

Nauruans during World War II

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Nauru was a small island of great interest to European powers during World War II. Phosphate had been mined there since 1906 by a consortium among Britain, Australia, and New Zealand to maintain agriculture in South Pacific colonies. But Japan was also eyeing it for its own agriculture. The central position of the island meant that it had strategic value for those nations as well as for the United States. With an airstrip the island provided a good base from which to make strikes against islands in the southwest Pacific. It thus became the center of an ongoing struggle that ultimately involved bombing and the relocation of two thirds of the Nauruan population. Following Japanese takeover of the island, 1200 Nauruans moved to Chuuk where more than 400 died. Of those who stayed on Nauru a significant number either died of medical complications or were beaten to death or executed for minor misdemeanors by the Japanese. And the Chinese on Nauru suffered even worse treatment than the Nauruans.

In this paper I examine the main events of the war for Nauruans beginning with the Japanese takeover in December 1941 and continuing through the final return of Nauruans to their island in February 1946. I then consider some of the long-term effects of these involvements, particularly the consequences of evacuation and starvation.

Nauru is mentioned only briefly in many accounts of the war in the Pacific. Dorothy Richard (1957) and Samuel Morison (1951) have provided some of the most complete documentation, which is supplemented by Wesley Craven and Frank Cate's formal history of the United States army and air forces in World War II (1950). But the focus of these accounts is winning the war, not its effects on the lives of Pacific Islanders. Sir Albert Ellis (1946) provides a good description of both the island and the disruption to Nauruan life from the vantage point of his longtime knowledge of the island as an administrator of the British Phosphate Commission. He was in the official party that arrived on Nauru in August 1945 to accept Japanese surrender. Patrick Cook (n.d.) has left a manuscript that he began as an eighteen-year-

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old Nauruan and maintained throughout the war. The exercise book with its pencil entries in English is preserved in the Australian War Museum, Canberra. A Chinese resident of Nauru, Nai Fai Ma (n.d.), also recorded the events of the war on Nauru in a diary, noting particularly the effects on the Chinese population. In addition to these written sources I draw on my own interviews with Patrick Cook and three other Nauruans who still hold vivid memories of World War II. I have pieced together the following from these oral and written accounts.

Background

The British Phosphate Commission was the main administrative body on Nauru from 1919 when Britain, Australia, and New Zealand replaced Germany under a League of Nations mandate agreement. The Japanese seized the island from Australia in December 1941, just after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and proceeded to build airstrips and bring in a large military force. The US military command responded by bombing Nauru in an attempt to destroy the airstrips. Caught in the middle of this conflict were some 1800 Nauruans and about 200 Chinese, as well as some Gilbertese who had been employed to work in the phosphate mine. Twelve hundred of the Nauruans were evacuated by the Japanese to Chuuk, while the others stayed home to suffer through the American bombing and the rigors of the Japanese regime. This paper examines the effects of this evacuation and bombing on the people of Nauru.

Nauru is a small island with a circumference of 19 kilometers and is situated in the mid-Pacific 42 kilometers south of the equator. The land area consists of a narrow coastal rim and a raised interior plateau, which was found in 1902 to contain a rich source of the mineral phosphate. This has been mined since 1906 and sold as superphosphate to fertilize the farms of Australia and New Zealand. Money from the sale of phosphate provided some income to a few Nauruan landholders, but they were paid below the international market price. The Japanese, who also needed to buy phosphate for their rice fields, had to rely on lower quality phosphate from Angaur, Makatea, and sources outside the Pacific. Part of their motive for seizing Nauru was to gain access to a cheap high quality source of phosphate.

A second Japanese motive for seizing Nauru was to expand the large military bases they had established in the eastern Carolines and Marshalls during the 1930s--an activity about which the United States knew very little. These bases had been established while Japan was administering Micronesia under a League of Nations mandate after World War I, even though the mandate had an explicit clause forbidding the use of mandated territories for

military activity (Miwa 1988). Japanese expansion during 1940 and 1941 necessitated the use of these bases as a supply line into islands such as Nauru and Tarawa in the Gilberts, which the Japanese took in 1942.

