

ROKSA Ends Asian-Pacific Heritage Month with Aganu'u Samoa Celebration

By Sinaoalii Easter Bruce

The Republic of Korea Samoa Association (ROKSA) culminated the Asian-Pacific Heritage month of May with an evening filled with island music, Samoan performances, and a Polynesian feast lined with favorite Samoan dishes. The Main Post Club, Underground at Yongsan Army Garrison was packed with over 200 guests anxiously waiting to participate in the evenings festivities.

MAJ Tauapai Laupola, Master of Ceremonies, welcomed the guests and promised a memorable evening of Samoan style entertainment. Prior to the formal portion of the evening, MAJ Laupola and CSM Nua called forward four soldiers to bid farewell as they will depart Korea for their next duty station. PFC Masina Taofegauiai, PFC Ropati F. Sooalo, SPC Bernadette Langford and SGT Manu Salanoa were center stage as they were each handed a Certificate of Appreciation, a ROKSA coin and a ROKSA t-shirt. ROKSA extended their deep appreciation and alofas to these soldiers for their support and service.

CSM Tuileama Nua as the guest speaker briefly described ROKSA's early beginnings. He reiterated the fact that many senior Samoan members of the Yongsan community mutually agreed to form this private organization in support of young Samoan service members and their families.

Following the invocation given by SFC Leafe Amosa, MAJ Laupola dismissed guests table by table to the buffet line. During the dinner hour, Ms. Easter Bruce presented a slide show loaded with photographs capturing ROKSA events from the past year beginning with photos from Aganu'u Samoa 2004. According to Ms. Bruce, "It was important to share the early beginnings of ROKSA and how the association has blossomed as a group but

passionately driven to support and celebrate the Samoan culture.”

Soldiers from the 2nd Infantry Division (2ID), Camp Casey opened the evening’s dance revues. After performing a few dance numbers, the group ended their piece by gathering on stage and singing a familiar Samoan tune, “Samoa Matalasi.” As the group sang, hand made posters proudly displayed the names of five soldiers who lost their lives in the Iraq/Afghanistan wars. During this Memorial Day weekend, ROKSA paid tribute to those soldiers for their ultimate sacrifice: Farao Kevin Letufuga, Jonathan I. Falaniko, Salamo J. Tuialu'ulu'u, Tina Safaira Time and Ioasa F. Tavae.

Following 2ID’s performance, Area III (Osan/Cp Humphreys) and Area IV (Daegu, Pusan) combined their efforts to represent their areas. PFC Lanuola Sua performed a tauluga siva flanked by Mr. Faresa Tu’uao and Airman Monte Isaia.

Area II, Yongsan ended the evening’s performances with Samoan dances comprised of young ladies, young men and children. Yongsan ladies included last year’s dancers returning from their first year of college just in time to learn the Samoan sivas. Rochelle Pennington (Radford University, Virginia), Yun Hui Voelker (Minnesota Mankato, Minnesota) and Jiovanna Bruce (Central Missouri State University, Missouri) were excited to be a part of Aganu’u once again. Remarkd Voelker, “I found it harder this year to learn the dances because we came back for summer break a little late.” According to Bruce, it will be their last as future summers will be earmarked for internships and other commitments related to their college majors.

The evening entertainment could not end without the finale tauluga siva performed by Ms. Leilani Wiley daughter of Morris and Luse Meleisea Wiley. After a blistering performance, Lani’s mother, Luse, beamed with pride at how well her daughter danced for the audience.

ROKSA partnered with Area II Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) Club Systems in sponsoring Aganu'u Samoa. Area II MWR Business Manager, Mr. Dan Melton donated a grand prize of one roundtrip airline ticket to anywhere in the United States (U.S.). Other raffle prizes included a \$50 AAFES gift certificate and 4-\$25 MWR dinner gift certificates. SGM Terry of Yongsan's NCOA provided a variety of raffle prizes contributing to the success of the event and boosting morale. ROKSA extends a warm "Fa'afetai" to all our sponsors for their unwavering support. In particular, ROKSA sends a special note of thanks to Mr. Chae, Ki Sok. Mr. Chae coordinated ROKSA's Golf Tournament in April raising over \$4000 making it possible to fund Aganu'u Samoa.

ROKSA is proud to have hosted Aganu'u Samoa in support of Asian-Pacific Heritage month. ROKSA board and key members held a brief After-Action Report (AAR) session on Monday during a Memorial Day BBQ to discuss improvements for next year's program.

In closing, to all Samoan service members and families that may be heading to Korea, know that ROKSA is here to help and support you. Please feel free to contact either CSM Nua or MAJ Laupola upon arrival in the ROK.

ROKSA Board

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