

WAR, RACE AND LOYALTY IN NEW GUINEA, 1939-1945

K.S. Inglis

On 13 October 1942 a man named Bert Beros, a coal miner in civilian life and now a sapper in the A.I.F., was doing repair work on the Kokoda trail. As he recalled later:

We were making steps up a very steep grade to enable the carriers to get out the wounded from the Iorabaiwa ridge. Seeing the way the natives looked after the wounded, Vic. said to me: 'There'll be a lot of black angels in heaven after this'. Next morning I wrote the 'Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels'...

Many a mother in Australia,
 When a busy day is done,
 Sends a prayer to the Almighty
 For the keeping of her son,
 Asking that an angel guide him
 And bring his safely back -
 Now we see those prayers are answered
 On the Owen Stanley Track. . . .
 Slow and careful in bad places
 On the awful mountain track,
 The look upon their faces
 Would make you think that Christ was black. . . .
 May the mothers of Australia,
 When they offer up a prayer,
 Mention those impromptu angels
 With their fuzzy wuzzy hair.¹

These verses were published in a newspaper in Brisbane, the Courier-Mail, and then in the Australian Women's Weekly, the most popular magazine among mothers of Australia.

One mother wrote some verses in reply:

And we're glad to call you friends although your faces
 may be black,
 For we know that Christ walked with you on the Owen
 Stanley track.²

More than twenty years later the verses by Bert Beros were recalled sardonically by a writer who had been on the Kokoda trail as a war correspondent. As Osmar White saw it in 1965:

A sentimental soldier with a bent for versification wrote

some lines of doggerel which described native stretcher-bearers on the Kokoda Trail as 'Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels'. The phrase caught on. Almost overnight even the most sullen, reluctant New Guinean employed on the military supply routes became in the minds of a large section of Australians a heroically faithful underdog offering proof by gallantry and devotion that he was not only a Christian gentleman at heart but he was also profoundly grateful for the benevolence of Australian policy and performance in the past. The speed with which the public image of a New Guinean was transmogrified from that of a bloodthirsty cannibal with a bone through his nose to that of a dusky-skinned, mop-headed, sexless Florence Nightingale must forever remain an inspiration to political propagandists.³

White allows that some native carriers did show the qualities for which they were praised; but

the majority did their work only because the white men in command bullied them into doing it. Few if any were serving voluntarily and most would have deserted if possible. At this stage they knew of no reason and felt no desire to fight on the side of the Australians against the Japanese; but the habit of obeying white men, inculcated by about sixty years of colonization, was hard to break.⁴

It seems to me that Mr. White is a little too sardonic about the idea of the fuzzy wuzzy angel. The carriers on the Kokoda trail did impress and even amaze white soldiers by their dedication to the job and their skill at it. When the Australians made their last withdrawal, from Iorabaiwa to Imita Ridge, the carriers undertook what their overseer and patron, Captain G.H. Vernon, said was the worst journey he had ever experienced in many years in New Guinea. The Australian commander, Brigadier K.W. Eather, wondered at this point how the carriers should be rewarded; and orders were issued requiring all soldiers to show consideration to the carriers and drawing attention to what they were contributing to the campaign.⁵ It was not long after this order was circulated that Bert Beros wrote his verses. Near the end of the war a senior military medical officer spoke to doctors in Melbourne about the natives of Papua and New Guinea.⁶ The sentimentality of legend he dismissed:

They are not gods - they are not even angels - they are men, and splendid men.

He contrasted them favourably with the only other non-Europeans observed closely by Australian soldiers, the Arabs - whom many Australians have been inclined to regard as typical of the

non-English-speaking peoples of the world. "In marked contrast to the 'wogs' of the Middle East", he said of the natives of New Guinea, "they are cleanly and modest in their habits." And of those whom he had seen working as carriers on the Kokoda trail, bearing the wounded and the seriously ill, he said:

They carried stretchers over seemingly impassable barriers, with the patient reasonably comfortable. The care which they showed the patient was magnificent.

That was not the propaganda of 1942; it was a professional tribute offered long after danger had passed. A still later judgment in similar terms may be found in a volume of the official history of Australia in the war.⁷

One plain fact stood behind the invention of the fuzzy wuzzy angel in 1942. The carriers on the Kokoda trail were needed as natives had never been needed before by white men in New Guinea. The dependence was illustrated beautifully in films taken by Damien Parer, who was Osmar White's companion on the trail. Parer's films gave a great many Australians their first close look at New Guinea and showed in particular the competence and tenderness of the carriers. In one of these films Kokoda Front Line, the commentator says: "No boongs, no battle". A student at Goroka High School last year, talking about the study of history, said that it was interesting to read about the war "and how our people were able to take part in it". For once, in the relationship between European and native people, there was partnership of a kind. It was not the partnership of equals. But white men would starve to death or be killed for lack of weapons or die of wounds, if the carriers did not get through. There were not enough white men to do the work of carrying; and they could not do it as well as the natives. As the official medical historian writes of one phase in the Owen Stanley campaign:

The superiority of the natives in this work was well in evidence: the white carriers could manage on a level track, but over the many steep and difficult places the patients had more discomfort, and the bearers became exhausted.⁸

It was this new need that made it possible for the fuzzy wuzzy to be regarded as an angel.