The Japanese expansion southward resulted in fierce battles at Tarawa in the Gilberts, in the Solomon Islands, and in New Guinea. Nauru was an important transit point in their push to control the islands of the southwest Pacific. It gave them a base for air sorties and for maintaining a military force. Even though there is no harbor on Nauru, a system of anchor buoys established for phosphate shipments was used by the Japanese to moor troop ships. They built three airstrips during their first six months on Nauru to provide air protection for shipping.

Japanese Seizure of Nauru

In December 1941 the Japanese seized Nauru from the Australians, and evacuated their citizens and 570 Chinese on 23 February 1942. The Japanese formally took possession of the island on 26 August 1942, raised their flag in place of the Union Jack, began to build military installations, and attempted to reopen the phosphate mine. They brought in over 4000 Japanese, some of them marines, some laborers, and a small group of NTK (South Seas Development Company) personnel to run the phosphate mine.

The population buildup on Nauru was accelerated further when the Japanese moved the Banabans from Ocean Island, which they had also seized. Several shipments of Banabans, amounting to about 900 people, arrived on Nauru during 1943. Most of these were relocated on Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Chuuk, but some remained on Nauru for the duration of the war (see Cook n.d.).

This sudden increase of the population on Nauru brought over 6000 people to an island where only 1800 Nauruans had existed previously (Richard 1957, 49). The raised reef had only a narrow band of fertile land around the coastal rim, while the rich vegetation in the interior was being ripped out to mine the phosphate between the coral pinnacles. Such a large population relied totally on outside supplies. In mid-1943 the Japanese administration made the decision to move some of the Nauruans off their island.

Evacuation to Chuuk

To reduce the size of this population two forms of evacuation were imposed. In June and August 1943 two groups of 600 Nauruans each were moved a thousand miles north to the island of Chuuk where there was already a

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considerable Japanese military force. The 600 Nauruans who remained on Nauru were evacuated from their homes and forced to live in designated areas of the island, away from their ancestral lands.

Cook recorded in his diary that 29 June 1943 was "another historical moment" when the Nauruan leaders were called in by the Japanese administration and told that 600 of their people were to go to Chuuk that day in a troop carrier that had arrived on Nauru bringing in more Japanese marines and laborers. "It was approved that a party of 600 natives under the supervision of Kaicho Detudamo and N.M.P. Joseph Harris will be the first." On 16 August 1943, "another order of the second Nauru evacuees was issued." This party was headed by Albert Harris. A total of 1200 Nauruans was evacuated to Chuuk (6).

The Nauruans were told to organize their people to leave. They did not understand why they were being evacuated, nor where they were going. They could see the overcrowding problem but had little appreciation of the war and why the Japanese were there. Desire for their phosphate was obvious, but the military buildup made little sense. Nai Fai Ma suggests the Nauruan leaders were told that families with relatives in the leprosy asylum were to be sent away. Apparently Japanese had a fundamental fear of leprosy and thought that, confined on a small island, they too would catch the disease.

On Chuuk the Nauruan evacuees were placed on the islands of Tol and Fefan, where they were expected to work on building airstrips and producing sweet potatoes and fishing to feed the Japanese garrison. Sweet potato cultivation, and indeed agriculture in general, were not familiar practices to Nauruans, as no root or grain crops grew on Nauru. They were expected to work alongside Chuukese who were used to growing root crops, although they had not cultivated sweet potato in earlier times. This workforce of Nauruans and Chuukese was supervised by strict Japanese overseers who used brutal practices to keep up production. The aim was to provide food for the large military force garrisoned there, and to construct airstrips for their progressive conquest of the South Pacific.

Little has been written about this part of the war and its effects on the lives of the Chuukese, the Nauruans, and other Micronesians. The Reverend Amram of Nauru still holds vivid memories of the privations of the two years he spent on Chuuk with his family. He described that period to me as the "turning point" in his life. Not only was the work in the fields unfamiliar and Japanese discipline extremely strict, but the Americans also bombed the area. The Japanese were liberal with their beatings. On one occasion, after a group of Nauruans had been beaten, they decided to swim to another island where their families were held. They went despite the threat of sharks. Reverend Amram recalls

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swimming, swimming, swimming, until about 4 or 5 AM, I reached the island exhausted. I went to find my family. I saw them huddled together. Near them some Nauruan houses were all destroyed by bombs. Some were dead. There were bodies everywhere. I asked "Are you alright?" They said "Take us away in case the planes come back." It was about 7 or 8 o'clock, so I took them away some distance. Then I prayed to God "Thank you for saving my family." I promised to devote my life to God.

