

Germany's Lost Pacific Empire

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## GERMANY'S LOST PACIFIC EMPIRE

By the late WILLIAM CHURCHILL

### CHRONOLOGY

- 1883 Annexation by Queensland of New Guinea east of the Dutch boundary at 141° E.
- 1883 Annexation annulled by Great Britain.
- 1884 October to December. Germany annexes Kaiser-Wilhelmsland (the northern shore of New Guinea east of 141° and inland to the central ranges) for the Deutsche Neuguinea-Gesellschaft, the New Britannia Archipelago (changing its name to the Bismarck Archipelago), and the Solomon Islands as far south as the strait between Ysabel and Malaita.
- 1884 November. Great Britain proclaims protectorate over British New Guinea (the southern shore east of 141° and inland to the central ranges), turning over administration to Australia, and over the southern Solomon Islands and the Santa Cruz group.
- 1885 August 25. German flag hoisted over Yap in the Caroline Islands. Spain protests the annexation, the matter being referred to the Holy See for arbitration.
- 1885 October 15. German flag hoisted at Jaluit in annexation of the Marshall Islands in the name of the Jaluit-Gesellschaft.
- 1885 Queensland re-annexes southeastern New Guinea.
- 1899 Germany buys from Spain the Carolines, Pelews, and Marianas.
- 1899 November 14. Germany completes the partition of Samoa on the dissolution of the Berlin General Act of 1889.
- 1914 September to December. Capture of Samoa by New Zealand, of New Guinea by Australia. of the equatorial islands by Japan.

### CREATION OF A GERMAN COLONIAL EMPIRE THE OUTGROWTH OF WEST GERMAN INDUSTRIALISM IN OPPOSITION TO PRUSSIAN AGRARIANISM

It is eminently characteristic of German administration that the very last item of acquisition of Pacific territory was really the first object of Germany's plans for her place in the sun. It was even more. The project for the annexation really underlies the whole German plan of creating a German empire. In the new government proclaimed at Versailles at the end of the Franco-Prussian War, the use of the term "empire" was in part braggadocio and in other part an attempt to establish a continuity of system with the Holy Roman Empire of the Middle Ages. That government was at the beginning, as at the end, a government of the more civilized Germanic states by Prussia. It was Bismarck and Prussia, the agrarian interest which could find its only active outlet in war, as opposed to the industrial and literary culture of the Rhine valley.

The point is one of extreme importance. The attitude of the German Empire toward colonies is not merely a matter of inference to be drawn from Bismarck's administration but is based upon the direct and positive statements of the Iron Chancellor himself. In the settlement of the terms of

the peace with France, it was proposed that Germany take over Pondicherry and the other French holdings in India and the Far East. Bismarck roundly denounced the project and swore that Germany not only needed no colonies but could not tolerate them.

Yet, there was another Germany which not even Bismarck could grind down. Even in the era of the Hohenstaufen emperors and popes there existed communities, city states, with full control over their own affairs and entirely free of the domination of clerical and feudal lords. These were the Hanseatic republics—Hamburg, Lübeck, Bremen, Riga, and the rest. They had established complete control over the trade of the North Sea and the

