Beyond the dedication of the statue of Sir Jacob Vouza in 1992, it has taken almost 70 years for the efforts of Solomon Islanders who participated in the Pacific Campaign of World War II to be recognised and celebrated. On 7 August 2011, the anniversary of the United States Marine Corps’ landing on Guadalcanal, a monument was unveiled and handed over to the people of Solomon Islands by the governor general, Sir Frank Kabui.

At the entrance to Honiara’s central jetty at the seaward end of Commonwealth Street stands this long-overdue monument honouring the legacy of Solomon Islanders and Allied coastwatchers who participated in the war effort on Guadalcanal and elsewhere. Designed and sculpted by the celebrated local artist Frank Haikiu, the monument features four life-sized figures on a 2-metre-high plinth, representing three islanders and a European (Figure 18). The two scouts are shirtless and dressed only in khaki shorts while holding bush knives and .303 rifles. This is an accurate representation of the dress code of their time. Radio operators, on the other hand, were trained personnel and were slightly higher in rank than the scouts. Hence, the artist impression of the radio operator having a shirt on is an accurate depiction of their status in the scouting network’s hierarchy. Amid the three islanders is a well-dressed European-looking male, with a hat and binoculars, looking out to sea. This figure represents a coastwatcher, symbolically scanning the horizon with his binoculars for any suspicious or subversive developments throughout the
islands. This monument, now known as the Pride of Our Nation, was the first major phase of the Solomon Scouts and Coastwatchers Trust’s monument-building initiative.

Figure 18: Artist Frank Haikiu’s design of the Pride of Our Nation sculpture, 2009
Source: Solomon Scouts and Coastwatchers Trust.

A year later, on the 70th anniversary of the United States Marines’ landing, the second phase of the project was completed. An honour roll was unveiled, listing on two plinths at the back of the monument the names of those who served in the British Solomon Islands Defence Force, including local scouts and coastwatchers. The final phase of the monument project was completed in early August 2013, with the dedication of a memorial anchor in honour of the Royal Australian Navy (Figure 19). In front of the anchor is a plaque that bears a brief historical description of the coastwatching network and its relationship to islanders who served as scouts during the Allied–Japanese confrontation in Solomon Islands. At the final monument dedication, the project coordinator, Bruce Saunders, announced in his speech that ‘the story is complete; the Pride of Our Nation is complete’ (Saunders 2013).
Together, the Solomon scouts and coastwatchers memorial, the honour roll and the Royal Australian Navy monument were given the official title the ‘Pride of Our Nation’ monument.

Eric Feldt, commander of the coastwatchers throughout the Pacific War began his book The Coastwatchers by stating that the coastwatchers ‘played a vital part in these operations, a part so important that without them the whole course of the war in the Pacific would have been drastically changed’ (Feldt 1991: 1). Feldt’s statement is similar in sentiment to Halsey’s quotation on the plinth of the Honiara monument (see Chapter 1). Evident in these sorts of statements is that the coastwatchers became a focus of early celebration and remembrance of the Allied victory in Solomon Islands. But the tales of the scouts, who formed the backbone of the coastwatchers, have not been consistently passed on in the islands over the ensuing decades, gradually becoming part of a forgotten national past. It is this forgotten past that the Pride of Our Nation monument attempts to revive. This chapter discusses the planning and building of the monument, why it is important and relevant to the contemporary Solomon Islands and what it has achieved to date. As Susanne Küchler (1999: 53) has shown, ‘a culture without monuments appears to us like a ship lost to the sea — unable to navigate and correct mistaken judgement’.

Figure 19: The Pride of Our Nation monument
This image shows the three elements that make up the completed monument. The two white plinths behind the coastwatchers’ statue are the honour rolls, while the black anchor at the right is the Royal Australian Navy monument.
Source: Photo by Anna Kwai.
Monuments and commemoration in Solomon Islands

