

William Davenport

CURATOR
EMERITUS,
OCEANIAN
SECTION

BY GULBUN
O'CONNOR

WILLIAM DAVENPORT DIED on March 12, 2004, in Philadelphia.

He was a great teacher and friend, and after all these years, I still feel privileged to have worked with him.

In 1963, on our way to the Solomon Islands, Bill and I met in Tahiti and traveled through Fiji

and New Caledonia together. He was going to spend the year on Santa Cruz in the eastern Solomons and I was headed to Guadalcanal to do my dissertation fieldwork on the Moro Movement. In the beginning of the year, Bill came with me to the Weather Coast on the southern part of Guadalcanal and we spent a couple of weeks visiting the villages in Moro territory.

Until then, I had only seen Bill in the classroom and around the Museum. In the field, he showed the same graciousness, humor, and empathy that he was known for in Philadelphia. He was also patient with me as I teetered on single-log bridges, kept asking if there were snakes in the many rivers we cooled off in, and expressed doubts that I would ever get anywhere with the old men we met who serenely chewed betel and seemed to pretend we were not there.

Two days before he died, Bill wanted to talk about Henri Rey [the subject of his article in this issue of *Expedition*]. We both remembered Henri and the great party he gave Bill on our last night in Tahiti. At dawn, Henri and his guests took us to the airport to see us off in true Tahitian fashion. Once we were aboard, Bill's response to the flight steward's question, "What would you like to drink?" was "I don't know if I need a martini or a toothbrush." I don't remember which one he got.



Bill made fieldwork seem effortless. Once, with our feet in some river, waiting for an informant to show up, he said, "This is called cooling your heels and you do a lot of it in the field." He clearly enjoyed the whole experience.

He was a man happy in his work. 🏠

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