

## June 2<sup>nd</sup>

On this day in 1915, Iga Pisa set out from Saipan on a 120 voyage to Guam aboard a Samoan paddling canoe.

Iga was the youngest of ten Samoan chiefs (*matai*) who were exiled to Saipan in April 1900 as a result of their involvement in a resistance movement against Samoa's German colonial government.

Soon after his arrival on Saipan, Iga enrolled in elementary school to learn the German language with the aim of gaining government employment upon his return to Samoa.

After two years of diligent study, Iga had become sufficiently fluent in German to be appointed interpreter for the Samoan community on Saipan.

At the outbreak of World War I, New Zealand forces took possession of German Samoa. Two months later, in October 1914, Japanese naval personnel occupied Saipan. Germany's time as a Pacific colonial power was over.

The senior Samoan *matai* soon petitioned the Japanese military to be repatriated to Samoa. Iga, however, was not ready to return home, as his newly acquired German language skills would do him no good with English-speaking New Zealanders occupying Samoa.

Considering his options, Iga decided to make his way to American-controlled Guam where he intended to study English. He would make the trip aboard a borrowed Samoan paddling canoe (*paopao*) which he had taken to Unai Agingan at the southern end of the island.

The *paopao* is a simple dugout outrigger canoe fashioned from a single log. It is normally used for fishing in protected waters. Both its depth and beam are rarely more than 12 inches and it requires constant bailing on the open ocean to prevent it from swamping.

Iga departed Unai Agingan on a calm Wednesday morning, 2 June, with the blessings of Lauaki, the leader of the Samoan exiles. Following a four-day voyage south, helped along by a makeshift sail fashioned from a bedsheet, Iga reached Rota. There he rested for eleven days under the care of Rota's *alcalde*.

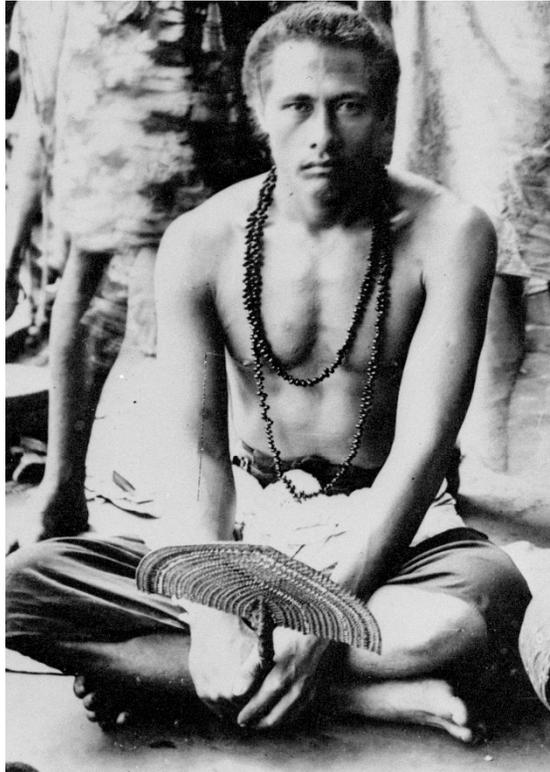
Iga finally made it to Guam on the afternoon of 18 June 1915 when he pulled his *paopao* ashore at Ritidian Point. He was quickly discovered and taken to Hagatna, the seat of the American naval government, for interrogation.

After recounting his remarkable voyage from Saipan and his interest in learning English, Captain W.J. Maxwell, the American naval governor, offered him government employment and lodging.

For the next four years, Iga worked in the naval printing shop during which time he became fluent in the English language. In 1919, with his studies complete, Iga requested and was provided passage back to Samoa via Honolulu aboard U.S. navy ships.

Following his return, Iga commenced a distinguished career as a public servant. He was the only exiled chief to witness Samoan independence in 1962. Iga's remarkable voyage to Guam is still remembered in Samoa today.

Those wishing to learn more about Iga and the other exiled chiefs are invited to attend "Samoa Exiles on Saipan, 1900-1915" a Council program which will run from 17-20 June. A schedule of events is available on the Council's website [www.northernmarianashumanities.org](http://www.northernmarianashumanities.org).



Iga Pisa in April 1909.



A paopao style paddling canoe very similar to the one Iga used for his voyage to Guam.  
(Photos courtesy of the National Library of New Zealand)