

STORY ABOUT THE U.S. MILITARY IN BERMUDA IN THE 1940's

Researched, Compiled and Written

By Eugene "Jean" Foggo Simon, St. David's Islander

BERMUDA stands alone in the mid-Atlantic, 750 nautical miles southeast of New York City. Bermuda's history of human settlement began with the wreck of the Virginia bound Sea Venture in 1609. Due to its physical distance from North America and the Caribbean, and its status as a colony of Great Britain, few historians have incorporated Bermuda into their scholarship. One might say that Bermuda is the "lost colony" of the North Atlantic World.

Be it lost or found, Bermuda has undergone a series of fundamental shifts in its economic orientation since its accidental discovery.

It began as an agricultural colony under charter to the Somers Isle Company. During the company's tenure, Bermuda became a major exporter of slave-produced tobacco. Its dissolution in 1684 sparked a maritime revolution.

In short order, tobacco fields were replaced by groves of cedar trees to supply the colony's thriving shipbuilding industry. Fully 90 percent of the land was reforested, according to historian Michael Jarvis. A second wave of change swept over Bermuda in the wake of the American Revolution with the influx of Loyalist refugees and the militarization of the colony. In 1795, the Royal Navy established a dockyard – the largest outside of Great Britain – on Ireland Island at the western tip of the archipelago.

Its strategic location and mild climate gave Bermudians a virtual monopoly on the selling of fruit, vegetables, and cut flowers in the spring months of April and May. Steam ships likewise made Bermuda more accessible than ever to American tourists. A trickle of nineteenth century American travelers, such as Mark Twain, found their way to Bermuda in search of rest. They were not disappointed. "Chameleon like," historian Michael Jarvis concludes, "the tiny colony continued to flexibly reorganize its economic activities to suit conditions in the changing Atlantic world."

Only lily bulbs and cut flowers continued to be exported to the United States in quantity. As a result, the acreage under cultivation in Bermuda dropped precipitously

from an estimated 5,000 acres to just 1,400. With the decline of Bermuda's farm sector, the colony's dependence on tourism revenue grew.

When the United States proposed to build a massive combined army-navy base adjacent to the Great Sound in the heart of the tourist resort, Bermuda's mercantile elite refused to "flexibly reorganize" its activities. To the contrary, it ferociously resisted this decision with all its might. The base location controversy was only resolved when the United States reluctantly agreed to relocate its proposed base to St. David's Island, located at the east end of the colony. It was no coincidence that this island, which still relied on farming, had yet to be transformed into a tourist haven. It is likewise not coincidence that the island's inhabitants had a reputation for not being entirely "white."

"Everybody here is lazy," wrote Julia Dorr in 1893. Yet it was a "very charming laziness." Bermuda was a place of sleepy digressions, where "courtesy is the rule" and "everything is done gradually." It was a "lovely, dreamy, restful land. A place of palatial hotels, well kept grounds, and snow white stone homes of coral formation". If this account and others like it are to be believed, there was no squalor or want on display, no "tumble-down shanties" to ruin the view.

It was a place where even Julia Dorr's "daintily dressed, black washing woman had the speech and carriage of a duchess."

Race segregation existed in Bermuda, but without the signage that demarcated the color line in the southern United States. Class also mattered. Founded in the 17th century, Bermuda prided itself on having one of the oldest parliaments in the British Empire, second only to Westminster itself. It was not a Crown Colony and so enjoyed special status within the Empire. This virtually self-governing colony possessed an elected House of Assembly and an appointed Legislative Council. The 36-members of the House of Assembly were elected every 5 years from Bermuda's nine parishes (4 from each). The vote was limited, however, to a small number of qualifying residents who had freehold property with a value of at least 60 pounds. The property qualification allowed the white minority to dominate elections in which only 8 percent of adults were eligible to vote. The vast majority of these voters were white, even though they accounted for only 40 percent of the population. Political power in Bermuda was therefore monopolized by a small group of white merchants, bankers and landowners.

Only wealthy white North Americans came. No tourist hotel accepted African Americans in Bermuda and anti-Semitism was so bad in the 1920's and 1930's that American travel agents created a coding system to identify which hotels and guest houses accepted gentiles only (the oleander symbol) and those willing to take in Jewish Americans (the hibiscus),

Mid-Ocean Club's gold memberships were carefully screened and cost \$2,500. Fully 510 acres were removed from public use at a time of rapid population growth.

