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Port Vila visit

Our team has been busy on the diplomacy front, with a recent visit to Port Vila.

Chairman Brad Wood and Museum manager Alma Wensi met with both the Australian and New Zealand high commissioners.

Jenny Da Rin from Australia and Jonathan Schwass from New Zealand are both regular readers of our newsletter and have visited our project office in Luganville.

But there's nothing like a face to face to discuss matters and update the two embassies on our project - including our finalized business and strategic plan, and the endorsement by the Vanuatu Government.

Ms Da Rin has offered the Museum her assistance in making contact with relevant government departments and organizations in Australia who may be of benefit to us.

New Zealand's Jonathan Schwass has a personal interest in the museum project and has recently purchased a Willy's Jeep in Port Vila.

The High Commissioner was interested in discussing the specific makeup of the Museum and the displays we had planned.

Bradley and Alma outlined their vision for the cultural aspects the museum might contain along with their broader vision of encompassing not just Espiritu Santo's role in the Pacific Theatre but other Pacific island regions such as the Solomon Islands and Guadalcanal.

Following the discussions, the High Commissioner reinforced his support for the project and also agreed to facilitate contacts in New Zealand who may be of assistance to the Museum project.

The visit also included time with some significant business identities, companies and government departments.

Inspiring Everyday Heroes



Roby Gibbs Malonzo with Rosina Malakai - Picture courtesy of Daily Post

This month's heroes are changing lives by giving people the ability to recover from losing a limb.



Inspiring everyday heroes



Bob Hill



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The Vanuatu Amputee Association (VAA) is a small prosthetic organization and charity group which began back in 2012 and was run by psychiatrist, Michael Shugg and his wife, nurse Julie Shugg.

The association has been setup to aid patients suffering from limb loss by giving them a chance to walk again using perfectly molded, prosthetic legs. The couple has donated all their efforts and money on making sure patients who went through limb amputations can walk again with new prosthetic legs to support them.

Stationed at Mr. Shugg's home at Prima, the VAA is operating a small workshop with the help of a prosthetic doctor from the Philippines to train two Ni-Vanuatu workers - 24 year old Rosina Malakai, from Tanna island and 18 year old Brian Sandy from Tongoa - to become Vanuatu's first ever Prosthetists.

Their teacher is 29 year old Roby Gibbs Malonzo, a prosthetic graduate from the University of the Philippine General Hospital in Manila.

He is staying until around March next year to coach his new trainees until they can be registered as prosthetists.

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

Picton Castle visit



Picton Castle as she is today

With the onset of the cyclone season in this part of the world, the steady stream of yacht sailors visiting us has sadly come to an end for a few months.

We've met a fair few people on some epic journeys, on all sorts of vessels. But none can match that of the Canadian-based sail training barque, Picton Castle.

It's when we started researching the vessel during its two visits to Espiritu Santo last month that we realized that this is one of the famous little ships of World War II.



Picton Castle as a ww2 minesweeper

The Picton Castle is now home to more than 40 trainee sailors, often young people, who sail on her around the world.

It's a beautiful vessel, and yet, 70 year ago, no-one would have called it beautiful. Because at the time it was one of the most unglamorous of ships, a minesweeper - and originally, launched in 1928 as a fishing trawler.

In August 1939, the Royal Navy requisitioned the trawler for use in World War II and refitted Picton Castle as a minesweeper. Late in the war, while sweeping mines near Norway, she made way for the port of Bergen for repairs. The Germans had just left Norway, and the sight of the Union Jack-bearing HMS Picton Castle earned her the title "The Liberator of Norway".

After the war she eventually began hauling freight working in the North and Baltic Seas. In 1992 and 1993, Captain Daniel Moreland was scouring various ports looking for a ship that could be converted into a square-rigger.

He found the Picton Castle in a fjord in Norway. He and a small crew cleaned her, got the big 700 HP Burmeister and Wain diesel engine running, and took her across the Atlantic to New York City where she was berthed at the South Street Seaport Museum.

In 1996, she was taken to Lunenburg in Nova Scotia, Canada, to begin a two-million-dollar refit. A clipper bow was welded in place, three steel masts added, and the minesweeper became the ship we see today.



Picton Castle heading out to sea last month in Segond Channel, just off Aore Island

Small and sometimes mysterious

Every so often we get dogtags handed to us, and as we've mentioned before, we have a couple of US based members and supporters who love a good mystery - Donna Esposito, and Francesca Cumero.



We sent Donna this dog tag which was the first one we have had handed in for a female. Donna found it quite a puzzle.

"I always assumed women in the Navy or Marines had the exact same dog tags as the men. So it's strange there's no service number. The name was not really bringing anything up, so I check to see who lived at that address in 1940."

That revealed there was a Virginia M. Wysock (yes a different spelling to the dogtag), who was 16 in 1940. Later that year she married a Henry Davis Carter.

"Apparently Henry served in the Navy during WWII. So maybe he made the tag as a souvenir for her?" Donna says it remains a bit of a mystery.

"A real US Navy tag would have had her service number and date of tetanus shot on it, so I'm leaning toward a souvenir. I haven't found that she served at all."

It appeared that Virginia died in 1975.

Thanks to Donna for this and her other dogtag detective work - and who knows what tomorrow will pop out of the soil of Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu.

Did someone say Christmas?

The Museum as part of its fundraising sells a small range of items through our Luganville project office - and we're big fans of ACTIV, the Vanuatu co-operative that is creating innovative products that benefit local producers.



You'll probably already know about the award-winning Aelan chocolate. Now we are stocking something for skincare - the Aelan Tamanu Oil Body Butter. It's made with pure Vanuatu tamanu oil, cocoa butter and extra virgin coconut oil, and retails at 800 vatur for a 60ml jar. We're sorry that we cannot send this overseas - but if you live on Espiritu Santo, you can visit our office and test a sample of the body butter.

This month in military history



The Sullivan brothers (left—Joseph, Francis, Albert, Madison and George Sullivan), famous even before their deaths (US Naval Historical Center)

We've noted in a previous newsletter the discovery by the late Paul Allen earlier this year of the wreck of the light cruiser USS Juneau.

The Juneau was lost on November 14, 1942, torpedoed trying to reach Espiritu Santo after being damaged in one of the climatic naval battles of the Guadalcanal campaign.

One aspect of the tragedy was how a mixup saw no search for survivors launched for several days, by which time many more sailors had died.

The other aspect of the loss of the Juneau is how five brothers - the Sullivans - were all serving on board, and all died.

We do not have the space to tell that story, but we recommend this link to an article in the magazine Navy Times. It's a fascinating tale of how the United States turned one family's horrific loss into a piece of stirring patriotism. That included a wartime movie, and a drive to raise funds for the war.

The fact that some of this didn't exactly square with reality makes for an intriguing read. Check it out.

<https://www.navytimes.com/veterans/2017/11/13/the-death-of-these-5-sailors-changed-how-the-us-manned-its-military-units/>

USS Juneau in New York Feb 11 1941. (Naval History and Heritage Command)



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