and, pressed vigorously in Washington by Casey and his staff, the United States was led to decide on a relatively massive commitment there.

Contemporary American and Australian records show vividly the rapid and radical change in the United States attitude. As late as 8 January 1942 an officer of the War Plans Division noted that efforts were being made to have Australia take reponsibility for defending the island. Less than a week later the Joint Chiefs of Staff, by now in possession of the Australian government's convincing demonstration that it lacked the means to carry out this task, decided that 'the United States should as a temporary measure furnish forces for the defense of the island, after meeting the emergency in the ABDA area'.[42]

Once the decision was taken it was executed with remarkable speed – though in an enevitably makeshift fashion. A force of 17,000 men, including infantry and service troops (to be joined by 1,500 Army Air Force personnel from a pool being formed in Australia) was earmarked for the defence of New Caledonia and sailed on 23 January from New York for Melbourne, where it was to be transhipped. It had some of the characteristics of a reinforced infantry division, and indeed it included most of the elements of what was later to be named the Americal Division and under that name was to campaign from Guadalcanal to Japan. But it was not yet a division, even in name. It included one brigade headquarters and two infantry regiments. For the rest, to quote the American official historian, it was a 'military stew' of hastily assembled units which had not previously worked together and did not know their commander, Brigadier-General Alexander

M. Patch, Jr, whom they would see for the first time at their destination. When arrangements for the transhipment of the convoy were being discussed with the naval attaché at the Australian Legation in Washington he was told among other things that the convoy 'was not tactically stowed'. This, not surprisingly, was a masterpiece of understatement. The transhipment at Melbourne, say the US Army historians, was 'attented by great confusion'. For once, however, there seems to have been no complaint about the performance of the Australian dockers who, working in mid-summer heat, had the convoy reloaded in eight days after its arrival in Melbourne on 26 February. It sailed straight away for Noumea where it arrived on 12 March.[43] (Even while it was being assembled in the United States, the possibility had been envisaged that it might have to be reallotted to the ABDA area, but so complete was the Allied disaster in that area that its diversion would clearly have served no purpose.)

Although General Patch had been instructed originally to plan 'on the assumption that additional forces would not be immediately available', reinforcements for New Caledonia numbering some 5,000 men were sent from the United States before the end of March. In part, this reinforcement comprised a regiment of heavy artillery needed to bring Patch's force up to divisional strength, such as the War Department had earlier hoped to draw from the ABDA command. In addition the War Department sent a third infantry regiment, the 164th, which was later to be the first Army unit committed to Guadalcanal.[44]

Even before the first American troops reached New Caledonia, Admiral King was pressing for the reinforcement of Efate in the New Hebrides. He was already thinking in terms of a counter-offensive, and in a memorandum submitted to President Roosevelt on 5 March he summed up his proposals in three short phrases: hold Hawaii; support Australasia; drive northwestward from the New Hebrides.[45] But the use of French territory under de Gaulle's trusteeship could not be taken for granted. Before the American landings mutually satisfactory conditions had had to be negotiated with the French National Committee.

On 24 December 1941 Tixier communicated to the State Department the general conditions under which the French were prepared to make base facilities available to the Americans in New Caledonia, the New Hebrides and Tahiti. These conditions, which closely followed those set forth by General de Gaulle on 21 November, were accepted by the State Department in a memorandum of 15 January 1942, with the exception of an obviously outmoded provision for the bases to be effectively under French command. This omission does not seem to have offended de Gaulle, who mentions the memorandum approvingly in his memoirs,[46] but the

message did not seem to be reaching d'Argenlieu who, the Americans found, continued to insist on committments which seemed to go beyond those exacted by the French National Committee itself. The High Commissioner, in fact, was rapidly losing patience with both the Americans and the Australians, who seemed to him unwilling to contribute any significant defence assistance to the territories under his command even while they were demanding bases there. In December 1941 he had sent a team of officers to Australia with a list of requests for reinforcements and equipment. He had asked for three Anson aircraft for his use. No equipment had been sent and no reinforcements beyond the independent company now under his command. In late January he was publicly denying rumours that Noumea was to be declared an open town. He had been told only in the most general terms that the United States was taking steps to provide for New Caledonia's defence, and suspected that in one way or another the Allies were up to no good. He was sufficiently annoyed to consider using the airfields and shipments of strategic metals as bargaining counters with the Americans. On 20 January he summed up his feelings in a telegram to de Gaulle.

> Military situation . . . is only fair. The mission sent to Australia was given a courteous welcome and obtained liaison personnel but no equipment nor air support . . .
>
> From the United States we have obtained only the appointment of a liaison officer. No reply to our urgent request for equipment . . .
>
> . . the population [of Tahiti] is seriously disturbed at the prospect of joint action by Japan and Vichy, especially in view of Washington's attitude on the *ralliement* of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon . . .
>
> The United States seem determined to extract from us all they need without any compensation. I have already requested you to give them nothing without countervailing contribution to our means of defence. The despatch of tonnage to lift ore and the construction of the aerodrome give us our only means of effective pressure . . . unless officially instructed to the contrary I shall suspend loadings unless I receive assurance of delivery of the necessary armaments.
>
> I apprehend, without having any firm confirmation, a secret combination between America and Australia to impose on us, without prior consultation, the landing of American troops. You have instructed me not to accept such a thing. I shall carry out your orders by every means.[47]

D'Argenlieu's state of mind at this stage is interesting. De Gaulle depicts him as sending to London 'reports full of energy but not of illusions',[48] of which the telegram just quoted is presumably an example. But in fact the Admiral had by no means shaken himself free of the illusion that he was, or should be, an important regional commander, subject only to the general jurisdiction of General Wavell, Commander in Chief of the ill-fated ABDA area. On 12 January he had sent an angry telegram to the Australian Prime Minister protesting that despite repeated assertions of respect for French sovereignty, Australia and the United States were, as he had good reason to

believe, discussing the defence of New Caledonia without any consultation with the Free French authorities. He demanded that the Australian Minister at Washington be instructed to make it clear to the Americans that Australia had no objection to direct negotiations between the United States and the Free French.[49]

On 14 January Curtin sent a soothing reply.

> I have received your message regarding defence of New Caledonia. Am giving careful consideration to the questions you have raised. We appreciate fully the difficulties with which you are confronted in problems of defence. I venture to point out that it is not correct that we are studying New Caledonian defence independently of yourself; it is correct that we are endeavouring to obtain additional aid for New Caledonia from United States sources.
>
> You know that it is not possible for this country alone to adjust differences between the Free French Movement and the United States of America. However, we sincerely hope that the time will shortly come when your courage and determination will be fully recognised.

It was all the Australian Prime Minister could do, in the circumstances. But d'Argenlieu was not appeased. On 21 January he again urged that Australia should stand out of the way and let the Free French get on with direct negotiations for American military assistance. His second telegram caused some consternation in Canberra, and the Department of External Affairs was in favour of meeting his wishes. The Chiefs of Staff, however, pointed out that whereas Australia had earlier supported the idea of seeking American equipment for the Free French troops in New Caledonia, the United States was now doing everything in its power to ensure the defence of the island. As for d'Argenlieu's insistence on direct negotiations with the Americans, that aspect was already being sorted out in Washington. It seemed unnecessary for Australia to intervene. The only action deemed necessary was to make 'a diplomatic reply' to d'Argenlieu's message.

Basically the Chiefs of Staff were right. On 21 January the Australian embassy at Washington reported to Canberra that at a meeting of State, War and Navy Department representatives attended by General Patch and by Australian service attachés it had been agreed to recommend, as 'the best means of reassuring the Free French, consistently with security', that General de Gaulle be given an immediate assurance that substantial American support would be forthcoming as soon as possible and asked to 'instruct the Free French representative in New Caledonia to co-operate fully both in future and as regards projects already under way'.[50] The message finally sent to the French National Committee, on 23 January, read

> The British and United States Chiefs of Staff appreciate the importance of New Caledonia and have initiated measures for its defence in general accordance with the conditions stipulated in my [i.e. the State Department's] memorandum of January 15. It is requested that you so inform the High Commissioner at Noumea,

> and impress on him the necessity for absolute secrecy. We hope the splendid assistance and cooperation rendered by the High Commissioner in the past will be continued in the future.

It was relayed on 25 January to d'Argenlieu with an instruction to accord the requisite cooperation to the Americans.[51] D'Argenlieu, however, continued to drag his feet, and as late as 9 February Assistant Secretary of State Berle told Tixier that he had no reason to believe that the message had ever reached Noumea.[52] One element in d'Argenlieu's dissatisfaction may have been the delay before he received on 1 February from the Australian Prime Minister the 'diplomatic reply' recommended by the Chiefs of Staff in Melbourne. Bound by the security embargo on Task Force 6184, by now entering the Pacific, Curtin sent him an encouraging but studiously vague message, between the lines of which he probably thought to read further Australian-American collusion at his expense. He maintained a somewhat churlish attitude, seeking to insist in particular that he be given full details of proposed American support and that any American forces going to New Caledonia should be placed under his command. On 23 February the State and War Departments agreed that it would be expedient for Patch, who was then flying to Hawaii en route to Australia, to call at Noumea to confer with d'Argenlieu, while still maintaining a considerable degree of discretion. 'I consider such a visit as most desirable', wrote General Marshall, 'since the French are very worried as to whether they are going to get any help from us or not. General Patch will be able to reassure them without divulging the size or composition of his force or probable date of arrival.' Could d'Argenlieu have known it, this decision represented a significant advance on the original War Department intention, which had been that Patch should confer fully with the *Australian* authorities – held responsible in principle for the defence of New Caledonia – before having any contact with the French authorities at all.[53] It satisfied de Gaulle, who, on 25 February, telegraphed to d'Argenlieu:

> I am informed by Washington that General Patch, commanding American army forces in the Pacific, has been ordered to visit you. His instructions are reach an understanding with you, directly and in the most friendly spirit, for the organization of the command.
>
> Moreover the United States Consul at Noumea has been instructed to state publicly that his government recognizes in the French Pacific islands no authority but that of the French National Committee.
>
> Under these conditions, which are satisfactory, we have no objection to the landing of American forces on our territory. If this landing takes place it will indeed be appropriate to give it maximum public emphasis.
>
> At the same time in the arrangements which you make with General Patch you are to take all steps to ensure that the command of the immediate defence of our colonies is held by yourself. On the other hand, if Patch is to have a

> defined sphere of action and if he has reserves at his disposal I see no inconvenience in your agreeing to depend on him so far as concerns general inter-allied action in this theatre of operations.[54]

Now d'Argenlieu had no grounds for withholding or attaching conditions to his cooperation with the Americans. On 12 March he reported to de Gaulle:

> On Sunday 9 March Brigadier-General Patch, commander designate of the allied troops in New Caledonia, arrrived at Noumea. . . substantial troops are expected shortly.
>
> Contact is now established between Patch and myself . . . it seems clear that the command of the allied forces in New Caledonia can be held only by Patch, whose forces and resources are overwhelming in comparison with ours. Having requested him to communicate his instructions to me, I assured him that he would exercise, as his orders provided, the tactical command of all forces in New Caledonia. He appreciated this decision and assured me that he would keep me informed of all his activities . . .[55]

On the same day Task Force 6184 arrived in Noumea harbour, abruptly increasing the population of the Grande Terre by nearly 50 per cent. Since, miraculously, the strength and the itinerary of this force had been kept secret until the last moment, no significant preparations had been made for their reception and maintenance. The American troops were landing on a friendly but unknown and unreconnoitred shore. General Patch's mission was, in extenso, 'in cooperation with military forces of the United Nations, hold New Caledonia against attack'. The difficulties, both technical and logistic, with which he was faced in carrying out this deceptively simple task must have seemed overwhelming. The lines of battle still had to be drawn in the Western Pacific and the eventual combat role of his troops was utterly uncertain. Topographical information, local supplies, communications, adequate port facilities – all were lacking. Even the weather was against him, for the rainy season was about to set in as a vast and miscellaneous quantity of stores and equipment, much of it unsuitably or inadequately packed, began to accumulate on Noumea's congested wharves and in hastily selected dumps. Not the least creditable feature of the way in which order was brought out of this chaos was the performance of the supply and engineer troops in distributing supplies and equipment, including crated aircraft, over what came to be known as the 'little Burma road' which formed Noumea's only link with the uncompleted airfields and more northerly defence positions. It was obviously a matter of months rather than weeks before deployment and training of ground and air forces would reach anything like a satisfactory stage. But as Patch assumed his herculean task there were two bright spots on his horizon.

