THE FIRE HAS JUMPED

Eyewitness accounts of the eruption and evacuation of Niuafo’ou, Tonga
Preface

This book is dedicated to the self-determination and courage of the Niuafo'ou patriots who in 1958 chose life on their own island without any government services whatsoever in preference to social security and bureaucratic services on 'Eua near the metropolis. It was in admiration of these people that I first visited Niuafo'ou in 1967 and later produced this book. 'Ofa atu.

It could not have appeared in its present form without the loving care, interest and skills of the following people, whom I wish to thank: Finau Kolo, 'Okusitino Mahina, 'Ulii Palu, Wendy Pond, Sione Taukei'aaho and Edgar Tu'inukuave for skilful translations; Thomas Riddle for photographs, Sister Mary Julia's diary and accounts by Palenapa Lavelua and Luseane Ta'ufo'ou; Caroline Phillips and Margaret Phillips for drawing maps; Andrée Brett for enhancing some snapshots; Veronica Rudolph and Waireti Tahuri for cheerfully typing some incomprehensible material; Jane Connor for designing the book and giving much encouragement; Mr A. G. Shearer for the magnificent aerial shot of Niuafo'ou on the rear cover; an unknown US Air Force pilot and the Mitchell Library, Sydney, for the cover photograph; the editors of the Fiji Times and Herald for permission to reproduce S. M. Manu's account of the evacuation and of Pacific Islands Monthly for photographs; Roger Green for suggesting Niuafo'ou in the first place; Wendy Pond, who gallantly steered and navigated a 6.3-metre sailboat there; 'Epeli Hau'ofa and Ron Crocombe for encouragement to reproduce these accounts. 'Ofa atu.

There is no standard orthography for the Tongan language; Finau Kolo and 'Okusitino Mahina have grappled with this problem. 'Ofa atu.

Garth Rogers
Auckland 1986
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Introduction

In September 1946 Niuafo’ou Island, a Tongan outlier, erupted for the tenth recorded time in a little over a century. No-one died, no-one was even reported injured; and unlike the 1943 outburst, which desiccated all vegetation and produced famine, that of 1946 left all gardens and eight of the nine villages unharmed.

The main casualty of the eruption, however, was the capital village of Angahā, where government buildings, stores and supplies were obliterated, and government officers and other local residents, including noble Fotofili, were dispossessed of their homes and property.

The Government was faced with a very difficult decision: should Angahā be rebuilt and restaffed or Niuafo’ou abandoned?

Several perspectives were expressed at the time on this problem but as it happened the Government decided to evacuate the entire population and relocate them, first in Tongatapu and later in Eua Island, where many of them still live with their families. From the Government’s point of view this was a safe and responsible decision. The island was renowned for volcanic activity, two villages had been totally destroyed in seventeen years, communications with Nuku’alofa, the centre of government, were notoriously precarious, and further outbursts of volcanism could obliterate everything.

Yet a majority of Niuafo’ou people had not lost their homes, property or gardens and did not wish in 1946 to leave their homes. Some of these, nearly one-half, eventually returned to Niuafo’ou after an absence of about twelve years to resettle their home sites and rework the lands of their forefathers.

All of the accounts which follow are by participant eye-witnesses and are
included for that reason but not all of them are by Niuafo'ou people. Two of the authors are wireless operators, another a storekeeper, all from other parts of Tonga; two others are Roman Catholic missionaries from Europe and America; one is a foreign researcher. Seven authors are from Niuafo'ou, and all of them put a similar case against the decision to evacuate and in favour of the decision to return. These Niuafo'ou accounts are therefore biased in one direction and justify the return to Niuafo'ou. It should be remembered, however, that the majority of the 1,300 or so people evacuated in 1946–7 have made new lives for themselves and their families throughout and beyond Tonga but mainly in 'Eua, site of the relocated villages on government land. The very first account is by one of those who lost nearly everything in Angahā in 1946 and now lives in the relocated village of the same name in 'Eua. It is hoped that the relocated people will produce more poets and historians to maintain their Niuafo'ou identity, for these are in anyone’s terms a special people.

Although the eruption and evacuation of Niuafo'ou was hailed at the time as a great sensation and disaster by South Pacific presses, very little has been published on the subject since.* The following accounts are therefore preserved in original language as primary sources in the name of each author.

Garth Rogers

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Chronology of eruption, evacuation and resettlement

Saturday 7 September 1946  Ketch Hifofua left Niuafo'ou for Niuatoputapu and Tonga with magistrate Mānoa Havea and noble Fotofili having completed annual government audit.

Sunday 8 September A normal peaceful sabbath.

Monday 9 September Full moon; wind SE.

7.00 p.m.  Earth tremors in Angahā.

7.30 p.m.  Radio operator calling Nuku' alofa then Suva without response, to 8.15 p.m.

8.15 p.m.  Angahā west on fire, intermittent shakes, one lasting about one minute; evacuation of Angahā well under way.

11.00 p.m.  Light rain and sand falling on evacuees at Piu and Mokotu heights. Most of Angahā on fire including government offices and copra stores.

Tuesday 10 September  Father Schahl and two sisters return to Angahā to retrieve goods and food. Sisters retire to Pameti's hut at Kolofo'ou, Father Schahl to Piu.

Wednesday 11 September  Cone of sulphur (over 200 feet high) deposited overnight by Alelea crater, destroying noble Fotofili's house and wooden hospital.