There was a strong racial dimension to these developments. In transferring a huge swathe of land to wealthy white foreigners, the Tucker's Town scheme displaced 400 black Bermudians – fishermen, shipbuilders, and small farmers mainly. When some residents resisted, tourist promoters, such as Stanley Spurling, were livid. In a fit of rage, Spurling said that the black residents of Tucker's Town were “undoubtedly going backwards; the standard of morality, the standard of the people themselves was receding”. For the white members of the House of Assembly, anyone opposed to the development was against progress itself. Sadly, this would not be the last time that black Bermudians would be required to sacrifice their homes for the tourist economy.

THE BASE LOCATION CONTROVERSY

The outbreak of war in 1939 devastated the tourist economy. The number of North American tourists venturing into the mid-Atlantic dropped from 80,000 visitors per year before the war to fewer than 1,000 a month in 1940. The great hotels stood empty, golf courses were virtually deserted and the high-end shops in Hamilton had a forlorn appearance. On the eve of the destroyers-for-bases deal, and in response to rumored U.S. defense needs, the Bermuda Assembly adopted a motion on September 2, 1940 that the colonial government would act to preserve Bermuda's “natural beauty and amenities so that the substantial investment of local capital in hotels and other enterprises incidental to the colony's peace time pursuits may not be imperiled.” Could tourist hotels and bases co-exist? Bermuda's tourist promoters and merchant elite did not think so.

The Rear Admiral John W. Greenslade, appointed by the U. S. President boarded the cruiser and set sail for Bermuda one day after the destroyers-for-bases deal was

announced. They arrived in Bermuda on September 5. The U.S. demanded land for base lands. In this doomsday scenario, the proposed bases would result in declining real estate values, loss of business in high-end shops and hotels, unemployment, and loss of revenue. The area to be leased was presented as the most attractive residential area in Bermuda, home to many influential families. "Valuable properties" owned by the colony's "most desirable American residents" would be expropriated. Nearby waters in the Great Sound, used for yachting, would likewise become off-limits to pleasure seekers.

The committee urged that the bases be built in the east end, preferably on St. David's Island. "Less important amenities" it argued, "would be disturbed and fewer persons displaced as a result." Official resistance to the proposed location of the U.S. bases in Bermuda "stiffened" in early October 1940 and the U.S. Consul General, William H. Beck, did not expect it to diminish anytime soon. Unique among the base colonies, Bermuda's government did not welcome the U.S. bases as a potential new employer. Bermuda was relatively well off.

St. David's Island was offered to the U.S. Bermuda's counter-proposal was prepared by the British naval staff, under the direction of the Governor, in order to minimize the disturbance on "conditions which have made the high class tourist trade there so successful in the past." Their efforts bore fruit with Greenslade's reluctant recommendation to accept the alternate site.

On November 18, 1940, the St. David's base location was announced in the Bermuda House of Assembly. Members listened in "grave silence" as the Speaker reported that the U.S. had originally asked to lease part of the West End of the island, but were offered alternative locations by a local committee. The U.S. agreed to the new location. Utter silence continued in the chamber after the message and memorandum had been read. The information conveyed was beyond doubt a complete revelation to a vast majority of the members. The awed reaction of elected members was soon shared by the public as word spread that half of St. David's Island and all of the neighboring Long Bird Island, as well as several smaller islands, would be incorporated into the new base.

In the end, the U.S. Navy managed to build its base in the West End, using a secret 1939 agreement to lease Morgan and Tucker's Islands for a seaplane base. They counted themselves lucky as the Navy base was only a fraction of the size of the

sprawling air base on St. David's Island. These lands were awarded to the original shareholders of Hamilton Parish in 1619 to compensate them for the poor quality of their own land. These lots were subsequently leased or sold to St. David's Islanders. The island was a hive of activity during the 17th Century with slave produced tobacco and livestock, and later, shipbuilding, fishing, and whaling. Still the island planters suffered economically when the political and economic center of the colony shifted from the town of St. George's to Hamilton. In due course, St. David's became more isolated and insular.

