

Members sign on for a further year

During September, the Museum sent out membership reminders to everyone who has supported us previously.

The response to our emails has been wonderful and humbling with many members wishing to continue their support for the Museum.

Some of you have contributed as a donation, or want to support the work we're doing. While others have joined again as a way of remembering a loved one who served on Santo during WWII. Whatever your motivation for renewing your membership we say thank you, most sincerely for your support.

If you are yet to renew your membership, we hope you will again. Your support means so much to us and enables us to keep the mini Museum open. You can renew your membership on our website, at this address:

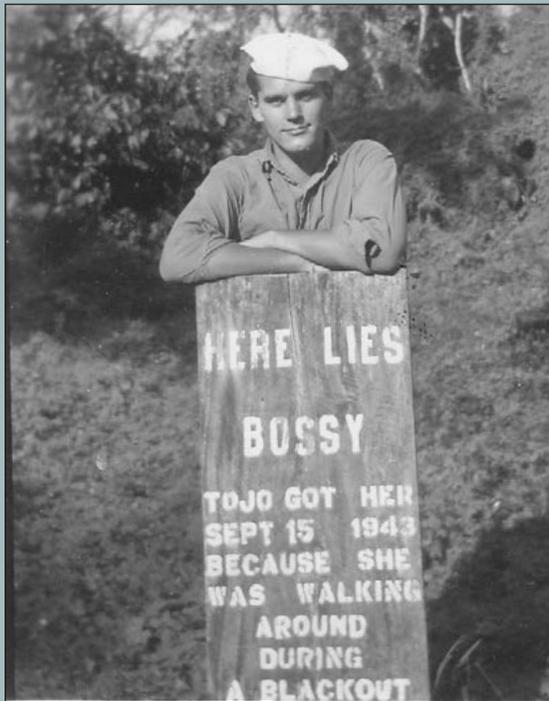
southpacificwwiimuseum.com/membership



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When the war came to Santo



The timber 'headstone' created by US Navy sailors for Bossy.

When the American's occupied Santo between 1942 and 1946, it's widely accepted by locals on Santo that the Japanese never *really* attacked the island. Infrequent shelling from the occasional Japanese submarine was about as serious as it got for the tens of thousands of personnel and Ni-Vanuatu locals on Santo.

In fact, the death of 'Bossie the cow' who was blown up late one night in one attack from a lone Japanese pilot, is the only known casualty of a Japanese aerial attack on Espiritu Santo.

However, what is not generally known, even by locals on Santo to this day, are the six attacks made by Japanese Seaplanes in 1943. Bombing raids that were intended to disable or destroy the airfields on the island.

Australian author, researcher and expert on the Pacific War, Michael Claringbould of Avonmore Books, has done extensive research on the attacks on Santo. His research, referencing both American and Japanese records, confirms the attacks and the dates they took place.

Michael has been assisting the Museum with information regarding the attacks and his research has opened up a treasure trove of information for us.

The raids

All of the raids were conducted by Japanese H8K2 'Emily' four-engine seaplanes from Shortland Harbour Seaplane Base, in the Shortland Islands, an archipelago in the Solomon Islands.



A Japanese H8K2 Emily seaplane.

The Japanese pilots maintained a pattern of departing late afternoon and returning early next morning. Japanese records contain crew names, bomb loads and other details entered in hand-written Kanji.

In total, the records show six air-raids and two reconnaissance missions took place.



Bomber #2 Airfield looking to the north east.

Air-raid 2

From US records:

Just past 2400, one or two bombers came over and dropped fourteen bombs a-straddle Bomber One, with none landing directly on the strip. Three men were wounded but no damage was done to equipment. The bombs were of the same type as before, anti-personnel and fragmentation.

From Japanese operational records:

Navy Group 851, departed Shortlands 1658, overhead Santo 2228, returned 0613, bomb load unspecified.



Aore Island's tank farm. Most likely the intended target of the raid.

Air-raid 1

From US records:

The first bombing occurred on the night of 20-21 January 1943 when one of four enemy aircraft came over dropping between eleven and eighteen Japanese type 98 general purpose bombs in the jungle about a mile southeast of Bomber Two, without doing any damage.