11.00 a.m.  Sione Malekamu Manu and three others retrieve coins from government safes (paper money already burned). Three active fire-holes in Angahā itself, nine others along beach.
Niuafo'ou geology and volcanology. T. A. Jagger, 1930
CHRONOLOGY

About midday  Plane heard well to north, passing towards west.

Thursday 12 September  Extensive landslide noted inside main crater near Piu.
10.00 to 11.00 a.m.  Plane heard flying from west to east but well to the north.

Friday 13, Saturday 14, Sunday 15 September  Small craters near Utu Palapu
still active.

Monday 16 September  On or before this date the Government requested air-
craft from Fiji to Samoa to investigate Niuafo’ou as radio had been silent from
10 September. RNZAF Catalina circled island once and flew to east about
2 p.m. This plane reported volcanic activity and destruction of part of Angahā,
sighted RC Priest and SOS distress signal. People on Niuafo’ou knew their plight
was discovered.

Tuesday 17 September  Hifofua dispatched from Nuku’alofa with Minister of
Lands, noble Havea Tu’iha’ateiho, Niuafo’ou noble Fotofili, Dr Brown, radio
technician Mr Small, medical supplies, food.

Radio ZJV Suva broadcast expected arrival date of Hifofua at Niuafo’ou
(19 or 20 Sept.); message received by Father Schahl, 19 Sept.

Alelea and Kekei craters active but weak.

Wednesday 18 September  About noon US Catalina dropped medical supplies,
food, cigarettes and message that rescue ship coming.

RNZN offered use of HMNZ corvette Arbutus; declined by British Consul
to Tonga on 20 September following report from Minister of Lands on
Niuafo’ou.

Thursday 19 September  Twin-engined land-plane circled island and flew to
east about 11 a.m.

Friday 20 September  Hifofua arrived about 10.00 a.m. with a US tanker
diverted from its course from Tutuila to Noumea. Minister of Lands assessed
situation and sent tanker away with a gift of bananas having decided “there
is no immediate danger”.

All villages except Angahā had returned to normal life; all craters were
dormant, occasional earthquakes.

Saturday 21 September  Unloading Hifofua.

Monday 23 September  Radio operator resumes two-way contact with Nuku’a-
lofa from Piu hill using Hifofua’s transmitter.

Tuesday 24 September  Hifofua departed with Father Schahl and Minister of
Lands.
Wednesday 25 September  Niuafo'ou radio reported all well but earthquakes persist.

Friday 27 September  Hifofua arrived Nuku'alofa; Father Schahl reported to RC bishop, Hon. Tu'ihateiho to HM Queen Sālote, and told British Consul Johnson he "was quite satisfied that the island must be evacuated as soon as possible . . ."

Saturday 28 September  Sister Mary Julia rescues school books from Vatulele Catholic school intending to reopen school under temporary shelter at Kolofo'ou. Earthquakes cease about this date.

Monday 30 September  Sometime this week Privy Council inaugurated the Niuafo'ou Evacuation Committee (NEC) under chairman magistrate Mānoa Havea. Other members included: 'Akauola, noble Fielakepa, lawyer Moulitoni Fisi'ihi, HRH Prince Tu'ipelelehake, HRH Prince Tungi, and Queen Sālote.

Friday 4 October  The NEC could not agree on the need to evacuate Niuafo'ou so it telegraphed orders to Niuafo'ou district officer Peuafui, magistrate Maile Tonga and head policeman Esau to conduct a plebiscite to ascertain wishes of Niuafo'ou people.

Saturday 5 October  Plebiscite held in Kolofo'ou village; heads of households signed to stay or to leave.

British Consul reported to high commissioner (8 October), "1,078 have elected for evacuation and 288 to remain, Government has today decided to evacuate the whole population and to enforce this by legislation . . ."

Wednesday 9 October  Government order for "general evacuation as soon as boats can be chartered", signed by Premier, telegraphed to Niuafo'ou.

Thursday 10 October  Government decision announced at Kolofo'ou in general meeting stimulates preparations to evacuate.

Tuesday 15 October  Slight tremors felt.

Thursday 17 October  Evacuations Ordinance No. 4 of 1946 enacted by Privy Council.

Tuesday 22 October  Hifofua with Mānoa Havea, Fusitu'a, Father Schahl, wireless operator Mr Small and portable transmitter sailed for Niuafo'ou about this date.

Thursday 24 October  Hifofua arrived at Futu about noon.

Friday 25 October  Father Schahl conducted the first mass in the Angahā church since the eruption.
Saturday 26 October  Loading Hifofua all day, departure deferred until Sunday owing to westerly winds.

Sunday 27 October  Hifofua sailed from Tapaipau during the afternoon with Sister Superior Marie Angela, Sisters Mary Cuthbert and Mary Julia; arrived Vava'u dawn 29 Oct., Nuku'alofa dawn 31 Oct.

Tuesday 29 October  General meeting in Kolofo'ou village, where Mānoa Havea made the historic speech: "I believe . . . that evacuation will take place but someone will be crucified for it". Fusitu'a had refused to call the meeting or to address it.

Havea explained that government orders were to pull down houses, mark the house-poles and store them at the beaches; to make copra, weave mats, plait sennit, salt down meats.

November and early December  The Hifofua plying back and forth from Niuafo'ou to Nuku'alofa with stores, government workers, Angahā people. One account is of a sailing from Niukena, Niuafo'ou, with about 200 government officials and Angahā people.

