

## Jim Specht's Brilliant Career—A Tribute

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**ABSTRACT.** Jim Specht's career at the Australian Museum spanned almost thirty years, over half as Head of Anthropology. In his capacity as Division Head, field expedition leader, museum curator, scholar and friend he had an enormous impact on both the anthropological and museum worlds. Although much of his work focuses on the western Pacific, its ramifications have been felt across the world. In this brief overview we highlight some of his more outstanding achievements.

TAÇON, PAUL S.C., JACK GOLSON, KIRK HUFFMAN & DES GRIFFIN, 2004. Jim Specht's brilliant career—a tribute. In *A Pacific Odyssey: Archaeology and Anthropology in the Western Pacific. Papers in Honour of Jim Specht*, ed. Val Attenbrow and Richard Fullagar, pp. 1–8. *Records of the Australian Museum, Supplement 29*. Sydney: Australian Museum.

James Richard Specht (Fig. 1) has had a rich, rewarding, long and varied career that has positively impacted on an untold number of people across the globe. The four of us have felt the “Specht effect” in different ways but for each it was an enriching experience. As co-researchers, close colleagues, teachers, students and long time friends, in different times and places, we have embraced the breadth of Jim's knowledge, leadership, experience and zest for life. Jim's tenure at the Australian Museum began in June 1971. He retired in November 2000. In this tribute a small sample of Jim's contributions to archaeology, museums, indigenous peoples, friends and colleagues is highlighted.

### Jim Specht and New Britain Archaeology

Jim Specht paid his first visit to New Britain in 1965 as a Ph.D. scholar of the Australian National University, continuing to visit until and beyond his retirement from the Australian Museum. The advances of the intervening years in our knowledge of the prehistory of the island and its place in that of the wider region are testimony to the value of a long-term commitment. His own research, and that of many others, came to benefit from his ever-increasing familiarity with the archaeological resources of his chosen study areas and his constantly renewed association with the local



Fig. 1. Jim Specht, early 2000.

communities with whom he carried out his work of reconnaissance and excavation. The close relationship that he developed with the provincial officials whose support was important at all stages also opened the door to further research. As we shall see, he became a point of reference for scholars of many kinds and a stimulator and facilitator of research in the area by other people.

**First steps.** The archaeological group that Jim Specht joined in the Department of Anthropology in the Research School of Pacific Studies at ANU in 1965 was small and new, and most of the designated region of its operations archaeologically virgin territory. In these circumstances he became the first archaeologist of the Bismarck Archipelago. He was despatched to the small island of Watom near Rabaul. There he was charged with following up the discovery, put on record more than 50 years previously by the missionary Father Otto Meyer, of what we now know as Lapita pottery. Until then, the study of Lapita pottery had been limited to sites in the remoter Pacific, in Tonga, Fiji and New Caledonia.

However, because the archaeological remains at Watom were blanketed by a thick volcanic ash that made sampling them a haphazard exercise from the viewpoint of a limited-term Ph.D. undertaking, he only had a single season there (Specht, 1968) before transferring his attention to sites in the northern Solomon Islands (Specht, 1969). Before he left for Australia at the end of his Watom fieldwork, however, he made an important visit to Talasea, at the base of the Willaumez Peninsula on the mid-north coast of New Britain.

Talasea was the source of the obsidian that Specht observed in the possession of inhabitants of Watom Island some 270 km away. Obsidian artefacts that he excavated with Lapita pottery on Watom were shown by subsequent spectrographic analysis to have also come from Talasea more than 2,000 years before (Key, 1969). In light of the

results of contemporary ethnographic work by Harding (1967) with the Siassi Islanders of the Vitiaz Strait, Specht saw the evidence emerging for the Talasea area as a centre for the extraction and distribution of a raw material widely valued over time as well as space and thus as a fruitful location for research. This was strikingly confirmed a few years later with Wal Ambrose's demonstration that the obsidian found by Roger Green in association with Lapita pottery in the Reef Islands of the southeast Solomons also came from the Talasea source some 2,000 km away (Ambrose & Green, 1972).

