

'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

- Analysts branded Biden's comments as 'unsubstantiated and poorly judged'
- Other academics said his categorization of the cannibalism was 'very offensive'

By Natasha Anderson, The Daily Mail, 19 April 2024

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 II



Local people watching wounded U.S. and Australian soldiers being placed on a row of stretchers. Papua New Guinea, December 1942

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 work 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 in 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.

Ref WD Ltr AG-360.33 (5-21-43)
 OB-S-AF-M (For instructions
 see 5 AF Reg 35-45A)

~~SECRET~~

WAR DEPARTMENT
 HEADQUARTERS ARMY AIR FORCES
 WASHINGTON

MISSING AIRCRAFT REPORT

1. ORGANIZATION: Location AFQ 713, Unit # 1; Command or Air Force V Bomber Command;
 Group 3rd Bomb (L); Squadron 90th Bomb (L); Detachment _____.
2. SPECIFY: Point of Departure Momote Air Strip; Course 170°;
 Intended Destination Nadzab, N.G.; Type of Mission Courier;
3. WEATHER CONDITION S AND VISIBILITY AT TIME OF CRASH OR WHEN LAST REPORTED:
Weather was good.
4. GIVE: (a) date May 14, 1944; Time 1700/L; and Location Depart Momote for Nadzab
 of last known whereabouts of missing aircraft.
 (b) Specify whether () Last Sighted; () Last Contacted by Radio;
 () Forced Down; () Seen to crash; or (X) Information not Available.
5. AIRCRAFT WAS LOST, OR IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN LOST, AS A RESULT OF: (Check
 Only one) () Enemy Aircraft; () Enemy Anti-Aircraft; () Other Circumstances
 as follows Not known.
6. AIRCRAFT: Type, Model and Series A-20G-20; A.A.F. Serial No. 42-86768
7. ENGINES: Type, Model and Series R-2600-23; A.A.F. Serial No. (a) 42-175009
 (b) 42-175164.
8. INSTALLED WEAPONS (Furnish below Make, Type and Serial Number); Information not
available.

9. THE PERSONS LISTED BELOW WERE REPORTED AS: (a) Battle Casualty _____
 or (b) Non Battle Casualty X
10. NUMBER OF PERSONS ABOARD AIRCRAFT: Crew 3; Passengers 1; Total 4.
 (Starting with pilot, furnish the following particulars: If more than 11 persons were
 aboard aircraft, list similar particulars on separate sheet and attach original to
 this form)

<u>Crew Position</u>	<u>Name in Full</u> (Last Name First)	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Serial Number</u>
<u>KAB 1. Pilot:</u>	<u>3 Prince, Harold R.</u>	<u>1st Lieut.</u>	<u>C-888775</u>
<u>KAB 2. Gunner:</u>	<u>1 Cardwell, Ashford H.</u>	<u>T/Sgt.</u>	<u>38329361</u>
<u>RAC 3. Engineers:</u>	<u>1 Zulkus, Anthony (NMI)</u>	<u>T/Sgt.</u>	<u>11009240</u> <i>RTR C</i>
<u>KAB 4. Couriers:</u>	<u>1 Finnegan, Ambrose J., Jr.</u>	<u>2nd Lieut.</u>	<u>O-2036172</u>

11. IDENTIFY BELOW THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE LAST KNOWLEDGE OF
 AIRCRAFT, AND CHECK APPROPRIATE COLUMN TO INDICATE BASIS FOR SAME:

<u>Name in Full</u> (Last name First)	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Serial Number</u>	<u>Check only one column</u>			
			<u>Contacted by Radio</u>	<u>Last Sighted</u>	<u>Saw Crash</u>	<u>Saw Forced Land.</u>

1. _____
2. _____ NIL
3. _____

12. IF PERSONNEL ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE SURVIVED, ANSWER YES TO ONE OF THE FOLLOWING
 STATEMENTS: (a) Parachutes were used _____; (B) Persons were seen walking away
 from scene of crash _____; or (c) any other reason (Specify) Nil
13. ATTACH AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS, MAP, CHART, OR SKETCH, SHOWING APPROXIMATELY LOCATION
 WHERE AIRCRAFT WAS LAST SEEN Nil
14. ATTACH EYEWITNESS DESCRIPTION OF CRASH, FORCED LANDING OR OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES
 PERTAINING TO MISSING AIRCRAFT: Nil
15. ATTACH A DESCRIPTION OF THE EXTENT OF SEARCH, IF ANY, AND GIVE NAME, RANK AND
 SERIAL NUMBER OF OFFICER IN CHARGE HERE. Kenneth E. Rosebush, Major, O-727552

Date of Report 17 March 1944.

Gerald J. Prokopovitz
 GERALD J. PROKOPOVITZ
 Captain, Air Corps.

90TH BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON (L)
3RD BOMBARDMENT GROUP (L) AAF

RES/cas

AFPO 713 Unit 1,
17 May 1944.

SUBJECT: Search Mission for Missing Aircraft A-20G-20, 42-86768

TO : Commanding Officer, 3rd Bombardment Group (L), AFPO 713 Unit 1.

1. I left Finschafen for Cape Gloucester searching the water all the way with nil observations. The Dispatcher at Cape Gloucester reported that no A-20G type airplane had landed there, on May 14, 1944.
2. From Cape Gloucester I continued by search to Momote Airfield. No sightings were made. The Dispatcher at Momote stated that Lieutenant Prince had filed a proper clearance for Finschafen or Nadzab and left that station at 1705/L, on 14 May 1944.
3. On my return from Momote to Nadzab, I continued my search with no results.

Roger E. Strasburg
ROGER E. STRASBURG,
1st Lieut, Air Corps.

Missing Air Crew Report number 48472D LT AMBROSE J. FINNEGAN

'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.