



Ainsley Fullard-Leo / 1931-2008

## Owner's devotion to Palmyra credited with atoll's preservation

[By Mary Adamski](#)

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Ainsley Fullard-Leo and his two brothers had a vision for their family-owned Palmyra Atoll that left the pristine tropical environment as a legacy for future generations.

"They had opportunities to sell it, for a nuclear waste dump, a casino, for commercial fishing, things that would have ruined its incredible wilderness value," said Suzanne Case, executive director of Nature Conservancy of Hawaii. "They agreed to sell it to Nature Conservancy at a discounted price. Ainsley loved Palmyra, and he was instrumental in its permanent protection," Case said.

Fullard-Leo, 76, died Oct. 21 at his home in Camas, Wash.

When the federal government proposed dumping nuclear waste on the atoll, a cluster of 33 islets 1,000 miles south of Hawaii, and the state looked into shipping refuse there, "Ainsley went out to speak to groups about not ruining it," said his wife, Betty Fullard-Leo.

Since its sale in 2000 for \$30 million, the Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service administer Palmyra as a national wildlife refuge. A consortium of research institutions including University of Hawaii and Scripps Institution of Oceanography study marine life and climate change in the atoll, which consists of 600 acres on land and 480,000 acres of submerged reef.

Ainsley's parents bought Palmyra in 1922. The U.S. Navy took it over during World War II. The Fullard-Leo family took their effort to reclaim it from the U.S. government all the way to the Supreme Court and won.

"When we tried to develop copra production and fishing, he would stay there for four months at a time," said Betty Fullard-Leo. "Ainsley would wander all over the place. We would be in touch by CB radio.

"He was a Renaissance man. He fixed everything in the house, did his own plumbing. Part of that came from being on Palmyra and having to make do," she said. "He loved

nature. He was always rescuing birds."

Fullard-Leo was born in Honolulu and graduated from Punahou School. He served in the military during the Korean War, working as an air traffic controller in Korea, a career he continued as a civilian. After retiring as an air traffic controller at 43, he earned a business degree from Hawaii Pacific University and managed family real estate investments.

He and his wife of 43 years lived in Kailua and in Camas, Wash.

His survivors include wife Betty, sons Marcus and Matthew, brother Dudley Fullard-Leo, six grandchildren, two nephews and a niece.

A celebration of his life will be held at 4:15 p.m. Nov. 24 at the Outrigger Canoe Club. The family suggests casual attire.

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