There was a second long-term outcome of Specht's involvement as a Ph.D. student with New Britain. A co-resident of University House, the ANU's graduate hall of residence at the time, was an American anthropologist, Ann Chowning, who had recently joined the University's Department of Anthropology. Chowning had carried out ethnographic fieldwork in the early 1960s with fellow American Jane Goodale in the sparsely settled Passismanua district of lowland tropical rainforest inland of Kandrian on the New Britain south coast. Here they found sites with chert implements that were unrecognized as artefacts by the inhabitants and made a large collection (Chowning & Goodale, 1966; Goodale, 1966). Chowning brought some of this collection with her when she came to ANU. In early 1967, Specht found himself briefly at the Kandrian airstrip en route from Kilenge, at the western end of New Britain, via Rabaul to Buka, for the next stage of his doctoral fieldwork. With the Passismanua collection in mind, he made some enquiries and discovered that chert tools had been found during recent work at the airstrip. Kandrian and district developed as a focus of interest for him when he joined the Australian Museum in 1971.

Specht was at Kilenge in 1967 because he had met Philip Dark of Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, at

University House in 1966. Dark was researching the context of art in culture at Kilenge and he invited Specht to record an engraved rock art site there. Specht did so, being hosted in the field by Adrian Gerbrands of the University of Leiden, who was Dark's colleague in the project. This led to what has been called "Specht's (1979*b*) seminal review" of rock art in the western Pacific (Ballard, 1992: 94).

**Defining the field.** Specht's fieldwork opportunities were limited for most of the 1970s, when his activities outside the museum were concerned with the development of programs of cultural assistance in the Pacific through the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and UNESCO. He did some work in the Talasea area in 1973 and 1974, initially following up the discovery of obsidian stemmed tools by Johan Kamminga in 1972. Given the association of Lapita pottery with transported obsidian from Talasea at Watom and elsewhere, Specht's main aim was to discover Lapita sites in the source area and investigate their relationship with obsidian quarries (Specht, 1974*c*). In 1974, he collected oral traditional information about obsidian sources ahead of a visit from Wal Ambrose to sample them for geochemical characterization (Specht, 1980*a,d*, 1981*c*) and initiated (with Lin Sutherland, geologist at the Australian Museum) an investigation into the tephrostratigraphy of the region that was more fully developed in later years. That same year Jim Rhoads, a graduate student of the University of Minnesota, joined him for fieldwork. Rhoads told us (pers. comm., 2000) that Specht was instrumental in developing his doctoral research proposal for ANU, which involved fieldwork among sago users in Gulf Province on mainland P.N.G. (Rhoads, 1980).

Shortly afterwards, Sydney University student Dimitri Anson began work on Lapita pottery from the Bismarck Archipelago, with Specht's encouragement and support. By this time, two of the four sites in the region that had produced such pottery, Watom and Talasea in New Britain were known as a result of Specht's own work.

Towards the end of the 1970s Specht's program really took shape. Described as a study of settlement history and exchange network development in the region of West New Britain (Talasea and Passismanua) and the Huon Peninsula (Specht *et al.*, 1981: 13) it comprised three main seasons of fieldwork over the years 1979 to 1982. There was close association with the newly established West New Britain Cultural Centre at Kimbe in the planning and execution of the fieldwork at the local level and John Normu of the Centre was a member of the field team. In the third season, Specht and Julian Hollis, a consultant geologist, extended the work of the tephrostratigraphic survey in the Talasea area begun some years before. In the course of this, they were taken to a new obsidian source at Mopir, which proved to be the "unknown" in the source determinations of archaeological obsidians being produced by Atomic Energy Commission research scientists at Lucas Heights in a collaborative program with Wal Ambrose. During the second and third seasons of the project, a member of the archaeological team was Ian Lilley, an M.A. student from the University of Queensland. He went on to do his Ph.D. at the ANU on the archaeology of the Siassi Islands of the Vitiaz Strait between New Britain and the New Guinea mainland (Lilley this volume).

There was fieldwork in the Passismanua district in each of the three seasons of the project. Excavations took place

in Yombon village territory, at Misisil cave. This work produced the then-oldest archaeological date for the islands east of the New Guinea mainland, one from the terminal Pleistocene, as well as dates back to 4,000 B.P. for activity at an open hill-top site with 1 m deep deposits (Specht *et al.*, 1981, 1983: 92). In addition, there was survey and excavation at the coast in the vicinity of Kandrian (Specht *et al.*, 1983: 92, 94).

In conjunction with this extensive program of archaeological research, Specht conducted complementary ethnographic investigations, focusing on oral traditions, early written history and material culture. His extensive knowledge in these areas led to a range of exhibitions (e.g., most recently Sospen Graun in 2000) and publications, including a lengthy and scholarly account of Richard Parkinson and his artefact collecting (Specht, 2000*c*).

