

## **Yukio Shibata and Michael Somare: Lives in Contact**

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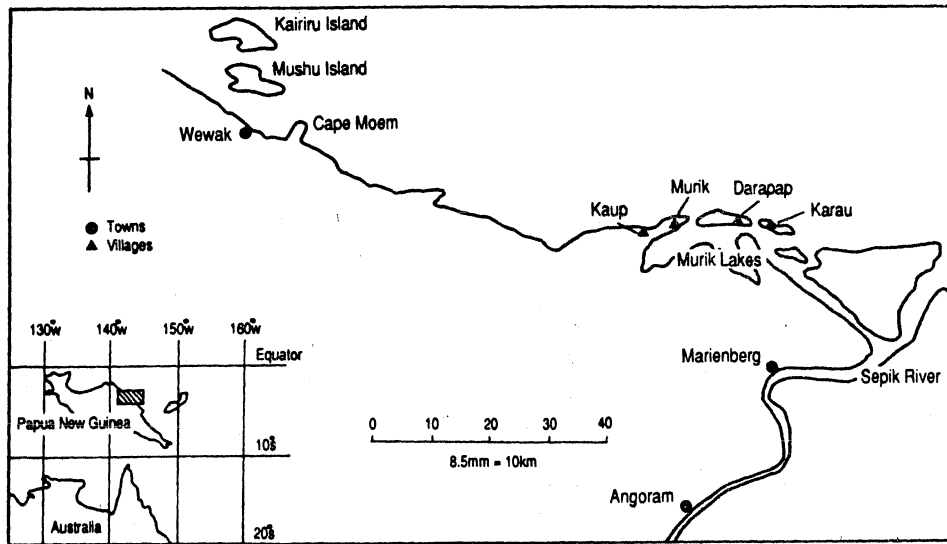
The Japanese invasion of New Guinea in 1942 brought unprecedented change to the lives of the local people of Papua New Guinea. Besides the havoc and destruction associated with the fighting, there were also cultural encounters by local people with massive numbers of Japanese, American, and Australian service personnel. Some of these encounters proved disastrous and destructive for one or both of the parties; others provided inspiration and long-lasting relationships. The paper explores the relationship between Michael Somare, former prime minister of Papua New Guinea, and Yukio Shibata, a commissioned officer in the Japanese occupation forces in New Guinea during the period 1943 to 1945. It is tentatively proposed that Shibata was an inspiration to Somare, providing him with a role model that enriched and informed Somare's later behavior as a politician and statesman.

### **The Japanese Occupation of Northern New Guinea**

Japanese armed forces occupied parts of both the Mandated Territory of New Guinea and the Territory of Papua during the period January 1942 until August 1945 when all Japanese forces in both territories were called on to surrender by the emperor. The surrender was formally effected on 6 September 1945. Because the Japanese influence on Michael Somare is the issue to be investigated in this paper, it is necessary to know the details of the Japanese occupation of the Wewak-Lower Sepik River areas, which include the villages of the Murik Lakes to which the Somare family returned from Rabaul in January 1942.

The facts are drawn from the following sources: volumes of the official Australian war history by Wigmore (1957), McCarthy (1959), and Long (1963); from the volume by Miller (1959) in the official military history of the United States Armed Forces in the Pacific Ocean; and from an English-language account of the occupation of New Guinea by Tanaka (1980). Two Japanese-language memoirs by officers who were in the Wewak area provide

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Sepik River Mouth, Murik Lakes, Wewak Coastline

personal observations about relations between villagers and Japanese soldiers. These works are by Yoshiwara (1955) and Ishizuka (1981). This information has been supplemented by personal interviews with exservicemen who served in this part of New Guinea: Y. Goto, S. Shozawa, and K. Yoshizawa (1983) and Y. Shibata and K. Kajizuka (1986).