From Japanese operational records:

Navy Group 851 departed Shortlands 1835, overhead Santo between 0000 to 0045, returned 0610, dropped sixteen 60kg bombs.



Bomber #1 Airfield looking to the north west.

Air-raid 3

From US records:

On the night of 26-27 January 1943 again just past midnight, one bomber passed over but the weather was bad, and after circling the island let go fifteen bombs in the jungle about four miles from the west end of Aore Island, again without damage..

From Japanese operational records:

Navy Group 851, departed Shortlands 1645, overhead Santo 2325, returned 0520, bomb load 16 x 60kg bombs, fired 30 rounds of 7.7mm (one crew member thought he saw a B-17).



Bomber #2 Airfield looking south east.

Air-raid 4

From US records:

One bomber flew over and dropped six bombs. The target was Bomber Two and two of the bombs landed on Bunker #6, damaging one of our bombers. They were the 500 pound type and the resulting craters were from 10 to 12 feet deep and from 18 to 20 feet wide. Three of these bombs failed to explode.

From Japanese operational records:

Navy Group 851 departed Shortlands 1835, overhead Santo between 0000 to 0045, returned 0610, dropped sixteen 60kg bombs.

Air-raid 5

From US records:

An enemy bomber dropped five or six bombs in the Second Channel with negative results.

From Japanese operational records:

Navy Group 802, departed Shortlands 1630, over Santo 2323, returned 0737, bomb load 8 x 250kg bombs.



The Second Channel looking east. Luganville is on the left of shot.



The entrance to the US Army 25th Evacuation Hospital.

Air-raid 6

From US records:

On the night of 14-15 September, one bomber dropped flares over Pallikulo Bay and Bomber One, and also let go fourteen bombs in the jungle adjacent to the 25th Evacuation Hospital.

From Japanese operational records:

Navy Group 802, departed Shortlands 1520, no time over target, returned 0625, bomb load 16 x 60kg bombs.

False reports

Two sightings are from US records however they are likely false sightings as no Japanese records correlate with either sighting:

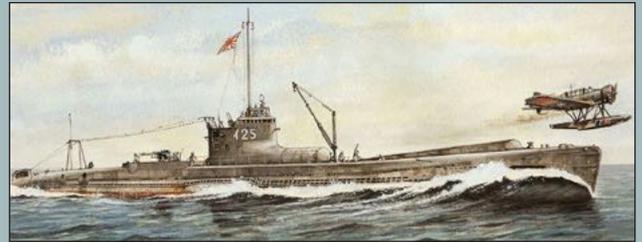
On 10 August 1943 a small reconnaissance plane flew over Pallikulo Bay, Segond Channel and Bomber One. It was assumed that it had come from a submarine.

Then on the morning of 24 August another such plane flew over the strip and Segond Channel.

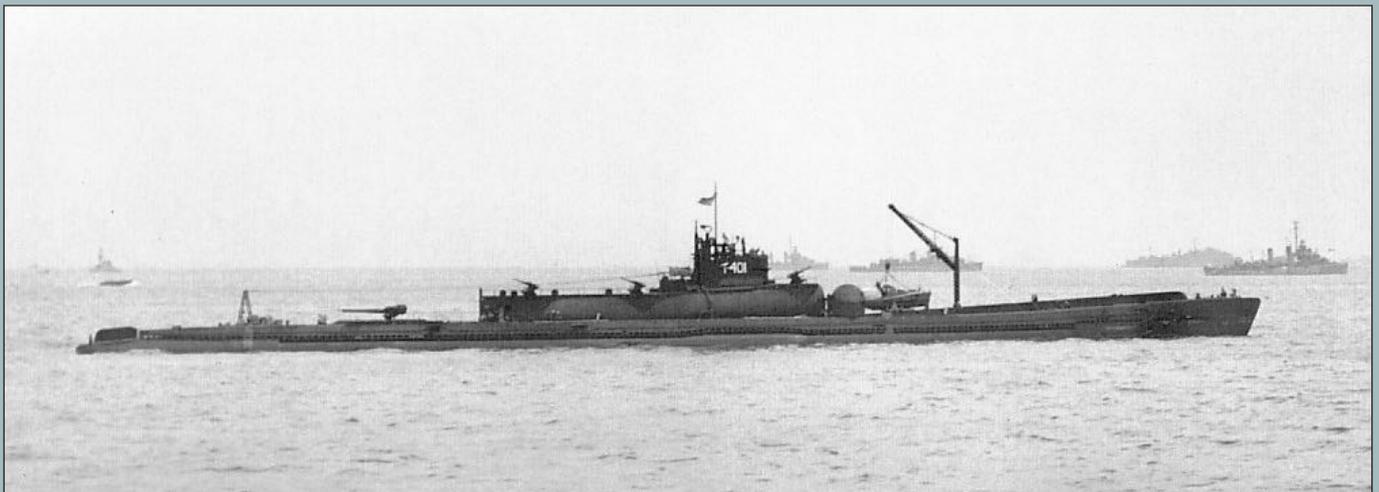
Six attacks and two reconnaissance flights, that almost nobody knew existed.