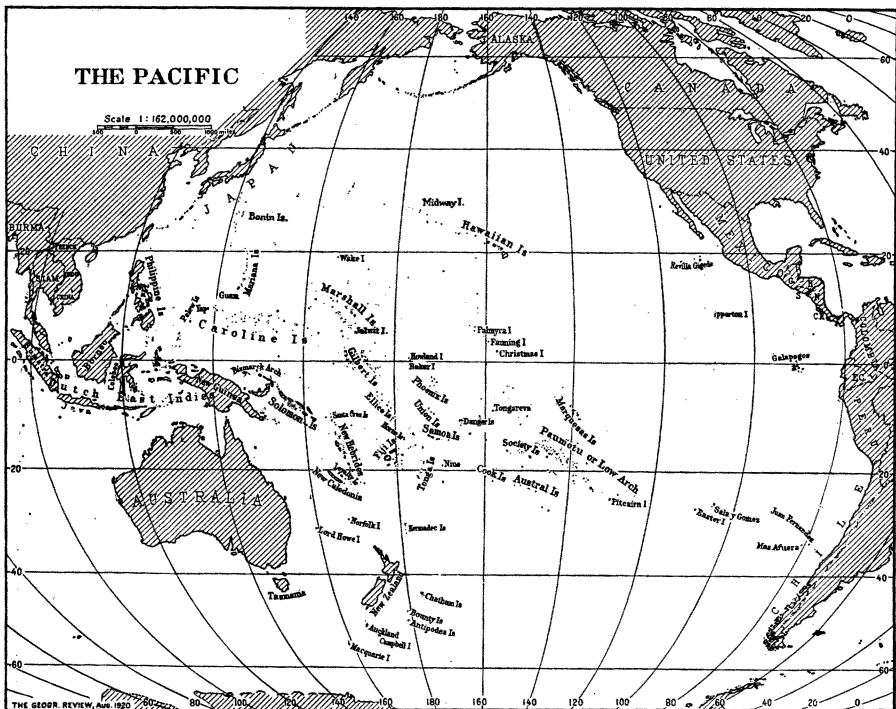


FIG. 1—Locational map of the Pacific islands. Scale, 1:162,000,000.

Baltic. They had settled themselves in London itself at the Steelyard and had so throttled England's commerce at its beginning that from their popular designation of "Easterlings" to this day the soundness of British finance must be stated in terms of the pound sterling. In the ordinary course of political events they found it necessary to associate themselves with their great and rude neighbor of Prussia on the east, for mutual protection. With Prussia they entered into the North German Confederation and joined with Prussia in the conquest of Schleswig-Holstein, of Bavaria, of Württemberg, and Austria, and eventually in the victory over France. The interests of the states of the Hanseatic League were overseas; their profit lay in procuring

the raw material upon which German craft and industry might exercise its constructive skill; their interest was none the less in finding a market for the product of German industry. Their capital must be fluid; their profit lay in the extent and frequency of the turn-over. Prussia, on the other hand, had no industry save that of farming—agriculture upon a great and feudal scale. Intimately as the Hanseatic League and Prussia found it necessary to associate themselves for purposes of government, their interests and objects were irreconcilable. Prussia was stagnant; Hamburg, type of its sister communities, had to exercise to live. It had to foster the development of the great industrial centers of the Rhine valley and the Palatinate, and that called for capital and yet more capital. It was inevitable that Hamburg should associate itself with the great banking interests which established themselves in Berlin after Frankfort had ceased to be the money center of northern Europe. Commerce and finance combined for the overthrow of Bismarck first, and eventually for the destruction of the empire of force which he had created.

#### THE HOUSE OF GODEFFROY AND THE ACQUISITION OF GERMANY'S PACIFIC COLONIES

One result of the effective blockade of the Southern seaports in our Civil War was to produce the cotton famine which, while advantageous to the valley of the Merrimac and southeastern New England, was ruinous to the English Midlands, the valley of the Rhine, and to the world at large. In all the warmer regions of the world every district in which cotton might be made to grow was exploited for the production of the great staple. The very life of Hamburg and Bremen and Lübeck depended upon the supply of cotton.

In Hamburg there was a merchant prince, Johann Cesar Godeffroy, merchant in the richest sense of the word, senator of the Golden Senate of his state. In search of cotton he sent out to the heart of the Pacific, to Fiji and Samoa, agents whose sole purpose was to establish plantations to relieve the dearth of Germany. The principal agent of the house of Godeffroy in the Pacific was Theodor Weber. Weber was a fit assistant to carry out the broad plans of his chief. His ability was recognized, first by his state, which created him Commercial Agent of Hamburg for the South Seas, and next by the North German Confederation, which appointed him its Consul, an honor which was carried over by the German Empire. Weber among savages beneath the palm trees, Godeffroy in Hamburg, manipulating a dream of world commerce, shared a vision—the vision of a German Empire which should establish itself in occupation of the Pacific Ocean. By reason of his daring extension of business Godeffroy brought his house into bankruptcy after a century and a half of great success; his mistake was in the exploitation of the Westphalian coal measures before German industry was ready to swallow the project. In the bankruptcy it was found that his South Sea operations were sound and paying, and these interests were

assumed by a joint stock corporation, Die Deutsche Handels- und Plantagen-Gesellschaft der Südsee-Inseln zu Hamburg. It is a matter of common note that a block of shares of this new company was allotted to members of the ruling family. The shareholders, under the leadership of the great Berlin banker Bleichröder, despite the opposition of Bismarck, forced through the Reichstag a subvention in aid of the new establishment. This was the beginning of the end of Bismarck, and in a few months the pilot was dropped; German business had won its first victory over Prussian militancy.

