

CHAPTER II

CAPTURE OF THE GERMAN COLONIES: SAMOA, NAURU

DURING the first phase of the naval operations the Australian Squadron had been employed on the orthodox business of fleets in war-time—searching for the enemy squadron, with the intention of bringing it to action, and, if possible, destroying it. Other business was now to be thrust upon it.

On the 6th of August the British Government telegraphed the following suggestion to the Australian Government:—

If your Ministers desire and feel themselves able to seize German wireless stations at Yap in Marshall Islands, Nauru on¹ Pleasant Island, and New Guinea, we should feel that this was a great and urgent Imperial service. You will, however, realise that any territory now occupied must be at the disposal of the Imperial Government for purposes of an ultimate settlement at conclusion of the war. Other Dominions are acting in similar way on the same understanding, in particular, suggestion is being made to New Zealand in regard to Samoa.

It is now known that this proposal emanated from a sub-committee constituted on the 4th of August by the Committee of Imperial Defence, in order to consider combined naval and military operations against enemy territory. There is some evidence that the sub-committee may have assumed that, before the proposed expeditions sailed, the German Pacific Squadron would have been accounted for. When once, however, the proposals had been promulgated, that all-important condition was submerged, and the proposed expeditions appear to have been regarded for the time being as the primary measures of British strategy in the South Pacific.

Now in the informal debates and discussions which accompanied the birth of the Australian Navy, one of the most frequent taunts used by opponents of the scheme was: "Australians do not know what a navy is wanted for. When war comes they will either keep their ships hanging round their coasts, or will want to run about the Pacific occupying enemy territory. What they have to learn is that the one use of a navy is to destroy the enemy navy, and the first thing a squadron must do in war-time is to hunt down

¹ This is the official version. Another version gives "or" for "on." But both put Yap in the Marshalls.

the enemy squadron wherever it is. When the enemy's ships are smashed, there will be plenty of time to occupy enemy country." Being a little more intelligent than these scorers would believe, Australians learnt the lesson thus crudely conveyed, and began to put it into practice the minute war was declared. It was therefore somewhat surprising for them to be asked, before the war was three days old, to use their ships for exactly the purpose against which all their previous advisers had warned them. The reason for the adoption of this course has never been altogether clear, and it was quite unexpected at this stage by the Australian Government and people. For complying with it, indeed, the Ministers of the day were (very unjustly) suspected of petty intrigues and unworthy aims; when they were cleared, the suspicions were automatically transferred to the Government of New Zealand, mainly because that Government's expedition was the first to start. These rumours and charges of the past would not be worth mention here for their own sake; they are recalled in order to emphasize the point that few thoughtful Australians suspected the British Government and the British Admiralty of having called the Australian Squadron from its proper task, and set it to work which the Commonwealth had been taught to believe utterly wrong in principle. It is obvious that the occupation of Rabaul, Apia, etc., was useful, because it left the *Cormoran* and *Prinz Eitel Friedrich* without bases. But some Australians are still of opinion that the early destruction of the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* would have more than compensated for a few extra weeks' shelter for the smaller enemy cruisers.²

² An unfortunate misstatement is made in the British official *History of Naval Operations* (Vol. I, p. 294), from which it has been repeated in the German official history (*Der Krieg Zur See—Kreuzerkrieg*, Vol. I, p. 167). "Open complaints were heard of the management of the Australian Fleet and regrets that the two Dominions had not kept the control in their own hands. Then, at least, they would have had their splendid contributions to the Navy—the *Australia* and *New Zealand*—to guard their own men." The German history goes on (p. 191) to point to the possibility that the destruction of the British squadron off Coronel may have resulted from interference by the dominions with the Admiralty's discretion concerning the movements of the *Australia*. It cannot, therefore, be too strongly stated that the statement quoted above, so far as it concerns Australia, is quite unjustified. No complaints of the kind were ever heard in Australia, where no one ever wished to tie the *Australia* down to convoy escort, even of the Commonwealth's own troops to Egypt. But there were complaints and regrets that the *Australia* and the other cruisers had been tied down to convoying duties at all, instead of being allowed, as the local authorities would have allowed them, to hunt down enemy warships.

The Commonwealth authorities replied at once (on the 7th) that they would willingly render the required service, "provided that the German fleet is considered the first objective," and on the 8th the then Minister for Defence (Senator Millen) drew up a minute:—

It is manifestly undesirable to divert any of the warships from their present mission for the purpose indicated in the cable. The object sought might, however, be attained by despatch of an armed merchantman carrying a sufficient complement of men.

Adding the proviso that the more powerful cruisers of the enemy should first be accounted for, the Naval Board concurred in this view; and on the 10th the following message went to London:—

Expeditionary force of 1,500 men being organized by Government for action suggested in your telegram 6th August. Despatching in merchant cruiser carrying four 4.7 guns. Departure subject to reports from Patey.

While Australia's reply of the 7th was still on its way, the High Commissioner sent another call to action—

Military authorities hope to hear shortly of Australian activity dealing with German possessions Pacific Ocean.

and on the 9th the Admiralty put in a message for transmission to Admiral Patey:—

Military expedition in two transports leaves New Zealand about 11th inst. for Apia. Senior naval officer New Zealand has been ordered to arrange for escort of at least one cruiser. You will be informed later of actual departure of expedition. Guard against interference by enemy.

No one knew where the big German cruisers were.³ They had had time to go anywhere and to hide anywhere; they might be near Rabaul (this was, it must be remembered, before the raid of the 11th), or near Samoa, or cruising between New Zealand and the Fiji group. Before the Australian Squadron could obtain a jot of information about them, somebody in London was pressing the Pacific Dominions to send off little expeditions into unsearched and dangerous waters, in order to occupy as a matter of urgency an island

³ There is evidence to show that Admiralty officials thought they were still in Chinese waters. The Imperial Defence sub-committee's original memorandum regarding the proposed raid on Yap says, "Naval escort two cruisers *Encounter* and *Sydney* would be suitable provided the German armoured cruisers in China are accounted for." It is difficult, however, to understand how the *Encounter* and *Sydney* could have usefully acted together. (Note.—Only extracts from Admiral Jackson's memorandum are available in Australia, and these differ slightly in various copies.)

here and an island there—the whole and only importance of those islands being their possible use as naval bases, of a very imperfect kind, by the cruisers for which our fleet was looking. Those cruisers once destroyed, the islands could be taken or let alone as might seem best and most convenient; their importance would be gone.

