

# Governor and First Lady Tulafono Visit the Republic of Korea

*By Chief Warrant Officer Two Tevita Feiloakitau*

Being stationed in Korea can be exciting, but it became even more exciting for Chief Warrant Officer Two Tevita Feiloakitau, of the 21st Military Police Detachment Criminal Investigation Division (CID), when he received word that the governor of American Samoa, Togiola T.A. Tulafono, would be visiting and that he had been selected as the escort officer for the visit. The governor was scheduled to attend meetings in Guam and decided to pay a rare visit to the troops in Korea on his way back to American Samoa.

There are more than 37,000 U.S. troops currently stationed in Korea and about 50 American Samoan Soldiers and airmen on the peninsula. These figures do not include Family Members, Department of the Army (DA) civilians, contractors, or English teachers at the Korean academies on the peninsula.

On 11 October 2007, Governor and First Lady Tulafono arrived at Incheon Airport on the peninsula of the Republic of Korea. Their arrival marked the first time an American Samoan governor had visited the peninsula.

The four-day visit with American Samoan Soldiers, airmen, Family Members, DA civilians, and contractors was a busy one, with much on the agenda. The visit began with a breakfast the next morning.

The governor and select personnel then proceeded to Camp Humphreys via a rotary-wing aircraft provided by the United States Forces Korea (USFK) protocol office. The protocol office also arranged ground transportation for all American Samoan Soldiers of Camp Humphreys to gather at the headquarters building for an open forum with the governor.

Next, the governor and his official party were flown to Osan Air Base, where they met with young American Samoan airmen who were stationed there. The airmen discussed their occupations and their duties in Korea with the governor. They also expressed their concerns about their home. The governor and his official party left Osan Air Base and ended the day at Yongsan.

The governor received an orientation briefing on 13 October, which provided him with a better understanding of the mission on the peninsula and the effects of deterring the aggressor. The governor

then proceeded to Camp Red Cloud for an office visit with the commander of the 2d Infantry Division, Major General James Coggin, and his wife. At the conclusion of the official meeting, the governor delivered a heartfelt speech to Samoan Soldiers in their native tongue. He implored each Soldier to have integrity and take pride in everything that they do. He also expressed his pride in them and their service to the Nation. At the conclusion of the speech, Major General Coggin added, "I certainly don't know what you said, but I felt your heart." An open forum was also conducted, and many of the questions were similar to those previously asked at other installations.

The troops continued to ask questions and raise concerns to the commander during lunch. Though most of the concerns raised were military in nature, Major General Coggin was also asked about the process of U.S. citizenship. The Soldier who made the inquiry had applied for citizenship months earlier and had not been able to determine the whereabouts or status of his application. Major General Coggin was greatly concerned about this situation, as he believes that Soldiers deserve first-class service due to the sacrifices that they make.

After lunch, the protocol officer escorted the governor and his official party to the demilitarized zone (DMZ) for a tour. It was a beautiful day, and miles of North Korea were visible during the tour. The tour ended with a short visit to a gift shop to purchase souvenirs; the day ended with a dinner in honor of the governor and first lady.

Invitations to the dinner were sent to all American Samoan Service Members, Department of Defense (DOD) Civilians, Contractors, and Family Members on the peninsula. Except for a few who had military duties, all Soldiers who received an invitation were able to attend. The master of ceremonies presented a short Biblical message and charged individuals to keep their leaders in their prayers. "Our prayers can make a difference in the decisions that our leaders make," the emcee stated.

The troops had many questions and concerns that they wanted addressed. Some of the American Samoan Soldiers and their Family Members brought up issues concerning citizenship, jobs in American Samoa, tourism, the national museum, the

relationship between American Samoa and Samoa, medical support for veterans, current election laws, and difficulties faced in meeting the requirement to register in person to vote. The governor discussed current laws and explained the changes that are under consideration.

The Soldiers expressed their gratitude and appreciation to the governor and first lady for their visit. One of the Soldiers stated, "I know that it's not by accident that you are here. You are meant to visit us for such a time as this. It's definitely not an election

year, so we know that there is no underlying motives of your visit (sic) but that you really care about our well-being." Gifts were presented to the governor, first lady, and military liaison officer on behalf of all American Samoans on the peninsula.

It is imperative that our leadership express their gratitude to the young troops for their service and courage in the Republic of Korea. The visit from Governor and First Lady Tulafono was a once-in-a-lifetime event for those troops. It will be forever imprinted in the hearts of those who experienced it.

