

Solomon Island Star  
Saturday December 1, 2007

Private View (Editorial)

### **The Shame of the Solomons**

by Ninamo Otuana  
Samanago Village, Fauro, Shortlands

People of the Solomon Islands, over the past two to three years, we have been reading about the dealings and carrying on about this Island in the middle of nowhere.

Some three years ago, we saw articles about Ballalai in the SI Star, arguments over her and her treasures of intact Japanese Betty bombers and Zero fighters, people as far away as Canada, Australia, New York, all the way to the hierarchy in the National Museum, former MP's [Member Parliament ], Elder Statesman, Museum advisors, Chiefs and people of the Shortlands, all have made themselves known about how they feel.

SI Star, issue after issue, Ballalai dominated the 'private view' section. To those who were against the issue of selling - removing of the planes from the Island, with no-sense of any long term benefit to the people of the Shortlands and the SI, you are right, keep up the fight and we will see the real thing happen on Ballalai Island.

As to how we all vision it, for the betterment of our people in the Shortlands and the the Solomons as a whole, those who are for the latter, you cause is my fight, I don't care are how much you say to justify your cause, the answer is really quite simple... it's wrong.

To put light on the issue of the Island Ballalai, let's begin the story from the start. If any of you are asking where my information is from, its easy... I grew up with it... I lived it!

My association with Ballalai starts in the modern ear of the 20th Century, sometime in the early 1980's. I am not going to waste my time talking about the customary ownership of Ballalai, the reason for that is also quite simple!

I did not sell it for an axe handle or whatever sale agreement was agreed to then, between Chief / landowner of that time and the buyer of the island, I was not even in existence at that point in time and I am sure 99% of you people talking now weren't even around as well, and if you were, you would have been the little brats crying for susu [Breast milk] from your mothers.... in other words, you would not have known anything at all.

The other 1% knows the truth about Ballalai and I am sure if this carries on, they would come out of the woodwork! Lets all face it and accept the facts of today's world in which we live. What's done is done... its long over due, its time to move on!

Ballalai came into my life as a young boy just coming out of my teens... old enough to understand... too young to realize... certainly not crying for susu from mummy! I was with my father, the late Dominic Otuana one day when he told me about the island called Ballalai and how it was up for tender.

I was fortunate enough to be with him on the last day one hour before the tender for Ballalai closed. He walked into the office which was responsible for handling the tender and asked them if anyone at all from the Shortlands had submitted anything for the island... the answer was "No".

So he put forward his... the very words he said to me was "rather than a foreigner owning this and taking it away from the people of the Shortlands I'll go for it". He also told me that if anyone else from the Shortlands had put in a tender for the island, he would have simply pulled out of the deal.

Well, to cut a long story short... he won the tender, and later with his various business friends came up with a concept to building a WW2 Museum on Ballale itself. What would Ballale be today, some 22 years later, had it not been for some very stupid people... I'll tell you what... it would have been in a class of its own, boasting more war relics in one place than any where else in the world.

To any war historians, Ballalai would have been the jewel of the Pacific. Today people of the Solomons, we still have a chance to claim that, only if we make the right decisions now.

With regards to my fathers business dealings, I had nothing to do with it, the only thing I know of my father and the way he lived his life was one prayer and faith to the almighty, so you go figure it out yourself how he would have done his business!!!! I am proud to be his son and privileged to have been close to a man with vision... something which a lot of our leaders today lack.

My personal dealings with the island called Ballalai came around 2001. Around 5 years after my father passed on, I had to deal with Ballalai whether I liked it or not, always knowing how hard my father tried all his life and died without seeing his visions.

My father's company called "Solama" was still on the title being the registered fixed term estate hold of around 80% of Ballalai. The airport runway and walkway to the terminal and where the old rest house were, belonged to Famo Trust Board and one block belonged to a private person. How all of that came about is another issue and has nothing to do with me.

In June of 2001, I approached the remaining 2 Directors of Solama Ltd. forwarding my intent as any normal son would do about taking over my father's assets, interests and businesses. It was agreed by all parties concerned that it was the right thing to do and so it was agreed that I would be handed the reigns so to speak.

I will never forget one of the directors telling me how he promised my father that he would look after his children and always keep an eye out in the best interests of Dominic Otuana's children, should in the future anything come up with Ballalai or should Dominic's son wish to do something... and so on, and I thank you humbly for doing what you did some six years ago and having confidence in me.

My options were to either keep Solama Pty Ltd or not. I decided not to have the company... I did not need it. The registered name on the title deed today was changed by me and that is of no one's business to poke their noses into my affairs.

After all, have I in the past 6 years since tried to move any planes? And to those of you who asked me the question "who am I?" and chose to ignore me at the Famoia Council of Chiefs meeting at Nila its quite simple... I am the landowner! That's who I am. My advice to you now is this: if you want to open up a can of maggots about this issue, you go right ahead, so far we are only skimming the surface!

The people in the so called project involved the removal of the eleven more planes other than the six to eight planes, already moved and chopped up on the beach at Ballale that are so called gifts to Craig Turner, from Famoia Trust Board, please speak out and tell the country why you chose to conduct your business in an illegal manner.

All people concerned with this issue must be held accountable to the country and to all the people of the Solomon Islands. Ballale Island is a tourist attraction, a war memorial, a grave site for men and planes. We as a nation need to preserve every bit of history here! And in this country for our future generations to learn and understand with pride what we have.

There is a lot more to tell of this story of which I shall in time. I am now forced to seek legal action against all who dared to ignore the land owner, destroy property and try to cheat our people.

I tried to tell people at the council of chiefs meeting in Nila, but unfortunately they had already been promised money for the deal and that was all they were focused on at the time. I am sure if they really understood all that was stated in the MOU that they agreed to, they would have thrown the whole project into the sea along with the projects counterparts.

This is only part one of this amazing story. People that wish to show their concern and support write your articles and let your view be known, after all this is OUR heritage, Mr. Turner or Mr. Spooners, or Mr. Coxx or any other salvage person wanting to steal from us. To my good people of the Shortlands, when the time is right, we will all sit down and talk about the right thing to do in the best interest of our people of the Shortlands. We have an obligation to our children and to the nation to do this!

To the 2 people representing FAMOA Trust Board at the meeting at Nila, the question

for you is this, "why are you stealing from your own people?" You guys are supposed to be leaders not stealers! With all due respect, why are you treating us like idiots... iu sarve? [you know?]. Somefalla lo mifall lelebet garem heti nao! Everything iufalla duduim ia... mi no keleva lo hem na! [ The few who protect us are not, everything you did is not clever or helpful now! ]

The days of MOU's must stop now! But if you choose to go down this path, then your name shuld be changed from FAMOA Trust Board to CONMOA Trust Me!