

TELEPHONE
PEARCEDALE 42

ROBINSON ROAD,
LANGWARRIN,
VICTORIA.
Australia.

2nd February 1959.

The British Consul,
Papeete,
Tahiti,
French Pacific Oceania.

Dear Sir,

To introduce myself, I should first say that I am a British novelist writing under my Christian names Nevil Shute, my full name being Nevil Shute Norway. For the last eight years I have lived in Australia at the above address, and shall probably continue to do so permanently.

I am at present writing a story dealing with events following on the wreck of a British world cruising yacht in the Tuamotus. The scene of this book is laid partly in a London suburb, partly in the United States, partly in Honolulu, and partly on the water front in the harbour of Papeete. Whenever possible I like to visit a scene before I write about it in one of my stories, and it was fully my intention to visit Tahiti in the early months of this year before writing that particular sequence in the current story. Unfortunately, I am now sixty years of age and I suffered a slight stroke shortly before Christmas. I am now allowed to work again, but it will be some time before I can undertake the fatigue of a journey from Australia to Tahiti. I am therefore writing to request your assistance in supplying me with certain information about Papeete and its water front, which would enable me to write this sequence of the book convincingly without having been there. I have done this before once or twice, notably in the case of a book about Greenland, but to make a convincing sequence of this nature requires of course a considerable amount of study.

Fortunately, I know the Fiji Islands fairly well having spent six weeks there last year. In that time I made several trips to the outlying islands including five or six days on a copra boat. I also spent a few days at the small town of Levuka, and from the Pacific Islands Year Book of 1956, which

I have studied closely, I imagine that Papeete and its harbour are somewhat similar to that of Levuka, though perhaps on a somewhat larger scale.

I should be most grateful if you could assist me in this matter, and I itemise my requirements under the following heads:-

- (1) I would be most grateful if you would send me by air mail any picture postcards of the water front that may be available, and of the harbour. I know from the Pacific Islands Year Book and from the Admiralty sailing directions that vessels moor in the harbour by an anchor dropped in the middle and the stern pulled into the quay as they do in many French ports. Any photographs or picture postcards of the actual scene would be of great value to me. I would also be most grateful for any small Guide Book that there may be to the town of Papeete dealing particularly with the water front, preferably in English of course but otherwise in the French language. This also should be sent to me by air mail.
- (2) Can you give me the name of a small, low class cafe or wine shop on the water front, such as would be frequented by half-castes or by European seamen with little money. Usually in French ports there is such a place called Abri de la Tempete. It would of course be desirable to use a fictional name for such a place, but would this be suitable? Alternatively, would you give me the real name of such a place, which I might use as there would be nothing slanderous or libellous concerning it in the story.
- (3) I understand that air services to Tahiti have hitherto been conducted on a fortnightly basis by flying boat, but that a land airport has been under construction for the last year or so. Is this land airport yet in use, and if so what services run from it to the mainland of the United States?
- (4) Is there any regular passenger transport service either by sea or by air between Papeete and Honolulu?
- (5) According to the Pacific Islands Year Book there is no United States Consul in Papeete. Is this so? If it is so, which Consul handles U.S. Consular affairs?

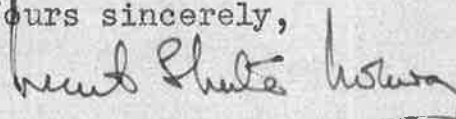
- (6) Regarding copra, in your district are the nuts harvested at given times of the year by men climbing the trees, as in Malaya and in parts of India, or are they allowed to fall to the ground when ripe as in Fiji where they are gathered from the ground every month or so? In the Tuamotu Islands, is sun drying of the copra principally used or do they dry it in kilns using the heat generated by burning the coconut shells and husks?

I am very sorry to add to your normal work by making such enquiries as these, which can hardly be held to fall within the sphere of normal Consular activity. My only justification, if I have one at all, is that these stories of mine are considerable dollar earners, and by writing them I add more than most individuals can do to the dollar earnings of the Sterling area.

... As I have said above, I should be most grateful if you would send me the picture postcards and the guide book, if any, by air mail together with your letter in reply. I am enclosing herewith a Sterling cheque for £5 made payable to yourself and drawn on my London bank to cover any expenses to which you may be put in this matter, and I need hardly say that if these expenses should exceed five pounds I should be glad to remit any further sum upon request. If there should be a balance in my favour, perhaps you would put it to the credit of any suitable charity in Papeete, and at a suitable time, if it seems to you to be judicious, I would be glad if you would present my compliments to the Governor of Tahiti and make such apologies to him as may be suitable for the fact that I intend to write about Papeete without having called upon him or visited the area. I would certainly not have dreamed of doing such a thing unless I had been stricken by this stroke, which is a thing that may happen to any of us in advancing years.

With every good wish,

Yours sincerely,



(Nevil Shute Norway).

Encl: Cheque.