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Remembering Alma

Our project manager, Alma Wensi, passed away unexpectedly on May 25th, 2019.

Alma was a very special man, and the passionate face to the world of our Museum.

If you were lucky enough to meet him at our office, you'll know how excited he was to tell people the stories of Vanuatu's wartime past.

In our next newsletter, we'll share more about Alma, and the memories of those who knew him.

Our thoughts are with his family, wife Edwige, and daughter Amirah.



Inspiring everyday heroes



Bob Hill



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A remarkable collection is home

Sometime in 1944, a Post Office the west coast of the United States received a most unusual piece of mail. A coconut, lacquered and with the correct postage, sent from Espiritu Santo.

It was addressed from 1st Lieutenant Nickolas Kobylk, of the US Medical Service Corps, working in the 25th Evacuation Hospital.

And it was one of a remarkable collection of wartime souvenirs and items created on Espiritu Santo and sent home to the US, to be carefully stored – and eventually forgotten.

That was until with the passing of both Nick Kobylk, and most recently, his wife, the collection was discovered by his family. They contacted the Museum, and offered the items, which have now made the trip of thousands of miles back home to Espiritu Santo.

Son Steven says his father, rose to Lieutenant Colonel rank in a career that concluded with the repatriation of US prisoners of war at the end of the Vietnam War.

He always remembered the time he spent on Espiritu Santo.

“The nature of the work was both grim and rewarding at the 25th Evac Hospital. Thankfully, the surroundings were beautiful and he fondly recalled the good times he enjoyed with his native friends.”

“My father must have highly respected the significance and quality of the items since he packed them carefully. As with many WWII vets in the medical corps he didn’t talk very much about the work or detailed interaction with the native peoples.

“But he told me they are proud people that would not accept something for nothing. He offered a few excess medical supplies and food. Some were accepted and some weren’t but the next day an item was left for him at the same location in ‘payment’ unsolicited.”

Nick Kobylk passed away in 1984. His sons Nikolai and Steven both had long service careers, the former as a Navy aviator, and the latter in the surface fleet.

We are very grateful to Steven and Nikolai Kobylk and family for their generosity, and parts of the Kobylk collection are now pride of place in our mini-museum.



Made in Santo—souvenirs from 1944



A wartime picture of Nickolas Kobylk



Intern Allie, on Tanna's Mt Yasur , 2018

. Our US intern

We are very excited to be hosting from June, our first United States history intern, who will be based at our office.

Allie Cobb we hope will be the first of many annual interns.

The project has been developed with us by History Professor Roy Campbell of Presbyterian College, South Carolina, who lived in Vanuatu for around a year as a Fulbright scholar. He led a group of alumni students to the islands last year. Allie was part of that and loved her time here.

Allie is from a small town in South Carolina, USA, called Batesburg-Leesville. She is just finishing her first year of graduate school at Clemson University. She wants to one day be a Professor.

Allie will be working on various projects over about six weeks while she is with us. Come and say hi to her and find out more.



DG Dorosday Kenneth Watson and Minister Nmalamuvomu Don Ken visiting our office.

A Ministerial visit

We were honoured this month to host a large delegation from the Government of Vanuatu, headed by the Minister of Justice and Community Services, Nmalamuvomu Don Ken, and the Ministry Director General, Dorosday Kenneth Watson.

As a cultural organization, our project is of close interest to the Ministry, and as part of a tour of relevant organizations on Espiritu Santo, the delegation of around 20 visited our project office.

The delegation also included Richard Shing, the director of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, which shares a memorandum of understanding with our museum.

The continuing interest and support of the Government of Vanuatu is highly important to us, and we thank the Minister, and Director General

Next month

We're back to our regular publishing date. Please join us.

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