stated aim. This study clearly illustrates the lack of understanding between various groups within New Zealand. Hopefully it will form the basis of a more wide-ranging study in the future.

PAUL D'ARCY
University of Hawaii at Manoa

* * *


Islanders were literally caught in the middle as the contenders struggled for control of the Pacific; they were given very little choice in the matter of their participation. The continued self-centeredness of the contending nations is evident today, more than forty years after the end of World War II, when we still know very little about Islanders' wartime roles and even less about their understandings of these wartime experiences.

This lack in our understanding of World War II has been the focus of ongoing research coordinated by the Institute of Culture and Communication of the East-West Center in Honolulu. These two important works have begun to correct previous representations of the war by providing oral accounts of Melanesians, particularly those involved in the Solomon Islands campaign. Both volumes contain materials collected by anthropologists, historians, and political scientists working in the field; others compiled by the Western Solomons oral history project; plus narratives presented at a conference on World War II held in Honiara in 1987. With the exception of introductory chapters by the editors that serve to place the narratives in context, all accounts are by Melanesians. These accounts were originally recorded in the local languages or in Solomons Pijin. In 'O'O these accounts are translated into English, with care to retain the narrator's original content and style. The Big Death contains some of the longer accounts, which are given first in Pijin and then in English as a contribution to bilingual and bicultural education in the Solomons.

The accounts in these two volumes
dramatically reveal that World War II was a watershed event in the lives of Melanesians. Wartime experiences profoundly affected their lives and have continued to shape their vision of themselves and of the outside world. These accounts portray in rich detail the wide variety of crucial roles that Islanders played during the war: as scouts, coastwatchers, guides, carriers, and rescuers, as well as soldiers. They are filled with tales of loyalty, bravery, and heroism, including the rescue of John F. Kennedy and the crew of PT-109. Clearly, the reputation of Melanesians as “angels of war” was well deserved. Equally important, these accounts speak of the tremendous social and economic upheavals the war caused in some regions: villages were moved, families were separated, people were scattered; regular subsistence activities were disrupted, and farm products were subject to confiscation; people went hungry or even starved; some witnessed and even helped perpetrate wartime atrocities; others were beaten, imprisoned, wounded, or killed because of their participation (or lack of it) on one side or the other.

By providing a variety of richly textured and vividly recounted personal narratives, these volumes allow us to glimpse the different ways in which individual Melanesians struggled to make sense of and cope with this foreign war. We see them puzzling over the enormous scale and scope of the war, labeled the Big Death by some, and over wartime conventions that required the slaughter of unknown individuals, endless drilling, maneuvers in open areas in broad daylight, and time out for entertainment in the evenings. We also begin to understand the tremendous significance Melanesians attached to the wartime sharing of friendship and food, particularly by the Americans, which contrasted sharply with their previous experiences under colonial rulers.

In these accounts we also recognize Melanesians as highly complex, intelligent, and caring human beings. We gain a sense of the ambivalence many of them felt toward both contending nations and toward their own involvement in the war; we follow them as they sort through and question some of the official policies and make their own decisions as to whether, to what extent, or how to carry them out. A few examples should suffice. The Solomon Islands Defence Force (SIDF) was a local coastwatching service established by the British after they evacuated the islands. In New Georgia, under the leadership of the legendary Donald Kennedy, the SIDF actively sought out and attacked Japanese patrols; meanwhile, in Santa Isabel, the SIDF regularly rescued downed pilots from both sides. Donald Kennedy was decorated as a war hero for his efforts, but he was apparently a humorless man and a harsh leader. William Bennett, his second in command and himself a recognized hero, reveals in his narrative that he shot and wounded Kennedy for his repeated wartime cruelties. George Maelalo, a Malaita man who joined the hastily formed Service Battalion, recounts that he did not understand what being a soldier meant at the time of his recruitment; did not really know what the fight was all about; and knew only that he had given his oath to shoot and kill the enemy. After the terrible
destruction of his unit in the Guadalcanal conflict, Maelalo went on to volunteer for further service. Yet, he tells, “Many times I saw Japanese in the bush, some very young soldiers, and I would think to myself, ‘My word . . . that man has the same heart as mine . . . ’ ” (188). Such varied portraits make it difficult to stereotype the typical “Melanesian response” to World War II.

These works add new, overlooked, and varied voices to the story of World War II in the Pacific. As the editors note, other yet unheard voices have still to be added: those of women, villagers who stayed behind, and Islanders from other parts of Melanesia and from other Pacific arenas in Polynesia and Micronesia. The significance of these collections goes much further than their important corrective value, however. Many of the accounts illustrate the tremendous impact the war had on Melanesian political consciousness, serving as a source of Melanesian unity, cargo cult beliefs, anticolonial activities, and the desire for independence. The struggle to come to grips with what happened during World War II continues. The tellings of these war stories are clearly as much reenactments, restirrings, and reinterpretations of old feelings as they are remembrances of the war. For example, Sir Gideon Zoleveke, in his concluding remarks at the 1987 conference in Honiara, stated that he had just realized that “the war was actually not our war.” Along with others, he was deeply concerned that Melanesians finally gain the recognition they deserve for their wartime activities, and that these important stories be made known to the younger generations in Melanesia and to the wider world. The Pacific Islanders who were involved in World War II feel an intense need for their voices to be heard; these two volumes serve as important first steps in that direction.

SUZANNE FALGOUT
Colby College