BOOK REVIEW

Hermann Joseph Hiery *The Neglected War: The German South Pacific and the Influence of World War I.* University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 1995
384 pp, ISBN 0824816684

reviewed by

James M. Vincent

*College of the Northern Mariana Islands*

This book, based on painstaking research of often previously untouched primary sources, deals mainly with the effects of World War I on the indigenous populations in Germany’s Pacific colonies. It is not a military history, but a detailed account contrasting German policies toward the colonized Pacific islanders with those implemented by the Australian, New Zealand, and Japanese occupiers.

Professor Hiery claims that German colonial policies in the Pacific were surprisingly liberal compared to the subsequent policies initiated by the Allies. German administrators allowed for the conservation or adaptation of traditional lifestyles while simultaneously allowing indigenous peoples access to modernization. The colonial officials sent out to the Pacific tended to be well educated, young, and flexible as compared to the Junker aristocrats sent to Germany’s large African possessions. In their small outposts far distant from Berlin, such officials could exercise considerable personal leeway in judgment. District Administrator Fritz in Saipan had even made Chamorro the official language of the Northern Marianas and had instituted authentic bilingual education. Culturally insensitive administrators, such as Boeder who instigated the Sokehs Rebellion on Pohnpei, were rare. And although German South Seas present an example of the “New Colonialism” centered on economic development and exploitation, the German administration in the Marshalls and Marianas often protected native land rights against European confiscation.

The book presents the Japanese takeover of Micronesia as an exercise in ethnic self-denial for the indigenous peoples who are allowed to participate in the marvels of Japanese inducted economic progress only to the extent of their assimilation to Japanese language and custom. And as early as 1920 Japanese made up some six percent of the population of Japanese Micronesia, and by 1940 over 80 percent of the northern Marianas’ inhabitants were Japanese settlers. In contrast, the German population of the northern Marianas never exceeded 20 administrators.

This work of 387 pages offers full notes and bibliography. It is attractively produced with historical photographs and cartoons.