In the first place, he was not building entirely from the ground upward, though alarmingly close to it. He had at least the benefit of the modest but

creditable preliminary work done by the Australian forces. Airfields had been surveyed and partially constructed; there was a working flying-boat base at Noumea; he had under his command a tiny but highly trained and useful contingent of Australian troops who were temporarily responsible for the land defence of the north; the RAN was operating a Port War Signal Station at Noumea, and his shortage of intelligence on New Caledonia was at least partially made up by the assignment to his staff of the three Australian service liaison officers (Lieutenant-Commander H.S. Barnett, RAN, Captain C.H. Carty-Salmon and Flight-Lieutenant E. McColl, RAAF) who possessed useful local knowledge and with whom he was to develop relations of confidence.

The second ray of light on the horizon was to prove deceptive. Amid so many uncertainties it seemed at least that the misunderstandings between the United States government and the Free French had now been cleared up. D'Argenlieu had assured Patch of his cooperation. But the High Commissioner's widely publicized handshake with the American commander on 9 March had merely disguised his continuing and indeed growing resentment at finding himself the fifth wheel of a coach obviously destined to be driven by Americans through his own French domain.

7 *The d'Argenlieu crisis*

WHEN THE NEWLY promoted Rear-Admiral d'Argenlieu arrived at Noumea on 6 November 1941 he had received a loyal and even enthusiastic welcome from the Gaullist majority of the population. The fear that he had been sent out to supplant Sautot, the hero of the *ralliement*, had been fairly well dissipated. Perhaps, after all, someone more martial, less incurably civilian and down to earth than Sautot was needed to preside over the defence of the Pacific territories. The Japanese threat was visibly increasing, and de Gaulle had sent out his close confidant to take charge. And, notwithstanding all said previously about d'Argenlieu, he *was* impressive. He had put aside temporarily but firmly his ecclesiastical quality – at his first reception of local personalities he coldly rebuked someone who addressed him effusively as 'mon Père'. He had been wounded at Dakar; he seemed full of military virtue. He spoke an almost unbearably classical French with great eloquence. 'Now we have a real leader', some people said. But soon he wore out his welcome.

D'Argenlieu had put aside his monkish habit without becoming a real political or military leader, for which he was too limited. He was that sad figure in public life, one whose qualities are unequal to the opportunities opened to him by events. We have already followed his obtuse dealings with the Australians and Americans as the Pacific war exploded and spread. He went on as he had begun, like a caricature of de Gaulle. In his zeal for the protection of French interests and sovereignty he made every possible mistake, whereas de Gaulle, who rarely gave offence unintentionally, was also capable of compromise in the interest of *Realpolitik*. As has been said, 'There comes a time in every public man's life when he has to know how to rise above principle'. De Gaulle knew this very well, but d'Argenlieu did not. He went ruthlessly ahead in the predestinate grooves of his instructions from de Gaulle, regardless of what he might meet on the way. The events of 1942 were unpredictable in 1941, and he proved unequal to them.

D'Argenlieu was accompanied by a large civil and military staff. They were a motley crew, drawn from the miscellaneous floating population to be found at Carlton Gardens, where de Gaulle was scarcely in a position to choose ideal assistance. (One writer on his London days quotes him as meeting criticism of a subordinate with the words, 'I am used to having to work with scum'.)[1] There was a former right-wing deputy who was d'Argenlieu's principal civil assistant, there was a variegated collection of military officers, at least one of whom was a disguised secret policeman, and, strangest of all, there was a British liaison officer wearing the brand new uniform of a lieutenant-commander in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. The green backing of the wavy gold rings on his sleeves seemed to indicate intelligence duties, but his functions were obscure, to no one more than the Australian and British representatives on the spot. As Ballard was to point out a little later to Canberra, he was completely in the High Commissioner's confidence and handled many confidential defence matters for him, but it was not clear just who had lent him to d'Argenlieu or whether he reported to any British authority: he should be regarded for all practical purposes as a Frenchman.[2] The new High Commissioner's staff did not consist entirely of dug-out officers and freeloaders, though that was the general impression which the local population soon came to hold. One of them, Commander Cabanier, was an already distinguished officer who, in command of a French submarine in an English port at the time of the armistice, had joined de Gaulle with his entire crew, and who was to end his career as Chief of Staff of the French navy. Loyalty was to oblige him to assume a major reponsibility in the conflict which soon developed between the d'Argenlieu mission and the population.

During the first months of 1942 d'Argenlieu and his staff increasingly provoked the New Caledonians' resentment by their obvious determination to lead a privileged and indeed luxurious life in this rear area and by their scarcely concealed contempt for the local inhabitants. Houses and cars were requisitioned for the mission on a generous scale, and even 30-odd years later its 'exactions' (a recurrent term) were vividly remembered at Noumea. So far as anyone could see, this behaviour was not balanced by any notable contribution to the improvement of the colony's defences, which had been alleged to be d'Argenlieu's main purpose. Local resentment was increased by the fact that hundreds of New Caledonians were fighting with General Koenig's Free French brigade in North Africa while d'Argenlieu's entourage seemed prepared to stay indefinitely in the distant Pacific. When General Patch's American forces arrived in New Caledonia early in March the local political situation was already quite tense: the

population would have been even more incensed if it could have known that only a few weeks before d'Argenlieu had been threatening to forbid the Americans to land in New Caledonia at all. In the context of an Allied effort in the Pacific there was no reason for the mission to stay. But for d'Argenlieu it was not so simple. The Japanese were not the only enemies visible to him. He obviously felt, and de Gaulle unfortunately agreed, that his presence was now more necessary than ever to deal with the 'turbulent' local population which was directly exposed to foreign influences. The logical end of this kind of reasoning was that Sautot rather than d'Argenlieu should be removed. His relations both with the population and with the Allies were suspect. It was so decided. On 29 April de Gaulle telegraphed to d'Argenlieu his decision to 'invite' Sautot to come to London where he would be given a new assignment.[3] Sautot acquiesced, but a wave of popular protest against his removal began to rise as soon as the position became known, as it did immediately. Sautot's enemy Vergès seems to have been partly responsible. He was for some unfathomable reason in d'Argenlieu's confidence. Sautot plausibly asserts that d'Argenlieu communicated de Gaulle's decision to Vergès who proceeded to boast in his cups that he had at last managed to 'get rid of Sautot'. In any event de Gaulle's telegram and Sautot's reply were read on Noumea radio at noon on 1 May. A committee of five New Caledonian notables, led by Bergès, which had been secretly formed some time earlier now sought out General Patch and asked him to forward to de Gaulle a protest against Sautot's removal, which they claimed was opposed by 90 per cent of the population. Patch declined to intervene. On 1 May Sautot told d'Argenlieu that he had withdrawn his decision to leave New Caledonia in view of the serious popular reaction to it. He sent through d'Argenlieu a message to de Gaulle – which caused grave offence – respectfully asking him to reconsider the matter. For the moment d'Argenlieu bided his time, while the 'Caledonian committee' set about mobilizing bush support for a possible coup on the lines of the September 1940 manifestation. On 3 May a widely respected local doctor, Edouard Trubert, reluctantly allowed himself to be persuaded to wait on d'Argenlieu with a mandate from the committee to try to persuade the Admiral to leave New Caledonia. Trubert duly interviewed d'Argenlieu and was satisfied that the latter had agreed to leave, though professing to be unable to understand the population's grievances against him.[4] Trubert was a modest and unassuming man, but intelligent and entirely reliable, and it cannot be thought that he misunderstood d'Argenlieu. Nonetheless the Admiral had no intention of leaving. The situation remained unresolved until 5 May, which happened to be the first anniversary of the Pacific contingent's departure for the front. A service, attended by both d'Argenlieu

and Sautot, was held at the cathedral at 8 a.m., followed by a ceremony at the war memorial at which Sautot spoke (d'Argenlieu did not attend) and Captain Dubois took the salute. The crowd was orderly, but continuing tension was obvious. Something had to give. The d'Argenlieu mission had clamped very like a state of siege on the town of Noumea, but the population was visibly stirring and might at any moment get out of hand. Meeting Sautot at the cathedral earlier that morning I had taken the opportunity to ask for a personal interview with him – my own chief Ballard was in Australia – and had been invited to call on him at 3 o'clock that afternoon. When I did so he explained that he was awaiting a reply from de Gaulle to his request for permission to stay on in Noumea. If de Gaulle remained adamant he would ask to be mobilized – 'I am a sergeant, you know, a sergeant in the artillery', he said surprisingly – and if that too were refused he would demand to be retired. He invited me to return in 24 hours to be told de Gaulle's decision, which he was sure he would know by then. Neither of us knew that on de Gaulle's orders he was about to be kidnapped and forcibly removed from New Caledonia. At 6 o'clock that evening d'Argenlieu spoke on the radio emphasizing the need for everyone to have confidence in de Gaulle's decisions. 'Vive de Gaulle! Vive Sautot!' he ended. As he was speaking, troops were surrounding the Governor's residence and Commander Cabanier was telling Sautot he must prepare at once to go on board the sloop *Chevreuil*. Four local leaders, Bergès, Mouledous, Pognon and Solier, had already been invited to see the High Commissioner at 5 p.m. and had been arrested on arrival at his office. They too were taken on board *Chevreuil*, which left the wharf and anchored in the harbour.

One leading personality who had escaped arrest was Georges Dubois, and he was perhaps the most important of all since he was in command of the local militia, who were intensely loyal to him and opposed to the mission. He was understandably worried and went to see Patch. (It should be remembered that at this stage no one had any idea how far d'Argenlieu was prepared to go. He had already been indulging in arbitrary arrests. As one of his prisoners recalled later, they had reason to fear that their very lives might be in danger.) Patch told him to go home and arranged for an American guard to be placed around his house. This action seems to be the source of later accusations that Patch interfered in French internal affairs. They were not justified. Patch's concern was to remain aloof and get on with the war. But he could not contemplate serious local disturbances, to which Dubois's arrest would certainly have led. On 10 May the RAAF liaison officer at Noumea, Flight Lieutenant McColl, noted that he had just called at d'Argenlieu's headquarters and found junior officers there

High Commissioner d'Argenlieu and Governor Sautot outside Noumea Cathedral, a few hours before Sautot's arrest, 5 May 1942.

> furious with the Americans and General Patch in particular as they considered he should have used force to help them. They also accused him of aiding the other side.
>
> During the whole dispute I was most of the time at American Staff Headquarters. I have access to everything in G.2 office and state quite definitely, not once did I see or hear anything which would give the slightest credence to any report that the General gave material help to either side. The General's repeated insistence on non violence actually favoured the Mission as they would never have been able to take away the prisoners on the 'CHEVREUIL' if the Militia had not been restrained by Dubois.
>
> The people here have a high regard for General Patch whose democratic manner appeals to them and they realize the position in which he was placed. I have had many discussions with both the British Consul and Maj. Oughton [a British ex-regular officer representing the Chrome Company in New Caledonia] who feel that a very difficult situation was handled admirably.[5]

Patch indeed was now in a most difficult position. A major battle was impending to the north of New Caledonia, which itself might be attacked at any time. He thought for a moment of forcibly preventing *Chevreuil*'s departure, but decided not to do so. The sloop sailed on the morning of 6 May. Its first call was at Walpole, a desolate island 200 kilometres from Noumea, where the four New Caledonian leaders were unceremoniously disembarked (and where, as one of them recalled later, the Melanesian sergeant of the escort, remarking, 'C'est pas bon, ces manières!', offered to arrest the metropolitan *aspirant* in charge of the landing party). It then proceeded to Auckland where Sautot was landed with a 'liaison officer' to keep an eye on him on his journey to England.

