

# W.P.H.C

M. P. No. 4439 ( G. & E. )

19 40

SUBJECT.-

Skeleton, Human.-

Finding of, on Gardner Island.

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LAST PAPER.

19

OTHER CONNECTED PAPERS -

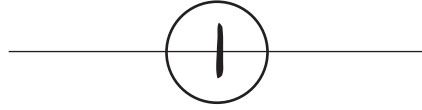
NEXT PAPER.

19

M.P. \_\_\_\_\_

19 .

# TELEGRAM



DECODE.

[CODE.....Govt.....]

From.....Acting Resident Commissioner, Gilbert and Ellice  
Islands Colony

To.....High Commissioner.

No. ...348.....

(Date) ...1st October..... 19..... 40.



Gallagher reports from Gardner Island the finding of a skeleton believed to be that of a woman. Near the skeleton was a box containing an old fashioned sextant. Box had number 3,500 stencilled on it and also bore the number 1,542. A woman's shoe was also found.

Possibility of this being Mrs. Putnam is naturally remote but Your Excellency will probably wish to make enquiries concerning number of sextant box.

Resident.

M.P. \_\_\_\_\_

19 .

DECODE.

[CODE.....Govt.....]

**CONFIDENTIAL** TELEGRAM

2

From.....Secretary, Western Pacific High Commission.....

To.....Acting Administrative Officer, Gardner Island.....

No. ....1.....

(Date) ....15th October,..... 19.....40.....

Sent 15.10.40  
OM  
ANSWERED.  
See.....  
4

(See ①)

Confidential. Please telegraph to me particulars of finding of skeleton in Gardner Island including where found, and state reason for believing it to be that of a woman and whether this belief based on anatomical characteristics. State dental condition and whether any evidence of dental work on jaws, length of skeleton from vertex of skull to arch of foot, approximate age and condition of bones and whether any hair found in vicinity of skeleton.

What have you done with skeleton? It should be carefully cared for and placed in a suitable coffin and kept in secure custody pending further instructions.

Keep matter strictly secret for the present.

Secretary, Western Pacific  
High Commission.

M.P. \_\_\_\_\_

19 .

DECODE.

[CODE.....Govt.....]

**CONFIDENTIAL**

# TELEGRAM

3

From..... High Commissioner.....

To..... Acting Resident Commissioner, Gilbert and Ellice  
Islands Colony.....

No. .... 500. (Date) ..... 16th October, ..... 19..... 40.

Sent 16.10.40

(See ① Confidential. Your telegram No. 348,  
② I have telegraphed direct to Gallagher for  
particulars with a view to identification.  
Matter should be kept secret for the present.  
High Commissioner

M.P. \_\_\_\_\_

19 .

DECODE.

[CODE.....Govt.....]

**CONFIDENTIAL**

# TELEGRAM

4

From..... Officer in Charge, Phoenix Islands Settlement Scheme,  
Gardner Island.

To..... Secretary, Western Pacific High Commission.

No. ....1.....

(Date) ....17th October,..... 19.....40.



Confidential. Complete skeleton not found only skull, lower jaw, one thoracic vertebrae, half pelvis, part scapula humerus radius two femurs tibia and fibula. Skeleton discovered by working party six months ago – report reached me early in September. Working party buried skull but made no further search. Bones were found on South East corner of island about 100 feet above high water ordinary springs. Body had obviously been lying under a “Ren” tree and remains of fire turtle and dead birds appears to indicate life. All small bones have been removed by giant coconut crabs which have also damaged larger ones. Difficult to estimate age bones owing to activities of crabs but am quite certain they are not less than four years old and probably much older.

Only experienced man could state sex from available bones; my conclusion based on sole of shoe which is almost certainly a womans.

Dental

Dental condition appears to have been good but only five teeth now remain. Evidence of dental work on jaw not apparent.

We have searched carefully for ring money and keys with no result. No clothing was found. Organized search of area for remaining bones would take several weeks as crabs move considerable distances and this part of island is not yet cleared.

Regret it is not possible to measure length of skeleton. No hair found.

Bones at present in locked chest in office pending construction of coffin.

Gallagher.