Monday 2 December  New Zealand Government arranged for MV Matua to be diverted from Apia, Samoa, to Niuafo'ou en route to Nuku'alofa, enabling total evacuation of Niuafo'ou in one operation.

Tuesday 17 December  Hifofua departed Nuku'alofa for Niuafo'ou with Hon. Tu'iha'ateiho vested with full executive powers to effect total evacuation.

Friday 20 December  Hifofua arrived off Funga'ana, Niuafo'ou, at dawn, loaded all day, sailed at dusk to Futu where it anchored for the night.

Saturday 21 December  MV Matua anchored well out from Futu at daybreak with P.M. Ata, Minister of Police 'Akaulola and a medical doctor on board.

Loading all day from 'Utuloa via the anchored Hifofua to MV Matua, without major injury or accident.

Ketch Hifofua sailed south at 6 p.m. followed about 30 minutes later by the Matua, which steamed past Angahā in the north.

Sunday 22 December  Matua's arrival in Nuku'alofa delayed to avoid disturbing morning church services. Tongatapu sighted about 3.00 p.m., docked between 4.00 p.m. and 5.00 p.m.

Lorries took evacuees to Vaikeli army camp; all ashore by 8.00 p.m., given tea and three biscuits per head by NEC officials.

Those left behind on Niuafo'ou included Vili Vaka; 'Aisea and his wife Nino, and their daughter Kolokesa and another small daughter; 'Aliki; Fakataha; Moala
Fakatautuki; Hefa and his wife, Selaima, and their daughter 'Olivia; Sione Kaituai; Kepa; Palenapa Lavelua; Luke; Tevita Masalu; Peni Suisui Moala; Makoni Suisui; Taelei; Saula Taukafa; Sione Ti'o; Tali Tu'i.

January 1947  Fiery eruption at Niuafo'ou reported by passing yacht.

Mid-July  SDA mission vessel Laoheni evacuated Hefa with his wife and daughter, 'Aisea and his wife and two children.

The Evacuation Act No. 11 of 1947 passed by Legislative Assembly.

October 1947  Ketch Aoniu sailed to Niuafo'ou with noble Havea Tu'iha'ateiho and Niuafo'ou people to collect goods, housepoles, foods and recalcitrant inhabitants. Departed Sunday evening leaving island uninhabited.

September 1949  Ketch Hifofua with noble Fotofili, Sione Mapu and others called at Niuafo'ou to retrieve personal belongings, foods.

October 1949  General meeting at Mataliku addressed by Prime Minister Havea Tu'iha'ateiho explaining resettlement of Niuafo'ou evacuees on 'Eua.

Sometime shortly after Minister of Lands, Prince Tu'ipelehake, and Niuafo'ou elders sailed in Hifofua to make first survey of 'Eua lands.

May 1950  First Niuafo'ou families moving into permanent homes on 'Eua.

_1950_ Government survey of Niuafo'ou with Prime Minister 'Ata, who was chairman of the NEC, noble Semisi Kalaniuvalu-Fotofili, Minister of Police 'Akauola, Robert Wolfram, Dougal Quensell and others in ketch Hifofua under captain Tippett.

Government school house and dispensary taken to Niuatoputapu.

November 1950  Return of first copra cutters to Niuafo'ou including Asipeli and Tevita Kata from Niuafo'ou, Sangato (lay preacher), Viliami, Luke and Foneti, all from Tonga.

April 1951  Party of about 120 copra cutters under Mo'ungafi of Sapa'ata, including Palenapa Lavelua, Sione Lauaki, Filo Fusitu'a, Tu'u Sakopo, and many others from all parts of Tonga at Niuafo'ou. This party all returned to Tonga with their copra in November 1951.

1957  Total copra from Niuafo'ou was 242 tons worth £10,000. Allocation of land on 'Eua to Niuafo'ou people from this date.

Mid-1958  First decision of NEC to return petitioners to Niuafo'ou. (Petitions signed by Fusitu'a and 608 Niuafo'ou people were presented to the Legislative Assembly as far back as 1948.) Prince Tungi addressed evacuees still at Mataliku: "Either go to 'Eua with government aid or return to Niuafo'ou without."
On 'Eua 247 allotments already allocated to Niuafo'ou people.

18 September 1958 (12 years after evacuation) MV Aoniu made first of two voyages to Niuafo'ou to return 39 families.

By 1959 Permanent settlement on Niuafo'ou of over 250 persons.

1959 Government primary school opened in Kolofo'ou.

By 1960 Total families now 46, total population 345 of whom 71 were copra cutters.

1963 Radio station established in Sapa'ata village.

1966 Government primary school opened in Tongamama'oa serving three villages in Hahake District.

By 1967 Over 300 adults in 113 households living on Niuafo'ou.


1969 Police stations reopened in 'Esia and Futu.

1976 Census of Niuafo'ou recorded 678 inhabitants whereas some 2,108 were living in Niuafo'ou villages in 'Eua.

1980 Airstrip opened on Niuafo'ou.

1981 426 tax allotments distributed to Niuafo'ou people by Minister of Lands, Baron Tuita.
The first signs of the eruption were on 23 March, and by 27 March there was a cloud of ash and smoke. The ash began to fall on people on the eastern side of the volcano in New Zealand.

Moeaki

This is an excerpt from the script to Angahā, 75.