At this point d'Argenlieu's single-minded concentration on ridding himself of Sautot involved him in a particularly discreditable incident. Two hours after *Chevreuil* sailed from Noumea she heard distress signals from a Greek merchant ship, *Chloe*, which was being attacked by a Japanese submarine some 30 miles south of Noumea. She held on course and made no attempt to intervene. Later that day Patch wrote to d'Argenlieu complaining that a request for *Chevreuil* to take part in a search for the submarine had been refused and asking urgently that she be instructed to return to Noumea to cooperate in anti-submarine patrols, pointing out that three other ships carrying American personnel and supplies were within this danger zone near New Caledonia. In reply d'Argenlieu declined to offer more than minimal and conditional cooperation. He was prepared to divert *Chevreuil* 'for a few hours' if given details of the movements of the ships in question, but protested that the sloop's cooperation would be 'only of the most insignificant military value'. This was nonsense. *Chevreuil* had been from 26 February to 24 April in Sydney being fitted with the latest anti-submarine devices. In the words of the British liaison officer on board, she

was equipped to the highest degree for a ship of her size to carry out an anti-submarine search. But d'Argenlieu had recalled her from Sydney to serve his own political ends and had no intention of allowing her to be diverted for Allied purposes.[6]

As soon as *Chevreuil* had sailed, a general strike was declared at Noumea, popular demonstrations broke out and many bushmen, alerted by telephone, began to converge on the capital. On the same day Patch reported to Washington that d'Argenlieu had asked him to use force to assist in maintaining order but that he had refused to intervene. He expressed anxiety about the consequences of d'Argenlieu's 'surreptitious and devious' action. In a second message sent on 7 May he reported that open violence seemed more imminent and that the resulting disorders could be highly favourable to the enemy. Demonstrations could be expected to grow in intensity until the source of the trouble, which he considered to be d'Argenlieu and his mission, was removed. The latter, Patch went on, 'sought and expected' the use of American troops against the population, but if his troops were so used he would 'lose the military support of the local militia and the entire population, which is important to us militarily'. He asked whether the international political situation permitted a delegation to him of authority to place d'Argenlieu and his staff under protective arrest 'as the disorders grew into an immediate and dangerous military threat'. General Marshall in Washington asked the head of the British Military Mission there, Sir John Dill, to have Patch's messages brought to de Gaulle's attention.[7]

The British authorities acted promptly. On 8 May the acting British representative to the French National Committee, Charles Peake, spoke very firmly indeed to Pleven and René Dejean at Free French headquarters. He was, he said, instructed to express 'the gravest disquiet both of the Commonwealth government and of the United Kingdom government at what was going on'. It seemed 'utterly inexcusable' that d'Argenlieu should have taken any action that might even risk the possibility of disorders in the existing circumstances. Late that evening Peake was told that de Gaulle had concurred in the despatch of a strong telegram adjuring d'Argenlieu to act in harmony with Patch. On the following morning an Assistant Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, William Strang, reinforced Peake's representations when Dejean came to see him to complain about British policy on Madagascar. D'Argenlieu's behaviour, Strang said, seemed incredible. New Caledonia was on the very edge of the battle and might be an early objective for the enemy. But at this very moment he had chosen to dismiss the Governor who had brought the island over to de Gaulle and who had worked in harmony with both the British and the Americans. Only the presence of American troops had made it possible to take this high-handed

action and, even so, there had been disturbances which gravely embarrassed the American commander in his task of providing for the defence of New Caledonia. Dejean admitted that d'Argenlieu had acted unwisely; de Gaulle, he reiterated, had sent him a strong telegram, and Tixier in Washington had been instructed to explain matters to the State Department.

Later on the same day (9 May) Admiral Stark, at that time the senior American Services officer present in London, saw de Gaulle and concluded with him an agreement guaranteeing liberty of action for Patch in his defence role. D'Argenlieu's safety was also guaranteed and he was to remain free to communicate with de Gaulle, but the local administration was to act in accordance with Patch's wishes. De Gaulle in fact had little choice in the matter. The British Chiefs of Staff, with Ministerial approval, had already informed their American colleagues through Dill that in their view the important thing was to see that Patch had a free hand to deal with the local situation in the interests of the island's security and defence. If to this end he found it necessary to 'circumscribe d'Argenlieu's contacts or his contacts with the population', he should be authorized to do so.

Patch was now strengthened by firm support from the governments of both the major Allies, and indeed it was urgent that no unnecessary obstacles should be placed in his path. On 10 May a Japanese aircraft carrier was reported making toward New Caledonia and an air alert was declared. This was in fact a part of the confused movements following the Coral Sea battle, and the carrier soon turned north again, but it was obviously a situation in which chances could not be taken. New Caledonia was still a specific Japanese objective. By this time local events had taken a new turn. On 8 May d'Argenlieu had set out on a visit to the west coast centres of Paita and La Foa – 'in order to rally the population which had been disgracefully misled by foreign-concocted propaganda', according to a report to de Gaulle from Cabanier.[8] At La Foa he was detained by a crowd and imprisoned. Under pressure from Patch, who was anxious to see order maintained without having to use his emergency powers, the bushmen allowed the Admiral to return as far as his country house at Paita (described in his correspondence with de Gaulle as 'my bush command post'). Subsequently he allowed the popular committee to negotiate with him an agreement for the release and exculpation of the Walpole prisoners, d'Argenlieu himself being understood to undertake to leave New Caledonia as soon as possible. The prisoners' return to Noumea on 17 May marked the effective end of the acute stage of the crisis.

In yielding, with a rather poor grace, to local demands and so ceasing actively to obstruct Patch, d'Argenlieu seems to have been moved rather by awareness of his weak position locally, where he had few supporters outside

Sautot and Georges Dubois (behind Sautot, his chef de cabinet Nicolas Ratzel) inspecting home guard, 5 May 1942.

his own staff, than by the 'strong instructions' which Free French headquarters had supposedly sent him. The relevant telegrams to d'Argenlieu reproduced in de Gaulle's memoirs give a rather different impression from that conveyed by the British Foreign Office's records of the incident. They contain no suggestion that d'Argenlieu had acted unwisely, and only the gentlest of admonitions to him to make an effort to re-establish relations of confidence with Patch in the national interest, despite the 'American interference' which de Gaulle joined d'Argenlieu in deploring. De Gaulle himself saw the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, on 11 May and was far from conciliatory. His main grievance at that moment was Madagascar, but he took the opportunity to denounce Allied conduct on several other matters, including New Caledonia in his list. His own correspondence with d'Argenlieu and his narration of the May incidents is only rather distantly related to the dismal reality of events. In his memoirs the story of d'Argenlieu and his wrecking crew is transmuted into a Cornelian drama in which the Admiral, like a latter-day Cid, behaves with unfailing nobility and virtue is finally rewarded.

> After three days of incidents good sense resumed its sway and d'Argenlieu took command again. . . In face of the imminent danger the population, deploring the recent disorders, rallied round the French authority. Various troublemakers were sent away to serve in Syria. [This is doubtless a reference to Dubois, of whose role de Gaulle was specially critical.] Patch, for his part, went to see d'Argenlieu to apologize for the 'misunderstandings in which he had been involved. . .' .[9]

The text of the Patch-d'Argenlieu exchanges attests to both the correctness and the firmness of the American General's attitude. He did feel obliged, as Dubois's commanding officer, to apologize formally for indiscretions charged against the latter, but these were both minor and inevitable, consisting merely of open discussions of the Sautot affair, which was on the lips of everyone in New Caledonia. Patch's formal apology was coupled with an equally formal request that no action be taken against Dubois, whom he described as 'a most valuable officer in my command'. Milton Viorst, in *Hostile Allies* (New York 1966), quoting General de Gaulle and Admiral Stark's exchanges with him, gave new currency to the idea that Patch had improperly taken sides in a local political dispute. The editors of General Eisenhower's papers (1970) have unfortunately followed Viorst.[10]

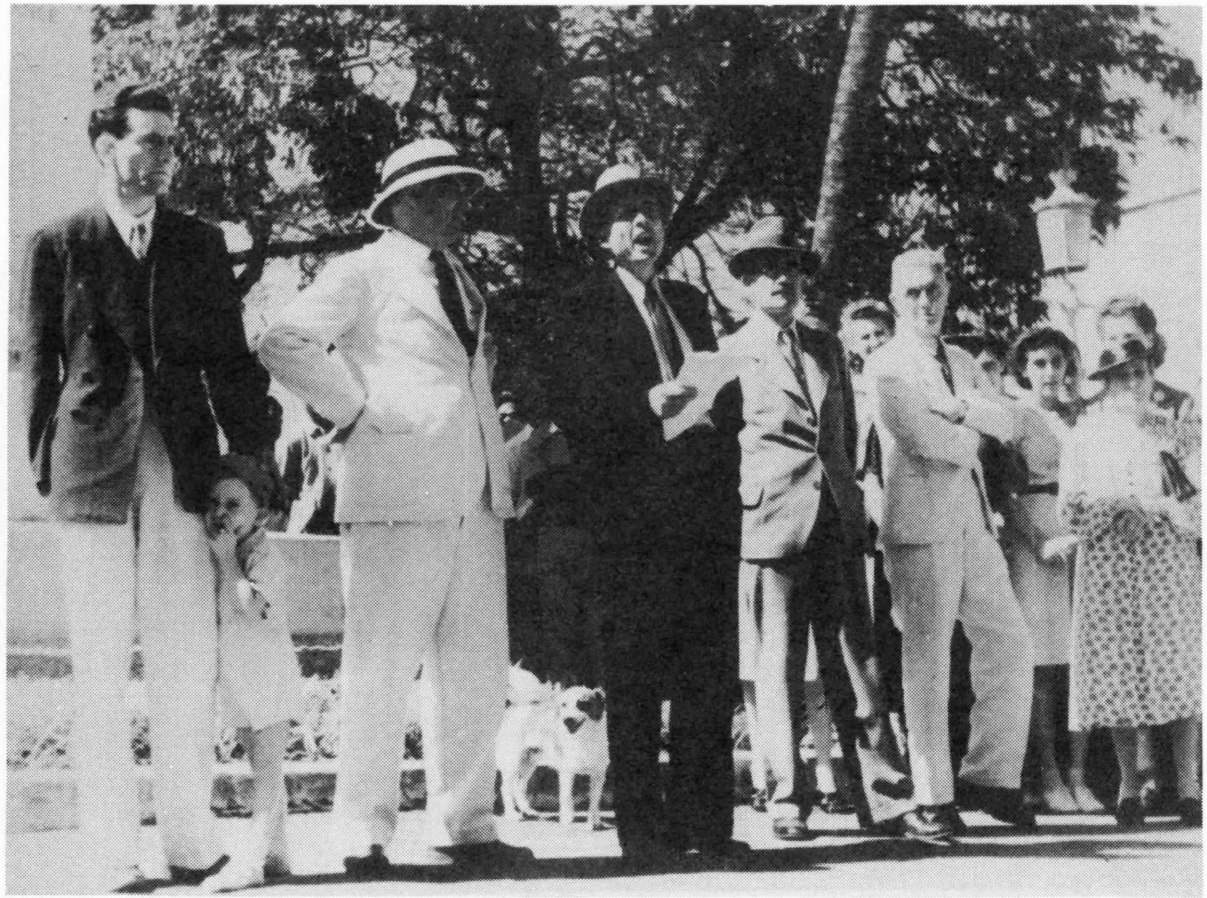
At the time, at all events, things appeared very differently in New Caledonia. The d'Argenlieu mission remained sullen and uncooperative, and at least one of its officers worked actively with disparate local elements at the dissemination of viciously xenophobic propaganda. As late at 19 May Lieutenant-Colonel Matheson (commanding No. 3 Australian Independent Company) and Flight Lieutenant McColl, having received first hadn evidence

that the ineffable Vergès was accusing Pognon of being an agent paid by the Australian Army, went to see d'Argenlieu's British liaison officer to ask if this blatant rumour-mongering could not be stopped. The officer said he had 'seen evidence' that Pognon was or had been an Australian agent. He went on at once to ask whether Matheson would agree to bring Australian troops to Noumea in the event of further disturbances. Matheson, a blunt and outspoken man whose patience had already been strained by the spectacle of a British officer echoing Vergès's absurd allegation, retorted that of course he would do nothing of the sort, for two cogent reasons: first he was under Patch's command and could not act without the latter's orders, and secondly he himself believed that in the recent incidents the mission had been entirely in the wrong.[11]

D'Argenlieu himself lived from now on in relative seclusion, from which he emerged briefly on 20 May to receive the new South Pacific Area Commander, Vice-Admiral Ghormley – in transit to his headquarters at Auckland – and hand him a memorandum of ill-founded complaints against Patch. Ghormley was predisposed to be sympathetic to Free French grievances, but fortunately for Patch, who had borne the brunt of his attitude, d'Argenlieu's claws had been clipped. As Ballard noted on his return to Noumea, the circumstances surrounding the deportation of Sautot and the local leaders had made it clear to all that his word was not to be trusted. Patch confided to Ballard late in May that he remained prepared to put the d'Argenlieu mission under protective arrest if they gave any more trouble.[12] The crisis point was not, however, approached again. The mission faded away gradually as various of its members were sent off to Tahiti and to London. D'Argenlieu himself remained, and he was incorrigible, but at least Patch could henceforth be confident that he would not be allowed to cause any major problems.

