

**“WINNING THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE”: THE US AND GLOBAL TOURS  
OF THREE SDA PACIFIC ISLANDERS - RATU MELI SELABOGI, KATA  
RAGOSO, AND ROBERT SALAU.**

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**PRELIMINARY DRAFT**

by

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## **ABSTRACT:**

In 1926 Ratu Meli Salabogi of Fiji was appointed as a delegate to the 41<sup>st</sup> General Conference (GC) Session in Milwaukee – the first delegate from the South Pacific Islands. He was followed in 1936 by Kata Ragoso, a Solomon Islander who was appointed as a delegate to the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Conference Session in San Francisco. Both Ratu Meli Salabogi and Kata Ragoso were more than just ordinary delegates though – they were explicitly selected and sent to the United States as part of a major PR and fund-raising campaign by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Following the 1926 GC Session Salabogi toured extensively in the Western US – speaking at meetings in St. Helena, Oakland, Fresno, Los Angeles, Loma Linda, Santa Ana, and San Diego in California and also at the Seventh-day Adventist camp-meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah.<sup>1</sup> Ragoso was probably the first Solomon Island visitor to the United States of America and following the GC Session he was taken on a nationwide tour by church officials, speaking to thousands in churches and auditoriums, on numerous radio broadcasts, as well as being filmed by the Pathé News Reel Company. Ragoso returned as a delegate to the 47<sup>th</sup> General Conference Session in 1954 – also held in San Francisco. Again he undertook a promotional tour – though this time with an even higher profile as a genuine war hero who had rescued and cared for numerous American military personnel fighting the Japanese in the Solomon Islands during World War II.

While not a GC Session delegate, in 1949 Robert Salau – also a Solomon Islander – undertook a global tour visiting Australia, Britain, and the US. During the Pacific war Salau had been involved in rescuing over 500 American servicemen and his arrival in New York was a sensation with eight New York dailies, the Associated Press, United Press, International News Service, and N. E. A. Aboard as well as representatives of radio and newsreel companies. He was featured in both Time and Newsweek.

This paper looks at the four “tours” undertaken by these three individuals and examines how they were portrayed in both the secular and church media; and at how the church utilized them in the promotion of its mission work – and how these individuals leveraged this publicity for their own benefit.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

### **RATU MELI SALABOGI**

In 1926 Ratu Meli Salabogi was appointed as a delegate to the 41<sup>st</sup> General Conference session in Milwaukee – the first Pacific Islander to be appointed to this role. Salabogi’s role was viewed by the church as more than that of an “ordinary” delegate – in some ways his role as a delegate was incidental. Salabogi was explicitly selected and sent to the United States as part of a major PR and fund-raising campaign by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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Salabogi was an early Fijian convert to the SDA Church. Upon retirement from his role as a *Buli* (district chief recognized by the British colonial government) – he spent his time as a traveling preacher and evangelist for the SDA Church. Prior to his US visit he travelled to Australia and later would also travel to New Zealand.

## KATA RAGOSO

Kata Ragoso was among the first group of Seventh-day Adventist converts in the Solomon Islands, having been baptized on January 1, 1918 by the Welsh pioneer missionaries Griffith F. Jones who with his wife Marion had pioneered the Seventh-day Adventist presence in the Solomon Islands. Following his baptism Ragoso was employed by the church as a teacher in the village of Ramata – despite having only completed a few years of school himself. He later became the leading Solomon Island assistant in the area; working as a teacher, translator, printer, navigator, and captain of the mission ship *Kima*. On May 18, 1935, Kata Ragoso and his cousin Barnabas Pana were ordained as Seventh-day Adventist ministers – the first Solomon Islanders to be so recognized.<sup>2</sup>

## ROBERT SALAU



Salau & Oti

Robert Salau became a SDA in 1919. He became a pioneer missionary and teacher – first working in the Solomon Islands then assisting Gilbert MacLaren to pioneer the SDA message in the islands of Mussau and Emirau in the St Matthias Group, PNG. In 1934 he assisted MacLaren and a group of indigenous missionaries in pioneering the SDA message in the Eastern highlands of PNG at Kainantu. During WW2 he was placed in charge of the Church's work in the St Matthias Islands.

In 1949 Robert Salau travelled to the United States via Australia and Europe accompanied by veteran missionary A. G. Stewart. He made stops in England, France, and Switzerland and spoke at a number of cities before his arrival in the US.