**The Lapita Homeland Project.** Jim Allen (1991: 1) reports that the idea for the highly productive Lapita Homeland Project, which he organized for the Bismarck Archipelago in the mid-1980s, arose out of a conversation with Jim Specht at a conference in Sydney in 1982 (see the subtitle of Specht, 1967*c*). It is no surprise that Specht was one of three people, the others being Wal Ambrose and Doug Yen, who Allen (1991: 2–3) invited to join him on the 1984 reconnaissance that set up the fieldwork schedule for the project in 1985.

During the project itself, because of his official and local connections, Specht had a wandering brief. He was in touch with the authorities in Kandrian and on the spot in the Arawe Islands ahead of the arrival of the project vessel, the *Dick Smith Explorer*, with Chris Gosden for the opening stage of fieldwork. The few days of survey that Specht could spend with Gosden were sufficient to demonstrate the archaeological potential of the island group, which Gosden (1991) explored to good effect in 1985 and subsequent years. From the Arawe Islands, Specht went to Rabaul to meet Roger Green and Dimitri Anson, settle them on Watom Island and relocate his excavation trenches of 1966 in preparation for their work. After Watom he was off to Kimbe to talk to the provincial authorities about his own plans, pick up John Normu at the Cultural Centre and move to Kandrian for survey and test excavation at the south coast. This was the occasion of the discovery of the Kreslo site as a result of local information (Specht, 1991*b*).

**Bringing it all together.** Regarding the obsidian province around Talasea, there were major questions outstanding from previous work, related to obsidian exploitation and use, the role of Lapita and the place of the stemmed obsidian tools. These questions were addressed in 1988 and subsequent seasons, when Specht was accompanied into the field by Robin Torrence and Richard Fullagar. Torrence, then of the University of Sheffield, had interests in the organization of stone tool production and Fullagar, a post-doctoral fellow under the Specht/Gosden ARC grant, was analysing use-wear and residues on tools.

According to Torrence (pers. comm., 2000), the major achievement of this period of fieldwork was Specht's trench at Bitokara Mission, which passed through 3 m of interbedded deposits of volcanic ash and the debris of obsidian working (Specht *et al.*, 1988: 8–9). This constituted a type section, which, expanded and refined by work elsewhere, established a tephrostratigraphic framework for the archaeological evidence of the region (Specht *et al.*, 1991: 282–284).

