

COPY

Notes of discussion with His Honour Mr. J.C. Barley, Resident Commissioner, Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, at Suva on 22nd February, 1937.

Present:-

His Excellency the High Commissioner.

His Honour Mr. J.C. Barley.

Secretary, Western Pacific High Commission.

Phoenix Islands.

The question of the congestion of the native population in some of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands was discussed, also the possibilities of relieving the position by settlement in the Phoenix Islands. The question of British title to the group was referred to, and His Excellency considered that the group should be included in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony.

2. His Excellency requested Mr. Barley to report on his recent visit to the Group and on the suitability of the islands for settlement, and to work out a scheme. The details of the lines on which settlement could be effected were briefly discussed - the question of planting; maintenance of the settlers until food crops are available; supplies water supply; maintenance of communications; visits of settlers to their home islands; etc.

3. His Excellency suggested that the "Nimanoa," after her coming overhaul in Fiji, should make a visit to the Phoenix Islands with an Administrative

trative Officer, a Medical Officer, and a party of natives.

4. The matter was referred to of the title of Messrs. Burns, Philp (South Sea) Company, Limited, under their Occupation Licence and the possibility of taking over their interests. They have not worked the two planted islands of Sydney and Hull since 1932, owing to the low price of copra, and a year or so ago they expressed their willingness to come to an arrangement with the Government to allow natives from the Gilbert and Ellice Islands to settle and work the copra plantations on a half-share basis. They are, however, shortly resuming operations in Sydney and Hull Islands, and will probably not now want to make any such arrangement, which would perhaps not be acceptable in any case. Occupation Licence to be looked up and terms examined, e.g. whether any clause relative to continuous working.

5. Mr. Barley will see Mr. J. Mitchell, of Messrs. Burns, Philp and Company, Limited, while passing through Sydney, discuss with him, and report.

6. Mr. Barley referred to the plague of rats which he had observed in the Phoenix Islands, and the damage done by rats in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands and methods of combating the pest.

7. Mr. Barley referred to possible methods of procedure in obtaining volunteers for migration to the Phoenix Islands, and raised the question of what apportionment of land could be promised, and under what title. His Excellency requested Mr. Barley to discuss on his return to the Colony and study the question in all its bearings.

8. Mr. Barley stated that from his observations during his visit he considered Canton Island quite impossible for settlement owing to the fact that it is merely a stony waste with neither soil nor sand. The most promising Island he had visited is Gardner Island, with Hull Island next, and then Sydney Island. He will submit a report.

No. 42/3.

TELEGRAM

FROM ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER, BERU, (MR. ARMSTRONG),
TO RESIDENT COMMISSIONER, OCEAN ISLAND,

14th January, 1937. Recd. 9.35 a.m. 15th.

14th January - No. 3, My telegram No. 1, About half population wish to leave Beru. Natives unanimously request to remain under authority of Resident Commissioner for Gilbert and Ellice Islands and establishment of Native Government with District Officer. Unanimously decided land of those leaving Beru be handed over to their utu - if through their own efforts they return to Beru future date they will be regarded as visitors only - and on arrival at destination distribution of land to take place n te aro ni katangaina.

DISTRICT.

Office of the High Commissioner
For the Western Pacific,

Suva, Fiji,

26th November, 1936.

Gilbert & Ellice.

Secret.

Sir,

With reference to my confidential despatch of today's date, relative to the question of settlement of surplus Gilbertese and Ellice population in the Phoenix Islands, I have the honour to forward, for your information, a copy of the marginally noted telegraphic correspondence with the Secretary of State.

2. In addition to the important consideration of the provision of an outlet for surplus native population, the effective occupation of the Phoenix Islands may become a matter of urgency to ensure their retention as British possessions.

A theory appears to have developed in certain schools the authority for which I am unaware, that occupation is necessary to give a recognized title to such territory.

This principle is illustrated by the recent action of the United States Government in annexing Jarvis, Baker, and Howland Islands, but in the case of those islands the United States perhaps had, apart from the question of occupation, some basis for their action in alleged earlier discovery and temporary occupation many years ago by American citizens.

3. With the development of air transport and the consequent

His Honour

The Resident Commissioner,

Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony.

To S.of S.- 29.7.36.
Fr. S.of S.-21.8.36.

- 2 -

consequent increasing interest in Pacific air routes, from both commercial and defence points of view, the position of the Phoenix Islands renders their retention a matter of considerable importance, and it is necessary that preparations for action should be made as soon as possible to secure British interests in the group.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

(Signed) Juxon. Barton

Acting High Commissioner.

