

THE ADMIRAL CHESTER W. NIMITZ MUSEUM

PRESENTS AN ORAL HISTORY

BY

RUBY BOYE JONES

COASTWATCHER

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I WAS BORN IN SYDNEY IN 1891. MARRIED IN 1919 TO SCOW BOYE WHO DIED IN 1947. TWO SONS NOW IN THEIR 50's.

LATER, I MARRIED FRED JONES WHO DIED 20 YEARS AGO. I SPENT 19 YEARS IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS FROM 1928. THE SOLOMONS WAS THEN A BRITISH PROTECTORATE, NOW INDEPENDENT SOLOMON GOVERNMENT.

MY FIRST HUSBAND WAS MANAGER OF THE CARY TIMBER CO. IN VANIKORO, ONE OF THE SANTA CRUZ GROUP OF THE SOLOMON ISLANDS, ELEVEN DEGREES SOUTH OF THE EQUATOR. MOUNTAINOUS, TO A HEIGHT OF 3,000 FEET, VOLCANIC, TROPICAL, VERY STORMY, BEING IN THE HURRICANE BELT, AND SURROUNDED BY A CORAL REEF.

MANY SHIPS WERE WRECKED THERE, INCLUDING THOSE OF THE EXPLORER, NOPIRUSE (SP ???) IN THE 19TH CENTURY. TRANSPORT WAS BY SEA, NO ROADS OR VEHICLES. RAIL TRACTORS WERE USED TO HAUL CARRY LOGS FROM THE HILLS TO THE HARBOR WHERE THEY WERE RAFTED BY WAITING SHIPPING TO MELBOURNE ABOUT 4 TIMES A YEAR, WHEN WE RECEIVED OUR MAIL AND SUPPLIES. WE WERE REALLY ISOLATED, AS SHIPS AVOIDED CALLING ON ACCOUNT OF THE HAZARDOUS ENTRY TO THE HARBOR.

WE WENT ON LEAVE EVERY 2 YEARS FOR 3 MONTHS. THE TWO SONS SPENT MOST OF THEIR YOUNG LIVES AT SCHOOL IN SYDNEY. CARY TIMBER CO. EMPLOYEES CAME FROM NEW ZEALAND AND AUSTRALIA ON TWO-YEAR CONTRACTS. THEY WERE TIMBER CUTTERS, LOGGERS, WATERFRONT WORKMEN, ENGINEER, STOREMAN, A DOCTOR, A RADIO OPERATOR AND ABOUT 80 NATIVE LABORERS. MISSIONARIES HAD DONE A GOOD JOB WITH NATIVE EDUCATION AND MEDICAL SERVICES. SOME OF THE NATIVES HAD BEEN TRAINED TO BECOME DOCTORS, TEACHERS, LAW STUDENTS. IN THE OLD DAYS, THE NATIVES WERE HEADHUNTERS. MANY PROVED TO BE VERY USEFUL DURING THE WAR HELPING THE COASTWATCHERS. ONE, HALF-CASTE BECAME COASTWATCHER AND USED THE TELE-RADIO. OTHERS WERE HELPFUL BEING ABLE TO MIX WITH THE ENEMY, SCOUT AROUND GATHERING INFORMATION ABOUT THE NUMBER OF PLANES ON GUADALCANAL AIRFIELD WHICH THE JAPANESE HAD BUILT DURING THEIR SHORT OCCUPATION.