Although population centers such as Lae and Salamaua were bombed by Japanese aircraft operating from Rabaul in January 1942, it was not until 8 March that year that these towns were occupied by the Japanese as part of a two-pronged attack on Port Moresby. Later Aitape, Wewak, Madang, and surrounding coastal areas were also occupied. In 1944 Wewak became a major Japanese defensive position as it became the headquarters of the 18th Army. The Japanese 6th Air Division occupied airstrips in and around Wewak as well, and there were naval installations on the islands off the coast of Wewak. These positions became the targets for both US and Australian bomber raids. Miller cites one raid on Wewak on 17 August 1943 in which over one hundred American planes attacked Japanese installations and then flew eastward along the coast attacking secondary targets as opportunities presented themselves (Miller 1959, 198). The coastline from Wewak to Madang became a major air lane during 1944-1945 and natural features such as the Sepik River mouth were used as navigational landmarks. Somare describes the destruction of the village of Karau during one of these raids, which he attributes to the Australians (1957, 3).

As far as can be established from the war records, the Murik Lakes villages were never bombed by the Japanese after the initial capture of Wewak in June 1942. No Australian military or administration targets existed there as they did in Wewak. The fact that all bombing of the Murik villages was by American and Australian planes provided the Japanese with a propaganda opportunity which they exploited and which has stayed in Somare's mind. The sight of the Japanese (thought to be the ancestors of the Murik people) defending themselves and the villagers from air attacks established a bond between Japanese and Murik people that still exists. Somare refers to visits to Wewak of Japanese veterans during 1969 and 1970 (1975, 76-77). Y. Goto, a participant in those visits and president of the Japan-PNG Goodwill Society, confirms the visits and refers to the warmth of the reunions.<sup>1</sup> Filmed scenes of the visits occur in the film *Angels of War*.

Miller concludes that General McArthur's decision to bypass Wewak and to make large-scale landings at Aitape and Hollandia on 27 April 1944 meant that Wewak was never the site of a major military confrontation, and the local people were fortunate that such battles never occurred there. The coastal lowlands of the Sepik River area, including Somare's home village in the Murik Lakes, were therefore the scene of spasmodic fighting as the Japanese forces gradually retreated to the diminishing perimeter around Wewak that the Australian 6th Division entered from the west on 11 May 1945. The Murik Lakes villagers were spared the worst of the destruction and interruption caused by the war, but they did have significant contact with the Japanese during the war as will be shown.

Wewak in 1942 was the administrative center for the Sepik District, which was peopled by villagers whom McCarthy described as follows: "The sago-eating people who lived along the river were of a smouldering temperament and oppressed with witchcraft and superstitious fears. Traditionally they were headhunters" (1959, 48). Contact with the people of the Lower Sepik swamps had not been on a great scale by the forties, and the Murik people were practically inaccessible in those days except by boat or canoe along the coast, usually from Wewak. The most frequent visitors were missionaries from the Society of the Divine Word at Wewak or Marienburg, one of whom, Joseph Schmidt, spent most of his working life in this part of New Guinea. His descriptions of the Murik people indicate that they were friendly and considerably acculturated to Western ways (Schmidt 1923-1924). McCarthy's description, which conflicts with Schmidt's, may be explained by the fact that it was obtained from Australian military sources who were not generally welcomed by the Murik at the end of the war.

In describing the European evacuation of the Sepik area McCarthy indicates that in March 1942 there were only thirty or forty Europeans in the

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Wewak area, and that in Angoram, to cite one instance, local people including native police rebelled against administration officers. As late as April 1942 the district officer, later Lieutenant Colonel J. H. Jones of ANGAU, was involved "in bringing the renegade police to book and restoring order among the natives<sup>2</sup> who had become disaffected" (McCarthy 1959, 49). Some of these district officers in their capacity as NGVR/ANGAU officers at the time of the occupation took to the bush where their local knowledge, particularly of individual villagers, was used in monitoring Japanese military activities. Of particular interest were acts of collaboration with the Japanese by villagers who seemed sympathetic or actively aiding the Japanese military effort.