TELEGRAM.

From Acting High Commissioner.

To Secretary of State.

Unnumbered.

29th July, 1936.

Secret. Your despatch of 19th May,

Secret,

... ..

Resident Commissioner, Gilbert, reports that while he has not had opportunity to investigate problem of over-population of Colony he understands that at least 500 natives of Beru and Arorae would welcome opportunity to migrate provided traditional land holding methods were preserved. It appears that Resident Commissioner discussed possibility of transporting excess population to Sydney and Hull Islands leased by Burns Philp and extensively planted with coconuts in full bearing. Firm wrote to Resident Commissioner in January saying they proposed early operations in Sydney and Hull with Tokelau (New Zealand islands) labourers.

5. I consider that over-population in Gilbert and Ellice Islands exists and I propose, with your concurrence, on both administrative and strategic grounds, to instruct Resident Commissioner to make forthwith full report and recommendations with a view to settlement as well as employment of natives.

Acting High Commissioner.

TELEGRAM

From Secretary of State.

To Acting High Commissioner.

No. 133.

21st August, 1936.

Secret. Your telegram of 29th July,
secret and unnumbered.

I am not clear what type of settlement
scheme is in contemplation and I would welcome
fuller explanation by despatch together with estimate
of cost of scheme and indication of how it is to be
financed.

I would also wish to be informed which
particular island is in view for experiment, whether
you are already satisfied as to its suitability, and
whether you advise action be taken to bring island
within boundaries Of Gilbert and Ellice Islands
Colony.

Secretary of State.

DUPLICATE

OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC,
SUVA, FIJI,

28th November, 1936.

Gilbert & Ellice.
Confidential.

Sir,

With reference to my confidential telegram No. 145 of the 23rd July, I have the honour to state that an early opportunity should be taken of investigating the question of over-population in the islands of the Gilbert and Ellice groups and of providing an outlet for the surplus people.

2. The islands of the Phoenix Group appear to offer a suitable home for these people. As you are no doubt aware there are eight islands in the group, Canton, Hull, Gardner, Sydney, Phoenix, Birnie, McKean, and Enderbury. The six islands first named are held under Licence of Occupation by Messrs. Burns, Philp (South Sea) Company, Limited, but only two (Hull and Sydney) have been planted, and that only partly, with coconuts. Because of the low market price of copra in recent years those islands have not been occupied or worked by the lessees since the middle of 1932, but it is understood that it is the Company's intention to

resume

His Honour

The Resident Commissioner,

Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony.

resume operations in the near future.

29. 8. 36.
3. I enclose a copy of a report on the various islands furnished, at my request, by Captain Bevir of H.M.S. "Leith" which visited the group in August.

4. The Phoenix Islands appear to be generally similar to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, and, in view of the successful results obtained from coconut planting in Sydney and Hull Islands, there appears to be no reason why they should not be successfully settled by Gilbertese or by Ellice Islanders.

5. Some initial outlay would be necessary for the transport of natives, seed coconuts, building and other materials, the provision of water supplies, and for maintenance of caretakers for some years pending the maturing of the coconuts and food gardens. Some preliminary investigation of health conditions, rainfall, and water supplies would be necessary - see paragraph 15 of my confidential despatch to the Secretary of State of the 5th August.

6. If the position with regard to over-population in the Southern Gilbert Islands has been correctly represented to me by Mr. Maude, the question of providing a suitable outlet for the surplus population is one of importance, and early action on the part of the Administration is
urgently

- 3.-

urgently required.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

(Signed) Juxon Barton,

Acting High Commissioner.

PHOENIX ISLANDS.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION.

CANTON, HULL & MCKEAN ISLANDS.

Landing of Personnel from H.M.S. "Leith."

Pacific Islands Pilot, Vol. II.

Admiralty Charts, Nos. 184, 1830.

ENDERBURY, PHOENIX & BIRNIE ISLANDS.

Inspection from seaward by H.M.S. "Leith"

Pacific Islands Pilot, Vol. II.

Admiralty Charts, Nos. 184, 1830.

SYDNEY AND GARDNER ISLANDS.

Pacific Islands Pilot, Vol. II.

Charts Nos. 184, 1830.