Moeaki

After our football club lost the last six games in a row, our captain decided to take matters into his own hands.
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Eruption

The first few accounts are all by people who were in Angahā at the time of the eruption. The first is by Moeaki Tākai, who was born in Angahā, Niuafo’ou, on 23 March 1923. Moeaki was a school teacher, band member and choir master until the 1946 eruption, when he was evacuated with his Fata’ulua wife and children to Eua. Since 1968 Moeaki has been district officer for the Niuafo’ou people on Eua, with his eight children scattered from Papatoetoe and Otara, New Zealand, to Nuku’alofa, Ma’ufanga and Ha’apai.

Moeaki wrote an account of the eruption for his children and used this manuscript to make a tape recording for Wendy Pond and Tupou Uluave at Angahā, Eua, in 1969.

Moeaki Tākai’s account

This is an account of Niuafo’ou, about what happened in the year 1946. I have gathered together these accounts so that when my children grow up they will be aware of the disaster which occurred there.

The sky was clear that afternoon and also that night. The wind was blowing gently from the southeast and the air was cool over the land on that afternoon. The moon rose in a clear sky and the weather was fine. In the harbour of Ta’akimoeaka there was a dead calm and its angry waves were still.

The beginning of the earthquake — Monday afternoon — 9 September 1946: After our football practice that afternoon, Monday 9 September, at about half past six in the evening, ‘Asipeli Kupu came and instructed us that the whole football club would go to ‘Ālele, that is Fotofili’s home in Angahā, to hold a
football meeting and that all the football teams of Angahā would sleep together on that night.

So we dispersed and I went down with Sione Malekamu Manu who was the wireless operator and also the clerk in the Niuafo’ou court at that time. We just went down and climbed up onto the concrete water tank at the Police Magistrate’s place, for he lived there together with the clerk. We ate our meal on top of the concrete tank — breadfruit and a small tin of corned beef. While we were eating the moon rose. It was a truly beautiful moonlit night for the moon was full that night and as we were just finishing our meal the drum at the padre’s home was struck for our band practice, for I was the band master in the Roman Catholic Church band. Malekamu and I agreed to go to the band practice instead of the football meeting. Malekamu told me to go on ahead and that he would go along to the band practice later. So I went up to our home, and went and had a wash, and while I was washing there was a bit of an earthquake, so I went into the house and while I was dressing there was another small earthquake. That was about eight o’clock in the evening.

I went straight down to the band practice and while I was talking with the bandsmen there was another small earthquake which was a little bit stronger. A fellow called Sione Fu’ikava from ‘Esia said to me, “We’ll be eating a lot of fish tomorrow Moeaki, we’ll be pulling in plenty of bonito tomorrow.” I said to him, “Hand out the sheet music.” Just as the sheet music was being handed out, there was another earthquake. From that moment on the earthquake struck regularly at intervals of about 20 seconds. After the sheet music had been handed out, and as we were starting to stand up, a strong earthquake struck very hard and shook for a very long time, perhaps for a minute and a half. The euphonium player, Fine Lavelua, said to me, “Moeaki, let’s stop, it’s going to erupt, there’s no doubt about it, it’s going to erupt.”

We quickly closed up the band-house and went outside. I looked over and saw that those folk who had been drinking kava with Father Lolesio in his house had dispersed also. I recognised only two of them: Petelō Nāmea, my real grandfather, a man from ‘Uvea, and a man called Sālesi Lomu, who is the father of Nāsio Lomu. I went back home; there wasn’t a soul left there. I listened in the direction of Sisi Toutai’s house. Sisi was still in there talking so I asked where the people from my home were. Sisi replied that they had already all gone to ‘Esia. That’s a village at the foot of the ridge peak called Piu. So I left right then and went to Sione Malekamu Manu at the residence of the Police Magistrate. But as I was on my way down, the earthquake was continuing and the time then, I estimate, was after eight p.m., but the moon was shining broad
as day and the wind was blowing fairly strongly from the southeast. As I was on my way down to Malekamu I didn't see a single other person in Angahā for it turned out they had already gone to Œśia, Kolofo'ou and Sapa'ata. When I reached the Police Magistrate's home, I saw still talking on the verandah the Police Magistrate, Maile 'Etoni Tonga, a man called Sefanaia Vaha'akolo, Malekamu, a Public Works Department carpenter called Lopeti Tupou, the assistant telegraphist, Vili Ha'angana, and a policeman called Tonga. I saw that the magistrate had already put on his pyjamas, trousers and a nightshirt. Malekamu was carrying his short black coat. I told Malekamu to give me his suitcase so I could go on ahead with it as everybody from Angahā had gone. The earthquake had not stopped for a moment. It was going on unabated. So Malekamu said to me, “Just carry my coat and my choirmaster's tuning fork.” As it turned out, he had decided not to go to the band practice but was carrying his coat and his choirmaster's tuning fork to go to the choir practice in Fata'ulua where he was choirmaster of the Wesleyan Church. Malekamu told me to go on ahead and that he would come later, as he would have a bit of a talk with those fellows and then they would go on to Sapa'ata if the earthquake kept on as it had that afternoon.

I went straight up to Sapa'ata as my grandparents lived there, Petelō Nāmea and Ana Malia Latai. When I got there, they had already gone to Œśia too. 'Atelaite my wife was there and Liku'one, then two-and-a-half years old, and little Lolesio, who was just a baby — Lolesio had been born only 19 days before that night. Young Latai was there, Löata, and David, our eldest boy who was three-and-a-half years old. When I arrived at Œśia, all our household was in the home of a fellow called Halani Mamatuki. Œśia was situated southwest of Angahā, but very close by, for there was actually only one tax allotment between Angahā and Œśia when the eruption occurred.

