

JUSTIN TAYLAN PAC STATEMENT

September 12, 2006

I would like to thank the PAC for investigating the timely and sensitive matter of Papua New Guinea war relics and for inviting me to testify in person.

My name is Justin Taylan. I am an historian, author and documentarian. My grandfather served in the US Army in PNG during the Second World War. He took me here in 1993 when I was 16 years old. The experience so moved me that I wrote a book about my grandfather's experience as a soldier. My conclusion read: "PNG remains full of the beautiful people Grandpa remembered from a half century ago. Abandoned airstrips, war relics, and memorials to those who died were all testament to the battles waged there... These experiences have left me a changed person."

I volunteered at the PNG Museum in 2003–2004 contributing historical information, photographs and equipment. I've also volunteered at other museums in America and for the past ten years have tracked the history, location and condition of war artifacts on a website I founded, "PacificWrecks.com".

It is my wish that PNG history be preserved so that future generations can learn of the world's greatest struggle. My statement today seeks two objectives: 1) To preserve PNG's historical heritage, 2) To leverage PNG's unique tourism opportunities toward generating revenue to support education, tourism infrastructure, and a stronger national museum.

Why We Are Here: *'The Swamp Ghost'*

We are here because of an airplane from the Second World War known as 'Swamp Ghost'. It is a symbol of the war in PNG and is famous around the world as the most intact wreck remaining on land.

In April a private group removed the bomber from where the war left it. Around the world, news of the salvage and sale spread like wild fire. A public outcry followed: "Why was 'Swamp Ghost' removed and sold? Why would the museum or tourism allow it? Was it really worth only \$100,000 USD?"

No public inquiry was held prior to the salvage. Questions persisted. "Was the 'permit' they issued adequate? Was the decision to accept the seemingly inadequate payment proper compensation? Was the deal legal?"

Today the bomber rests on a dock at Lae and has been cut into small pieces for shipment out of the country. Will PNG permit the bomber's export? Or will the matter be reconsidered such that the government may take steps toward protecting this invaluable relic?

Impact of the Second World War on PNG

It is important for all nations to keep reminders of their war history. PNG's role sixty years ago in the world's greatest conflict is central to the country's national heritage and can provide

lessons for future generations. And PNG enjoys a unique distinction in that it still has relics drawing tourists, scuba divers and historians worldwide.

The war changed PNG more than any event before or since. New Guineans served as carriers and scouts offering local insight that helped the Allies win the war. Women and children fled to the bush and experienced hardship. Thousands of PNG's people died. Locals met people from other countries and saw new technologies for the first time, like the airplane. The seeds of independence were sown.

Why Should the PAC be Concerned with History?

How does this relate to the PAC? The PAC is responsible for government money spent in PNG and ensuring that government organizations adhere to their charters. PAC serves as a watchdog minimizing corruption and theft of government resources. The committee oversees budgetary allocations so that government departments do not waste funds. PAC is the ultimate arbiter of financial accountability.

The National Museum

The government entrusts the National Museum to look after artifacts and historical sites. The museum's charter states their mission is: "To Preserve and protect PNG's unique cultural, national & contemporary heritage".

In the sphere of World War II history the National Museum has failed the people of PNG. PAC has the responsibility to correct this ailment and refocus the museum to its charter.

The 'Swamp Ghost' is just one case among many where museum personnel failed to critically examine proposals from salvagers and instead facilitated the removal of historical and tourism assets. Museum rules have routinely been ignored and major decisions are made without the public having any knowledge of or role in the process.

My recommendations for changes at the museum are as follows:

- The museum should maintain a collection of artifacts in the nation's capital that is accessible to tourists and citizens. Plans for a modern indoor museum facility at the old airport terminal (or another location) need to be revived. Such a facility is a prerequisite of any viable museum collection and will ensure safekeeping of national treasures like 'Swamp Ghost'.
- Staff should work with tourism to identify sites of value for protection in their natural environment and to nurture historical tourism.
- The museum should engage only in museum-to-museum dealings.
- All proposals should be made available for public review. All board meetings should be open to all, including the media. Public feedback should be formally solicited and considered.
- There should be a temporary moratorium on the salvage of wartime artifacts and any active export permits ended.
- Past salvages should be evaluated for criminal conduct. If a case constitutes theft of PNG property or the sale of stolen goods, overseas law enforcement should be

engaged in returning these national assets. Those New Guineans abetting theft should be prosecuted.

