

COMMUNICATIONS IN THE SOUTH SEAS

Introduction.

1. The region under survey extends from the Equator in the North to approximately 30° South latitude in the South, and from Dutch New Guinea in the West to the Marquesas and Tuamotu Islands in the East. This paper will be concerned with communications between the island groups of this area and the outside world, and between the island groups themselves, and, to a lesser extent, with intra-group and domestic communications.

2. A review will be made of communications in the South Seas as they existed in 1939, of the changes effected by the Pacific War, and of the present state of communications, with emphasis on the particular deficiencies and problems confronting the administering powers. Finally, an attempt will be made to demonstrate the interest of a South Seas Regional Commission in the efficient working of an adequate communications system, and to indicate those problems to whose solution the Commission might make an effective contribution.

Pre-War Communications in the South Seas.

3. By 1939, a wide variety of shipping services, both passenger and freight, linked the islands of the South Seas with the rest of the world and with each other. The 'thirties had seen the development of trans-Pacific air services, and civil airlines were becoming increasingly important, while radio communication was used extensively throughout the area. In general, pre-war communications in the South Seas were adequate for island needs.

Pre-War Shipping Services.

4. Prior to the outbreak of war in September, 1939, an extensive network of shipping routes traversed the South West Pacific area. Broadly, these may be classified as follows:

- (a) Between Australia and adjacent Island groups - Papua, New Guinea, British Solomon Islands, New Hebrides, New Caledonia;
- (b) From Eastern ports to Australia via the Islands;
- (c) From the Pacific Coast of North America to Australia via the Islands;
- (d) From European ports to the Islands;
- (e) Between New Zealand and the Islands;
- (f) Within individual island groups.

In these trades, British, American, Australian, Dutch, French, Norwegian, Swedish, German and Japanese shipping organisations were concerned.

5. The following survey deals with pre-war services according to the above classification:

(a) Between Australia and adjacent Island groups:-(i) Papua-New Guinea-Solomon Islands.

Burns Philp & Co., Ltd. operated services from Sydney to the Solomon Islands and New Guinea every six weeks with m.v. "Malaita", and from Sydney to Papua and New Guinea every three weeks with m.v. "Bulolo" and "Macdhui". The main ports served were Port Moresby, Samarai, Lae-Salamaua, Madang, Wewak, Aitape, Rabaul, Kavieng, Gizo and Faisi. In addition, calls were made as required at various plantation anchorages.

(ii) New Hebrides.

Burns Philp & Co., Ltd. operated a service from Sydney to Lord Howe Island, Norfolk Island and Vila, with calls at plantations as required, every six weeks with s.s. "Morinda".

H.C. Sleigh also carried logs periodically from Vanikoro in the Northern New Hebrides to Australia with their cargo vessels "James Cook" and "Matthew Flinders".

(iii) New Caledonia.

Messageries Maritimes operated a service from Sydney to New Caledonian ports every four to six weeks with s.s. "Pierre Loti".

Societe Miniere et Maritime Hagen operated one vessel - "Neo Hebridais" - on a monthly service from Sydney to New Caledonian ports and occasionally to Vila.

Societe le Nickel had approximately three sailings a month from New South Wales ports to New Caledonia, with supplies for the Smelters, principally coal and coke.

(iv) Fiji.

The Australian Colonial Sugar Refining Co., Ltd. operated two vessels between Sydney and Fiji which assisted with general merchandise.

(v) Vessels under (b), (c) and (d) above also occasionally carried goods from Australia to various islands where they were proceeding to load copra.

(vi) From about 1936 to 1939, several British and Australian Shipping Companies ran holiday tourist cruises from Australian ports to various islands, including New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, Papua, New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa, with passenger liners normally employed in the European or Australian trades.

(b) From Eastern ports to Australia via the Islands:-

(i) The Australian line, Burns Philp & Co., Ltd., operated a two-monthly service between Australia via New Guinea and Manila, Hongkong and Saigon.

(ii) The Dutch line, K.P.M., operated two services from the East to the Islands and Australia, viz:-

(1) Saigon-Singapore-Java-Port Moresby-Vila-Noumea-Auckland-Wellington-Sydney-Port Moresby and return.