M.P. \_\_\_\_\_

19 .

DECODE.

[CODE.....Govt.....]

# TELEGRAM

5

**CONFIDENTIAL**

From.....Secretary, Western Pacific High Commission.....

To.....Officer in Charge, Phoenix Islands Settlement  
Scheme, Gardner Island.....

No. ....2.....

(Date) ....26th October,..... 19.....40.....

ANSWERED.  
See.....10.....

Sent  
26.10.40  
OM

4

Confidential. Your telegram of 17th  
October, organized search should be made in  
vicinity and all bones and other finds including  
box, sextant and shoe, should be forwarded to Suva  
by the first opportunity for examination.

Secretary, Western Pacific  
High Commission.

M.P. \_\_\_\_\_

19 .

# TELEGRAM

6

DECODE.

[CODE..... Govt. and ]

Cypher

**CONFIDENTIAL**

From..... Resident Commissioner, Gilbert and Ellice  
Islands Colony

To..... High Commissioner.

No. .... 75.....

(Date) ..... 11th February, ..... 19..... 41..



Confidential. Acting Senior Medical Officer has taken objection to presence on Government vessel of human remains consigned to Suva. Circumstances indicate that these are those referred to in correspondence ending with your telegram No. 500, 1940, Confidential.

③

Acting Senior Medical Officer appears to be acting in unorthodox fashion and is detaining all ships calling at Tarawa (at present four) on health grounds on account of this incident. I am enquiring as to authority under which he presumes to do so but in the meantime should be grateful for definite instructions from Your Excellency to pass on to him.

Resident.



M.P. \_\_\_\_\_

19 .

# TELEGRAM

7

DECODE.

[CODE... Interdepart-  
mental.]

From High Commissioner

To Resident Commissioner, Gilbert and Ellice  
Islands Colony.

No. 83.

(Date) 14th February, 1941.

⑥ IMMEDIATE. Confidential. Your telegram No. 75, instruct acting Senior Medical Officer that ships must not be detained without good reason and then only in accordance with Regulations or higher instructions.

⑥ He should be directed to report reasons for action taken referred to in your telegram and instructed that if human remains are those they are assumed to be he is not to detain shipping.

High Commissioner

**CONFIDENTIAL**

M.P. \_\_\_\_\_

19 .

# TELEGRAM

8

DECODE.

[CODE..... Govt. ....]

**CONFIDENTIAL**

From..... Resident Commissioner, Gilbert and Ellice  
Islands Colony.

To..... High Commissioner.....

No. .... 94.....

(Date) ..... 17th February, ..... 19..... 41..



⑥

My telegram No. 75, Acting Senior Medical Officer has now apparently examined the remains. He states that they are part of skeleton of elderly male of Polynesian race, bones having been probably in sheltered position for upwards of 20 years possibly much longer. He notes some disintegration of the bones in the course of transportation and suggests if they are considered of archaeological interest Your Excellency might wish him to strengthen [them] by a method with which he states Your Excellency knows he is specially familiar.

Resident.

M.P. \_\_\_\_\_

19 .

# TELEGRAM

9

DECODE.

[CODE.....Govt.....]

From.....Resident Commissioner, Gilbert and Ellice  
Islands Colony.....

To.....High Commissioner.....

No. ....95.....

(Date) .....17th February,..... 19.....41..



- ⑦ Your telegram No. 83, all shipping was released on completion of examination. I have instructed Acting Senior Medical Officer as in
- ⑦ your telegram No. 83 and will forward report in due course.

Resident Commissioner

10

Nikumaroro (Gardner) Island  
Phoenix Islands District,  
27th December, 1940.



Confidential.

Sir,

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your confidential telegram No. 2 of the 26th. October, 1940, and to state that two packages are being handed to the Master, R.C. S. "Nimanoa", for eventual delivery to the High Commission Office in Suva. The larger of these packages is the coffin containing the remains of the unidentified individual found on the South Eastern shore of Gardner Island; the second package is the sextant box found in the immediate locality and contains all the other pieces of evidence which were found in the proximity of the body.