He became a pastor of the Nauruan church, a position he still holds.

When the Japanese questioned him about this episode, they wanted to know the whereabouts of the Australian submarine that had taken him from one island to another. When he denied there had been an Australian submarine, the Japanese interrogators tied his hands and beat him until he was unconscious. He had no broken bones, but other Nauruans took care of him and tended his wounds until he became strong enough to work again. After that he worked extremely hard to avoid the displeasure of the Japanese.

Another Nauruan taken to Chuuk was Detudamo, an outstanding Nauruan leader who had been lobbying the British Phosphate Commission since 1927 for a greater share of phosphate profits for the Nauruan landowners. Before leaving Nauru he had been appointed governor of the Nauruans by the Japanese and had endeavored to plead the Nauruan cause with the military administrators. He did his best to keep morale high amongst the Nauruans on Chuuk and appealed to the Chuukese for food when supplies ran short in 1944 (but with little success, according to Amram). The Nauruans on Chuuk became despondent as they watched many of their family and friends die, with no way to find food or medicine to help them.

One episode that illustrates Detudamo's shrewd perception of their situation on Chuuk was recorded by Reverend Amram. Just before the Americans arrived to liberate Chuuk, the Japanese offered Detudamo some Camel cigarettes, but he refused. They then offered him Sakura (Japanese) cigarettes. He took one and lit it and smoked. ("He must have used his head," Amram commented.) As a result of this wise choice the Japanese brought an American and a Japanese medicine kit. He refused the American kit, saying he preferred the Japanese one. Then they asked, "Suppose the war finished. What ship would you like to take you home--American, Australian or Japanese?" Detudamo replied "Nippon ship." They were all smiles. "We were very happy that we were spared. So many Nauruans had died," concluded Amram.

By October 1945, well after the American occupation, 410 of the expatriate Nauruans had died and most of the remaining 793 Nauruans were still working on a Japanese potato plantation on Tol Island. Apparently they

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despaired of being discovered by the American inspection force because Detudamo, their chief, wrote a letter to the commander of the occupational force, delivered on 1 November 1945. The letter begged for food because they were subsisting on "only green leaves and toddy . . . and if help is still delayed we shall all be perished. . . . We would be very grateful if you would be so kind as to send us foodstuffs such as rice, navy bread, etc., with your bill. On reaching home (Nauru) arrangements would be made through our government for payment" (Richard 1957, 49). Those remaining Nauruans were returned to Nauru in February 1946 aboard an Australian ship. Amram recalls both happiness and sorrow as the story of the hardships of life on Chuuk were shared with the much depleted families.

Living on Nauru 1942-1946

The 600 Nauruans who were left on Nauru after August 1943 were also subject to privations, including evacuation from their home districts (for details of Nauruan social arrangements in districts, see Pollock 1987). They were told to move out of their homes in the various districts around the island and to relocate to Nibok and Boe districts in the less frequented northwest corner of the island. Their houses were either pulled down to make room for the barracks of Japanese marines, or were commandeered by the Japanese, particularly those in the Menen district, for their officers. Also in Menen district, on the site of the tuberculosis sanitarium, large separate encampments were built for the Japanese military and the 700 laborers who were brought in to build the airstrips.

Another group of Nauruans who suffered at the hands of the Japanese were the leper patients who had been confined in the leper asylum in Menen district. All forty-nine of them were told that they would be taken to a place where they would be cared for. Instead they were crowded into three leaky boats, towed out to sea, and then fired on from the shore. The Japanese fear of leprosy is given as justification for this inhuman act (Ma n.d.).

Between September 1943 and January 1944 the main activity on Nauru was building three airstrips, which the Japanese needed for their forays into the Solomons and Papua New Guinea. They also needed these as a backup for their position on Tarawa, Gilbert Islands, and for the defense of the Marshalls and Chuuk. In addition to the Japanese laborers 275 Nauruans were also required to work on the airstrips for the Japanese (Ellis 1946, 27). They were expected to work from dawn to dusk and were beaten or denied food if they slacked at all. For people who had never had to do much physical work this was exacting enough, but the discipline and privations were additionally traumatic.