Rabaul had fallen in January 1942. In February everybody expected Port Moresby to follow. But the Japanese paused, and then in May an invasion fleet bound for Moresby was forced to turn around in the Coral Sea and go back to Rabaul. In July the Japanese began their effort to drive by land across Papua to Port Moresby. It was

reasonable to believe in these months that when Moresby fell Australia would be invaded. For the first time in their history, Australians really were fighting to defend their own land. An Australian war correspondent on the trail, George Johnston, made a shrewd prediction:

I have an idea that the name of the Kokoda Trail is going to live in the minds of Australians for generations, just as another name, Gallipoli, lives on . . .⁹

In terms of Australians involved and killed and wounded, Gallipoli was a minor campaign compared with later battles in France and Belgium. The fighting on the Kokoda trail was also small in scale compared with later campaigns in New Guinea. But Gallipoli was felt to be a blooding, a national initiation, as France and Belgium were not; and Kokoda was felt to be a defence of home and hearth, as no later campaign was: so each was the object of that special regard which is the stuff of legend. And as an individual saver of lives, Simpson, the man with the donkey, participated in the legend of Gallipoli, so a collective saver of lives, the fuzzy wuzzy angel, became part of the legend of Kokoda.

No such indigenous contribution was foreseen by anybody when the war started in 1939. The beginning was announced in The Papuan Villager, a monthly paper produced for the small minority of Papuans who could read English. "We are sorry to have to say that the British Empire is at war", the editor said in September 1939. But the outcome was certain.

Some of you will remember the war that began twenty five years ago. We called it the 'Great War', and our side won. Perhaps this new war will be still greater. It will last a long time. But we feel quite sure that our side will win again.

On the same page was a photograph of a reassuring symbol of British imperial might, a warship. It was H.M.A.S. Australia, a descendant of the H.M.S. Nelson which had brought British protection to Port Moresby in 1884, and namesake of a ship which had presided over the seizure of German New Guinea in 1914.

The war had been caused by German aggression; or, as the paper put it, fierce Germany had been growling and snapping at the smaller dogs of Europe, and even eating them. Great Britain and France, quiet dogs, became savage when Germany ate up Poland.

The essay on the war concluded with a warning, a reassurance, and an exhortation. The warning was that

War among the white men is a terrible thing. They do not fight with bows and arrows and spears and clubs, but with warboats and flying-machines, and rifles and bombs and cannon. You could not count the men who will be wounded and killed before the fight is over.

The reassurance was that Papuans need have no fear of it:

It is true that we are part of the British Empire, and therefore an enemy might come to attack Papua. That is why we have some big guns and fighting aeroplanes and soldiers and sailors at Port Moresby. But it does not seem likely that the war will come here; we are so far away.

The exhortation followed:

every Papuan should remember that he belongs to the British Empire; and he should be ready to do anything he can to help his Empire win.

In September 1939 it seemed unlikely that the help offered by a loyal Papuan could be direct or substantial.

But by the middle of 1940 the war had taken on a grim aspect. "There will be hard times for everyone before it is finished", readers were warned in May. In June they were asked to send money to a Papuan War Fund to help the Empire fight. By the middle of 1941 air raid precautions began in Port Moresby, superintended by F.W. Williams, the government anthropologist, who was also editor of the Papuan Villager. Readers were told in May 1941 that bombs burst differently from hornbill eggs. But Papuans need not be alarmed: an aerial enemy would be too anti-European, thrifty and accurate to trouble the natives.

If an enemy came here in an aeroplane he is not likely to want to hurt the native villages. He is at war with the Europeans, and he would want to smash the things that belong to Europeans, such as the big stores, in Port Moresby. He would have to carry his bombs a long way, and he would only have a few of them. He would not waste them on Poreporena. He would go for B.P's or the Post Office.

In August 1941 the Japanese were mentioned.

The Japanese are almost as bad at making trouble as the Germans. Their war against the Chinese is a very wicked and cruel one. . . . We do not like the Japanese very much, but we do not want to have a war with them. They

have been making trouble. America is talking very strongly to them.

They were the subject of a long article in October.

The Japanese are not white men. Their skins have a rather yellow colour, sometimes pale brown. They are often small men, but well-made and strong. One strange thing about them is the way their eyes slant upwards at the outer corners. . . . In early days the Japanese soldiers were bow-and-arrow men, like so many Papuans. But now they have warships and cannons and tanks and aeroplanes.

Perhaps this was a mistake. I do not think their warships and other fighting things are really as good as those of the Europeans; and if they ever go to war against the Europeans they will soon find this out.

Finally the editor fitted Japan into the canine metaphor.

Japan is like a very snappy little dog, barking at three big dogs that just lie down and look at her. The three big dogs are Great Britain, America and Russia. If this little dog ever begins to bite, then the three big dogs will jump on her and tear her to pieces.

The Japanese were mentioned briefly in November 1941. "They are not in the war, and we hope they will not be silly enough to come in". That was the last issue of the Papuan Villager ever published.

* * * *

The complacent view of the war expressed for so long in the Papuan Villager was genuine, not contrived. In the Papuan administration, as in that of the Mandated Territory, and, indeed, in the Australian government and armed forces, there was during most of 1941 no serious apprehension that the war would come dangerously close to Australia; even if the Japanese entered, it was confidently assumed that forces at imperial and allied bases far from Australia would contain them. The whites themselves were unprepared for the coming of war to New Guinea; and even when they saw it coming they did little to prepare their native charges for the experience.

The white residents of Papua and New Guinea - the Islanders, as the late Eric Feldt called them in a perceptive portrait - were in 1941 a commanding race.