In various annoying smaller ways d'Argenlieu could still be a nuisance, and he seized every opportunity. Almost up to the eve of the Guadalcanal landing in August he kept up an acrimonious correspondence with Patch on various petty grievances, and maintained repeatedly that he was not himself responsible to Ghormley, Nimitz or indeed any Allied authority except de Gaulle.[13]

The French Administration under Governor Montchamp, who replaced Sautot at the end of July and remained in sole charge after d'Argenlieu's departure, did not make a good impression on the Americans. Admiral Halsey later commented severely on Montchamp's aloof attitude.[14] The American naval historian says 'The French governor kept sulkily (but not silently) aloof in his "palace" on the hilltop'.[15] That, it would seem, was not entirely Montchamp's fault. He had made a good impression on Luke's



Georges Dubois addressing gathering at War Memorial, Noumea, 18 May 1942. He is flanked by d'Argenlieu's just-released prisoners (from left, E. Solier, P. Bergès, E. Moulédous, R. Pognon).

successor, Sir Philip Mitchell. But he was bound by instructions from d'Argenlieu, who retained responsibility for Pacific affairs even after his return to London, and even suspected the Admiral of tampering with his reports to de Gaulle. Great events were taking place but d'Argenlieu was unable to rise to their level. His last chance to make significant trouble was found in the New Hebrides, where it was necessary to make a tripartite agreement for the use by the Americans of condominium territory in what was now an increasingly important operational base area. On 2 September Mitchell reported to London that he had discussed the New Hebrides situation with the American Under-Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, then passing through Suva on his way home from Noumea, who 'stated that difficulties with the French were increasing and spoke with some irritation'.[16] This emotion was widely shared. On 10 September Mitchell, visiting Vila, noted that 'the French Resident Commissioner Kuter is liked and trusted by Blandy and the United States commanders but d'Argenlieu distrusts, obstructs and stultifies him as far as he can'.[17] He remained convinced, like others before him, that d'Argenlieu's retention in the Pacific might lead to grave trouble. Fortunately the Admiral-monk left the Pacific finally in November 1942. We may leave him at Washington where he saw Secretary Hull on 8 December and spoke of his 'most happy impressions of his cooperation with the American forces in the Far East' and of the 'distorted rumours of friction between himself and General Patch'.[18]

The need to discuss the local consequences of d'Argenlieu's levity has caused us to leave Governor Sautot marooned on the shores of New Zealand. From Auckland on 11 May he wrote to Luke giving his own heated version of events. 'It is indeed shocking', commented a Foreign Office official primly, 'that Frenchmen should behave and speak of one another in this way'.[19] Nevertheless Sautot's version is accurate. On his arrival in London he encountered an icy reception from de Gaulle who spoke in bitterly critical terms of the qualities of the New Caledonian population in general and of Dubois in particular. Though keenly disappointed at finding his leader so ill-informed as to the true situation, Sautot deceided, once de Gaulle's attitude had seemed to soften somewhat, to accept the new post offered to him, which proved to be not Madagascar but Oubangi-Chari in central Africa. He thus passes out of the wartime story.[20]

The larger events of 1942 now claim attention.

8 *'Drive northwestward from the New Hebrides'*

THE LOCAL POLITICAL troubles which confronted General Patch in May 1942 could scarcely have happened at a worse time or place. New Caledonia was directly in the path of the enemy advance, destined in the minds of the Japanese strategic planners to serve, like Fiji and Tonga, as an air base directly threatening Australia and helping to interdict its communications with the United States. But at that precise moment the turning point was being reached. The naval battles of the Coral Sea – fought while d'Argenlieu was distracting Patch's preparations to meet an apparently imminent attack – and above all of Midway were about to disrupt the Japanese plan. Thenceforth New Caledonia and the New Hebrides, fortuitously situated a thousand miles nearer to the scene than the initial South Pacific area headquarters at Auckland, would play a role as the bastions of the counter-offensive, conceived and mounted by the United Sates Navy, which by the beginning of 1943 was beating back the left prong of the Japanese thrust into the Australasian region.

Japanese naval planners had long held the view that Rabaul should be a stepping-stone to the conquest of the northeast coast of New Guinea and of the Solomons, preparatory to the seizure of Fiji, Samoa and 'strategic points in the Australia area'.[1] As soon as Rabaul had fallen on 23 January they proposed an advance into the Solomons, to Lae and Salamaua on the New Guinea coast and even to Port Moresby. The occupation of Lae and Salamaua was delayed by a long-range American raid,[2] but on 8 March they were taken. A second strike carried out by two carriers from the Gulf of Papua – a part of an operation designed to cover the transit from Melbourne to Noumea of General Patch's task force – did little damage but seems to have convinced the Japanese naval commander in the area, Admiral Inouye, that he should await the return of naval forces from the Indian Ocean before attacking Moresby and Tulagi. Meanwhile he advanced into the southern Solomons, from which fighter aircraft were within reach of Tulagi and Guadalcanal.[3] A plan to isolate Australia by occupying Moresby and Tulagi as soon as possible and then reducing New Caledonia,

Fiji and Samoa had been approved in Tokyo on 28 April. That was the position as the United States moved to organize defence in the Pacific Ocean in the new situation created by the loss of the entire Southeast Asian area.[4]

Before the end of March, with the Australian government's approval, General Douglas MacArthur, evacuated from the Philippines, had become Supreme Commander, Allied forces in the Southwest Pacific area, which extended east of Australia to the 160th meridian of longitude with a north-easterly bulge to include the whole of the Solomon Islands as well as New Guinea and the Bismarcks. The whole of the rest of the Pacific (with the exception of a zone east of the 110th meridian, near the South American coast, which constituted the Southeast Pacific area) was placed under the command of Admiral Nimitz in Hawaii, who became Commander-in-Chief Pacific Ocean Areas as well as Commander-in-Chief Pacific Fleet. Nimitz's command was divided into three areas under naval commanders. The one which concerns us here is the South Pacific Area, which stretched from the equator to the south pole, bounded on the west by the Southwest Pacific area and on the east by the 110th meridian. It thus included New Zealand, New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, Fiji and Samoa.

On 17th April Vice-Admiral R.L. Ghormley, USN, was put in command of this area, with headquarters in Auckland. He was warned that the resources allotted to him would be inadequate but that it was hoped 'in time, possibly this fall' to start an offensive from the South Pacific.[5] As if to emphasize further the naval bias of the South Pacific operations, Rear-Admiral J.R. McCain was appointed Commander Aircraft South Pacific with operational control over army as well as navy aircraft in the area. The Joint Chiefs of Staff kept overall strategic direction.

Before Ghormley could take up his command the Japanese had begun to execute their plan for the reduction of Moresby, southeast New Guinea and Tulagi, and had collided with an American carrier task force in the Coral Sea (6-8 May). American losses were relatively greater than Japanese, but Japanese occupation of Moresby was postponed, as it proved for ever, though Tulagi had been captured on 3 May. Japanese air losses in this action proved in the long run decisive.[6]

The Japanese strategic plan remained unchanged, though parts of it had had to be delayed. It had, indeed, become more ambitious, since the American raid on Tokyo on 18 April had shown the need to seek out and destroy the US fleet in Hawaiian waters. Midway and the Aleutians now took top priority on the Japanese programme. The second objective was the New Caledonia-Fiji-Samoa area, and Port Moresby the third.[7]

Early in May American intelligence became aware of Japanese plans. The commander of the Japanese combined fleet, Admiral Yamamoto, deprived

of the advantage of surprise, duly attacked the American fleet at Midway and was decisively defeated on 4 June, losing all his four fast aircraft carriers.[8] The American victory marked, in the largest strategic sense, the turning point in the Pacific war. It made Hawaii secure and opened the way to Allied offensive action. But for the moment the difficulties of exploiting this opportunity were formidable.

In the first place the ever-increasing demands of the Pacific theatre had to be balanced against the needs of the European-Atlantic theatre which throughout retained top strategic priority, despite brief episodes of emergency action to strengthen the Pacific forces. The directives issued to both MacArthur and Nimitz had made it clear that their first role was defensive, though the idea of taking the offensive at the earliest possible moment was always prominent in the minds of Nimitz and his chief, Admiral King. MacArthur, too, preached an offensive doctrine, in his own language, saying to the Australian Advisory War Council on 17 June, shortly after Midway:

> From the strategical point of view we should take the initiative and not await results in other theatres. Our aim should be to strike at Japanese bases in the islands to the north and throw the enemy bomber line back 700 miles.
>
> The greatest weakness of the present setup is that there is too much strategical control in London and Washington. . . . if the decision were left to [me, I] would attack now, even in the face of a tactical defeat, in order to destroy the Japanese psychology of initiative.

But his strategic concept was too grandiose and unrealistic to be acceptable to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. As he said on the same occasion, 'he did not agree with the strategy of defeating Germany first . . . the best way to help Russia would be to establish a second front in the Pacific'.[9] The American admirals, on the other hand, were prepared to undertake, even with slim resources, the tough slogging 'up the ladder' of the Japanese-held South Pacific islands, which they saw as the necessary beginning.

The inescapable need to set about this task was soon imposed by the force and direction of Japanese action. There were now disposed in the Pacific unpalatably large numbers of troops, in the view of Army planners devoted to the objective of beating Germany first.[10] The Army build-up, however, had been a clear necessity in face of the Japanese thrust and the best of use would be found for all these men and planes. At this point, indeed, aircraft in particular were still painfully scarce. King's insistence on garrisoning the New Hebrides as well as New Caledonia in strength now began to pay off. Patch's subordinate, Brigadier-General Chamberlain, had taken command in the New Hebrides and had begun to push the construction of a second airfield there, on Espiritu Santo, which was very soon to assume primary importance.

On 11 June, a week after Midway, the Japanese strategic plan was radically altered. The idea of direct attacks on New Caledonia, Fiji and Samoa was postponed indefinitely and the amphibious operation against Port Moresby cancelled in favour of an overland drive southward across the Owen Stanley mountains for which General Horii's South Seas Detachment, previously under orders for New Caledonia, was to be used.[11] The Japanese, however, could not fail to press the advantage which they still retained in the Bismarcks-Solomons area, and an Allied counterstroke was urgently necessary if there was to be any chance of throwing them off balance. On 2 July King and Marshall issued a joint directive for an offensive to be mounted at once,[12] with the ultimate objective of seizure of the New Britain-New Ireland-New Guinea area. It was to comprise three 'tasks'. Task One, the occupation of the Santa Cruz islands, Tulagi and 'adjacent positions', was to be commanded by an officer designated by Nimitz and its target date was set at 1 August. Task Two (the occupation of Lae, Salamaua, the northwest coast of New Guinea and the remainder of the Solomons) and Task Three (the occupation of Rabaul and adjacent positions) would be carried out subsequently under MacArthur's command. (The latter two tasks are outside the scope of this work and are mentioned only for the sake of completeness.) For Task One MacArthur was to provide necessary naval reinforcements and land-based air support. Army forces from the South Pacific were to be used to garrison the Tulagi area.

On 6 July the Joint Chiefs' opinion that the Japanese advance must be stopped promptly had been strengthened by reports that the Japanese had begun to develop an airfield at Lunga Point on Guadalcanal, from which they would be able to threaten the New Caledonian and New Hebridean bases directly. The way ahead was now clear. It lay first through what has been feelingly called 'this faecaloid island of Guadalcanal'. On 10 July Washington confirmed the orders for Task One and the target date for it, set back in the event to 7 August, which happened also to be the date due for completion of the Japanese airfield.[13] On 1 August the boundary of the South Pacific area was moved west to run south from the equator along the 159th meridian. It now included all the objectives of Task One.

Before the end of July Ghormley, who had taken up duty as COMSOPAC at Auckland in June, moved his headquarters up to Noumea. New Caledonia and the New Hebrides now assumed the first importance as supporting bases for the preliminary reconnaissance of Guadalcanal and for the operation itself. In particular the airfields in these islands began to play a real part. Plaine des Gaiacs was operational, with a 7,000-foot strip; so were Tontouta and Efate. Koumac near the northern tip of New Caledonia was ready by 25 July and Santo could take fighter planes, though not yet heavy bombers,

by 28 July. There were already seaplane bases at Noumea, Efate and Santo, and McCain established his operational air headquarters at Santo in the tender USS *Curtiss*. This was the fruit of months of intensive work by US Army Engineers, Navy Construction Battalions (Seabees), Australian civilian workers and local labour. In a slightly longer perspective, it was also – with the exception of the Santo airfield, which was an entirely American achievement – the result of more than a year of survey and development efforts by the Australians, whose direct role in the South Pacific was now coming to an end, but who, after all, 'isolationist' or not, had started the whole thing.