It is, however, not difficult to see the local people's point of view and to understand friendships formed with individual Japanese, such as that between Somare and the Japanese officer Shibata, whom Somare remembers as Sivata (1975, 3ff). Tanaka (1980, 99ff) devotes a lengthy section of his history of the war to describing relations with the local people whom he claims the Japanese were not out to colonize or subdue. Tanaka's view is that it was policy to deal with the locals firmly so that they would eventually be able to share in the achievements and rewards of the "co-prosperity sphere" which was to be established in the Southwest Pacific. The Japanese had appealed to the peoples of the far-eastern British colonies such as India, Burma, and Malaya as well as their Netherlands and French counterparts to join in an anticolonial revolt against their patronizing and exploitative white rulers. While this antiadministration feeling lacked any sort of unified base or political identity in New Guinea, local groups at the village level did support the Japanese. Details of what from an Australian point of view was "betrayal" can be found in McCarthy (1959, index 649). The Japanese viewpoint is summarized by Tanaka:

Papua New Guinea people also gave a very good impression to the Japanese soldiers and sailors. . . . [T]he contacts with the local residents were mainly aiming at asking them for their cooperation concerning the supply of provisions and some labour. . . . [T]hey were good-natured, cooperative people. In some places, many great favours were granted to the Japanese. . . . [L]ocal residents kindly supplied the Japanese soldiers with all the food they required. They did this by going without their own food under the orders of the Great Chieftains around Wewak. (1980, 100)

The official Australian attitude to this collaboration was that it was somewhere between disloyalty and treason. The punishment was summary, because the native ordinances did not canvass such "crimes," and was carried out publicly. To be fair, however, McCarthy is evenhanded in his description

of the quandary the locals found themselves in. McCarthy's judgment of circumstances in 1942 was:

It must have been difficult for the natives to decide whom they should help. . . . [T]he Japanese did not merely ask but demanded cooperation from the villages and the consequences of refusal were harsh, the burning, or air bombing and strafing of a reluctant village being routine procedures. . . . Many natives indeed went beyond an attitude of sympathy and friendliness and passed on information at considerable risk to themselves, or patrolled deep into Japanese territory as guides or on other missions. Some, however, were prepared to aid the Japanese whether from feelings of resentment dating from pre-war times, from hope of gain or for personal reasons of various kinds it is hard to say. (1959, 88)

The foregoing descriptions, both Japanese and Australian, demonstrate that history is mostly self-serving, and that in war histories winners usually get to write the authorized version. In general terms it can be said that the local people suffered at the hands of both Japanese and Australian-American forces and paradoxically benefited from both groups in individual and different ways. The contention in this paper is that Michael Somare was one of the Papua New Guineans who benefited from contact with the Japanese, and while this is implicit in his autobiography (1975), it needs to be shown explicitly how the Japanese occupation challenged prevailing local attitudes to the white authorities and to record some of the advances and improvements they brought to village life.

The Murik Lakes villages were occupied by soldiers from the Maritime and Engineering Transport Division of the Akazuki Regiment, part of General Adachi's 18th Army, during the period from late 1942 until the end of the war (Jehne 1983, personal communication). When not actually involved in hostilities the life of the individual soldier under such circumstances is inclined to boredom unless garrison duty is supplemented by creative and productive undertakings. What follows is drawn from Jehne's interview with Goto; the accounts of Tanaka (1980), Yoshiwara (1981), and Ishizuka (1985); and my interview with Shibata and Kajizuka in 1986.