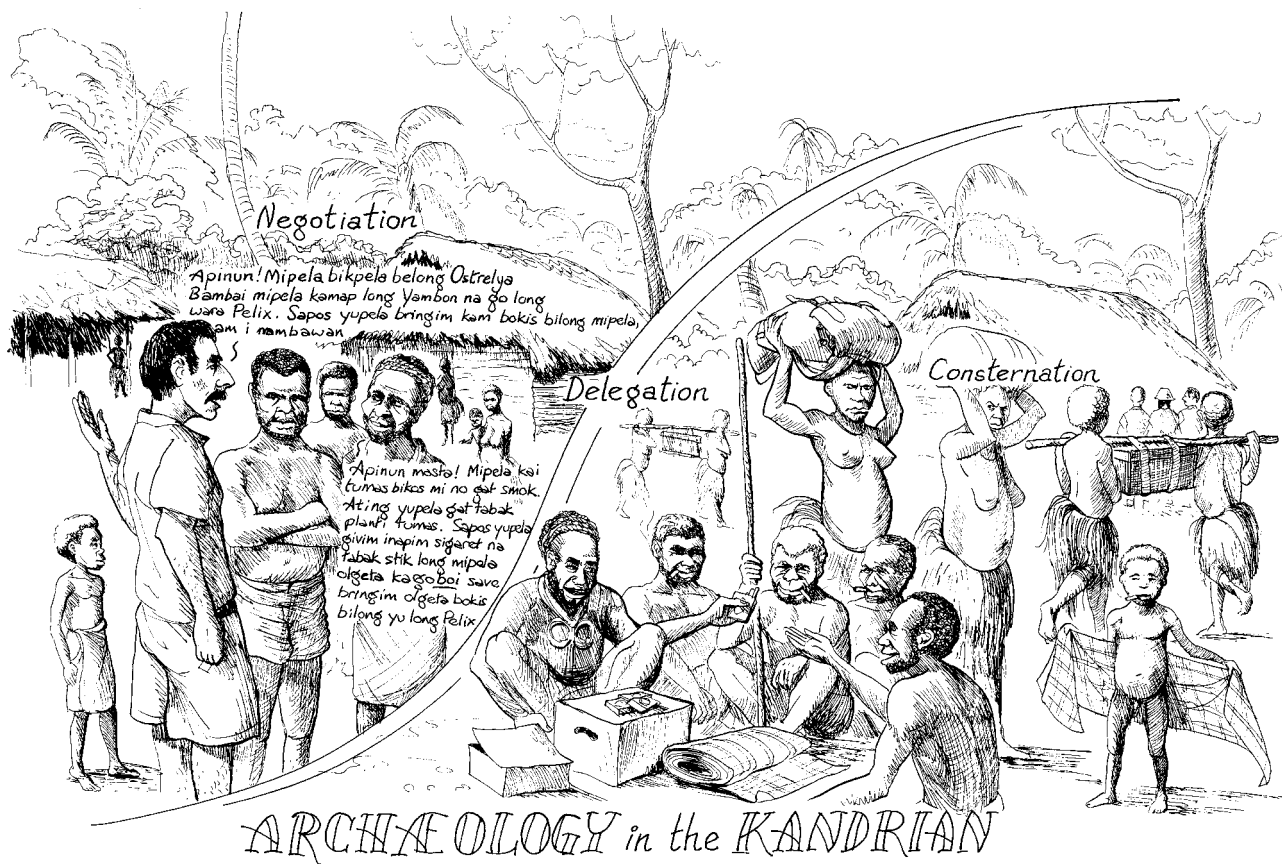


Fig. 2. Cartoon depicting Jim Specht negotiating the portage of equipment in the Kandrian area, Papua New Guinea. Designed by Foss Leach, drawn by Linden Cowell.

At this time, Russell Blong, of the School of Earth Sciences at Macquarie University, became involved with Specht's tephrostratigraphic program in the Talasea region, although it was Blong's Japanese colleague, Hiroshi Machida of Tokyo Metropolitan University, who took the leading role. Machida became closely associated with Specht's work and was appointed to a Visiting Fellowship at the Australian Museum. The program (Machida *et al.*, 1996) included not only sustained investigations in the north, but also the identification of the same tephra sequence at sites in the Passismanua district in the south that were shortly to be excavated.

Meanwhile, Specht and his team expanded and systematized the sampling of obsidian flows within source areas that Wal Ambrose had initiated earlier in the decade (cf. Torrence *et al.*, 1992). Glenn Summerhayes, a Ph.D. student at La Trobe, who was in the field with Specht in 1989, analysed source and archaeological samples of obsidian at Lucas Heights (Summerhayes *et al.*, 1993).

The interrelated operations described above provided the opportunity for detailed work on changing patterns of settlement and resource use in the region. Whilst Torrence undertook investigations on Garua Island, Specht followed up other aspects of the coordinated program of research in West New Britain for which he and Chris Gosden obtained joint funding for the period 1989 to 1993—Gosden in the Arawe Islands and Specht on the mainland.

As a result, Specht went south in 1991 to re-establish his contacts in the Kandrian coastal area and consider options for Yombon, in the interior rainforest. Ten years before,

when he had worked at Yombon, it was a remote area, six or seven hours walk from Kandrian on each of two days, requiring a cargo line of up to 30 men to carry everything in (Fig. 2). Now, in early 1991, there was a mission, radio and an airstrip, but Specht still walked in with Chris Gosden, then at La Trobe University, and his Ph.D. student, Christina Pavlides, to obtain support from the people and the mission for Pavlides to undertake archaeological research (see this volume).

The early 1990s saw major pieces of the West New Britain jigsaw that Specht had acquired 20 years before firmly in place. However, Specht conducted further work with a range of colleagues, especially Robin Torrence. Subsequent research programs recently received funding for fieldwork beyond 2003.

### Jim—The Museum Man

Over the course of 29 years, Jim Specht had a profound impact on the Australian Museum. He was a pillar of strength and continuity through three decades of almost constant change. He saw many Anthropology staff members come and go but also was instrumental in building up the Anthropology section, as well as defending it from budgetary and other attacks. Specht acted as Head of Anthropology for over half his time at the Museum and on many occasions acted as the Museum's Deputy Director (including one stretch of almost a year). When Jim retired in late 2000 he was one of only two Museum Chief Scientists, a position bestowed upon him in recognition of the museum science wisdom he had accumulated.

Specht was very successful at obtaining grants, including various large ARC grants. He attracted a range of postdoctoral fellows, with Richard Fullagar and Robin Torrence staying the longest. Infrastructure grants obtained by Specht, sometimes in association with colleagues at the University of Sydney, enabled the Museum's Archaeology Laboratory to be refurbished. The well-equipped laboratory, used regularly by staff, students and visiting fellows, stimulates innovative projects at the Museum.