Monuments and commemorations are not foreign concepts in the traditional societies of Solomon Islands, but the modern practice of constructing monuments or sculptures in public spaces with the sociopolitical intention of nation-building and of strengthening collective interests has made these aspects of the culture seem new. As a child, I grew up in a traditional village setting where the oldest generation of the village were grandchildren of a pagan fata’abu or priest, who decided to abandon his pagan god for the new Christian god, introduced to him by his coastal relatives. But even after generations of Christianity, when passing certain places in the bush, people today still fall silent because of the heaviness of the past that dwells around them. These sites each have a tale, perhaps marking the spot where a leader died during a tribal skirmish, or the corpse of a priest was left to decay before his bones were moved to his final resting place. Women and girls are not allowed to pass through some sites. Although as a child I did not understand the stories behind the sacredness of these objects or sites, I knew that they were revered. These are monuments that each tribal group associates with an event or a traditional political figure. In her study of the practice of malanggan, a ceremony marking the finishing of the work of the dead in the Bismarck Archipelago, Papua New Guinea, Küchler noted:

We may fail to recognise such objects [artworks embedded in the culture] as monuments as their perishability and fleeting presence in culture conflict with our [Western] assumption that commemorative work should provide a lasting visual referent for acts of remembrance, yet it is their ephemerality that allows us to understand the place of memory in modern culture, best exemplified by the war memorial (Kühler 1999: 55).

The Japanese Memorial and the Guadalcanal American Memorial

The twentieth-century phenomenon of war monument–building began in Solomon Islands only in the early 1980s. The Japanese returned, but this time to unveil a monument commemorating their comrades who fell during the battles of Guadalcanal. On Mount Austen east of Honiara (known to the Allies as Hill 35), stands this Japanese memorial (Figure 20). The monument consists of two white plinths facing seaward,
looking down on significant battle sites such as Henderson Field, the Galloping Horse and the Seahorse. The monument itself was built on the north-west end of the ridge where the Battle of the Gifu was fought.¹ Near the entrance of the monument is a sculpture of the Japanese artist Seiichi Takahashi, who was killed in combat on Guadalcanal, and over his shoulder is a fishing net. The Takahashi sculpture was donated by the city of Ishinomaki where he was born.

Figure 20: Japanese War Memorial
Source: Solomon Scouts and Coastwatchers Trust.

Eight years after the dedication of the Japanese memorial, the Guadalcanal American Memorial was unveiled on Skyline Ridge (or Hill 73) (Figure 21). In what seemed a war of monument-building, the American memorial was built almost parallel to the Japanese memorial at Mount Austen. The Guadalcanal American Memorial was initiated in the early 1990s through the cooperative effort of the Guadalcanal Solomon Islands War Memorial Foundation and the American Battle Monument Commission. The site was chosen primarily for its spectacular views, again overlooking some of the significant battlegrounds on Guadalcanal. Engraved on marble plinths are detailed accounts of the phases of the battle of Guadalcanal. Adding to the historical significance of the site, during its excavation in early 1992

¹ The battle was named Gifu by the Japanese defenders involved since most of these soldiers were from the town of Gifu Prefecture in the Chubu region of central Japan.
the remains of an unknown Allied soldier were discovered in a shallow grave on the hill. When the monument was constructed, a star-shaped plaque was placed within the compound in honour of this ‘unknown warrior’. The remains were later identified as belonging to Sergeant John Branic of the United States Marine Corps. The Guadalcanal American Memorial was unveiled on 7 August 1992, to mark the 50th anniversary of the United States Marines’ landing on Guadalcanal, and a ceremony continues to be held at the monument on the same day every year. Beyond mourning the dead and celebrating victory in the Solomons Campaign, the United States monument is historically significant since it also marks the first American offensive in World War II.

Since its dedication in 1984, the Japanese memorial has only occasionally been the site of Japanese commemorative ceremonies. In 2008, a Japanese bone recovery mission was conducted and this led to ceremonies being held at the monument, including Shinto rituals, wreath laying and a flag-raising ceremony (Solomon Times Online 2008). Recovered bones of Japanese soldiers were burnt in front of the monument and the ashes returned to Japan.

In contrast, the American monument has been a site of regular commemoration. Since its unveiling in 1992, the monument has annually hosted veterans, international dignitaries, officials and representatives of the United States Marines. The annual 7 August program begins at
6:55 am with the arrival of the Solomon Islands prime minister and governor general, followed by a flag-raising ceremony, speeches and laying of wreaths. The day’s program concludes at the Honiara Yacht Club, where a memorial plaque lies in honour of Douglas Munro, a member of the United States Coast Guard, mortally wounded on Guadalcanal in September 1942. While the 7 August ceremony at the Skyline Ridge memorial is a private commemoration organised for American veterans, over the years it has been attended by officials of the Solomon Islands Government as well as local residents.