## THE TOURS

Salabogi toured California – speaking in St. Helena, Oakland, Fresno, Los Angeles, Loma Linda, Santa Ana, and San Diego. He also spoke at the Seventh-day Adventist camp-meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A. H. Piper, "A Sabbath in the Solomons: Ordination of Pana and Rangoso," *Australasian Record*, July 8, 1935, 2.

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This press coverage – though limited was apparently enough to convince the church that the exercise should be repeated – though not for another 10 years.

Ragoso's first trip overseas was a six-month trip to Australia in 1934-1935. The forerunner to his 1936 US tour, this trip was organized so that Ragoso could:

- “gain a better knowledge of the English language”<sup>4</sup>
- correct the proofs of a New Testament manuscript in the Marovo language before it was sent to the British and Foreign Bible Society for publication;<sup>5</sup>
- promote and raise funds for the church's mission outreach in the South Pacific amongst Seventh-day Adventists;
- promote and raise funds for the church's mission outreach in the South Pacific and associated fundraising amongst the general public.

Ragoso travelled widely in Australia, visiting a number of Seventh-day Adventist camp-meetings, and speaking at a number of public meetings – including that of the Parramatta Rotary Club.<sup>6</sup>

The success of this first Australian trip prompted church administrators to appoint Ragoso as a delegate to the 1936 General Conference Session in San Francisco and to organize an extensive promotional tour of the USA immediately after.

Ragoso travelled to the US via Sydney Australia where he made his first ever radio broadcast –an interview on Radio 2UE where he spoke in Marovo and was translated by Pr Norman Ferris (a veteran Australian missionary to the Solomons).<sup>7</sup>

The 43<sup>rd</sup> General Conference Session was held in San Francisco and there was a distinct emphasis on missions at the session and in addition to Ragoso there were other indigenous converts on show - “a Campa chief from the Upper Amazon territory, two North American Indians, a Filipino, a Japanese, a native from Sierra Leone... an East Indian from India.”<sup>8</sup>

The weekend after the conclusion of the session, Ragoso began his tour by speaking at the Modesto Seventh-day Adventist Church in central California on Friday night and in the Fresno Seventh-day Adventist Church, Armona Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the Shafter German Seventh-day Adventist Church on Saturday. He was accompanied by Ferris who continued to act as his interpreter.<sup>9</sup> The tour however came to an abrupt halt when Ferris became ill. While Ferris was invalided, Ragoso was sent to Pacific Union College where he attended Summer School for four weeks.<sup>10</sup> While Ragoso spoke English, he was not used to speaking in English publically and it was

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<sup>4</sup> “Kata Rangoso: Solomon Islands Chief,” *Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate*, April 18, 1936, 6.

<sup>5</sup> “Kata Rangoso: Solomon Islands Chief,” 6.

<sup>6</sup> “Kata Rangoso: Solomon Islands Chief,” 6.

<sup>7</sup> Kata Ragoso and R. E. Hare, “Remarkable Changes in Heathen Lands,” *Australasian Record*, May 4, 1936, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Gwynne Dalrymple, “A World-wide Movement,” *Signs of the Times*, July 7 1936, 8.

<sup>9</sup> “Chief Kata Ragoso,” *Pacific Union Recorder*, June 10, 1936, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Kata Ragoso, “Kata Rangoso's Impressions of America--Part 1,” *Australasian Record*, October 12, 1936, 6.

initially feared that the rest of the tour would have to be cancelled. However, “it was finally decided to have him visit a few of our churches, speaking as best he could. Without reflecting on interpreters, it may be said that the chief’s own use of English was more pleasing and satisfactory than if he had spoken through an interpreter.”<sup>11</sup>

Ragoso was accompanied on his trip east by L. A. Hansen. The pair travelled across the country by train and private car to Washington DC via Huron, Greenburg, Pittsburgh, Allentown, and Trenton; then visited Baltimore and New York City before heading west to Chicago via Philadelphia, Detroit, Jackson, Lansing, Battle Creek, and Grand Rapids. They then headed south to Denver via Omaha, Lincoln, Kansas City, and Enterprise.<sup>12</sup> The itinerary was intense; as Hansen notes: “With from one to three services a day, newspaper interviews, broadcasting, sight-seeing, and personal visits, sometimes we were up to midnight.”<sup>13</sup> From Denver, Ragoso travelled back to Los Angeles via Boulder, Colorado Springs, Pomona, Beverly Hills, and Long Beach; accompanied now by G. C. Hoskins.<sup>14</sup> He spent five days in Los Angeles speaking on several occasions before leaving the US aboard the *SS Monterey* on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August. The ship visited Hawaii, Samoa and Fiji before its arrival in Sydney, Australia. After changing ships in Sydney, Ragoso at last headed home to the Solomon Islands.

