



Bruce Palmer embarking for Bau, Fiji, August 1969.
(Photograph by Kenneth E. Emory)

John Bruce Palmer: 1923-1974

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BRUCE BIGGS

JOHN Bruce Palmer, B.A., Dip. Tchg., was born in the small New Zealand town of Woodville in 1923. He died suddenly at Auckland on May 3, 1974 not long after he and his family had returned to the land of his birth, following more than ten years residence in Fiji, where he was Director of the Fiji Museum, and in Hawaii, where he was a Senior Fellow at the Culture Learning Institute of the East-West Center. His death cut short a highly productive career in Polynesian and Fijian studies, and removed one of our most innovative and original workers in the fields of museum direction and culture learning. All who knew him will feel the loss of a sincere and valued friend; those who work in allied fields will know that they have lost a gifted colleague.

Bruce served in the New Zealand armed forces during World War II. He then trained as a teacher at Wellington Teachers' College, took a bachelor's degree in arts at the Victoria University of Wellington, and taught school in the Maori Schools service of the New Zealand Education Department. In 1956 he became Lecturer in Polynesian Studies at Wellington Teachers' College, and was there until 1963 when he took up the Directorship of the Fiji Museum, a position he filled with distinction for ten years, before taking up an appointment at the East-West Center in 1973.

During his time as Lecturer in Polynesian Studies at the Training College in Wellington, he found time and energy for intense participation in the fields dear to his heart. He served as President of the New Zealand Archaeological Association and conducted field surveys and excavations with the participation of the College Archaeological Club which he formed. He filled several offices in the Polynesian Society and for three years was joint editor of its journal.

By 1963 he was extremely well-fitted to take up the post of Director of the Fiji Museum. He undertook the job with characteristic enthusiasm and energy, completely revitalizing the Museum, which despite its excellent collections of Fijian material, was not a particularly inspiring place. Under Bruce's direction it became a cultural center for Suva, a place visited by local residents as well as by tourists,

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and often mentioned as a suitable model for such institutions in the Pacific area. Under his supervision additions to the building were planned and brought to completion, and many new displays showed the museum's fine collection to advantage. At this time he was also serving on numerous bodies concerned with the arts and with the conservation of archaeological sites and other aspects of culture in Fiji. His work was recognized by the award of the Fiji Independence Medal.

In Fiji, Bruce maintained his deep interest in all aspects of culture history. He took part in a number of archaeological investigations and encouraged others to undertake research in Fiji. In 1969 he took care of the local arrangements for the Wenner-Gren Symposium on Pacific Culture History held at Sigatoka, an outstandingly successful meeting that owed much to his efficient organization.

Bruce Palmer's quiet and pleasant personality, his deep commitment to Pacific scholarship, and his genuine liking and concern for the people with whom he worked ensured him many friends in all parts of the world. Each one of us will have been shocked by his sudden death and share personal grief with his wife and children. Our sense of loss is heightened by the knowledge that his untimely passing occurred when he still had much to contribute to our knowledge in those fields of interest which were so dear to him. *Haere, e te hoa, haere ki Hawaiki.*

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