Tanaka explains that during the latter part of 1944, when supplies of rice were no longer available from Southeast Asia, this staple food would have to be grown locally in paddy fields as is customary in Southeast Asia and Japan. The Japanese introduced the flooded rice-field to villagers living in the wetlands, and Japanese and locals worked side by side both in the establishment of the paddies and in the husbandry of the crop. They also grew a wide variety of vegetable and fruit crops alienating village land, thus (according to Australian historians) adding to the hardships of the local people (Long 1963,

292). In some situations, however, the locals were compensated for their land at the time by the Japanese who also readily adapted to the age-old processes of bartering and trading. Illustrations both from Yoshiwara (1981) and Ishizuka (1955) confirm these shared activities, which challenge the commonly held local view of villagers working *for* foreigners, but not *with* them. There were other value systems concerning personal relationships that the Japanese held and that presented a contrast to those held by Europeans or Australians in 1942. Mrs M. Jehne, the interviewer and interpreter for the conversation with ex-servicemen recorded in 1983, asked the Japanese group a question about the identity of the Japanese as perceived by the locals when they arrived at Murik in 1942.

JEHNE Please comment on the statement that the local people thought the Japanese were "our dead forefathers coming to rescue us" (Somare 1985, 5).

YOSHIZAWA When the "white" men gave things to the natives they threw the things down in front of the natives, but the Japanese handed these small gifts (cigarettes etc) over to them quite formally with their hands. The natives appreciated this treatment very much.

GOTO There are other reasons why the natives felt closer to the Japanese than to the Europeans. The Japanese, whether winning or losing, generally adopted an attitude of "equality" to the natives and would live and eat together with them. There was none of the master-servant relationship with them--that characterised European-Papua New Guinean interaction. For example, such as eating separately and punishing natives if they should observe white women changing their clothes. Also we do not have any reports that Japanese troops seduced the native women whereas it is reported that many were seduced by the Allied forces. The Japanese maintained a strict code of behaviour and the natives respected the Japanese for this.

To understand the significance of Goto's remark it is necessary to recreate briefly the relationships between master and servant in both territories prior to the war and to refer to analysis and commentary available on colonial racial relationships. At the time he left Rabaul in 1942 the young Somare was five, six in April, old enough to be forming his first values and attitudes toward white men and women.

Prewar Rabaul was still the Mandated Territory's administration center--a town whose expatriate population was dominated by government and church officials. (Following disruption caused by the eruption of the volcano, Matupi, in 1937, plans were proceeding to transfer the government administrative functions to Lae.) Many of these officials were the class- and race-conscious

employers described by Nelson, who never seemed to work for the money they obviously had and certainly never worked in a fraternal sense with their Tolai laborers or servants (1982, 165ff). Underpinning this behavior was the belief, generally held by white people, that Papua New Guineans were inferior, less intelligent, and, with any encouragement, given to arrogance.

The status of local people was determined by the native ordinances of both territories that proscribed the behavior and dress of villagers when mixing with white people, particularly women. Oliver in his personal reflections on life in Bougainville summed up the expatriate view of local people: "In so far as the area's indigenous peoples figured in their objectives, they were looked upon mainly as private producers of raw materials, as labourers in European enterprises, as consumers of European manufactures and as accessories in the civilisation and development of the colony" (Oliver 1973, 78).

The young Somare, who spent his first five years growing up in the married native police quarters at Vunamami in Rabaul, would have been in awe, perhaps fear, of white officials and would have been in the process of establishing a servant mentality. As far as white women were concerned, he may have been aware of their helping and caring roles in hospital, missionary, and charity work, and perhaps conscious of the isolation they also endured at the wishes of the white male population. If he had not developed these attitudes in Rabaul prior to the war, he would certainly have learned them in Wewak five years later when the war was over. The ambiguities white women faced in their relationships with male indigenous workers, including their personal servants, are explored by Inglis (1974) in an examination of the White Women's Protection Ordinance (1926) of the Territory of Papua. Inglis' argument is that the white male perception was that Melanesian men were sexually overactive (that is, more active than whites) and unrestrained in their sexual behavior, which matured in their early teens. This perception by white men led to fear and resentment of black men and boys and eventually to prejudice and discrimination against them. For Inglis this piece of legislation is the extreme of Papuan caste legislation (Inglis 1973, ix). The legislation was male instigated, and charges heard under it were sensation-alized by the expatriate press. There is no reason to believe that these attitudes were any different in Rabaul than in Port Moresby. Inglis cites reports in the *Rabaul Times* similar to those in the *Papuan Courier*, the principal expatriate newspapers in New Guinea and Papua prior to the war.

