



Volume 04 Number 12

December 2019

Our holiday wishes to you all

Our warmest holiday greetings from Vanuatu and the South Pacific World War II Museum to all our members, sponsors, supporters, and visitors.

It's been another busy year of building the profile of our project, attracting new interest, and unearthing the history of the wartime years here.

Amid all the positive steps, we remember that our dear friend, and the project's foundation manager Alma Wensi is not here to share this time with his family, or with our Museum community.

Alma passed away unexpectedly in May 2019, and there is not a day when he is not missed. We do know Alma's spirit is with us as we head into 2020 – we wish you all well in your endeavours, and thank you once again for your interest and support.



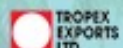
Alma, Xmas 2018

Yuletide 1942

This is a photo from Christmas Day 1942 on Espiritu Santo. The details of the picture are incomplete, but we do know these are sailors from CV-6, the mighty US aircraft carrier the Enterprise, and they appear to be stocking up their provisions. Or specifically, their cigarette supplies! The Enterprise had only recently been in action in the decisive naval battles around the Solomons. The Big E went on to serve in all the major campaigns of the Pacific War.



Inspiring everyday heroes



Bob Hill



Official Navara Sponsors

Visitor numbers surge for the Museum

We've had another phenomenal year for our Unity Park, Luganville mini-museum.

The office is two years old, as of October 2019, and we've had more than 11,000 local and international visitors in that time.

In the year to October 2019, we had 6586 visitors, a rise of 46 per cent on the previous year.

More than 3500 of the visitors were our local people, which is great to see, and a rise of 47 per cent on the year.

Our international visitors rose from 1872 in 2018, to 2531 in 2019. But that doesn't tell the full story.

While cruise ship numbers were very similar in both years, our visitors who came from international air flights rose by 75 per cent, totalling 1482 in the year to October 2019.

We don't have a budget to advertise, so there are some probable reasons for that very big rise – so here they are:

- Greater awareness of our project and word of mouth,
- Our inflight video courtesy of Air Vanuatu, a founding Navara Fund supporter.
- Our regular historical articles in Island Life magazine.
- And the support of local operators who bring visitors to us as part of their tours.

Last but very, very much not least is the terrific work of our office staff, Marina and Melody, who greet visitors, and provide the warmest of Vanuatu welcomes to our home.. A huge thank you for your hard work.

It's heartening that more people are finding their way to our door, and great evidence that a full scale museum will be a big drawcard for all.



Chairman Brad Wood on a plane. Our promotional video on inbound Air Vanuatu flights is helping lift our profile with international travellers.

What a find!



We've been thrilled to hear from one of our new members, Mike Lechwar, who lives in St Louis in the United States, and in recent days has been battling snow drifts. That's a world away literally from where his father, Edward L Lechwar, served on Espiritu Santo from mid-1942 to 1944. Edward was assigned to Carrier Air Support Unit 10 (CASU) at Turtle Bay. Mike has begun sharing some fantastic photos – like the early model Corsair above—that we've never seen before. We look forward to seeing more of these and learning more about the wartime experience of Mike's dad. Mike by the way and his son visited Espiritu Santo 10 years ago to honour his father's service.

Inspiring Everyday Heroes

Our heroes this month all have their eyes on the skies. One is already reaching the heights, and the others are taking the next steps on that same journey.

Katura Lavinia Marae has already featured in our pages, when in 2016 she became the first ATR-72 female pilot for Air Vanuatu.

Now she has made history again as the first Ni-Vanuatu female pilot to operate internationally on the Boeing 737-800.

The 30-year-old originally from Malekula and Tongoa has made the progression from Twin Otter to the Boeing 737 in just six years.

Katura told the Vanuatu Daily Post that her achievement could be seen as a footprint for women and girls to follow the same path in accomplishing their goals.

Meanwhile five scholarships have been issued, the first under a new agreement between Air Vanuatu and the Vanuatu Government, for pilot training.

Jack Tafari, Samson Boedoro, Spencer Noal and Junior John Harry will complete their Air Transport Pilot License (ATPL) at Nelson Aviation College in New-Zealand. Jack and Samson are currently first officers on Air Vanuatu's Twin Otter.

Stephen Tarimoliliu will be undertaking his studies around the Multi-Engine Command Instrument Rating at the Advance Aviation Training (AAT) Ltd in Fiji.

Inspiring Everyday Heroes is our Museum brand and means how the stories of yesteryear and our project can inspire today's new generation.



Katura Marae—now flying the Boeing 737-800 for Air Vanuatu. Picture courtesy Vanuatu Daily Post.

The month in military history

You might imagine Christmas Day would mark some brief pause in the grim business of war. But there was no such sentimentality in the war in the South Pacific.

On Christmas Eve, 1942, US aircraft struck at the Japanese air base at Munda in the Solomon Islands. Navy fighters and B-24 Liberators took off from the American base on Guadalcanal and made the 205-mile trip from Henderson Field to Munda on New Georgia Island.

The mission cleared the way for the Army Air Force to launch a Christmas Day operation on the Japanese harbour at Rabaul, according to the Navy Department. This time Flying Fortresses took off from Guadalcanal, without fear of interference for now from the Japanese at Munda airstrip. Christmas did indirectly figure in the operations however. According to a military spokesman at the time "supplies are going regularly to our forces while planes and warships are effectively blockading the [enemy] troops on the island. This will allow the men stationed on the island to have a Christmas dinner that will include turkey among other foods that are customary at home.

Sign up for the Santonian!

Our special quarterly newsletter, the Santonian, is out this month. It's exclusive to full members of the Museum. This month's issue features a special article by one of our great supporters, Donna Esposito, on her recent trip to Pelieiu, "scene of what is often described as the most fierce battle of the Pacific War. If you would like to become a full member and receive the Santonian, check out this link.

<https://southpacificwwiimuseum.com/membership-2/>