During this tour Ragoso preached in Seventh-day Adventist churches and public auditoriums and halls, participated in evangelistic campaigns held in tents, and addressed a number of Seventh-day Adventist camp-meetings. His audiences were often large – 1500 during the Divine Service at the Battle Creek Tabernacle;<sup>15</sup> 2,500-2,700 at Pastor C. J. Coon’s tented evangelistic campaign in Detroit;<sup>16</sup> 3,000 in Denver at the City Auditorium;<sup>17</sup> and “perhaps five or six thousand” black Seventh-day Adventists in Baltimore.<sup>18</sup>

## THE MEDIA COVERAGE

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<sup>11</sup> L. A. Hansen, “Chief Kata Ragoso: An Interesting Itinerary,” *The Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 15, 1936, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Hansen, “Chief Kata Ragoso: An Interesting Itinerary,” 19, Ragoso, “Kata Rangoso's Impressions of America--Part 1,” 6-7.

<sup>13</sup> Hansen, “Chief Kata Ragoso: An Interesting Itinerary,” 19.

<sup>14</sup> Hansen, “Chief Kata Ragoso: An Interesting Itinerary,” 21.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor G. Bunch, “Battle Creek Tabernacle,” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 10, 1936, 19.

<sup>16</sup> Hansen, “Chief Kata Ragoso: An Interesting Itinerary,” 19.

<sup>17</sup> Hansen, “Chief Kata Ragoso: An Interesting Itinerary,” 20. Ragoso gives a larger figure of “between 5,000 and 6,000” for the Denver meeting: Kata Ragoso, “Kata Rangoso's Impressions of America--Part 2,” *Australasian Record*, October 19, 1936, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Ragoso, “Kata Rangoso's Impressions of America--Part 1,” 7.

Salabogi's visit received coverage both in Seventh-day Adventist magazines and somewhat limited coverage in the non-Seventh-day Adventist press. Press coverage was not confined to the areas which he visited – short articles can be found in newspapers from as far afield as Pennsylvania, New York State, and Indiana.<sup>19</sup> SDA officials also placed advertisements in newspapers concerning his visits and



a number of newspapers ran articles announcing his coming speaking appointments as well as coverage of his message. These were often somewhat sensationalist in nature – even those authored by the church. For example the *Ogden Standard Examiner* (Utah) carried what appears to be an advertisement for Salabogi's speaking engagement in Salt Lake City Utah: "It is thrilling to hear Ratu Meli Salabogi tell of his deliverance from being a devil man. Cannibal Club and Human Flesh Plate!"<sup>20</sup> (This final phrase appears to reference certain artefacts that Salabogi brought with him from Fiji.) Interestingly the illustration clearly shows

a European in a suit and tie being freed from the bonds of sin – not a Fijian chief!

During his time in the USA, Ragoso made more than twenty radio broadcasts.<sup>21</sup> These broadcasts were at the initiative of the General Conference's Radio Commission – an organization tasked with radio evangelism throughout North America.<sup>22</sup> W. E. Howell points out some of the purposes behind these broadcasts when he states

On returning from the General Conference session, it occurred to us that considerable benefit might be gained for our Harvest Ingathering and our colporteur work if a native islander, converted from heathenism and now a minister of the gospel that saved him, might tell his experience over the air in some of our larger cities.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> "American Girls Like Fiji Flapper," *Reading Times*, Sept. 21, 1926, 9; "Fiji Eats on Train; Swallows Miles Away," *Oneonta Star*, June 30, 1926, 10; "Fiji Eats on Train; Swallows Miles Away," *Indiana Messenger* June 17, 1926, 7.

<sup>20</sup> *Ogden Standard Examiner*, June 1, 1926, 10.

<sup>21</sup> The number of broadcasts varies according to different sources. L. A. Hanson refers to "eleven broadcasts" but does not mention the WOL broadcast in Washington DC, the broadcast on WHJB in Greenburg Pennsylvania, nor the broadcasts that took place after he left Ragoso in Colorado. "Utilizing Modern Publicity Means--No. 1," *Ministry*, November 1936, 7. In a later account he lists fourteen broadcasts but does not include those broadcasts that occurred after Colorado: "Chief Kata Ragoso: An Interesting Itinerary," 19. In one report W. E. Howell lists twenty stations – and since Ragoso sometimes spoke more than once on a single station, the actual number of broadcasts would have been higher: "Radio Progress," *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 17, 1936, 19. However in a later account he states "Chief Ragoso broadcast over sixteen different radio stations" "Kata Ragoso," *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 9, 1937, 24.