(2) Saigon-Singapore-Java-Port Moresby-Samarai-Salamaua-Rabaul-Auckland-Wellington-Sydney-Port Moresby and return,

/ with ...

with monthly sailings alternating over the two routes, so that one trip was made every two months over each route.

- (iii) The French line Messageries Maritimes three times a year extended "Pierre Loti" from New Caledonia to Indo-China via Java.
  - (iv) The British Eastern & Australian Line vessels called at Rabaul each month on their service between Australian ports and Borneo, Philippine Islands, Hongkong, Shanghai and Japan.
  - (v) The German line N.D.L. operated the vessel "Friderun" between Hongkong and Manus, New Ireland, New Britain and the New Guinea mainland on approximately a six-weekly service.
  - (vi) Various Japanese vessels also called at individual Island ports whilst trading between Australia and the East, according to the inducement offering.
- (c) From the Pacific Coast of North America to Australia via the Islands.
- (i) The American Matson Line ran a monthly service from Australian ports to Auckland-Suva-Pago Pago-Honolulu-Los Angeles-San Francisco, with "Monterey" and "Mariposa".
  - (ii) The Canadian-Australasian Line ran a monthly service from Sydney-Auckland-Suva-Honolulu, Vancouver with "Aorangi" and "Niagara".
  - (iii) The Union Steamship Co. of New Zealand, Ltd. operated a cargo service approximately monthly between Australia and the Pacific Coast of North America via Fiji-Samoa-Tonga or Tahiti, according to the inducement offering for the vessel to call at one or more of these groups.
  - (iv) The British Line, W.R. Carpenter & Co., Ltd. in 1939 was just establishing a monthly service between Australia and the Pacific Coast via the Islands.
  - (v) The Swedish Line General Steamships Corporation vessels carried on a service at least once a month between Australia and the Pacific Coast, calling at the Islands according to inducement offering.
  - (vi) The Swedish-Australia Line vessels also occasionally loaded copra in the Islands for the Continent and took cargo from Australia to their Island ports of call.

/ (vii) ...

(vii) The Norwegian Pacific Islands Transport Line in 1939 had commenced a service with two vessels from Pacific Coast ports to various Island groups, with occasional extensions to Australia.

(d) From European ports to the Islands.

(i) The British Line, W.R. Carpenter & Co., Ltd., operated three vessels in a service from Europe via Australia to the Islands and these ships occasionally carried cargo from Australia to their Island ports of call.

(ii) The French Line Messageries Maritimes also operated a service approximately monthly from France via the French West Indies and Panama to Papeete, Noumea and return.

(e) Between New Zealand and the Islands.

(i) The Union Steamship Co. of New Zealand, Ltd. operated a service every four weeks from Auckland to Tonga, Samoa and Fiji and every four weeks from Auckland to the Cook Islands group with s.s. "Matua".

(ii) The New Zealand Government vessel "Maui Pomare" also operated a service approximately monthly between New Zealand and the Cook Islands.

(f) Within Individual Island Groups.

Full information is not available regarding local services, but it can be stated that vessels were regularly employed in the following groups:-

(i) Papuan coast, between Daru-Port Moresby-Samarai and from Samarai to the Morobe coast.

(ii) New Guinea from Rabaul to various plantations in New Britain, New Ireland, Admiralty Islands, Bougainville and neighbouring groups.

(iii) New Caledonia/New Hebrides - from Noumea to various ports on the New Caledonian coast, Loyalty Islands, and the New Hebrides.

(iv) Fiji Group - from Suva to the other islands of the Fiji Group and to the Gilbert & Ellice Islands.

6. The majority of these services were Government-subsidized, either directly or as mail-carriers. Governments, moreover, often maintained their own vessels for special purposes: the New Zealand Government employed a special vessel for the fruit trade with its Island dependencies, while cargo ships owned by the British Phosphate Commission carried phosphates from Nauru to Australia and New Zealand.

7. In all areas, there were, of course, numerous vessels of small tonnage privately owned, which, in addition to carrying cargo to the owner's stores and from his plantations, also carried cargo for other persons as and when required.