THE NATIVES WOULD BE PRETENDING TO BE FRIENDLY. THEY WOULD REPORT BACK TO THE COASTWATCHERS WHO HAD BEEN PLANTATION OWNERS, MANAGERS, ETC, BEFORE THE WAR. DURING 1940, WHEN THE EUROPEAN WAR WAS ON, THE RADIO OPERATOR WISHED TO RESIGN AND JOIN THE FORCES AND SERVE OVERSEAS. HE SUGGESTED THAT I WOULD TAKE OVER TEMPORARILY UNTIL A REPLACEMENT CAME FROM SYDNEY. I WAS ALREADY HELPING WITH OFFICE WORK IN MY HUSBAND'S OFFICE ADJOINING THE RADIO STATION. I AGREED TO GIVE IT A GO. HE TAUGHT ME HOW TO COMPILER THE 3 DAILY WEATHER REPORTS FROM A PANEL OF INSTRUMENTS ON THE

WALL. ALSO, CLOUD TYPE, AMOUNT, HEIGHT, ETC, VISIBILITY AND RAINFALL WHICH WAS HEAVY. ALSO, HOW TO OPERATE THE TELERADIO. BY VOICE AT THAT TIME. I HAD TO LEARN MORSE LATER. HE LEFT AT FIRST OPPORTUNITY, SOME WEEKS LATER. NO REPLACEMENT WAS AVAILABLE. THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT PERMIT A MAN TO COME TO SUCH A REMOTE AREA IN WARTIME WHILE WEATHER REPORTS WERE GETTING THROUGH WHICH WAS ESSENTIAL TO SHIPPING AND AIRCRAFT. LATER, IN 1941, WHEN THE JAPANESE ENTERED THE WAR, THE GOVERNMENT ADVISED THE EVACUATION OF CIVILIANS. ALL SHIPPING WAS CONTROLLED FOR WAR PURPOSES ONLY, SO PRODUCTION OF TIMBER CEASED. THE STAFF AND THEIR FAMILIES LEFT ABOARD A CHARTERED SHIP. WHAT A SAD DAY THAT WAS FOR US. MY HUSBAND CHOSE TO REMAIN FOR THE COMPANY'S INTEREST ATTENDING TO THE MAINTANENCE OF THE ROLLING AND FLOATING STOCK, MACHINERY, HOUSES, BUILDINGS, ETC.

I DECIDED IT WAS MY DUTY TO STAY ALSO TO CONTINUE TO OPERATE THE RADIO. I WAS BY THEN, SENDING WEATHER REPORTS TO TULAGI WHICH WAS THE CAPITAL OF THE SOLOMONS UNTIL IT WAS BOMBED. I WAS THEN ADVISED TO SEND ALL RADIO TRAFFIC TO AMERICAN RADIO STATION BASED IN NEW HEBRIDES. ONE MORNING, AFTER I HAD SENT MY USUAL REPORT, A JAPANESE VOICE CALLED ME BY NAME AND SAID, "JAPANESE COMMANDER SAY, YOU GET OUT." AT THAT TIME, COASTWATCHERS WERE SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH SEAS. ONE ACCEPTED THE CALL AND REPLIED IN UNPRINTABLE TERMS. SOON AFTER THAT, AN AMERICAN SHIP CALLED IN. AS SOON AS THEY DROPPED ANCHOR, THE NATIVES WITH CANOES WENT OUT AS USUAL WHEN WE HAD VISITORS. "WE WANT TO SEE THE WIRELESS MAN" THEY WERE TOLD. "MRS. JONES WIRELESS MAN". THAT DID AMUSE THE VISITORS. WE WELCOMED THEM ASHORE. THEY CAME TO ADJUST THE RADIO TO A NEW FREQUENCY, ADVISING ME TO USE MORSE KEY ONLY FROM THEN.