<sup>22</sup> See Howell, "Radio Progress," 19, for more details of the organization's work.

<sup>23</sup> W. E. Howell, "Some Radio Specials," *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 27, 1936, 19.

Essentially then, the purpose of these broadcasts was to promote the work of the church and raise its public profile. The broadcasts also had the additional benefit of attracting people to the various meetings that Ragoso addressed – including several evangelistic campaigns:

It was evident that the radio broadcasts helped much to bring people to the services at the various places, for there were always a goodly number of non-Adventist listeners present....The radio people were always accommodating in announcing the place of meeting and in extending our invitation for the public to attend."<sup>24</sup>

In Detroit, following Ragoso's broadcast on WJR, between 2,500 and 2,700 attended Seventh-day Adventist evangelist C. J. Coon's tent meeting resulting in "a large crowd that overflowed the tent and the extra rows of benches outside" with many having to stand.<sup>25</sup>

As probably the first Solomon Islander to visit the United States, Ragoso's appearance attracted attention wherever he went: "The appearance of Kata Ragoso clad in coat and vest, and a loin cloth, or skirt, instead of trousers, without shoes or socks, and with his bushy head off hair and no hat, was such as would attract attention anywhere."<sup>26</sup> During his various public appearances Ragoso created "a mild sensation"<sup>27</sup> with "almost endless requests from individual persons for the chief to pose long enough for them to snap his picture."<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, "the requests for autographs became so numerous that we [church officials] simply had to refuse."<sup>29</sup>

Ragoso was interviewed and photographed frequently by newspaper reporters with accounts appearing in local newspapers where he was appearing – including *The Pittsburgh Courier*, *The Middletown Times*, *The Philadelphia Tribune*, *The Daily Plainsman* of Huron, and the *Lincoln Evening Journal*. Accounts also appeared in national newspapers like *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. An article also appeared in the June 8, 1936 edition of the weekly news magazine *Time*. Stories were also syndicated by the Associated Press and other organizations, and a number of stories appeared in newspapers located in areas that Ragoso did not visit – such as *The Times Recorder* in Zanesville Ohio, *The McIntosh County Democrat* in Checotah, Oklahoma, and *The Bakersfield Californian*. Stories were also carried internationally in Canada by *The Winnipeg Evening Tribune*,<sup>30</sup> and by a Portuguese language newspaper in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.<sup>31</sup> Articles also appeared in Christian magazines – in *The Friend* (the magazine of the Hawaiian Board of Missions), and *The Brethren Evangelist*.<sup>32</sup>

Accounts were generally positive and well-balanced – though often with sensationalist headlines:

- "King of Cannibals Let Loose on City" – the *New York Times*;
- "Civilized, But Barefoot Prince, Causes Sensation" – *The Pittsburgh Courier*;

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<sup>24</sup> Hansen, "Chief Kata Ragoso: An Interesting Itinerary," 20.

<sup>25</sup> Hansen, "Chief Kata Ragoso: An Interesting Itinerary," 20.

<sup>26</sup> Hansen, "Chief Kata Ragoso: An Interesting Itinerary," 19.

<sup>27</sup> "Civilized, But Barefoot Prince, Causes Sensation," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 15, 1936, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Hansen, "Chief Kata Ragoso: An Interesting Itinerary," 19.

<sup>29</sup> Hansen, "Chief Kata Ragoso: An Interesting Itinerary," 19.

<sup>30</sup> "Cannibal's Meals May End Up In Big Black Pots But They're Not Cooked There," *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, July 29, 1936, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Walter L. Burgan, "What Can Be Done," *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 26, 1936, 13.

<sup>32</sup> "Kata Ragoso," *The Friend*, December 1, 1936, 231, "A Savage?," *The Brethren Evangelist* 1936, 12.

- “A Cannibal King” – *The Middletown Times*;
- “Head Hunter Preaches” – *The Bakersfield Californian*;
- “Son of Cannibal” – *The McIntosh County Democrat*;
- “A Prince, Though Barefoot” – the *Philadelphia Tribune*;
- “Cannibals’ Meals May End Up in Big Black Pots but They Are Not Cooked There” – *The Winnipeg Evening Tribune*.

## KING OF CANNIBALS LET LOOSE ON CITY

But Visitor, Despite War Club  
and Shield, Has Foresworn  
Tribe’s Former Diet.

HE IS NOW A MINISTER

Ragoso, From Solomon Islands,  
Atop Empire State Tower,  
Says ‘That’s Great.’