#### Land Communications.

8. Motor roads were generally confined to the vicinity of ports and plantations on islands on which motor vehicles could be landed; elsewhere, island travel was by native foot trail.

#### Air Services.

9. The first regular use of aircraft in the South Seas dates from the opening of the gold-mining areas in the interior of the New Guinea mandate. The first service between the goldfields and the coastal ports was opened by Guinea Airways in 1928, and by 1940 there were several competing companies. A regular service between Sydney and New Guinea via Port Moresby was established in 1938. In 1940, Pan American Airways began a regular clipper service between Honolulu and Auckland via Canton  
/ Island ...

Island, Suva and Noumea. A regular service between Sydney and Auckland had been in operation since 1939. The administrations in Papua and the Mandated Territory, in Dutch New Guinea and in Tahiti employed aircraft for local administrative and survey purposes. An attempt in 1931 to establish a local private airline in Fiji had been abandoned during the depression.

#### Radio Communication.

10. Radio communication was used extensively throughout the South Seas by island administrations, trading and mining companies, missions, settlers and explorers. 'Hardly an island of the Pacific, indeed, is now without an official telerradio which can maintain two-way communication with a mother station at the island capital.' \*

11. The Australian firm, Amalgamated Wireless, maintained major radio stations in New Guinea, Papua and Fiji, which were supplemented by government sub-stations. There were smaller government stations in Samoa, Tonga and other British Islands. The United States Navy operated a powerful station in Eastern Samoa. Close radio contact was maintained between French Indo-China and New Caledonia, while there were smaller stations in the New Hebrides and the French establishments.

#### War-Time Changes.

12. The immediate effects of the outbreak of the Pacific War included the discontinuance of most of the

---

\* Keesing : 'The South Seas in the Modern World' - p.16 (1940).

shipping services of 1939, the absolute suspension of civil air services, and the consequent isolation of many island groups from world markets.

13. Throughout the duration, however, regular shipping services were provided by Burns Philp (s.s. "Morinda") to the New Hebrides, and by the Union line (s.s. "Matua") to Tonga, while military and naval aircraft maintained contact with other areas not under enemy occupation.

14. War-time developments also brought important changes of long-term advantage to the South Pacific. With the use of air power on a large scale, a wide network of airfields and seaplane bases sprang into being. Road transport in the larger islands was revolutionized. As a result of a series of inter-theatre and inter-regional Conferences held between 1941 and 1946, important progress was made in co-operation and co-ordination of practices between the Governments and Administrations responsible for the provision of meteorological services in the South Pacific. The purpose of these Conferences was to establish uniform meteorological codes, procedures and practices in respect of principally aviation, meteorological organisation in the South Pacific area.

15. The most serious consequence of the war, however, and one which rather outweighed these developments, was the serious reduction in the volume of post-war shipping.

#### Post-War Communications in the South Seas.

16. The present state of communications in the South Seas is best apprehended against the background of island / requirements. ...

requirements. The destruction of civilian establishments and plantations on islands involved in military operations, the war-time isolation of other groups from sources of supply, and, in some cases, the mere resumption of normal administration will necessitate extensive rehabilitation measures involving, particularly in the case of New Guinea and the Solomons, the restoration of displaced natives, the return of the pre-war European inhabitants, and the movement of materials and supplies of all kinds.

17. In the absence, therefore, of inter-Government arrangements for rehabilitation and supply on a regional scale, the main flow of traffic must continue to pass between the main centres of administration for the respective areas and their dependencies, between dependencies and overseas markets and within the dependencies themselves. This movement will be complicated in the short period by the consideration that, until the transition period is passed, back-loading will be rarely available, so that some volume of one-way traffic will be inevitable.

18. With the exception of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, the requirements of the respective areas seem to be adequately, if not completely, met so far as the movement of essential personnel and consumable goods for the local populations is concerned. But, despite the rapid development of trans-Pacific and inter-island air services, and the satisfactory position in respect of meteorological services and radio communication, the volume of shipping appears inadequate for the requirements of rehabilitation.

