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# RABAUL TO TOKIO:

(Written for "The Listener" by A.M.R.)

"Another advance in New Britain," announced the tram optimist. "Next step Rabaul. Then Tokio."

"Bunk!" grunted the tram pessimist. "Between Rabaul and Tokio are thousands of miles and thousands of islands all fortified like Tarawa."

But both were wrong.

What then, are the facts about Japan's Pacific Islands?

It's a long story.

\* \* \*

1521 A.D.

MAGELLAN, after icy weeks spent in battling round South America, entered a calm blue "pacific" sea and sailed on and on, week after week, without change of wind and without sight of land. Finally, when they had scratched this straight line over a third of the way round the globe, his men saw an island at last and round its coast Mediterranean sails. But the natives of the "Islas Latinas" (Lateen sail Islands), proved as interested in Magellan's boats as he in theirs. In fact they stole one. And hence the name on the map of "Ladrones (Thieves) Islands"—furthest north-west of all the



Asleep on a pillow of wood: a Caroline Islander who scorns civilised pillows, preferring spongy driftwood

Pacific archipelagos and yet, through this voyager from furthest south-east, the first discovered by Europeans.

1600 A.D.

The Spaniards colonised the Ladrones and the Philippines beyond them. (Incidentally Spanish missionaries gave them their alternative name of Marianas out of respect for native susceptibilities.) Then sailing south and east they found scores of little volcanic and coral archipelagos (the Carolines) thickly inhabited by an indigenous Polynesian-Melanesian-Malay people and rich in fish, copra, and sandalwood. Adventurers of all races drained in here in the nineteenth century as French and British gradually made other places in the Pacific too law-ridden for them. Their diseases killed nine out of ten of the islanders and their debaucheries lit up the beaches. Micronesia became the buccaneers' last stand.

1898 A.D.

Spanish-American War. U.S. Warship Charleston entered Guam harbour (Magellan's original island) and fired on the fort. The Governor hastily came off by boat and apologised for not returning their salute of welcome, as, cut off from European news, he perhaps imagined it to be: Guam (he explained) was out of ammunition. U.S. kept Guam and Philippines after the war but returned the rest of Micronesia to Spain—who forthwith sold it to Germany.

1914 A.D.

Japanese occupied German Micronesia.

1941 A.D.

From the Marshalls, the coral "outliers" of Micronesia, Japanese plane-carriers, following the route by which the original inhabitants had reached Hawaii two thousands years earlier, slipped across to Pearl Harbour. Later they moved to the Gilberts and Nauru. But in concentrating on the 25-year-old battleships in Pearl Harbour the raiders overlooked two brand-new plane carriers. Paying a return visit, steaming along inside a rain-squall, these two broke up the Japanese fleet that was gathering in Kwajalein lagoon to invade Fiji. And in 1943 the Gilberts were won back.

When Is An Island Not An Island?

After History comes Geography. Micronesia is not "thousands of islands," but 1400 more or less. "More or less" has to be added because the line between reef and island is often hard to draw. The Marshalls, for example, number 900 if you include the reefs. If you insist on solid or permanently inhabited land (as our figure 1400 does), they reduce to 32. Furthermore, as you get up towards Japan itself, into the Bonins, for example, where undeniable Japanese have undeniable blue eyes, many islands are, without shelling or bombing, already too hot to hold any garrison. And one or two of these additionally complicate the census by alternately appearing and disappearing.

Japanese administration divided Micronesia into Marshalls, Eastern, Central, and Western Carolines, and Marianas.

The Marshalls are entirely coral lagoons. Indeed it was probably through travelling over these clayless, metal-less—in fact almost soil-less—stepping-stones that our Maoris and the other Polynesians became Stone Age men although their remote ancestors in Micronesia had worked metals, pottery and looms. Some atolls, however, are very large—Kwajalein, a well-equipped Japanese submarine base, measures 600 miles by 30—though the islands inside or upon them are all small like Tarawa.

Buccaneers, Missionaries and Rats

The main Carolines, on the other hand, though coral-ringed, are solid, well bushed, volcanic peaks. Hilly, double-harboured Kusaie, first call north after Rabaul, is one of the many "most beautiful island in the Pacific." Bully Hayes, Buccaneer, with his crew of swashbuckling Gilbertese, made it his headquarters when he lost his ship and impressed the remaining 200 natives