

## Samoans, World War II, and Military Work

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When Commander Benjamin F. Tilley arrived at Tutuila in August 1899 he marvelled at Pago Pago harbor, "a perfect fortress . . . stronger for defense than Gibraltar." Eight months later eastern Samoa was ceded to the United States, and Tilley set out to establish a naval administration for the territory. He created a government that included only two new institutions, a judicial system and the Fitafita Guard, who were to enforce court decisions and generally maintain order. Tilley formed the Fitafita in order to attract "the elite young men and thus bring them under the influence of the government" (quoted in Olsen 1976, 9-10, 21). During the 1920s and 1930s, employment with the naval administration brought a great deal of prestige to the Fitafita guardsmen. Darden states that the Fitafita were an important source of cash for their extended families (*aiga*), and that guardsmen were "accruing prestige vastly out of proportion to their traditional status" (1952, 13).

In the early 1940s World War II came to American and Western Samoa. When Samoans speak of this period they talk of the abundant wage labor opportunities and the continuities of their military service to the United States. In the 1940s large numbers of Samoans, not just Fitafita guardsmen, gained access to wage labor opportunities, military enlistment opportunities, and a chance to redefine their status in relation to their traditional chief's *matai*. Hundreds of American and Western Samoans developed transportation, communication, and supply skills, and with the end of the war they were eager to succeed in overseas labor markets. In this way World War II provided a major stimulus to international Samoan migration, a migration that now encompasses a wide geographic expanse from New Zealand through Samoa to Hawai'i and the US mainland. For Samoans, as for other Islanders discussed in this conference, the aftereffects of World War II have been as disruptive as the war itself.

During World War II in Samoa, for the first time hundreds of Samoans were allowed to volunteer for the US military, either as Fitafita guardsmen or as members of the US Navy or Marine Corps Reserve. When the naval

ROBERT W. FRANCO

station at Tutuila was closed in 1951, these recruits and their dependents, nearly a thousand people in all, were relocated to Hawai'i. From the 1940s to the present Samoans have been volunteering to serve in the US armed forces, and as they have traveled to military bases in Hawai'i, California, and Washington they have found kin who have preceded them and established Samoan enclaves near these military bases. From World War II to the present military enlistment has been a significant catalyst to migration, and a major strategy for adapting to American urban environments.

In 1940 Pago Pago was only a minor naval station lacking "the facilities necessary to handle wartime logistical problems" (Olsen 1976, 175-176). In the spring of 1940 Captain A. R. Pefley went to American Samoa to draw up plans for the development of defense capabilities on Tutuila. Pefley's development plan included the following points:

- 1 Additional quarters for officers and enlisted men must be constructed;
- 2 Expand commissary, storage, and refrigeration;
- 3 A new dispensary and additional generators needed;
- 4 Increase light and heavy machinery and equipment;
- 5 Purchase additional land at Fagotogo and Utulei;
- 6 Build garage, machine shop, and recreation facilities;
- 7 Improve sanitation in Pago Pago and other areas;
- 8 Develop a thorough agricultural program to feed the men.

In November 1940 expansion of the naval station began. Later this expansion program was part of a contract, The Pacific Air Bases Program, which included construction work at Pearl Harbor (Burke 1972b, 25).

Much of this initial expansion on Tutuila was conducted under the administration of G. K. Brodie, director of the Public Works Department. From the naval records there appears to have been a great urgency to this expansion. For example, the records refer to "war clouds brewing," and "the clouds of war descending." Brodie felt that the necessary speed of the work was unfortunate and that there would be problems going from a "decrepit, minor Naval Station" to a "Pacific Air Base" in a short period of time (Burke 1972b). Brodie, in a memorandum to Lieutenant Commander W. L. Richards, wrote:

The labor situation is most unique. . . . In general, the native labor will be sufficient and satisfactory. However, there are several points that require special mention: a) Native Food supplies have to be maintained. The natives have one great fault; they have little foresight. As long as they have sufficient food in the ground for their needs, they are satisfied. They do not

