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Q.G.G. *Queensland Government Gazette*
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R.A.N.I. *Regerings-Almanak (after 1883, Regeeringsalmanak) voor
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S.M.H. *Sydney Morning Herald*
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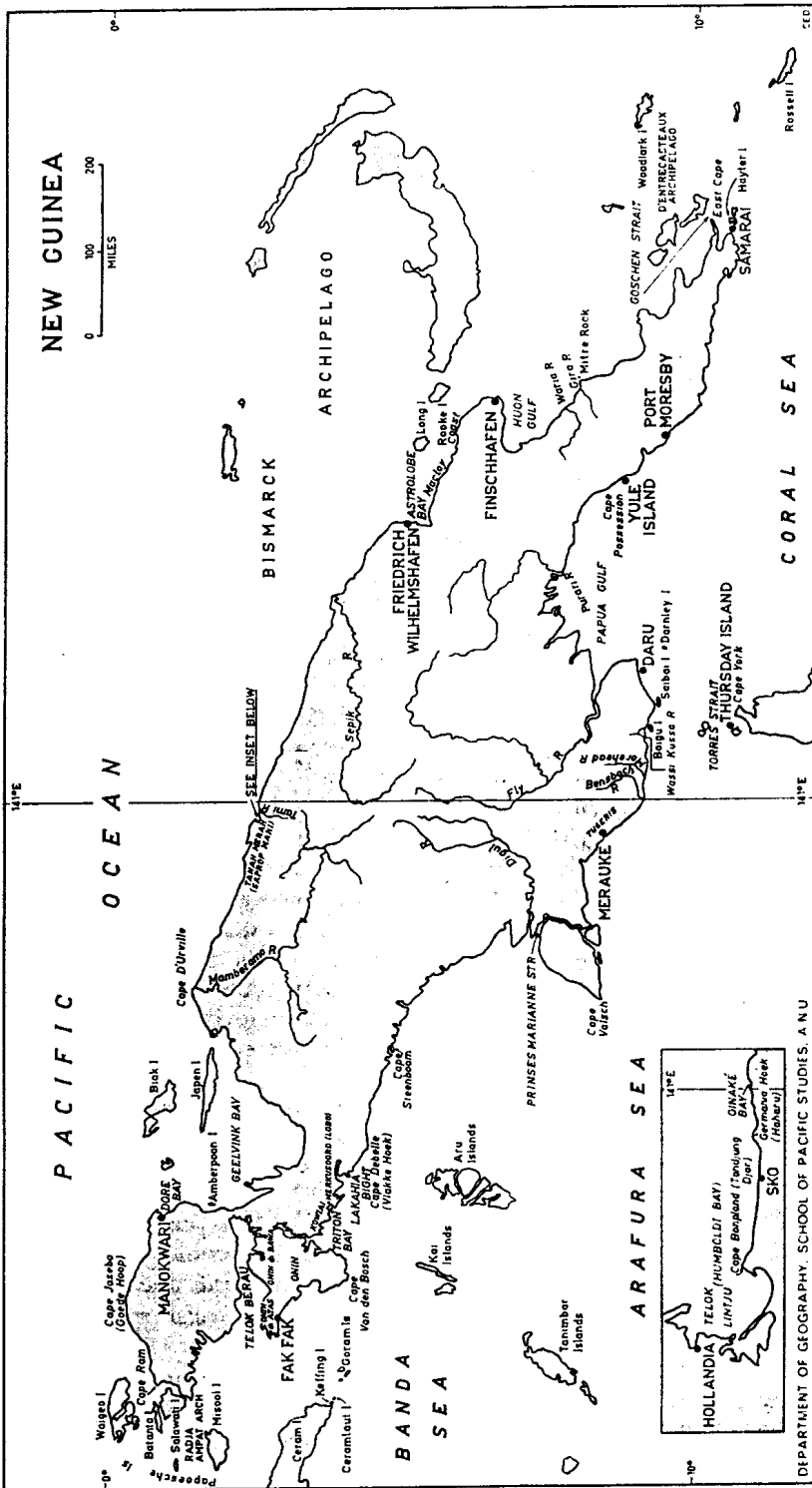
Introduction

Primitive inhabitants, immense swamps, and a deadly climate combined to provide a protective wall around New Guinea which long thwarted intervention and even exploration. Its location in a backwater at the far end of both the Indian and Pacific Oceans meant that such early contacts as were established, mainly by the corsairs and traders of the various islands in the Moluccas, were restricted to small and isolated pockets along the fringe of western New Guinea.