While I was talking with 'Atelaite in front of Mamatuki's house I noticed people going back and forth in all directions in the middle of Œśia. I looked up towards the house front of a man called Kalu from Œśia where some men were standing talking. I went up to them and as I was drawing near them an Œśia man called 'Atonio Sailosi spoke to me. “Moeaki, you know what, it’s going to erupt, there’s no doubt about it.” Good gracious! 'Atonio was still talking when there was a fantastically loud explosion, and the whole country rumbled terrifyingly and I heard the people, everyone, raising the alarm, and men and women burst out shouting, “It's erupting! It's erupting at Futu!” Shortly after the explosion and the rumbling of the craters, a glow appeared in the sky but one couldn't tell exactly where it was erupting from. At that moment I
thought to myself I would never again see such a terrifying thing for the rest of my life. The whole country was lit up like daytime. When I looked up at the moon it seemed as if it were floating in a sea of blood.

Then I heard everybody shouting to one another and asking round about for their children who had disappeared. Oh dear, the groaning and groaning of the elderly, the crying and continual shrieking to Jesus to please save them. Parents could no longer see or hear their children and the same went for families too. The only thing happening was the explosion and eruption of craters and the appearance of the glow in the sky. The men, women and little children had all fled outside and each one was making his own way and running along the various little paths up to the peak of Piu. I ran down to our home where ‘Atelaite and our children were. Just as I arrived, ‘Atelaite threw me our bag of clothes and she told me to carry Liku’one. So I reached out and clasped Liku’one in my arms and grabbed the bag of clothes and then I ran to the little path which led from the edge of the bush and so I lost sight of the others from our home.

The really unfortunate thing was that I didn’t know the track to Piu, so we just kept going blindly on up through the middle of the scrub, and as we were plodding up the hill I could hear calling and crying back and forth from different places the whole time. I heard a voice crying nearby coming from above right at the place were going up towards. Of course, I was dead with exhaustion and fear into the bargain for as we were going up, one felt the heat of the fire burning on one’s back. For the place from which the fire was bursting out was, I believe, about two-and-a-half miles away from us and I believe for certain that if the wind had eventually blown from the north that night there would be no-one still alive of the people of Angahā, ‘Esia, Kolofo’ou and Sapa’ata for if the wind had blown from the north, the flames and smoke would have come down in our direction and caught the people on the slopes of the mountain, even though it was two-and-a-half miles away. Even if the people had stayed on the mountain, they would have been wiped out if the wind had blown from the north on that night. But fortunately the wind was blowing from the southeast and blowing fairly strongly so the flames and the smoke were deflected to the north and so nobody was burnt or asphyxiated in this terrible disaster.

But, to get back to where I was, we continued straight on up to where the crying was coming from. Then, when we were perhaps only two fathoms away, we came up to the weeping. I had heard correctly; it was the voice of a man. We came upon these two people and I saw clearly they were a Vava’u man
Niuafo'ou estates and villages, 1967. G. Rogers
called Sēmisī who was married to a woman from ʻEsia, ʻEmeline Kalu. The man was flat on his back; he could no longer stand up, the combination of exhaustion and great fear. The couple were still young and they had just got married. And there was young ʻEmeline, crying and begging Sēmisī please to get up so they could go up to the top in case the fire came and got them. But poor Sēmisī kept telling ʻEmeline to try and go by herself because he just couldn’t get up again. The reason Sēmisī was like that was that they had run up the hill. He was out of breath I would think and he was dying of fear as well. For don’t think for a minute that the ground was still; the earthquake kept shaking all the time. I don’t know about the front line, whether the noise and explosions of the big guns was like that, like the explosions of the craters. The land was ringed with lightning, and one could see all sorts of different colours, flashing and appearing in the sky.

But to get back again to where I was, I went over and told Sēmisī to get up and let’s go, but the poor fellow begged me he couldn’t manage again to go on again. Of course, we two didn’t stop; I just spoke as we went on up, for perhaps the fear I felt was greater than Sēmisī’s. So we two just kept on going up and we lost sight of those two people.

As we kept on going up, I felt that I could no longer hold onto our bag of clothes and carry Liku’one, so I threw our bag of clothes into the bush.

As we went up, as time went on, I felt the heat and the scorching of the fire on my back, and as a result another fearful thought occurred to me, that I should throw away my poor little girl and go on myself and survive. Of course, I couldn’t see the fire behind me any more, but in my mind the fire was very close to getting us, and from the rumbling of the lava flow it seemed as if it would rush up and get us. But then I decided, I’ll carry my dear little daughter and if the fire gets us then we’ll just go together but I would have done my duty towards my dear little kid to save her life, and if it were the will of God to wipe out his people then that was that. While all these things were happening I of course had no idea where my wife, our baby, nor our eldest boy, Tēvita Tākai, were and I didn’t know where Tākai (Tu’ita) was, nor my two poor old grandparents, ʻAna Malia Latai and poor old Nāmea Kuvalu, for since we had lost sight of each other in ʻEsia, we hadn’t seen a single person from our household.