/ 19. ...

## H.6

19. Such conclusions, however, must remain tentative until Government policies concerning rehabilitation, trade and shipping have been formulated and an accurate assessment of requirements made.

Post-War Shipping Services.

20. (a) Between Australia and adjacent Island groups.

(i) Papua-New Guinea.

At present, the Commonwealth maintains six-weekly services to Port Moresby, Samarai, Lae and Madang with "Montoro" under charter from Burns Philp & Co., Ltd., with an auxiliary service of the same frequency to Port Moresby and/or Samarai by "Muliama". Special vessels are periodically allocated for accumulations of passengers and cargo for the Territory, and for Army disposals.

It is the announced aim of the Commonwealth Government eventually to take over the full responsibility for the maintenance of shipping services between Australia and the Territory. These plans envisage in the meantime the operation under Commonwealth control of two additional vessels in the service - "Malaita" and "Bulolo" - when they again become available for civilian purposes, and it is thought that they will be adequate for some time to come to meet normal trade requirements of the area.

(ii) Solomon Islands.

At present there is no service from Australia to the Solomon Islands. Devastation in the Protectorate by war has been very great and much rehabilitation will be required before the coconut plantations, upon which the island economy is based, can recommence production. Many European owners are unable to secure the necessary transport to enable them to return. At present, overseas shipping communications to the Group are limited to the voyages between Suva and the Protectorate of such small ships as the Western Pacific High Commission can charter. These vessels are sufficient only for passenger accommodation and freightage of essential supplies for resident Administration and mission personnel. With the approaching exhaustion of supplies purchased from Allied Forces, they will be quite inadequate even

/ for ...

for this purpose. Negotiations are in train for the establishment of a monthly 'feeder' service from Rabaul to the Solomons by one of the small inter-island vessels operated by the Commonwealth, but it is doubtful whether this service would meet rehabilitation requirements.

(iii) New Hebrides.

s.s. "Morinda" has maintained six-weekly services from Sydney throughout the war, but will need replacement in the near future. Plans envisage a new vessel specially constructed for the trade which will combine the present New Hebrides service with an extension to the Solomon Islands Protectorate.

(iv) New Caledonia.

Messageries Maritimes have resumed the service from Sydney to New Caledonian ports with "Polynesian" approximately five to six-weekly.

Societe le Nickel vessels have maintained their services to the Smelters, and can assist only occasionally with other cargo.

"Neo Hebridais" maintains a regular service to Sydney and has apparently returned to the New Caledonia-New Hebrides service.

(v) At present, in view of the copra position, no vessels are proceeding from Australian ports to the South West Pacific Area for copra loading, so that no casual assistance to the Papua-New Guinea area is available from such tonnage.

(vi) Tourist cruises from Australia to the Islands cannot yet be resumed.

(b) From Eastern ports to Australia via the Islands.

(i) The Eastern & Australian Line has resumed its service between Australian ports, China and Japan, and these vessels are assisting with the movement of cargo from New Guinea ports to Australia when possible.

(ii) The position of the Dutch N.E.I. services is uncertain, but it is understood they desire when the time arrives to resume their pre-war trades.

(iii) The Messageries Maritimes will, no doubt, also re-establish the connection between New Caledonia and Indo-China at a later date.

/ (iv) ...

- (iv) German and Japanese incursions into the South West Pacific area need no longer be taken into consideration.
- (c) From the Pacific Coast of North America to Australia via the Islands.
  - (i) Matson Line services at present are on a provisional basis pending the rehabilitation of "Monterey" and "Mariposa".
  - (ii) Canadian-Australasian Line hopes to have "Aorangi" in service about the middle of next year and this vessel will presumably operate a two-monthly service in her post-war programme.
  - (iii) The Union Steamship Co. of New Zealand, Ltd. is again operating a trans-Pacific cargo service approximately monthly via the Islands.
  - (iv) W.R. Carpenter & Co., Ltd. are resuming their Trans-Pacific service and this will include calls at the Islands when inducement is offering.
  - (v) Swedish Trans-Pacific vessels controlled by General Steamships Corporation at present are not calling at island ports.
  - (vi) As previously stated, casual assistance from Swedish-Australia Line vessels is not available owing to lack of copra for export to Europe.
  - (vii) The Pacific Islands Transport Line has now resumed its service with one vessel running approximately three-monthly trips.
- (d) The prospects of re-opening direct services between Europe and the Islands appear to depend upon economic conditions and the relaxation of the present pressure upon shipping in other areas.
- (e) The services between New Zealand and Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and the Cook Islands are being maintained.
- (f) Within individual Island groups.
  - (i) The Commonwealth has assumed responsibility for the Papua-New Guinea coastal and inter-island shipping services and, briefly, has established the following routes:-

