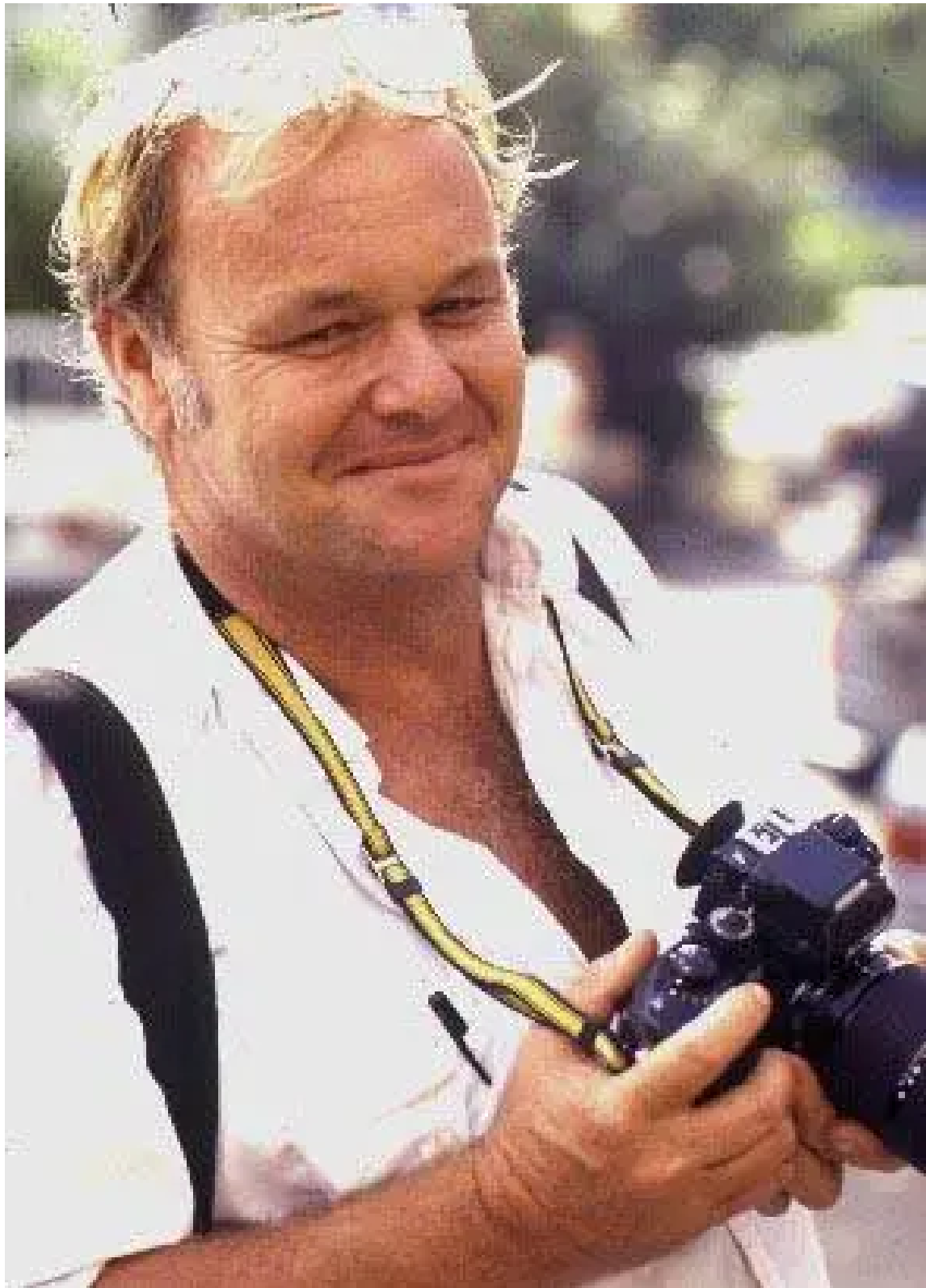


A Tribute to Tahiti's Alex du Prel (1944-2017)

