

April 17, 2007

Dear Sir Ian,

Thanks very much for your letter of 8th February. I can appreciate your good feelings about Dr. Macpherson; from reading some of his papers, including his passionate report on Gerald Gallagher's demise, I certainly get the impression of an upright, hard-working, dedicated man.

It now looks like we'll be going back to Nikumaroro in July for about three weeks of archaeological work. In the village we plan to excavate at the carpenter's house, where PISS Public Works Officer Jack Kimo Petro lived for awhile; we've found airplane parts in the vicinity in the past, and it's evident that the residents of the place gathered in whatever looked like it might be useful from whatever machines came their way. His son, Edwin Petro, whom we interviewed in Majuro, recalled hearing his father, Aram Tamia, and others discussing the discovery of aluminum fragments on the reef. We also plan to do intensive work at the other end of the island, at the site that matches Gerald Gallagher's description of the bones discovery site, in hopes of recovering something that can be subjected to DNA analysis. Meanwhile, we've begun working with a Kiribati government organization that's compiling all available documents on the Phoenix Islands, in connection with its nomination to UNESCO's World Heritage List, so I'm busily digging through our files and copying things to send off. I only hope the place has a few years left before it goes underwater. We're also making inquiries in Honiara, following up on your suggestion that DO diaries may have wound up there. The unsettled conditions in the Solomons at present are complicating this effort, however.

I just received a copy of Robert Lowry's *Fortress Fiji*, with your elegant jacket note, and have only begun to peruse it. It reminds me of a question I've been meaning to ask. Can you tell me anything about the excavation, use, and subsequent closure of the tunnels under Suva? I understand that the Fiji Museum's collections went into one of them and came out damaged to some degree, so that some material had to be discarded. We wonder if the same may have happened to the Nikumaroro bones, or if they may still be in a tunnel somewhere. It must have been a huge undertaking to excavate the tunnels, but I've never seen an account of it, and wonder about them.

You mentioned Harold Gatty. As you probably know, his son Ron still lives in Fiji; he's been very helpful to us. I'll enclose still another offprint from the TIGHAR website by Fr. Martin Moleski, one of our team members who visited Mr. Gatty a few years ago. I'm embarrassed by the weird confusion that Fr. Moleski seems to have experienced between Gerald Gallagher and Sir Harry Luke; I'd not noticed it until I opened up the article to print it for you.

I've also been meaning to ask you about the late Stanley Brown. I know a little about his career both with the WPHC and later with Fiji's naval forces, and I've seen (but not yet read) his book on Fijian history, but my understanding of his story is very limited. We met him in 1989 during a reception at the U.S. Charge d'Affairs' home, where he described how – as Chief Engineer aboard *Viti* – he held a lantern for Dr. Macpherson while he operated on Gallagher. Ten years later, after Mr. Brown had suffered a stroke, Robert Keith-Reid wrote a strange wire service piece claiming that it was Mr. Brown who found the bones on Nikumaroro. When asked about it, Mr. Keith-Reid indicated that he had been mistaken, and Mrs. Brown confirmed that Mr. Brown had had nothing to do with the bones. We've wondered how the story got started, and it struck me that Mr. Brown might have been in command of *Nimanoa* when she visited Nikumaroro in January 1941 and collected the bones. They would thus have been in his possession for awhile, during the time that Dr. Isaac became so exercised about their shipment through Tarawa and closed the harbor for awhile, and this might have caused Mr. Brown to be associated with the bones in some minds. This in turn has provoked a friendly argument within our organization, some saying "no, he couldn't have commanded *Nimanoa*; he was an engineer," while others argue that the WPHC's flotilla was not so large that officers didn't very likely have to be prepared to do almost anything. Please pardon this lengthy lead-up to the question: is it reasonable to think that Mr. Brown might have been in command of *Nimanoa* in early 1941?

Another thing I hope you can do for me sometime if you're so inclined is just to recall your voyage to the Phoenix Islands with Sir Harry Luke and give me a sense of what your visit to Nikumaroro was like. In *The Things We Do For England...* Eric Bevington has an account of Sir Harry's coming ashore at Beru with his very tall A.D.C. (you?) "in full panoply;" I've often wondered whether the visit to Nikumaroro involved similar pageantry – or was it a less formal affair?

If there's anything we can do for you while on the island this year, we'd certainly be happy to do so. We will of course pay our respects to Gerald Gallagher's grave, even though he is no longer in it, and take plenty of pictures.

Best regards,