In this connection it is to be noted that the sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence was not at the time at all satisfied with the manner in which its proposals were being put into practice. Its chairman, Admiral Sir H. B. Jackson, on the 24th of August in a memorandum concerning troop movements in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, written “to meet the dispositions proposed by the First Lord,” said:—

“If these waters were known to be clear of enemy cruisers, the situation would be very different, and I would point out that the duties that occupy and foreshadow the movements of our Eastern squadron are hardly those laid down in Standing War Orders, where the destruction of the enemy warships is the first and principal duty. It is noteworthy that these have not been encountered or seriously looked for; and we seem to be asking too much from the limited force we have in those waters, and are looking ahead and planning our military expeditions without taking sufficient thought of our enemy's naval forces.

“The *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst* may not be the only ones in the Pacific; apparently the little *Geier* is active in interrupting our communications, and it is high time we destroyed the German communications and armed vessels of all descriptions in these waters.”

At any rate, the effect of these demands on the plans of Admiral Patey was destructive, and must be considered in some detail in order to refute charges of immobility, delay, and the like which have been brought against him. The Admiralty's message of the 9th did not reach him till the evening of the 14th. Meanwhile during the night of the 12th-13th he received from the Governor-General of New

Zealand a message saying that an expedition was in preparation, and asking whether it could be safely sent off. To this he replied:—

I do not consider it safe at present for expedition to start without escort. I have not received any order about it yet.

At the moment the *Australia* was searching the area round Bougainville, and must return to a base to complete with fuel; the admiral, however, did not imagine that after his warning any troops would leave New Zealand until he was ready to support them, and accordingly proceeded to develop his plans on his way back to Port Moresby. He had already come to the conclusion that the big German cruisers were some distance away to the north or east, probably on their way to America, so that a visit to Samoa was quite on the cards; it was therefore well within his duty to move towards Samoa, and he planned to cover the New Zealand transports with the *Australia* and *Melbourne*, leaving the *Sydney*, *Encounter*, and destroyers to guard against possible but unlikely attacks from the north or north-west.⁴ The *Sydney*, in particular, was to revisit Rabaul and persevere till the wireless station there was found and destroyed.

Day by day these plans received slight alterations. A message from the admiral commanding in China, to the effect that the French cruiser *Montcalm* had been ordered to that station, led to a decision to take the *Sydney* to Samoa also, especially as it had been proposed⁵ to bring the *Minotaur* and *Yarmouth* into Australian waters directly Japan declared war (an event expected on the 12th, though it was postponed). The three Australian ships were to leave Port Moresby on the 19th, coal at Noumea, and meet the New Zealand transports

⁴ Patey afterwards wrote that, upon consideration he "came to the conclusion that an expedition to take Samoa was a very desirable operation if covered by the Fleet." On the strength of this an attempt—surely quite unjustified—has been made to attribute to him a share in the responsibility for launching the expedition at this early stage. Whatever he may have thought of it afterwards, the fact is that the proposal entirely frustrated his own intention and that of the Australian Government, which had urged upon the British Government that the German fleet should be "the first objective." [After reading this footnote in the 1st edition of this work, Admiral Patey stated that the meaning of the words quoted was that "by this means I might have had an opportunity of bringing Admiral von Spee to action, as I felt sure he would be in the vicinity, and I thought that, once I had got so far to the east, I might have been left free to deal with the German squadron in my own way. . . . I should have been waiting for him (von Spee) outside Samoan waters, and not at anchor, as he seemed to expect."]

⁵ See pp 18-19.

on the 26th at a rendezvous about 600 miles north of New Zealand. These dates were almost immediately altered to the 17th and 24th—apparently because on the 14th, for the first time, Admiral Patey heard that the expedition had been timed to leave on the 11th. On the 15th, however, he received from the Admiralty, through the Naval Board, information that the expedition had started:—

Following telegram received from Admiralty. Message begins: For Rear-Admiral, *Australia*. New Zealand expedition for the capture of Samoa due at Suva 20th August under escort *Montcalm* and two "P" class.⁸ 3,000 tons coal ordered Samoa. Possible *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst* may be there. Proceed with *Australia* to support expedition, arranging coal board ship convenient to reach Suva 20th August. If late, *Australia* to follow expedition to Samoa, using *Encounter*, *Melbourne*, *Sydney* for New Guinea expedition and, if possible, destruction of wireless at Nauru. They will be required later for convoy of Australian troops to Aden. Yap will be dealt with by China Squadron. Message ends.

It will be noted that the original suggestion to seize German wireless stations had now developed into one for a full-blown occupation of the principal German islands. This was no doubt desired partly for strategical reasons—to deny these bases to the German fleet, and make them available for the British—but it seems probable that a political motive was also largely responsible. It has long been known that a good many high officials in London, neglecting Lord Kitchener's hint that the war might last at least three years, were convinced that it would be over by Christmas—not necessarily ending with a disastrous defeat of Germany, but pursuing a course that would convince the German Government of its folly in starting hostilities, and so might lead to peace negotiations. In that case, it may well have seemed to them both wise and of urgent importance that we should have in hand some German territory for bargaining purposes, possibly to exchange for Belgium. It is not easy to see how such a belief could justify the despatch of transports and small cruisers (perhaps ahead of their escort—"if late," the telegram says) into an area possibly containing the two big German cruisers; but it offers some sort of explanation for a course of action that in any case is difficult to understand.

⁸ i.e. the *Psyche* and *Philomel*. The *Pyramus* was also sent.

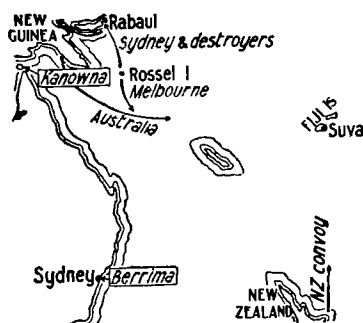
However that may be, the expedition to Samoa was on its way, and all Admiral Patey could do was to get it halted till he could accompany it:—

I could meet expedition off Suva 24th August.

But at least he might be able to stop the Australian expedition from running similar risks:—

I do not consider it advisable for Australian expedition to start for New Guinea without escort *Australia*, so long as *Scharnhorst* *Gneisenau* are not accounted for or definitely located. In view of this *Melbourne* *Sydney* should accompany *Australia* to Samoa, and afterwards all return to carry out New Guinea expedition. . . . *Australia* will proceed alone if not approved. Please ask Admiralty to reply at once.

The suggested plan at this moment was (a) to take the *Australia* and the *Melbourne* to Suva as quickly as possible in order to catch up the New Zealand convoy; (b) to keep the Australian transports (of which one, the *Kanowna* was at Thursday Island; the other, the *Berrima*, at Sydney) in port until the *Australia* could get back; (c) to send the *Sydney*—which, as soon as it was known that the *Montcalm* would be available for the convoy, was once more free—with the destroyers first to Rabaul, then to search Friedrich Wilhelm Harbour on the mainland of New Guinea.