By Guest Contributor - March 16, 2017



Editor's Note: Several days ago I received the news of the passing away of Alex du Prel, a renaissance man and one of the only muckraking Journalists in French Polynesia. Born in Vienna, January 15, 1944, he was very European in temperament but American by nationality. Alex led a fabled life, arriving in Tahiti on a sailboat and later becoming a veritable local institution. I got to know him best when he worked as the manager of Tetiaroa, an island resort off Tahiti that was owned by Marlon Brando. However, Alex was much more than a resort manager. He was Brando's right hand man in French Polynesia, sorting through a miasma of finance, politics and more than likely, family affairs for the iconic actor. Alex was also a journalist to be reckoned with. He founded **Tahiti Pacifique**, a monthly magazine that took on the shenanigans, incompetence, and corruption that were often synonymous with local politicians. Alex was a thoughtful, honorable guy with a conscience. He spent endless hours at his office, in reality a tumbled down shack, located in the midst of a lush rainforest on the island of Moorea. There was little money in his job and not a lot of recognition from locals. He was doing investigative journalism in French Polynesia because no one else could or would take on the powers that be. I'm told his magazine was just as, if not more, influential in Paris as in Papeete. If you wanted the inside story on what was happening in Tahiti, **Tahiti Pacifique** was really the only place to go.

This article is a translation of an obituary by **Luc Ollivier**, Editor in Chief at **Tahiti Pacifique**. We thank him for the honor of republishing it in **Hawaii Reporter**.



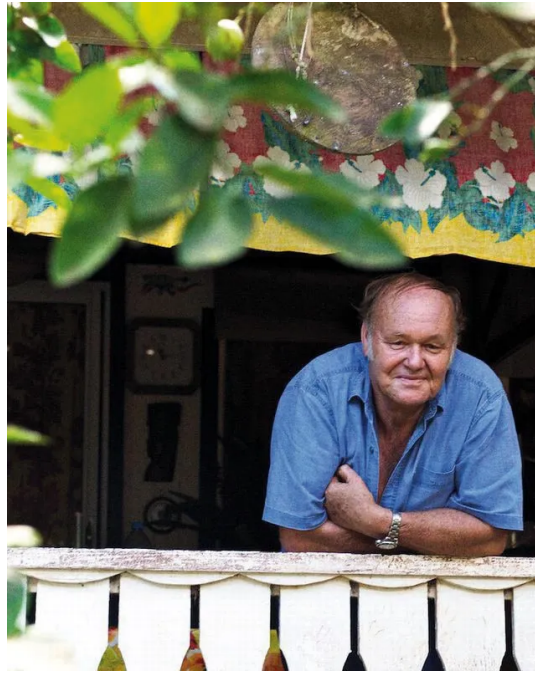
"If I succeed it is because I have a nasty temper".

This is essentially what Alex de Prel said during his last interview in August 2015 to Cédric Valax on Tahiti's Radio1 news show. This is a personal analysis that no one has ever challenged. Alexandre du Prel, passed away on Tuesday, March 14, on his island of Moorea, leaving behind a saddened family, but also thousands of friends who were entranced by the notoriety of his magazine: **Tahiti Pacific**. There are many, who may shed a tear or at the very least regret his disappearance, which will leave a great vacuum in the local journalistic microcosm.

If Alex du Prel had a big, assertive mouth, it was mainly via his writing, done in his little wooden shack above Cook's Bay in Moorea. From this perch he launched scud missiles every month since 1991 on the political and economic life of the "Great" island of Tahiti, which made him a man both feared and respected by the Tahiti establishment. His positions rarely left him an uncontroversial figure, but he was always able to defend himself.

One still remembers his editorial in the aftermath of the election of Donald Trump, which had earned him an avalanche of letters and emails.