⑤  
Packages received  
*[Signature]*  
25.3.41

2. The fact that the skull has been buried in damp ground for nearly a year, whilst all the other bones have been lying above ground during the same period, was probably not apparent from previous correspondence, but may be helpful in

The Secretary,  
Western Pacific High Commission,  
Suva - Fiji.

but may be helpful in determining the age of the bones. In spite of an intensive search, none of the smaller bones have been discovered and in view of the presence of crabs and rats in this area, I consider that it is now unlikely that any further remains will be traced. A similar search for rings, coins, keys or other articles not so easily destroyed has also been unsuccessful, but it is possible that something may come to hand during the course of the next few months when the area in question will be again thoroughly examined during the course of planting operations, which will involve a certain amount of digging in the vicinity. If this should prove to be the case, I will inform you of the fact by telegraph.

3. Should any relatives be traced, it may prove of sentimental interest for them to know that the coffin in which the remains are contained is made from a local wood known as "kanawa" and the tree was, until a year ago, growing on the edge of the lagoon, not very far from the spot where the deceased was found.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "George B. Gallahue". The signature is written in dark ink and includes a decorative flourish at the end.

Officer-in-Charge,


Phoenix Islands Settlement Scheme



Report on portion of a human skeleton.

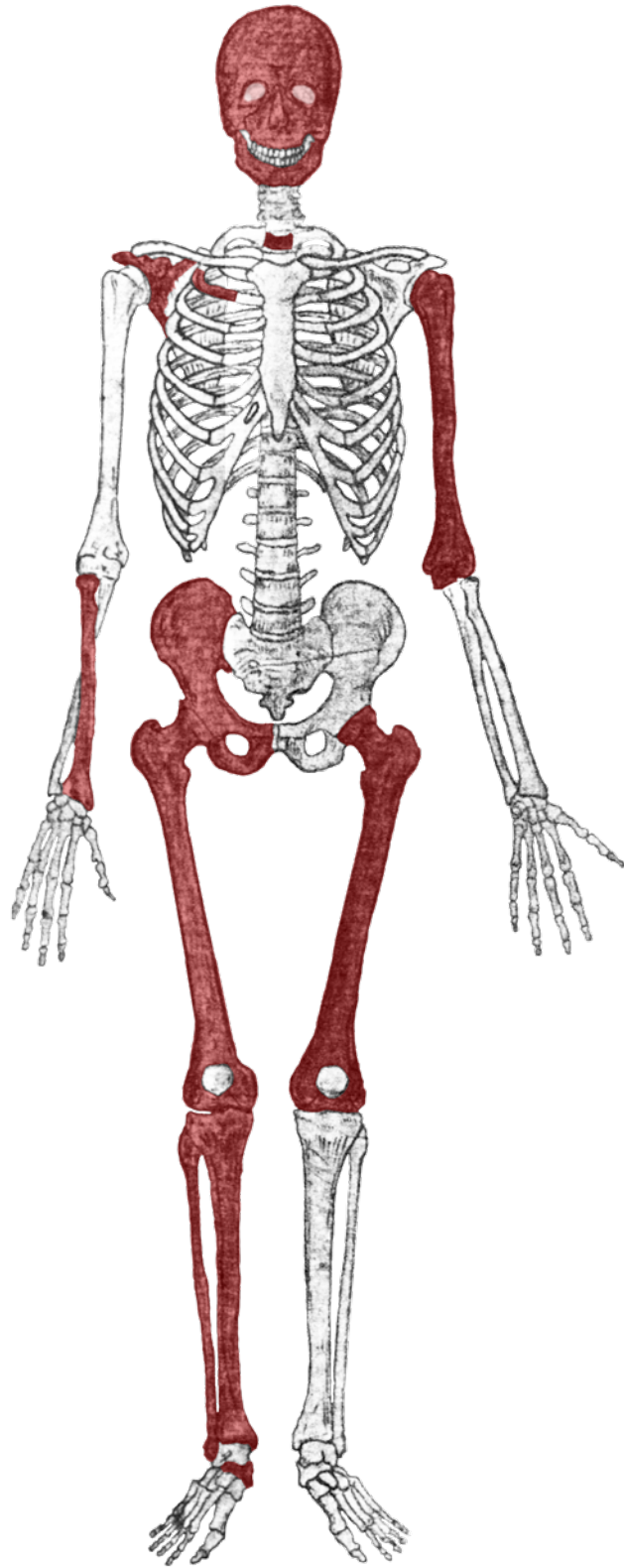
I have to-day examined a collection of bones forming part of a human skeleton. These bones were delivered to me in a closed wooden box by Mr. P.D. Macdonald of the Western Pacific High Commission.