The total Japanese force on Nauru in May 1944 was 4178 (Ma n.d., 23). It consisted of 2867 marines and 1311 laborers. Another 1463 "natives" were listed, as well as 179 Chinese. The "natives" included Nauruans as well as Gilbertese, Ellice Islanders, and one or two Marshallese. Thus the total population on Nauru at that time amounted to 5820 (Ellis 1946, 27). This was the largest population by far ever to occupy this small island.

During the occupation from August 1942 to September 1945, when the Japanese surrendered the island, those 5820 people lived under very crowded conditions. Even under normal circumstances resources would have been stretched. But with the island effectively blockaded by American air attacks, Japanese supply vessels were unable to bring in either provisions or ammunition. In September 1943 a 1000-ton Japanese vessel and a 6000-ton cargo vessel were sunk by American bombs or torpedoes. Despite the daily American bombing raids two Japanese cruisers and two transport submarines managed to get through bringing provisions and ammunition to Nauru during 1944. The arrival of 75 tons of rice and 50 tons of ammunition in September 1944 in the two Japanese submarines was extremely welcome (Ellis 1946). But that provided only a temporary respite from the starvation facing the Japanese as well as the Nauruans and Chinese. That was the last shipment of provisions to reach the island until the war ended in August 1945. Nai Fai Ma describes the deaths of the Chinese from starvation in bleak entries in his diary.

In addition to the blockade against Japanese supply ships, the weather had added its own constrictions to the food supply. A severe drought set in during early 1943 and lasted into 1944, thereby reducing the productivity of the few pandanus and breadfruit trees that remained on the narrow coastal belt. The coconut trees produced fewer and smaller nuts. But their production was already reduced by the practice of tapping the inflorescences to make sweet toddy--a practice used extensively when all other food sources were exhausted. The Japanese allotted coconut trees thus: "Three trees for a Japanese, two for a native, and one for a Chinaman" (Ellis 1946, 29).

The calcareous soil of Nauru produced little besides the pandanus and coconuts on which Nauruans had based their traditional diet. But to keep such a large population alive the Japanese administration ordered the growing of pumpkins. When the group of Australian and New Zealand representatives of the British Phosphate Commission arrived on Nauru to accept Japanese surrender, they found pumpkins everywhere, both growing profusely and stored in sheds ready for use. The reason that Nauru had been turned so successfully into a pumpkin patch was the use of 40-gallon petrol drums full of sewage and excreta as the "soil" in which the pumpkins flourished. Ellis described the smell and the flies as "the Japanese's

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unprecedented legacy" (1946:85). Dysentery was rife. The Australian occupation forces poured oil on the drums to burn them in order to restore Nauru "to its usual sanitary and healthy atmosphere" (Ellis 1946, 83).

Fish was more readily available. During the last two years of the occupation Cook's diary entries consisted only of the number of fish he caught each day, and of the bombing raids. He still recalls this as the time when he learned to fish. He also noted, with some irony, that the bombing raids sometimes yielded a good supply of fish if the Americans missed their target and a bomb exploded close to shore killing many fish. Fishing became the work of many Nauruans for their Japanese captors, and all the fish they landed had to be handed over, except for one for their families. The Japanese kept a close watch as each fisher came ashore; several Nauruans and Chinese and Gilbertese were beaten for concealing a fish to feed their families.

The result of these lean times, however, was not as severe as one might expect. Although some Nauruans (and more Chinese) died from starvation and complications, the Australian occupation party that arrived in September 1945 remarked that they had expected to find the inhabitants emaciated and in poor health, but instead they all looked "fairly well," though suffering from dysentery and other diseases (Ellis 1946, 83).