Constant dealing with, and authority over, natives gave the Islander a habit of command. . . . With it went a sense of responsibility, not of the kind which coddles but which takes the native into account in any project The islander was, in fact, something of a seigneur10

A guide to race relations issued to every Australian officer and non-commissioned officer in the Pacific islands during the war, and written by a member of the prewar community of Islanders, declared:

The native has always looked up to the white man. He admires him because of the marvellous things that white men at large can do. . . . You may not be marvellous yourself, but he will think you are, merely because you are one of the white race. . . . he stands in awe of us. He thinks we are superior beings. We may not all deserve this reputation, but it is worth acting up to11

The Japanese invaders quickly made it difficult for white men to act up to their reputation as superior beings. White men sometimes contributed actively to the reduction of awe by not taking the dependent native into account in their own projects for self-preservation - by not discharging (to pursue Feldt's idiom) the responsibility of seigneur to vassal. Natives who worked in Port Moresby, and in particular the wharf labourers who made up the town's main body of workers, became apprehensive in December 1941 when they saw the departure of white women and children and other signs of anxiety among the Europeans. Early in the afternoon of 23 January an air raid alarm sounded. The natives labourers fled at once into the bush; and, in the words of an official commission of enquiry, "although many returned to the town later, their confidence in their white masters had been gravely impaired. . . .12 The alarm had been false. It must have been a relief for the natives when no Japanese planes appeared; but it may not have been comforting to discover that the white masters appeared not to know whether or not the bombers were on their way. In any case, genuine air raid warnings came soon enough.

On 25 January the military authorities in Canberra ordered the calling up of all white British males under 45 in the two Territories. The order caused commercial houses to close and disabled the civil administration. George Johnston, who arrived on 13 February, reported:

Semi-civilized natives were the biggest sufferers. They had come to rely on the trading stores for their rice and tinned

meats. With the stores closed they began to pull in their belts, and they began to lose confidence in the white men who had protected them for so long.¹³

Some residents of Port Moresby now conscripted into uniform were set to unfamiliar work. "There was", Feldt wrote of the pre-war Islanders, "a distaste for doing those things which a boy usually did for a European - menial tasks and those requiring no intelligence."¹⁴ The Administrator of Papua, Leonard Murray (who had succeeded his late uncle Sir Hubert in 1940 after working under him for 30 years) observed that natives "were alarmed at seeing those who had been their masters doing labouring work in Army uniform. . ."¹⁵ Civilians suspected that the call-up had been intended to humiliate them.

The military commandant, Major-General B.M. Morris, denied it; but it was true that the soldiers engaged in administering the call-up showed no great tenderness towards civilians.¹⁶ Some of the soldiers, who were not Islanders but newcomers, may even have relished setting seigneurs to do the work of vassals.

The first air raids happened early in February. The events were reconstructed later by J.V. Barry, K.C., sitting as a Commissioner of Enquiry into the circumstances relating to the suspension of the civil administration of Papua:

At 3 a.m. on the 3rd February, 1942, the Japanese bombed Port Moresby. About six bombs were dropped; one soldier was killed, and a soldier, a sailor and a civilian injured, but there was no substantial material damage. As a result of this bombing the natives fled from the Port Moresby area . . . and coastal shipping was immobilized through lack of native crews.¹⁷

The second air raid, soon after 3 a.m. on 5 February, caused more damage than the first. Burns Philp's and other stores were hit, and by daybreak Australian troops were looting them. They went on looting stores and empty houses for days. Osmar White, looking back 25 years, found that this is what he remembered most vividly of the Territory in time of war:

Looted Moresby was a blood-chilling example of how thin the veneer of white civilization is in times of great stress and danger.¹⁸

Barry concluded as Commissioner that the civil administration was from this time unable to maintain order.

Some of the native police left Port Moresby without authority and some prisoners were either released or ran away from the gaol gardens.¹⁹

Those police who stayed in the town left at night to sleep in the bush. So did the remaining European residents. "From the 5th February onwards", Barry concluded, "the situation, so far as it related to the natives, was out of hand at Port Moresby . . ."²⁰ What human facts lay behind such judicial cliches we can only imagine, unless somebody who endured those days can be persuaded to set down his memories of them. General Morris informed the Chief of the General Staff on 13 February that not only in Port Moresby but throughout the Territory, native administration had broken down. His message outraged Leonard Murray; and Barry's enquiry found that only in Samarai and Misima had control collapsed as it had in Moresby. But Barry judged that the Commonwealth government had been wise to order the suspension of civil administration and the introduction of military control in both territories.

Leonard Murray was ordered out and left for Australia by flying boat on 15 February. He begged for an investigation and duly got it; but Barry's report can have given him no comfort.²¹ Barry discerned in Hubert Murray's nephew "a mental approach which lacked the flexibility necessary in the rapidly changing urgencies of the situation. . ." The Commissioner offered, moreover, "a graver criticism" of Leonard Murray.

It was among the foremost duties of the civil administration to protect the native inhabitants of the Territory and consult their welfare, and over the years the natives had been taught to rely confidently upon the Administration and to respect its authority. Yet in none of his communications with the authorities in Australia. . . did the Administrator advert to the consequences which would result to the natives from the withdrawal of the white administration officers . . .