/ (a) ...

- (a) Papuan trunk-line service Daru-Port Moresby-Samarai calling at a number of intervening anchorages.
- (b) Port Moresby-Gulf of Papua.
- (c) Samarai to Morobe coast and outlying islands.
- (d) Madang to Northern New Guinea ports.
- (e) Madang to Manus, returning via New Britain.
- (f) Rabaul to New Britain, New Ireland and Bougainville,

whilst, as mentioned above, the opening of a service from Rabaul to the Solomon Islands Protectorate is anticipated early in the New Year.

- (ii) Shipping communications within the Gilbert & Ellice Islands Colony and between that Colony and Fiji appear to be fairly satisfactory, and may be improving rapidly.
- (iii) The Government of New Caledonia maintains regular coastal shipping services.

#### Land Communications.

21. The construction of many miles of new motor roads on these South Sea islands which were used as allied bases cannot materially ease the general communications problem.

#### Air Services.

22. As a result of the civil aviation agreements recently concluded between the United States of America and Australia and New Zealand, and between Canada and Australia, the foundations have been laid of a system of trans-Pacific air services.

23. The British Commonwealth Governments in the area (United Kingdom and Fiji, Australia and New Zealand) have formed a South Pacific Air Transport Council, the purpose  
/ of ...

of which is, broadly, to review air services and facilities in the South Pacific area and to make recommendations to member Governments in regard to the operation of trans-Pacific and regional services.

24. The Provisional Civil Aviation Organisation, through its South Pacific Regional Meeting, which all Governments in the area are invited to attend, will review existing facilities and ensure that approved international standards are observed.

(a) Regional Air Services.

(i) Australian Services.

Australia at present operates a thrice-weekly service from Sydney to Lae, via Port Moresby.

Qantas Empire Airways, with the approval of the Governors of Fiji and New Caledonia, are also operating an unscheduled flying-boat service Sydney-Suva via Brisbane and Noumea to an approximate frequency of two return trips per month.

(ii) New Zealand Services.

The New Zealand National Airways Corporation at present operates regular services with R.N.Z.A.F. aircraft as follows:-

New Zealand-Fiji direct (one return trip weekly).

Fiji-Tonga-Western Samoa-Cook Islands (to Samoa weekly, to Tonga and Cook Islands fortnightly).

Fiji-Norfolk Island-Noumea-New Zealand. (This weekly service calls at Noumea once every four weeks.)

R.N.Z.A.F. aircraft also maintain a local service in the Fijian Islands twice weekly.

Except for these services, however, and for the regular calls of trans-Pacific aircraft at Canton Island, there are no regular air services to any of the Western Pacific High Commission territories.

/ (b) ...

(b) Trans-Pacific Services.

Since June, 1946, Pan American Airways have been operating a weekly Skymaster service from New Zealand to California via Noumea, Fiji, Canton Island and Honolulu.

Under the Australia-United States Air Agreement Pan American Airways will shortly be operating a service to Sydney as well as Auckland with occasional calls at Noumea.

British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines, using Australian National Airways Skymasters, has been operating a fortnightly trans-Pacific service from Sydney to Vancouver via Fiji, Canton Island, Honolulu and San Francisco, since September, 1946.

Under the Australia-United States Air Agreement also, the British service will very shortly be enabled to put down and pick up passengers at San Francisco.

Meteorological Services.

