



## Welcome to our new-look newsletter

For the past five or so years, the design of our Museum newsletter has remained essentially the same. It has served us well and in that time its two writers, former Museum manager, the late Alma Wensi and VSA New Zealand volunteer Kevin McCarthy have done an outstanding job bringing you our latest news. However, we thought it was time for a refresh and with our July 2020 edition comes an all new contemporary design. We hope you enjoy the new look and what's new with the South Pacific WWII Museum.

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# Corsair wreck discovered

An exciting discovery off the coast of Espiritu Santo has ignited debate on the circumstances behind the 'crash' of a World War II Corsair fighter aircraft.

The discovery of the aircraft by Santo locals earlier this month was reported to South Pacific World War II Museum Chairman, Bradley Wood. Following a dive on the wreck by Dive Vanuatu divers, initial photographs were taken to help identify the aircraft. It was soon confirmed that the single seat aircraft was an early model Vought Corsair, featuring what came to be known by pilots as the 'birdcage' canopy.

Dozens of aircraft of this type were based at Turtle Bay Fighter Airfield, north of Luganville just off the East Coast Highway. The aircraft also operated from Bomber #1 Airfield on Pallikulo Bay.

Squadrons from the United States Marine Corps and the Royal New Zealand Air Force flew the Corsair throughout the South Pacific. Which air force operated this aircraft is yet to be determined.

Santo local Kevin Green and his daughter Mika went back to the Corsair site to take some clearer high definition photographs of the wreck. Here Mike peers into the cockpit of the aircraft as dozens of curious tropical fish look on.



However, the biggest mystery surrounding the discovery, and the one causing the most debate is how the aircraft came to rest in 30 metres of water off the east coast of Santo.

World War II Museum's Bradley Wood said, "due to the absence of propeller blades, it appears the aircraft may have been dumped off a ship or possibly a barge towards the end of the war. If the blades were still serviceable, they could have been removed and fitted to another aircraft."

While that might be one theory, aviation enthusiasts on the Museum's Facebook page have speculated that the blades may have simply corroded completely away after 70 years in salt water.

Dive Vanuatu were the team that initially took photographs, but due to Covid-19 and closure of international borders, local diver Kevin Green offered his assistance to take more recent high quality photographs.

Whatever the outcome, Bradley Wood said, "aircraft wrecks are quite common in the waters around Espiritu Santo and complete aircraft are somewhat of a rarity. To find a complete aircraft so close to Santo is what makes this find so significant."

# World War II Willys Jeep unveiled

There was a real buzz being generated in Vanuatu in the lead up to the 40th Independence Day celebrations, with big gatherings of people in the three main townships of Port Vila, Luganville, and Tanna. An entire week of public holidays was declared by the government to observe this event from July 23 to 30.

On July 23 there was a huge parade here in Luganville and whilst that was taking place,

our Museum Manager Lengkon Tokon was attempting to collect some recently acquired 'dog tags' at the post office to surprise our Chairman Bradley Wood, when in fact it was Lengkon that was about to be surprised.

Bradley had organised for the recently restored and beautifully repainted Willys Jeep to be driven out in front of the South Pacific World War II Museum for the general public to view and enjoy for the day.



## Meeting with approval

Visitors from all over Sanma Province and further afield came by the Museum to have their photo taken with the recently restored Willys Jeep.



While the public were gathered at the numerous stalls in Unity Park and the La Plaz area for the program, more than 300 passers-by had to do a stop-over at the Museum to take a few selfies with the newly unveiled Jeep.

We were very fortunate to have the opportunity not only to display the Willys Jeep but also invite a large number of our local community into the Museum to share and experience the rich WWII history we have, including the Lord Mayor Mr. Peter Patty and his wife. It was a truly eventful day particularly for Lengkon, thanks to Bradley's surprise.

We hope to see the Museum's Willy's Jeep in next year's Independence Day parade.

# New P-38 scale model for the Museum

The South Pacific WWII Museum now has its third scale model ready to go on display .

In addition to the Willys Jeep and 'Elco' PT Boat, we now have a 1/48 scale P-38G Lightning, "White 147" of the 339th Fighter Squadron, 347th Fighter Group, 13th Air Force.

The model represents one of the aircraft based on Guadalcanal, that shot down the 'Betty' bomber Admiral Yamamoto was travelling in, killing him in the process.



This is the most detailed P-38 model currently in production and will look stunning in the Museum.

**James Carter - Modeller**

The model which took two months to build, measures 240mm long with a wingspan of 330mm.

It is currently in Melbourne Australia and once flights resume to Vanuatu, this model will be winging it (couldn't resist the pun), over to our mini museum for display.

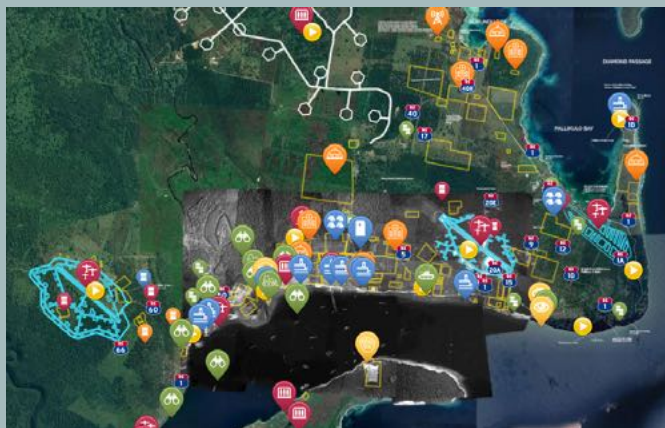
## Books donated by local author

During the weeklong public holiday, the Museum was visited by Mr. Francis Hickey who had come to Santo to take part in and witness the Kenu (Canoe) Festival which was taking place in Luganville.

Mr. Hickey is based in Efate in Port Vila and is a part of the Vanuatu Kaljarol Senta (or Vanuatu Cultural Centre) and he kindly donated 3 booklets he wrote:

- Ol Kenu blong Vanuatu (The Canoes of Vanuatu)
- Kastom Fasin blong lukaotem Envaeromen (Cultural Ways of Taking Care of the Environment)
- Ol Natongtong blong Krab Bay long Malekula 2008 (Mangrove Trees of Crab Bay on Malekula 2008)

Thank you Francis for for your donations that we have registered and keep in our archives.



Our new interactive map adds incredible levels of detail and new information about 'Base Button' on Santo during WWII.

Lengkon Tokon - Project Office Manager

## New interactive map on our website

We're pleased to announce that we've recreated the interactive map page on our website and it's even better. Using aerial photos, maps and plans we had in our archives, we added details from a new map we discovered to provide even more detail.

The map extends from the Seaplane base and Aore Island up the east coast to Turtle Bay Fighter Airfield. You'll find it at: <https://southpacificwwiimuseum.com/map>

# Museum re-opens (now all we need are visitors)

Like the majority of tourism based destinations and venues in Vanuatu, the Museum has been hit hard by the effects of the Covid-19 outbreak. With international visitor numbers down to practically zero, we've had to adjust our opening hours accordingly - at least until the borders reopen.

The Museum is currently open from **8.00am - 12.00pm Monday to Friday** and at other times by appointment. We hope to see you soon.



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