## *Samoans and Military Work*

entirely grasp the fact that when we take most of their men for labor they will have to rely on the women, old men, and children for plantation work. We are making every attempt to encourage or force them to keep planting in excess so that there will always be adequate food to supply the men working. If their food supply fails, we will have to take over the task of feeding the island by the importation of rice and by fishing with dynamite. At regular intervals, native Public Works employees who have high standing with the natives are being sent out to check the plantation and put pressure on the chiefs to keep the planting going. This is an odd and perhaps illegal expenditure, but it is almost mandatory under the circumstances; b) The natives can do a good 8 or 10 hours work a day, but when worked beyond that, they cannot keep up the pace. They desire to work as much as possible to get the money, but trials have proved that they cannot physically stand up under long working hours. (Burke 1972b, 25)

By October, 1942 the US military was preparing for a possible attack on Tutuila and for a protracted engagement. The role of the Fitafita Guard in any defensive action was clearly specified:

Fitafita section 1 -- Take the enemy forces under fire approaching within the east sector of the Naval facility. Control the spread of fire during lulls in the battle.

Fitafita section 3 -- Take enemy forces under fire approaching within the *malae* area. Control fire . . . safeguard essential material and records as directed. Be prepared to carry out Naval Station Logistic Plan One on order.

Fitafita section 4 -- Take enemy forces under fire approaching within the west sector . . . control fire during lulls in the battle.

Fitafita section 5 -- Take enemy forces under fire approaching within the *malae* area. Be prepared to man fire truck on order. Power house detail control damage to Naval Station power supply. (Burke 1972a)

Samoans were also active within the Supply Division at Pago Pago. This division was viewed as one of the most important because it was necessary to "keep the logistics train functioning smoothly" (Burke 1972b, 129). The Supply Division consisted of 2500 civilian employees, and it is assumed that most or all of these were Samoans.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor many ships were directed to Pago Pago. According to Burke, "Ship arrivals jumped from three in December, 1941 to fifty-six in December, 1942. Shipping activity was intensive throughout 1943. In March, 1943, 121 vessels passed through Pago Pago harbor. Shipping arrivals declined after February, 1944, from fifty per month to less than twenty" (1972b, 135).

ROBERT W. FRANCO

A great deal of military activity occurred in Samoa between January 1942 and March 1944. In October 1942 there were 14,371 American servicemen on Tutuila and Upolu. During the following twelve months this military force decreased to 9491, and by February of 1944 only 2080 American servicemen remained in Samoa (Burke 1972a, 75). The "Marine Era" on Tutuila ended on 1 March 1944, when the base reverted to a naval station. The naval commandant was then responsible for the "roll up" of the base, that is, he made available supplies and building materials to be sent to the forward bases in the Northern and Central Pacific. The naval station was given a new, less urgent "mission" (Burke 1972a, 7). The station then provided:

- 1 Limited anchorage facility
- 2 Permanent fueling facilities
- 3 Minor naval repair depot
- 4 Supply facilities
- 5 Communication facilities
- 6 Weather observation station
- 7 Limited aviation facilities
- 8 Hospital facilities
- 9 Internal security using any personnel available

Even into 1945 more than seven hundred Samoans were working as stevedoring personnel using cargo handling equipment, cranes, trucks, and trailers, and reports from Tutuila remark: "Ships are promptly discharged to full limit of labor and equipment available" (Burke 1972a, 13).

In general the US military presented positive assessments of the Samoan labor force, especially during the period of intense military activity, 1942-1944. Burke states: "Throughout the entire war period Samoan personnel were used wherever possible releasing the Navy personnel for more vital jobs. The Samoans performed very satisfactorily. Although the Samoan did not have the stamina of a Caucasian, he could work for about ten hours a day without losing efficiency" (1972b, 131).

The US military was also present on Upolu and Savai'i after 27 March 1942. The greatest concentration of American troops was on Upolu, as Savai'i was considered too rough and mountainous for airfields, and there were no anchorages for larger ships. Through negotiations with A. C. Turnbull, acting administrator in Western Samoa, and with other representatives of the New Zealand government, the United States was able to secure tenure over 5000 acres of land for the period of the war. The land was to be developed into an airstrip using US military personnel and Samoan workers. The Samoans were paid 5 shillings per eight-hour day if they were laborers and 8 to 16 shillings

per eight-hour day if they were foremen or specialists. It appears that the Western Samoans were also eager to work, as one report states that "sufficient labor is available at all times" (Burke 1972*b*, 46). In addition to assisting military personnel with the construction of an airstrip, Western Samoans also worked in roadbuilding. As the war moved westward beyond Samoa, Western Samoans worked to maintain the airstrip as an emergency facility.