### A CANNIBAL KING

A KING OF THE cannibal islands went on the loose in New York a few days ago. He did it in style, too. He wore only a singlet, his kinky hair was aureoled about his head and he carried a war club and a shield. New Yorkers yawned and asked “What is that guy advertising?”

### HEAD HUNTER PREACHES

SAN FRANCISCO, June 18. (U. P.)—Chief Kato Ragoso, of the Solomon islands, whose father was chief of a tribe of head hunters, is now addressing evangelistic services on the Pacific coast. Besides substituting soul hunting for head hunting, Chief Kato also wears a shirt, but has not yet accepted shoes.

Articles were sometimes accompanied by photographs – often of Ragoso posing with some of the artefacts he brought from the Solomon Islands. These included a war club, a shield, a triton shell “trumpet” and an idol. These were used as props in his lectures and sermons – and were often carried on public to arouse the interest of the public – on top of the Empire State Building he is said to have “paused to tell the guides that in his hands he held the club with which his cannibal father killed 40 men.”<sup>33</sup> This was a common refrain – while touring the Paramount Building in New York Ragoso told onlookers that “This war club was my father’s With it he killed forty men.”<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps no visitor to this country, at least of late, was so much photographed as Kata Ragoso. Metropolitan newspapers showed him in various poses, often in pictures of considerable size. The World Wide Photo Service syndicated pictures of the chief to many newspapers throughout the country....Always there appeared a caption telling who the chief is and where he is from, and connecting him with the work of Seventh-day Adventists.”<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> “High Life in Manhattan,” *Times Recorder*, March 9, 1937, 5.

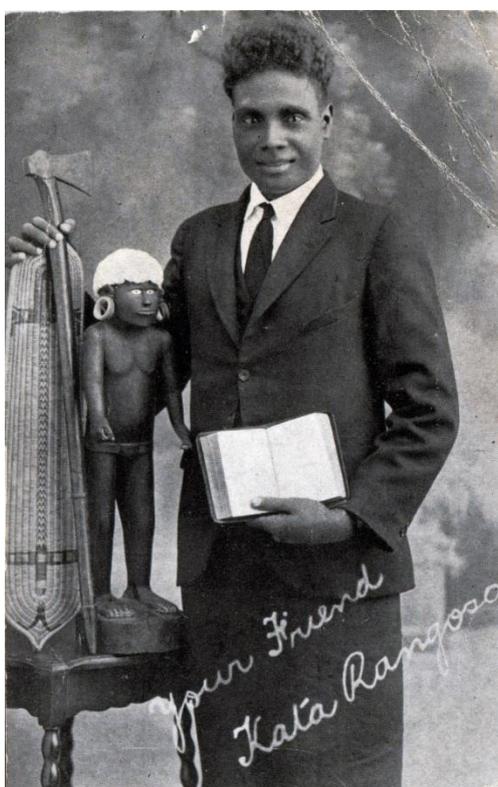
<sup>34</sup> “King of Cannibals Let Loose On City,” *New York Times*, July 24, 1936, 19.

<sup>35</sup> Hansen, “Chief Kata Ragoso: An Interesting Itinerary,” 19.

The chief was one of America's most photographed and publicized visitors. A large file of clippings has been secured. Stories and pictures will also appear in early issues of various trade journals and several railroad magazines and studio newsheets. America likes him and will welcome him back with open arms. They would like to see his wife with him when he comes to visit America again. His millions of radio friends extend an invitation to him to return."<sup>36</sup>

This publicity was courted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church administration, with L. A. Hansen noting that

Our own Press Bureau deserves a measure of credit for the newspaper publicity, W. L. Burgen having sent advance word to the newspapers in most of the cities visited. Usually reporters would be awaiting our arrival or would be ready to come to our hotel at once. It was an excellent illustration of what coordinated effort can accomplish."<sup>37</sup>



The church went so far as to distribute large quantities of a signed picture of Ragoso that showed him posing with his shield, war club, idol and Bible. These were signed by Ragoso: "Your Friend, Kata Rangoso".