I often wondered whether ʻEsia was still safe or whether it too had been destroyed by the fire. Of course I was thinking as we climbed up to the ridge top, and I felt that we were close to the top of the mountain, for I had heard the shouting of people and crying from the summit of Piu. So we just kept
straight on to the place where we could hear the crying of the people coming from. And suddenly we came out on the main track which runs round the summit of the mountain. I saw the people going back and forth ceaselessly, up and down this track, and I noticed some people sitting down and weeping silently on the roadside, and some were praying and crying very loudly. Others were trudging around, calling and crying out for their poor children and others of their family whom they had lost sight of. These things were going on in the darkness and in broad daylight because of the glow in the sky from the erupting of the craters and the continual surging of lava flows. The only difference was that this kind of light is red as a result of the glow of the fire in the sky. I glanced up at the moon which was right overhead and it looked exactly like a piece of red cloth waving in the sky. I just sat there and watched silently, depressed that I had not seen a single member of my family on top of the mountain.

At that moment I looked down to the centre of Angahā. It looked to me as though it had been completely covered with flames and smoke and I thought to myself that Angahā had been completely burned up. I had only been sitting down for a short time with Liku’one when I was startled by a man called Tu’ipulotu Moseo from ‘Esia, riding a horse and carrying a little baby. He said to me, “Moeaki, take your baby.” It was our little baby Lolesio. He had been born only 19 days when this eruption occurred. Tu’ipulotu told me that he would run down again and bring up his weak old mother. I asked him, “Where’s ‘Atelaite and Latai?” And Tu’ipulotu replied, “They are coming up the track together right at this moment, they are nearly here.” Then I felt a little bit better. So I thanked Tu’ipulotu, for he had come across ‘Atelaite and Latai on the road, taking turns to carry the baby, so he had brought it up on the horse. Shortly afterwards, Latai, ‘Atelaite and other friends from our home arrived. ‘Atelaite was leading Tēvita by the hand. That was the first time we had seen each other since losing sight of each other in ‘Esia. They had fled along a different track while we two had come up right through the scrub.

We just rested by the side of the road and wept just like the other people, but we cried because we didn’t know where Petelo Nāmea and Tākai (Tu’ita) were, and Oloveti had not yet appeared and neither had Pani, the youngest brother of Tākai, and Hulu was lost and Lea was still not in sight. So we just sat there with hundreds of people and watched the fire destroying the centre of Angahā.

We could see clearly the padre’s house, the Catholic Church compound, and the Catholic Church building. We could also see clearly the glow in the hole
Sketch-map of Angahā in the 1920s. C. S. Ramsay
in front of the Roman Catholic Church. We could see clearly the church building standing and not burning. As for the nuns' residence, we couldn't determine whether it was burning or not. The destruction of the whole row of government residences in the centre of Angahā was clearly visible from the top of the mountain. The different coloured glows in the sky from the two government copra sheds looked frightening also. There were 500 tons of copra in each of these two sheds at the time. We could see clearly too, the two wireless station masts still standing but they were surrounded by fire and lava.

Not one building was still visible of the telegraph office, the post office, the police magistrate's court, the treasury, the police residence and the two prisons, the row of old Morris Hedstrom shops, the new store of Mr Dougal Quensell, the big store of Soakai Pālelei, the residence of the police magistrate, and that of the wireless operator. The whole time the waves of lava were breaking in all directions and nothing but the glow and burning rocks could be seen. We could also see the famous harbour called Ta'akimoeaka being buried by the lava flows and some homes of some people were also burned. The Wesleyan Church building could be seen clearly standing there unburnt. Yes, the continuous rising of the waves of lava was to all appearances like a sea of gold in its luminosity, and again and again the craters threw up rocks into the sky which destroyed everything they landed on, turning it into a great desert of rocks. Oh dear, how could it ever fade from memory in the hearts and minds of the Niuafo'ou people, the chiefs of Tongatapu, Ha'apai and Vava'u and every other part of these Tongan islands who were in Niuafo'ou on that night and who saw with their own eyes the astounding events on the ninth day of September 1946. It is impossible to describe the terror of this tragedy experienced by the Queen's people.

This mountain peak Piu is situated to the south of Ālele'uta and 'Ēśia. There is a clear view down from the summit of the mountain to the centre of Sapa'ata, Kolofo'ou, 'Ēśia and all of Angahā, and it is a mile and a half from the flag pole to the summit of Piu; so there is nothing in the villages or the surrounding country which one cannot see clearly from Piu. Piu is about 800 to 1000 ft. above sea level [actually 700 ft.]. Looking south from Piu one can see clearly the famous landmark known as lake Vailahi, which is six square miles in area.

But to get back to where I was: We had just been sitting down for a short time on Piu with hundreds of other people just settling down in tears and waiting for advice from the volcano experts as to what instructions they would give when suddenly we were startled to hear a voice calling, "Everybody go to Mokotu — the eruption hasn't finished yet." The experts say that usually when
the lava reaches the sea that is the end of the eruption. It does not continue beyond that, although the craters will continue erupting and throwing up rocks, but the lava flows will no longer occur.

Mokotu is another peak. It is higher than Piu but it continues eastwards from Piu. Perhaps it is about three-quarters of a mile or so away but one follows the ridge top. Piu and Mokotu are one mountain, but there are two peaks, Piu is one and Mokotu is the other. So the people shifted from Piu and we went straight to Mokotu. The time then was perhaps after two in the morning. When this shift was made the land was by no means stable, the earthquakes were continuing, and the craters were still rumbling.