In 1758, the public lands in the eastern half of St. David's were auctioned off to the highest bidder. As only two of the twelve shares were purchased by existing lease holders, many people were turned off the lands or became tenants. Some of the new owners built substantial homes, whereas others purchased the land for its valuable cedar for shipbuilding. Many inhabitants returned to farming arrowroot, onions, and potatoes in the early 19th century. Lilies emerged as a major export crop in the early 20th Century. With the completion of the Severn Bridge in 1934, St. David's Island became the last of the major islands to be connected to the rest of the colony. Because St. David's Island had yet to be integrated into Bermuda's tourist economy, the colony's elite cast it as an undeveloped rural "backwater."

St. David's Island was a place apart. It was thought it had "something alien in its atmosphere." "There were women on St. David's", Julia Dorr said, "who never visited the port towns of St. Georges' and Hamilton." It was also said that many St. David's Islanders had "never seen a horse." These untruths continued to circulate in 1940.

Race was also a factor. Forty families – with overlapping kinship ties—lived on the island during the 18th century. These included descendants of American Indians exiled from mainland North America during the Pequot war of 1637 and other conflicts or captured during raids on the Spanish Caribbean. Philip Rabito-Wuppensenwah, a researcher who had visited Bermuda, had shown that stories of the Native ancestry of St. David's Islanders circulated throughout the 19th and 20th Centuries. It was commonly believed, for example, that the Minors, Fox, Foggo, Lamb, Burchall and Pitcher families descended from American Indians. One can point to any number of references in the literary and archival record to the "distinctive Indian appearance of many St. David's Islanders who were referred to as the "Mohawk." Clearly, St. David's Islanders

were viewed as not quite "white," by Bermuda's elite men and women. It therefore stands to reason that the racial reputation of St. David's Islanders played a major part in the Bermuda Committee's decision to offer up the island to the Americans because "they were expendable".

The location was announced on November 18, 1940. The next morning, Governor Bernard, announced that due to the necessities of the war, the effects "had unhappily fallen on them." He continued that the "houses in which you (SDI) have lived all your life, and which your ancestors lived in, is hard to leave." He vowed that the property interests of those displaced would be looked after and "their welfare studied." He went on to say that a "carefully selected committee" would be chosen to "get the best possible terms. Nobody would be left in the lurch". The Governor, along with the four members of the House of Assembly representing St. George's Parish, none of whom lived on St. David's Island made the announcement. S.S. Toddings, for his part, encouraged those present to "look at the bright side --- the bases would bring employment and prosperity". The Governor invoked duty to Empire..."Demands are being made on all parts of the Empire, and this is their demand on us." Those present recorded their "deep remorse" at losing their homes, but nonetheless agreed to make this sacrifice. It was impossible "not to feel the utmost sympathy for these simple folk," wrote the author of Bermuda's unpublished history of the war.

Sir Stanley Spuring, an East End politician, tourist promoter and land speculator, called the bases a "valuable asset" for the area.

S. S. Toddings replied that "it was the cast of killing an asset already a known quantity or choosing one which would be an advantage to Bermuda. The tourist trade would have been ruined by using the Great Sound site while the other was a 'perfect scheme.'" A key member of the Bermuda Committee, Howard Trott, said that it was their only choice as 1,500 people would have been dispossessed had the original plan gone ahead. The building of the base in the east end was therefore seen as a double victory for Bermuda's white merchants. On the one hand, it ensured that the tourist areas would remain "intact" and on the other it would provide an economic engine for what it considered to be "the most backward part of the colony".

U.S. BASES BRING WOE TO ISLANDERS

On Tuesday, December 24, 1940, the following *Resolution of Loyalty* appeared as a news item in the Daily News. They voiced their feelings in a simple resolution:

“Resolved, that this meeting of people vitally affected by the establishment of the U.S.A. defense base on St. David’s Island record their deep sense of remorse at losing their homes in which their families have lived for centuries, but wish to express their loyalty to the British Empire by accepting the sacrifice in a spirit of support for the ultimate winning of the war against Germany and Italy.”

PROPERTY VALUATION

The U.S. base authorized the taking of 118 privately owned properties from their owners that were homes to sixty-five families for their benefit. Black St. David’s Islanders had small land holdings on the eastern half of the island and relied for their livelihoods on the land (gardens, pigs, fruit trees) and waters (fish). White residents, by contrast, had larger land holdings, and were involved in tourist speculation in the west end. A color line thus divided the two ends of the island --- West vs. East. Here are a few who lost their valued homes and land:

Archibald A. Fox, the largest grower of cassava in Bermuda. He had spent 12 years building up stock only to see it lost in 1941.