According to Goto's claim, the Japanese behaved in markedly different ways from the Australian or European norm, exhibiting behavior that would have challenged the assumptions forming in young Somare's mind about equality and the master-servant relationship. For example, some private Japanese soldiers used to labor alongside the Papua New Guineans, demon-

strating ways of planting crops. In doing so they would also rest, share food, and eat together. That a brotherhood of shared purpose was established between villagers and the Japanese is demonstrated by the strenuous ANGAU efforts to rehabilitate locals after the Australian troops reoccupied areas of Japanese influence (Gash and Whittaker 1975, plate 665). Goto also claims that Japanese soldiers respected village women and made no sexual demands on them, a point confirmed by Somare (1975, 5). Although officially frowned on, there is no doubt that the Australian or European male population sexually exploited local women in the tradition of the double standard in sexual behavior found widely in British and Australian colonial possessions.

### **Somare and Shibata**

Yukio Shibata was born in Kamogawa, Chiba Prefecture, in 1920. After completing his middle schooling he went to a military engineering college where he studied among other subjects metallurgy and ethnology. He was working in the nickel mines and the associated refinery in Chiba Prefecture when the war commenced, and he was commissioned as a lieutenant after attending officer training school. He was sent to New Guinea in 1943 where he was attached to the 9th Boat Engineering Regiment, a logistics unit responsible for the transport of supplies along the north coast of New Guinea. Shibata was the judicial affairs officer or administrator of a part of this unit. After service in Lae and Finschhafen he was assigned on 12 March 1943 to the Murik Lakes, a major location for Japanese small ships and landing craft.

Small ships transported all sorts of goods from major harbors along the coast to Japanese troops. As the war closed in on the Japanese, supplies of food from Southeast Asia diminished, and the Japanese were forced to grow increased amounts of vegetables and to trade for fresh and dried fish, pork, and sago with the local people. The Murik Lakes were chosen as the site to produce salt for the 18th Army, and it was Shibata's job to manufacture the salt by boiling and evaporating sea water. The salt was then distributed by boats, one of which was commanded by Shibata. To the local people he was the boat captain or "Kepten" (Pidgin), and this is why Somare remembers him as Captain Sivata. Shibata's headquarters were in the village of Karau, Somare's home village.

The Karau children were intrigued by the boats the Japanese used, which were different from the canoes they were accustomed to, and Shibata remembers this as the common interest that brought him and the children together. In addition, Shibata shows a natural fondness for young people. The need to communicate with both children and elders forced Shibata to learn New



Guinea Pidgin (Tok Pisin) in which he soon became fluent. (He had some knowledge of English from his schooling in Japan.) He says he learned Pidgin from a Bible which he found in a deserted church. Shibata remembers how lonely he and his fellow soldiers were, and how the children played with them and "brought some joy into their lives." Children and soldiers taught each other games and dances, stories and songs. Shibata was concerned that the war had interrupted the mission schooling provided by the SVD and sought the permission of his superiors to set up a village school in Karau early in 1944. Somare was one of about twenty children who attended the school. At that time he was eight years old. Shibata does not specifically remember Somare as Somare remembers Shibata, but he does remember one boy as very intelligent, quick, and outgoing--a boy who produced a clever piece of writing called "Kaup is Japan." Kaup is one of the Murik villages, and Shibata has speculated that Somare might have been this clever boy.

The village big men agreed to build a school, which Shibata sketched. In his spare time Shibata started an ethnography of the Murik villages and produced genealogies of the families which were complemented by sketches and descriptions recording different aspects of village life. Shibata managed to retain this ethnographic material, returned to him by Australian prisoner-of-war authorities when he was repatriated to Japan in early 1946. He worked on his ethnography during the six months he spent recovering from malaria in a hospital, and presented some of the material to General MacArthur, whose military history staff were collecting primary documents from the Pacific campaign.