When we reached Mokotu there was another announcement in the Niuafo'ou dialect saying, “Stay here, stay here! Don't go away again, everyone quickly build his own coconut leaf shelter in case salt rain falls. Do it quickly!” All the men worked quickly, each building his own coconut leaf shelter, just roughly built ones, each to protect his family from the salt rain. This kind of rain falls when the eruption is over. It is salt rain and sulphur and this kind of rain is useless for anything, for it is only salt water and sulphur.

Translated by Wendy Pond and Tupou Uluave

Ko e talanoa ki he vela 'a Niuafo'ou 'i he ta'u 1946, na'e fai 'e Moeaki Tākai

Ko e talanoa ko 'eni te u fai ia ki Niuafo'ou, 'i he me'a na'e hoko ki ai 'i he ta'u 1946. O, na'a ku hanga 'o fakamā'opo'opo 'a e ngaahi talanoa ko 'eni ko'e'uihe ke 'i ai ha 'aho 'e tupu hake ai 'eku fānau pea nau sio ki he tu'utāmaki ko'eni kuou a'u ki ai. Pea ko hono talateu 'eni:

Talateu
Na'e tafitonga 'a e langi 'i he efiafi ko 'eni, pea mo e pō foki, pea angiangi tonga hahake 'a e matangi, 'o mokomoko lelei, 'a e 'ea ki he funga fonua, 'i he efiafi ko 'eni. Na'e hoko hake 'a e māhina 'i langi tafitonga, pea 'afua foki. 'I he taulanga ko ia ko Ta'akimoeaka, na'e nonga 'aupito, pea nonga hono ngaahi peau louloua'a.

Kamata 'a e Mofuike, efiafi Mōnite, 'aho 9 'o Sepitema, 1946
Hili 'emau ako 'akapulu 'i he efiafi ko 'eni, 'aho Mōnite, 'aho 9 'o Sepitema taimi haafe 'a e 7 efiafi nai na'e me'a mai 'a 'Asipeli Kupu 'o tala 'a e tu'utu'uni 'i e kātoa 'a e kalapu 'akapulu ki Ālele, ko e 'api ia 'o Fotofili 'i Angahā, ke
fai 'a e fakataha 'akapulu, mo mohe taha 'a e fo'i tau 'akapulu kotoa 'a Angaha 'i he pō ni.

Na'a mau mātuku leva pea ma ō hifo kimaua mo Sione Malekamu Manu ko e faimākoni ia mo e kalake 'i he Fakamaau'anga 'i Niuafou 'i he taimi ko 'eni. Na'a ma ō hifo pē 'o kaka ki he funga sima vai 'i he 'api 'o e Fakamaau Polisi, he na'e nofo ai pē mo e kalake foki. Ne fai 'ema kai 'i he funga sima, ko e mei, mo e ki'i kapa pulu.

Lolotonga 'ema kai, kuo hopo hake 'a e māhina, ko e pō māhina faka'oko'ofa mo'oni, he na'e kātoa 'a e māhina he pō ni. Pea faka'osi'osi atu 'a 'ema kai, kuo tā mai 'a e nafa mei he 'api 'o Pātele, ko 'emau ako ifi, he ko au na'a ku faaifai 'i he ifi 'a e Siasi Katolika. Ne ma alea leva mo Malekamu ke ma ō kimaua ki he ako ifi ka e tuku ai pē 'a e fakataha 'akapulu ia. Talamae leva 'e Malekamu ke u mu'omu'a ka tokī 'alū ange ki he ako ifi.

Pea u 'alū hake au ki honau 'api, pea u 'alū 'o kaukau, pea lolotonga 'eku kaukau, kuo lulu 'a e ki'i mofuike, pea u 'alū ki fale, 'o lolotonga 'eku 'ai vala, mo e to e lulu 'a e ki'i mofuike 'e taha, 'a ia ko e 8 efiafi nai ia.

Ne u 'alū hifo leva ki he ako ifi, pea lolotonga 'emau talanoa mo e kau ifi, kuo lulu 'a e ki'i mofuike ia 'oku ki'i lahilahi ange. Na'e pehe mai 'e he ki'i motu'a ko Sione Fuikava mei 'Esia: "Te tau kai ika lahi 'a pongipongi Moeaki. 'E toho lahi 'a e 'atu pongipongi." Pea u pehe atu 'e au ia: "Tufa 'a e tuunga-fasi." Kamata tufa ko ē 'a e tuunga-fasi, kuo to e lulu mo e mofuike 'e taha, pea kamata leva ke hokohoko ai pē 'a e mofuike ia, mahalo ko hono vahavaha ko e sekoni pē e 20. Pea osi 'a e tufa tuunga-fasi, pea ko 'emau kamata tu'u hake pē ki 'olunga, kuo tataha 'a e fu'u mofuike lahi 'aupito ia, pea lulu fuoloa 'aupito ia, mahalo ki he miniti 'e taha, mo e konga nai. Na'e pehe mai 'e he tangata ifi 'ifoni, ko Fine Lavelua: "'E Moeaki, tau tuku, he 'e vela ia, he 'ikai to e faka'alanga'anga, 'e vela ia."