#### THE CASE OF SAMOA

It was not going to be easy for Germany to take over Samoa. Other interests were involved. The British colonies of Australia and New Zealand had established a lucrative trade. The United States since 1839 had the exclusive right to the establishment of a naval base in the harbor of Pago Pago. The clumsiness of the execution of adroitly planned German machination in stirring up disorder among the Samoans actually brought the United States in 1889 to the point of the immediacy of war, a horror prevented only by the intervention of the gale which destroyed every ship in Apia harbor, except the British *Calliope*, which escaped by the merest thread. This led to a conference of Great Britain, the United States, and Germany in Berlin, resulting in the Berlin General Act, which undertook to provide a government for the Kingdom of Samoa and to protect it against the schemes of greedy nations.

It is for that reason that Samoa, the very best of Germany's colonial empire, remained the last territory to be annexed.

#### BRITISH AND GERMAN ACQUISITIONS IN NEW GUINEA

The colonies of Australia, now unified in the Commonwealth, felt pride in being outlying members of the British Empire, but for all practical purposes they regarded themselves as independent constitutional communities. In connection with the slave trade necessary for the working of the sugar plantations in tropical Australia, a trade which was allowed to exist under the more seemly designation of the labor trade, the colony of Queensland in 1883 annexed the eastern half of the continental island of New Guinea, whose mountain summits lay on the other side of the narrow Torres Straits. When this independent act of the colony was reported in London Lord Derby at once disavowed the act of sovereignty on the ground that a colony had no right to annex territory to itself. This created a storm, not only in Queensland, but in the other colonies of Australia, and public meetings of protest were held in Brisbane, in Sydney, and in Melbourne, and all the colonial parliaments passed various measures complaining of this invasion of their rights. Germany seized the opportunity and, in the last months of 1884, annexed the northern shore of New Guinea from the Dutch boundary eastward to Dampier Strait and the territory back of it theoretically to the crest of the central range of mountains. This was done, not as an imperial act,

but as the placing in possession of the land of Die Neuguinea-Gesellschaft, imitative of the British chartered companies in South Africa and in Borneo. Continuing the annexation, but this time as imperial, the expedition assumed the whole of the New Britannia Archipelago and of the northern Solomon Islands as far south as the strait between Ysabel and Malaita. At once Australia was ablaze, and London, yielding at last to the popular sentiment of its great southern dependency, annexed the southern shore of New Guinea and turned it over to Australia for administration; and in the islands Great Britain established a protectorate over the southern Solomons and Santa Cruz.

#### GERMAN ACQUISITION OF THE CAROLINES, MARSHALLS, MARIANAS, PELEWS, AND SAMOA

In August, 1885, still in extension eastward in the Pacific, Germany performed an act of annexation over the island of Yap in the Carolines. This group was claimed from the earliest discovery period by Spain, which protested the annexation. By agreement, the matter was referred to the Pope for arbitration, who eventually decided that the title lay with Spain. In October of the same year Germany hoisted its flag over the Marshall Islands, not as an imperial act, but in the form of another company, the Jaluit-Gesellschaft. In 1898 the United States had first captured and then bought from Spain the Philippines and the island of Guam in the Marianas. The following year Germany bought from Spain for 24,000,000 pesetas the remainder of its now useless Pacific holdings, the Carolines, the Marianas, and the Pelews (German, Palau). Toward the end of the same year, following the war upon the death of King Malietoa, the Berlin General Act was annulled by consent of the three nations and Samoa was distributed: Tutuila to the United States; Upolu to Germany; Savaii to Great Britain. Immediately Great Britain and Germany adjusted the tangle of other affairs in the Pacific, Germany receiving Savaii and in return making various concessions to Great Britain in the Tonga and the Solomon Islands.

#### STATUS OF COLONIAL DOMINION IN THE PACIFIC IN 1900

Thus, with the end of the century an equilibrium was struck in the tropical Pacific. France was in possession of the Society Islands, the Marquesas, and the Paumotus in the extreme east and of New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands in the west, together with the insignificant missionary property of Uea and Fotuna in the center between Fiji and Samoa, and a joint administration of the New Hebrides shared with Great Britain. The British Empire held, either as protectorates or by direct annexation, the greater part of the Solomon Islands in the west, Fiji and Tonga in the center, and north of Samoa toward the equator the Tokelau (Union) and Gilbert groups, together with an abundance of scattered and less important islands. Germany held Samoa in the center and along the equator extensive possessions in New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago, the Pelews, the Marianas, the Carolines, and the Marshalls. The United States had Tutuila in Samoa to the south, Hawaii to the north, Midway and Wake Islands in the open sea, Guam in



the Marianas, and the Philippines. The interests of these great powers fall into two distinct groups. Great Britain, France, and Germany exploited their possessions in the Pacific in the interest of commerce and productive agriculture; the United States was and is interested solely in the maintenance of unimpeded communication between its great outpost of Hawaii and the Philippines. These great powers differ in their holdings in another and most important regard. Great Britain, France, and the United States are in a position to control the passage through the East Indian archipelago. Germany has been unable to obtain a foothold in the Malay East.