Shibata still has this material, a copy of which he gave to me. His recollection of what was taught in the school is therefore based upon written record. School started early in the morning and with an assembly in which ritual recognition was made of the sun, the winds, and other natural phenomena. Respect for elders, particularly the village big men, was also a feature of this ritual, which included traditional Japanese greetings and obeisances. Shibata, who is not a Christian, was establishing his school curriculum in the Shinto tradition which, at that time, lent support to Japanese militarism and enforced ideas, such as order and respect for the emperor or for those who had his delegated authority.

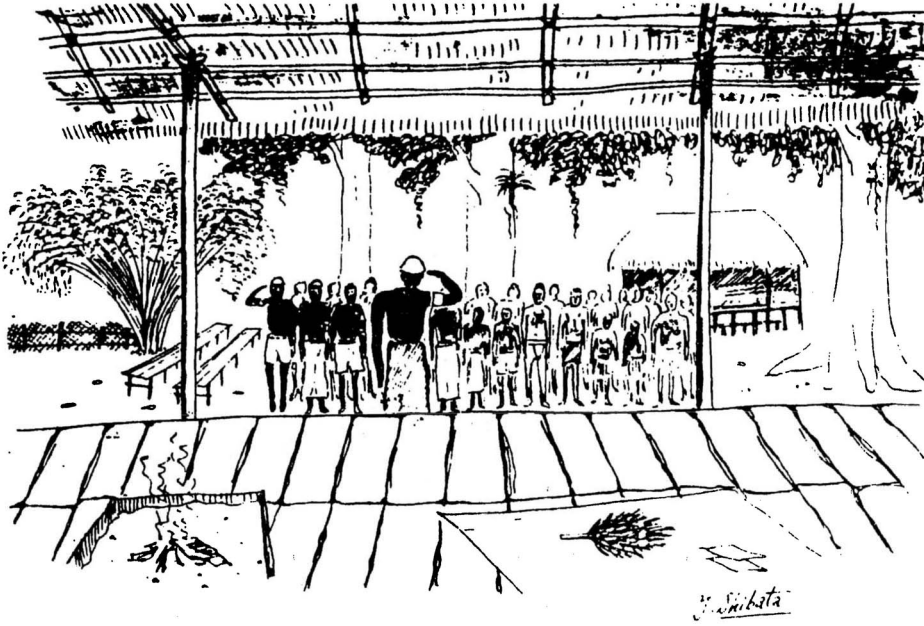
Rote learning of factual material, where students repeat information written on a blackboard or spoken by a teacher, establishes the authority of the teacher and the political system represented by the teacher because the recitation of memorized facts reduces the need to think. This method of instruction was, and for younger children in Japan still is, the traditional way of learning. Shibata used the ground as his blackboard, inscribing ideograms from the kanji syllabary that Somare and the other children were asked to



Murik salt processing. *Sketch by Yukio Shibata*

recognize and recite, finishing off with names and honorifics to show respect for the teacher. Shozawa, who ran a similar school in the next village, remembers being disconcerted at the Murik way of counting, which he remembers as "one, two, many," although this view is wrong, according to Schmidt, who identified several different numbering systems using base four and base five, depending on the purpose of the counting (1923-1924, 725ff). Shibata and Shozawa decided that they would teach the Murik children the Japanese number system so that when they wanted four boys, for example, to run an errand, that would be the number who responded. Number sequence naturally led to simple calculation made concrete by using natural materials such as pebbles and shells. Games also were used to reinforce number concepts, and there are drawings among Shibata's ethnography of children in lines and groups exchanging places or obeying instructions that would allow them to conceptualize abstract numbers and facts.

Shibata taught the children Japanese classic stories such as "Momotaro" and songs such as "Akatombo." When they met again in Tokyo in 1985 and in Wewak in 1986 both Shibata and Somare showed that neither had forgotten the words of these traditional songs, even though the meanings had been lost over the forty-year period. Shibata believed that Kendo, one of the Japanese martial arts, disciplined the body, so he added formal exercises to each day.