Besides being extremely active in Museum research and politics, Specht threw himself wholeheartedly into many exhibitions. One of the more exceptional and successful exhibitions was the award winning *Pieces of Paradise*, which opened in March 1988. Specht was also instrumental in establishing the Australian Museum's djamu Gallery, which had anthropology, art and material culture exhibitions at Old Customs House, Circular Quay from late 1998 to late 2000. As can be seen from his publication list (Khan, this volume), Specht also wrote many exhibition catalogue essays and, in some cases, most label and exhibition display text as well. However, Specht's publications were not limited to museum exhibitions and New Britain archaeology. While at the Australian Museum, Specht published in both scholarly and popular venues on a vast range of topics, including rock-art and many aspects of material culture such as the nature of ethnographic collecting, as Khan notes in more detail (this volume).

As a museum man dealing with the tangible results of more than a century of ethnographic collecting, Specht (1991c) was caught up early in questions about a proper role for museums in the post-colonial era. During the 1970s, as already noted, he was a member of various committees concerned with programs of cultural assistance to Pacific Island countries through the Australian Government or UNESCO and this continued through the 1980s. Inevitably, this work came to involve questions about the return of objects to new or remodelled museums and cultural centres in previously dependent territories, and about the provision of technical facilities and training for the proper curation of collections. As a result, Specht built up special relationships with cultural officials and workers in Pacific Island countries, especially Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea. It is in this context that we can appreciate Specht's long and supportive association with the West New Britain Provincial Cultural Centre at Kimbe.

This was formally set up in 1978 after discussions between the West New Britain Provincial Government, the West New Britain Division of Education and the National Cultural Council, which was established in 1973 to coordinate cultural activities throughout Papua New Guinea and provide financial assistance for the purpose (see Namuno, 1991: 92 for the Cultural Centre; Crawford, 1977: 29 for the Cultural Council).

The regular field visits of Specht and his team, and those of others developing his work, have been of great help to the Centre in its work. Officers of the Centre took part in the fieldwork activities of the visitors. Namuno (1991: 98–99) points out that this gave Centre staff the opportunity to carry out cultural patrols that otherwise might not have taken place. There was also a direct contribution to the Centre through the provision of fieldwork reports, items collected in the course of fieldwork and photographs. As John Namuno (pers. comm., 2000) notes:

The Provincial Cultural Centre and especially the Provincial Museum owe Jim a great deal. A good volume of the collection held in the Museum had been supplied by Jim in his field trips around the province. He has provided the Museum with good quality photographs and slides which are very useful to the Museum. And not only that but the compiled notes on all the research conducted since 1978. He assisted John Normu in the Museum records and other necessary requirements. The West New Britain Provincial Museum will really miss him, but will remember his great work for a long time. Being a small set up, we are really going to miss someone who is a friend and like a father to us.

**South Pacific Cultures Fund.** As is evident above, most academics know of Specht through his important archaeological work in New Britain, his numerous scientific articles and from interacting with him through the Anthropology Department/Division of the Australian Museum since 1971 or at numerous international conferences. Fewer people, though, know much about his long-term commitment and assistance to living Pacific cultures, Pacific nations, Pacific Island Museums and Cultural Centres. Specht's support was given not only through his Anthropology staff and with the assistance of the recently retired Australian Museum Director, Dr Des Griffin, but also through Specht's involvement in the setting up of the Australian Government's South Pacific Cultures Fund (SPCF) in the mid-1970s. Specht was on the committee of this "low budget" but incredibly useful "grass roots" cultural aid fund until 1983.

For nearly 20 years, the SPCF distributed approximately AU\$100,000–200,000 annually to many cultural projects throughout a dozen Pacific nations (Fig. 3). Specht and Robert Langdon of the SPCF advised the Australian Government on aspects of the setting up of the fund. Together they travelled widely throughout the Pacific in the mid-1970s through to the early 1980s, looking into the possible "cultural aid" desires, needs and aspirations of certain island societies and local and national governments. By the time the Australian Government shut down the SPCF in 1996, it had funded hundreds of cultural projects. With its disappearance, the Australian Government lost its least expensive but most effective, sympathetic and widespread form of useful profile in this vast area.

