

gong as a signal for Boyd to return at once. On hearing it they burst into loud cries of derision. Webster now became seriously alarmed and was wondering what had best be done when he saw an armed party of islanders attempting to board the schooner by the bowsprit. What followed may best be described in his own words.

"In the utmost confusion we proceeded to arm ourselves, but I cautioned my shipmates to refrain from fighting, if possible, as Mr. Boyd was on shore. The deck guns were neither run out nor loaded. I unshipped the boarding pikes from the main boom, and threw them forward to our Islanders to keep off the Natives. I then darted down below and handed up five or six muskets, and brought up a case of cartridges. 'Keep from firing,' I said. 'Remember Mr. Boyd.'

"Suddenly, a cry arose from the water; a cry which, once heard, could never be forgotten. It was as if a host of demons had been let loose. The air resounded with their yells and the sullen roaring of numerous war conchs. The next instant a shower of spears, arrows, stones and other missiles, came whistling at us. For the moment we all sought the shelter of the bulwark to allow the first storm to pass. We then fired at the crowded canoes with murderous effect as we had loaded our muskets with ten pistol bullets each. This, however, did not deter them from attempting to board, and it was

not till many had been shot down that they were driven from the after part of the vessel's side. A moment of quiet elapsed, followed by another burst from the war conchs, and another fiendish yell, and on they came again. They boarded us forward and were rapidly driving our crew aft, their boarding pikes opposed by the wicker-work shields with which the Natives defended themselves. Seeing that our crew were unable to keep them off, I went to their assistance and fired at the savages with a double-barrelled gun. Their shields proved of no avail against the white man's fire; one or two fell wounded, and our crew, with a shout, made a simultaneous charge and cleared the decks, despatching the wretches who had been wounded, and throwing them overboard. They were, for the time, converted into as great demons as those against whom they fought.

"We now got a two-pounder swivel gun loaded with grape to bear upon the nearest canoe; a volume of white smoke hid the object, and next moment, when it cleared away, the canoe was seen upset and the water slightly discoloured. This decided the battle."

Next day Webster organized an expedition to search for Boyd. They went on shore and burnt down two villages, but the only trace found of the missing men was the portion of a baked human skull which they believed to be that of Boyd's Native servant. Of Boyd himself there was no sign. For many years afterwards rumours kept filtering through to the Australian ports of a white man held prisoner by the Solomon-Islanders, but expeditions sent out to search for him invariably returned with their quest unfulfilled.

The "Wanderer" sailed for the Australian coast, but was wrecked off Port McQuarie. For some years more Webster continued in his roving habits, until finally he returned to New Zealand and settled down to become a timber-merchant at Kohukohu, in the Hokianga district.

It was almost certain that Boyd was no longer alive, but the curious idea of founding a so-called republic in the Solomon Islands persisted in the minds of

