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Martin Clemens. *Alone on Guadalcanal: A Coastwatcher's Story*. Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1998. 36 photos. 6 maps. Notes. Glossary. Index. xviii + 343 pages.

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Martin Clemens was a Cambridge-educated civil administrator in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate when World War II broke out. Born in Scotland, he went to the South Pacific in 1938 and was 27 years old when the U.S. Armed Forces arrived on Guadalcanal in 1942. This began a near legendary relationship with the U.S. Marine Corps and its 1st Marine Division during the six-month struggle to seize, occupy, and defend this first objective in the naval war against Japan.

In an age where modern special forces rate their own uniforms, weapons, and command, Martin Clemens' experiences behind Japanese lines and in leading local forces against the Japanese in support of the Marines is a story worth reading. The Coastwatchers, as their intelligence network was commonly known, were issued radios, codes, and a schedule and not much else other than their own local knowledge to keep information flowing on Japanese air and naval movement up and down "The Slot" leading to Australia.

Consisting of a mixed group of reserve officers, policemen, government officials, and planters they had to rely on their relations with the indigenous population to live,

move, and evade capture. There were successes and failures and Clemens was one of the best. As Clemens recalled: “A district officer’s job was to look after fifteen thousand Solomon Islanders, some missionaries, and some planters and traders. They were all scared out of their wits when thirty thousand Japanese arrived; then came nineteen thousand American Marines, and the last named were the only lot who had food.” He tells his own story in a straightforward style accessible to the general and specialized reader alike.

As a bonus, a documented introduction by distinguished historian and Marine Allan R. Millet introduces Guadalcanal and Martin Clemens as well as the intelligence network and the relationship with the 1st Marine Division that developed. General Alexander A. Vandegrift, USMC, commanding the 1st Marine Division, reflected after the 7 August landings: “During the ensuing weeks, when we were often only one battalion and one day ahead of the Japanese countermoves, we relied heavily upon information brought to us by Martin and his charges.... We can well look to the past to see how one man, representative of his service, by his personal example sustained one small but vital alliance.”

While well known to Marines and the readers of Richard Tregaskis’ Guadalcanal Diary, Clemens’ full story before and after the campaign was not as accessible. After the war he served in Palestine and Cyprus until retiring to Australia in 1960. The book is a pleasure for general and academic readers alike, handsomely produced by the Naval Institute Press.



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