

William was born on the Loyalty Islands probably on 30th August 1880 at Tuo village, Mare , the son of Waupo and Sera , servants to the chiefly Naisiline clan. In 1912, the Australian newspapers reported that Jacob, claiming to be King of the Loyaltys, had requested the Australian Government take over the administration of his Islands from the French, who administer the Islands as part of New Caledonia. Jacob had feared that the 6,000 odd Japanese working in the nickel mines on New Caledonia contained many soldiers and spies and would take over the Islands. It is unclear what gave rise to this fear, the Japanese being our allies at this point in time.

On 12th August 1914, William enlisted in G Company AN&MEF. On his attestation papers he stated he was single, a gardener by trade and gave his brother on the Loyalty Islands as his next of kin. He also stated that he served in South Africa with the 2nd NSW Mounted Rifles (Reg Number 2955).

William is mentioned in L C Reeves book, "Australians In Action in New Guinea" with regards to the venture to Namatanai, New Ireland. Word had been received that the head of the Methodist Mission, Rev Cox had been thrashed and ill-treated by some German residents at Namatanai. On 11th November members of G Company set sail from Rabaul aboard the MEKLONG, for Namatanai.

"The expedition was successful in capturing the offenders at Namatanai. Dr Brauert, the principal in the assault, was captured by Private Watriama. Watriama, who is the rightful king of the Loyalty Islands, fought with the British forces in New Guinea, and wears on his breast the colors (sic) of the South African war.

The Loyalty Islands are a French Protectorate, but as Watriama favors (sic) the British Government, his brother, who is a strong adherent to French rule, is recognised by the French Government as the king of the Loyalty Islands.

Watriama speaks perfect English, and made himself a favorite with all members of the expedition.

The five Germans captured at Namatanai were brought to Rabaul, tried by Court-Martial, found, guilty, and punishment was inflicted in the presence of the whole of the troops of the Rabaul and Herbertshohe garrisons on the 23rd November, and sent to Sydney by the MATUNGA, which left the same day."

The punishment mentioned in this story was a public flogging, to replicate what the prisoners had done to the missionary, this action attracting a lot of unfavourable press back in Australia.

The stories above relating to William as a Prince of Loyalty Island are not factual if we consider evidence put during an unsuccessful trading visit to New Caledonia in the 1920's as recorded below.

On 4th March 1915, William returned from Rabaul and was discharged, term expired, after serving 205 days.

On 15th December 1915, William enlisted as part of the 13th Reinforcements of the 18th Battalion. On 16th he was made and acting corporal and some time in the first half of 1916, he married May Ethel Tipping before embarking on the KYARRA for the UK on 3rd June 1916.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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A/Sergeant Watriama taken in Paddington in March 1916

William served in France with the Battalion and returned to Australia aboard the DEMOSTHENES, leaving the UK on 27th July 1917 and being discharged medically unfit (TB) on 5th December 1917.

In 1920 William contacted James Stewart, who served with William during WW1, claiming to he had letters from Mare and Lifu islands asking to find markets for copra, cotton and timber from the island. The chartered the NOOREBAR and sailed for New Caledonia. The ran into trouble with the authorities in Noumea where they learned that "... Watriama had been banned from the Islands and was under pain of imprisonment if he returned. The news of him being on board was rapidly circulating around the town and the curiosity aroused was easily converted into the wildest rumours. The Chamber of Commerce was assembled and a motion passed and presented to the Governor protesting against our being allowed to go to Mare or Lifu, eventually by reason of the good offices on (British Consul) Mr Johnson, permission was given by His Excellency, provided we landed Kanaka Watriama. As this man – liar and rogue that he was, was a returned soldier, we could not agree to this so that in the end the vessel returned to Sydney empty."

"From knowledge gained at a later stage in New Caledonia, I believe him to be an agitator of the worst kind, and under guise of bringing the Loyalty Group under the British Flag is only working to suit his own ends. His claim to be paramount Chief of the Loyalty Islands is a myth – The Mare and Lifu natives laughing at it. To be accurate he is the son of a bondwoman who was educated by Missionaries, and who made himself a pest which led to his being banished in 1914."

(Extract from an interview given by James Stewart to Det. Sgt Stuart Robson, NSW CIB, 25th Jan 1922.)

William died in 1925 and the Prime Minister Billy Hughes gave the eulogy, claiming William to be a great patriot.

Williams son, Merlyn William Watriama served in the Second World War (Service Number NX4144).