On the 15th of August, in passing Admiral Patey's telegram on to the Admiralty, the Naval Board suggested—

As Australian expedition ready to leave for Thursday Island immediately and Australian fleet is at Port Moresby, Government ask your consideration (as to the) practicability (of) *Australia* conveying Australian expedition first, then proceeding with Samoa expedition. Very short time necessary to carry out New Guinea expedition, while other course will involve delay of fully a month. The (Australian) Government's proposal on the other hand will, while securing New Guinea, only delay Samoa enterprise a few days.

The Admiralty, however, on the 11th—before learning that the Australian expedition was ready—had given leave for the New Zealand expedition to start, which it did early on the morning of the 15th. Though the Australian suggestion was reasonable, it was then too late to entertain it;⁷ but, as the Australian Government appeared anxious to avoid delay, the Admiralty put forward a new proposal by which this might be lessened. The new plan was explained in a telegram which the Naval Board on the 16th passed on to Admiral Patey as follows:—

Following telegram received from Admiralty. Begins: New Zealand expedition having started must be covered by *Australia*, as the two German cruisers' whereabouts unknown. Proposed that *Melbourne* and *Sydney* should convoy New Guinea expedition northwards inside the Barrier Reef, to be subsequently joined at a suitable base by *Australia* and *Montcalm*. Ends.

The Australian Government adopted this suggestion, and informed Admiral Patey—

500 men now leaving Thursday Island for Port Moresby by *Kanowna*, unless you countermand direct to officer commanding garrison at Thursday Island. . . . Expedition from Sydney will leave Wednesday 19th August for Thursday Island by *Berrima* inside the Great Barrier Reef.

It appears, then, that the Admiralty had now noted the danger into which the New Zealand expedition had been originally sent. But these negotiations had undoubtedly placed Admiral Patey in a difficult position. Just as the New Zealand expedition had been sent to sea without consulting the admiral in command in Australian waters, so now the Australian expedition was hurried out of Port Jackson without consulting him, and his cruisers were taken out of his hands and allotted to convoy duty. Patey's own opinion is not in doubt; he wrote it down at the time:—

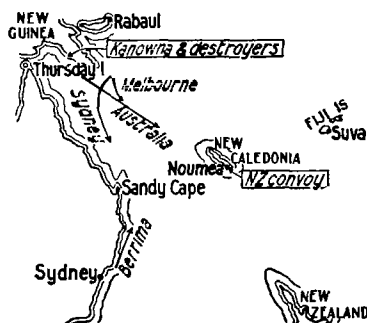
I did not think that the New Zealand expedition would have started before I was ready to meet it, nor did I contemplate that the Australian expedition for New Guinea would start till after the New Zealand expedition had safely landed. I now found myself with two expeditions to convoy, and therefore had to relinquish all other operations. . . .

If the New Zealand expedition had delayed their start for three days, I could have met them at a pre-arranged rendezvous between

⁷ Had the course suggested by the Commonwealth Government been followed, the *Australia* with the New Zealand expedition would probably have arrived at Samoa about the time of the German squadron's visit.

New Zealand and Suva, and thus avoided the necessity of the expedition coming considerably out of their way to Noumea; no time would really have been lost in the end, and coal would have been saved.

Accordingly the whole plan of operations was altered in a few hours. Rabaul was left to its own devices; luckily no great harm ensued. The *Australia* and *Melbourne* went off to Noumea to take up the New Zealand convoy. The *Sydney* left Rossel Island on the 18th and proceeded south to meet the *Berrima* off Sandy



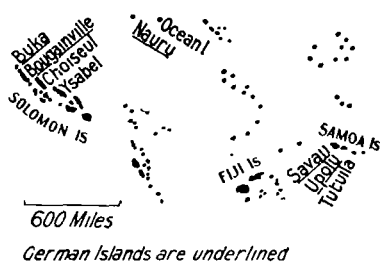
Cape, the *Encounter* from Port Moresby following at her slower speed. The destroyers were sent to Port Moresby to keep guard over the *Kanzawa*. Except for the chance of meeting the German cruisers near Samoa, the whole squadron was deliberately diverted from its proper objective and set to guard expeditions which, in the opinion both of Admiral Patey and of the Australian Government, were of less importance than the task—still unfulfilled—of searching for the German fleet.

II

As the operations now to be considered were concerned with the German colonies in the Pacific, it will be advisable to preface this narrative of them with a short account of those colonies.

During the seventies of last century the Hamburg firm of Godeffroy and Son began to spread their trading stations, hitherto centred in Samoa, over the Marshalls and the Bismarck Archipelago, where they were soon joined by the firm of Hernalheim, which also began to trade in the Carolines and the Gilberts. When the German Empire found itself

in a position to add colonies to its other Imperial trappings, these island groups naturally came under review; an attempt to annex Samoa in 1882 was frustrated by the Reichstag, but towards the end of 1884 the German flag was hoisted at various harbours in the Bismarcks and New Guinea, and within a few months the Marshalls—then no one's property—were added to the new acquisitions. An attempt was also made to grab at the Carolines and Mariannes, which were (nominally, at least) owned by Spain. In 1888 Nauru was annexed and attached to the Marshalls; in 1899 Spain, then suffering under her defeat by the United States, was persuaded to sell the Mariannes (except Guam), Pelews, and Carolines; in 1900 the two larger of the Samoan Islands were taken over, the United States getting the third, and Britain receiving as compensation two of the western Solomons (Choiseul and Ysabel), which had been German since 1886. The two Solomon Islands farther west—Bougainville and Buka—remained German.



After several experiments in forms of administration, the settled arrangement at the outbreak of war was as follows: Samoa formed a separate colony under its own Governor; all the other groups—Marshalls, Carolines, Pelews, New Guinea mainland, and Bismarcks (with two Solomons attached)—were under the Governor of "German New Guinea" (a term which officially included them all), with headquarters at Rabaul in New Britain. Saipan in the Mariannes, Ponape, Yap, and Friedrich Wilhelm Harbour (now Madang) in New Guinea were the principal district headquarters. There were minor Government stations at Jabor in Jaluit, Kuror in the Pelews, Truk, Kāwieng in New Ireland, Nauru, Manus in the Admiralty group, Kieta

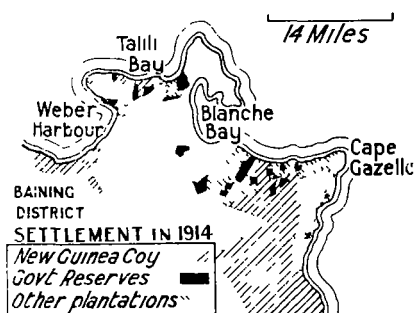
on Bougainville, and Eitape and Morobe on the New Guinea mainland. The areas and populations were estimated roughly as given in the table below :—