In some small way, these attacks will rewrite the history of the war on Santo. What we find astonishing, is that these incidents are not more widely known by locals on Santo today.

All the more reason for the Museum to continue educating generations of Ni-Vanuatu people about the history of their beautiful island and the crucial role it and their ancestors played during the Pacific War.



The Japanese B1 type submarine saw service throughout WWII. They carried a single floatplane with folding wings that was stored in the small hangar under the conning tower.



The huge Japanese I-400 Series submarine, could hold three aircraft with folded wings in the large hangar under the conning tower. It was part of a plan by the Japanese to attack the United States with what became known as an 'underwater aircraft carrier'. These mammoth submarines were 122 metres (400feet) long and displaced over 6,500 tons submerged. The war ended before many 400s were built and Japan's plan put in motion.

What was the BRU?

New photo collection sheds light on a little known Santo area.

Early in 2019, Museum member Teri Ellerbe visited the Museum with her husband as she retraced her father's footsteps during WWII. In fact we ran a story on Teri back in our April 2019 edition of the newsletter.

While we knew her father Harold had been stationed with the Boat Repair Unit (BRU) not far from the Museum, we'd never seen shots of the BRU, apart from an aerial shot in the US Archives.

However, recently Teri asked us whether we would like copies of some photos her father took of the BRU during his time on Santo.



The 100 ton crane at the Boat Repair Unit, used for lifting boats out of the water for maintenance and repair.



Tank Lighters beached at the Boat Repair Unit.

Not only that, Harold also took photographs of local Ni-Vanuatu villagers somewhere in the mountains on Santo. We're not sure of the exact location where the shots were taken, however they're an important record of traditional life on Santo during the Pacific War.

Of course we were delighted to accept Teri's offer and she kindly scanned the photos and sent them to us.

The photographs will be kept together and named the Harold F Rhone Collection in honour of Teri's father.

Thank you Teri for shedding new light on another important aspect of the base here on Santo.

If you would like to donate photographs, memorabilia or any other items to the Museum, please get in touch with us. We can be reached via email at:

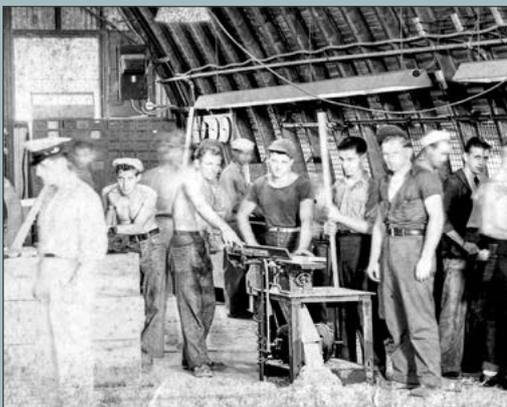
info@southpacificwwiimuseum.com



Unknown Ni-Vanuatu villagers somewhere on Santo.



A lighter is lifted onto the wharf for maintenance at the BRU.



The Construction and Repair Shop at the BRU on Santo.



An unknown villager somewhere on Santo's coast.



More landing craft being craned out of the water at BRU for repairs.

Barnstorming a Lancaster

WWII features its fair share of tall tales and stories too good to be true. While it might not be directly related to the Pacific War, this wartime story is up there with the best of them - because it was true.