It was indeed a grave charge: in effect, that Leonard Murray had thoughtlessly abandoned what his uncle had called the sacred trust of civilization towards the natives of Papua:

so far as the civil administration was concerned, the natives would have been left in a time of crisis without the guidance and protection to which they had become accustomed and for which they were entitled to look.

Barry found that in the circumstances, it was better to have a military government which did have plans for the protection and welfare of the natives.

The Anglican Bishop of New Guinea, Dr. Philip Strong, described the behaviour of white men at Samarai in these weeks as

a sorrowful chapter in the history of Papua . . . The chief motto I fear has been 'Save thyself', or rather, 'Save the white man and don't bother about the native'.²²

The Bishop reported that hundreds of indentured labourers, signed on under contracts guaranteed by the government, had been abandoned by their employers. "I can see" he said

that it will take years to undo the harm of the last few weeks and to win back the confidence of the natives again, if indeed it can ever be as implicit as it was, and victory when it comes . . . will be robbed of some at least of its fruits by reason of this dishonour.

Native people in the Mandate saw the white men flee before the Japanese early in 1942. Such flight was inevitably undignified, in some places more so than others. Feldt writes severely about the manner in which administration officials and civilians escaped in haste from Kieta after the fall of Rabaul; and he reports that at Buka Passage, a number of civilians declined the advice of an official to prepare for the possibility of invasion; such a move, they protested, would be derogatory to their prestige with the natives.²³ It was clearly Feldt's view that by making undignified departure more likely, such a response, or lack of response to the approach of the Japanese would do even more damage to the prestige of the white community in native eyes.

A missionary who worked as a coast watcher in the British Solomons, and who has written recently a history of the Solomons as he thinks it might be seen through Melanesian eyes, says of this time: "The Europeans at Tulagi left in a hurry and Melanesians for the first time saw white men in a panic."²⁴

I have been quoting European observers. What did native people think of all these events? How widely was confidence in the European masters damaged by the coming of the Japanese? How permanent was the damage? To ask a still larger question about indigenous attitudes: how did native people perceive this war? To that question there must be thousands of separate answers, covering a range from the reader of the *Papuan Villager* to the person who understood no language but his own local one, and from people whose areas were visited directly by the war to those who saw nothing and heard little of it.

Warfare had once been normal among the many peoples of this region, from the coasts to the high lands of the interior. The

white men had forced peace on them. "The two outstanding facts about European settlement in a country like Papua", Hubert Murray had said, "are the introduction of metals and the establishment of tribal peace."²⁵ Less than twenty years after he spoke those words, a great war had New Guinea as one of its front lines. The names of villages in New Guinea were in the headlines of the world, and the world brought more disruption to the peoples of New Guinea than they or their ancestors had ever known. Before this war was over it had become the greatest, and in a sense the first, event in the history of this country. One day, some Papuan or New Guinean scholar may deny that it was an event in the true history of his country, as the Indian historian K.M. Panikkar has denied that the period of English influence and rule belongs to the proper history of India. If so, he will not really be denying its importance; he will be expressing a certain policy towards the European element in his history. For the present, it remains the most widely apprehended divider of public time: Time Belong War, Time Belong Fight Belong Japan.

Historians so far have not written much about native responses to the war. There is information scattered through the official war histories, but it is not easily drawn together. Some social anthropologists have been more enlightening. Dr. Margaret Mead reports the Manus theory of why the war was fought.

Originally the English - in the person of Captain Cook - discovered New Guinea, and the English were going to come and occupy it. But they didn't hurry enough, and the Germans got there ahead of them. The English, however, kept on remembering that they were the ones who had discovered New Guinea, so in World War I they came and took New Guinea back. But then the Germans couldn't forget that they had had New Guinea, so in World War II they put the Japanese up to trying to get New Guinea back for them. Because there were so many Japanese, the Americans came to help the Australians drive them out. The Americans, however, didn't want New Guinea; they only wanted to straighten things out.²⁶

Professor Peter Lawrence found that some people in the Madang district believed the war to be sent by God as a punishment for the Europeans' dishonesty; and other people believed that the Japanese were spirits of the dead, sent to liberate the people from European rule and help establish a more prosperous way of life.²⁷ When K.E. Read went among the Ngawarapum of the Upper Markham Valley after the Japanese had left, people asked him about the war.

They were concerned to learn why the white men were fighting the Japanese and were not averse from reproaching me with

the contradiction that, while they themselves were forbidden to fight, Europeans were engaged in a war with another people. On these occasions I explained that the Japanese wanted to take New Guinea. 'Then why not share it?' I was asked. 'It is a big place; there is enough ground for all! . . . Only the white men knew what the war was all about, I was told, and in a vague way the natives believed that its duration depended on the will of the King; when he said we had fought long enough, hostilities would cease.'²⁸

The war brought from over the sea a new kind of white man. Coming as they did from the virtually monoracial and fairly egalitarian society of Australia, the soldiers lacked instruction in how to behave towards natives. The old hands, the Islanders, were anxious to give it. The Islanders' guide book to the newcomers, You and the Native said:

There may be a bad egg who deliberately defies you, just to try you out. There is only one thing to do in these circumstances. Crack him.'²⁹

Dr. Ian Hogbin, who quotes this advice, reports that when soldiers and natives were clearing up the mess of Madang after its recapture:

Two tanks were installed near the wharf for drinking, both full of the same chlorinated water but labelled respectively 'European personnel' and 'Natives only'. As I passed one morning I heard the ANGAU officer in charge of the natives roundly abusing a private who had gone to the wrong tap. 'Have you no pride of race?' he asked. 'Don't you realise that this water is for coons?'³⁰