2. Canton and Hull Islands are atolls. They have extensive lagoons. Hull and Sydney Islands have vegetation. With the exception of Hull and Sydney the islands on the Phoenix groups are deserts. They provide practically no shelter from wind and weather. None were inhabited in 1936.

3. Throughout the group the equatorial current sets westerly at from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 knots. The prevailing wind is easterly and there is driftwood on the eastern shores. The fringing reefs are nowhere extensive and the sea breaks close to the shore. With the exception of Canton and Sydney islands there is no anchorage in the Phoenix group.

4. Except at Canton, landing by boat is difficult in any swell. Coral, which is covered at high water, ~~just~~ juts out into the sea and falls away steeply to great depths. It is full of deep clefts which make wading difficult and dangerous, and a boat unless handled with considerable skill is liable to damage when landing. It seems probable that coconuts would thrive on these islands, but loading copra or landing stores, would, as at so many other coral islands, be an awkward process.

5. Innumerable sea birds nest on the islands and are very tame.

CANTON ISLAND.

6. Canton island consists of a coral atoll enclosing a spacious lagoon. Its greatest length is between N.W. & S.E. and the maximum breadth of land about 400 yards. It is of uniform height (about 8 feet above sea level on the western side and about 30 feet on the eastern) and is visible a correspondingly short distance away.

7. The soil is chiefly stony, but with sufficient earth to support a growth of rank grass, low scrub (1 ft. high), some bushes widely separated and a very few coconut trees. It seems that some more of the latter could be planted with profit in view of the fact that landing at this island is easy. There^{are}/also, however, large areas of brittle dry coral stones that would support no vegetation.

8. The plan of Canton Island on Chart No. 184 appears to be from an accurate survey. The lagoon is extensive but studded with reefs and coral pinnacles. There are no islets in the lagoon. Access to the lagoon is available for small craft only and is through a channel on the west side. This is the only inflow and outflow for the tide, and the current runs up to 6 knots. Landing is easy anywhere inside the lagoon. The shores are sloping and sandy. There are many sharks inside and outside the lagoon.

9. There is little left of the wreck marked on the chart, except a hand winch, a steel mast and a tank which are scattered on the land in the vicinity. Anchorage can be found near the boat passage. Under the prevailing easterly winds a ship will lie comfortably. Slack water in the channel occurs about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours after time of High and Low water. There is practically no stand.

10. There is a clump of about half a dozen cocoanut trees
near

near the boat passage and about three others over the whole length of the atoll.

HULL ISLAND.

11. This is also an atoll, rectangular in shape with an apparently deep lagoon in the centre.

12. The south-west corner has been extensively planted with coconuts and there is a small settlement for the use of the working parties that occasionally visit it for copra. A hospital with several medical stores was seen and also a hut containing lanterns, nails, rope, etc., and a supply of useful tools. At the settlement the atoll is $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile wide. There are some pigs and chickens living wild, and one fresh water tank.

13. The area which has not been planted with coconuts, is covered with bushes 7 to 10 feet high. Among these, about $\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the settlement along the N.W. coast is the nesting place of the Boatswain Bird.

14. There is no boat passage into the lagoon (except as under) and working boats from seaward would encounter the difficulty mentioned in paragraph 4 above, though at the settlement during the prevailing easterly winds there is comparative shelter from swell and wind and conditions are probably easier than at the smaller islands. There are numerous shallow inflows and outflows from the lagoon along the N.W. coast and it is possible that some of these may be workable for small boats at high tide.

ENDERBURY, PHOENIX, MCKEAN AND BIRNIE

ISLANDS.

15. These have had guano deposits and are contoured like a saucer. The western side is about 15 feet high and the eastern or weather side about 10 feet high. In the centre there is, or has been, in most cases, a brackish lagoon or swampy ground. There is no access to these swamps from the

sea. The only vegetation is rank grass and in some cases bushes, though these are scarce. For this reason the islands are hard to see at any time and dangerous to approach at night.

ENDERBURY.

16. There are three thin clumps of cocoanut trees in different parts of the island and a few bushes. Many of the trees in the southern group are stripped of leaves.

17. The size and shape of the islands as given on Chart No. 184 is correct. The lagoon consists of a few pools of water only. There is the remains of a wreck on the S.E. corner. There is no fresh water.

PHOENIX ISLAND.

18. A pile of stones is all that could be seen of the hut marked on Chart No. 184. The tramway line, formerly used for guano, was not observed.

19. The island is reported to be overrun with rabbits. The lagoon is nearly dry and there is no fresh water.

BIRNIE ISLAND.