25. A Committee of Meteorologists attached to the South Pacific Air Transport Council and representatives of British Commonwealth countries was established in 1946. The Committee has examined and prepared plans for the extension of Meteorological services adequate for the requirements of aviation in the South Pacific area.

26. Through the medium of the International Meteorological Organisation and the Provisional International Civil Aviation Organisation, it should be possible to effect co-operation and co-ordination of practices between all administrations in the South Pacific area.

27. Recent physical surveys have been conducted by meteorological representatives of the Australian and New Zealand Governments in the area west of 170° E. longitude and east of 170° E. longitude respectively. It is hoped that by the end of 1947 the whole of the South Pacific area between Australia and Eastern Samoa will be covered by a fully co-ordinated Meteorological service.

/ Radio ...

Radio Communications.

28. Australia maintains radio-telegraph and radio-telephone communication with Papua, New Guinea and Nauru, and radio-telegraph communication with the New Hebrides, Fiji and New Caledonia.

29. In Papua and New Guinea, the Administration maintains coastal radio stations, aeronautical stations, and a radio communication system to cater for internal requirements.

30. In Fiji and the Territories of the Western Pacific High Commission, the local Administrations maintain Radio Stations adequate for all present requirements of oversea and inter-island telegraphic communications; and development plans provide for the extension of the network of inter-island radio communications to cover all islands.

31. In the absence of material from other sources, no conclusions can be made as to the adequacy of existing radio communications in the South Seas. In view, however, of the adequacy of the pre-war system and of the present position in the Territories mentioned above, which were among those most affected by the Pacific War, it may be inferred that the present position is generally satisfactory.

Conclusion.

32. The realisation of the ultimate objectives to which a South Seas Regional Commission will be dedicated must wait upon measures of rehabilitation and the resumption of normal administration in the areas concerned. In this work, the Commission itself may well take an active part,

/ but ...

but, in any event, the necessity of adequate communications to the success of all such measures needs no demonstration. Execution of the recommendations or directives of the Commission will place an added strain on the existing system.

33. The adequacy of existing communications can only be evaluated when the trade and rehabilitation policies of the Governments concerned are formulated and an accurate assessment of these can be made. Such a study might well be undertaken by an agency of the Commission, perhaps with a view to formulating a co-ordinated over-all communications programme for the area. The solution of the particular problems indicated in the survey of the present state of communications will perhaps best be realised as an integral part of such a programme. In the event, however, that such a course should prove impracticable or involve excessive delay, the Commission might be invited to consider means of alleviating immediate shortages, for example, in shipping resources.