The answer, presumably, was No. This private had not realised that the water was for coons, and may not have thought of the natives as coons anyway. Osmar White writes:

When white soldiers arrived in force they seemed hardly to belong to the same race as the aloof Government officials, planters, missionaries and commercial men whose 'magic' had exempted them from vulgar toil.'³¹

The people studied by K.E. Read responded exactly as Osmar White implies native people responded to the new white men. They decided that the soldiers were a different race from the Europeans they had known before the war. They concluded that there were two distinct groups of Europeans, the English and the Australians. Before the war, in pidgin, white men were divided into German and English. The soldiers who arrived from Nadzab in 1943 called

themselves Australians. They looked different from the officials of peacetime: their uniforms were green, not white. They behaved differently. A young man told Read that during an air raid at Wau he had run into a slit trench only to find that it was occupied by Australian soldiers. "But they did not turn me out. If it had been the English they would not have let me stay with them. But the Australians are different." The Australians, Read was informed, knew that the people were men, not dogs. Most ANGAU officers were classified as English, not Australians.'³²

This was a village whose experience of contact with Europeans before the war was smaller than that of many coastal areas. How commonly was the distinction that Read discovered made elsewhere? There may still be time to find out. The people in this village had heard, by the way, of another group of Europeans known as Amrika, though they had not seen any; and of people whom they called Afrika, or Bilak Amrika. Hogbin and Mead offer leads which might yet be followed up about the native perception of negro soldiers, and Mead in particular has explored the relationship between Americans and natives - a large theme which I am excluding almost entirely from this paper.

Some of the new white men gave new names to the natives. Mead reports that to the Americans in Manus the people were not "boys" or "niggers" but "Joes" or "good Joes".³³ George Johnston on the Kokoda trail wrote:

The boys from the Middle East called them 'wogs' at first, because it was their name for the Arabs. Soon they learnt the New Guinea army term, which is 'boong'. Before they have been there long they are calling them 'sport', which seems to be the second A.I.F.'s equivalent of 'digger'. . . . Like all other colonial races, the Papuans have learnt to treat the white man with a certain amount of awe. They call him 'taubada', which means something like 'lord' or 'master', and they do what he tells them. They are a little bewildered to hear the white man call: 'how are you, sport?' as they pass him. . . ."³⁴

This was an interesting moment in a history that is so far practically unstudied, the history of naming in this country. "Wog" and "coon" were words full of contempt - sometimes genial, sometimes not. "Boong" was ambiguous: it could contain more or less of respect or affection, according to how and by whom and of whom it was used. "Sport", unlike any of the other words, could be used reciprocally: two men may call each other "sport", or "mate"; and if they are of different races they are making an affirmation about the family of man. How widespread was the usage noted by Johnston? And if it was widespread, why did it not remain common after the war?

Johnston made his notes two days after Bert Beros wrote those verses giving the carriers a name which expressed not merely respect but a kind of reverence. It was not an Islander but a coal miner, a newcomer used to putting his own body to hard and dirty work, who celebrated the fuzzy wuzzy angel.

It would be interesting to know what the carriers themselves might say about their relationships with the soldiers, and perhaps we can find out through sons and daughters literate in English and studying history and anthropology. It would be good, also, to have the testimony of men who evaded the ANGAU agent, or who deserted after being impressed for carrying, and of those who carried for the Japanese. The published evidence in English suggests that the Japanese were more disagreeable as masters than the Australians, and this may well be true. But we do not yet have the story from the only people who can tell it with authority.

On the general theme of native responses to the Japanese, more has been published than I can refer to even summarily here. The anthropologist Dr. Peter Worsley, reviewing the literature in 1957, observed that "apart from the long-occupied regions, generalizations about Japanese-native relations are not easily made".³⁵ This remains true a decade later. We had hoped to have at this seminar a Japanese scholar who could have spoken on the theme, but unfortunately that has not proved possible. There must be varied memories of the Japanese among older native people, waiting to be elicited. There was a striking example lately of how clear the memory can be, when the son of a Japanese soldier here in the war showed his father's photograph to a group of people near Aitape and was taken at once to an unmarked grave. He dug, and found his father's bones and identification disc.

Coast watchers were unusually well placed to observe native responses to the Japanese, living as they did in Japanese-held territory and depending for survival on the support or at least toleration of native people. Feldt's book reports cases in which white men were handed over to the new masters, cases in which white men were protected from them, and cases in which people were uncertain whom to obey. He says that in contested areas it was very difficult for natives to decide which, if either, of the contenders to believe: never before had there been at the same time two sets of foreign masters, contradicting each other. He shows different people in the same locality making different decisions about how to behave, as for example when the Japanese landed at Saidor. Here, writes Feldt:

The natives were impressed by the Jap numbers and terrified by the savage punishments meted out to those of them who disobeyed. A few remained loyal to the Coast Watchers and

continued to help with food and information at great danger to themselves. Most tried to be neutral, but some openly assisted the Japs.³⁶