- Ongoing restoration projects involving PNG Museum aircraft should be completed on a firm timetable or be returned to PNG.

Tourism Promotion Authority

Around the world, interest in the Second World War increases and historical tourism is a burgeoning industry. Last year, more visitors trekked the Kokoda Trail than ever before. PNG is one of the few places in the world where artifacts and historical sites can be experienced virtually unchanged from sixty years ago. This is a unique competitive advantage on the world stage and has been recognized as such in the PNG Tourism Sector Review and Master Plan 2007–2017.

It is the PAC's responsibility, on behalf of Parliament, to see that the nation's history is protected. As more and more artifacts are lost to salvage, opportunities for future tourism growth are diminished. The National Museum needs to work closely with the TPA to protect sites and artifacts with tourism value.

PAC findings will serve as the basis for public discourse on policy priorities and a renewed collaborative opportunity for the National Museum and Tourism Promotion Authority. The best relics have already been taken from the country. It is imperative that protection of those remaining be undertaken. A protection plan should be developed and implemented preserving them as monuments where the war left them. This would include government protection, local awareness programs and education. Simultaneously 'grassroots' tourism should be cultivated to benefit locals.

An oversight committee is needed for issues related to tourism, the museum, law enforcement and the government. This committee should have arrangements with law enforcement and government protection to investigate and prosecute plunderers. Museum and tourism staff and their boards of directors should enjoy the government's shield against personal lawsuits. The case of 'Swamp Ghost' illustrates the pressure such threats of litigation weigh upon decision makers.

'Swamp Ghost'

The 'Swamp Ghost' is a perfect example of an artifact full of history, tourism potential and monetary value for PNG. In 1942, most New Guineans had never seen an airplane. Some mistook them for giant birds. This bomber's crew was rescued and led to safety by locals without whom they'd have perished. Aircraft like 'Swamp Ghost' visited every corner of the PNG from 1942–1945. Some carried cargo, others released bombs and bullets.

I visited 'Swamp Ghost' twice. The first trip I made into a documentary that was shown on EM TV in April 2006. My second trip I guided eight tourists to the bomber and surrounding villages proving that local people welcomed tourism and that the aircraft was easily accessible by a 1.7km walking trail. Tourism to 'Swamp Ghost' could have generated a sustainable

revenue stream that within a few years would have exceeded the lump sum offered by salvagers.

I propose for PAC consideration the following course of action for ‘Swamp Ghost’:

- The relic’s export permit should be revoked by the museum and reinstated pending further review of this matter in light of PAC recommendations.
- If the plane is exported from Lae in a manner not in accord with PNG law, an unequivocal statement should be issued that the relic was stolen from PNG and any museum in receivership will be held accountable under international law.
- ‘Swamp Ghost’ should be relocated from the dock at Lae to a safe location, like the Guard Dog Compound (which has apparently offered its yard) as an interim step.
- The government should develop a ‘Management Plan’ for the bomber’s future. This will involve planning and fund allocation to display it at Nadzab or relocate it to Port Moresby into an indoor hanger (old airport terminal?).
- Outside organizations and people should be sought to preserve the bomber in PNG as a historical attraction. If it is to be auctioned, the PAC should ensure the highest international bid is obtained.

Conclusions

‘Swamp Ghost’ is a harbinger of future PNG policy governing war relics. It may stay, it may be sold to the highest bidder, it may be shuffled out the back door for millions below market value. Regardless of its uncertain fate, Swamp Ghosts’ enduring legacy may be its inspiration of PNG’s cultural awareness and interest in historical preservation.

I urge you to reflect on the charter of the organization to which you belong. I challenge each of you to think about your responsibilities to the people of PNG, future generations, tourism and fostering the best museum in the Pacific. And I urge those impacted by PAC findings to consider carefully their next actions. Doing what is right is never easy, especially with outside offers for money or under threat of malice.

I believe proper government stewardship can simultaneously preserve PNG’s rich past and leverage it to bring wealth to the nation, now and for future generations. Such an outcome tomorrow demands decisive action by the PAC today.

I thank the PAC for the privilege of offering testimony. I look forward to contributing in any way I can toward these important initiatives. And I hope that 13 years from now, as I did 13 years ago with my grandfather, that I will still be able to see relics like ‘Swamp Ghost’ here in PNG. Thank you.

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