Sir Jacob Vouza statue

Neither the Japanese nor American memorials on Guadalcanal seem to have any connection to a past — whether horrific or victorious — that is shared with the indigenous inhabitants of the land on which they stand. The Japanese memorial serves the purpose of mourning loss rather than celebrating victory, so perhaps some form of acknowledgement of islanders’ contributions would have been more appropriate for the American memorial, in light of the local contribution to the Allied victory. Michael Rowland argues that in order for a ‘monument’ to become a ‘memorial’, it must fulfil three functions: (1) acknowledge the importance of the dead and their sacrificial deeds, (2) accept the loss in a collective manner and substitute a gain for it through symbolic objects and (3) identify the dead through remembering names in rolls of honour and commemorative events (Rowland 1999: 144). But these functions at the American memorial do not seem to encompass islanders’ efforts. In an effort to fill the gap of recognising islanders’ contributions, a bronze sculpture of local war hero Sir Jacob Vouza was built at the same time as the American monument. A major portion of the funds for the construction of the monuments were donated in 1989 by a United States congressional appropriation, and the American Battle Monuments Commission to the Solomon Islands Memorial Foundation (White 1995: 539).

The bronze statue was made in Australia and shipped to Honiara in July 1990. It was initially planned to be part of the American Guadalcanal Memorial at Skyline ridge. However, since funding for the American memorial came directly from the United States, the appropriateness of Vouza’s statue to be placed within its physical confines was reconsidered. This led to the location of Vouza’s statue to the Rove police headquarters.
The individualisation of the Vouza sculpture does not go unnoticed by Solomon Islanders. The former prime minister, the late Sir Peter Kenilorea, wrote to the *Solomon Star* criticising the development:

‘The Second World War was not our war and Sir Jacob Vouza’s proposed statue is a form of ‘grease’ by Americans to allow the Solomon Islands Government to accommodate the memorial … What possible benefits do we, as a country get out of the War Memorial? This simply reinforces local peoples’ sense of inferiority. The idea to build the monument, its design, the money and the technology all belong to foreigners … And yet again, at the height of Skyline Ridge we have yet to witness another battle between USA and Japan. Do we need them to do that yet again in our own soils? … I think that apart from the praise given to our people for their services during the war years, the Americans and British need to consider some form of compensations to our local people … I think we have already had enough of USA vs Japan during the last war (*Solomon Star* 28 April 1989: 7, cited in White 1995: 538).’

The Vouza sculpture is a life-size figure of the hero, standing on a marble plinth with a bush knife in his right hand, looking out to the coast (Figure 22). At the rear of the statue are two white pillars with details of all Allied military units that took part in the battle for Solomon Islands. On the front of the plinth are the words ‘America, Australia, New Zealand and their Allies thank the Solomon Islanders for their tremendous World War II effort. This statue honours all Solomon Islanders who fought alongside us during the Solomon Island battles from Guadalcanal to Bougainville’.

Despite this, the individualised nature of the Vouza sculpture means it fails to collectively remember or represent all local veterans. As Rowland (1999: 130) discusses, certain memorials are ‘successful by the demands they make for recognition of what was done, to whom and by whom’. The Vouza memorial is successful in promoting an individual tale of heroism but suppresses the recognition of other islanders who were equally heroic in the war. When studying British memorials to World War I, Alex King (1999) also revealed that the choices made in designing a memorial involve the erasure of certain memories. Despite the general inscription on the Vouza monument acknowledging all Solomon Islanders, the use of a single iconic individual does not offer any connection to other local veterans or

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2 Note that Sir Peter Kenilorea was chairman of the Solomon Scouts and Coastwatchers Trust when it was founded in 2009.
their families, and the statue stands idle as if without purpose and notice in central Honiara. Hence, the recognition owed to the islander war effort has remained obscure. In order to address this shortfall in memory, the idea of the Pride of Our Nation monument was conceived.