The official war histories contain a great variety of evidence on the theme. In Dexter's volume The New Guinea Offensives, for example, is printed a message from the Australian commander-in-chief, General Blamey, in June 1943, that the Australians in the Sepik area must "do everything possible to enlist the natives on our side, or at least draw them away from the Japanese".³⁷ In this region, until quite late in the war, natives fought for the Japanese against the Australians. In the battle for Shaggy Ridge at the end of 1943 natives suspected to be working for the Japanese and pretending to be members of the Papuan Infantry Battalion were shot. What Dexter calls "the native problem" was troublesome along the Ramu river in 1943.³⁸ The commander of Bena Force wrote on 21 July 1943:

we are essentially dependent on the generosity of a population which owes the 'Allies' little or no allegiance.³⁹

In one area near the Ramu an experienced ANGAU man, Captain G.C. O'Donnell, wrote:

The pre-war history of the natives was of truculent groups with some experience of European plantation ways, very infrequently patrolled or visited by Government officers and, consequently, contemptuous of the authority of the Administration.⁴⁰

Dexter suggests that in the Ramu Valley, many natives were hostile to intruders whoever they were, and this may have been so in parts of the Sepik region. In the Markham Valley, Dexter reports a senior Australian officer who thought that the Lutheran mission had done much "to sow the seeds of anti-British feeling" among the natives.⁴¹ But natives in this area who had actually been fighting for the Japanese changed sides cheerfully when the Australians returned.

Even these Japanese-trained natives were not averse, however, to changing sides, particularly because of the contrast between Australian and Japanese treatment. In one of the huts at Kaiapit were three dead natives who had had their hands and feet tied and had been bayoneted by the Japanese. Such treatment did not endear the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere to the natives.⁴²

The published writing by Australians includes many accounts of Japanese treating natives with a severity which antagonized other

natives. If the Japanese were thoroughly in command, such severity might serve the rational purpose of ensuring obedience; but where the natives had any freedom of action, it tended to be self-defeating. Feldt says that around Cape Gloucester, natives at first amiable towards the Japanese were turned against them by apparently senseless brutality. Of one episode he writes:

The natives were horrified - violence for a purpose they could understand, even for the most selfish purpose, but they could not forgive this wanton, purposeless murder.⁴³

The key word here is "wanton". The Japanese here were seigneurs who showed no responsibility to the vassals, recognized no limits to what the overlords could do.

Whether Japanese or native informants would agree that behaviour of this sort was general I do not know; but there is no doubt that deprivation and impending defeat made the Japanese more demanding as masters. Shortage of supplies forced them into increasingly unpopular behaviour. Lawrence reports that on the Rai coast relations between natives and Japanese were friendly until the tide of war turned. Then in 1944 the hard-pressed Japanese demanded more and more labour, no longer bothered to pay for it, and punished severely any failure to co-operate. In retreat, they

became desperate. They robbed gardens, coconut groves, and banana and sugar-cane plantations. They stole pigs, dogs, and fowls. Finally, they shot and ate natives themselves.⁴⁴

A cult leader protested, telling the Japanese that he was responsible for their coming and that he would now work through his ritual for the arrival of the Americans and Australians. The Japanese shot him.

In the upper Markham area studied by Read, the Japanese took coconuts and bananas and pigs without paying for them. This cost them sympathy not only because people were deprived of food but because it lowered their respect for the newcomers. It was customary here to judge the superiority or inferiority of people by the abundance of their food resources. Read was told:

In their own place . . . they said they had plenty of everything. If they possessed these things their relatives would have sent some. But nothing came to them.⁴⁵

As the Japanese became visibly less well supplied it was easier for people to decide which of the two armies of outsiders was going

to be the winner. For many people that had been the great perplexing decision of the war. Mr. Peter Ryan, patrolling behind Lae in the time of the Japanese occupation, had many conversations with natives who were anxious to be on the side of the winner. He tells in his book Fear Drive My Feet how he tried to persuade people that he represented the winners.

Circumstances had made shrewd politicians of these natives, for they were caught between two opposing forces and were determined to side with the ultimate winners. They sometimes argued with me that the Japanese were so numerous that they must win. 'Look', they would say, 'you know for yourself there are now more Japanese in Lae alone than there were white men in the whole of New Guinea before. The Japanese must be stronger'. I would point to our air raids. 'If the Japanese are so strong, why don't they stop those aeroplanes from bombing them? . . . Every day more and more of our planes come over; we are getting stronger and stronger, and will soon finish the Japanese off'. . . . 'Yes, perhaps', they would say with a shrug, and go off puzzled, trying to decide whether to back the side that had many men or the side that had many aeroplanes - a small-scale edition of the problem that armchair strategists were arguing about all over the world.⁴⁶

At Oligadu, on the Huon Gulf, in September 1943, a native whose job it was to carry the pack of the commanding officer of the 22nd Australian Infantry Battalion took flight at the sound of Japanese small arms. According to the historian of the battalion, the man "became panic-stricken and took to his heels down the track towards Lae", shouting "Big fight, big fight, Ja-pa-n man e win". The unit never saw him again.⁴⁷ He was wrong, as it turned out; but who would say that he was irrational? Not for another two years was it quite certain who had backed the winner, and native runners were sent to spread among the villages the message: "Japan man 'e cry enough".⁴⁸

Looking back on it all, one man in a village between Madang and Wewak spoke of the contending intruders in a tone of stolid resignation. To an anthropologist this man said:

You see, we do not understand. We are just in the middle. First the Germans came - and the Australians pushed them out. Then the Japanese pushed out the Australians. Later the Australians and the Americans forced the Japanese to go. It is beyond us. We can do nothing. When a kiap tells us to carry his baggage we have to do it. When a German told us to carry his baggage we had to do it. If we did not we might be killed. All right, there it is. Take it or

leave it. Nogat tok. I didn't say anything, that's just how it is, that's life.⁴⁹