From the late 1970s until 1995 Pacific Island individuals, groups, local governments and cultural institutions made their SPCF requests through their own governments to the Australian High Commission in their respective capitals. The vast scope of the SPCF-supported projects reflected to a large extent Specht's heart-felt concern to assist indigenous peoples and developing nations in the Pacific to use whatever means were available to retain and develop their cultural identities. Specht's view of the practical ways that a large and respected museum (with the world's largest ethnographic collections from the western Pacific) and a government cultural fund could assist Pacific nations to fulfil their cultural visions has been immensely successful. It has left an enduring and permanent legacy in many areas of the Pacific.

**Returning cultural property.** Over the last twenty years the Australian Museum has come to be recognized internationally as a world leader in the return of cultural property to its country of origin. Important items have been returned to Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Zealand, Canada and India. The Australian Museum Trust

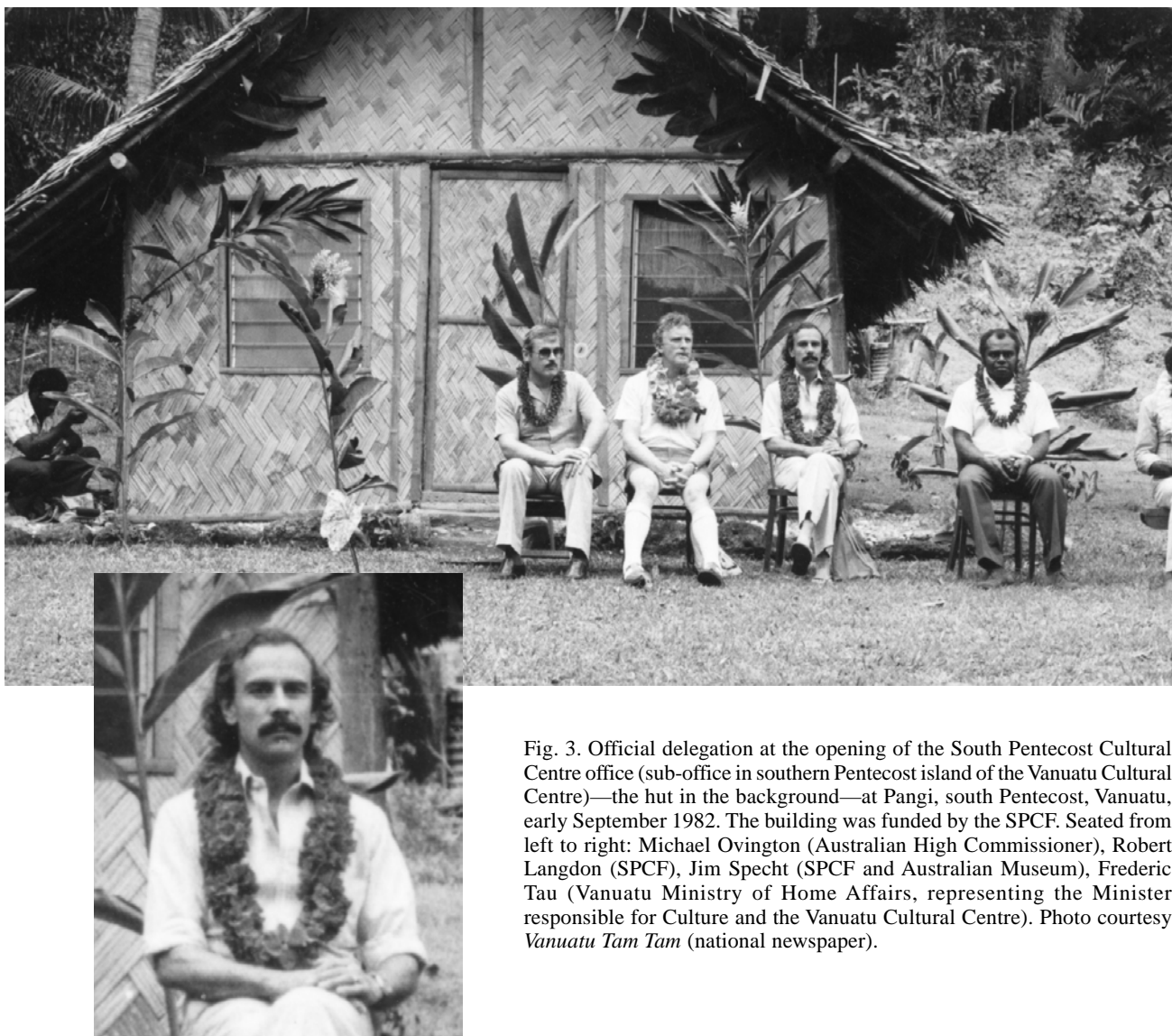


Fig. 3. Official delegation at the opening of the South Pentecost Cultural Centre office (sub-office in southern Pentecost island of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre)—the hut in the background—at Pangi, south Pentecost, Vanuatu, early September 1982. The building was funded by the SPCF. Seated from left to right: Michael Ovington (Australian High Commissioner), Robert Langdon (SPCF), Jim Specht (SPCF and Australian Museum), Frederic Tau (Vanuatu Ministry of Home Affairs, representing the Minister responsible for Culture and the Vanuatu Cultural Centre). Photo courtesy *Vanuatu Tam Tam* (national newspaper).

has adopted appropriately sensitive policies concerning return of material consistent with UNESCO Conventions.

The leadership of Specht, Head of the Department of Anthropology, made the difference to the Australian Museum's role in returning cultural property. His involvement in UNESCO committees in the 1980s, which drew up guidelines that refined our approach to issues of return, and his longer involvement with cultural centres in the Pacific, led to trusting relationships being developed. These relationships gave the Museum greater confidence in their dealings on this matter, a contribution which, among others, the late Grace Molissa, of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, recognized. Speaking at the opening of the magnificent exhibition, "Pieces of Paradise" (the project team of which was chaired by Specht), Grace Molissa said:

We Melanesians, particularly ni Vanuatu, welcome Australia's review and reorientation of approach and direction from Europe to the Pacific where we all live. Greetings from Vanuatu, from the smallest museum in the Pacific to the biggest museum in the southern hemisphere. I take this opportunity to thank the Australian Museum Trust and staff for the numerous good deeds rendered to the Vanuatu Cultural Centre... We're glad that overseas museums have collected Vanuatu material and looked after them so well.

Mrs Molissa also acknowledged that it was during Jim's term on the Committee of the Australian Government's South Pacific Cultures Fund that funding was initially provided for the salary of the first museum curator in the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, as well as a subsequent trainee curator.