Ragoso was also filmed by the Pathé News Reel company: "He was shown walking on the street and in the studio, sounding the conch shell....The sound picture recorded a short statement by the chief regarding conditions of former days and the contrast of today. This picture was designed for countrywide distribution."<sup>38</sup>

Ragoso was taken to a number of well-known tourist "sights". These included visits to the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty, Radio City, and the *Queen Mary* when in New York; Niagara Falls, the Tribune Tower in Chicago, and Pikes' Peak in Colorado. The Seventh-day Adventist Church's publicists also worked hard to gain entrance to other less typical sites of interest, including the "Green Diamond" train in Chicago and the Ford factory in Detroit. Ragoso was also given the opportunity to ride in the cab of a train. This event was arranged by G. C. Hoskins and like all these sight-seeing stops, was not undertaken simply for Ragoso's benefit – though clearly he enjoyed them. These stops were public relations opportunities that often attracted a crowd as well as news reporters and photographers:

Our transportation agent, G. C. Hoskins, had arranged for the chief to ride in the cab of the Challenger train from Council Bluffs to Omaha. Word had been sent on to this

<sup>36</sup> George C. Hoskin, "Kata Ragoso," *Signs of the Times*, January 19, 1937, 15.

<sup>37</sup> Hansen, "Chief Kata Ragoso: An Interesting Itinerary," 19.

<sup>38</sup> Hansen, "Chief Kata Ragoso: An Interesting Itinerary," 19.

effect, and newspapermen were awaiting the chief's arrival for pictures and interviews. It was twelve o'clock before we could get away from the station.<sup>39</sup>

For Salau's visit in 1949 and Ragoso's second visit in 1954, it was their actions during WW2 that became the focal point.

Ragoso's visit is headlined in the *Los Angeles Times* as "Rescuer of Wartime GI's Pays Call"<sup>40</sup> while an article in the *San Bernadino County Sun* notes that Ragoso will speak at La Sierra University College Hall describing "his experiences as leader and organizer of the famous 'Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels' who rescued more than 250 Allied servicemen from capture by the Japanese during World War II."<sup>41</sup>

Another article records Ragoso meeting with an American serviceman by happenstance on Fisherman's wharf in San Francisco: "The Rev Kata Rangoso, Solomon Islands Chieftain, was posing for pictures when he heard a familiar voice say 'I know you.' It was the voice of Joe Borruso, who was stationed on the island with a Navy force.

**Rescuer of Wartime GIs Pays Call**



**BASEFOOT CHIEF**—Kata Ragoso, tribal chief in Solomon Islands and now an ordained minister, displays side his bible worshipped in former head-hunting days. Ragoso, who led rescue of many Americans in war with Japan, is visiting Los Angeles. (AP Wirephoto)



**KATA RAGOSO**  
... former cannibal

**College Speaker Former Cannibal**

Kata Ragoso, Solomon Island chief converted from cannibalism to Christianity, will speak at La Sierra College Hall Saturday afternoon, at 3:30, said Elder W. M. Adams of the San Bernardino Seventh-day Adventist Church.

He will relate how Christian missions are changing the lives of natives who for centuries have practiced head-hunting. The Solomon Islander will also describe his experiences as leader and organizer of the famous "Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels" who rescued more than 250 Allied servicemen from capture by the Japanese during World War II.



Salau was photographed in similar poses to his travelling predecessors – holding a weapon from his homeland the Solomon Islands and a Bible. He also carried with him on his tour weapons from PNG: "Holding in one hand the Mount Hagan spear and stone battle-ax, representing the weapons of carnal

<sup>39</sup> Hansen, "Chief Kata Ragoso: An Interesting Itinerary," 20.  
<sup>40</sup> "Rescuer of Wartime GI's Pays Call," *Los Angeles Times*, April 20, 1954, 3.  
<sup>41</sup> "College Speaker Former Cannibal" *San Bernadino County Sun*, April 17, 1954, 10.

warfare so long used by the primitive people of the hinterland of New Guinea, and in the other the Bible”<sup>42</sup>

Salau’s visit was covered by *Time* magazine in an article “Religion: Pidgin Belong You” June 6, 1949.



(NY9)NEW YORK, MAY 24—A PACIFIC PREACHER—Robert Salau, 42-year-old ordained minister of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, holds a spear and a bible as he sits on rail of liner Mauretania on his arrival here today from Southampton. Son of a former head-hunter on the Island of Vella Lavella in the Solomon Islands, Salau is here to renew his acquaintance with U.S. servicemen he met during the war. (APWirephoto)GW31333stf-ac)49

“Miss Helen Carpenter, Press Bureau staff member assigned to press publicity, spent a week in New York City before the arrival of Pastor and Mrs. A. G. Stewart and Pastor Salau on the Mauretania, contacting newspapers and wire services with advance information to awaken interest in Salau and his mission. This resulted in advance stories and the alerting of the New York press hitherto comparatively untouched by Seventh-day Adventist activities.

