

Solomon Island Star
December 1, 2007
“WEEKEND MAGAZINE”
by Ednal Palmer
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[Photo - Japanese plane on Ballale... the war relics there are now the centre of a court action. Photo courtesy Y. Sakaida]

[Photo - Ballale Airport Today... as seen from the air. Photo courtesy of Beryl Canwell, COFEPOW - Children of Far East POWs]

[Photo - Resotod Japanese plane overseas said to have been rebuilt from relics from Ballale. Photo courtesy of Pacific Wreck Database, pacificwrecks.com]

NEW BATTLE FOR BALLALAE

ATTEMPS to ships overseas the old warplanes removed from the Ballalae have been blocked by court action.

The four warplanes were removed from Ballalae Island after what was to be believed to be an agreement between chiefs and an international group.

But the planes are now held in at Ports Authority Shed at Point Cruz.

The project to remove war relics, especially the war plane from the historical island, has been widely criticized.

Ballalae people have expressed concern over the removal of the war relics.

They said removing these relics means removing history from the people of the province.

They also criticized the deal which was made in 2005.

Under the deal eight war planes are been removed from the island and sent overseas.

However, it was not until early this month that steps were taken to transport the war planes.

Four planes were taken and transported to Honiara last week ready for shipment overseas.

However, according to sources these planes are still in a shed at Point Cruz Wharf following the courts intervention.

The story of the war relic at Ballalae is one of the great interests.

THE BALLALAE PLAN

It all started in 2003 when an Australian named Craig Turner spearheaded a project to get the war relics and send them overseas.

During that year Mr. Turner was appointed senior advisor and director of the project by the then Tourism Minister Alex Bartlett.

As part of his remuneration package, he was allegedly granted an exclusive license to remove two WW11 aircraft from Ballalae.

He was required among the other tasks to assist with the development of the satellite museum at Ballalae and to train Solomon Islanders in conservation techniques.

A reliable source said that Mr. Turner, who is behind the current deal, claimed to be the

Director of the Airline Aircraft Salvage Museum during his appointment. However a source said there was no evidence that such a place exist. Unconfirmed reports suggest 11 of the warplanes were sold for millions of dollars, while other reports said the group will fund a WW11 museum on the island. However the source said that the appropriateness of granting an exclusive license to export items of national heritage to an advisor as part of their salary should be questioned. The item removed so far generated millions or dollars when brought overseas and exhibited in international museums, the source said. So hoe did the relics ended up in Ballalae?

BACKGRUND OF BALLALAE AND SIMILAR INCIDENCE IN THE PAST

The Japanese arrived in 1942 without resistance on the Ballalae. They build a coral crushed runway that spanned the length of the island. It developed the island into a forward air base that was an important base for both their Navy and Amy during early mid 1943. As the war turned against them hundreds of Allied bombing raids destroyed the base and littered the island with wreckage. Bypassed and left to wither on a vine, no Allied soldiers set foot on the island until an Australian Amy visit November 1945. The Australians made a shocking discovery on the island: a mass grave containing British POWs captured at Singapore and brought to the island as laborers. All had perished there from both Allied bombings and at the hands of their Japanese captors. Ballalae's aviation wracks have been largely ignored and neglected. This has served to both protect the island from post-war scrapers, but has also made the place a target for a serious salvagers spirit away relics without the knowledge of the larger outside world, or compensation to the local people or government. Nearly a quarter century has passed since the war. Ballalae's time-capsule was about to be broken. In the late 1960s, before the war bird craze swept the world. In 1969, he had just finished the movie "The Battle of Britain" where he had restored and flown a Hurricane fighter for the film. Flushed with confidence and cash from the film, he figured he would go to Pacific and salvage a Zero and a Val, and get them flying for the next Hollywood movie, "Tora Tora Tora!" Word of the island got to Australian Bill Chapman, a Pharmacist (Chemist) working in Port Moresby, New Guinea who was interested in war relics. In 1969, Diemert visited Chapman and befriended him. He suggested they go to Ballalae to fin a Zero and Val. Diemert made his way to Bougainville, and then by barge to Ballalae. There he found the treasure trove he imagined: an island full of Japanese wracks. He had to hurry; Ballalae was actually over the border in the Solomon Islands-another country. In the late 1960s enforcement and laws were lax. All there has to do was enlist the help of some locals, promised them some future compensation, and load as many planes aboard his barge as possible!

Diemert loaded a Val and three Zeros aboard his barge. Since the planes were intact, their wings and tails would have to be cut off!

His visit was cut short with a violent case of scrub typhus he contracted on the island and was reached to the hospital.

He left with only one barge load of booty that sailed back to Port Moresby.

After narrowly recovering from his illness, Diemert convinced the RCAF(Royal Canadian Air Force) to pick up the relics in one of their transports flying via Port Moresby, air lift them back to Canada for free...in exchange to one of(the Val) for their museum.

An American Patrick Murphy also involved in the removal of the wreckages in the late 1990s when he traveled to Ballalae.

Faruo Islanders assisted him in shipping a wreck (a Zero identity unknown) to Bougainville for export.

Lawrence Kibule, witnessed the happenings said Murphy, got three boys from Faruo Island, to help him take a fighter airplane from Ballalae.

He told them he would pay them \$10,000 but only gave them a carton of beer.

Most recently, new faces have taken an interest in the relics on Ballalae and hoped to export and sell some, or all of them.