The decision to launch the Guadalcanal operation was logical and necessary but the means of executing it were meagre. Anglo-American talks early in July led to confirmation of plans for a landing in North Africa late in 1942, and few resources could be spared from this zone of primary concentration. In the South Pacific Guadalcanal came to be known unofficially as 'Operation Shoestring'.

Many are the official and unofficial histories that have been written on the grim campaign of Guadalcanal. It is not my purpose here to try to do full justice to this desperate and ultimately decisive struggle, but simply to recall some salient features of the New Caledonia-based operation and its significance.

'Long time in even scale the battle hung.' The initial Marine landing was a success, and Tulagi and Henderson Field (as the Guadalcanal airfield came to be called) were seized at once. But there had been no time for adequate planning or rehearsal of the amphibious operation. The premature withdrawal of Admiral Fletcher's carriers left the amphibious force, in the memorable phrase of its commander, Admiral Turner, 'bare arse'.[14] The Marines ashore on this unpleasant island were in a similar plight when the remnants of Turner's own force, smashed by Admiral Mikawa at the battle of Savo Island (where naval losses included the Australian cruiser *Canberra*), withdrew with the partly unloaded transports on the afternoon of 9 August.[15] For nearly three months, painfully and inadequately reinforced (at first by aviators and Seabees) and supplied from New Caledonia, they stayed locked in dubious battle for possession of the airfield. At first the Japanese, underestimating the vigour of the American drive on Guadalcanal, had maintained the simultaneous objective of a landward assault on Port Moresby, but as August and September dragged on without a decision in the Solomons (and as they were held by the Australians at Milne Bay in Papua) they were obliged to retract the righthand claw of their advance. On 23 September came the decision to stand on the defensive in mainland New Guinea, with the point of the Japanese-held territory at Kokoda.[16]

On 8 October the first Army unit, the 164th Infantry Regiment of the Americal Division, sailed from New Caledonia to reinforce the Marines. In October a determined and, as it proved, final Japanese attempt to retake Henderson Field was mounted and in Washington the President had become sufficiently concerned to ask the Chiefs of Staff, on 24 October, 'to make sure that every possible weapon gets in that area' to hold and keep Guadalcanal.

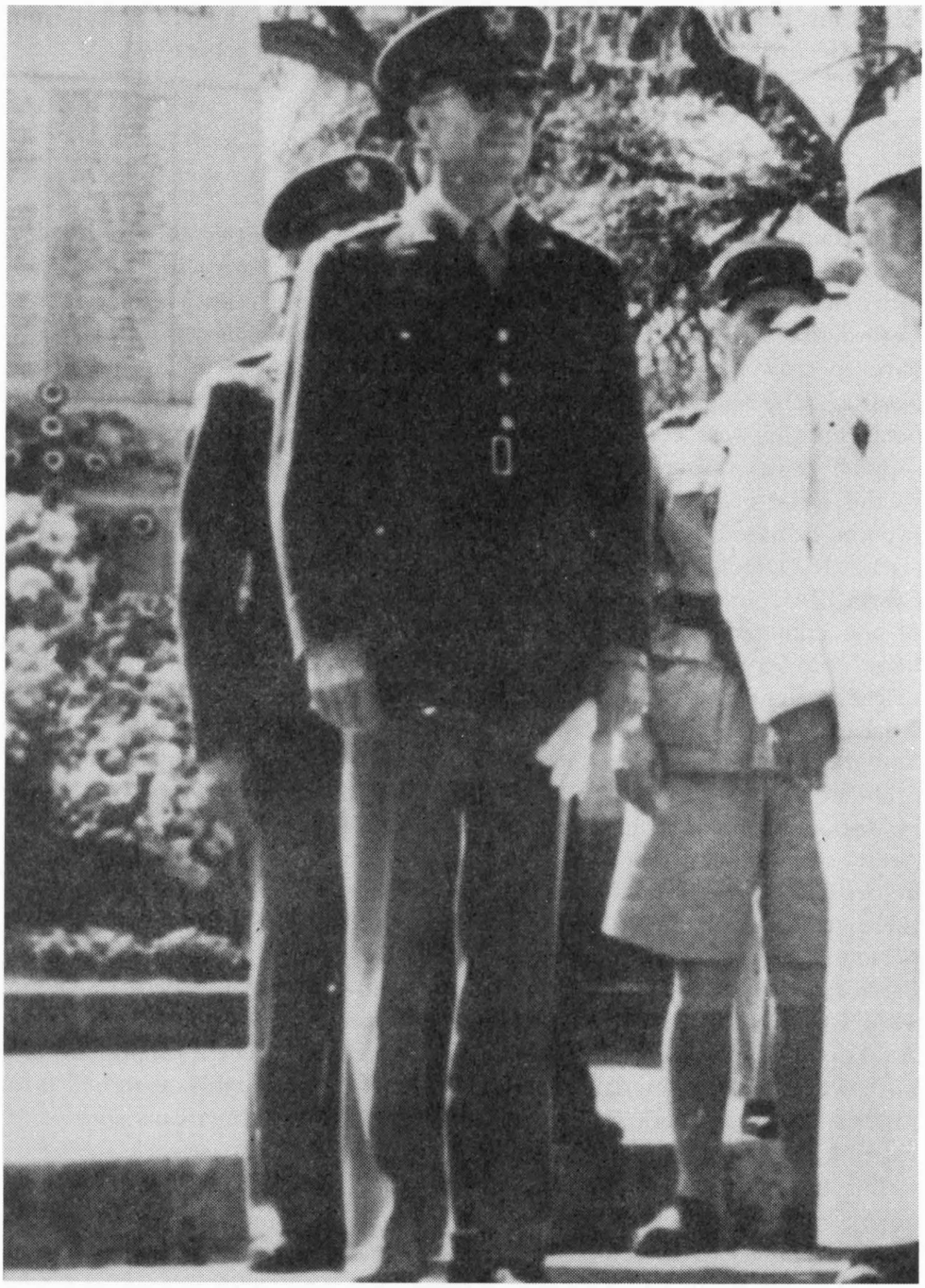
The turning point of the campaign came in the middle of November, when the naval engagement known as the Battle of Guadalcanal resulted in a clear Japanese reverse, with the loss of two battleships and 11 transports. The Americans remained firmly in possession of Henderson Field. A day or two later President Roosevelt was able to say, justly enough: 'It would seem that the turning point of this war has at last been reached'.[17]

The Japanese had still not given up hope of expelling the Americans from Guadalcanal, and it was not until 4 January 1943 that Imperial GHQ decided to fall back on New Georgia. But from November the Americans were over the hump. On 9 December General Patch moved up from Noumea to assume command, and on the same day the First Marine Division began to be phased out of this grim island after four months of continuous combat. American reinforcements flowed in, and on 9 February Patch was able to report the end of the Guadalcanal campaign.[18]

In the immediate South Pacific context the way ahead was still hard enough. Japanese bases in the northern Solomons and on Bougainville were being strengthened and reinforced and new airfields built. But in the six months' struggle on Guadalcanal the Japanese had not only lost two-thirds of the 36,000 ground troops committed there, but also their lead in air power, and above all the strategic initiative, which they were never to regain. New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, Fiji and Samoa were firmly retained in Allied hands.

The battle is the payoff. Even the best-prepared forces, obviously, can realize their potential only to the extent that they are effectively concentrated and brought to bear against the enemy at the right place and the right time. Guadalcanal was the point of concentration, but New Caledonia was the immediate background to the battle scene. 'The nerve center of this campaign', says the naval historian S.E. Morison, 'was not . . . at Washington or Pearl Harbor, but at Noumea, where Admiral Halsey and his chief of staff . . . with about 15 seasoned staff officers and 50 blue-jackets ran the entire South Pacific Force of Navy, Army, Marine Corps. . .'.[19]

Noumea's atmosphere of feverish improvisation at that time is not easy to recreate, even for one who was there. Morison, writing from the seaman's



Major General A.M. Patch, USA, at Noumea.

viewpoint, has reached back two thousand years to find the best description of the 'feeling of immediacy at Noumea on the last night ashore'–

o fortes pejoraque passi
mecum saepe viri, nunc vino pellite curas:
cras ingens iterabimus aequor.

An extraordinarily wide range of military and naval activities were, suddenly, being carried on in this under-developed tropical country and above all in its small and sleepy capital. The congested port of Noumea – on one day toward the end of September 1942 it held 86 ships, some of which might have to grow barnacles for three months before they could be unloaded, despite the arc-lights blazing on the docks all night – and hastily improvized ports on the west coast were the channel for the troops, equipment and supplies moving up to Guadalcanal, the aircraft (all too few) being relayed to the scene of operations and the wounded and sick being ferried back, often in damaged ships, to the hospital ship *Solace* and the field hospitals.[20]

On 18 October 1942 Admiral W.H. Halsey succeeded Ghormley as COMSOPAC at Noumea and presided over an intensive reorganization of the command structure of the South Pacific area, with a Service of Supply, a Service Squadron and a fully-fledged Air Force (the 13th, under Brigadier-General Twining at Santo). The New Caledonia base itself became I Island Command, with its own logistic organization. Gradually, ordered activity replaced improvisation. Port congestion long remained a serious problem, but it was reduced to manageable proportions by a large increase in dock personnel, using local civilians and Melanesian labour as well as Army troops and Seabees. At one stage, at the beginning of December before the main body of the Americal Division moved off to Guadalcanal, there were considerably more than 100,000 American and New Zealand personnel on the island. It seems likely that even after the departure of Patch's division the local population was outnumbered by the men of the 43rd US Division, the 3rd New Zealand Division, the Navy, Marines and Air Forces. The American presence was overwhelming. The local population, both white and Melanesian, was increasingly and profitably absorbed into various American work forces, and relations between Americans and locals were on the whole remarkably good.

For the fighting men the pleasant island of New Caledonia was not only a base but a haven which, viewed from Guadalcanal and the perilous waters around it, must have seemed like an unattainable paradise. 'Noumea itself', says Morison, writing shortly after the war, 'is a ramshackle unpainted town, but the climate and the surrounding scenery are superb . . . New Caledonia

is the one island in the South Pacific that Americans wished they could keep; but President Roosevelt had promised France to restore her empire intact, so that could not be.'[21] (It is now well known that in 1943 and 1944 President Roosevelt repeatedly asserted that New Caledonia should *not* remain French after the war,[22] but that is another story, soon forgotten and mercifully unknown at the time in New Caledonia.)

Above all, Noumea became a humming and effective support base. Its role is well symbolized by the story of the great carrier USS *Enterprise*, limping badly damaged into Noumea after the Santa Cruz engagement late in October 1942 and steaming north again not many days later, with welders and riveters from the naval base still at work on her decks, to join in the decisive November battle off Savo.

Ci falt la geste – a triumph of courage in adversity wrought by men assigned to fight in an under-equipped secondary theatre. The situation offered a striking contrast to the muddled conduct of affairs in the Southwest Pacific area, where the Australian forces at least were to be locked into an ultimately pointless jungle campaign on mainland New Guinea.

New Caledonia was the fulcrum on which the great American lever had rested as it was brought to bear in this first phase of the counter-offensive. It was the territory of a small, self-constituted and misunderstood ally, Free France, and had already been the site of useful anti-Japanese defence works before the Americans became involved. At the end of December 1941 the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, had said of the Free French 'They are in every sense an Ally', pointing out that their forces were now collaborating with the Americans and the British in many places of the highest strategic importance, *particularly in New Caledonia.*[23]

The frivolous conduct of one misguided French patriot, Georges Thierry D'Argenlieu, does not diminish the value of the alliance forged by Australia and the Free French in the Pacific while the United States was still formally neutral. It could easily have been otherwise. Without straying unduly into the realm of conjecture it is possible to reflect on the complications that would have arisen if a Vichy régime, destined inevitably to toe the Japanese line, had been allowed to take hold in the South Seas. In 1940 the *ralliement* of New Caledonia had been a close-run thing, but fortune had favoured the brave – and skilful. One of Australia's first genuine foreign policy decisions had been forced on it, with the happiest results, but the harmonious merging of this modest beginning into the great events of 1942-45 should not obscure the fact that the successful execution of Menzies's bold decision to cooperate with the Free French was the achievement of a tiny group of men on the ground – Australian, British and French. In this corner of

the world Allied cooperation was a reality and, whatever may be thought of New Caledonia's history as a French colony, no man of goodwill can fail to rejoice in that, nor in the way thus prepared for the territory's reunion with a liberated France.