Specht's credibility, his care and his unrivalled knowledge of all the relevant issues, together with his commitment to the rights of peoples in respect of their culture, made the difference.

#### An appreciation

This tribute to Jim Specht illustrates the value of his long-term commitment to the West New Britain region, not only to the research problems that he addressed but also to the local communities he consulted, and who contributed and benefited in the process. Specht has attracted a large number and wide range of Australian scholars, at different stages of their careers, to take part in the projects that he has formulated. He has always carried these projects out in close association with the scholarly institutions of the host country and their personnel, officials at the national and local levels and the cultural establishments on the spot, in particular the West New Britain Provincial Cultural Centre.

His legacy also continues across Australia, particularly at the Australian Museum, as well as in Vanuatu and in many other parts of the world, as comments from colleagues, friends, former students and indigenous peoples attest. For instance, Anthropology curator at the South Australian Museum, Barry Craig notes:

Jim's professional opinion is widely sought and respected; his Forewords and Introductions to books and republications of classic works are eagerly sought and read. I arranged for him to be an official external supervisor for my Ph.D. thesis, not only because there was hardly anyone else in this country who had the broad range of knowledge and experience to do it, but also because I wanted to have his criticism before I handed in the thesis rather than afterwards.

Former student Paul Rainbird, now teaching in the Department of Archaeology, University of Wales, Lampeter, goes further:

My association with Jim does not go back a long way—less than 10 years in fact, but this time has been a significant one for me as ... Jim was able to nurture my new found interest in Pacific archaeology. In February 1992 I enrolled as a doctoral candidate at the University of Sydney studying Micronesian archaeology and due to my growing admiration for Jim I asked him to be my co-supervisor along with Roland Fletcher at the university. Our friendship grew and the supervisory relationship became steadily more informal with the majority of advice and much discussion or debate occurring over dinner or a few schooners in the New Zealand Hotel or Lord Wolseley amongst others. Following the completion of my Ph.D. in 1995 and over the next three years up until the end of 1998 we saw each other fairly regularly either in Sydney or at conferences and special events. Since my return to the UK contact has been limited to irregular email communication. However, in my research and teaching Jim's name often comes to the fore whether it be in regard to shell artefacts from Nauru or the politics of museum collections, such is the wide range of his intellectual legacy.

Jim never shirks from criticism where it is deserved, but his humour and humanity along with his maintenance of high personal standards of behaviour are indelible memories and these, along with his knowledge of the Pacific and academic integrity, are the things from Jim that I continue to strive to attain.