![Figure 22: Sir Jacob Vouza monument, 2013](Source: Photo by Anna Kwai)

**The Solomon Scouts and Coastwatchers Trust**

The initial idea for a monument in honour of Solomon Islanders came from Australian expatriate and businessman Sir Bruce Saunders KBE OBE, who has lived in Solomon Islands for over 40 years. Saunders first arrived in Solomon Islands in 1968 after marrying his wife Keithie, a daughter of Alvin Blum, a United States serviceman in the Solomons Campaign who returned to Guadalcanal after the war as a missionary for the Baha’i faith (Saunders 2013). The close family connection to and identification with Solomon Islands, and a strong interest in war histories, has seen Saunders regularly visiting battle sites on Guadalcanal and elsewhere in the islands since his arrival in the country. In 1972, Saunders and his family established a tour business to administer to wartime veterans of both American and Japanese soldiers who return to visit Solomon Islands.
This exposure to the history of the Solomons Campaign and visiting veterans has increased Saunders’ knowledge of the significance of local contributions to the war effort in the Solomons Campaign. He stated:

I was always impressed by the fact that when people spoke about the war they always talked about what a Solomon Scout did — a Scout was always referred to as a ‘Solomon Scout’, not a scout from Guadalcanal, from Vela la Vela etc. I was also aware that the victory of the Guadalcanal Campaign for the Allies was due to a great extent on the work of the Coastwatchers and the Solomon Scouts (Solomon Scouts and Coastwatchers Memorial Trust 2010).

With this in mind, and having remained in the country to endure the 1998–2002 ethnic unrest and witness a young nation struggling to recover from major sociopolitical upheaval, Saunders conceived of building a monument to herald local wartime contributions and also to serve as a bridge to promote national unity and identity for a nation struggling to recover from turmoil. Saunders brought his idea to the attention of Prime Minister Derek Silkua, and on 7 August 2009 the Guadalcanal War Memorial Trust was founded and formally endorsed by the Solomon Islands Government.3 The trust board originally comprised seven members: Sir Bruce Saunders, founder of the trust; Sir Peter Kenilorea, the first prime minister;4 John Innes, a historian of the Guadalcanal campaign; Keithie Saunders, the United States consular agent to Solomon Islands; Anna Kwai; Michael Ben, secretary of the Solomon Islands Veterans Association; and Michael Liliau, a member of parliament for Guadalcanal Province and the son of local scout Bruno Nana (Aruhuri 2003).5 The incorporation of such a variety of members into the trust board is significant for understanding the momentum gained by the project across different groups of people in the broader society of Solomon Islands, and its success in raising public awareness of the national pride and unification agenda of the Pride of Our Nation monument. In a press conference organised by the trust in early 2010, Saunders explained that with the country struggling to create a national identity, there was no specific recognition of the service rendered by the Solomon scouts

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3 See Appendix 1: Prime Minister Derek Silkua’s letter of endorsement of the Solomon Scouts and Coastwatchers Trust.
4 Sir Peter Kenilorea died in February 2016.
5 Bruno Nana died in late 2011. His daughter has transcribed his wartime stories into a booklet.
and coastwatchers in the Pacific War. The building of a monument to recognise the services of the Solomon scouts and coastwatchers could help to restore a sense of pride and national identity.

By early 2011, a site was chosen and approved by the Honiara City Council and local artist Frank Haikiu was given the task of designing and building the monument. At the entrance to the Solomon Islands Ports Authority, at the end of Commonwealth Street in the heart of Honiara, a groundbreaking ceremony took place on 26 May 2011. The site was chosen not for any particular historical purpose, but for a sociopolitical need. Commonwealth Street is one of the busiest streets in Honiara and is used by heavy vehicles heading to and from the national port compound. It is also a major public thoroughfare leading to the national jetty, the access point for inter-island travel to and from Honiara.

The placement of the monument on such a busy street will hopefully minimise any acts of vandalism and make maintenance more convenient. As Alex King argues, a physical memorial requires regular care to ensure its durability: ‘no monument can resist the effect of time and nature, and the effectiveness of a memorial demands not only investment in its structure, but also a commitment to its upkeep’ (King 1999: 151). This was of course a factor the trust board discussed when choosing the site. For the designer, Frank Haikiu, the site would also convey the purpose of the monument to all Solomon Islanders: ‘I want all Solomon Islanders coming in and going out of Honiara to look at this monument and think, “that could be my grandfather, father or relative” and feel a sense of pride for what Solomon Islanders did during the war’ (Figure 23).6

In his speech at the dedication ceremony, Sir Peter Kenilorea, the nation’s first prime minister and a member of the trust board, said that the site was chosen carefully, remarking ‘the figures look northwards to the sea, and they will welcome Solomon Islanders travelling to the capital from their homes in the islands. For those travelling home, the figures will wish them a safe journey after their time in Honiara’ (Kenilorea 2011).

