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A visit by the US Ambassador

The Museum was delighted last weekend to host the United States Ambassador to Vanuatu, Catherine Ebert-Gray.

Madam Ambassador Ebert-Gray is based in Papua New Guinea but is a frequent visitor to Vanuatu, and this time, singled our museum out for a visit to find out more about our work.

In October 2017, the US embassy's deputy chief of mission, Mary Drake, was guest of honour at the opening of our project office. *(continue Page 2)*

US Ambassador Catherine Ebert-Gray, with trust chairman Brad Wood and Marina Moli from our project office.



A legacy of history

In the late 1980s, a significant project was undertaken to record the wartime memories of Ni-Vanuatu people.

The man who played a big part in realizing that dream, James Gwero, passed away earlier this month.

His legacy is the famous Bislama oral history, Big Wok, published in 1998.

James, who was born in 1929, joined with United States anthropology professor Lamont Lindstrom and others to gather stories for the book.

Professor Lindstrom, who is a Museum member, says he is deeply saddened by James Gwero's passing.

"We worked hard to talk with more than 120 men and women in 1988 and 1989, to record their stories of World War II.

James took me to Nabangahake village in Ambae, his home village, and in 1990 he came to be with me in Honolulu, Hawaii."

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SOUTH PACIFIC WWII
MUSEUM

Inspiring everyday heroes

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(A visit by the US Ambassador continues)

Last weekend, Ambassador Ebert-Gray met with board chairman Brad Wood, and Treasurer William Widup and had a long chat with them about our plans.

She is enthusiastic about the Museum concept, and is keen to assist us with us making useful connections with those who are potentially interested in the United States.

The Ambassador has left us with some good ideas to pursue, and we made sure she left with something to remember us by - a sliver coin, stamped with an authentic wartime United States seal.

The Ambassador is keen to turn it into a brooch to help carry our message.

And as a keen diver, the Ambassador also took the chance to make three descents on the wreck of the SS President Coolidge while she was on Espiritu Santo.

We thank her, and the US Embassy for their ongoing interest and support, and look forward to many more visits.

This month in military history

Its February 1943, and the last run of the Tokyo Express has taken place. The Express was the nickname given to the Japanese fast destroyers that would sail down the base at Rabaul and elsewhere, to Guadalcanal.

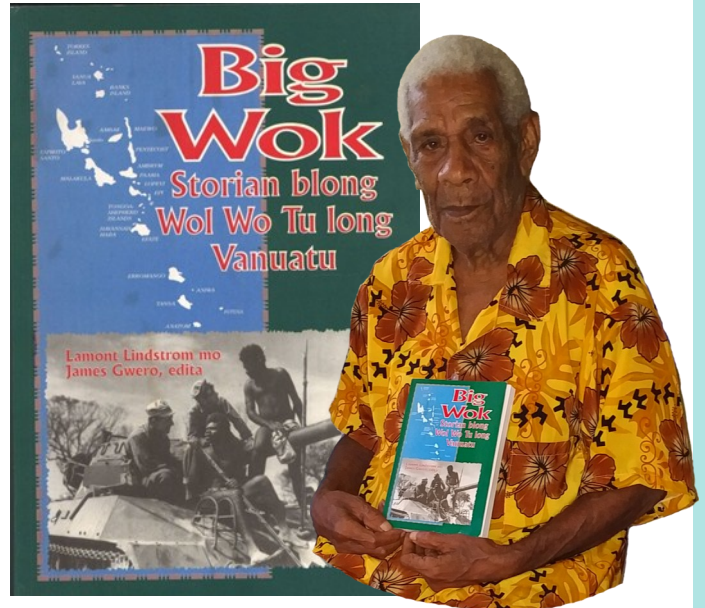


Rear Admiral Raizo Tanaka, famed commander of the Tokyo Express

With the airfield on the island in Allied control, and bombers from Espiritu Santo also on the watch, the Japanese have to make their supply runs under cover of darkness to avoid damaging bombing attacks. The Japanese nickname is less flattering - they called it Rat Transportation because it happened at night. More than 11,000 Japanese soldiers are evacuated under the noses of the Allied forces during the final missions - the Battle of Guadalcanal is over.

To signify final victory, General Alexander Patch, commander of the land forces on the island, messaged his superior, Admiral William F. Halsey, "Tokyo Express no longer has terminus on Guadalcanal."

(A legacy of history continues)



"When we were in Hawaii, he worked to transcribe these stories and sort out the relevant parts to insert in Big Wok."

In October 2017, James was a guest of honor at the opening of our Museum project office in Luganville, joining US embassy deputy chief of mission Mary Drake and then Minister of Lands, Ralph Regenvanu to cut the ribbon.

James Gwero's work will be invaluable to the South Pacific World War II Museum in telling our Ni-Vanuatu stories.

We thank him for his work and the legacy he has left to Vanuatu.



Opening of the South Pacific WWII Museum Project Office, Oct 2017. (L-R) Minister Regenvanu, DCM Mary Drake, James Gwero, Brad Wood, and Mr John Olo Aru President of the Sanma Provincial Government.

More discoveries from the deep

The rollcall of sunken ships in the South Pacific that are now being discovered seems to grow every week at present.

This month the RV Petrel team created by the late billionaire Paul Allen has discovered two major warships in the water around the Solomon Islands.

The first was the Japanese battleship Hiei, sunk in the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal. It was the first Japanese battleship lost in the war; her sister ship Kirishima was sunk nearby shortly afterwards.

The big battlewagons had been sent to undertake terrifying night bombardments of the Allied airfield on Guadalcanal, but were at risk in the narrow waters where smaller ships could get close.

The second major find was that of the USS Hornet, and aircraft carrier sunk in the Battle of Santa Cruz islands. This same carrier had in early 1942 carried out an audacious raid on Japan, using twin-engine bombers that normally would never fly off a "flattop". The Doolittle Raid, as its known, stunned the Japanese who had thought their home islands safe from attack for now.

The RV Petrel began its South Pacific mission by last year finding the USS Lexington, another carrier sunk during the famous Battle of the Coral Sea. You can see the remarkable pictures, taken at a depth of over three kilometers below the sea, in a video that plays at our mini-museum, courtesy of Vulcan Productions.



The Japanese battleship Hiei



The USS Hornet

Inspiring Everyday Heroes



Last year we had a visit from New Zealanders Geoff and Bev Pownall. They are heavily involved with a charity that sees life-changing surgery made available to children from Pacific nations.

ROMAC stands for Rotary Oceania Medical Aid For Children, and first began out of Australia 30 years ago.

Geoff and Bev were visiting here to meet friends from the local Rotary chapter.

A New Zealand region of ROMAC began in 2004 and now around 50 children from Oceania are receiving treatment each year.

A recent case of a Vanuatu girl who received treatment was Rachel, who accompanied by her mother Victoria, arrived in Auckland in New Zealand in June 2018.

She had a renal condition, and was treated by the specialist team at New Zealand's children's hospital, Starship.

Rachel and her mum were hosted by the Rotary Club of Birkenhead who made sure they had plenty to keep them occupied and happy with during six weeks of recovery.

Rachel flew home fully recovered in early August. You can read more about the wonderful work of ROMAC, including how to donate to their work, at

www.romac.org.au



ROMAC patient, Rachel

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

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"Inspiring everyday heroes"



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