The physical conditions for Nauruans who remained on Nauru differed little from those that Nauruans suffered on Chuuk. Both groups had to work hard, were subject to harsh Japanese authority, and were close to starvation. The only consolation for those who stayed on Nauru was that they were on their home island, and so suffered a different form of psychological trauma than those who were physically separated from it. They developed a mistrust of anyone who was not Nauruan. The fight for survival set Nauruans in opposition to Chuukese on Chuuk, and against Gilbertese and Chinese, as well as their Japanese captors on Nauru. Nai Fai Ma worked closely with the Japanese authorities during the occupation of Nauru, but the day the Japanese were evacuated after Victory in the Pacific Day, August 1945, he attacked a Japanese with an iron bar and nearly killed him. His reason was that this was one way of retaliating for the hardships inflicted on himself and his fellow Chinese (25). No doubt ancient antagonisms between Japan and China surfaced at this emotional moment.

Bombing of Nauru

Bombing occurred daily on Nauru throughout 1943 and 1944 so the Nauruans became very used to the raids. But when the island was first attacked on 27 December 1940 to cripple the phosphate installations, Cook described the event as "a thing which I'll say most thrilling in History" (1). Two years later

he was still excited by the sight and sound of warfare: "It was a beautiful site [sic] to see the defense guns flashing upwards in fine groups of red balls, yet considerable damage was done to the airfields" (5). These are the words of a young man describing an exciting event. Later in his diary the entries are more prosaic and repetitious: "Three of them [American bombers] visited us early at 8 AM dropping bombs for which we retaliated without effect" (31 July 1944). The excitement was gone. During 1943 and 1944 Nauru was bombed by American planes almost every day.

Americans began bombing the new airstrips and installations on 25 March 1943 as part of their campaign to stop Japanese military expansion into the southwest Pacific. The American Joint Chiefs of Staff decided by the summer of 1943 that the Gilberts should be taken by Allied forces in an action code-named Operation Galvanic. This was to be a quick thrust as the first step toward capturing Pohnpei and Chuuk in the Carolines. The newly constructed airbase on Nauru, which was finished in January 1943, was seen as a threat to the success of Operation Galvanic as the Japanese could use that island to cover an area between the Solomons and the Gilberts (Craven and Cate 1950, 300). On 19 November 1943 the US warships *Saratoga* and *Princeton* attacked Nauru and "neutralized" it, so that it was no longer able to support the Japanese campaign in the Gilberts (Morison 1951, 136). For some six weeks the island continued to be bombarded. On 8 December alone US bombers dropped 51 tons of bombs on Nauru and "tried to sink it" (Cant 1945, 163).

These repeated attacks on Nauru's airstrips contributed to the success of the American attack on Tarawa by drawing off Japanese attacks on the American Marine landing force. The American aim was to overpower the 3000-strong Japanese garrison on Betio, Tarawa, which was not quite ready for the American onslaught on D-day, 20 November 1943. As Cant commented: "The persistence of Japanese on Nauru was irritating during the Gilbertese campaign. The island was repeatedly bombed but the air base was regularly and repeatedly repaired by the enemy. Nauru did not sink, but never fully recovered from this onslaught" (Cant 1945, 163). The success of this campaign for American forces, albeit with losses of over 3000 men, was the beginning of a long period of isolation for the Japanese and Nauruans on Nauru.

Following the success of Operation Galvanic in the Gilberts, American bombing of Nauru continued, but this time the aim was to divert Japanese energies away from defending the bases they had established in the southern Marshalls, such as the airstrips on Mille and Jaluit, and the significant bases on Kwajalein, Pohnpei, and Chuuk. From December 1943 through January 1945 bombing of Nauru continued on most days. As Cook recorded for

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9 December 1943, "Another memorable date; a formation of American fighter planes raided us early at 5:35 AM and destroyed most of the military objects, and warships were firing on the island." This raid resulted in four Nauruans killed and twelve Nauruans injured, as well as many more Gilbertese killed and wounded. The church (newly built in 1940) and several British Phosphate Commission buildings were destroyed.

Effects of Bombing

Cook made little direct record of his or other Nauruan reactions to the events of the war. From the few comments he does make we can infer some of his emotional reaction. For example he refers to 25 December 1941 as "Our Black Day" when enemy planes returned "and smashed our old wireless station by diving very low using machine guns and bombs. From then a constant visitation of enemy bombers has taken place." And beside 22 August 1942 he wrote, "We all went mad with fear when we saw them (American bombers) tearing the air like wild Indians on the war path."