I HAD BEEN PRACTICING MORSE FOR SOME TIME, LEARNING FROM BOOKS AND LISTENING TO SESSIONS FOR BEGINNERS. THEY GAVE ME A TEST AND APPROVED. I USED THE "PLAYFAIR" SECRET CODE. THEY WERE SURPRISED TO LEARN I WAS NOT A TRAINED MECHANIC. THEY ONLY STAYED FOR A DAY, BUT IN THAT TIME, I WAS DELIGHTED TO HELP THEM MAKE THE FIRST AMERICAN FLAG IN OUR AREA BY MACHINING THE STARS, THEN 48, THE STRIPES WERE ALREADY SEWN. THEY LEFT US SOME SUPPLIES FOR WHICH WE WERE THANKFUL AS WE HAD BEEN SHORT OF RATIONS, LIVING ON FISH, WHICH WAS PLENTIFUL, NATIVE VEGATABLES, WEAVELY FLOUR AND RICE AND TROPICAL FRUITS. FOR MY PROTECTION, CMDR. FILT, ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY, IN CHARGE OF THE COASTWATCHERS CAME TO VANIKORO TO APPOINT ME AN HONORARY THIRD OFFICER IN THE "WRANS", THAT IS WOMEN'S ROYAL AUSTRALIAN NAVY SERVICE, WHICH WAS NEWLY FORMED.

THE ACCEPTABLE AGE FOR SERVICE WAS THEN 18 TO 36. I WAS NEARER 50. I WAS DELIGHTED TO BE OF SERVICE AND FILLED IN THE NECESSARY PAPERWORK. MY UNIFORM WAS DELIVERED IN A WATERPROOF CONTAINER BY PARACHUTE LATER. THE NATIVES RETRIEVED IT IN A CANOE. WHAT A UNIQUE PERFORMANCE THAT WAS. IT CAUSED SOME EXCITEMENT AS YOU CAN IMAGINE.

I REMAINED THE ONLY WOMAN COASTWATCHER AND AM REGARDED AS ONE OF THE "WRANS" GIRLS. WE MEET OCCASIOANLY AND RECENTLY CELEBRATED THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FORMATION OF THE "WRANS" ASSOCIATION.

DURING THE WAR YEARS, I REPORTED ENEMY PLANES. I ALSO HAD AN OCCASION TO REPORT ON AMERICAN LANDING CRAFT WHICH THE NATIVES HAD SEEN ADRIFT OUTSIDE THE REEF. MY HUSBAND WENT OUT AND INVESTIGATED. IT WAS BATTLE SCARRED BUT NO SIGN OF LIFE ABOARD. IT WAS A MENACE TO SHIPPING SO IT WAS REPORTED. WE NEVER HEARD WHAT HAPPENED TO IT. OUR HARBOR WAS LATER USED FOR THE AMERICAN AIRCRAFT TENDERS SEVICING "CATALINAS" ON RECONNAISANCE FLIGHTS, ETC. GUAM WAS BOMBED BY THEN. THEN WE WERE REALLY IN THE WAR ZONE AND MADE MANY FRINDS AND ENJOYED THE COMPANY.

ONE DAY, THE ENEMY ATTACKED ONE OF THE TENDERS IN THE HARBOR. LITTLE DAMAGE WAS DONE BUT THE JAPANESE LOST THREE OF THEIR 8 PLANES IN THE ACTION. VANIKORA WAS A VERY GOOD RECEIVING STATION. I FREQUENTLY WAS ABLE TO RELAY MESSAGES FROM THE LEYTE AND GUADALCANAL COASTWATCHERS. I ALSO RELAYED A CODED SIGNAL DURING THE CORAL SEA BATTLE WHICH I WAS TOLD LATER WAS OF VITAL IMPORTANCE. ADM. HALSEY CAME TO VISIT VANIKORO ONCE. ON ONE OCCASION, HE CONGRATULATED ME UPON MY WAR EFFORTS. HE SAID HE WAS PLAYING HOOKEY BY DROPPING IN. WE APPRECIATED THAT SPECIAL OCCASION. LATER ON, ADM. FITCH OF THE U.S.N. ALSO HONORED US BY A SPECIAL VISIT. WE WERE DELIGHTED. MY RADIO CONTACTS IN NEW HEBREDES WERE YOUNG AMERICANS WHOM I NEVER MET BUT I USED TO SEND THEM CAKES AND COOKIES WHENEVER I HAD A CHANCE. MY SON, KEN, AT THAT TIME WAS SERVING IN THE RAAF IN NEW GUINEA. THEY SENT ME A PARCEL ONE DAY TO SHOW THEIR APPRECIATION, CHOCOLATES, CIGARETTES, SWEETS AND AN ASSORTMENT OF COSMETICS. AFTER SENDING MY USUAL REPORT THE NEXT DAY, I ADDED A CODED MESSAGE, "THANKS FOR THE GOODIES, I AM NOW A RAVING BEAUTY." THEY WOULD HAVE ENJOYED THAT JOKE IF THEY COULD HAVE SEEN ME. WHEN I DEVELOPED SHINGLES, ADM. HALSEY GRANTED ME PASSAGE WITH BATTLE SCARRED OR BATTLE WEARY TROOPS. I HAD RECEIVED THE SIGNAL, "PREPARE TO BOARD WITHOUT DELAY--- GUIDE MEN TO STATION". THE TIME AND DATE OF ARRIVAL WAS GIVEN. FOUR MEN REPLACED ME, FOR THE FEW WEEKS THAT I WAS AWAY. THEY WERE SORRY TO LEAVE UPON MY ARRIVAL.