On the morning of May 24 when the Coast Guard cutter left the wharf to meet the Mauretania, our reporter was thrilled to have with her newsmen and photographers from eight New York dailies, the Associated Press, United Press, International News Service and N. E. A. Aboard also were representatives of radio and news reel companies with their batteries of equipment. Pastor Salau rose magnificently to the occasion, and during the hours of posing for pictures and answering questions in an extended news conference on the boat, he gave wonderful testimony to what God had done for his people. This was strongly reflected in the stories that began to appear over the entire country May 25, with pictures of him carrying spear and Bible.”<sup>43</sup>

A typical report outlining Salau’s connections with American Servicemen in WWII is that published in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* on August 6, 1949: “Pastor Salau,

whose native organization in the South Pacific saved the lives of 500 servicemen downed by the Japs in World War II, is eager to greet some of the rescued men. On some islands a 24 hour watch was maintained at five-mile intervals on the coast and canoemen were dispatched bring in survivors.... [Salau] acted as liaison officer between his people and the military authorities.”<sup>44</sup> This Salau met a number of servicemen during his tour – at least six in New York

## EVANGELISM AND MISSION PROMOTION

<sup>42</sup> A. G. Stewart, “Pastor Salau Visits England

<sup>43</sup> J. R. Ferren, “Mission work Pays,” *Lake Union Herald*, June 28, 1949, 1-2

<sup>44</sup> “Adventist From Solomons Attends Portage Meeting,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, August 6, 1949,



Emphasized in reports and articles was the degree of the change that took place in Salabogi's life following his conversion:

His grandfather was a heathen and a cannibal. Ratu Meli had with him at the conference in Milwaukee a spear and battle club with which the Fijians used to maim and to kill.... In the photograph he has the old battle club in one hand and the Bible in the other. Once his people fought their fellow men with the club, now he fights for their souls with the Bible. The club stands for the Fijians' one-time hatred of men; the Bible symbolizes Ratu Meli's present love for them.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, he is most frequently pictured holding both a Bible and a traditional Fijian war club.

Salabogi's messages specifically encouraged giving to the Seventh-day Adventist Church's missionary activities:

He exhorts God's people in California, who have been so good as to send out the glad news of the third angel's message to the South Seas and other lands, to continue faithful in their gifts so that other native tribes may also be won to God before the sun sets on salvation's day. "Now," said Ratu Meli, in a recent speech, "is the time to scatter wealth, not to store it up. God is at work gathering his people from the islands, and I have come as evidence of what He is doing."<sup>46</sup>

Like Salabogi, a major theme of the news articles on Ragoso was the degree of change that had taken place in Ragoso's life following his conversion. As the *Middletown Times Herald* perceptively points out, "Chief Ragoso was in New York to advertise Christianity and what it had wrought in Marovo in twenty-two years."<sup>47</sup> Similarly, the *Lincoln Evening Journal* notes that Ragoso is "here to tell of the influences of Christianity on the natives of his part of the world in contrast with the savagery and cannibalism that formerly existed there."<sup>48</sup> **It was this change and contrast that the Seventh-day Adventist church promoted in its quest for financial support for its mission work.**

Salabogi was portrayed at the 1926 session as an example of the importance of Seventh-day Adventist overseas missions: "Christianity has claimed Ratu Meli; he has felt the softening and subduing power of the influence of Jesus in his life; and he is one of the greatest forces for good and for God in the South Seas.... He is a living monument to the efficacy of the religion of Jesus Christ and the worth of Christian missions."<sup>49</sup> This 1926 GC Session was billed as "The Greatest Missionary Conference Ever Held" and as a result of the appearance of Salabogi and the appeals made before

<sup>45</sup> Baker, "The Greatest Missionary Conference Ever Held," 2-3.

<sup>46</sup> J. E. Fulton, "Fijian Chief is Visitor," *Southern Union Worker*, July 7, 1926, 2.

<sup>47</sup> "A Cannibal King," *Middletown Times Herald*, August 1, 1936, 4.

<sup>48</sup> "Native Chieftain To spend Two Days Here," *Lincoln Evening Journal*, June 15, 1936, 5.