He also records that some of those bombing attacks resulted in fatalities or injuries either to Nauruans or Gilbertese. In his personal recollections to me he commented on his feelings when, as a young man, he watched his sister and cousins die as a result of a bombing that blew apart the house in which they were living. He and a friend had been off fishing when the bombing occurred. In his diary he also recorded raids that damaged buildings such as the government office and store.

Nai Fai Ma's record is also very factual, though less detailed than Cook's diary. Ma comments on the brutality of the Japanese and on the drastic shortage of food for the Chinese. We know that they were assigned only one coconut tree and can infer that their rations of rice were less than was needed to sustain them. The Chinese who had been left behind on Nauru at the time of the evacuation of the Australians in February 1941 were recorded then as being sickly (Ellis 1946, 28). So it is less surprising that the number of Chinese who died during the Japanese occupation was high.

The reaction of Nauruans to the Japanese occupation of their island is hard to judge, except in hindsight. For example Cook's comment on 25 August 1942, the day when the Japanese occupation was established was: "Another warship arrived and officially announced the occupation of the island. Therefore we submittedly approved that day to be recorded as a very romantic conclusion to the Nauruan history. The Hinomaru (Japanese flag) instead of the Union Jack was not respected by every native on the island of Nauru. Detudamo was appointed Governor." This acceptance of a fait accompli was only slightly elaborated during our discussions of the war; Cook

recalls that as a young man he accepted what happened without too much resentment of the Japanese. The conflict of loyalties emerged with hindsight.

Cook's account shows a gradual change of loyalties, which I judge as only natural given the close proximity with which he and other Nauruans were living with the Japanese. He uses the terms enemy and raiders throughout the diary; in the first entries up to August 1942 those terms refer to the Germans and the Japanese, but gradually thereafter he records the bombing attacks by "American Boings [sic]" and American raids, and a "daily visitation of enemy planes" on 12 March 1944, which was clearly an American bombing raid.

Not only were Cook and the other Nauruans under very strict military rule by the Japanese, and fearful of repercussions if they stepped out of line, but they also were suffering losses of relatives at the hands of American bombers. In 1987, as a result of hindsight, they felt no particular affection for the Japanese but judged that their only way of staying alive was to do what the Japanese commanded. Nauruans were in the minority and were easily picked off if they committed offenses. They also told me that they did not understand why the Americans kept up their bombing raids for so long (two years) after the island was rendered ineffective militarily. They of course were living with the dispirited and disarmed Japanese force and knew how short all supplies including ammunition were on the island, but the American forces had only indirect knowledge of their condition. As American raids shifted from the airstrips to the tuberculosis settlement where Japanese forces were housed and to the gasoline drums, they became a daily threat to the lives of the Nauruans.

The ambivalence of one young Nauruan is recorded by Cook. On 15 February 1943 he wrote:

The 10-year-old son of Detudamo (the Nauruan chief and Governor) was imprisoned today by his father's command. It's because an air officer asked him how he enjoyed the trip (on one of the Japanese planes) the other day the boy then said "I enjoyed it very much." Then the officer said now which country did you like most the English or the Japanese, the boy said "I like both the English and Japanese." The officer was very sorry as he expected the lad to praise Japan so he talked it over with Detudamo advising him to teach the boy to learn the good manner. So his father imprisoned him. (5)

The total number of Nauruans killed during these bombing raids was about forty, but no accurate record of their deaths was kept apart from Cook's diary entries. Many more were injured, as were Gilbertese and Chinese. For 4 May 1944 Cook wrote: "Nine or more dive bombers inflicted heavy casualties on soldiers and us and ruined many houses." A similar entry occurs for 8 May. But with the shortage of supplies, including medicines and

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equipment for the hospitals, it is likely that many of those who suffered from what would normally have been minor injuries succumbed for lack of treatment. The rate of death was enhanced also by the poor physical condition of those who were wounded.