Olsen, (1976, 177-179), in his fine history of the American naval administration in Samoa, summarizes some of the beneficial and disruptive effects of Samoan participation in World War II:

One of the most important benefits that Samoans would derive . . . was the experience and training Samoan mechanics and craftsmen gained working alongside American civilian contract employees and the Seabees. As a result after the war, Samoans were competent to construct, maintain and operate the Island Government facilities. With the exception of the Public Works officer and his assistant . . . all the employees of the Public Works Department were Samoan, including draftsmen, surveyors, foremen, machinists, heavy equipment operators, plumbers, electricians, refrigeration mechanics, welders, and clerks. Also, during and after the war, Samoans working for the naval station learned valuable trades that allowed them to open their own small businesses, such as small auto repair shops, paint shops, and carpentry services. Other Samoans who had enlisted received veteran's benefits allowing them to further their education. (1976, 177-179)

However, Olsen goes on to argue:

On the whole the impact of World War II was disruptive despite the benefits Samoa gained as a result of the war. The very foundation of Samoan society --the *matai* system--was threatened . . . The replacement of Samoa's plantation economy by a wage economy gave the young men . . . a feeling of independence gained from having money in their pockets rather than being dependent on their *matai* who controlled the family's lands. (1976, 179)

In 1945 Governor Hauser addressed the American Samoa Fono in these words: "We have much to do, as native industry, agriculture, education, and the like suffered greatly when you made your all-out effort for the U.S. and our allies" (quoted in Olsen 1979, 186). Governor Hauser warned the Fono that the wartime prosperity would soon be over. This prosperity is probably best reflected in the growth of the assets of the Bank of American Samoa during the period. Between 30 June 1941 and 30 June 1945 this bank's assets grew from \$309,768 to \$1,804,281 (Olsen 1976, 178).

ROBERT W. FRANCO

In the period 1945 to 1950, the American Samoa Fono addressed three major issues to the naval administration. First, a request was made to give all Fitafita guardsmen and Samoan Marines American citizenship. This request was withdrawn when questions about citizenship and land ownership were raised. Second, Chief Tuiasosopo complained from his position within the Fono that during the war years the military administration had inappropriately selected lower ranking chiefs for government positions. Third, in the discussion over a constitution for American Samoa, it was decided to remove a clause prohibiting "involuntary servitude" because the Fono was afraid that such a clause might restrict the authority of *matai*. These issues show quite clearly that American Samoa political leaders, even after the disruptions of World War II, still placed great value in their *matai* system and its prerogatives in economic decision making. Further, the citizenship issue foreshadowed an ongoing concern over citizenship status and land tenure questions.

The period 1940 to 1950 was a decade of rapid population growth in American Samoa, no doubt partly due to the presence of the US military (see Keesing 1973). By 1951 the wartime prosperity was ending, and Samoans were finding it difficult to readjust to a lowered standard of living. Lewthwaite, Mainzer, and Holland vividly describe the diaspora that accompanied the closing of the US Naval base in American Samoa in 1951:

*The General R. L. Howze, the last scheduled naval transport sailed on 25 June, 1951. It carried many members of the disbanded Fitafita Guard north to Hawaii . . . and when, in 1952, the President Jackson called on short notice to pick up dependents, the authorities were faced with something of a rush. For many claimed relatives in Hawaii and seized the opportunity for free or low cost naval transportation, and though the hastiness of the medical and financial screening was to provoke protest--almost 1,000 Samoans embarked for Honolulu. (1973, 135)*

### Conclusion

During the 1940s a rapid increase in the number of wage-labor opportunities stimulated large-scale rural-urban migration to Pago Pago. Job skills acquired during World War II gave Samoans the confidence to begin moving internationally--American Samoans to Hawai'i and the US mainland, Western Samoans to New Zealand--in the early 1950s. These early international movers were probably more highly skilled than any later wave of Samoan migrants. The initial migrants to Hawai'i and the US mainland established

Samoan communities around military bases, and these "ethnic enclaves" have provided, and continue to provide, points of entry for new Samoan migrants.

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