Specht has also made an impact on members of the art world, for instance speaking at exhibition openings and giving many lectures to the Oceanic Arts Society. He developed many close friendships with contemporary artists, including the late Tony Tuckson and his curator/author wife, Margaret. Margaret provides an example of the sort of inspiration Specht gave to others with shared interests:

Jim is a very special part of my life. But for him I doubt if I would have battled on with my research into the pottery of PNG. He allowed me free access to the pot collection at the Museum and gave endless encouragement and helpful advice. In 1971 I started to work with Patricia May to do the research and put together our book on PNG pottery. Jim gave a lot of help and did invaluable reading and correcting for the revised, re-published version in 1999. Recently, we worked together and with Patricia, as three curators of the exhibition *Sospen Graum* for djamu Gallery. It was a joy to work with Jim again for both Patricia and myself. I treasure his friendship.

For former Australian Museum anthropologist Betty Meehan, it was Specht's negotiation skills that were particularly impressive:

As you probably all know, Jim lives in a small, charming and somewhat run down terrace house in Ultimo. No matter what time he finished work or socialising he always walked home a distance of several kilometres on a route which took him through Hyde Park. Some of us at the Museum worried about these late night journeys. In fact, one night he was accosted while walking through the park by two large "lads". They wanted money. Unfortunately for them, they could not have chosen a less likely candidate, for Jim was well-known for never carrying much cash on his person. On this night he had, from memory, two ten cent coins in his pocket. Amazingly, even in this dangerous and threatening situation, he negotiated with his assailants about the cash and they agreed to split it 50/50 with him! Apparently, Jim continued on his way home without further mishap. Perhaps it is these exceptional negotiating skills that made him such an excellent colleague and leader in a large and at times unwieldy institution.

Besides former students, museum curators and academics, Specht has many close indigenous friends, as can be seen from comments such as the following by John Namuno, Provincial Cultural Officer of the Kimbe Provincial Cultural Centre, Papua New Guinea:

I would like to make my personal comments on Dr Jim Specht's attitudes and general everyday manners and lifestyle as I saw over almost twenty years when conducting researches in the West New Britain Province. On many occasions I went with Jim into the Villages to discuss visiting sites and so on and I really admired his approach to the Village Elders. You would see him sitting on a piece of log offered, as sitting stool, and calmly conversing in Pidgin English with the Villagers. After everything is done Jim would give them packets of cigarettes or tinned food as rewards. Because of his doings, Jim was well known in the areas where he visited and worked...

One very remarkable thing I would like to say about Jim too, is his good and long memory. To all the Elders, Jim made contact with them in their little remote villages, Jim never ever forgot their names and their faces. Sometimes he would enquire about a face he did not see and was told that the person had died.

That is the same for the names of places or sites where some research activities had been conducted. The names and geographical setting never left Jim's brain. He would correctly describe a place he visited some three to four years ago as if he had just visited it yesterday. And that is Jim as I know him...

We would like to conclude with a few comments by Ralph Regenvanu, Director of the Vanuatu National Cultural Council and Vanuatu Cultural Centre. They are an extract of a speech read at Specht's retirement dinner at the Australian Museum on 11 November 2000:

On behalf of all of us in Vanuatu, I would like to take this opportunity to express our most profound appreciation to you, Jim, for the work you have done over many years in support of the preservation and promotion of culture in Vanuatu... May I make the point here that the Australian Museum is the institution singularly responsible for over 90% of the items of our ancient cultural heritage that have been repatriated and now are part of our national collections. This is due significantly to Jim's vision of the meaning of cultural heritage and the role of our institutions in facilitating this meaning...

Dr Specht, through your work at the Australian Museum and with the South Pacific Cultures Fund you have left a permanent cultural legacy not just in Vanuatu but throughout the Pacific and we, our peoples, thank you.

We wish you well in your retirement and hope you will use this opportunity to visit us again—soon and frequently...

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS. Jim Specht's close colleagues, Robin Torrence and Glenn Summerhayes, and Pamela Swadling, for many years his counterpart at the Papua New Guinea National Museum, provided information, read drafts and saved us from some errors of fact and interpretation. We thank them for their help. We also thank Barry Craig, Betty Meehan, John Namuno, Paul Rainbird, Ralph Regenvanu, Jim Rhoads and Margaret Tuckson for tributes and comments they allowed us to include. Most of all, we thank Jim himself for his willingness to be interviewed and his patience in the face of the plethora of enquiries that ensued from each of us.

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