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After the deluge comes history

Cyclone Harold caused much damage to Luganville and Espiritu Santo, but it also unearthed historic items from World War II. Museum Trust chairman Bradley Wood discovered a treasure trove of US military relics from World War II, where pounding waves had washed out coastal embankments. Among the finds were a brass flashlight, numerous bottles, various brass and bronze fittings, uniform belt buckles, silver coins and a data plate from a US Navy 10-man balsawood and canvas life raft. Brad says the amount of erosion was amazing, with some local houses destroyed and washed 40 metres inland. The fresh finds were around Million Dollar Point, and previously unknown dumps on Aore Island.



The personal items found on Aore included old razors, coke bottles, taps, silver coins and even a bottle of Old Spice, giving a window into the personal lives of US soldiers while stationed in Vanuatu.



The other major site was the Luganville Seaplane Base that was known to the museum team "somewhere in that location", but its exact layout had been unclear.

Brad says the cyclone eroded the beach line and exposed certain reference points that actually now make the location really clear. Exhaust manifolds and exhaust suppressors for the sea planes were also found.

The remarkable finds sparked overseas interest, with Australia's ABC interviewing Brad about the finds. The discoveries don't stop there. Read on to find out about some other finds that are unfolding the untold about Vanuatu's World War II history.

SOUTH PACIFIC WWII MUSEUM
 Inspiring everyday heroes

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Where we are at

Our Museum project office in Luganville is once again open, with special precautions.

From June 29, the Museum has reopened. To keep everyone as safe as we possibly can, we are providing a small wash station out front and there'll be a maximum of two people at a time in the Museum. If you want to visit with a larger group, appointments will need to be made in advance. Hopefully we'll see you there!

Vanuatu continues to be free of the COVID-19 virus, but to preserve that status, tourism is not yet back on the agenda.

Of course, Espiritu Santo and other islands are also recovering from Cyclone Harold, and a State of Emergency has been extended throughout Vanuatu for 30 more days from June 11.

Decoding a 1944 coconut

A purchase of what is known as Trench Art for the Museum has shown how past artefacts can yield up stories, thanks to modern-day digitising. US servicemen would often while away their time turning coconuts into mementos that were then sent home.



In this case, those responsible made sure their names were on the coconut, as you can see from the photo. Our supporter and WWII historian Donna Esposito was as always up for the challenge, and started searching online for the names.

She soon discovered an Illinois paper of the time, the Arlington Heights Herald, from September 1 1944 had plenty about the coconut, and the men behind it. Donna also did some work on the names on the coconut, and found for example that Harvey Klehm was a Seabee on the island. He passed away in 1985. We'd love to hear from anyone who knows more about the men and their time in the New Hebrides.

Donna meanwhile has some other news to share. You may have seen her Island Life magazine piece about Frank Mahan and his part in a pioneering US drone unit during the war. Mahan would later serve on Espiritu Santo. She has now uploaded photos and videos taken by Mahan. You can view the photos at <https://flic.kr/s/aHsmMwtnMr> and they include VK-11 and VK-12 squadron photos with all the pilots identified. His movies are at: <https://youtu.be/m4rAEiRVmac> and here: <https://youtu.be/lbEFOynDisk>

Finally, a presentation Donna gave about Frank Mahan and STAG-1 at the Empire State Aerosciences Museum in Glenville, New York on 15 February 2020 can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/Z1vyHvffyPI>

A French rarity



Another discovery keeping us busy is this large aileron brought into us.

We put it up on our Facebook page along with an identifying plate.

Turns out this wasn't a World War II warbird, but from a rare French civilian plane, the Nord 1200 Norecrin made in France from 1945.

Thanks to our expert audience, and we'll update you on progress.

Jimmy Carter is checking with the Bureau d'Enquêtes et d'Analyses pour la Sécurité de l'Aviation Civile (BEA) at Le Bourget airport in France.

They look after all aircraft accidents and investigations for France and its territories and Jimmy is interested to see if they had any record of the aircraft.

He's also contacted Airbus – as a long way back in history (before Airbus came into existence), one of its parent organisations manufactured the aircraft type.

Inspiring Everyday Heroes

Many Vanuatu families are familiar with the separation that happens when some family members travel to Australia and New Zealand to work in agriculture. The RSE scheme is an important way for Vanuatu people to earn income, while assisting in particular horticulture in the two countries. The COVID-19 situation however has meant around a thousand workers having to stay longer than intended in the two countries. Added to that stress has been the damage done back home by Cyclone Harold. Now repatriation flights from New Zealand and Australia have been underway. We wish all the RSE workers and their families a joyful reunion.

