

THE FRIAR-ADMIRAL OF OCEANIA

THE terse official communiqué from Washington announcing that American troops had arrived in New Caledonia will doubtless take a load off the mind of Admiral Georges Thierry d'Argenlieu, Free French Admiral of Oceania, who only last February was warned by Tokio that "Japan will not hesitate for a moment to resort to force to stamp out De Gaullists in the Pacific."

The Admiral, who was one of the men who stood most determinedly in the way when Japan cast envious eyes on France's strategic Pacific possessions, is



GEORGES D'ARGENLIEU
Father Louis de la Trinité

one of the most colourful of the leaders of Free France. In wartime an Admiral, in peacetime he is Father Louis de la Trinité, of the Carmelite order. He fought in the Great War, entered a monastery in 1920, donning tunic, girdle, scapular, hood and mantle, and studied mystical theology. Eventually, he became head of the Carmelite order in all France. The outbreak of the present war found him again with the fleet, and he was captured at Cherbourg by the Germans in June, 1940. Jumping out of his prison train, however, and disguising himself as a peasant, he found his way to the Channel Coast and to London. He led the assault on Dakar, was wounded in the leg there, and spent his convalescence in French Equatorial Africa, organising Free French shipping. Then he went on a lecturing tour to Canada; then back to London to broadcast from the BBC; then to Oceania.

Malta of the Pacific

New Caledonia, wild and picturesque, and at the same time one of the richest Islands in the Pacific, must for some time have been a headache both to the Friar-Admiral and to the Australian defence authorities. According to Wilfred G. Burchett, an Australian newspaperman, who visited the island last year, once an enemy were established there, he "could make the island a Malta of the Pacific, and a self-supporting Malta at that. Bombers based on the quiet waters of the wide lagoon which surrounds the island would be within a few hours' flight of Australia's capital

cities, three hours from Brisbane, and four hours from Sydney. Australia's chief supplies of nickel and chrome—so essential for her armament production—would be cut off and would be harnessed to the enemy's war industry. New Caledonia's great herds of cattle and deer, her waters teeming with fish, could provide food enough to support a mighty army; her cosy anchorages would serve as bases from which submarines could play havoc with Australia's communications with the outside world."

And this strategy applies with equal force to New Zealand, especially as Auckland is approximately the same distance from Nouméa as Sydney. Trade between New Caledonia and New Zealand, which was once negligible, has recently shown signs of increasing, chiefly due to large orders of New Caledonia coffee.

Mountains of Minerals

The mountain chain which runs the length of the island of New Caledonia is incredibly rich in valuable minerals. A story is told that in the early days, the International Copper Company sent an Australian expert to survey the island's ore deposits. Reporting in England to the directors of the company, he was asked by a titled director for a rough indication of the quality of minerals in the mountains of New Caledonia. "My Lord," replied the Australian, "if you were to take all the minerals out of those mountains, the mountains would fall to pieces."

Nickel and chrome are two metals in which New Caledonia is particularly rich. The nickel, of which the island produces about eight per cent of the world supply, is worked by the powerful international Société le Nickel, which is allied with Nickel Mond of Canada and the International Nickel Corporation.

The chrome—and here again New Caledonia produces over eight per cent of the world's supply—is worked by English, American and Australian capital. The ore rarely assays at less than 45 per cent of chrome, and in some places, it is to be found in seams which contain hundreds of thousands of tons of the highest-grade ore.

Japanese Interest

But according to Wilfred Burchett, one of New Caledonia's greatest potential assets is a deposit of iron ore over 55 per cent metal, and claimed by one engineer to be the biggest of its kind in the world. Situated in mountain country in the interior, the deposit has been estimated to contain 250,000,000 tons of ore.

The Japanese have been interested in New Caledonia's metals since before the last war, when they acquired a nickel mine which, however, they later sold to the Société le Nickel. From 1935 onward, says Burchett, Japanese mining interests were very active in the colony. An iron concession, on which work was started in 1939, yielded them several hundred thousand tons of ore.

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