Grover Lamb supported his wife and three children by selling produce from his fruit trees and from fishing; whereas, Marie Borden sold vegetables from her garden. Most claimants supported themselves at a minimal level from crops grown on their land.

Testifying on Solomon Fox’s behalf, his wife indicated that their livelihood depended on five orange trees, fifty banana trees, four lime trees, and one grapevine. (Note by Eugene “Jean” Foggo Simon, researcher. These are my great-great grandparents - Papa “Solly” (Solomon) and Mama “Dolly” (Elizabeth) Fox).

Official Arbitrators strongly favored outside speculation and did not consider the replacement value of “Negro shacks.” If speculators relied on the tourist aesthetic to

establish property value at the hearings, the inhabitants of St. David's Island often emphasized their longtime residency at the hearings. St. David's was their home. When Solomon "Papa Solly" T.J. Fox rejected the American offer of \$422 for his property, his wife expressed their concern that the visitors were not in a position to "know values as they do not know conditions here." Further she said, "it does not seem fair to me as they are putting me out of my home where I have lived for years and have been satisfied." Noting that her husband was "disabled, in a wheelchair, and unable to work", she indicated that, "it would be impossible to start a new life under the conditions offered us by the American Government." The couple, therefore, hoped that the Arbitration Board would give their claim fair consideration. "You all realized I am sure," she said, "that in giving up this land, we are giving up something that is a part of us."

FORCED REMOVAL OF ST. DAVID'S ISLANDERS

A February 1941 dispatch from the British embassy in Washington to the U.S. State Department outlined the proposal procedure. The U.S. asked that the colony furnish information on 7 points –

1. the price the owner paid for the property;
2. the date of acquisition;
3. the cost of any subsequent improvements;
4. the assessed value of property or taxation;
5. the amount of property tax paid;
6. an indication of local practice of usual local ratio between assessed property and current selling price, and
7. evidence of real estate priced.

A 3-member tribunal was selected to establish property titles on St. David's Island. It took one day to inspect the east half of St. David's Island parcels D-36 to D-113. It is hard to fathom, and unbelievable, how the Public Works team could have assessed 77 claims in a single day – yet it claimed to have done so! A person would have to be as dumb as a rock to even begin to believe these outright lies.

The procedure adopted was to place a standard value of 500 pounds (\$2020) per acre and a cube unit value on the dwelling that equaled the "cubic unit costs estimated by their architects for new, modern, stone houses to be erected to house the dispossessed residents." The U.S. district engineer noted "that the Board of Public Works figures exceed the U.S. offer in all but two of the 108 properties." Yet, property owners were left in the dark. Only 6 people accepted the U.S. offer, the remaining 156 property owners took their cases to arbitration. According to the U.S. district engineer, "all are influential, successful men. None are real estate brokers or builders." It went without saying that the entire board was white. In 1940, Bermuda's civil service was also all white. The total cost of acquiring land in Bermuda as of August 1943 was \$2,850,000. The property owners had claimed over \$4 million dollars in compensation, whereas the U.S. offered only \$1,478,070! Another example...

The estate of H.M. Fox in the northeast was subdivided and was racially segregated. The Fox estate was subdivided into 34 lots. The houses were "all of native stone construction, pine flooring, framing and millwork, and were equipped with complete bath, running water, electricity, etc." The new homes were roughly equal in size to the lost ones.

The U.S. district engineer had his misgivings: "Just why it was necessary to re-house these people adjacent to the lease area is unknown to this office. What disposition will be made of the homes after they are deeded to these people is also unknown to this office."

Residents also moved into temporary shelter for the interim: "Many of the displaced crowded onto the remaining half of the island." The St. David's Committee secured four prefabricated barracks to house many of the families. NOTE: I lived in these barracks with my family. My sister, Millicent Elmena Stuart Foggo, who was 14 months younger than I, was born in these barracks. They were totally overcrowded. Four barracks to house all of these families!

