

D.O.3a.

SECRET

C. Bevin, Esq.

44

No. F 720/229

Subject: Pacific Islands

RECEIVED
10 MAR 1939
C. O. R. L.

Reference to previous correspondence:

Letter from the Dominions Office of the 13.2.39

lit to CO. (301)

F 720/204

14.2.39

With the compliments of Mr Dixon

A copy has also been sent to Major Jacob (C.I.D.)

Dominions Office, Downing Street,

193

9 MAR 1939

WELLINGTON,

14th February, 1939.

SECRET AND PERSONAL.

Dear Harding,

I was very glad to have your secret and personal telegram of the 11th February about the proposals in view for United Kingdom representation at the forthcoming Pacific Defence Conference. If those proposals mature, the New Zealand Government will, I feel sure, consider themselves fortunate in having such distinguished representatives, though I must confess to a slight feeling that, if Sir Ragnar Colvin and General Squires are chosen, the New Zealand Government may not be quite sure to what extent they are competent to speak for the United Kingdom as distinct from the Commonwealth. This choice, however, if approved by the Commonwealth Government, should be a great help to co-operation in defence matters between Australia and New Zealand which is at present entirely lacking.

2. The background of my secret and personal telegram of the 8th February is that the Navy and Air Force, which, as you know, are under a Commodore, R.N., and Naval Board, and a Group Captain, R.A.F., feel that the Army, which is under a New Zealand Chief of Staff, are lagging behind in defence preparations. Even allowing for the possibility of some Service jealousy, it is permissible to believe that a Service organisation on traditional New Zealand lines may be less up-to-date in some respects than other Services which are being built up by English officers.

SIR EDWARD HARDING K.C.B., K.C.M.G.

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3. A characteristic of the New Zealand Government, which has been noted by their own Civil Servants as well as by the officers on loan to them, is their eagerness to ask advice from almost anybody except their own advisers, and they tend to believe that the further an adviser has come, the better is his advice. They are, therefore, very likely to ask the advice of the United Kingdom Service representatives on almost any subject, whether or not it is on the Conference agenda, and they may well seek advice on the organisation of the military forces here. Hence the desire that an Army representative should be included in the United Kingdom delegation and the feeling that a man in close touch with the War Office would be better qualified to advise the New Zealand Government and to report to the authorities at home than an adviser holding an overseas appointment, but I imagine that there would be no objection on these grounds to General Squires.

4. I sent Archer on the 1st February a press cutting about the extension of Major-General J.E. Duigan's appointment as Chief of the General Staff of the New Zealand Military Forces until the 31st March, 1940. The reason for the extension may be partly that there is nobody very obvious to succeed him; the only possible local officer is thought to be Colonel O.H. Mead, who succeeded Colonel E. Puttick as 2nd Military Member of the Army Board on the 1st January. It is said, however, by some people that there are reasons of a private nature for the extension. I only draw attention to the personal aspect as the prospective termination of Duigan's

appointment

appointment in 1940, unless prolonged, might make the New Zealand Government more disposed to ask for an officer from England and might make 1940 an opportune moment for introducing any change. I am, of course, not competent myself to express any opinion of the efficiency of either the Forces or the Chief of Staff.

5. The Service representatives here will no doubt make their views on the subject known personally to the United Kingdom representatives at the Conference, and I will, of course, show this letter to the High Commissioner.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) G. E. BOYD SHANNON.