The shortage of food is barely mentioned by Cook, but Nai Fai Ma made more entries in his diary about the Chinese dying of starvation. On Saturday 25 February 1944 Cook recorded that "Casual labourers ceased duty owing to lack of rice. . . . The Allied Blockage forced the soldiers to eat creepers and its kind, while we natives eat (DOBOIY) weeds DENENO, DOMO DURU. Later the Copra were ceased owing to that Copras were nowhere to be found" (8). On 10 April 1944 he noted "Soldiers demanding toddies from us," referring to the coconut toddy made by catching the sap from a cut inflorescence on a coconut tree. On 21 April 1944 "Two hundred native men were called up to collect toddies for the soldiers. Rice rationing among them was greatly reduced--they eat rice soup only for their morning breakfast. Some of the already collected toddy tree will be taken from us on the 26th." Among the strict orders issued to Nauruans were: "Don't give your toddy (to Japanese soldiers)--give it as a present [and] Don't take coconut fruits. The punishment was - Nipon - Do - Kiro One soldier was shot while stealing native toddy. See list of names of others doing same. Eade (Giurour) and Deirog left home for Secretar's Hombu (Jap Collies; Hd Qrts) offering themselves for food-stuffs. Soldiers and native constables were sent out to search for them" (Cook n.d., 11).

Nai Fai Ma on the other hand has left us some graphic details of the increasing shortage of food from March 1944 to the end of the war. On 17 March he recorded, "Food problem becoming serious. Coconut trees suitable for collecting 'toddy' numbered." On 20 March he wrote: "Coconut trees distributed among the people: Japanese 3 trees each; Native 2 trees each; Chinese 1 tree." And on 1 July, he noted "Rice gradually getting scarce. Pumpkins, sweet corns and sweet potatoes take the place of weed and wild grass growing in uncultivated tracts." On 13 September: "Ocean Gilbertese LUKA 'toddy' collector of Japanese after severely beaten and tied up for three days executed for defrauding by supplying Japanese with 'toddy' mixed with water." On 14 September a Japanese transport submarine surfaced and landed 75 tons of rice, 50 tons of ammunition and several tons of cargo (23). Ironically, Ma recorded the death of four Chinese from starvation between September and December 1944, and two Chinese who were working for the Japanese were beaten to death on separate occasions for stealing a pumpkin. The record for 6 July 1945 states: "CB 284 SEEK KOW suffering from paralysis and his body swollen up in all parts owing to malnutrition, passed away." One report gives a total of 22 Chinese deaths during the war out of the 190 who

remained on Nauru (Anonymous 1946, 17). These records indicate that the Chinese probably suffered more physically from the shortage of food than the Nauruans themselves, though there were fewer of them.

The physical destruction of Nauru was described in detail by an anonymous visitor in February 1946. Temporary houses lined the foreshore but did not distract from the vast destruction of the settlement by American bombing and shelling. In addition the Japanese had constructed an elaborate and strong system of defenses against a marine landing, leading the author "to the obvious conclusion that the Japanese in their own way hoped to conclude a sort of compromise peace with the Allies, and on terms favorable to both sides (some say saving face) would retain Nauru for its vast deposits of phosphate. 'What I have I hold' would doubtless have applied in this case." These defense works, which consisted of deep pits as tank traps, concrete pill boxes, and underground dugouts and radio stations, were all protected by many gun emplacements. A Japanese cemetery near Buada Lagoon contained more than five hundred Japanese burials (Anonymous 1946).

Effects of the War on Nauruans

The war brought total disruption to the lives of all Nauruans, whether they were evacuated to Chuuk or stayed on Nauru. In 1946 they had to begin to build a new society, based on new family structures and new status considerations. One persistent cultural phenomenon was Head Chief Detudamo, who had not only survived but had provided moral support during the trying times on Chuuk.

Physical destruction of the island from eighteen months of almost daily bombing raids by the Americans, and from the Japanese installations, meant that houses had to be built in home districts, using whatever finance could be found. The British Phosphate Commissioners provided sixpence per ton export duty on phosphate and advanced £200,000 for a fund for reconstruction and rehabilitation of the island. The Australian administration, however, was slow to act, so that in 1948 Nauruans were still living in huts built from scrap materials salvaged from the war, and their schools and hospitals were inadequate. Phosphate mining resumed in July 1946. Ellis (1946) was very concerned about the damage to equipment, but the plant was repaired and set running again with seventy-six Europeans to direct its progress.