Appendix

No. 3 Independent Company, AIF, in New Caledonia

AS WE HAVE seen in Chapter Six, the only Australian force available to strengthen the defence of New Caledonia following the outbreak of the Pacific war was a small guerrilla unit, the recently formed No.3 Independent Company of some 300 men. As things fell out this company, which was later to make a distinguished record in New Guinea, did not experience combat in the South Pacific area, but the part which it played in the first months of the war deserves to be remembered.

The Australian Chiefs of Staff were of course aware that such a tiny detachment could not significantly affect the outcome of any major Japanese attack on New Caledonia, and had defined the purposes of its dispatch as morale-strengthening and if need be demolition (having in mind especially the need to deny the valuable New Caledonian mines to the Japanese for as long as possible). The formal instruction issued on 15 December 1941 to the company's commanding officer, Major (later Lieutenant-Colonel) D.G. Matheson, a Western Australian engineer who had won the Military Cross and Military Medal in the first World War, made it clear that his unit was expendable.[1] His role, he was told, was to place himself under Admiral d'Argenlieu's command and cooperate with the Free French forces in the defence of New Caledonia, while taking care himself to retain control of the company and maintain mobility 'in order to inflict the greatest damage to enemy forces by harassing and guerrilla tactics'. Since a Japanese-occupied New Caledonia could be used as a base for operations against Australia and against the sea lanes between Australia, New Zealand and the United States, it was vital to deny the island's anchorages and aerodromes to the enemy as long as possible. In the event of a Japanese attack and the occupation of New Caledonia Matheson was to continue guerrilla operations against enemy shipping, air and land forces until he assessed that further resistance was unlikely to gain results of value. He was warned that there was slight prospect that his force would be reinforced or – eventually – evacuated, and he was accordingly instructed to plan for the use of 'any local craft which, as a last resource, could be used to withdraw personnel when guerrilla tactics become no longer effective'.

Within weeks of its arrival at Noumea on 23 December the company's presence was being felt in many parts of its allotted sector (from the Bouloupari-Thio road to the northern tip of the island) throughout which it was dispersed by sections, company headquarters having been established at Bourail on the west coast. The New Zealand Chief of Air Staff, visiting New Caledonia at this time, noted that 'the principal stay of [the French authorities'] morale was the small Australian unit for which they have a very high regard'.[2]

During this first phase, in the words of the company's operations report,[3]

> our sections lived in concealed camps, mostly composed of huts built for us by the natives. All tracks, native and wild food resources, and possibilities of using local inhabitants and pack animals in harrying operations against the enemy were fully explored. Preparations for the destruction of roads, mines and installations useful to the invader were made, and prepared charges cached in readiness.

In mid-1941 an Australian commando officer, Captain T.P. Kneen, travelling incognito, had unobtrusively reconnoitred New Caledonia and had reported to Army Headquarters in Melbourne that the terrain was ideal for independent company operations. The idea of encouraging the formation of French guerrilla units, favoured by Kneen, could not be pursued, but the section commanders of No.3 Independent Company were made responsible for the training and tactical employment of the French Home Guards in their areas.

Kneen had noted in his report

> The natives are a fine race, intelligent and strong.
> They are loyal subjects, of whom more wish to enlist than can be accepted. . . In some districts, however, notably in the far North, they have always at the back of their minds the fact that the French came and took their land only 80 years ago.[4]

In practice the second consideration did not override the first; the Australian military mission led by Colonel Fanning had been impressed favourably by Melanesian troops they had seen, and Matheson's instruction said 'The natives of New Caledonia are reported to be keen and of a good type and should be capable of being organized into independent detachments for guerrilla operations'. So it proved. The acting CO's report records that

> some sections raised and trained native detachments of their own. Our men came to be held in high regard both by the New Caledonian French and the natives, which latter gave us the greatest assistance wherever we went. This gave the lie to the earlier reports that the natives of New Caledonia were treacherous and cunning.

The origin and nature of these earlier reports to which Captain Dennis attaches a definite article remain obscure. They certainly did not emanate from Australian Army Headquarters or its secret agent Captain Kneen. A former officer of the company can only conjecture that the dark warning was to be found in such scanty publications as members were able to read when they were ordered at short notice to this unknown territory. In reality the company's stay in the French colony was as cheerful an incident as can be found in military history.

In March 1942 the company passed under the tactical command of the newly arrived American General Patch, who found this small detachment of by now expert troops extremely useful in the training of his green (largely National Guard) units:

> detachments of approximately one infantry company were sent out to each of our sections to learn the country and be instructed in our methods of operation. Thus each of the section leaders found himself in charge for the training, and tactics in the event of an enemy attack, of a company which included officers of higher rank than himself and troops trained on different lines from his own men. The section commanders carried out this task with admirable tact and enthusiasm.

As the American presence was consolidated the company was concentrated, in May, in a smaller area comprising the northernmost zone of the Grande Terre (north of a line through Ouaco and Cap Colnett) where 'a re-training programme including weapon

training, landing practice and battle practice was carried out'. The writer's military informant recalls that the American officer in command of the neighbouring sector, preparing to resist the Japanese at the water's edge, found it disconcerting to have no support on his right flank except a unit whose training and tactical doctrine would encourage them to take to the hills with a view to annoying the enemy from there. No doubt some practical compromise was reached; by July Matheson had under his command a company of United States infantry and another of tanks as a holding force at Koumac airfield. By the end of that month this last sector of the island was taken over by the Americans and No.3 Independent Company was withdrawn to Queensland and further retraining. It had had one brief direct glimpse of the enemy as Japanese forces moved into Guadalcanal.

> From 1 July to 4 July there was an island alert. Nos. 10 and 6 sections observed a KAWANSI 4 engined flying boat, which reconnoitred the northern end of the island and No. 6 section O.P. later observed an enemy submarine inside the reef. Reports were also received that a fairly strong Japanese naval force had appeared in the southern Solomons. During the alert the Coy showed excellent morale and swung from training conditions into readiness for attack in very quick time.

That is the official story of the New Caledonian service of what a Noumea historian, Henri Daly, has called 'an *élite* unit with an exceptional commander'.[5] It is balanced on a more homely plane by the recollections of a former private soldier of the company, recorded by the official historian Gavin Long near the end of the war.[6] He remembered hard training and the struggle to indoctrinate the raw but willing American boys into the art of bushwalking; but he had thoroughly enjoyed his insight into the life of the New Caledonian bush. He recalled appreciatively notable meals enjoyed at Voh; the cheap wine and beer; dynamite fishing in the hill steams; deer hunting and pig shooting; horseback riding with villagers; his section commander's efforts to teach the troops French; but above all the ready friendship of black and white New Caledonians.

> We made real good friends with the natives. We'd go to the village and have coffee with the chief.
>
> We got into trouble with the gendarmes for breaking into Jap shops. We never got into trouble with the natives, nor the French except the gendarmes.

When the company was withdrawn d'Argenlieu civilly expressed appreciation of its services, though no doubt Matheson's strictly correct — and therefore, in the Admiral's mind, blameworthy — attitude during the May disturbances was still fresh in his memory. A more striking tribute was Patch's request, to which AHQ acceded, that Matheson himself remain in the South Pacific Area as a member of his personal staff — in which capacity this remarkable officer was killed in action in 1943.

Notes

Australian official records used are in the Australian War Memorial collection and in the following records series in the Australian Archives (A.C.T. Branch):

A571 Treasury Department (1901-76)
A816 Department of Defence Co-ordination (1939-42)
A981 Department of External Affairs (1925-42)
A1196 Department of Air (1936-56)
A1608 Prime Minister's Department, Secret and Confidential War Series (1939-45)
A2671 War Cabinet agenda files (1939-1946)
A2673 War Cabinet minutes (1939-46)
A2684 Advisory War Council minute files (1940-1945)
A2937 External Affairs Office, London (1924-1945)
A3300 Australian Legation, Washington (1939-48)
AA 1975/215
Australian Official Representative, Noumea (1940-45)
CP290/2 Papers from the Records of the Prime Minister's Office (1938-42)

United Kingdom records are in the following series in the Public Record Office, London:

FO 371 Foreign Office, General Correspondence of the Political Departments
DO 35 Dominions Office, Original Correspondence

United States official documents used are in the following collections:

Modern Military Branch, Military Archives Division, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, DC 20408.

Operational Archives, US Naval History Center, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, DC 20390.

Translations are by the present author unless otherwise noted.

CHAPTER ONE

1 Wilfred Burchett, *Pacific Treasure Island* (Melbourne 1941), 11.

2 *Moniteur Universel* (Paris), 14 Feb. 1854. These words can be taken at face value as explanation of this action.

3 Henri Rivière, *Souvenirs de la Nouvelle-Calédonie* (Paris 1881), 282-8.

4 Pierre Gascher, *La belle au bois dormant: regards sur l'administration coloniale en Nouvelle-Calédonie de 1874 à 1894* (Noumea 1975), 285.

5 J.P. Doumenge, *L'Homme dans le Pacifique Sud* (Paris 1966), 512.

6 Jean Guiart, 'Naissance et avortement d'un messianisme en Nouvelle-Calédonie', in *Archives de sociologie des religions*, VII (1959), 25.

7 Pierre Benoit, *Océanie Française* (Paris 1933), 5.

8 As Fr O'Reilly temperately remarks. P. O'Reilly, *Calédoniens* (Paris 1953), 113-4.

9 Idem, *Memorial Calédonien* (Noumea 1976), IV, 290.

10 Doumenge, op. cit., 513.

11 The full text of the Bayardelle report (hereinafter 'Bayardelle report') is published in *Bulletin de la Société d'Etudes Historiques de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, no.20 (1974), 2-48. A copy (without indication of authorship or provenance) is in Australian Archives (hereinafter AA) AA 1975/215 item 3/40.

12 M. Lenormand, 'L'Evolution politique des autochtones de la Nouvelle-Calédonie', *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, IX (1953), 245-99.

13 Rivière, op. cit, 78.

14 Ibid., 282.

15 Alain Saussol, *L'Héritage* (Paris 1979), 291.

16 Ibid., 300-3.

17 Ibid., 304.

18 Maurice Leenhardt, *Gens de la Grande Terre* (revised ed., Paris 1952), 219.

19 R.H. Leenhardt, 'Le Gouverneur Feillet et le grand chef Amane', in *Cahiers d'Histoire du Pacifique*, no.7 (1977), 19-34.

The chief Amane, as viewed by Feillet and his daughter, represents an almost unique appearance on the New Caledonian scene of the noble savage, a phenomenon rarely discerned or imagined by Europeans in Melanesia though familiar in Polynesia and other regions.

20 Maurice Leenhardt, 'Notes sur le régime de l'engagement des indigènes en Nouvelle-Calédonie, mars 1914', *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, XXXIV (1978), 9-18.

21 Idem, *Do Kamo : Person and Myth in the Melanesian World* (Chicago 1979), 137.

22 Idem, 'Notes sur le régime de l'engagement . . . ', 14.

23 Jean Bianquis, *Nos devoirs envers les indigènes et nos colonies* (Paris 1906), quoted by André Roux, 'Les Protestants Français', in M. Merle (ed.), *Les Englises chrétiennes et la decolonisation* (Paris 1967), 222.

24 Bayardelle report, 29.

25 A. Surleau, 'Qui était le pasteur Lehnbach?' in *Bulletin de la Société d'Etudes Historiques de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, no.23 (1974), 46.

26 *Dumont d'Urville* signals in AA AA 1975/215, item 3/40.

27 Saussol, op. cit., 331.

28 Lenormand, op. cit., 271-2.

29 Leenhardt, *Gens de la Grande Terre*, 223.

30 Washington, US Navy World War II Report No.432.

31 Burchett, op. cit., 69-72.

32 E.L. Piesse, quoted in R.C. Thompson, *Australian Imperialism and the Pacific* (Melbourne 1980), 221.

33 B. Brou, *Histoire de la Nouvelle-Calédonie – Les Temps Modernes: 1774-1925* (Noumea 1974), 281.

34 See Cabinet agendum of 14 Jan. 1937 in AA A981, item 145, Imperial Relations; Imperial Conference 1937, Report of Committee on the New Hebrides in AA A981, New Hebrides 4; Submission to Minister for External Affairs 13 July 1938, in AA A981, New Hebrides 22.

35 D.F. Nicholson, *Australian Trade Relations* (Melbourne 1955), 91-3.

36 See M. Simington, 'The Southwest Pacific Islands in Australian interwar defence planning', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, XXIII (1977), 173-7.