			Land Area. Sq. miles.		Population.	
					Native.	White.
Samoa	..	..	995	..	37,000	500
Bismarcks	..	..	18,000	..	190,000	700
Solomons	..	..	3,850	..	60,000	100
New Guinea mainland	..	..	70,000	..	110,000	300
Mariannes	..	..	250	..	4,500	50
Carolines, Pelews	..	..	560	..	42,000	250
Marshalls	..	..	150	..	10,000	170
Nauru	..	..	8	..	1,400	100

As may be gathered from the above figures, the white settlement was confined to trading-stations and a few plantations. No island of any size had been properly explored except along the coast-line. The German plan of settlement, especially in the Bismarcks, was to edge the coast-line with good roads made by native labour, occasionally to push plantations a little way in from these roads, and for the rest to let the native tribes govern themselves so long as inter-tribal fighting was kept down, and a small poll-tax was collected by the local head-men, who

were enrolled as Government officials. Great efforts were made to attract planters and capital from outside, although the main business was kept carefully in the hands of German trading companies — the Jaluit Company, the New Guinea Company, Forsyth's, Hensheim's. Similarly the shipping of

island products was almost entirely done by vessels of the North German Lloyd, the German-Australian Company, or the Jaluit Company. A few Australian planters had been attracted to New Britain, and one or two Australian firms were experimenting in Bougainville.



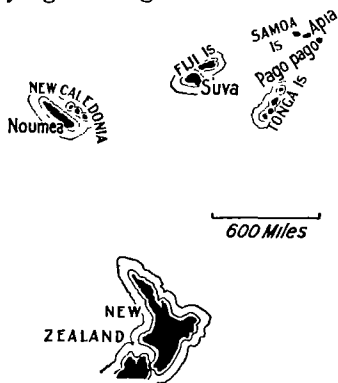
As far as can be ascertained, no fortifications of any kind had been constructed in any of the groups, though there was undoubtedly a strategic plan behind the road-construction, and coaling-sheds, wharves, &c., had been made at certain stations on a scale out of all proportion to existing or prospective trade demands. Much effort had been spent on exploration and investigation of a scientific character. By 1910—less than thirty years after the first annexation—it was possible for German publishers to put forth books containing elaborate details of the ethnology, coastal botany and zoology, meteorology and hydrography of all the Pacific colonies, together with a list of nearly 350 important works on those subjects already compiled.

Apart from these general facts, very little was known about the enemy colonies at the outbreak of war. The German policy of restricting trade—contrary to the whole spirit of the agreements with Britain under which nearly all these colonies had been acquired—was successful in depriving outsiders of any accurate knowledge of the situation within the groups, as may be easily seen from articles written about them even within recent years. In August, 1914, rumours of secret fortifications, of huge concealed stores of coal, even of elaborate electrical contrivances for harbour defence, were widely circulated; and British and Australian authorities, while they placed little trust in these rumours, were nevertheless compelled to take precautions against the possibility of their being correct. A simple instance, both of lack of knowledge and of the unnecessary trouble which it eventually cost, is the search for the wireless station in New Britain. It was known that it was being constructed. There was excellent evidence that it was not ready at the end of June, and that it would probably not be completed for many months to come. But its position was a mystery, and, when someone who really knew it was discovered, the authorities hesitated about believing him; he might, like so many others at that time, be pretending to greater accuracy than his actual knowledge justified. The fact that the German Governor had a second station of a temporary character attached to his vagrant headquarters increased the puzzle, inasmuch as references to this station were naturally supposed

to be connected with the main installation at Bitapaka. It may, indeed, almost be said that the German colonies had two lines of defence—the one their squadron, the other their unknownness; and while, with the German squadron out of the way, there should have been plenty of time to feel a way into these unknown regions, as long as that squadron was in being, and might be within reach, every day was of importance. Troops cannot be sent two thousand miles to feel their way about in tropical bush, while two enemy cruisers are possibly on their heels. When once it is known that the enemy cruisers are destroyed or driven across the ocean, such troops may take their time.

III

Early on the 17th of August the *Australia* left Port Moresby for Noumea, being joined by the *Melbourne* from Rossel Island on the 20th. Noumea was reached next day, and the New Zealand transports were found there; so, too, was the French cruiser *Montcalm*,⁸ flying the flag of Rear-Admiral Huguët. The expedition now consisted of two transports (*Moeraki* and *Monowai*), three cruisers (two Australian and one French), and the three small British cruisers (*Psyche*, *Philomel*, *Pyramus*) which had escorted the troops from New Zealand.⁹ A glance at the map will show how far out of their way these vessels had been forced to come.



⁸ At the outbreak of war the *Montcalm* (according to *La Guerre des Croiseurs* by Paul Chack, *Capitaine de Frégate*) was returning through the South Sea after a cruise to South America. It was originally intended that she should visit Samoa on the 5th of August, but she was behind her time, and had just left Raiatea in the Society Islands when, on the night of the 4th, she picked up a wireless message from Honolulu giving vague news of the strained situation in Europe. Admiral Huguët accordingly headed for Fiji. On the 6th he heard that Germany and England were at war, but not until the 8th that France was involved. On reaching Suva on the 12th he received from his Government orders to join the British China Squadron, and was proceeding to Hong Kong *via* Noumea when he was recalled and instructed to wait at Suva for the Samoa expedition. Hearing, however, that the German squadron was off New Guinea, he decided to meet the Australian squadron at Noumea.

⁹ These troops were an infantry battalion, an engineer company, and medical and army service corps details, with 2 15-pounder guns, 2 6-pounders, and 4 Maxims. They totalled 1,383 men.

The rumour that the two big enemy cruisers might be near Samoa had been repeated from the Admiralty just as Admiral Patey reached Noumea. He therefore drew out the order of sailing with great care; the *Psyche* was to go eight miles ahead by day (two by night), the rest following in two columns a mile apart, one headed by the *Montcalm*, the other by the *Australia*. The *Montcalm*, being the slowest of the big ships, set the pace, which was usually twelve knots. In case of attack, the *Australia* was to lead towards the enemy, followed by *Montcalm* and *Melbourne*; the convoy, in charge of the three small cruisers, was to make for safety.