- 2... The bones included:- (1) a skull with the right zygoma and malar bones broken off: (2) mandible with only four teeth in position: (3) part of the right scapula: (4) the first thoracic vertebra: (5) portion of a rib (? 2nd right rib): (6) left humerus: (7) right radius: (8) right innominate bone: (9) right femur: (10) left femur: (11) right tibia: (12) right fibula: and (13) the right scaphoid bone of the foot.
- 3... From this list it is seen that less than half of the total skeleton is available for examination.
- 4... All these bones are very weather-beaten and have been exposed to the open air for a considerable time. Except in one or two small areas all traces of muscular attachments and the various ridges and prominences have been obliterated.
- 5... By taking measurements of the length of the femur, tibia and the humerus I estimate that these bones belonged to a skeleton of total height of 5 feet 5 inches approximately.
- 6... From the half sub-pubic angle of the right innominate bone, the "set" of the two femora, and the ratio of the circumferences of the long bones to their individual lengths it may be definitely stated that the skeleton is that of a MALE.
- 7... Owing to the weather-beaten condition of all the bones it is impossible to be dogmatic in regard to the age of the person at the time of death, but I am of the opinion that he was not less than 45 years of age and that probably he was older: say between 45 and 55 years.
- 8... I am not prepared to give an opinion on the race or nationality of this skeleton, except to state that it is probably not that of a pure South Sea Islander---Micronesian or Polynesian. It could be that of a short, stocky, muscular European, or even a half-caste, or person of mixed European descent.
- 9... If further details are necessary I am [sic] prepared to take detailed and exact measurements of the principal bones in this collection, and to work out the various indices (e.g. the platymeric index for the femur or the cnemic index for the tibia) but if such a detailed report is required the obvious course to adopt would be to submit these bones to the Anthropological Dept of the Sydney University where Professor Elkin would be only too pleased to make a further report.

  
Principal,  
Central Medical School  
Suva.

4th April, 1941.

11B



Bones - coloured red  
(uncoloured portion of skeleton  
represents missing bones)

DECODE.

[CODE.....Govt.....]

# TELEGRAM

12

From.....Secretary, Western Pacific High Commission.....

To.....Acting Administrative Officer, Gardner Island.....

**CONFIDENTIAL**

No. 2.....

(Date) .....28th April,.....19.....41..

*sent*

ANSWERED.  
13  
See.....

10

Confidential. Your letter of 27th  
December remains and sextant box received but  
not the sextant. Did you forward sextant?

Secretary, W.P.H.C.



DECODE.

[CODE.....Govt.....]

# TELEGRAM

13

From.....Acting Administrative Officer, Gardner Island.....

To.....Secretary, Western Pacific High Commission.....

**CONFIDENTIAL**

No. ....

(Date) .....28th April, ..... 19..... 41.



(But see (12) (1) )  
S.N.

Confidential. Your telegram No.2,  
no sextant was found. Only part discovered  
was thrown away by finder but was probably part  
of thread of inverted eyepiece.

Gallagher.

OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER  
FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC,  
SUVA, FIJI.

14

No. 4439.

82 (40)

6th June, 1941.

8 3

6.6.41.

Dear Commander Nasmuth,

With reference to our telephone conversation relative to the identification of a sextant and box which I mentioned as having been found and which you were so good as to say you would examine, I regret to state that on further examination it was discovered that no sextant had actually been found but only a box thought to have contained a sextant.

(See (13))

I am forwarding the box to you with this letter and His Excellency would be grateful if you would examine it with a view to determining its use and origin if possible.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) H. Vaskess

Secretary to the High Commission

Commander G.B. Nasmyth, F.R.Met.Soc.,  
Suva.