

# War in Samoa 1889 - 1899

## photographs published by Charles Kerry & Co.

### COLLECTION INFORMATION SHEETS



# INTRODUCTION

In 2008 the Powerhouse Museum introduced a new series of research publications, which it has made available online in PDF format. The stories and information arise out of current collection research and provide more detailed information about the collection than is available through the Museum's online database.

This is one of a number of online publications the Museum is developing. Other series include facsimile copies of old or out-of-print catalogues, books and brochures as well as collection information sheets and peer reviewed research. These are all available through the Museum's on-line collection database OPAC.

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## The Samoan Wars 1889 – 1899

Tradition in Samoa dictated that leadership of the islands was to be invested in an hereditary chief, but in the 1880s these claims to power were anything but certain. Robert Louis Stevenson, who lived in Samoa during this period of turmoil, commented that Europeans used to a history of kings and queens tend to leap to the conclusion that the office of high chief is absolute. In fact the office in Samoa was elective and held in many ways on condition of the holder's behaviour and attendance to his many obligations.<sup>1</sup> This confusion was to have ongoing ramifications in the late nineteenth century as European powers asserted their claims to land and political power across the three major islands of Samoa.

In 1881, Laupepa was anointed king on the basis of his holding of three of the five names (Malietoa, Natoaitete, and Tamasoalii) which covered the principality of Samoa. However the other two chiefs who had claims to these highly significant titles, Tamasese who held the name Tuiaana and Mata'afa who held Tuiatua, were not completely satisfied with the arrangement. In an effort to maintain the peace each was given the role of 'vice-king' to be held for two year periods.

This situation provided the seeds of discord amongst the Samoans, but a greater threat to the peace of the island was the German, British and American settlers pursuing their commercial interests (particularly the German interests of the firm of Deutsche Handels und Plantagen Gesellschaft fur Sud-See Inseln zu Hamburg ( DH&PG.)) alongside these traditional relationships.

The centre of all this activity was on the island of Upolu at the port of Apia where Samoans, Germans, Americans and Englishmen all resided. Perhaps the best description of the state of these interests is to be found at the

beginning of Stevenson's book, *A Footnote to History*,

*Here, then, is a singular state of affairs: all the money, luxury, and business of the kingdom centred in one place; that place excepted from the native government and administered by whites for whites; and the whites themselves holding it not in common but in hostile camps, so that it lies between them like a bone between two dogs, each growling, each clutching his own end.<sup>2</sup>*

European intrigue exacerbated existing tensions which erupted in 1885 and led to civil war amongst the Samoans and fighting between the Germans on one side and the Americans and the British on the other. The German Counsel Dr. Stuebel entered into an agreement with Malietoa and then advocated the deposing of the existing Samoan government. However Malietoa and Tamasese secretly approached the English offering them the islands as a Protectorate. When the Germans found out they sought to replace Malietoa and, overlooking the obvious choice of Mata'afa, selected Malietoa's accomplice Tamasese as their man.

Tamasese, supplied with weapons by Germans and Americans, raised his flag on 28 January 1886, while Malietoa was forced from Mulinuu, the seat of his royalty and raised his flag in Apia. Here he was confronted by the German Counsel Dr. Stuebel who, with the aid of ten men from the German cruiser *Albatross* forcibly took down his flag. Europe and America sent a delegation to sort out the mess and a lull in hostilities ensued which lasted for nearly a year. But by August 1887 tensions had increased again and no less than five German warships were stationed in the harbour at Apia and on 25 August, 700 Germans came ashore and hoisted the German flag above the Government House in Apia.

In September 1888 a large group of Samoans revolted against Tamasese and the German Government. By December 1888 skirmishes were erupting across the islands and tensions between the European warships in Apia harbour were at their height. On the 21 December the German ship the *Olga* shelled and burned the village of Vaialele. By March 1889 the harbour was crowded with three American ships in Apia bay, the *Nipsic*, the *Vandalia* and the *Trenton*; three German ships, the *Adler*, the *Eber* and the *Olga*; and one British, the *Calliope*. In addition there were six merchant-men, ranging from twenty-five to five hundred tons, and a number of small craft which further encumbered the anchorage. On 15 March a hurricane struck and the *Eber* went down on the reef with nearly 80 drowned, the *Nipsic* was beached on the sand escaping with a few lives lost, the *Adler* was lifted onto the reef which broke her back and twenty lives were lost, the *Vandalia* also went down in the storm after colliding with the *Olga* losing 43 lives, while the *Trenton* only lost one life.