Ne tātāpuni fakavave leva 'a e fale ifi, ka mau hū ki tu'a. Pea u sio atu ki he mātua, na'a nau faikava mo Pātelao Lolesio 'i hono fale, kuo nau mātuku mai mo kimautolu. Ko e fo'i toko ua pē na'a ku 'ilo'i pau, ko Petelo Nāmea, ko 'eku kui mo'oni ia, ko e motu'a mei Uvea, mo e motu'a ko Sālesi Lomu, ko e tamai ia 'a Nāsio Lomu. Ne u 'alū hake au ki 'api, kuo 'ikai to e 'i ai ha taha ia. Pea u fanongo hake ki he 'api 'o Sisi Toutai, 'oku kei lea pē 'i ai 'a Sisi. Pea u 'eke atu, pe ko fē 'ia nai 'a e kaume'a homau 'api? Pea talamae 'e Sisi, kuo nau osi 'alū kotoa ki 'Esia. Ko e kolo ia ki he mata hake ki he mo'unga ko ia ko Piu. Na'a koi 'alū hifo leva mai 'api 'i he taimi ko 'eni kia Sione Malekamu Manu, kii he 'api nofo'anga 'o e Fakamaau Polisi. Kae lolotonga 'a 'eku 'alū hifo ko 'eni, 'oku fai ai pē 'a e mofuike ia, pea ko e taimi ko 'eni kuo.
THE FIRE HAS JUMPED

‘Ofato, afenga 'o si’ete faka’aho
Tu'u he la‘a tu'u he hako
Ke toli mo fili hao manako 'ene anganofo he taulalo
Viki e lelei ne fakama'unga ki ai 'ete manako
Taha'i kuonga ne lato he foaki 'a e tautama'o
Pohopoho lava, ko ia koa ho fakamālo?

‘Ofato, hingoa 'o si'ete siā ngako
'Efinga si'ete 'ilo
Pitenga si'oto ifo, pununga'anga 'o e manako
‘Ofa loto 'i si'oto mahu he 'ikai ngalo
Fiu hono kumi holo, tā na'a te tuku 'i loto
Ki se'ete kopate malu ko e 'akau popo he vao

This is a selection of the pop songs composed in the 1960s by Kitione Mamalaho during his term of office as the Niuafo'ou Wireless Operator. The songs were sung by the Malau-'o-Vailahi group and recorded at Sapa'ata in 1967 by Garth Rogers.

i. Malau 'o Vailahi/Megapode of the Crater Lake

Niuafo'ou is renowned for its megapode birds, Megapodiis pritchardi, fowl-like birds not found anywhere else in Polynesia and prized as game, the birds and eggs accompanying presentations from Niuafo'ou to the royal household. They are preferred to domestic fowls because of their oily flesh and the rich yolk of their eggs. The megapodes are found along the shorelines of Niuafo'ou's volcanic lakes; Vailahi and 'Ahau are named in the poem. They dig deep holes in the warm sand, to depths of one or two metres, and leave their eggs buried, to incubate unattended. Niuafo'ou people recover the eggs by excavating the burial places. The composer notes wryly that the main centre prizes Niuafo'ou's delicacies and beauty spots, but ignores her need for modern facilities. Niuafo'ou in the 1960s had only a rutted clay road encircling the island, and for public transport only the Copra Board truck and Noble Fusitu'a's truck. Vailahi, the large crater lake, was reached on foot, by leaving the main road, climbing to the crater rim, and descending to the lake edge.
Eggs of the malau bird from Vailahi. G. Rogers
In the refrain, the metaphor of the megapode depicts Niuafo'ou in the twentieth century as a distant and backward outpost of the Tonga Kingdom, having been left out of the Development Projects which have concentrated on centralised development in Tongatapu, the seat of Government. In the past, however, Niuafo'ou had its chiefs of rank and renown who married into the aristocratic lines of Tonga.

Protocol embellishes a speech
It's the saving grace of mine
Dear Niuafo'ou with her megapodes
Still in popular demand.

Step up, I'll lead your gaze
Vailahi is a fine lake
Idyllic scenes pose problems, but
Transport a tourist and he's happy

Digging them out, that's difficult
Down in the dark, out in the light
Dogging the loved one's choice
Done! with tears rolled in dust.

I adore the megapode's swimming stroke
You're a big smoke, Tongatapu, but I'm at home in 'Ahau lake
Else I'd be an adjunct to the royal repast
Prosper down there and do remember me.

Chorus
Dear megapode of Vailahi lake
Buried in the march of progress
Better not forget our history
Or I'll be the one forsaken.

ii. Founga Fakahifo mo e Fakaheka/Loading and Unloading Procedures

In the 1960s, copra was loaded at Futu from the end of a lava outflow, unprotected from the surge of the sea. A lighter went back and forth between the copra ship and the loading point. The sacks were carried down the beach
and out along the rocks by a team of men supervised by the stevedore, Siaosi Telefoni Ongoloka. In the last verse, the poet speaks wryly of the abundance which the Niuafou people enjoyed before modern development enslaved them in copra production without returning the benefits of wharf construction or mechanisation.

Deference to all concerned
I take refuge in the Almighty
In telling this funny little story
If I've got a nerve, ignore it.

I questioned the stevedore
Re loading and unloading procedures
If the anchorage is rough, what,
Friend, is to be done about the copra?

Chorus
"There's only one thing to be done:
Try to postpone the vessel's departure."

Look smart, act on the double,
Shoulder your sack, trot to the loading rock,
Prepare to sling aboard, wait for the double-banger,
Take a one-footed stance, stay on balance as you step.

If you don't feel quite up to being a man
Streuth, don't believe what you're told
By an upstart foreigner acting as guide
You'll be dead-beat within the hour.

Chorus
It's my innate talent to sweat
But for whose benefit is it?

I lead a two-sided life in the Friendly Isles
For centuries I was well endowed
Short-fall on wealth under present adjustments
Hereditary slaves for the foreseeable future.