6 Frank Haikiu’s message was delivered by Bruce Saunders during the unveiling of the monument in 2011. Although Frank attended the ceremony, he did not speak. A recording of his message as spoken by Sir Bruce is in the author’s possession and can also be obtained from the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation library in Honiara. On 7 August 2015, during a commemoration ceremony at Commonwealth Street, a plaque was unveiled in honour of artist Frank Haikiu. The plaque was placed on the forefront plinth of the monument.
But the trust not only invests in building monuments. As mentioned, the role of Solomon Islanders in the coastwatching network, while instrumental to the Allied victory, had faded in island memories of the war. This was due in part to the submission of local memories to dominant forms of histories. Geoffrey White (1995: 533) argued that ‘when local stories do emerge in the public spaces of national memory, they risk being so disfigured by dominant narratives and commodifying practices that they become unrecognizable’. This is true of Solomon Islanders’ participation in the war. In the period after the war, local memories became less significant among dominant narratives of Allied exploits in the Pacific theatre so that even a general knowledge of local experiences and exploits was dying as each older generation passed away. And because the local culture is vested in oral recollections, as the decades passed, those memories gradually faded. Written narratives were not available until the 1980s, when researchers and educated Solomon Islanders started to record and translate the wartime recollections of surviving veterans (see Aruhuri 2003; Bennett 1988; Gegeo 1988; WPA 1988).
The iconography of the sculpture itself is reflective of the submission of local knowledge to popular narratives. Influenced by these dominant narratives, the sculptor crafted the European figure to be taller than the local figures: a depiction that unintentionally downplays the efforts of islanders during the war. Furthermore, this depiction reflects the racial hierarchy that existed among ‘white’ colonial officers and ‘black natives’ during the war, sentiments that still exist in the country.

To ensure that younger generations are aware of the wartime contributions of their ancestors, the memorial project, through its educational objective, pushed for inclusion of local war histories into the secondary school curriculum, and drew high school students into the project through a poster competition and school awareness programs. In early 2013, a brief story of the roles of islanders in the Solomons Campaign finally found a place in the revised Year 8 history textbook (Daudau et al. 2013: 27–50). Working in partnership with the curriculum department through the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, the project has partially achieved its vision of pushing the story of Solomon scouts and coastwatchers to the fore, in the realisation that in order for national pride and unity to be fostered by the monument, the story needs to be told. One way to ensure this is to place it into the school curriculum. In the following years, the textbook was made available to schools across Solomon Islands. Although the scouts and coastwatchers story is summarised in a mere quarter page among numerous history topics, it is still significant in retelling forgotten stories of local war experiences to the younger generations.