20. This is the smallest of the group and has no sign of a lagoon. There is a stone beacon on the east side of the island, not west side as charted. The reef stretches about 300 yards off the north and south points. There is the remains of a wreck off the south point.

MCKEAN ISLAND.

21. This island has a small swampy lagoon. It is pear shaped with the maximum breadth at the south end. The length and breadth are incorrectly charted. These were found to be about 1700 yards and 900 yards, i.e. about half the size shown on the chart.

APPENDIX.

APPENDIX.

Rough dimensions, in sea miles, of islands
visited. (In sea miles of 2000 yards)

Canton	$8\frac{1}{4}$ X 4 (with lagoon)
Hull	$3\frac{1}{2}$ X 2 " "
Birnie	$\frac{3}{4}$ X $\frac{1}{4}$
Enderbury	3 X 1
McKean	$\frac{1}{2}$ X $\frac{1}{2}$
Phoenix	$\frac{3}{4}$ X $\frac{1}{2}$.

(Signed) Oliver Bevir,
Captain.

H.M.S. "Leith" at Suva.

29th August, 1936.

No. 685/--

CYPHER TELEGRAM

FROM THE RESIDENT COMMISSIONER OCEAN ISLAND (MR. BARLEY)
TO THE ACTING HIGH COMMISSIONER SUVA FIJI

27th July, 1936.

From Resident. Unnumbered, Secret, July 26th,
Your telegram July 23rd.

Regret that I have not had opportunity since arrival in Colony of thoroughly investigating question of overpopulation of Southern Gilbert and Northern Ellice Islands, which represents intricate problem demanding close study and deliberation. At same time I am given to understand that at least 500 natives of Beru and Arorae alone would welcome opportunity of migration to Phoenix Islands provided that they were allotted land in freehold in accordance with their traditional system of tenure. I am also convinced that success of any scheme of emigration would depend upon (a) inclusion of Phoenix Group within jurisdiction of Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony Government and (b) detailing of officer with specialised knowlegde to negotiate with natives and carry scheme into effect. Maude is only officer I can suggest.

While in Sydney recently I discussed with General Manager, Burns, Philp, possibility of transporting excess population to islands in Phoenix owned by his Company, particularly to Sydney and Hull which are extensively planted with trees in full bearing. He appeared to be impressed by the idea both as solution of overpopulation difficulty and as act of strategic foresight and promised to give matter his early attention. Letter received in January stating that in view of purchase of Fanning and Washington Islands they were
considering

considering re-opening at an early date Sydney and Hull with Tokelau labourers. I have no further information as to whether any action has been taken in the matter. Shall I make further enquiries as to present position from General Manager?

No. 623/--

CYPHER TELEGRAM

FROM THE ACTING HIGH COMMISSIONER SUVA FIJI

TO THE RESIDENT COMMISSIONER OCEAN ISLAND (MR. BARLEY)

24th July, 1936, Rec'd 11030 24th

July 23rd, Unnumbered, Secret - Reference my confidential letter June 20th and my confidential telegram 145 of July 23rd. Question of actual occupation of Phoenix Islands or of some of them has now been raised and may become urgently necessary for strategic reasons. Telegraphic reply to correspondence under reference urgently required.

HIGH COMMISSIONER.

No. 621/145

TELEGRAM.

FROM ACTING HIGH COMMISSIONER, SUVA, FIJI,
TO RESIDENT CR., OCEAN ID. (MR. BARLEY)

23rd July, 1936. Recd. 10.35 a.m.
23rd.

23rd July - No. 145, Confidential, My despatch 20th June,
Over population, Please telegraph brief outline of any
action you propose.

HIGH CR.

Government House,
Suva, Fiji.

20th June, 1936.

Confidential.

Dear Barley,

I have been reading the papers on the recruitment of natives of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony for work in Western Samoa - see Macpherson's report of the 20th April, 1932, in particular.

I have also been talking to Maude who has told me that you had in mind thinking out a scheme to relieve the congestion by migrating the natives to the Phoenix Group. He tells me that the Gilbertese have been forced by the stress of life on the islands to become persistent abortionists.

I have an idea that the Phoenix Group is likely to become an important link in Pacific aviation and perhaps in^a British aviation girdle round the world. Could let me know whether you have been able to consider the emigration question further.

With kind regards

(Signed). Juxon Barton.

J. C. Barley, Esquire.