<sup>49</sup> Alonzo L. Baker, "The Greatest Missionary Conference Ever Held," *Signs of the Times*, September, 1926, 3.

the end of the Session, “153 new foreign missionary recruits had been found and voted to proceed to their fields at once.”<sup>50</sup>

## FUNDRAISING

As noted above, one of Ragoso’s primary roles on the tour was that of a fundraiser – particularly to raise funds for the church’s work in overseas missions. On multiple occasions, Ragoso’s visits to Seventh-day Adventist churches and camp-meetings is presented as a factor in increased giving to missions:

- Ragoso “took the [West Pennsylvania] camp by storm, winning the hearts of the people. His messages, presented in good English, had much to do with the goodly mission offering.”<sup>51</sup>
- Ragoso “appeared twice on the program [of the Kansas camp-meeting], and at the close of the last meeting, an offering for missions was received. This offering and the Sabbath school offerings together amounted to \$1,465.22 for missions. This was considered liberal for these times in Kansas.”<sup>52</sup>
- Ragoso’s appearance at the East Pennsylvania camp meeting coincided with “a good response to the missions appeal, [with] Sabbath school and mission offerings totalling over \$2,000. In addition, “more than \$10,000 was pledged by those present to be raised in the Ingathering campaign.”<sup>53</sup>
- At the Battle Creek Tabernacle, Ragoso’s appearance resulted in mission offerings of \$280.<sup>54</sup>
- According to L. A. Hansen, “People gave willingly and liberally” to the mission offerings collected at every venue.<sup>55</sup>
- “Somehow as we listed to this dark-skinned brother speak our tongue, our hearts were impressed with the true value of mission offerings. Is it not an inspiration for us to work harder in the Harvest Ingathering, for we are assured that these people are very grateful that God has remembered ‘the islands of the sea?’”<sup>56</sup>

Milton Weiner writing in the *Baltimore Afro-American* articulated clearly his understanding of Salau’s visit to the US:

“It is my belief that Pastor Robert Salau is here in America for one reason. He is a prime, articulate, exotic and outstanding example of the wonderful work Americans are doing in helping to bring God and Christianity to the poor benighted heathen in the forgotten corners of this earth.

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<sup>50</sup> Baker, “The Greatest Missionary Conference Ever Held,” 3.

<sup>51</sup> Richard A. Farley, “The West Pennsylvania Camp Meeting,” *Columbia Union Visitor*, September 10, 1936, 3.

<sup>52</sup> J. F. Piper, “Camp Meeting in Kansas,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 12, 1936, 20-21.

<sup>53</sup> M. N. Campbell, “East Pennsylvania and New Jersey Camp Meetings,” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 10, 1936, 20.

<sup>54</sup> Taylor G. Bunch, “Battle Creek Tabernacle,” *Lake Union Herald*, September 1, 1936, 10.

<sup>55</sup> Hansen, “Chief Kata Ragoso: An Interesting Itinerary,” 21. A collection was not undertaken at the meeting held in the City Auditorium in Denver because the use of the building was donated by the City of Denver.

<sup>56</sup> “Notes,” *Pacific Union Recorder*, August 226, 1936, 6.

His many appearances in this country will make them give more and more money, gladly and willingly to convert many millions such as he. In other words, he is a 'come-on' to raise needed funds."<sup>57</sup>

## **CONCLUSIONS:**

Salabogi, Ragoso and Salau were not the only Pacific Island delegates during this period – at least two others: Ratu Jiali Tuilakemba and Ratu Setareki Cevaca from Fiji were delegates in 1930. However it was these three men whose visits the church promoted and whose roles went far beyond that of ordinary delegates to the GC session.

Ragoso's first tour in particular seems to have been a wild success – gaining a great deal of positive publicity for the church. The number of newspaper articles etc. publicizing his visit was unprecedented – as was his radio broadcast presence. This positive publicity translated into increased revenue and support for the church's mission projects and the success off the tour encouraged the church to plan for Ragoso to attend the 1946 General Conference Session. Unfortunately "the matter of transportation proved to be an insurmountable barrier, so he stayed at home in his own Solomons."<sup>58</sup> In 1949 Robert Salau travelled to the United States from the Solomon Islands and appeared in similar photographic poses as had Ragoso.

By participating in this tour Ragoso's personal profile in the church rose and he was given increasing responsibilities. With the outbreak of war in the South Pacific and the evacuation of expatriate Seventh-day Adventist missionaries, Ragoso was appointed Mission Superintendent of the Solomon Islands mission – caring for 10 workers and around 4,000 members.

## **NOTE:**

A note on spelling. Ragoso is spelled Ragoso but pronounced Rangoso. Early sources – particularly in Australia – often spelled his name as Rangoso and in quotations and references this spelling has been preserved.

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<sup>57</sup> Milton Weiner, "Racial Prejudice is so Artificial," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 16, 1949, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Lora E. Clement, "Let's Talk it Over," *Youth's Instructor*, July 2, 1946, 5.

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