Owing to the grounding of the *Monowai* on a bank in the harbour, the expedition did not leave Noumea till the 23rd, and reached Suva on the 26th. There they got the news of Japan's entry into the war. Fifteen Samoans, representatives of all the important villages in German Samoa, were also taken aboard, with the intention of sending them to their homes as soon as the colony had been captured, so that they might explain to their friends exactly what the British proposed to do. Sailing again on the 27th, the expedition found itself off Apia about 7.45 a.m. on the 30th, and the pre-arranged programme of capture was carried out. The *Psyche* was sent in towards the harbour, flying a flag of truce; two picket-boats from the *Australia* accompanied her, and proceeded to sweep the channel for mines, a course which would obviously not have been adopted had any enemy warships been seen in the harbour. Then the *Psyche's* steam-boat, flying her colours and a flag of truce, made inshore with an officer carrying Admiral Patey's demand for the surrender of the colony and the immediate cessation of wireless operations. Half-an-hour was allowed for an answer, but none was forthcoming for some time afterwards. About 10.15 an official who announced himself as acting-governor gave his word that no resistance would be offered, and that no mines had been laid in the harbour; the wireless calls, which had been frequent and urgent when the fleet was first sighted, had ceased. At noon Admiral Patey received from the acting-governor a letter protesting against the



NATIVE TROOPS BEING TRAINED BY GERMAN RESERVISTS IN NEW GUINEA, 1914

*Lent by Capt. J. Lyng, A.N. & M.E.F.
Aust. War Memorial Collection No. A2544*

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THE *Berrima* ON HER WAY TO RABAU

Lent by Stokes C H G Maxwell RAN Aust War Memorial Collection No A2221



OFF PALM ISLAND, AUGUST 1914

H M A S *Sidney* in the distance.

Taken by F S Burnell Esq



MEN OF THE 1ST BATTALION, A N & M.E.F., LANDING AT PALM ISLAND
FOR TRAINING

Taken by Capt B C A Pockley 1 A M C

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admiral's alleged intention of bombarding Apia,¹⁰ and stating that orders had been given to discontinue the use of wireless plant and refrain from resistance. "I leave it to Your Excellency," added Herr Rimbürg, "to take possession of the Protectorate of Samoa, and only beg to observe that Your Excellency must also take over the responsibility for the life and property of the European population."

The acting-governor's verbal assurances had, of course, been signalled by the *Psyche* to the *Australia* long before this, and at 11.30 the two transports entered the harbour and began to disembark their troops. At 1 p.m. the Union Jack was hoisted on shore, and the German flag over the Governor's house was lowered shortly afterwards. The landing was completed in good time; the transports lay in a heavy swell, and the only craft available to tow in the laden boats were a few small motor-launches, but the 1,400 men were all ashore by 2.30. Then came the turn of the guns and stores, which were landed, and the transports finally cleared, by noon on the following day—an operation which in the admiral's opinion reflected great credit on the responsible officers. At night the *Australia*, *Montcalm*, and *Melbourne* to avoid being surprised stood out to sea and cruised at slow speed, returning in the morning.¹¹

At 8 a.m. on the 31st the Union Jack was formally hoisted over the courthouse at Apia, and saluted with twenty-one guns from the *Psyche*. At noon the New Zealanders were left to themselves, and the *Montcalm*, *Australia*, and *Melbourne* hastened back to Suva. Much as the admiral might have wished to stay in Samoan waters—where he expected to find the German cruisers, and where he would have found them a fortnight later—he was no longer his own master; the Australian convoy was awaiting him off the Queensland coast, and its passage to Rabaul must be guarded at the earliest possible moment.¹²

¹⁰ No threat of general bombardment had been made (see Admiral Patey's letter in *Appendix No. 20*)

¹¹ In the first and second editions of *Volume XII*, plate 14 is wrongly described as showing the squadron in harbour at Apia. The photograph was taken at Suva six weeks later.

¹² Admiral Jerram on the 24th of August telegraphed to the Admiralty his opinion: "I consider that Marshall Islands should be examined by Australian Squadron after they coal at Fiji Islands and before escorting expedition to Rabaul. . . ." By order of the Admiralty, however, Patey had to return to escort the expedition which, in accordance with the Admiralty's own proposal, had already sailed. Commandant

Once established on shore, the New Zealanders determined to hold the islands without naval help. The *Philomel* was detached to visit Pago-pago in Tutuila (the island belonging to the United States), to give the Administrator there formal news of the British occupation. The *Psyche* and *Moeraki* went off to the Tonga Islands on a similar errand. The *Pyramus* and *Monowai* followed the big cruisers to Suva; and when the *Pyramus* on the 3rd of September handed over to the Governor of Fiji her five prisoners—the German Governor and his secretary, the commandant in charge of the wireless station, and a couple of others—the capture of Samoa could be considered complete.

On the 2nd, at the close of this period of operations, the Australian warships were disposed as follows:—

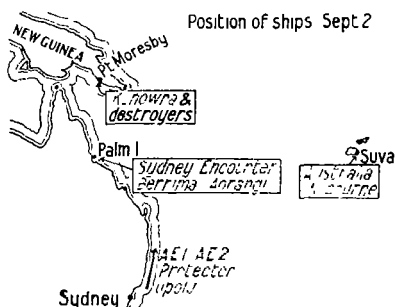
At Suva: *Australia* and *Melbourne*.

At Port Moresby: three destroyers and transport *Kanowna*.

At Palm Island (a little north of Townsville): *Sydney Encounter*, transport *Berrima*, supply-ship *Aorangi*.

On way to Palm Island from Sydney: two submarines, with *Protector* and *Upolu* as tenders.

At Suva the *Montcalm* left the squadron for Noumea, in pursuance of her previous orders to join the China Squadron. Her assistance in Australian waters, however, was valuable, and upon the request of the British Admiralty



Chack (*La Guerre des Croiseurs*) is, therefore, in error in saying that the reason for Patey's return was to satisfy Australian opinion. Admiral Huguet in a despatch (of the 13th of October) to his Government refers to his own insistence, in a later conference with Patey, upon the mistake of having wasted time over secondary objects such as the Samoa expedition instead of searching for the German fleet. Patey, he surmises was hampered by the Admiralty, which had its eyes upon public opinion in Australia. This is probably a reference to the anxiety exhibited, especially in New Zealand, concerning the safety of the contingent destined for Europe (*see ch. vi*)—a very different matter. Australian opinion was neither responsible for the New Guinea enterprise, nor concerned in hastening it, and the Australian Government had asked that it should not be allowed to interfere with the first duty of the squadron—to find the German fleet.

this order was modified to allow her to cooperate with Admiral Patey so long as her presence was needed.¹³

IV

While the Samoan expedition was in progress, fresh arrangements were being devised in London for the work to be done in the Pacific. A telegram received in Melbourne on the 19th of August directed that "when Rear-Admiral considers the local naval situation will admit," Rabaul should be occupied by the Australian expedition, and three minor expeditions then detached from it to seize and occupy Nauru, Yap, and Angaur. A later message (1st of September) added the task of escorting the Australian expeditionary force to Aden. The big German cruisers, it must be remembered, were still at large and unlocated. In reply the Admiral

suggested for your consideration that this (the escort to Aden) cannot be done simultaneously with occupation of Angaur, Yap, Nauru, owing to lack of ships. Still, would suggest that China Fleet might join up and carry out a combined sweep through Caroline Islands and Marshall Islands, in which case ships might be spared for escort for the troops to Aden.