The Pride of Our Nation and contemporary Solomon Islands

As argued by T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper in *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration* (2000: 3–85), there are two principal approaches in the literature on war memory and commemorations, entailing either a psychological or political emphasis. In the psychological view, monuments are where surviving veterans and relatives gather to remember the dead, and their wartime memories are reconciled. From a political standpoint, monuments recognised national pasts in the light of modern socio-political and economic developments. The Pride of Our Nation monument has become the site of a collective memory of a triumphant but difficult past, one that was shared with the
Allied nations. Susanne Küchler (1999: 55) shows that war memorials enable different memories to come together despite their conflicting natures. For the few local surviving veterans of the war, the monument is a place to remember both the good and bad experiences the war brought to their shores and their lives. But the monument is also a place where islanders’ participation is acknowledged by the international community. For people like Baroness Ann Taylor, head of delegation of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association of the United Kingdom, a gesture of respect for the commitment of islanders to the British Solomon Islands administration during the dark days of the war is the appropriate message to relay when laying a wreath at the new monument. During the ceremony in 2013, her wreath bore the message: ‘In grateful memory, rest in peace. All members and staff, Houses of Parliament, United Kingdom’ (NPSI 2013) (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Rt Hon. Baroness Ann Taylor lays a wreath at the Pride of Our Nation monument
Source: Solomon Islands National Parliament Media Department.
In 1998, 20 years after obtaining political autonomy from Great Britain, the young nation of Solomon Islands faced a sociopolitical clash between the people of the provinces of Guadalcanal and Malaita. Among the causes of the tension were the grievances by Malaitans of commercial centralisation on Guadalcanal, which had its roots in the postwar exploitation of Allied infrastructure by the British administration, and the demand by the people of Guadalcanal that all Malaitans on Guadalcanal leave their island and return lands, whether purchased legally or not. The situation escalated as paramilitary groups were organised by both sides. For four years (1998–2002) the country was in turmoil, with over 22,000 Malaitans and people from other provinces fleeing the capital for their home islands (Bennett 2002). Although peace was restored in 2003 through an Australian-led joint effort by Pacific nations, the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), the country still struggles to recover politically, economically and socially. Recognising the wartime contributions of islanders by constructing the monument is an invaluable step, symbolically depicting a nationally unifying image of islanders working together during the war.

The Pride of Our Nation monument is the first of its kind in the country. Sculpted by a local artist, built locally and dedicated to the people of Solomon Islands, there is a more immediate sense of public connection to it than to other existing monuments. After the 2011 commemoration ceremony in Honiara, I walked among the crowd on Commonwealth Street asking individuals of their impressions of the newly erected monument. All the people I spoke to expressed their appreciation for recognising the effort of islanders in the war. Other positive sentiments included that the monument beautifies the capital and provides a site for tourists to visit. But these acknowledgements of the monument’s value do not prevent different interpretations of the physical monument itself. Drawing upon the country’s relationship with RAMSI, trust board member Sir Peter Kenilorea stated in his 2011 speech that the monument ‘is also a reminder that the united purpose and spirit of cooperation among the Coastwatchers from Australia, Great Britain and New Zealand — alongside the Solomon Scouts of the time — laid the foundations on which the spirit of RAMSI has become evident in the past several years. Everyone working together for the benefit of all’ (Kenilorea 2011). In the editorial section of the Solomon Star, one Honiara resident thanked those who conceived the idea of building the monument, concluding ‘this is our pride and may the story of these men live through the ages in this monument’ (Aquilani 2011).
The Pride of Our Nation monument: A national success

The Solomon Scouts and Coastwatchers Trust has been successful in gaining recognition on national and international fronts. In 2010, the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force announced that the year’s recruits (the ‘2010 recruit wing’) would be named ‘Solomon Scouts and Coastwatchers’, a significant gesture towards ensuring the legacy of the local wartime effort prevails. The recruit wing continues to provide a guard of honour alongside members of the United States Marine Corps at the yearly commemoration ceremonies.

The erection of the Pride of Our Nation monument has seen the 7 August commemoration at the American monument shift from a private ceremony to a national celebration. In 2011, for the first time, a series of ceremonies was held, organised to include the local Solomon Islands public and coinciding with the American memorial program. The 2011 program began at the American memorial, moved to Commonwealth Street for the unveiling of the Pride of Our Nation monument and finished at the Munro plaque at the Yacht Club.

The official dedication ceremony began with the arrival of the Solomon Islands governor general, followed by words of welcome from the organisers. An opening prayer was said by Bishop David Vunagi of the Anglican Church. Peter Kenilorea, the chairman of the monument trust board, then gave a speech on behalf of the trust, followed by speeches from the Royal Australian Navy adviser, Commander Geoff Turner, and Colonel Robert Loyne of the United States Marine Corps. The monument was then unveiled by the governor general and wreaths were laid by various dignitaries. A Christian dedication ritual was performed around the monument by the bishop, and the ceremony was concluded with a closing prayer by Timothy Lufuia of the Baha’i faith. During the public street celebration that followed, various groups performed, including the United States Marine Corps Band, church groups and local artists. A public exhibit was also hosted by the Solomon Islands National Museum and later relocated to the museum. The ceremony was coordinated by the Reverend Mareta Tahu of the Methodist Church.