It took place in Australia. Sydney to be exact, in October 1943 and involved a brand new Lancaster bomber and the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

You can probably guess where this is going. However, to put this story into some context we need to go back a little to its beginning.



The classic Avro Lancaster. This one flies with the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight and is one of only two left flying today. Photo: BBMF.



RAF pilot, Peter Isaacson.

The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) had plans to build Lancaster bombers in Australia under licence with the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation in Victoria. The plan never went ahead and the war ended before any aircraft could be built. However, that didn't stop the RAAF flying a Lancaster to the other side of the world in the middle of the war for evaluation purposes and a promotional tour.

'Q for Queenie' was the RAAF's first and only Lancaster. She was flown to Australia from England in May 1943 and was to fly around Australia and New Zealand on a goodwill mission to encourage Australians to buy War Bonds.

The pilot selected to make the remarkable journey was a young pilot by the name of Peter Isaacson. Isaacson completed 45 sorties with RAF Bomber Command in the UK, when the likelihood of surviving an operational tour of thirty missions was never more than 50%.



Isaacson and the crew of Q for Queenie.

He was chosen in May 1943 to captain Lancaster Q for Queenie on the flight from England to Australia, then from Melbourne to New Zealand and back, non-stop in both directions.

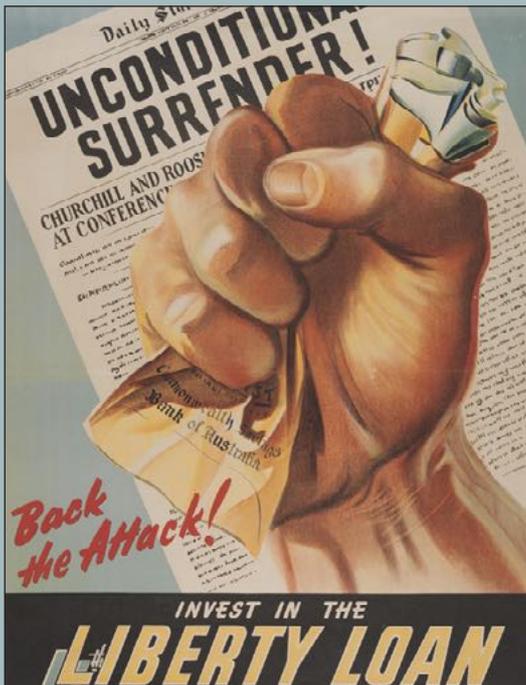
Isaacson was awarded the Air Force Cross in August 1943 for this mission, the citation noting that it was *"the first occasion on which an aircraft has flown to Australia by this route and the direct flights between Melbourne and New Zealand are the first of their kind"*.

On October 5, 1943, Q for Queenie took off on the 4th Liberty Loan Tour of Tasmania, Victoria and New South Wales, including a circuits above Sydney.

On October 22, the big Lancaster was making slow lumbering passes over Australia's largest city, dropping thousands of leaflets to Sydneysiders, encouraging them to contribute to the War Bond fund raising effort.

With Isaacson at the controls, impulsiveness got the better of him and he decided to do something that would go down in the history books. A feat none of his crew knew about until it was over.

The Lancaster was known for its ability to fly smoothly and consistently at low level. The dam buster raids in May of that same year had proven that and Isaacson, being an experienced Lancaster pilot, was about to do something not dissimilar.



A wartime poster for the Liberty Loan scheme. Photo: AWM



Peter Isaacson's 'target' for his run over Sydney Harbour. The famous Harbour Bridge.

He flew Queenie out over Sydney Harbour to the east before making a turn somewhere adjacent to Point Piper to line it up with his target for the run, the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Dropping down to an altitude that would have ordinarily sliced the masts of the yachts that sail the harbour, he headed for the 503 metre (1,650 feet) bridge span.

The Lancaster passed under the road deck and into aviation history as the largest aircraft to have ever flown under the Sydney Harbour Bridge - a clearance of only 49 metres (161 feet) from the deck to the water.



