



Volume 05 Number 2

February 2020

Bigfala success as sales hit the mark



The Museum is celebrating a terrific fundraising sale over the last week of February. The Bigfala sale, in the words of Museum manager, Lengkon Tokon, went "awesome". You can see from the picture above our pop-up market where we had household goods, hardware, and tools for sale. Lengkon says the final sales total is still being finalised, but it exceeded expectations, and will help our work substantially. Thank you once again to Luganville Municipal Council, Santo Hardware, and Lester Roy Security Services for their assistance, and thank you to the people of Espiritu Santo. We hope you had a great time snaring a bargain, and supporting our future.

SOUTH PACIFIC WWII MUSEUM
 Inspiring everyday heroes

Air Vanuatu BSP TROPEx EXPORTS LTD
 Bob Hill *Thank You*
 Official Navara Sponsors

A story of dogtags—and drones

Our great museum supporter, US historian Donna Esposito, has written a story that features in the last 2019 issue of *Island Life* magazine, available here in Vanuatu.

Donna is one of what we dub our Dogtag Detectives. We wanted to know the history behind a set of dogtags belonging to one Francis "Frank" Mahan, which we had picked up from a militaria collector in the US.

She found a remarkable story. Frank Mahan had in fact served on Espiritu Santo as a senior Navy officer in a prominent role. But that was only the beginning.

He had before that posting been part of the largely-forgotten pioneering STAG-1 unit, which was one of the first uses of drones by the US military. We think drones are very 21st century, but they date from the mid-1930s.

Despite the promising performance after just one month of combat duty in 1944 against targets in the Solomons, the STAG-1 project was abruptly cancelled. Apparently by then the outcome of the war seemed sure, and the Navy chose not to devote more resources to the experimental project.

After the war, Frank Mahan settled with his wife in a historic home, Harriton House, in Philadelphia. That house, as Donna discovered, is now a Museum, and they were as surprised as anyone that the dogtags of Frank Mahan had found their way back to Espiritu. They knew plenty about Frank, and were delighted to help us tell his story. Truth is stranger than fiction, as they say.

To learn more about STAG-1, visit www.stagone.org. Watch color footage of TDR-1 drone tests here: <https://www.pbs.org/video/history-detectives-tdr-1-test-mission/> A special thanks goes to Bruce Cooper Gill, director of Harriton House for providing photos and details about Mahan. Visit www.harritonhouse.org for more information.



Francis Mahan—circa 1944



A TDR drone

We've got a great partnership with Island Life over several years, publishing a range of original historical articles about the war in Vanuatu. We appreciate however that not everyone can easily pick up a copy of the magazine, so we plan to share Donna's work with our full members, in the next Santonian newsletter. If you'd like to become a full member, please go to:

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

Island Life is moving to a new format, but we are still going to be appearing in their pages.



Inspiring Everyday Heroes

These are some of the 35 students who have recently been granted New Zealand scholarships. For 2020. They are pictured with the NZ High Commissioner, Jonathan Schwass. The students will study this year at universities in New Zealand and at the University of the South Pacific in Vanuatu, Fiji and Samoa.. Well done! (Inspiring Everyday Heroes is our brand and means how the stories of yesteryear and our project can inspire today's new generation, Picture courtesy NZ High Commission.).



A wrecked Japanese Zero fighter, on Guadalcanal.

The Month in Military History:
On February 8th, 1943, the Japanese Navy ended a week-long highly successful evacuation of Guadalcanal. The US and its allies had thought Japan was carrying out a further attack, not a retreat. But wars are not won by retreats, and the tide in the South Pacific would now flow in one direction only. The mighty bases of Vanuatu had played a huge role, but their task was far from over.