The Admiralty's answer (which Admiral Patey did not receive till the 9th of September) was to insist that the *Sydney* and *Melbourne* must be in Port Jackson by the 22nd of September, ready to take up escort duty; Nauru might be dealt with by the *Melbourne* on the way; "further details can be arranged after seizure of Simpsonhafen by remainder of your force." By the "remainder of the force" were meant the *Australia*, *Encounter*, *Protector*, destroyers, and submarines—quite enough to capture Rabaul, but hardly sufficing for the detachment of expeditions to occupy Yap and Angaur as well.¹⁴

Admiral Patey's proposal for a combined sweep of the China and Australian Squadrons was also made directly to Admiral Jerram. But he, though suspecting that the

¹³ At Noumea Admiral Huguet was asked to re-arm and re-commission the despatch boat *Kersaint*, whose guns had been placed ashore, and send her to the New Hebrides. This, however, he refused to do, on the ground that the Germans might attempt a landing at Noumea. At a later date the *Kersaint* was re-armed and cruised in the islands.

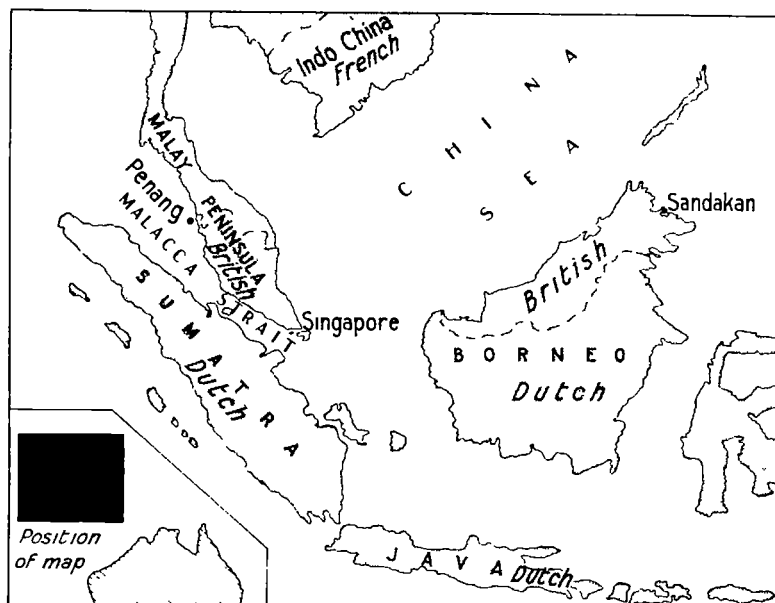
¹⁴ At this stage the Admiralty already suspected that the German squadron might be on its way to South America, and had, on the 5th of September, warned Admiral Cradock who, telegraphing from Pernambuco, had asked for information as to its whereabouts. In an Admiralty appreciation dated the 7th, the possibility of reinforcing Cradock with the *Australia* was considered, but it was pointed out that she could not reach him until the 15th of October, whereas he could be reinforced from England in about twenty days.

Gneisenau and *Scharnhorst* were going to South America, still dreaded their possible appearance in the Java Sea. Rumours were current that the *Emden*, *Königsberg*, and *Geier* were all in Malaysian waters, while two armed merchant cruisers—the *Prinz Eitel Friedrich* and *Cormoran*—were at large somewhere, and other possibly armed merchantmen lay sheltering in Dutch ports. Consequently Admiral Jerram felt obliged to leave the big German cruisers to his colleague in Australia:—

As regards suggestion for combined sweep from Rabaul, I think that while you are to the north-eastward of Australia it is better for me to remain west of New Guinea.

This Malaysian patrol was carried out in force, British, French and Japanese ships searching around Sumatra, Java, Sandakan, and the Malacca Strait, but finding no trace of the German squadron.

It will be seen that the suggested search of the Marshalls and Carolines had been rejected by Jerram because of his



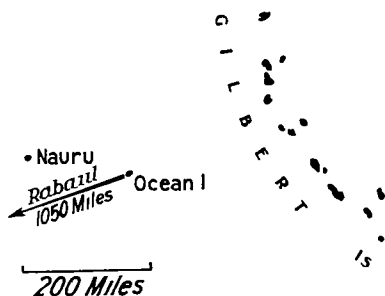
AREA OF MALAYSIAN PATROL

The position of this area in relation to Australia is shown by the black rectangle in the small inset map.

belief that the presence of Count von Spee in Malaysia, though less probable than a withdrawal to South America, would be so much more dangerous that its possibility called for the first attention of his whole squadron. By the 13th of September, when his search of Malaysia had been completed, the Admiralty's arrangements for convoying the Australian and New Zealand transports to Aden supervened. The Admiralty had by then decided to use almost the whole Australian Squadron for this escort. This would leave Australia and the New Guinea expedition without a protecting squadron between them and von Spee, whom Jerram now believed to have gone eastward. Jerram did not think it likely that the Germans would double back; but he had had no definite news of them for over a month. It was therefore arranged between him and the Admiralty that his main force—the *Minotaur*, *Ibuki*, and *Chikuma*—should sail for New Britain, he himself moving to Hong Kong to control the many threads of his command. This plan was presently changed; but it may be inferred that the British authorities (probably for sound political reasons) regarded both the early despatch of the dominion forces for Europe and the safeguarding of Australia and the New Guinea expedition against the possibility—however remote—of attack, as more important than the direction of concentrated effort to hunt down the German squadron.

V

At the outbreak of war Nauru was administered by the Jaluit Company as a German possession, but was occupied and practically owned by the Pacific Phosphates Company, four of whose ten directors, including one of the two managing directors, were German. The German Government had also stipulated that all the Company's staff appointments, as they fell vacant, should be filled by Germans. As a result of this stipulation the manager on Nauru (Captain Haefcke) was a German, while of the sixty-three European employees



twenty-two were avowedly German and three others had distinctly German names. Roughly speaking, the population at the outbreak of war consisted of 30 Germans, 70 British subjects, 1,400 natives, and about 1,000 Chinese and Caroline Islanders in the Company's employ. Two of the thirty Germans were Government officials, and a few others were wireless operators.

