

## 5. Second World War

In late December 1941, Europeans began to be evacuated from Tulagi, other administrative centres, plantations, and mission stations. On 22 January 1942, Japanese aircraft bombed Gavutu, next to Tulagi. Fala, a member of the Solomon Islands Defence Force, took the first retaliatory shot at a Japanese plane. The last European civilians departed Tulagi on 8 February 1942.

Three days later, Resident Commissioner (now titled Military Governor) William Marchant moved his headquarters to Auki, Malaita and then to Furi'isango in the hills above. The Japanese took control. On 7 August, the American Marines Division landed on Guadalcanal at 'Red Beach' between Tenaru River and Tenavatu Creek. Their objective was to gain control of the nearby Japanese airfield (still under construction) and to expel the Japanese from the islands. By 10.00 pm 10,000 troops had arrived; Guadalcanal's population soon increased by two-thirds. Control of Tulagi as a seaplane and shipping base, and of Guadalcanal for its airfield, were crucial to turning back the Japanese advance further south into the Pacific and to Australia. At its peak in December 1943, the US had 124,000 service personnel stationed in Solomon Islands. The fight-back against the Japanese was slow and in the Western Solomons isolated Japanese units and smaller groups remained until the end of the war.

Solomon Islander men were encouraged to join the British Solomon Islands Defence Force, which had about 800 members, including most of the prewar constabulary. The Solomon Islands Labour Corps, proclaimed on 30 November 1942, initially had around 1,450 members: 1,100 based at Lungga and 350 at Tulagi. As the war progressed, numbers increased to around 3,700 in mid-1944. Solomon Islanders provided labour, helped the Coastwatchers (European ex-government officers and planters) and local Scouts who reported on Japanese activities. Their experiences were crucial for the development of the islands in the post-war years.



5.1. There are American and Japanese war memorials at Honiara, and in 2011, a memorial (left) was opened to the Solomon Scouts and Coastwatchers. (Clive Moore Collection)

5.2. Sir Jacob Vouza was a pre-war Sergeant-Major in the police, a war hero, a District Headman on Guadalcanal, President of the Guadalcanal Native Council and a member of the BSIP Advisory Council. His statue (right) is located outside the Police headquarters at Rove as part of the memorial to the Allied troops from Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Tonga, and Solomon Islands labourers and Scouts who fought alongside them during the war. (Daniel Evans Collection)



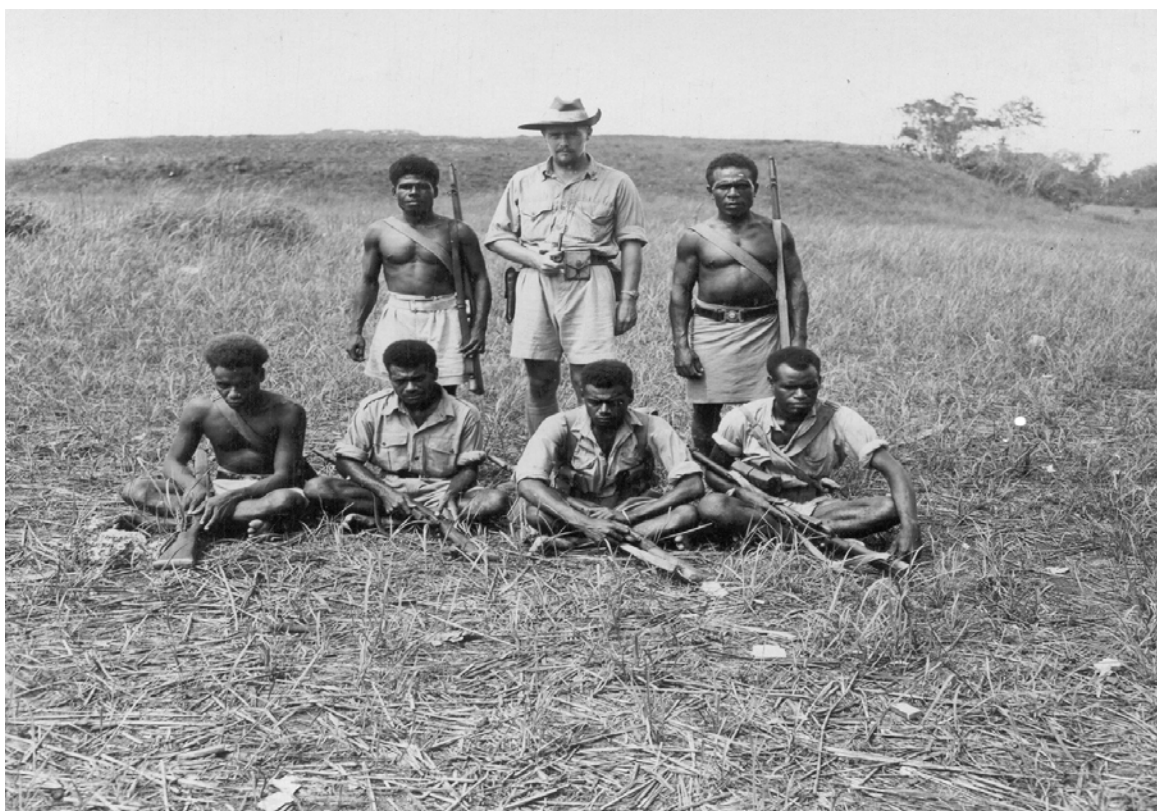
5.3. To Solomon Islanders, the scale of the American landing on Guadalcanal in 1942 was almost beyond comprehension. (US National Archives)



5.4. American supply base at the mouth of the Lungga River, on the edge of modern Honiara, 1940s. (Lt. Robert Porter, Signal Corps, in Peter Flahavin Collection)



5.5. Solomon Islands posed on an American truck on Guadalcanal, June 1942. (US National Archives)



5.6. Coastwatcher Martin Clemens and Scouts, October 1942. (US National Archives)





5.7. Solomon Islanders bartering local products and carved walking sticks with American Seabees (Naval Construction Batallion), off Gela, September 1943. (US National Archives)



5.8. There were several airfields built around Honiara. The main one was Henderson Field, photographed here in April 1943. It is now the site of Henderson International Airport. The frame of the original American control tower still stands nearby. (US National Archives)