The enforced work that the Japanese imposed on the Nauruans during the war also had a long-term effect. Nauruans had never worked so hard before, and the work they were expected to do was completely foreign to them, whether building airstrips on Nauru and Chuuk, planting sweet

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potatoes, or digging Japanese defenses. After the war the attitude to work continued, and all able-bodied Nauruans were employed.

One political outcome of these five traumatic years was that Nauruans decided upon a more democratic system of government. Today they speak of abolition of the Temonibe class--a process which began in 1927 when a new political body replaced the former Council of Chiefs, but which was hastened by the events of the war. In 1951 governing power over affairs of the island was placed in the hands of a newly created body, the Nauru Local Government Council. The council was a major step toward self government and the declaration of independence in 1968. Detudamo and Hammer de Roburt emerged from the war period as the primary leaders, not only as chiefs, but also in the broader more democratic postwar political structure (see Viviani 1971 for discussion of the setting up of the Nauru Local Government Council).

Social relationships also changed. Nauruans had never been very keen to travel on whaling ships or to become indentured labor in Queensland, as had other Pacific Islands people. But after World War II bonds between Nauruans became even tighter as a result of their shared losses of family members, and their decrease in overall numbers. The harsh life that each group had suffered left its mark as a determination to build a strong society based on their own model, independent of outside influences. The Americans had bombed them, the Australians had apparently abandoned them, and the Japanese had beaten and starved them, so who could they trust but their fellow Nauruans.

Their loyalties also became more clear. Control of their island by outsiders was not providing Nauruans with the kind of life they wanted. Their wartime associations of the label "enemy" first with the Japanese and then with the Americans, was later broadened, at least in Cook's diary, to include all Allies--that is the British, Australians, and New Zealanders who had been working their island for phosphate for forty years.

The Banabans (from Ocean Island), who had been evacuated to Nauru, had no island to return to after the war, so accepted the island of Rabi off the northeast coast of Fiji as their future home. The Nauruans knew that they might also have to face such a possibility, though not as drastic as that faced by the Banabans. Watching the Banaban episode enabled Nauruans to consider this possibility in their own future; they rejected an Australian offer for resettlement on an island off the north coast of Australia.

The population of Nauruans had been severely reduced. In 1946 there were only 1369 Nauruans, as well as 21 Gilbertese and Ocean Islanders, and 778 Chinese, some of them newly arrived. Thus the Nauruan population was reduced by 439 over the three years of evacuation and occupation. Their

health also remained poor, with leprosy and tuberculosis as the most prevalent diseases, and yaws, venereal disease and beriberi also widespread.

What interests me most in this whole wartime episode on Nauru is the effect of drastic food shortages on the current status of health. Nauruans have been described in the 1970s as having one of the highest incidences in the world of diabetes, with 40 percent of the population in 1981 diagnosed with noninsulin dependent diabetes mellitus. An important question that needs closer examination is the link between this wartime period on Nauruans' physical status and the recently documented high incidence of diabetes.

Conclusion

Older Nauruans remember clearly the drastic interventions in their lives brought about by Japanese evacuations to Chuuk, and by the bombings they suffered both on Nauru and on Chuuk. The three-year period from 1942 through 1945 is imprinted indelibly into their memories. These memories have led to two long-term effects.

First, determined to control their own lives after having been pawns in a major war, they rejected the British Phosphate Commission's offer to relocate them. Nauruans wanted to maintain ties to their island. After the war the fight for phosphate royalties continued with renewed vigor, ending only when the Nauruans bought the phosphate industry from the commission for A\$20 million, a transaction entwined intimately with Nauru's declaration of independence in 1968.

Second, their land became even more precious to them. Most Nauruans continue to live on Nauru. Those who do migrate do so either to seek education, to take positions in Nauruan diplomatic missions, or, in a few cases, to take jobs in Australia. But the bulk of the Nauruan population can be found living on the island of Nauru. In this they differ markedly from other Pacific Island nations where a growing proportion of the population is to be found in metropolitan countries (for further details see Pollock n.d.).

Both short-term and long-term effects of the war resulted on Nauru. When we have drawn together war accounts from other islands in the Pacific we may see some similarities. We need to do this before people such as Patrick Cook and Reverend Amram can no longer share their memories with us.

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