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7 The events on 7 August 2011 were documented live by the Solomon Islands Broadcasting Corporation and a DVD was produced and made available for purchase by the trust board.
The incorporation of different Christian denominations and other groups in the street celebration was a significant achievement for the monument’s aim of promoting a sense of national unity and identity.

The event on 7 August 2011 was indeed a day of national celebration. Around the new monument were crowds of people trying to get a glimpse of the figures on the monument, or read the inscriptions on the plinth. In my quest for public feedback on the monument, I stood among the crowd listening to the comments of ordinary people on what they saw and thought of the sculptures. There was a sense of admiration, but also curious questions such as whether the life-sized figures were depictions of individual islanders — an impression that perhaps stemmed from the understanding of the Vouza statue. As a member of the project’s organising committee, it was a relief to see from a distance the designer, Frank Haikiu, explaining his vision for the monument and stating that the figures did not represent any particular individuals.

International recognition

Since the dedication in 2011, the annual Pride of Our Nation commemoration ceremony has attracted the local public, international dignitaries, veterans and families of veterans of Guadalcanal, as well the international media. In 2010, a team from Maori Television in New Zealand filmed a documentary featuring Aaron Kumana, one of the surviving veterans who rescued the future United States president John F. Kennedy and his crew when PT-109 sank after a collision with a Japanese destroyer off Naru Island. The documentary was aired in New Zealand during Anzac Week in 2011.

In 2012, to mark the 70th anniversary of the United States Marine Corps’ landing on Guadalcanal, President Barack Obama sent a letter of recognition for the roles played by Solomon Islanders in the Pacific Campaign, writing ‘their efforts helped save the Pacific, and they are worthy of the highest praise and recognition’ (see Appendix 2). Such recognition reflects the significance of islander contributions to the war effort throughout Solomon Islands and aids in spreading the message of national pride and unity that the monuments portrays. A few weeks after the 70th anniversary celebrations, William and Catherine, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, reopened the newly upgraded Commonwealth Street and inspected the Pride of Our Nation monument in a gesture of recognition from Buckingham Palace (Figure 25).
In 2013, the Australian Government formally paid tribute to the Solomon scouts and coastwatchers’ efforts in the war. This recognition included the provision of 500 commemorative medallions, officially handed over by the Australian Parliamentary Secretary for Defence, David Feeney. During a small gathering in Honiara, Feeney acknowledged Solomon Islanders’ contributions to the Royal Australian Navy’s coastwatching network and admitted that it was an overdue gesture by the Australian Government and ‘the first ever award of the Solomon Islands Coastwatcher and Scouts medallion’ (Armbruster 2013). Sadly, the Solomon Star (2013: 3) reported ‘the commemorative medallions are too late for most old soldiers. Only three remain and none could attend. Edward Lulumani, one of the surviving veterans, died only a week before the medallions were awarded’.

A year later, the United States Secretary of State John Kerry laid a wreath at the monument as a political gesture of appreciation of the service of Solomon Islanders to the Allied war efforts. In 2015, four-star General Vincent K. Brooks, commanding general of the United States Army Pacific, also paid tribute at the monument during a diplomatic visit to Honiara, laying a wreath in honour of those who served. The monument
has become a de rigueur stop for political dignitaries visiting the country to pay tribute to the lives that were lost and the hardships faced by those affected in World War II.

Conclusion

The Solomon Scouts and Coastwatchers Trust has filled a gap in the history of the Solomons Campaign of World War II, and also a gap in memory-making and monument-building in the country. The project ensured that a fading piece of the nation’s history was revived for the benefit of the present and future generations. Through its educational component, knowledge of a heroic tale will prevail among the younger population of the country and national pride and identity will be found in the collective efforts of Solomon Islanders who served with the Allies during the war. Through and beyond this, the Pride of Our Nation monument is becoming an agent for national unity, and serves as a reminder of the long-term impacts the war had on a developing nation. The war helped bring about the centralisation of development through the immediate availability of infrastructure in the postwar period. This, in part, contributed to the upheavals that began in 1998. Yet while the monument recognises a heroic legacy and promotes national identity, it does not capture the complexities of war as endured by islanders during the campaign, nor does it acknowledge the widows and children of those who served.
This text is taken from *Solomon Islanders in World War II: An Indigenous Perspective*, by Anna Annie Kwai, published 2017 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.