WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING

UNVEILING OF THE PLAQUE
7th July 2012
Next year on the anniversary of the Monument, “Pride of Our Nation” the Solomon Coastwatchers and Scouts Memorial Trust will unveil the plaque bearing the names of the brave Solomon heroes.

The Trust has sent messages through the national radio station, Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation (SIBC) and through articles in the national paper, Solomon Star, advising veteran Scouts and Coastwatchers or their descendants to come forward with their names and details to avoid any disappointment of being left out.

JOHN INNES WWII HISTORIAN’S BOOKLETS
Our Telekom, the Solomon owned Telecommunications’ operator in the Solomon Islands has indicated that they are willing to sponsor the publications of the World War II booklets that Mr John Innes has written. Mr Loley Ngira, the CEO of Our Telekom agrees with the Trust on the importance of documenting the knowledge that Mr Innes has acquired of the Pacific War, especially his passion for the history of the battle of Guadalcanal.

We also have John Innes’ Battlefield tours on DVD available for sale at AUD$25 which also includes postage. Anyone interested in seeing footage of the opening ceremony of the Memorial and street party may also purchase a copy of the DVD at AUD$40 which also includes postage.

DONATIONS
Donation appeals for the Solomon Coastwatchers and Scouts Memorial Trust initiatives are still welcome. There are three projects the Trust project committee would like to complete by end of 2012. These are:
- the publication of World War II booklets
- the unveiling of the plaque with the listing of the names of the Solomon Scouts and Coastwatchers
- the street party celebration incorporation into the national holiday of the Solomon Islands’ Independence Day.

Donations can be made by telegraphic transfer directly to the Coast Watchers Memorial Trust Account:
Details are: Westpac Bank, Mendana Ave. Honiara, Solomon Islands
Swift Code: WPACSBSSB
A/c Name: Coast Watchers Memorial Trust Board
B.S.B.: 039030
A/c No: 2000105664
Pride of Our Nation

The Solomon Scouts and Coastwatchers Memorial Trust has recently written to the Solomon Island Government’s Independence Day organising committee suggesting that the Monument Street Party concept be incorporated into the country’s annual national day celebrations on 7 July.

The Trust recommended a memorial service be held prior to the opening ceremony on Commonwealth street on 7 July. As the day is already a public holiday it would allow more Solomon islanders to participate in the celebrations. At the same time allowing the community to honour their heroes and help unify Solomon Islanders through a sense of pride in the great sacrifice these gallant Solomon Islanders made to alter the history of the Pacific War - least we forget.

SOLOMON ISLAND SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Ms Annie Kwai is back at it again studying her Masters at the National University of Australia in Canberra thanks to the scholarship provided by the Australian Government. The Trust hopes that her thesis and findings will be incorporated into the Solomon Island curriculum for primary level students to understand who and what the Solomon Coastwatchers and Scouts were about. Last term Ms Kwai scored ‘distinction’ on her examinations results and the Solomon’s Memorial Trust is looking forward to her completing her studies and returning to help this very important project.
Dedication of the Monument

By Rita Koroi

The Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels of Papua New Guinea and their heroic deeds of coming to the aid of the Australians on the Kokoda trail during the Second World War is quite well known. Lesser known is the story of Solomon Islands coastwatcher network, led by an Australian, who commanded a rag tag group of Europeans and hundreds of Islanders. As the British colony was evacuated ahead of the Japanese advance in the Pacific, some brave expats decided to stay on as the Allies’ eyes and the ears behind enemy lines.

As a child I use to sit on the floor next to my grandfather, Geoffrey Kuper, and listen to his stories of when he was a coastwatcher, but did not understand the full extent of the role he played during the war. He was based at Tataba in Isabel Province, and his radio code name was “Unattached K. He could claim fame for being the patriarch of the only coastwatcher family. My grandmother, Linda Kuper, was right by his side throughout the war. She was the first Solomon Island woman to drive and took my grandfather in a jeep to and from the American base whenever he went to give his services as a doctor.

It was only while helping with the Solomon Islands Coastwatcher and Scouts’ Memorial Trust that I finally understood what my grandfather had experienced. Geoffrey Kuper and so many other Solomon Islanders helped change the course of history in the Pacific War by helping the Americans win the Battle of Guadalcanal. In US Admiral Bull Halsey’s words, “The coastwatchers saved Guadalcanal, and Guadalcanal saved the Pacific”.

The Battle of Guadalcanal finally halted the enemy’s advance, marking the turning point of the war in the Pacific in 1943. Almost 40,000 people died during the six-month campaign, known to Solomon islanders as the Big Death. Hundreds of Solomon Islanders saw active service, and many more helped and protected them. They also rescued a remarkable number of downed pilots, sailors and soldiers, including the future president of the United States, John F Kennedy, when his patrol boat - the PT109 - was rammed and sunk by a Japanese cruiser.

In August 2011, a memorial was unveiled to the Solomon Islands Scouts and Coastwatchers. The day was chosen to coincide with the annual service marking the US marines landing on Guadalcanal on 7 August 1942.

Solomon Islands Governor General Sir Frank Kabui and three surviving veterans - Edward Lulumani, Alfred Bisili and Thomas Titulu - officially unveiled the memorial. Among the hundreds of invited guests and onlookers were former Prime Minister Sir Peter Kenilorea, the head of the US armed forces in the Pacific Major General Colonel Robert D Loynd USMC, a representative of the Australian Navy Commander Geoffrey Turner as well as the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs Honourable Manasseh Maelanga and the British High Commissioner His Excellency Mr Timothy Smart.

I think my Uncle Addie (Adrian Wickham) summed it up nicely when he said, “that he went along not sure really what to expect and then ended up being very touched and moved by the whole event.” I am pretty sure others that came to witness the unveiling of the “Pride of Our Nation” monument felt the same.

Many people have felt that this memorial paying homage to the coastwatchers and scouts has been long overdue. It is sad that the majority of these brave souls such as the late Daniel Pule, Sergeant Dovu, Sir Gideon Zoleveke, Bill Bennett, my grandfather and many others were not there to witness it. Their great sacrifices and commitment to ensure the freedom we take for granted today will now be remembered.

The Scouts and Coastwatchers’ Memorial Trust is managed by Mr Bruce Saunders, who hopes future generations of Solomon Islanders will be able to learn of their ancestors’ exploits. My late grandfather had lamented that he was only a “friend when in need” after the war. Mr Saunders always felt that the locals had not been given the recognition and acknowledgement that they deserved. In fact his late father-in-law Mr Blum was a former American service man, was one of only few to return to Solomon Islands after the war and build a life for himself and his family here.

In Honiara, take a stroll down Commonwealth Street and see for yourself the Pride of Our Nation monument that was sculptured by renowned Solomon’s artist Frank Haiku, it depicts a Coastwatcher and three Solomon Island Scouts. One of the scouts is manning a radio, another holding a bush knife, and the third is holding a old 303 rifle.

The memorial is a reminder to all Solomon Islanders to feel pride in the selfless sacrifices our ancestors made.