

Jacob Vouza



Everyone in the village was talking about the new-comers, Jacob Vouza and his wife:

“A new policeman has arrived here on Guadalcanal. You should see him. He’s very tall, maybe 6 feet, and he has great broad shoulders.”

“He looks really powerful.”

“He has a lovely wife.

“And they’re both Christians. They’ve started having worship services on Sundays. The policeman teaches from the Bible.”

“I think I’ll go along, it sounds good.”

Jacob Vouza and his wife soon settled in to life in the village near Honiara in the Solomon Islands. Their Sunday meetings grew in number and the village folk greatly respected their new policeman and his wife.

“They live their lives like true Christians, just like he teaches us,” they said.

The village community lived together peaceably, learning to follow the Christian way. Then one day their peace was shattered.

“What’s that noise?” asked one man.

“Sounds like a plane, coming this way,” said another.

Jacob Vouza looked up to the distant skyline then called urgently to everyone, "You'd better run and hide in the bush. Those are enemy planes. Get your families together and run!"

In the following few days, Japanese planes had landed on the airstrip at Honiara, ships had landed Japanese soldiers at the wharf and they now occupied the township of Honiara and the surrounding villages. Vouza recalled the past few years.

"I always thought it was suspicious the way those Japanese men came spying their way into our islands," he commented to a friend. "I remember when I was working at Tulagi there was a Japanese who worked as a carpenter. He openly boasted about how his people would come one day and occupy our islands."

For the first few months after the enemy landed on Guadalcanal, Jacob and all the villagers were hiding in the jungle, and no one knew where he was or what he did. But then the day came when a ship appeared from the east. "It's an American ship!" someone cried, "They've come to help us claim our islands back!"

The villagers watched from the shelter of the jungle as the American troops landed on the wharf at Honiara, relieved and excited that help had come for them.

They found ways of contacting the Americans to pass on information about the whereabouts of the enemy. Jacob Vouza came to the American officers. "I know all the tracks through the jungle, lots of secret ways to spy on the enemy." he said, "I can get the information to you about what they are doing and where they are going."

The Americans were pleased to have such a strong, reliable man helping them and Jacob Vouza served their forces well.

But the day came when Jacob was captured by the Japanese. He had some important information about the movement of enemy troops which he was anxious to pass on to the American officers. He was following a jungle track to their base when he was taken.

Roughly the soldiers pushed him up against a tree and threatened him. "You tell us where the Americans are!" they ordered, but Jacob remained silent. They tied him to a tree with lengths of bush rope. "We'll give you tins of food. Tell us what you know!"

Jacob said nothing.

The man who had been a carpenter at Tulagi was amongst the Japanese party that had captured Jacob. He recognised Him and bigger bribes were offered. "You're a big man in the police force. You're important. We'll give you lots of food."

"Tell us about the Americans."

But nothing would make Jacob talk.

They left him for a time and Jacob thought they had finished with him, but later they returned.

"One last chance," they said. "Tell us where your friends are. If you don't we'll kill you!" Still not a word from Jacob.

They thrust bayonets through his arms, neck and finally his body. Believing he was dead they left him there, tied to the tree. But Jacob did not die.

"I must get to the American base and give them the information I learned today," he thought to himself. "I've got to get out of these ropes."

Somehow he managed to chew through the bush ropes and set himself free. He was bleeding a lot from the bayonet wounds, and his strength was fading. But he determined to reach the American base. "I must get there tonight," he said to himself, "This information is too important to wait."

It was twenty miles to the American lines, but staggering, crawling, bleeding, sometimes forced to rest, he struggled through the jungle during the long hours of the night.

Suddenly, "Halt! Who's there?"

It was an American sentry on duty who had heard a noise in the nearby jungle and called out his challenge. Then out of the dark jungle crawled Jacob, his strength almost gone.

"We must get you to a doctor immediately," said the sentry.

But Jacob objected. "No, the doctor can wait. Take me to an army officer. I have important information for him. I must see him first."

They helped him walk the rest of the way to see the officer, who listened to his amazing story of courage and determination. "You're a very brave man, Jacob Vouza. You've done well to get this information to us. Thank you for your courage and loyalty. Now you've done your duty we need to get you to the doctor."

During the months that followed Jacob recovered under the care of the Americans. In the following two years there was bitter fighting on Guadalcanal between Japanese and Allied forces, but finally the Japanese were driven out and eventually the Solomon Islanders were free to return to their lands.

Jacob Vouza was awarded the George medal, a British award for bravery and also the American Silver Star. Those who knew his story knew that both awards had been well and truly earned for this brave man who gave a new and deeper meaning to the word "loyalty."

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