In the middle of July¹⁵ Captain Haefcke suddenly left his work on Nauru and went to Rabaul, notifying the Company that he had gone "in connection with business with the Government which will be explained in later correspondence." On the 1st of August, while Haefcke was still away, news came through the wireless station to the German officials that war was imminent with England, France, and Russia. The Administrator at once persuaded the Company's acting-manager, a young and inexperienced Englishman, to send the *Pronto*—a Norwegian vessel under charter to the Company, which was at the time lying off Nauru waiting for a cargo—with Government despatches to Jaluit. The young manager was not, of course, informed that any war was imminent. On the 5th the Administrator received definite news that war had been declared by Britain, and again kept it to himself. On the same day Haefcke returned from Rabaul; and on the 6th the Administrator demanded the loan of a second vessel to be sent to Rabaul "in consequence of the outbreak of war between Germany and Russia." Besides important despatches for the Governor, it was to take along an experienced wireless operator and material for completing the Bitapaka wireless station. Haefcke—carefully acting through two British employees of the Company—handed over the *Zambezi*, a British vessel also waiting off Nauru under charter.

Probably the wireless material was the most important part of the *Zambezi's* cargo. Yap and Nauru, where the two high-powered wireless stations of the German Pacific chain were situated, are about 2000 miles apart. In 1914 it had not yet been discovered how to carry on signalling with sureness and regularity over such a distance. The Bitapaka station was intended to bridge the gap, but was still unfinished at

¹⁵ The date suggests some connection with the warning message of 11 July to von Spee, but the inference is uncertain.

the outbreak of war, and had to be hurriedly made ready for the reception and transmission of messages. Its working, as might be expected, very soon become unsatisfactory; indeed on the 9th of August Yap was obliged to insist that Bitapaka "give every word three times," and just before the destroyers' raid the engine of the wireless plant was under repair. It is evident that one of the orders brought back by Haefcke from Rabaul was to send along at once, from the Nauru station's stores, material for strengthening and improving the Bitapaka plant; and an entry in the Postmaster's diary¹⁶ on the 10th of August shows that Rabaul was anxiously expecting a vessel from Nauru.

When the *Encounter*, as already mentioned,¹⁷ captured the *Zambezi* just outside St. George's Channel, the prize had aboard not only the wireless operator and cement and bedplates for Diesel engines, but also a German engineer, Brauns by name, to whom the Governor's despatches had been entrusted. Instead of destroying them at once, he gave them to a steward with instructions to throw the packet overboard directly a certain sign was given;¹⁸ but the steward chose to misunderstand his orders, and the precious packet was seized in time by the boarding officer from the *Encounter*. The enclosed letters, mostly containing official news of matter intercepted by the wireless station, included the following document, which has several points of interest:—

The Imperial Administration at Nauru has chartered the steamer *Zambezi* for a journey to Rabaul and back, to transmit important despatches, as wireless communication with Rabaul has not been possible for the last few days. The wireless administration is sending to the *Komet* an experienced operator, Mr. Ulrich, as useful wireless communication with Rabaul cannot be effected otherwise. The local wireless station could also establish an emergency communication within two days.

At the request of the Imperial Administration Engineer Brauns has undertaken to transmit the despatches, or in case of need to destroy them.

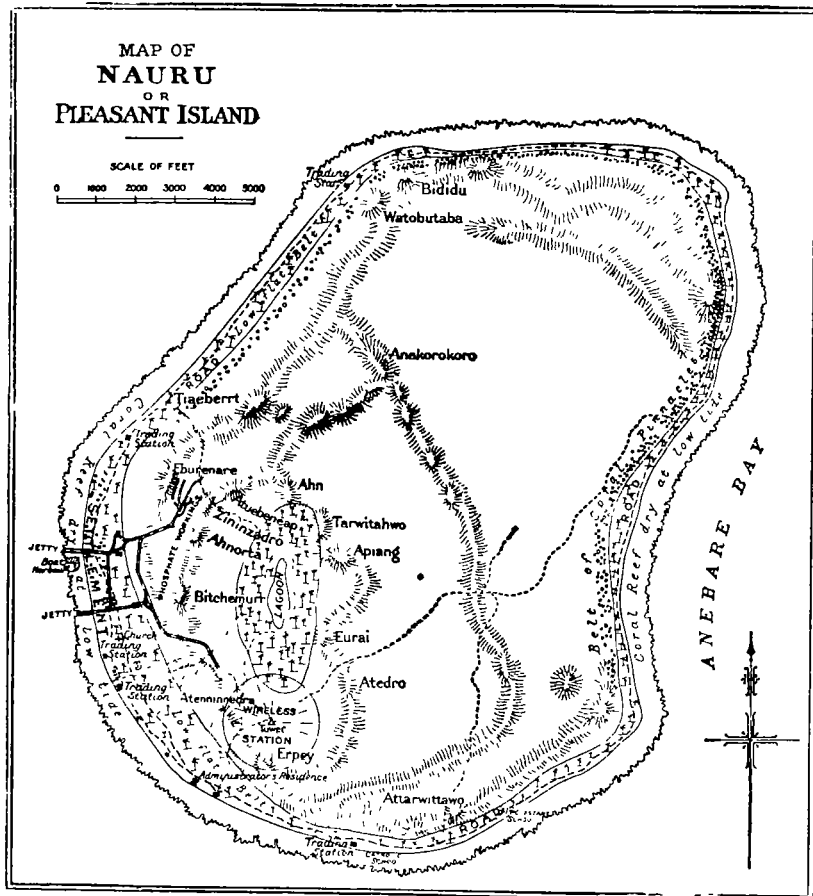
The local population at the time of the vessel's departure had no proper knowledge of the real state of affairs.

¹⁶ See Appendix No 12

¹⁷ See p 15

¹⁸ This seems to indicate that the *Encounter's* nationality was not immediately ascertained, and that Brauns had some expectation of finding a German warship near Rabaul.

Map No 3



NAURU ISLAND

By courtesy of The British Phosphate Commission

This letter, signed by W. Wostrack, the Administrator, and dated the 6th of August, shows clearly that both the *Pronto* and the *Zambezi* had been commandeered on false pretences as far as the British employees of the Company and the masters of the vessels were concerned.

The *Zambezi* once away, however, there was no need for further concealment. On the 7th the Administrator announced that Germany was at war with England, and proclaimed a state of martial law. Yet even at this moment he did not so inform vessels lying off Nauru; on the contrary, he inveigled ashore the master of the British vessel *Messina*, arrested him, and attempted to seize his ship. The mate of the vessel took alarm, sheered off in good time, and made straight for Ocean Island, to which place he carried the first news of the outbreak of war.

For the next few weeks Nauru remained quiet, and the Germans spent most of their time in training a native "police" force. But provisions began to run low, and on the 26th Joseph Clarke, the Company's chief engineer, was allowed to use the *Frithjof* (another Norwegian vessel under charter) to visit the British Resident on Ocean Island and endeavour to obtain food from him. This was, of course, impossible, and the suggestion was flatly rejected. It was arranged, however, that the Company's manager on Ocean Island should send off one cargo of rice for the Chinese employees, and that Wostrack should be asked to let the British subjects on Nauru go if they so desired, thus leaving the German Administration only its own subjects to provide for. Wostrack, for his part, did not believe in options. Clarke returned to Nauru on the 4th of September with his message; on the 5th the following notice was issued:—

Seeing that the British Government has detained provisions belonging to the Pacific Phosphate Company and the Jaluit Company of Nauru, and that sufficient provender for the whole European population is not to hand, I, the Imperial Administrator, order all British subjects now residing on Nauru to leave the island as soon as possible.