37 D. Shineberg, *They Came for Sandalwood* (Melbourne 1967), ch.5-8.

38 J.P. Faivre et al., *Géographie de la Nouvelle-Calédonie* (Paris 1955), 81, 102-3.

39 C. Lemire, *Voyage à pied en Nouvelle-Calédonie*, quoted by P. O'Reilly, 'Le français parlé en Nouvelle-Calédonie', *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, IX (1953), 203 ff.

CHAPTER TWO

1 See Edgard de Larminat, *Chroniques Irrévérencieuses* (Paris 1962), ch.3, to whose first hand account the present writer is indebted for the foregoing.

2 Bayardelle report, 12. Emphasis supplied.

3 In AA A981, item New Caledonia 1B, part V. Emphasis supplied.

4 C7426/7327/17 in London, Public Record Office (hereinafter PRO) FO371/24328.

5 War Cabinet minute 345 in AA A2673, vol.3.

6 War Cabinet minute 365 in AA A2673, vol.3; Australian Dept of External Affairs, *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-49* (hereinafter *DAFP*), vol. III (Canberra 1979), nos 427, 439 & 455; Bayardelle report, 14-15.

[7] See, e.g., Bayardelle report, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12.

[8] Henri Sautot, *Grandeur et Decadence du Gaullisme dans le Pacifique* (Melbourne 1949), 10.

[9] Quoted in F. Broche, *Le Bataillon des guitaristes* (Paris 1970), 303.

[10] The nickel story is pieced together with the aid of papers in AA A2937, item New Caledonia; AA A981, New Caledonia 1, III; AA 816 item 19/311/74.

[11] Text in Bayardelle report, 19. The Australian official was B.C. Ballard.

[12] Luke telegram of 26 July 1940 to Prime Minister of Australia in AA A981, item New Caledonia 1, III.

[13] Bayardelle report, 21-2.

[14] G. Baudoux, 'Mon action sur le ralliement de la Nouvelle-Calédonie entre le 18 juin 1940 et le 19 septembre 1940', in *Bulletin de la Société d'Etudes Historiques de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, no.24 (1975), 19-25.

[15] Launched 1932; three 5.4 in. guns; 15 knots. Of the *Bougainville* class of *avisos coloniaux* which, as *Jane's Fighting Ships* noted, had proved most efficient and reliable in service.

[16] Bruce's telegram 626 in AA A2937, item New Caledonia.

[17] Bayardelle report, 7. J. Legrand, *L'Indochine à l'heure japonaise* [Cannes 1963], 40. Lémery himself does not mention New Caledonia in his own memoirs, in which he asserts that during his brief tenure at the Ministry of Colonies he was opposed to collaboration with Japan. There is, however, no doubt as to the authenticity of the notorious telegram no. 73B of 25 Aug. 1940. M. Rapadzi confirmed the foregoing account to the present writer in Sept. 1974.

[18] Facsimile printed with Bayardelle report, 11.

[19] Quoted in Broche, op.cit., 127. Internal evidence suggests that Broche's citation is authentic, as his *témoignages* generally seem to be. (His account of events at Papeete in 1940 was confirmed to the writer by the late Dr Guy Loison, an unfriendly witness.)

[20] A file of *Dumont d'Urville*'s signals, allegedly abstracted by a Gaullist crew member, circulated ashore and a copy reached Ballard. Now in AA A1975/215, item 3/40.

[21] Bayardelle report, 44.

[22] The following account of events in the New Hebrides is drawn mainly from the complementary accounts in Sautot, op. cit., and in Resident Commissioner R.D. Blandy's 'Quarterly Summary of Events for the History of the War', no.4, 30 June to 31 Dec. 1940 (copy in Melbourne, Australian Navy Office records).

[23] *DAFP*, vol. IV (Canberra 1980).

[24] AA A816, item 19/311/74.

[25] See PRO FO371/24331 (C9380/7327/17).

[26] Dominions Office telegram 291 in AA A981, item New Caledonia 1, III.

[27] External Affairs telegram no.5, AA A981, item New Caledonia 1, III.

28 *DAFP*, vol. IV, 131n.

29 Teleprinter message D192 from Dept of the Navy to Prime Minister's and External Affairs Depts, ibid., 103-1.

30 Telegram, Menzies to Luke, ibid., 132.

31 AA A981, New Caledonia 37.

32 Ibid.

33 Submission to McEwen in AA A981, New Caledonia 1, III.

34 Menzies to Chief of Naval Staff, *DAFP*, vol. IV, doc. 102.

35 C9933/7327/17 in PRO FO371/24332.

36 Dominions Office telegram no.326 of 6 Sept. 1940 to Australian Govt, AA A981 New Caledonia 1, III (doc. 105 in *DAFP*, vol. IV, 144).

37 Dept of External Affairs telegram 140 of 8 Sept. 1940 to External Affairs Office London in AA A2937, New Caledonia (doc. 109, ibid., 149).

38 External Affairs Office, London, telegram 778 of 9 Sept. 1940 to Dept of External Affairs, Canberra in AA A981, New Caledonia 37 (doc.112, ibid., 153). (It was at this second meeting that Morton mentioned British possession of 'actual telegrams from New Caledonia'.

39 Suva telegram, unnumbered, of 7 Sept. 1940 in AA A981, New Caledonia 37 (doc.107, ibid., 147).

40 Noumea telegram 15 of 8 Sept. 1940 to Dept of External Affairs, Canberra, in AA A981, New Caledonia 1, III (doc.110, ibid., 150).

41 Australian Govt telegram 473 to Dominions Office, in AA A981, New Caledonia 1, III (doc.111, ibid., 151).

CHAPTER THREE

1 This narrative of events leading to the *ralliement* draws on Blandy's 'Summary of events for the history of the war, No.4, 30 June to 31 Dec. 1940', and on 'HMAS *Adelaide*, Letter of Proceeding, September 1940', in AA CP290/1, Bundle 1.

2 Baudoux, 'Mon action. . .'.

3 External Affairs telegram 23 in AA A981, New Caledonia 1, IV (No.133 in *DAFP*, vol. IV, 175).

4 Ballard's telegram 30 in AA A981, New Caledonia 37.

5 Personal conversation, Sept. 1974.

6 The Australian Govt's telegram 473 of 9 Sept. 1940 to the Dominions Office notified acceptance of this committment. AA A981, New Caledonia 1, III.

7 AA A981, New Caledonia 2.

8 War Cabinet agendum 282/1940 in AA A2671.

9 Ibid., supplement 1-2.

10 War Cabinet minute 681, AA A2673, vol. 5.

11 Australian Govt's telegram to Dominions Office no. 43 of 23 Jan. 1941 in AA A816, 19/311/96. Dominions Office telegram to Australian Govt No. 65 of 31 Jan. 1941 in AA A981, New Caledonia 2.

12 See War Cabinet minute 959 in AA A2673, vol. 6.

13 A copy of Dubois's report to Sautot is in the writer's possession.

14 War Cabinet minute 959, AA A2673, vol.6.

15 Dubois report.

16 See Treasury consideration in AA A571 40/2656C.

17 AA A981, New Caledonia 5; AA A2937 Free France; Charles de Gaulle, *Mêmoires de Guerre: L'Appel 1940-1942* (Paris 1954), 363 (where the date of the instruction to Sautot is given incorrectly).

CHAPTER FOUR

1 Broche, *Le Bataillon des guitaristes*, 214.

2 Dominions Office telegram 104 in AA A1608, D41/1/9, part 4.

3 Minute by R.L. Speaight, 26 Apr. 1941, PRO FO371 (Z3022/145/17).

4 Menzies's telegram M18 of 16 Mar. 1941 in AA A981, New Caledonia 1, VI.

5 De Gaulle's telegram of 7 Mar. 1941. Text in de Gaulle, *Mêmoires de Guerre: L'Appel. . .* 358.

6 De Gaulle, op. cit., 188.

7 On Brunot's mission see also Broche, op. cit., 159-72 and Documents annexes IV.

8 Ballard's memorandum of 25 Feb. 1941, AA AA1975/215, 21/41.

9 PRO FO371/28400 (Z2367/145/17).

10 Texts in AA AA1975/215, 21/41.

11 Letter, H. Somerville Smith to N.E. Archer (Dominions Office), PRO DO35 1003/1.

12 Morton's paper CFR(41) 113. Copy in PRO FO371/284801 (Z3414/145/17).

13 Free French headquarters' 'Note on French Possessions in the Pacific' reproduced in CFR(41) 117 of 27 Apr. 1941 (PRO FO371/28401).

14 Minute by P.A. Clutterbuck, 27 Apr. 1941 on file WG11/3/90 (PRO DO35 1003/1).

15 Letter from A Lincoln (MEW) to F.R. Cowell (Spears Mission), 5 May 1941. Copy in PRO FO371/28401 (Z4075/145/47).

16 Copy in AA A816, 19/311/10.

17 De Gaulle, op. cit., 187.

18 Ibid., 474.

19 Broche, op. cit., Documents annexes, IV, 1.

20 Bruce's telegram 615 of 6 Aug. 1941 to External Affairs, Canberra, in AA 1608 D41/1/9 part 4.

21 De Gaulle, op. cit., 188.

22 Jean Lacouture, *Un Sang d'encre* (Paris 1974), 60.

23 'Rémy' (Gilbert Renault-Roulier), *Dix ans avec de Gaulle* (Paris 1972), 410.

24 De Gaulle, op. cit., 109.

25 See PRO FO371/28404 (Z6280/145/17). Text quoted (with incorrect date) in Broche, op. cit., Documents annexes, IV, 4.

26 De Gaulle, op. cit., 476.

27 Text in Broche, op. cit., Documents annexes, IV, 2.

28 Ibid., IV, 11.

29 See Prime Minister's telegram 4431 of 13 Aug. 1941 to Bruce incorporating report from Ballard, AA A1608,D41/1/9, part 4.

30 Ballard's telegram 391 of 27 Aug. 1941, AA A1608,D41/1/9, part 4.

31 Prime Minister's Dept telegram 4339 of 9 Aug. 1941 to Bruce, AA A1608,D41/1/9, part 4.

32 PRO FO371/28406 (Z7865/145/17).

33 Bruce's telegram 14 [sic] of 22 Aug. 1941 to Prime Minister, AA A1608, D41/1/9, part 4.

34 Ballard's telegram 406 of 8 Sept. 1941 to External Affairs, Canberra, AA A1608, D41/1/9, part 4.

35 Quoted in Broche, op. cit., Documents annexes, IV, 15.

36 De Gaulle, op. cit., 183-7.

37 Telegram of 1 July 1941 from Pleven (in Washington) to de Gaulle. Text in de Gaulle, op. cit., 472-4.

CHAPTER FIVE

1 De Gaulle, *Mémories de Guerre: L'Appel. . .*, 517-8.

2 Ibid., 523.

3 'The American influence in Vichy was, throughout, despite Hull's claims to the contrary, very slight and Washington hardly ever managed to modify the course of the French Governemnt'. Such is A.D. Hytier's verdict in *Two Years of French Foreign Policy: Vichy 1940-42* (Geneva 1958), 320.

4 Hytier, op. cit., 315-6.

5 R.O. Paxton, *Vichy: Old Guard and New Order* (New York 1972), 112.

6 Hull memorandum to the President, 31 Dec. 1941, quoted in R. Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins* (New York 1950), 484-5.

7 Personal conversation, Paris, 1945.

8 Note by Darlan quoted in Legrand, *L'Indochine à l'heure japonaise*, 132, n2.

9 This and subsequent telegrams quoted in ibid., 133-7.

10 J. Decoux, *A la barre de l'Indochine* (Paris 1949), 126.

11 Text in Legrand, op. cit., 126.

12 J. Decoux, *Sillages dans les mers du Sud* (Paris 1953), 246.

13 Washington, Dept of State, Foreign Relations of the United States (hereinafter FRUS) 1942 vol.II, 687-8.

14 Legrand, op. cit., 134.

15 FRUS 1942 vol.II, 674-5.

16 De Gaulle, op. cit., 52.

17 D'Argenlieu's posthumously published *Souvenirs de Guerre 1940-1941* (Paris 1973) do not carry his story beyond Feb. 1941.

18 Text of telegrams in FRUS 1942 vol.II, 689.

19 Ibid., 690-2.

20 Welles's record of conversation in ibid., 694-5.

21 World War II report #432, Report on the Franco-American Relationship in New Caledonia, appendix C, in Operational Archives, US Navy Historical Center, Washington.

