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**SPEECH AT THE LAUNCHING OF MANU KOROVULAVULA’S BOOK**

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**Soqosoqo Vakamarama Complex Fri. 21st March, 2014**

**NABUA 12 Noon**

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bula vinaka and a very good afternoon to you all.

I’m delighted to be here to launch these two volumes of Manu Korovulavula’s book on the Malayan campaign – one in English and the other in i’Taukei.

This is a very important occasion, not only because of the subject matter of this book but because we have so few events like this in Fiji.

Our nation’s collective memory comes from the stories that people tell about various stages of our history.

And not enough stories are being recorded so that future generations of Fijians can learn from the eyewitnesses to the events that have shaped us as a nation.

Not enough books have been written to give us a proper Fijian narrative - a permanent record of the great events that make up the story of Fiji.

Which is why I am so delighted that Manu Korovulavula has chosen to tell his own story as part of the wider story that unfolds in the pages of *“Vala Mai Maleya”* and *“Malayan Campaign”.*

The Malayan campaign or emergency took place sixty years ago and has been rapidly fading into memory as most of those who were there pass into history themselves.

But it’s wonderful that the story has suddenly been brought to life in the pages of these books and I urge as many Fijians as possible to read them.

That story is seen through the eyes of a young soldier who was there – truly an eyewitness to history in the making.

Manu Korovulavula was 17 years and four months old when he enlisted at the Nasese Camp in October 1951. Within months, he was in Malaya, -the former British colony that is now Malaysia – helping to fight a bloody guerrilla war.

It must seem strange to a younger generation today that over a four year period from 1952 to 1956, some 1,600 Fijian troops left our islands to fight in the jungles of South East Asia.

Why did they go? What was the cause? What did it have to do with Fiji? Why were Fijian lives sacrificed in the Malayan campaign? The answers are in the pages of these books.

Malaya at the time – like Fiji – was a British colony, part of the British Empire. It was also very important to Britain economically. It was the largest producer of natural rubber in the world and the second largest producer of tin. So it was a very valuable asset to the British and, in turn, for us, because in those days, we were also dependent on Britain’s wealth.

In Malaya, the British faced an insurgency from the Malayan Communist Party - backed by the Soviet Union and China – who wanted to take over the peninsular as part of the communist push through South East Asia.

The communist Malayan National Liberation Army began to wage war on British interests, killing British plantation owners, attacking plantations and destroying transport and infrastructure.

It couldn’t officially be called a war because Lloyds - the company that insured the plantations and tin mines -wouldn’t have to pay for the damage if it was classified as a war. So it was called an emergency.

And because it was a guerrilla insurgency in very dense jungle, the British looked around their Empire to see who had experience in guerrilla fighting. And their eyes settled on the brave, tough soldiers in their colonial possession in the far off Pacific – Fiji.

Less than a decade before, Fijian troops had shown exceptional skill and courage fighting the Japanese in dense jungles during the Solomons Campaign. So in 1952, the first 800 volunteer soldiers of the First Battalion, Fiji Infantry Regiment, set sail from Suva to join the struggle in Malaya to hold the Communists back.

They were led by Ratu Edward Cakobau – the father of our current President.

And they included not only the young Manu Korovulavula but his father and brother, who sadly are no longer with us today but are certainly here in spirit.

It’s wonderful that these books have been dedicated to both of them – Manu’s late father, Major Isireli Qerea Korovulavula, who won a Military Cross, and his late younger brother, Warrant Officer Class Two Nacani Naravoro Korovulavula, who was awarded an MBE for his distinguished service.

All three remind us of the sacrifice many thousands of Fijian soldiers have made over the years in the service of our nation. Those who are gone live on in our hearts and memories – genuine Fijian heroes who made their mark far from our shores and whose exploits deserve to be remembered forever.

These books ensure that the story of Fiji’s role in the Malayan Campaign will live on – to be read and re-read by Fijians today and generations of Fijians to come.

Thanks partly to our contribution, the communist threat in Malaya was eventually defeated and when the British left, the thriving independent nation of Malaysia was born. And Fiji will always have a special place in Malaysian history because of what our troops achieved there.

So vinaka vakalevu, Manu, for telling your story, for reminding us all of an episode in Fijian history that did much to cement our own national identity and certainly serves as an inspiration for every Fijian soldier today.

I again urge every Fijian to read these books and have great pleasure in launching Vala Mai Maleya and Malayan Campaign.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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