The Shibata school in Kaup village, Murik Lakes. *Sketch by Yukio Shibata*

Shibata, Shozawa, and the other officers who taught the children of the Murik villages believed that the daily regimen they imposed on the children's lives would bring about a more purposeful existence that would fit them to share in the prosperous coexistence the Japanese envisioned in Papua New Guinea. Older men and women were also subjected to a certain amount of learning, and the Japanese used the children to communicate with the elders. Women were urged to cook food for recuperating servicemen and were encouraged to visit the makeshift hospitals and to perform simple tasks. Cigarettes, tinned goods, articles of clothing, implements, and other artifacts were bartered for both children's and adults' services.

As Allied control of the north coast of New Guinea increased, Shibata said, the Murik villages were subjected to increased aerial bombardment, particularly because the smoke from the fires of the salt works pinpointed their positions. Shibata and the local big men decided in July 1945 to move the women and children into the mangrove swamps, and the school closed down. Shibata came out of hiding in September 1945 when the war ended and was repatriated in January 1946.

Both Shibata and Somare have testified to the inspirational nature of their shared experience (Somare 1970, 1975; Shibata 1986; Minakami 1986), and proof of this mutual regard is to be found in the reunions of Somare and Shibata in 1985 and 1986. Because both men have recorded their versions of

this period it is possible to draw attention to some minor discrepancies in the accounts. Somare believes the Japanese were not only educating young people but also training them as future soldiers. The Japanese interviewees dismiss this idea, but there is evidence in the Australian war histories that New Guineans fought both with Australian and Japanese military forces. Somare also wrote that Shibata was a Japanese-American who made his way to Japan at the outbreak of war and enlisted in the Japanese army. This is incorrect. Shibata did not visit the United States before the war. Somare was also misinformed about the "Kempeitai," which he believed was Japanese for "captain" (1970, 31), while actually it refers to the Japanese military police. These small differences aside, Somare has acknowledged it was the Japanese who provided him with his first formal education, and that he appreciated the experiences he had with Shibata and the Japanese, who were favorably different from the white men he had seen in Rabaul.

Implicit in Somare's recollections of this time is the inference that he was excited at the prospect of learning something from another culture. Because Shibata was sensitive about acculturation and wanted to build on Somare's own culture, the experience for Somare was a happy one, and one which was to encourage him when the opportunity arose in 1947 to enroll at Boram Primary School, part of the government school system in Wewak. Shibata therefore must be recognized as providing the first major nonindigenous influence on Somare's life, during the period between his eighth and ninth birthdays.

When Shibata was asked what he hoped the outcome of his village school would be, he said that he hoped it would help young people, particularly those with leadership abilities, develop attitudes that would suit them for self-determination. Perhaps Shibata is being idealistic after the event, because it is difficult to assume that the Japanese would not have replaced one form of colonial administration with another. But it is worth noting that Somare in later years was motivated by a desire for self-determination, which would lead eventually to the realization of self-government and independence achieved through political means.

### Notes

1 A Japanese-speaking friend of the author, Claus Jehne, arranged to interview the ex-officers on a trip to Japan in 1982-1983. Through the help of the Japan-Papua New Guinea Goodwill Society, Jehne made contact with the Japanese New Guinean veterans and audiotaped an interview.

2 The term *native* is not used in this paper unless it occurs in direct quotation or in the context of the prewar period. The term was used by anthropologists and administrators prior to the war to designate indigenous Papua New Guineans and occurs in the titles of regulations and ordinances. For example, offences under the Native Administration Regulations (1924) of the Mandated Territory were heard in the Courts for Native Affairs (Mair 1970:67). Not all prewar anthropologists were satisfied with the term *native*, however, and Ian Hogbin as early as 1934 at Wogeo referred to "the Wogeo people" or the "islanders" or "villagers" or used a similar synonym, rather than the word *native*.

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