European explorers sometimes sailed along New Guinea's coasts but their occasional acts of annexation were not taken up by their respective governments. Of the European powers, only the Dutch maintained a long, albeit haphazard, interest because of their monopoly of the spice trade in the neighbouring Moluccas. They were satisfied, however, to view New Guinea as a convenient buffer against foreign interests and to recognize the supposed claims of their protectorate of Tidore to some of the coastal islands off the western tip.

British activity off the northern shore of Australia spurred the Dutch into an expedition in 1828. A formal act of annexation claimed for the Dutch Crown the territory from the 141st meridian of East Longitude to the Cape of Good Hope in the north-west. This was followed in 1848 by another (overlapping) claim: a secret decree extended Tidore's rule to all territory between the 141st meridian in the south and Cape Bonpland, east of Humboldt Bay, in the north. Although this decree can be regarded at most to have staked out a provisional claim, the territorial limits of Dutch possession which were eventually accepted were generally identical with this definition.

Australian anxiety over possible European expansion in the south-west Pacific led to annexation of the islands off Cape York Peninsula by Queensland in 1872 and of all the Torres Strait islands in 1879, an abortive attempt to annex New Guinea in 1883, and the assumption of a British Protectorate over the southern shores of New Guinea in 1884. Tripartition of the island was completed with the German flag-raising ceremonies in the Bismarck Archipelago and the north coast of New Guinea in October-December 1884 and the Anglo-German agreements of 1885-6. The colony of British New Guinea became the (Australian) Territory of Papua in 1906 and a mandate over the former German New Guinea was conferred upon His Britannic Majesty for and on behalf of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1920.



1 New Guinea

Isolated and contented behind their vast continental land mass and New Guinea 'buffer', Australians displayed little interest in the borders of their northern possessions—or, for that matter, in the possessions themselves. Inaccurate descriptions of the western boundary are found in several publications, including official ones, which gloss over or blandly ignore the redefinition of the Anglo-Dutch boundary made in the Convention of 1895.¹ Not that the 'official instruments' themselves which define this boundary are free of serious ambiguities. Furthermore, astronomical border observations taken at various times provided surprises. Of special interest is the astronomical position of the Bensbach River, since the meridian which goes through the middle of the mouth of this stream forms the boundary for over 150 miles until its intersection with the Fly River. By an accident of human geography, however, any discrepancy in the location of the border in this area is of little consequence.

To Australians looking north, Queensland's boundary may not seem unusual; to Papuans looking south, however, it will soon be obvious that the boundary lies (as Sir William MacGregor once put it) 'within less than a bowshot' of the Papuan shore. Within it are not only the off-shore islands of Cape York Peninsula but practically all islands of Torres Strait. Even mangrove-fringed Saibai, within two miles of the Papuan shore, and members of the Talbot group at the mouth of the Wassi Kussa River, within a few hundred yards of Papua, fall under Queensland jurisdiction. It is almost impossible to sail from Daru, just south of the Fly estuary, to the western border of Papua without passing through Queensland waters. Proposals for border revision made in the 1880s and 1890s were stranded in sight of the harbour.

Queensland's territorial jurisdiction did not extend to the waters outside the three-mile limit of its Torres Strait possessions—where most of the valuable sedentary fisheries are found. However, the Australian Continental Shelf Proclamations of 1953 and the Pearl Fisheries Regulations of the same year placed the resources of the whole region within the Queensland maritime boundary line in the Torres Strait under Australian jurisdiction. The same legislation does grant Papua (and the Trust Territory of New Guinea) a sweeping expanse of 'proclaimed waters' in which the search for pearl-shell and other sea treasures falls under their jurisdiction, but most of these waters form part of the Coral Sea, Solomon Sea, and Pacific Ocean with depths ranging between 1500 and 2500 fathoms—prohibitive for exploration and exploitation.