The Australian authorities after the war did not hold it against a man merely that he carried baggage for the Japanese. When the time came, for example, to decide who should be compensated for loss of land or property, or for death or injury, caused by the war, it was recognized that European notions about the obligation of citizens to show allegiance to their government were not applicable here. As Professor John Legge writes, the committee on compensation

agreed with Mr. Justice Phillips, Chief Justice of New Guinea, that natives, especially those of the Mandated Territory, had seen a number of changes in administration, from German to Australian, to Japanese, to Australian, and that they lacked the experience which enabled them to judge when a de facto government should be recognized as a de jure one, 'a question which even enlightened European governments have found embarrassing'.⁵⁰

Many natives of Papua and New Guinea knew that somehow or other they were under the King whom Australians recognized as their sovereign. I mentioned earlier the view of the war expressed to Read:

in a vague way the natives believed that its duration depended on the will of the King; when he said we had fought long enough, hostilities would cease.

When Mr. Malcolm Wright landed from a submarine in New Britain in July 1942, he was given a piece of locally made tapa cloth by an old luluai who said to him:

We would like to send this to the King. . . . Tell him that we are still his people and we look forward to the day when the Australians return to New Guinea.⁵¹

In October 1943, in another part of New Britain, Wright was recognized by a tultul who had known him before the war.

He held our hands in a mixture of joy and disbelief; then suddenly he asked, 'How's the King?' Assured that His Majesty was in good health, he began to ask questions about the war.⁵²

But it would be difficult to argue that such declarations of loyalty to the monarch, made by people knowing no society larger or less personal than a tribal community, expressed a meaningful

allegiance to the constitutional structure of which King George VI was the ceremonial head. In the Sepik at the end of the war an Australian soldier described in his diary a parade of natives inspected by Captain R.R. Cole, of ANGAU. The soldier wrote:

His little Praetorian Guard of native police always fascinates me; I am sure they would kill anyone from King George down if Cole said so.⁵³

It was not likely that the future Commissioner of Police would order his men to kill King George; but the diarist's choice of words illuminates, I think, the character of the loyalty displayed by such men. Mead makes a similar point about those natives who remained faithful to individual missionaries in areas held by the Japanese:

They were not loyal to a country - they had no country, no idea even of the Mandated Territory as a political unit. . . . they had seen first the Germans, then the Australians administer a system within which certain individuals had treated them kindly, others had treated them badly. There were 'good masters' and 'bad masters', that was all.⁵⁴

According to Mead loyalty was not really expected of natives.

The official view of the war as presented to the people of New Guinea by the Australian military administration officers. . . was simply, 'The Japanese are bad. Kill them. This was reinforced with 'We are coming back'. There seems to have been no ideological presentation more complicated.⁵⁵

The last Australian official to leave the area studied by Read spoke to the people in similar terms. Read says that when the Japanese arrived, the population had not decided on any fixed attitude towards the newcomers:

the native attitude developed out of first-hand knowledge of the invaders, and as conduct was either resented or approved, so the people arrived at their final judgment.

It was thus not loyalty which influenced the ultimate decision . . . Coercive powers are more apparent to subject peoples than abstract principles.

The view of Australian rule held by these people was that

they were subject to our Administration, that it was imposed on them, backed up with force, and that they

had to accept it or suffer the consequences. 'You have guns' men said to me. 'We have nothing. We do as the white men say. What else can we do?'⁵⁶

The illustrations I have given are all from the Mandate, which had known German rule before Australian rule and in which it was dubious whether Australians had the right to demand loyalty. But Read's observations about the coercive character of the colonial relationship may be taken to apply to Papua as well as to the Mandate. To an English observer familiar with developments in Africa, Lord Hailey, Sir Hubert Murray's system of administration "amounted to no more than a well-regulated and benevolent type of police rule".⁵⁷ It does not make sense to speak of loyalty to a regime resting so much on command and so little on consent as Hubert Murray's Papua. Moreover, consent presupposes knowledge; and it is plain to any reader of the Papuan Villager that not even the most highly educated of Papuans in 1941 were assumed to have any serious knowledge of the world outside their own immediate environment. Dr. Lucy Mair was writing of both territories when she said in 1948:

in the absence of the conception of a regime to which loyalty was due, there could be no question of disloyalty, or of co-operation with one side or the other.⁵⁸

Sir Hubert Murray himself was frank about how little the war was understood. In November 1939, he wrote:

These natives have of course only the vaguest notion of whom we are fighting against, and none at all of what we are fighting for . . .⁵⁹

He was nevertheless confident of what he called the "solidarity of the native population with the Government and the white residents generally. . ." and it seemed to him that unsolicited gifts of money which had been sent to the government were evidence of such solidarity.

. . . I think that their desire (which is general throughout the Territory) to stand by us in our hour of need is of value as testimony of an appreciation of the efforts which have been made to help them in their painful ascent towards modern civilization.

Murray did not live to see the coming of the Japanese army to the country he ruled, the defeat of the white men in parts of Papua and New Guinea, the impressment of native labourers on a scale unimagined in peacetime, the appearance of a new kind of white man. He would surely have been wounded by some things the new men said

about pre-war administration when they made huge promises about the future.