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

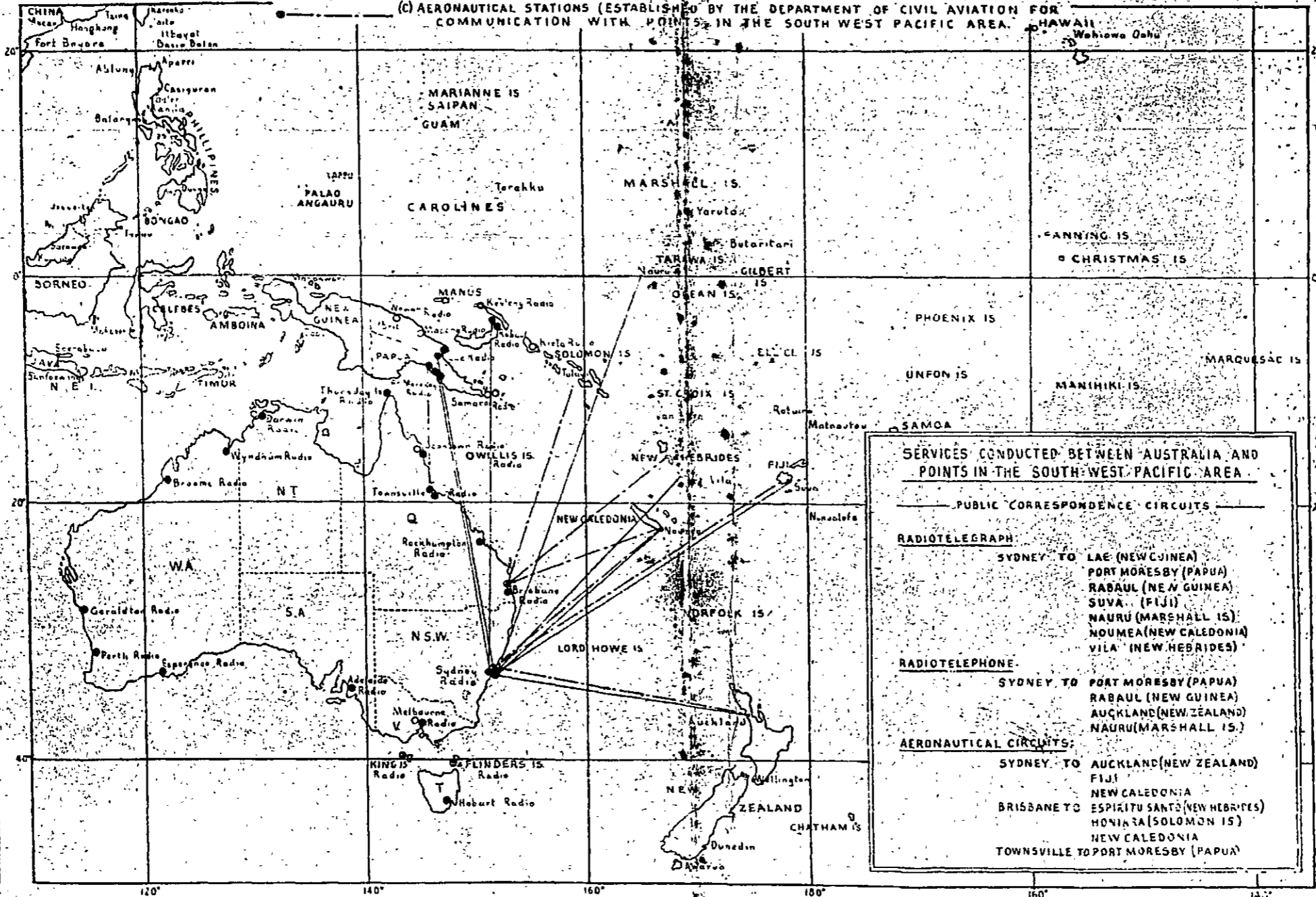
**RADIOCOMMUNICATION SERVICES**

**S.W. PACIFIC AREA**

(A) COASTAL RADIO STATIONS (FOR COMMUNICATION WITH SHIPS)

(B) FIXED STATIONS (RADIOTELEGRAPH AND/OR RADIOTELEPHONE PUBLIC CORRESPONDENCE SERVICES) FOR COMMUNICATION WITH POINTS IN THE SOUTH WEST PACIFIC AREA.

(C) AERONAUTICAL STATIONS (ESTABLISHED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF CIVIL AVIATION FOR COMMUNICATION WITH POINTS IN THE SOUTH WEST PACIFIC AREA.)



**SERVICES CONDUCTED BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND POINTS IN THE SOUTH WEST PACIFIC AREA**

— PUBLIC CORRESPONDENCE CIRCUITS —

**RADIOTELEGRAPH:**

SYDNEY TO LAE (NEW GUINEA)  
 PORT MORESBY (PAPUA)  
 RABUL (NEW GUINEA)  
 SUVA (FIJI)  
 NAURU (MARSHALL IS.)  
 NOUMEA (NEW CALEDONIA)  
 VILA (NEW HEBRIDES)

**RADIOTELEPHONE:**

SYDNEY TO PORT MORESBY (PAPUA)  
 RABUL (NEW GUINEA)  
 AUCKLAND (NEW ZEALAND)  
 NAURU (MARSHALL IS.)

**AERONAUTICAL CIRCUITS:**

SYDNEY TO AUCKLAND (NEW ZEALAND)  
 FIJI  
 NEW CALEDONIA  
 BRISBANE TO ESPERITU SANTO (NEW HEBRIDES)  
 HONIARA (SOLOMON IS.)  
 NEW CALEDONIA  
 TOWNSVILLE TO PORT MORESBY (PAPUA)