The boundary between Papua and the Trust Territory of New Guinea is a heritage of the Anglo-German past. Considering that the diplomats were mainly concerned with arriving at a fair division and possessed no knowledge of the New Guinea interior, the geometrical boundary lines which they carved through the heart of New Guinea served their purpose remarkably well. Any unsatisfactory aspects have been obscured rather effectively by the fortuitous elimination of the

Germans caused by the post-World War I transfer of German New Guinea to Australia—which has exercised jurisdiction first as a Mandatory Power and then as Administering Authority of the Trust Territory—and by the formation of the administrative union of the two territories in 1949.

Maps can highlight boundary peculiarities and at the same time may initiate misconceptions. The wording of the Queensland Coast Islands Act and the Papua and New Guinea Act stimulated 'cartographical chauvinism', and a solid boundary line was drawn around Papua and New Guinea through thousands of miles of the high seas. This has created the false impression that the Commonwealth government considered these waters part of an 'Australian lake' and subscribed to the same 'archipelago theory' as some of its Asian neighbours.² It led to such official statements as 'The Trust Territory of New Guinea extends from the equator to eight degrees south latitude', while the closest group of rather forlorn atolls under Australian jurisdiction is approximately fifty miles south of the equator.³

This bird's eye view of New Guinea's boundaries exemplifies absentee boundary-making. Partition, however, has had no disastrous consequences for the indigenous inhabitants. In the case of the former Anglo-German boundary the feverish search for gold by intrepid prospectors only led to the discovery of large numbers of people in the Highlands in the early 1930s—well after the elimination of German rule. As for the Irian boundary, population was sparse in the border zone and ignorance of the location of the border forced officials to take a rather nonchalant view of the imaginary line even in those areas where some kind of administrative control had been established. Although the situation had begun to alter by 1963, it was still possible to visit regions where people engaged in shifting cultivation moved across the border in complete ignorance of its existence. This is not to say, however, that New Guinea's boundaries have had no effect. Whenever a particular administration or missionary organization established itself more or less effectively in a frontier region it naturally placed its stamp on the type of village organization, schooling, brand of Christianity, and lingua franca. The boundary, therefore, served as an important cultural barrier. Police Motu became the lingua franca in Papua, *Moluks Maleis* (a Moluccan version of bazaar Malay) in western New Guinea, and various brands of Neo-Melanesian (Pidgin) in the former German New Guinea. A type of Neo-Melanesian, different from that spoken in neighbouring Bougainville, developed in Shortland Island just across the international boundary, and Pidgin English was employed in the Torres Strait islands.

There were other differences as well. With the sale of liquor to natives prohibited in Papua-New Guinea until late 1962, illicit traffic in this commodity flowed into the Australian part from the Torres Strait islands and, in the post-World War II period, from Hollandia. The

plume trade flourished in the Dutch part of New Guinea until the mid-1920s when the Australian example of prohibiting the hunting of birds of paradise was followed. Meanwhile, however, Malay hunters had penetrated the interior and the Sepik District's lonely Vanimo Patrol Post owed its establishment to an attempt to halt the smuggling of birds to Hollandia. Both the erstwhile activities of the Malay hunters and the subsequent attraction of Hollandia, Merauke, and even Mindiptana, as centres of 'civilization' and employment contributed towards the widening of the horizons of the border peoples in the Australian part—and to the spread of bazaar Malay across the boundary into the Sepik and Moejoe-Ninggerum border areas. Similarly, the pearl-shelling industry in the Torres Strait attracted the coastal Papuans of the Western District, notably the Kiwai islanders of the Fly River estuary. Easier access from the west coupled with neglect in the east also led to the peaceful physical penetration of Dutch authority and missionary activity across the Irian boundary. Although the Australian Administration had absorbed these enclaves administratively by the time the Dutch were forced to depart from western New Guinea, the practical results of Dutch activity were not easily undone.

One of the themes running through the following chapters is that New Guinea's boundaries have been thought of too little in the past. But criticism on this count naturally has to be tempered in light of the almost insurmountable obstacles which climate, disease, inhospitable terrain, and the unexplored nature of the country imposed. Added to this is the fact that Australia lost interest in New Guinea the moment she acquired it, that west New Guinea to the Dutch was the last waggon on the train of their vast colonial empire, and that a vast *terra incognita* served as a buffer between Papua and Kaiser Wilhelmsland. The statement of the American geographer Nicholas J. Spykman that boundaries are not only lines of demarcation but also points of contact between 'territorial power structures' is thereby rendered largely inoperative—at least until 1962.⁴