On July 15, 1941, the Governor met with the St. David's Islanders about the delays in rehabilitation and compensation payments. He faced a storm of anger, and rightly so. According to the unpublished history of wartime Bermuda, "indignant citizens

to call on others to sacrifice, but when they were themselves called to do so by Rear Admiral Greenslade in September 1940, "they resisted with all their considerable might".

To summarize, I have researched these truths and my conclusion is as follows:

My name is Eugene "Jean" Foggo Simon, a born St. David's Islander. My mother is a Fox descendant and my father is a Foggo descendant. Both grew up on St. David's as did my grandparents, great grandparents and great great grandparents. Some of the Foggo's lived on Tucker's Town. The gravesite that was bulldozed there a few years ago to make way for the golf course, held some of my relatives. I have photos of that gravesite that I personally took several years ago. I write this to get some of the anger out of my system. I will copyright my document to ensure it is held under my name. I have seriously been researching my family history since 1996, and have unearthed more than I knew existed.

I was born in 1938 and grew up during these times. I am one of the remaining elders still alive who can tell more than is printed here about growing up on St. David's Island. Asked to research and present by Lynne Whitfield (CURB) about Historic Land Loss Oral Histories, I have reluctantly thought about it over the past month. I hesitated to send my hard work to you because I have no idea where it will end up or who will take credit for it. This is not my first time submitting research to a Government Department in Bermuda. I am sure you can understand my reluctance when I enthusiastically did so originally only to never hear from anyone.

I realize the early politicians who made these unkind statements in the research about my family years ago have passed away, but this was the way St. David's Islanders were treated and thought to be ignorant. We are neither and never have been.

Alfred Albert Hamilton Foggo, my great grandfather's home was used by U.S. officials while the base was in operation. During that time, without excess to the base lands, my family did not know that the home was still standing. It was in early 2001 that I discovered the home was still standing while visiting Southside Beach. That is when I knowingly trespassed and took the photos I mentioned earlier. Shortly thereafter, we

asked the Bermuda Land Development Corporation about purchasing it, and all of a sudden the home was torn down and no longer available!

I don't know what or how this research will be used. To begin the long delayed process of apology and atonement for the act of slavery that was practiced on St. David's Island towards its people, both Black and Natives, is far outreaching. These reports have been requested previously, and yet nothing happened. At least we were never advised of the outcome. Our properties were literally taken from us. My great grandparents received \$422 for 5 acres of farmland to make way for a graveyard. Even though they were aging and my great grandfather was in a wheelchair, it did not make any difference for the greed of those in power during that time – both Bermudian as well as U.S. officials.

As I studied the discrimination and difficulties our people had trying to relocate and keeping their families together, it makes me ill thinking of the difficulty and stress they lived under. Had reparations been paid many years ago, there would have been intergenerational material prosperity for those of our descendants living today.

St. David's Island descendants have suffered long enough! With the name calling and trials to educate our children, walking along a stretch of land (St. David's Road), trying to get to the Chapel of Ease on Sundays, or to the Entrance to catch a bus coming out of St. George's to attend Howard Academy or Berkeley Institute was treacherous. We suffered in fear never knowing or trusting that soldiers who watched us as we clung together praying we would arrive at our destination in one piece.

I write from my own experience as well as from the stories that were handed down from my parents, grandparents and great grandparents. They spoke of land lost due to misappropriation by devious means or where land value was under compensated. To provide photos, maps, location, size, documents, etc., for Tucker's Town, and St. David's Island would require further research that I am not prepared to do at this stage in my life. I do have quite a bit of personal research, but due to your time restrictions, July 23, 2020 deadline, it is impossible for me to comply.

However, there are records at the Bermuda Archives you may be interested in. I have personally researched there as I looked for records to be able to bring the first powwow to St. David's Island in 2002 to ensure living history would continue. There is also not enough time for me to copy the files that I do have on this subject.

The Bermuda Government, U.S. Government and the United Kingdom should seriously consider paying reparations to survivors of the base lands. These decisions were also made without our input in the 1940's and that to me brought St. David's Island to the brink of ruin.

Where would Bermuda be without St. David's Island?

When will accountability come to pass?

Thank you for the opportunity.

Sincerely,

//Eugene "Jean" Foggo Simon
14565 State Route 58 South
Oberlin, Ohio 44074 (USA)
(1) (440) 221-0036 (cell)
e-mail: foggo@oberlin.net
(Morning Dove – Native name)

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