IN 1943, THE LATE KING GEORGE APPROVED THE AWARD OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE MEDAL TO ME FOR MERITORIOUS SERVICE. I PROUDLY OWN FOUR OTHER MEDALS, 1939-'42 STAR, THE PACIFIC STAR, THE WAR MEDAL, THE AUSTRALIAN SERVICE MEDAL, ALSO THE BADGE FOR RETURNED ACTIVE SERVICE. ALTHOUGH ALMOST 40 YEARS AGO, I STILL HAVE PLEASANT MEMORIES OF THE GOOD AND THE BAD OLD DAYS WITH FOND MEMORIES OF THE AMERICAN FRIENDS.

IN 1947, MY HUSBAND TOOK ILL AND NEEDED MEDICAL ATTENTION. THE COMPANY CHARTERED A PLANE. WE CAME SOUTH. HE WAS ADMITTED TO HOSPITAL WHERE HE LASTED ONLY TWO WEEKS WITH LEUKEMIA. I RETURNED TO VANIKORO TO SETTLE UP AFFAIRS. KEN WAS ALREADY MARRIED, DON WAS 18, NOW MARRIED WITH 2 SONS. THE CARY TIMBER CO. MADE ME A GENEROUS RETIRING ALLOWANCE. I BOUGHT THIS HOME 33 YEARS AGO, LIVE ALONE WHERE I HOPE TO REMAIN WHILE ENJOYING GOOD HEALTH AND ACTIVE, AND BLESSED WITH GOOD FAMILY AND MANY FRIENDS.

I HAVE EXPERIENCED HURRICANES AND EARTHQUAKES, WHICH WERE FRIGHTENING AND SCARY. MALARIA, MANY TIMES AND BLACKWATER FEVER WHICH USUALLY PROVES FATAL. I COUNT MY BLESSINGS. I WILL BE 90 YEARS OLD THE SAME DAY AS THE BRITISH ROYAL WEDDING. AGE IS A MATTER OF MIND AND IF YOU DON'T MIND, IT DOESN'T MATTER. I WISH YOU ALL THE BEST IN YOUR EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH A LASTING MEMORY TO ADMIRAL NIMITZ ACHIEVEMENTS DURING WORLD WAR II.

GOOD LUCK FOR THE ADMIRAL MEMORIAL CENTER. REGARDS FROM RUBY JONES.

I HOPE THIS TAPE MEETS WITH YOUR APPROVAL. PARDON MY DELAY. THIS HAS BEEN MY FIRST EXPERIENCE TALKING TO A MACHINE. I HAVE BEEN AS NERVOUS AS A CAT AND IT SHOWS. GOODBYE FOR NOW.

END OF TAPE.

TRANSCRIBED BY FOREST J. REES
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