Having arrived more than 40 years ago in French Polynesia on a sailboat that he had built, Alex du Prel came to seek an authentic way of life where simplicity and kindness were disappearing in favor of modernity.



Over the years, one man in particular would be the target of many of his attacks: Former President Gaston Flosse, who appeared in the front page of the first issue in May 1991. He would also go after figures the French administration or anything that could harm his idyllic image of French Polynesia: corrupt politicians, insufferable administrative rules, and especially all these "little chiefs", the bureaucrats who came from Paris to advise Polynesians how they should live.

He called these people the "experts".

"All my youth, I had dreamed of a place where we could live in harmony. This was Tahiti, where people spoke to each other and where the laws remained embryonic," he told French investigative reporter Gérard Davet of *Le Monde*, in 2009.

Alex was a modern day adventurer and a practitioner of 17 trades. This earned him extraordinary encounters, like the one with Marlon Brando who entrusted him with the management of his Tetiaroa atoll resort in 1987.

However, Alex decided to live a new adventure.



The surveyor, the bronzed sailor, the actor, the yacht club director turned to journalism.

Alex has his own ideas about tackling big stories but his outspokenness didn't lend itself to collaboration. His journalistic vehicle will be a monthly magazine and in this Alex could write as he saw fit. He borrowed \$6000 from a few friends, whom he planned to

reply as soon as he could (as he told me during our first interview).

His path was not easy and the process was chaotic at the beginning. He was very much alone before finding other volunteer protestors such as Bernard Poirine, Christian Beslu, Jean-Marc Regnault and many others. He was at one with his collaborators who felt as if they were prisoners of the "Flossien" regime—the government run by Gaston Flosse.

Alex had the gift of annoying Flosse (which would earn him several trials), thanks to increasingly detailed, investigative pieces and an ever-increasing number of sources who obviously wanted to remain anonymous, just like his "advertisers" who bought advertising space while telling him later not to publish the ads for fear of reprisals.



Alex would relate these kinds of anecdotes with a big smile but making a living from the publication was a challenge for his marriage. "Several times we have nothing to eat at home except a few bananas in the garden and a bowl of coffee", he told us. Despite this, Alex believed in his mission.

Alex really wanted to be absorbed in the DNA of Tahiti Pacific. With an impertinent, even irreverent tone he created a bond with his readers. He did not hesitate to share intimate moments with them, such as the time he caught an STD when he was 18 years old. In one of his last interviews, he recalled, that it would be apparent to anyone visiting his office, re-reading his articles, or watching a documentary movie made about his life, that his magazine, **Tahiti Pacifique** was paramount.

Despite his weariness and illness, he remained stoic with the main goal of ensuring the future succession of the magazine. To be honest, as he would have liked to be, sometimes written or verbal exchanges between Alex and those of us taking over the publication, were charged.

But how could it have been otherwise?

The founder, father, of **Tahiti Pacifique** had trouble with change even though he said he was not psychologically rigid. But Alex also knew how to adapt and recognized when his work was done well. Since the end of 2016, he had stopped writing, his body betrayed him but the spirit was still alive and he managed to make himself understood when he observed our team carrying out research in his archives.

Until the end Alex kept an eye on his magazine. **Tahiti Pacifique** without Alex would not be like it was before—his acerbic style was really unique and could never be imitated. However, **Tahiti Pacifique**, as it has been doing since the beginning of the year, must continue to fight.

This is a fight that only we can do. Alex's wish was that the paper continue to stand against power, money and corruption.

For these reasons, **Tahiti Pacifique** has become the leading Tahiti journal in Paris, where it is read at the Élysée, by the Prime Minister's office (as **L'Express** wrote) and the French National Assembly. This recognition made Alex proud and continues to inspire us.

The editorial staff of Tahiti Pacifique and Hawaii Reporter wishes to express its condolences to Alex' wife Célia Tepio Germain and their children, Poema Sophie and Philippe.

Photos courtesy of Luc Ollivier, *Tahiti Pacifique*

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