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## Alone on Guadal-canal: A Coastwatcher's Story

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and beyond, between 1939 and 1945. No serious scholar can afford to ignore it.

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University of Calgary

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Clemens, Martin. *Alone on Guadal-canal: A Coastwatcher's Story*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1998. 333pp. \$32.95

In February 1942, in the wake of Japan's first bombing raids on Tulagi, Martin Clemens received his first wartime directive. A young British colonial administrator in the Solomon Islands Protectorate, Clemens was dispatched to Guadalcanal as district officer with additional instructions "to act as Intelligence Officer." Implicit in his charter was the defense of his territory. With the Japanese onslaught just days away and no military forces with which to oppose them, "defense" was problematic. Still, Guadalcanal was defended, and the forward momentum of the Japanese Empire was forever broken. This book is the author's story of the remarkable efforts of all the men who, despite tremendous odds, turned the tide of war in the Pacific.

The book begins as the official diary of a colonial administrator, detailing day to day events and transactions of government. With the Japanese attack, however, the diary quickly becomes a chronicle of survival in an increasingly desperate

situation. Though not likely intended as such, it is also the story of how one man excelled in managing chaos in what we would today call unconventional and asymmetrical circumstances of exceptional stress and personal risk.

When Clemens arrived on Guadalcanal, the military situation was grim. To face the advancing Japanese he had only a handful of poorly armed native police and a small network of coastwatchers. Yet despite Japanese advances, he was able to build a well organized network of over seventy-five scouts, informers, and coastwatchers by the time the Marines landed in August. That network expanded to over four hundred by December.

Clemens's other duties did not go away with the preparations for battle. Throughout he had the added burden of responsibility for an increasingly nervous population of native islanders, planters, and missionaries. As described in his narrative, his immediate tasks included evacuating nonindigenous civilians, hiding colonial records and silver, feeding the population in the face of an embargo on food imports, expanding his intelligence network, and maintaining order, which included trying to solve a murder. He did all this while nursing a temperamental radio set, foraging for food, and dodging Japanese patrols while maintaining the loyalty and cooperation of an eclectic mix of pagans, Christians, Europeans, and ultimately U.S. Marines.

With the Marine landing, Clemens became a special staff officer in the First Marine Division intelligence section. His narrative of life with the Marines on the beachhead and in such historic engagements as the Tenaru River, Tasimboko, and Edson's Ridge, offers the fresh perspective of one whose previous exposure to Americans had been very circumscribed. He writes of short rations, shoestring defenses, "Washing Machine Charlie," the "Let George Do It" medal, and daily life in a headquarters continually bombed, shelled, and threatened with land attack. His wonder at the spirit of the Marines—and at a traditional Thanksgiving feast after months of short rations—is genuine and profound. Also, his personal commentary on such well known figures as Alexander Vandegrift, Merritt "Red Mike" Edson, Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller, and Sergeant Major Jacob Vouza adds to the flavor of the narrative. One particularly revealing comment concerned the Americans' infatuation with information. The comment was not made in a critical way, but it is interesting given today's emphasis on information operations.

The author's stated purpose is to recognize the considerable role of the islanders in the war, as well as the spirit of the Marines, who overcame tremendous adversity to make Guadalcanal free again. He meets both objectives. The book is filled with vignettes of native scouts engaging Japanese patrols,

lobbing smoke pots at enemy positions to mark targets for air strikes, and rescuing downed American pilots, all at great risk. This may be the least familiar chapter in an otherwise well known story, and it is probably the most important recent contribution to understanding the battle for Guadalcanal.

It is interesting to note that this book was first submitted for publication in the 1950s. After several attempts over the years it is only now in print. That a well told tale of high adventure by an author of unrivaled qualifications should await a publisher so long is a mystery. We have it now, however, and there is much to learn from it about the battle, the people, the spirit of making do, and winning when reason might say that winning is simply not possible.

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Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps

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Johnson, David E. *Fast Tanks and Heavy Bombers: Innovation in the U.S. Army, 1917–1945*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1998. 288pp. \$37.50

This well documented and convincingly argued book probes the extent to which various constituencies within the military will go to protect parochial service interests and promote narrow agendas. Looking at the Army in the interwar period, David Johnson, a senior analyst at RAND, speaks to