As Isaacson's flight was unplanned, photographers were not on hand to catch it. Except for one. This is the only known photo of Queenie flying under the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Isaacson's "stunt" flouted a 1931 regulation that prohibited aircraft from flying under the bridge. So it was no wonder that when the aircraft landed at Mascot airport in Sydney following the flight, Isaacson was threatened with a court martial from two separate authorities. Eastern Area in which the 'crime' was committed and Southern Command to which he was attached at the time of the offence. According to Isaacson, there was quite a fight between the two authorities as to who had the authority to bring the charges. So much so, in the end they gave up. Or were they encouraged to let the matter drop?

Isaacson gave his crew no warning of what he was about to do and when asked later why he did it, replied "because it was there". It was, however, reported at

the time that he undertook the stunt to support the war loan effort for which he and his crew were actively fund raising. In fact the media claimed "he did it for the £iberty £oan!"

The publicity generated by the stunt for war loans was astonishing. So would anyone have the resolve to court-martial Isaacson, just for doing his job? The answer was no, and nothing more came of the famous flight.

Four days after the stunt, Q for Queenie was involved in a ground accident at Evans Head in northern New South Wales. On October 26 1943, Queenie's port undercarriage collapsed when Peter Isaacson, was bringing the Lancaster in to land, causing extensive damage to the landing gear and the aircraft's outside port engine.

The repairs took 9 months to complete and at a cost of an unbelievable £100,000. It was the most expensive repair bill in RAAF history.

Following the repairs, RAAF pilot Peter Isaacson and his crew once again took to the skies in Queenie. She went on to fly to New Zealand once more and raised a phenomenal £5 million from the Kiwis.

Isaacson rose to the rank of Wing Commander and went on to instructional duties at an operational training unit and even did another tour with Queenie later in the war. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM), Air Force Cross (AFC), Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) and later in life, made a Member of the Order of Australia.

Post war, he set up his first newspaper in 1947 and went on to run one of Australia's most successful publishing empires. He passed away on April 7, 2017 in the Melbourne suburb of Toorak.

THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

A flight into mystery

One of the ironies of the last days of any war are that people continue to die. In this case, the loss came after the Pacific War had barely been over for a month and would have come as a terrible shock to family expecting to welcome their loved ones home.

On 24 September 1945, the RNZAF suffered its largest loss of life in one day when Dakota NZ3526 disappeared on its way home from the Pacific islands.

The aircraft from No. 40 Squadron took off from Bomber #1 (Pallikulo Field) on Espiritu Santo at 5.30am, bound for Whenuapai, the RNZAF base in Auckland, New Zealand.



Dakota NZ3526. Photo Medals Reunited website.

On board were four crew and 16 passengers, all New Zealand airmen returning home from active service. At 9.06am, NZ3526 sent out a 'standby, standby' message, but radio contact was then lost.

Despite a large-scale search by Catalina, Dakota, Hudson and Liberator aircraft over several days, nothing more was heard or seen of NZ3526 or its crew and passengers.

The most likely explanation is that the Dakota suffered a catastrophic structural failure in turbulent air conditions, similar to weather described by an aircraft following 25 minutes behind, which was forced to climb to avoid the turbulence.

No trace has ever been found of NZ3526 or the personnel on board, and they are commemorated on the Bourail Memorial in New Caledonia.

You can learn more about the incident and the story of one of the crewmen at the excellent Medals Reunited New Zealand website at bit.ly/3mbFvQS



A RNZAF Dakota unloads at Bomber # 1 on Santo during WWII.

Inspiring everyday heroes

Christelle Crowby is leading the way for female farmers in Vanuatu, through a new program designed to assist

Christelle is not long back from Australia where she worked as part of the Seasonal Worker Programme from 2019.

She was born into a family of farmers, and has carried on the tradition to become a certified farmer, managing her land at Snake Hill.

The Yumi Growem Vanuatu program, with Australian government support, aims to build the financial literacy, business and entrepreneurial skills of returned seasonal workers who are running a small business.

Christelle will be passing on her new skills to her all-female team.



Australian High Commissioner, Sarah deZoeten, is pictured with Christelle Crowby. Picture courtesy Australian High Commission, Vanuatu.

agricultural entrepreneurs just like her.

She's the only female farmer in the first group of Yumi Growem Vanuatu entrepreneurs.

We wish Christelle the very best of luck with her farm.

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



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