

# NEW CALEDONIA, STERN AND WILD

## Leaves From The Diary Of An Ex-Coffee Planter

**M**URDERERS make the best servants, they say in New Caledonia. Forgers, thieves, habitual rogues, are not to be trusted. But a decent, clean-living, respectable murderer, yes.

That's only one of the oddities stored up in the memory of C. T. A. Tyndall, now on 2ZB's copy-writing staff, who spent six years in New Caledonia growing coffee. This is generally supposed to be a pretty "pukka" sort of occupation, punctuated by frequent gin slings and trips to England, but to Mr. Tyndall it brought six years of loneliness (with his nearest white neighbour 50 miles away) a lot of hard work, and, in the end, disillusionment.



Spencer Digby photograph

C. T. A. TYNDALL  
His murderer was an old man

It wasn't the fault of the coffee, for New Caledonian coffee is the third best in the world, Jamaican Blue Mountain coffee being rated the finest and Guadeloupe Bonnesfleur the next. It was simply the Wall Street crash of 1929, which indirectly had the effect of tumbling coffee down in four years to a third of its price. That was the time when, by a queer economic contradiction, shiploads of Brazilian coffee were burned in a desperate effort to keep prices up.

### A Penal Colony

The observation about murderers making the best servants, it should be explained, arose from the fact that New Caledonia was once a penal colony, not quite as notorious as Devil's Island, but nevertheless a complete and final exile. Rochefort, who played a famous part in the Paris Commune of 1870, was ban-

ished to New Caledonia, though few political prisoners were sent there, the majority being criminals of all shades.

Their penalty paid, they lingered on, many leading highly respectable lives.

### 2ZB's "Spotlight" Session

*Interesting people in all walks of life are brought to the microphone in Ian Mackay's "Friday Spotlight" session from 2ZB. Last Friday "Mac" interviewed O. N. Gillespie, who told some amusing tales of the early days of motion pictures in New Zealand.*

*On Friday, January 17, he will interview C. T. A. Tyndall, who has had an adventurous career in many parts of the world, from Mesopotamia to New Caledonia.*

*"Friday Spotlight" is on the air at 7.45 p.m.*

It was a murderer, then an old man of 70, that Mr. Tyndall had as a servant.

Another Ripleyesque tale Mr. Tyndall has to tell is of the giant groper or "loche" found around the coast there. They grow to tremendous sizes, up to 1800 lbs. They lurk among the seaweed and coral growths, and many an unwary swimmer loses an arm or leg to a groper. A fantastic story is told of a native swimmer who unwittingly swam right into the mouth of a giant groper, which immediately closed on him. Terrified, the native dug his elbows into the fish's gills, the groper opened its mouth, and the native leaped out. Mr. Tyndall does not vouch for the veracity of the story, but he has seen the native of whom it is told, and sure enough, his chest is deeply scarred, as though by regularly spaced teeth.

Still another oddity (though oddity was hardly the word the white residents used) was the administrative system of New Caledonia, which, of course, is a French possession. At one time residents were supporting three governors, one in New Caledonia, one on his way out from France, and the third away on leave, ill.

### In Mesopotamia

Before growing coffee, Mr. Tyndall spent some time in little known parts of Irak and Iran, then known as Mesopotamia and Persia. He had served through the war with the Indian Army, and after the Armistice he was attached to the political service in Irak. The biggest job he assisted in was an attempt to settle 40,000 Assyrians in Iran. The march from Bagdad was a long one, over several ranges of snow-clad mountains, and what with disease and attacks by Feisal's Arabs, they

ended up in a sorry state. The repatriation was not a success.

Leaving the army, Mr. Tyndall was offered free passage to any port in the British Empire. He chose Rockhampton, for him the port farthest away, and went cotton growing. Next, after a spell at rabbitskin buying, he went to New Caledonia.

Back in Australia he discovered a talent for writing radio plays, and for some time he wrote for the ABC. He has had about a dozen performed over the air, and several in South Africa and Canada.

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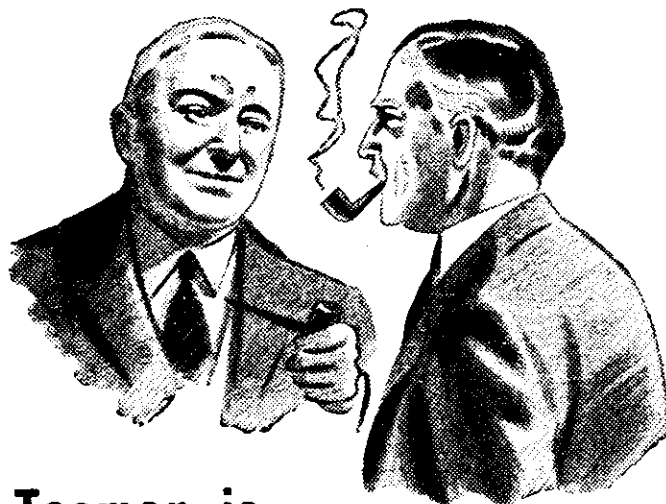
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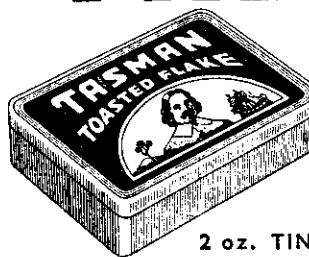
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