In the past, you natives have been kept backward. But now, if you help us win the war and get rid of the Japanese from New Guinea, we Europeans will help you. We will help you get houses with galvanized iron roofs, plank walls and floors, electric light, and motor vehicles, boats, good clothes and good food. Life will be very different for you after the war.⁶⁰

That was the gist of an address in Brisbane to natives who had joined the Allied Intelligence Bureau. One of them, Yali, excited by the promise, passed it on to his people at the end of the war. Hogbin suggests that individual soldiers innocently encouraged hopes about as high as Yali's.⁶¹ Why can't every village have a school and good roads and decent transport? Why can't each man have a cash crop to grow and market? Why can't plantation workers get a pound a day? It was not the job of an ordinary soldier to find answers to the questions he asked on behalf of the natives.

Would any of the wartime promises be fulfilled? The central character in T.A.G. Hunderford's novel about the war in New Guinea thinks not. It is August 1945, and the Australian soldier has just told a native scout that he cannot come to Australia after the war.

There was no way of telling them that there was to be no reward for their loyalty and bravery and hospitality. Now that the white man's crying need of them was filled, they would have to go back to whatever they might salvage from their lives. And nobody could do anything about it.

They had already had their reward - a slushy poem written from the gratitude of a soldier's heart and dedicated to them, the fuzzy wuzzy angels, the Christs with black faces. But they were not angels, and they were not Christs; they were men, dirty and cruel and loyal and brave, and incapable of understanding that their blood-brotherhood with the white soldiers, who had shared the hospitality of their hidden villages and the common danger of ambush and attack, would be broken in a day.⁶²

That was not the view of Colonel J.K. Murray, who now became the first Administrator of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea.

A new spirit, new ideas, new demands and standards, have spread through the native community. I do not propose to attempt, even if I could hope to succeed, to stifle that spirit so that European employers can return to the standards of a vanished world.⁶³

The new Administrator was speaking to an Australian audience in 1946. He said of the war:

The native population suffered appallingly, caught up in a war not of their making in which they were helpless and bewildered. . . . Security, the priceless good which we had once brought to the natives, had been replaced by the memory of fear and a new knowledge of the impermanence of the seeming-solid institutions of European order. Everywhere there was uncertainty, restlessness, hardship and the desolation. . . . With a handful of experienced officers we set about rebuilding the Territory.⁶⁴

Among the returning Islanders there was a lively fear that J.K. Murray and his men were about to complete the destruction of the Territory. Osmar White renders the state of mind of one old hand, who says:

The natives are insolent - completely out of hand. They won't work. They don't want work with all this war damage money about.

And as for the Administrator:

a man who invited educated cannibals to dine with him and talk about equality with animals, animals, animals! Him, an Administrator.⁶⁵

It is beyond my scope to try to assess how far the hopes and fears of 1945 were fulfilled in the years that followed. Looking back from 1968 one may be struck more by what did not change after the war than by what did change. Despite the spirit of restlessness which Colonel Murray and Osmar White's character discerned, a colonial society survived. Were wartime observers inclined to exaggerate the elements of dislocation and underestimate the continuity of control? Was it, as White suggests, that the habit of obeying white men was hard to break? If so, why? Was the pervasive presence of military discipline a safeguard against any drastic change in relationships? Were the peoples of the region still too divided into separate villages for the coming of the Japanese to have such profound effects as it had on the Netherlands East Indies, where a nationalist movement already strong seized the war as an opportunity for revolution?⁶⁶ (And were there any substantial differences between the Australian and Dutch parts of New Guinea in their experience of war?)

The changes brought by the war were not revolutionary or straightforward; but changes there were. Few white men were as

well placed to observe them as Mr. J.K. McCarthy: kiap in the Mandate, coast watcher and ANGAU officer in the war; senior official in the administration of the joint Territory after the war. For the native people, he writes in his book Patrol into Yesterday, the war was both a great destroyer and a great teacher; it brought the end of awe and the beginnings of friendship. The spectacle of the white masters in defeat, he suggests, taught that there was not, after all, such a great gulf between white skins and black; and more positively, Australian soldiers conveyed the same message.

It became fashionable after the war to regard as sentimental nonsense the legend of the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels, but sentiment should be judged by the times . . . The foundations of goodwill had been laid, and the war consolidated them . . . the natives began to glimpse the future of their race.⁶⁷

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NOTES

- 1 H. "Bert" Beros, The Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels and other verses, 3rd. ed., Sydney n.d., pp.11-12. The lines quoted here are less than half of the whole poem.
- 2 These lines were quoted in a number of missionary publications during the war. I have not yet found their source.
- 3 O. White, Parliament of a Thousand Tribes, London 1965, pp.129-30.
- 4 *ibid.*, p.129.
- 5 R. Paull, Retreat from Kokoda, Melbourne 1958, pp.226-7.
- 6 Major-General F. Kingsley Norris, "The New Guinea Campaign", Stand-To (Journal of the A.C.T. Branch, R.S.L.) May-June 1955, pp. 4, 7. This was a paper read to the Victorian branch of the British Medical Association on 21 February 1945, first published in the Medical Journal of Australia, 15 December 1945.
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- 10 E. Feldt, The Coastwatchers, Pacific Books, Sydney 1967, p.10. The first edition was published in 1946.
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- 30 *ibid.*, p.278.
- 31 White, *op. cit.*, p.135.
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- 39 *ibid.*, p.244.
- 40 *ibid.*, p.246.
- 41 *ibid.*, p.427.
- 42 *ibid.*
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