#### CHANGES OF OWNERSHIP IN 1914 OWING TO THE WAR AND THEIR STRATEGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

This condition of equilibrium existed for thirteen and one-half years. Then came the war. New Zealand on its way to the Mediterranean took German Samoa without resistance. The forces of the Commonwealth of Australia gathered the German Solomons and the Bismarck Archipelago and were occupied for several months in quelling German opposition in New Guinea. Neglecting for the time the strong fortification Kiaochow, the Japanese picked up the equatorial possessions of Germany from the Pelews to the Marshalls. Under the unusual designation of mandataries, the possession of these several members of the former German empire of the Pacific remits to New Zealand, to Australia, and to Japan.

It stands clear among the problems of the greater strategies that no Atlantic power can afford to fight for the possession of any Pacific holdings; that no Pacific power can afford to let them go. Thus, there was no attempt on the part of Germany to make any determined effort to hold its Pacific empire; it was content to let it pass to enemy hands at the beginning of the war, knowing that the eventual fate must rest in the outcome of the war as fought in Europe. The British Empire in assuming its share of the former German possessions is in a dual position. As Great Britain, an Atlantic power, it can have no need of these islands; but constituent members of the empire, the Commonwealth of Australia and the Dominion of New Zealand, are essentially Pacific lands at the present and inevitably will develop to a position of greater importance in that regard. It is, therefore, eminently fitting that these two constitutional states should assume the control of the contiguous Pacific area.

#### THE PRESENT POSITION OF THE UNITED STATES IN THE PACIFIC

The position of the United States in the Pacific was in no sense threatened by Germany in the war; Hawaii and Samoa at the east and Guam and the Philippines at the west were not the object of German attack, and, superficially, it may seem that they are not affected by the distribution of the German islands in the Pacific. It is to be noted, however, that the equatorial islands from the Marshalls to the Pelews are parallel to an important American line of communication, namely that from Hawaii to the Philippines. The lines are not exactly parallel, but sufficiently so for practical

purposes. At the east Jaluit lies about 500 miles to the south of the American line of communication, a distance which in modern warfare we have learned is to be covered in a very scanty tale of hours; toward the west the distance is reduced to 47 miles, that being the interval between American Guam and Rota, the next island in the Marianas, a distance now within the easy scope of modern artillery. Fortunately for the security of our line of communication, these islands have no harbors of a character to serve as bases for capital ships. They do abound, however, in smaller bays and roadsteads, each of which might serve as a store base to be used only once, or to be sacrificed without great loss, by an enemy at the beginning of any war which shall engage in any activity in the Pacific. They would serve equally as ambush for destroyer units prepared to harass our fleets advancing along the great circle to the westward. A particular element is introduced in these equatorial islands by the frequency with which the atoll type recurs. There are hundreds of these islands in which a narrow wall of sand surrounds some considerable areas of water in an inner lagoon and protects it from the oceanic wave movement. There are thus many excellent possible bases for hydro-airplanes with abundant surfaces of smooth water giving an ideal take-off. The late war has shown the great prospect of value in offence which may be expected from airships of this type. The number of these bases is such as to entail a most considerable difficulty upon the commanders of any fleet which attempts to search them out and to clean them up, for the assault upon a vessel having the freedom of the skies presents a task of conspicuous difficulty to a vessel confined to the water.

Along the same track lies another American line of communication and a fixed one. The Pacific cable of the Commercial Cable Company is carried along the bottom of the sea from Hawaii to a relay station at Midway and a point of general distribution at Yap in the Carolines. From Yap an American branch line extends northward to the Bonin Islands, where it connects with the Japanese line with Tokyo. At Yap another connection is made with British lines to the China coast; the American cable extends to Manila, and other connections are made with New Guinea and with Menado on the Gorontalo Peninsula of northern Celebes. These points, which mark out the course of cable distribution, are equally central points in the network of radio communication across the Pacific.

#### CONCLUSION

Such is the situation in the South Seas at the end of the war. The period of annexation of these several empires in the Pacific passed over without violence other than intemperate speech. This was followed by a period of equilibrium which was not disturbed by any set of circumstances existing in the Pacific but entirely by conditions whose cause and origin was in Central Europe. The German empire of the Pacific has been wiped out, and new states of control have been established. A new balance has been struck. The future alone can disclose whether a state of stable equilibrium has been reached.