The Germans in the wake of this disaster agreed again to talks with the British and the Americans. This allowed tensions to quieten down and a treaty document was signed in which Malietoa was recognised as king by the European forces. However this was against the wishes of many Samoans who saw another chief, Mata'afa, as the real hero of the conflict.<sup>3</sup> The agreement also established an accord for the tripartite supervision of the islands, but unfortunately for all involved, it appears to have been constructed in haste and the resulting document led to squabbles and by 1892 the island '... still lacked any form of peace, order and effective administration'.<sup>4</sup>

Tamasese had died in 1891 and in 1893 another civil war broke out between Mata'afa and Malietoa, the upshot of which was the capture and deportation of Mata'afa. In 1894 fresh conflict broke out between Tamasese's son and Malietoa which was put down by German forces.<sup>5</sup>

But in August 1898 Samoa's King Malietoa

Laupepa died and his long-time rival Mata'afa returned from exile supported by the German forces.<sup>6</sup> This act was strongly opposed by the British and Americans who backed Laupepa's son, Tanu, and in January 1899 a war, similar to the one ten years previously, erupted in Apia.<sup>7</sup> In an astounding turn of events the American heavy cruiser U.S.S. *Philadelphia* shelled Apia on 14 March almost ten years to the day of the anniversary of the hurricane which ended the first conflict.

This shelling was done in an attempt to dissolve a provisional government set up by Mata'afa and Germany and re-establish the tripartite solution. Instead it inflamed the hostilities and Mata'afa's forces attacked houses in Apia, particularly the Tivoli Hotel where three American sailors were killed.<sup>8</sup> M. Rogers, E Halloran of H.M.S *Royalist* and Thomas Holloway, A. Thornberry and John Mudge of U.S.S. *Philadelphia* all appear to have lost their lives during the skirmishes around Apia which led up to the 1 April encounter.

Tanu's forces were outnumbered by Mata'afa's on Upolu and so British and American ships picked up hundred of supporters from the Samoan Islands of Savai'i and Tutuila and brought them back to Apia where they were armed and trained.<sup>9</sup> On 30 March a British and American force under Commander Sturdee, along with about one hundred Samoans under Lieutenant Gaunt, made their way along the coast driving small numbers of Mata'afa's men before them.<sup>10</sup> On the first of April, and no doubt feeling full of confidence at the ease with which they were forcing Mata'afa's forces off the coast, they pursued him inland. This tactic was foolhardy in the extreme as they were no longer covered by the fire of the warships and were attacked by thousands of Mata'afa's men. While only seven were killed, the historian Paul Kennedy considered these were, 'remarkably light considering the circumstances'.<sup>11</sup>

John Monaghan, Norman Edsall, Lieutenant Phillip Lansdale and James Butler of the

U.S.S. <i>Philadelphia</i> and J. Long and A. Prout,	6	Kennedy, <i>The Samoan Tangle</i> , 146
seamen on H.M.S. <i>Royalist</i> and Lieutenant	7	Kennedy, <i>The Samoan Tangle</i> , 150
Angel Hope Freeman of H.M.S. <i>Tauranga</i> ,	8	Kennedy, <i>The Samoan Tangle</i> , 153
were all killed during the April 1st encounter	9	Kennedy, <i>The Samoan Tangle</i> , 153
with Mataafa's forces.	10	Kennedy, <i>The Samoan Tangle</i> , 153
	11	Kennedy, <i>The Samoan Tangle</i> , 154

The upshot of all this activity was the establishment of Samoan, American and British forces along the coast while Mata'afa's Samoan forces and the Germans were firmly entrenched in the interior.

The inevitable deadlock was broken by a ceasefire announced on 25 April and in May 1899 a specially set up commission of British, American, and German representatives arrived. Soon after a treaty was agreed to by all parties. This document recognised the independence of the Samoan Government and divided European interests so that Germany received the western Samoan islands with Savaii and Upolu, the United States received the eastern islands with its capital at Pago Pago on Tutuila and Britain withdrew from the area for recognition of rights on Tonga and the Solomon Islands.

