



‘They wouldn’t just eat any white men that fell from the sky’: Outraged Papua New Guinea academics lash out at Biden’s ‘unacceptable’ suggestion that cannibals ate his WW2 pilot uncle

Description

WW2 : Outraged Papua New Guinea academics have slammed President Joe Biden for his ‘unacceptable’ suggestion that his uncle was eaten by cannibals in the country after his plane was shot down during World War II.

Biden implied on two occasions Wednesday that his maternal uncle 2nd Lieutenant Ambrose J. Finnegan had met a grisly end at the hands of cannibals after his plane was shot down by the enemy over New Guinea in 1944.

But the White House and official defense records confirmed that Finnegan died when the military plane he was in experienced engine failure and crashed into the Pacific Ocean, not over land.

Historically, cannibalism has been reported Papua New Guinea, the Pacific nation that occupies the eastern half of the island of New Guinea, but local academics say Biden’s categorization of the act is ‘very offensive’.

Michael Kabuni, a political science lecturer at the University of Papua New Guinea, told The Guardian cannibalism was previously practiced by some communities in very specific contexts and that locals ‘wouldn’t just eat any white men that [fell from the sky](#)’.

Other analysts branded Biden’s claims as ‘unsubstantiated and poorly judged’, especially during a time in which the US has been trying to strengthen its ties with Papua New Guinea.

Outraged academics have slammed President Joe Biden (pictured on right at a war memorial in Pennsylvania on Wednesday) for his ‘unacceptable’ suggestion that his maternal uncle 2nd Lieutenant Ambrose J. Finnegan (left) was eaten by cannibals in Papua New Guinea after his plane was shot down during World War

Kabuni argued that the Melanesian people, which includes the those from Papua New Guinea, are

‘very proud’ and would be offended by Biden’s generalization of cannibalism.

He explained how cannibalism was not practiced due to a lack of food, but instead as a sign of respect in very specific contexts – such as eating a deceased relative’s body to prevent it from decomposing.

‘But taking it out of context, and implying that your [uncle] jumps out of the plane and somehow we think it’s a good meal is unacceptable,’ he added.

[Economics lecturer](#) Maholopa Laveil echoed Kabuni’s analysis, claiming that Biden’s commentary ‘paints PNG in a bad light’.

‘PNG has already had a lot of negative press around riots and tribal fighting and this doesn’t help, and [the claims are] unsubstantiated,’ Laveil told the newspaper.

‘For a US president to say that – particularly after a lot of with PNG and the work they’ve been doing in the Pacific – even off the cuff, I don’t think that should have been said at all.’

Allan Bird, governor of Papua New Guinea’s province of East Sepik, however said he was not offended and instead said he found the comments to be ‘hilarious’ and was ‘lost for words actually’.

He suggested that Biden probably heard his parents claim Finnegan was eaten by cannibals as a child and that the family legend ‘probably stuck with him all his life’.

Local academics say Biden’s categorization of the act is ‘very offensive’. Historically, cannibalism has been reported Papua New Guinea but analysts say it was practiced in very specific contexts and that locals ‘wouldn’t just eat any white men that fell from the sky’. Joe Biden is pictured outside the Oval Office on Thursday

President Joe Biden reaches to touch the name of his uncle Ambrose J. Finnegan, Jr., on a wall at a Scranton war memorial, Wednesday, April 17, 2024, in Scranton, Pa. His uncle died in WWII

President Joe Biden reaches to touch the name of his uncle Ambrose J. Finnegan, Jr., on a wall at a Scranton war memorial on Wednesday in Scranton

Biden first made the suggestion that his uncle may have been eaten by cannibals after he paid tribute to him during a visit to the war memorial in his hometown of Scranton, Pennsylvania on Wednesday.

The 81-year-old president, who was aged one when his uncle died in 1944, reached out to touch Finnegan’s name which was engraved on the monument.

‘He got shot down in New Guinea, and they never found the body because there used to be a lot of cannibals, for real, in that part of New Guinea,’ Biden later told an audience of steel workers in Pittsburgh.

Biden also repeated the story to reporters, adding that ‘he got shot down in an area where there were a lot of cannibals in New Guinea’ and that the US government had recovered parts of the downed plane.

White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre later confirmed that Finnegan ‘lost his life when the

military aircraft he was on crashed in the Pacific after taking off near New Guinea’.

The official Defense POW/MIA Accounting agency said Finnegan’s plane was headed to New Guinea on a courier flight and was ‘forced to ditch in the ocean’ off the island’s coast ‘for unknown reasons.’

The aircraft hit the water hard and three crew members failed to emerge from the sinking wreck, while one survived and was rescued by a passing barge, it said on its website.

There are no images of Joe Biden’s uncle’s plane crashing. This photograph shows a Douglas A-20 Havoc medium bomber attack aircraft being shot down by anti-aircraft fire during an attack on the Imperial Japanese seaplane base and harbor installations at Sekar Bay on 22nd July 1944 at Kokas in Dutch New Guinea, Dutch East Indies.

‘An aerial search the next day found no trace of the missing aircraft or the lost crew members,’ it said.

But despite the inaccuracy of his remark, Jean-Pierre defended Biden, saying it had been ‘incredibly emotional and important’ to the president to be able to honor his uncle at the memorial.

Biden ‘highlighted his uncle’s story’ to show support for veterans and draw a contrast with election rival Donald Trump, who reportedly disparaged military members killed in war as ‘losers’ and ‘suckers’ while president, she said Thursday.

The issue is personal to Biden, whose elder son Beau was a veteran of the Iraq war and whose death from brain cancer the president attributes to military ‘burn pits’ used to incinerate waste.

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