Accordingly, on the 6th the *Frithjof* left again for Ocean Island with 41 men, 6 women, and 2 children, all British nationals, aboard her.

Three days later the German population received a shock. The *Melbourne*, as mentioned before, was to be detached from the *Australia* to destroy the Nauru wireless station as soon as the Samoan convoy was safely ashore. Early on the 4th of September, therefore, she left Suva, reached Nauru at daylight on the 9th, and landed a surprise party—four officers, twenty-one petty officers and men—through heavy surf at one of the piers constructed by the Phosphate Company some distance from the main settlement. From the pier a friendly native, who happened to be there, lowered a gangway ladder, and so helped the party to land without injury or loss of life. Lieutenant-Commander Blomfield,¹⁹ who was in charge of the landing-party, occupied a building at the shore end of the pier, and promptly marched off with six men to the Administrator's house two miles away, made him prisoner, took his promise of unconditional surrender, and sent him aboard the *Melbourne*. Then at 7.15 a.m. he turned his attention to the wireless station. It was deserted, but had been put out of action by its own engineers—either at sight of the *Melbourne*, or possibly earlier, when it was found that Yap did not answer and Rabaul was out of order. At any rate, the dismantling was thoroughly completed; the resident engineers were made prisoners of war and sent off to the *Melbourne*; at about 1 o'clock—seven hours after the first landing—the landing-party was re-embarked, its only loss being one rifle.

The essence of this little expedition was speed and surprise. As the captain of the *Melbourne* wrote later:—

It is apparent that no defence was organized; but, had it not been for the promptitude with which Lieutenant-Commander Blomfield acted, the Germans and their armed police could have defended the wireless station to such an extent that its capture could only have been effected after more men had been landed, and at a cost of much time and more casualties than the complement of a light cruiser could afford without loss of efficiency.

The advance with only six men by a road through thick bush for two miles to the settlement, and the further advance, also through bush, to the wireless station were daring, and they were successful because they were daring.

¹⁹ Commr. M A Blomfield, O B E , R N , b Pilkington, Lancs , Eng , 16 June, 1884

The terms of surrender also need notice:—

In view of the fact that His Imperial Majesty's Possession of Nauru has not suffered injury at the hands of the Captain of His Britannic Majesty's cruiser *Melbourne*, I undertake on behalf of His Imperial German Majesty that repair will not be permitted to the wireless telegraph station for the use of German subjects during the war.

I also undertake to deliver myself up to British authority when called upon to do so, being now released on my word of honour.

W. WOSTRACK, Imperial Administrator.

As at Apia, and again later in New Britain, the German officials carefully avoided a formal surrender of their territory. At the same time they also avoided—except during the second Australian visit to New Guinea, still to be narrated—any show of resistance, and on the slightest provocation (or without any provocation at all) appealed to the Hague Convention to protect their territories from bombardment. It may be gathered (not, indeed, from any explicit evidence, but from the bearing and language of the prisoners) that eventual victory was looked upon as certain, and the approved German policy was to avoid damage by every possible means to possessions that Germany must soon regain. Wostrack, it may be added, kept his parole rigidly, although Nauru was necessarily left alone for several months, and some of the wireless operators offered to reinstate the station for him; and, while the other Germans remained vindictive to the last, he honourably gave the British officials “every assistance” when the island was at last formally occupied.

It will be remembered that an Admiralty message, received on the 19th of August, directed the occupation of Nauru, Angaur, and Yap. Whatever Admiral Patey may have thought at the time, his experience of Samoa decided him against carrying out this order without protest. Samoa was very short of food; in order to prevent immediate trouble with the Chinese coolies employed on the plantation there, a transport had to be sent off at once from Suva with thirty tons of rice, and another steamer was chartered to follow with other provisions. At Suva the admiral learnt further that all the German Pacific colonies were reported to be in the same

condition. They produced very little in the way of food-stuffs suitable for non-native residents, and had been dependent on imports; when their trade was cut off, starvation came in sight.

On the 5th of September, therefore, while on his way from Suva towards Australia, Admiral Patey telegraphed to the Admiralty:—

Unless strong reasons to the contrary exist, submit that Angaur and Nauru should not be occupied, but their wireless telegraph stations should be destroyed. From experience gained at Samoa, and from information received, German Pacific islands are very short of food. Occupying them will entail our feeding the inhabitants as well as the garrisons, will relieve the Germans of this responsibility, and become an anxiety to ourselves. Already food has had to be sent to Apia. Yap, being larger and having submarine cable, might be occupied.

To this message no reply was made. But it was obviously impossible for the *Melbourne* to leave a force in occupation; and Captain Silver,²⁰ when he rejoined the squadron, put in a report very much in the same sense. Nauru, he said, was for the time being useless to the Navy as a wireless telegraph station, though it might be useful commercially in the future. If it were garrisoned, the Phosphate Company's workmen, as well as the garrison, must be fed by the occupying power. Access to the island was so difficult that no German warship would call there for provisions unless she had unlimited time at her disposal, and this no German ship was likely to have during the war. His solution was that the Phosphate Company should be allowed to carry on, using neutral vessels to victual the island within reason.

This recommendation having been telegraphed to the Admiralty on the 23rd, the matter passed out of naval cognisance, but subsequent events may be summarised as follows: The Company naturally began at once to press for permission to start work again. In mid-September they had been informed by the British Government that, "as soon as Nauru had been occupied by British forces," they must re-provision the island—an order which apparently meant also that they might start work. It was not, however, till the 6th of November that the flag was actually hoisted and the

²⁰ Vice-Admiral M. L'E. Silver, CBE, R.N., of Bradenham, Bucks, Eng. b Chatham, Eng., 7 Aug., 1869

island formally occupied, all German officials and employees being at the same time deported and the previously expelled British employees brought back.

It was after this final occupation that a soldier, wandering at large on the island and casually investigating the caves along its shores, stumbled upon a carefully hidden package of papers. This proved to contain the German wireless operator's diary and the messages transmitted or received between April and August. While the mass of these messages is in warships' cypher—orders sent to the squadron at Ponape or to the *Planet* at Rabaul, probably of great interest if the key were known—a good many are in plain language or in the cypher whose key was captured in the *Hobart*, and these have been used to verify the account of the German squadron's movements and of events on Nauru.