CHAPTER SIX

1 Louis Morton, *U.S. Army in World War II: The War in the Pacific: Strategy and Command: The First Two Years* (Washington 1962), 34-45. Russel F. Weigley, 'The Role of the War Department and the Army', in D. Borg and S. Okamoto, *Pearl Harbor as History* (New York 1973), 165-88, is illuminating on the internal contradictions of pre-war United States planning for Philippines defence.

2 Morton, op. cit., 86-91.

3 War Plans Division memorandum of 21 Feb. 1941, quoted in *Army Air Forces Historical Studies, No.9* (Washington 1944), 4-5. See W.F. Craven and J.L. Cate, *The Army Air Forces in World War II* (Chicago 1949), I, 180.

4 Morton, op. cit., 98-9.

5 Ibid., 98.

6 Canberra telegram 633 to Dominions Office in AA A816, 19/11/131, file 1.

7 FRUS 1941 vol.1, 573.

8 Ibid., 577.

9 Ibid., 579.

10 Canberra telegram 510 to Noumea in AA A816 19/11/31, file 1.

11 Noumea despatch to State Dept of 4 Dec. 1941, copy, Washington, National Archives, R.C. 165, War Plans Division records, item WPD 3718.

12 Short to Adjutant General, AG686, in WPD3718.

[13] Noumea despatch to State Dept (copy in WPD3718)

[14] Short to Adjutant General, 22 Nov. 1941, in WPD3718.

[15] Dominions Office telegram No.754 to Australian Govt in AA A816 19/311/131, file 1.

[16] Dominions Office telegram 776, ibid.

[17] Noumea telegram 28 in FRUS 1941, vol.1, 582. Emphasis supplied.

[18] Noumea telegram No.469 to External Affairs, Canberra in AA A816 19/311/131, file 1.

[19] State Dept telegram 25 to Noumea, FRUS 1941 vol.I, 582.

[20] Ibid., 583.

[21] Noumea despatch to State Dept (copy in WPD3718).

[22] These Melbourne exchanges are recorded in AA A816 19/311/131, file 1.

[23] View attributed to King by S.E. Morison, *Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions* (London 1948), 249 n. See also E.J. King and W.M. Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King* (London 1953), 161. It was not, of course, only King who viewed Australian attitudes as unduly defensive and even isolationist. See C. Thorne, 'MacArthur, Australia and the British 1942-1943; *Australian Outlook*, XXIX : 1 and 2 (1975).

[24] D.M. Horner, *Crisis of Command* (Canberra 1978), ch.3, 35. That chapter is a comprehensive account of Australian strategic thought at the end of 1941.
end of 1941.

[25] WPD3718.

[26] Ibid.

[27] External Affairs Office, London, telegram 771 of 9 Dec. 1941 to External Affairs, Canberra, reported that the Free French Commissioner for Foreign Affairs had passed the text of this instruction to High Commissioner Bruce. In AA A816 52/302/117.

[28] State Dept memorandum of 11 Dec. 1941 in WPD3718. FRUS 1941 vol.I, 583-4.

[29] File note in WPD3718-12.

[30] FRUS 1941 vol.I, 583-4.

[31] Washington telegram 1122 in AA A816 52/302/117.

[32] AA A2671, 418/41, 14/301/227.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Horner, op. cit., 33-5.

[35] FRUS 1941 vol.I, 584.

[36] Memorandum by J.D. Hickerson (State Dept) in WPD3718.

[37] D.D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (London 1948), 19-25.

[38] H.L. Stimson and McG. Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (London n.d.), 198-200.

[39] Telegram 1541 from Minister for External Affairs to Australian Minister, Washington, in AA A1196 22/501/42, II.

40 Eisenhower memorandum to Marshall, 28 Feb. 1942, in A.D. Chandler et al., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, The War Years*, I (Baltimore 1970) (hereinafter *Eisenhower Papers*), 149-55. ABDA — American-British-Dutch-Australian; this new command area under General Wavell included Burma, Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies and (formerly) the Philippines.

41 Morton, op. cit., 203.

42 See WPD3718-14 and WPD3718-17. Australian Legation reports are in AA A816 52/302/117, file no.3, and A1196 22/501/42, II.

43 Morton, op. cit., 208-12. Instructions to General Patch in WPD3718-17.

44 M. Matloff and E.M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1941-1942* (Washington 1953), 150. Morton, op. cit., 212.

45 King and Whitehill, op. cit., 175-6.

46 De Gaulle, *Mémoires de Guerre: L'Appel. . .*, 190, 512.

47 Ibid., 515. It is instructive to compare d'Argenlieu's attitude to American development of the New Galedonian airfields with that taken up by his colleague Médecin-général Sicé, High Commissioner in Free French Equatorial Africa, when faced with a request by the newly-belligerant United States to use the airfield at Pointe Noire (French Congo) as a staging point. Instructed by the French National Committee to bargain the use of this landing ground against formal American recognition of the Committee as an ally, or at least a firm promise to supply certain transport aircraft being sought for French Africa — a tactic described to Tixier by Assistant Secretary of State Berle as 'infantile' — Sicé made his own decision to accede promptly to the American request. The Committee acquiesced, but showed displeasure at his initiative. On 1 Apr. 1942 the American consul at neighbouring Léopoldville reported to the State Department the view of French authorities in Equatorial Africa that 'it is Pleven who is "playing politics" with the war effort, not de Gaulle'. See FRUS 1942 vol.II, 568-9. De Gaulle himself, however, as he later recorded (op. cit., 192), found the haggling over the aircraft a normal enough tactic to use with the Americans.

48 Ibid., 190.

49 Canberra's consideration of d'Argenlieu's complaints is in AA A816 52/302/117.

50 Washington telegram 122 in A A A816 52/302/117.

51 De Gaulle, op. cit., 521.

52 FRUS 1942, vol. II, 503-6.

53 WPD 3718-17.

54 De Gaulle, op. cit., 526.

55 Ibid., 529.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1 A. Gillois, *L'Histoire secrète des Français à Londres* (Paris 1973), 69.

2 Ballard's telegram to External Affairs, Canberra No. 523 of 26 Dec. 1941, in AA A1608, D41/1/9, part 4. Indexes to British Foreign Office records show that there were papers in that department on this officer's appointment, but the present writer found the key paper could not be located in the Public Record Office.

3 In de Gaulle, *Mémoires de Guerre: L'Appel. . .*, 534, the date of this telegram is given as 8 Apr., but this is clearly incorrect. Sautot, *Grandeur et Décadence*, 141, says de Gaulle's instruction was communicated to him on 30 Apr.

4 On the events of early May see Sautot, op. cit., 141-56. His account is usefully supplemented by General Patch's report of 1 July 1942 to CINCPAC (Appendix to US Navy historical report #432) and a careful narrative prepared by Flt Lt McColl, RAAF (AA A981, New Caledonia 1, X.

5 Flt Lt E. McColl to Airintel Melbourne, A210 of 10 May 1942, in AA A981, New Caledonia 10.

6 US Navy World War II historical report #432, which contains copy of narrative by the British liaison officer, Lt J. Templeton, RNVR.

7 Action taken in London on Patch's representations is recorded in US Navy report #432; AA CRS A2937, New Caledonia; and PRO FO371/3184 (Z3926/14/17).

8 De Gaulle, op. cit., 593.

9 Ibid., 191-2.

10 *Eisenhower Papers*, I, 287-9.

11 Flt Lt E. McColl to Airintel, Melbourne, A1203 of 21 May 1942 in AA A981, New Caledonia 10.

12 Ballard's telegram 140 of 27 May 1942 in AA A816 19/311/138.

13 US Navy report #432.

14 W.F. Halsey and J. Bryan, *Admiral Halsey's Story* (New York 1947), 137.

15 S.E. Morison, *The Struggle for Guadalcanal* (Boston 1950), 186.

16 PRO FO 371/31885 (Z6943/14/17).

17 PRO FO 371/31885 (Z6821/14/17).

18 FRUS 1942 vol.II, 550.

19 PRO FO 371/32053 (Z5194/1586/17).

20 In 1950 the present writer called on Sautot at Noumea, of which town he had been elected mayor, and expressed regret at having been unable to keep the appointment accorded him in May 1942. The ex-Governor at once began to recount, emotionally and at length, his journey to London and the disillusioning meeting with his hero de Gaulle. For the most part he was recapitulating what had already been written in his book published a year before. But there was something new. Launched into an account of his London tribulations, he said, 'And then I decided I had to kill General de Gaulle'. Sensing an incredulous reaction, such as he may well have encountered elsewhere — for no one who knew him could believe that he would wait seven years to recount such a story — he insisted that he had reached the conclusion that political assassination had become his duty, to be performed during one of de Gaulle's morning walks in Pall Mall. He had been dissuaded only at the last moment, he said, by a French priest to whom he made his confession at Westminster Cathedral. It will never be known how much French history may have been influenced by the quick reaction of that unknown priest.

CHAPTER EIGHT

1 Morison, *Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Action*, 6.

2 Morton, *U.S. Army in World War II . . .*, 215; Morison, op. cit., III, 266-8.

3 Morison, op. cit., III, 387-9; Morton, op. cit., 216.

4 Morton, op. cit., 217.

5 Morison, op. cit., IV, 251; Morton, op. cit., 256.

6 Morison, op. cit., IV, 46-64.

7 Morton, op. cit., 279.

8 Ibid., 280-5; Morison, op. cit., IV, 141-59.

9 AA A2684 minute no. 967.

10 'The Navy', General Eisenhower had complained in February, 'wants to take all the islands in the Pacific – have them held by Army troops, become bases for Army pursuit [aircraft] and bombers. Then! the Navy will have a safe place to sail its vessels.' *Eisenhower Papers*, I,112.

11 Morton, op. cit., 284.

12 Ibid., 294-304. Text of joint directive in appendix E, 619.

13 Morison, op. cit., III, 264-77.

14 Morison, op. cit., V, 27-8.

15 Morton, *The Struggle for Guadalcanal*, 58-9.

16 Ibid., 337. D. McCarthy, *Southwest Pacific Area – First Year* (Canberra 1959), 146.

17 Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, 656.

18 Morton, op. cit., 316-71.

19 Morison, op. cit., 185.

20 Henri Daly, 'Les Américains en Nouvelle-Calédonie', in *Bulletin de la Société d'Etudes Historiques de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, No. 17 (1973). Daly notes that cargo handled at Noumea amounted to 48,600 tonnes in Nov., 140,300 tonnes in Dec. and 217,500 tonnes in Jan. 1941. (Tonnage arriving in one peacetime month nearly 30 years later totalled 129,000 tonnes.)

21 Morison, op. cit., V, 186.

22 M. Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1943-1944* (Washington 1959), 339, mentions remarks in this sense by Roosevelt on the eve of the Cairo Conference (Nov. 1943). The President spoke in the same vein to the Pacific War Council in Washington at that body's last meeting on 12 Jan. 1944. Australian Legation's telegram to Dept of External Affairs, Canberra, in AA AA3300, [265].

23 Sherwood, op. cit., 453. Emphasis supplied.

APPENDIX

1 Copy in AA A1196, 22/501/42.

2 A copy of this officer's report, provided by the New Zealand Minister at Washington, is in WPD 3718-25.

3 Text in Canberra, Australian War Memorial (hereinafter AWM) 565/4/1.

4 Text of Kneen's report is in AWM 565/4/2.

5 Daly, 'Les Americains en Nouvelle-Calédonie', 1-30.

6 AWA, Gavin Long Diaries, N71, 77-88.

Index

NOUVELLE CALEDONIE ET DEPENDANCES

XXV^e ANNIVERSAIRE DU RALLIEMENT A LA FRANCE LIBRE

A TOUS LES FRANÇAIS

La France a perdu une bataille!
Mais la France n'a pas perdu la guerre!

Des gouvernants de rencontre ont pu capituler, cédant à la panique, oubliant l'honneur, livrant le pays à la servitude. Cependant, rien n'est perdu!

Rien n'est perdu, parce que cette guerre est une guerre mondiale. Dans l'univers libre, des forces immenses n'ont pas encore donné. Un jour, ces forces écraseront l'ennemi. Il faut que la France, ce jour-là, soit présente à la victoire. Alors, elle retrouvera sa liberté et sa grandeur. Tel est mon but, mon seul but!

Voilà pourquoi je convie tous les Français, où qu'ils se trouvent, à s'unir à moi dans l'action, dans le sacrifice et dans l'espérance.

Notre patrie est en péril de mort.
Luttons tous pour la sauver!

VIVE LA FRANCE !

Ch. de Gaulle

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