## References

Paul M. Kennedy, *The Samoan Tangle; a Study in Anglo-German-American Relations*, University of Queensland Press, Queensland, 1974

Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Footnote to History; Eight years of Trouble in Samoa*, 1892, transcribed from the 1912 Swanston edition by David Price, 2005, Project Gutenberg eBook, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/536/536.txt>

## (Endnotes)

1 Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Footnote to History; Eight years of Trouble in Samoa*, transcribed from the 1912 Swanston edition by David Price, 2005, Project Gutenberg eBook, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/536/536.txt>

2 Stevenson, *A Footnote to History; Eight years of Trouble in Samoa*

3 Paul M. Kennedy, *The Samoan Tangle; a Study in Anglo-German-American Relations*, University of Queensland Press, Queensland, 1974, 100

4 Kennedy, *The Samoan Tangle*, 101

5 Kennedy, *The Samoan Tangle*, 103



85/1284-1455 Photographic glass negative, a group of Samoans using the roof of a house as a beach shelter (possibly during the 1889 wars), photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, 1889-1899



85/1284-1472 Photographic glass negative, wreck of the German warship 'Adler', photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Apia, Upolu, Samoa, 1899



85/1284-1442 Photographic glass negative, Mata'afa's camp, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, Samoa, 1899



85/1284-1479 Photographic glass negative, street scene outside the Tivoli Hotel, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Apia, Upolu, Samoa, March-April, 1899



85/1284-1478 Photographic glass negative, Malietoa supporters training for battle, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, Samoa, 1899



85/1284-1484 Photographic glass negative, U.S. Marines with 10.2 cm (4 inch) naval gun emplacement in Samoan village, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, Samoa, 1899



85/1284-1477 Photographic glass negative, Lieutenant Gaunt instructing some of Malietoa's supporters, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, Samoa, 1899



85/1284-1452 Photographic glass negative, Lieutenant Gaunt instructing some of Malietoa's supporters, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, Samoa, 1899



85/1284-1477 Photographic glass negative, Lieutenant Gaunt instructing some of Malietoa's supporters, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, Samoa, 1899



85/1284-1453 Photographic glass negative, Lieutenant Gaunt, sailors and some of Malietoa's supporters, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, Samoa, 1899



85/1284-1418 Photographic glass negative, mustering of Samoan supporters of Malietoa, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, Samoa, 1899



85/1284-1417 Photographic glass negative, American and British soldiers in trenches, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, Samoa, 1899



85/1284-1480 Photographic glass negative, Malietoa supporters and U.S.S. Philadelphia marines on the streets of Apia, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Apia, Upolu, Samoa, March 1899



85/1284-1481 Photographic glass negative, Malietoa supporters trained by Lieutenant Gaunt marching through the streets of Apia, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Apia, Upolu, Samoa, March 1899



85/1284-1482 Photographic glass negative, the mustering of Malietoa supporters trained by Lieutenant Gaunt before their march down the coast, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, Samoa, March 1899



85/1284-1483 Photographic glass negative, Apia harbour with H.M.S. Royalist, U.S.S. Philadelphia and other warships, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Apia, Upolu, Samoa, 1899



85/1284-1998 Photographic glass negative, copy from an original positive print, Samoan fighting men and two women, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, Samoa, 1899



85/1284-1979 Photographic glass negative, supporters of Chief Mata'afa in one of their strongholds, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, Samoa, 1899



85/1284-1434 Photographic glass negative, American and British graves, H.M.S. Royalist and U.S.S. Philadelphia, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, Samoa, April - May, 1899



85/1284-1435 Photographic glass negative, American and British graves, H.M.S. Royalist and U.S.S. Philadelphia, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, Samoa, April - May, 1899



85/1284-1437 Photographic glass negative, American graves, U.S.S. Philadelphia, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, Samoa, April - May, 1899



85/1284-1438 Photographic glass negative, American graves, U.S.S. Philadelphia, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, Samoa, March 1899



FREEMAN'S GRAVE  
 Photo. Sydney

85/1284-1436 Photographic glass negative, British graves, H.M.S. Royalist and H.M.S. Tauranga, photographer unknown, published by Kerry and Co., Upolu, Samoa, April - May, 1899