

South Pacific WWII Museum

Subscribers newsletter

southpacificwwiimuseum.com

December 2021

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Museum investigates mystery airfield.

A recent email from Museum member Robert Bradley, has resulted in the South Pacific WWII Museum learning of another previously unknown airfield on Espiritu Santo.

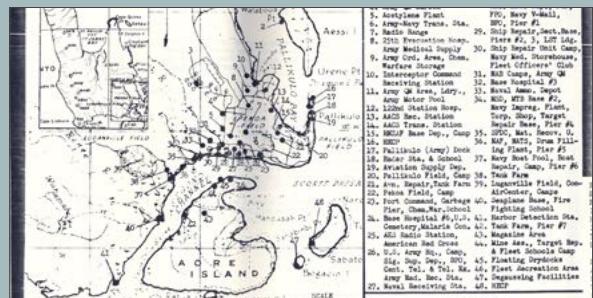
The airfield appeared as the result of a map Robert thought we might be interested in. We had seen another version of the exact same map before, however this version had the words 'Sandberg Field' on it, and an arrow pointing south west past the Seaplane base, which was located to the west of Luganville.

We checked all the detailed maps we have in our collection and the airfield is not marked on any of them. However, the US Army Aviation Museum had a photo of it. The shot clearly shows a palm tree lined runway with two L-4 cubs on it. It is captioned, "L-4 Cubs on Sandberg Field, Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, 1943."

We love new discoveries and this one will certainly rewrite the WWII history of Santo and no doubt keep us occupied well into the New Year.



Sandberg Field on Santo, presumably looking south east. Photo US Army Aviation Museum.



No sign of Sanberg Field on this map from December 1944.



And no mention of Sandberg Field on this very detailed map from Museum member Mike Lechwar, dated 1943.

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New acquisitions

Museum purchases new ephemera.

During the month, the Museum added to its collection with a few small but important pieces of Santo history.

For those of you who are museum members, you would have received our quarterly 'Santonian' magazine, named in honour of the Base Button newsletter published during WWII.

We have managed to purchase an original copy of the Santonian dated October 17, 1944. It's a combination of trivial and serious news, sports results, comics and news from home.



A copy of the Santonian from October 17, 1944. A fascinating insight into life on Base Button during the Second World War.

There's even a film guide for the nine theatres on the island at the time, including one we never knew existed at the PT-Boat base where the Museum will be constructed.

The Museum has also secured a collection of six menus from the SS President Coolidge, not long before it was acquired by the US War Shipping Administration and converted into a troop transport.

Interestingly the Coolidge served as both an occasional troop transport/evacuation ship and passenger liner from June 1941. However, these menus

| THE SANTONIAN AMUSEMENTS | | |
|---|---|---|
| MOVIE CALENDAR | ANNEX | AVIATION OVERHAUL |
| SUN. A. M. TUESDAY ROUTE OF DIXIE DAVID BRUCE-Jerome Cowan | THURSDAY SEVEN DAYS AMERICA Wally Brown-Lila Garsay | THURSDAY WINGED MAN William Boyd-Audy Clyde |
| Wednesday THIS IS THE LIFE Robert Wayne-Victor Varconi | Wednesday MAGICAL WORLD Jack Carson-Jane Wyman | Wednesday THIS IS THE LIFE Donald O'Connor-Peggy Ryan |
| Thursday COURA WOMAN David Bowes-Lyon Hall | Thursday THE GIRL IN THE GATE Edward Lowe-Jackie Carter | Thursday HE'S A SOLDIER, TOO Deborah Kerr-Mills Poch |
| Friday THE STORY OF DR. MARCHAL Gary Cooper-Lorraine Day | Friday CHINA GIRL Gene Tierney-George Montgomery | Friday GILDED LILY'S GHOST Oscar Homolka |
| 1000th RAAF HOSPITAL THREE | | |
| TUESDAY THIS IS THE LIFE Donald O'Connor-Peggy Ryan | THURSDAY FOLLOW THE BAND Leslie Arden-Mary Beth Hughes | THURSDAY RAFFIA PARADE Gale Sondergaard-Billie Dove |
| Wednesday WINGED MAN William Boyd-Audy Clyde | Wednesday MAGICAL WORLD Donald O'Connor-Peggy Ryan | Wednesday SWEETHEARTS Paul Lukas-Carl Simon |
| Thursday THIS IS THE LIFE Donald O'Connor-Peggy Ryan | Thursday SEVEN DAYS PARADE Gale Sondergaard-Billie Dove | Thursday ROUTE OF DIXIE David Bruce-Jerome Cowan |
| Friday HE'S A SOLDIER, TOO Deborah Kerr-Mills Poch | Friday ADMIRAL CLEMENS Peter Lorre-Carl Esmond | Friday THIS IS THE LIFE Robert Wayne-Victor Varconi |
| NAVAL COMMAND RAAF HOSPITAL SIX | | |
| TUESDAY THE STORY OF DR. MARCHAL Gary Cooper-Lorraine Day | THURSDAY THIS IS THE LIFE Donald O'Connor-Peggy Ryan | THURSDAY MEET THE PEOPLE Dick Powell-Leslie Hall |
| Wednesday SEVEN DAYS AMERICA Wally Brown-Lila Garsay | Wednesday HE'S A SOLDIER, TOO Deborah Kerr-Mills Poch | Wednesday LOVING PARADE Doris Day-Ronald Colman |
| Thursday ROUTE OF DIXIE David Bowes-Lyon Hall | Thursday GILDED LILY'S GHOST Oscar Homolka | Thursday HOW TO GET A GIRL John Wayne |

Nine cinemas provided personnel with a selection of latest release movies from back home.

are from her cruise in August 1941. In early 1942 the Coolidge was officially converted into a troopship, fitted with anti-aircraft guns and painted 'Navy Grey'. So the menus are from that overlap period where she was fulfilling dual civilian and military roles.

The Santonian and the Coolidge menus will go on display in the Museum just as soon as we can get them up to Vanuatu.



Six menus from the SS President Coolidge were purchased from a collector in the USA. They're in beautiful condition.

THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

A pile of bricks

This month's piece of history is quite a big one – and at first glance, you might query what it has to do with the Second War and war in the Pacific.

It's December 2, 1942, and the first successful test anywhere in the world of a nuclear chain reaction was conducted by Enrico Fermi at the University of Chicago.

At about that time, the US Marines, Army and Navy – although it was not immediately obvious – had won the Guadalcanal campaign, and set Japan on an irreversible course to defeat.

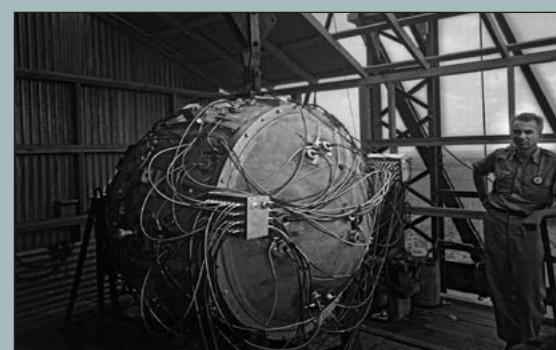


US Marines are kept busy loading material into Higgins boats on the beach at Guadalcanal, as they prepare to leave the tropical island.

To those fighting in the jungles of the Solomons, and supporting them from the New Hebrides, the very idea of a nuclear bomb would have been inconceivable.

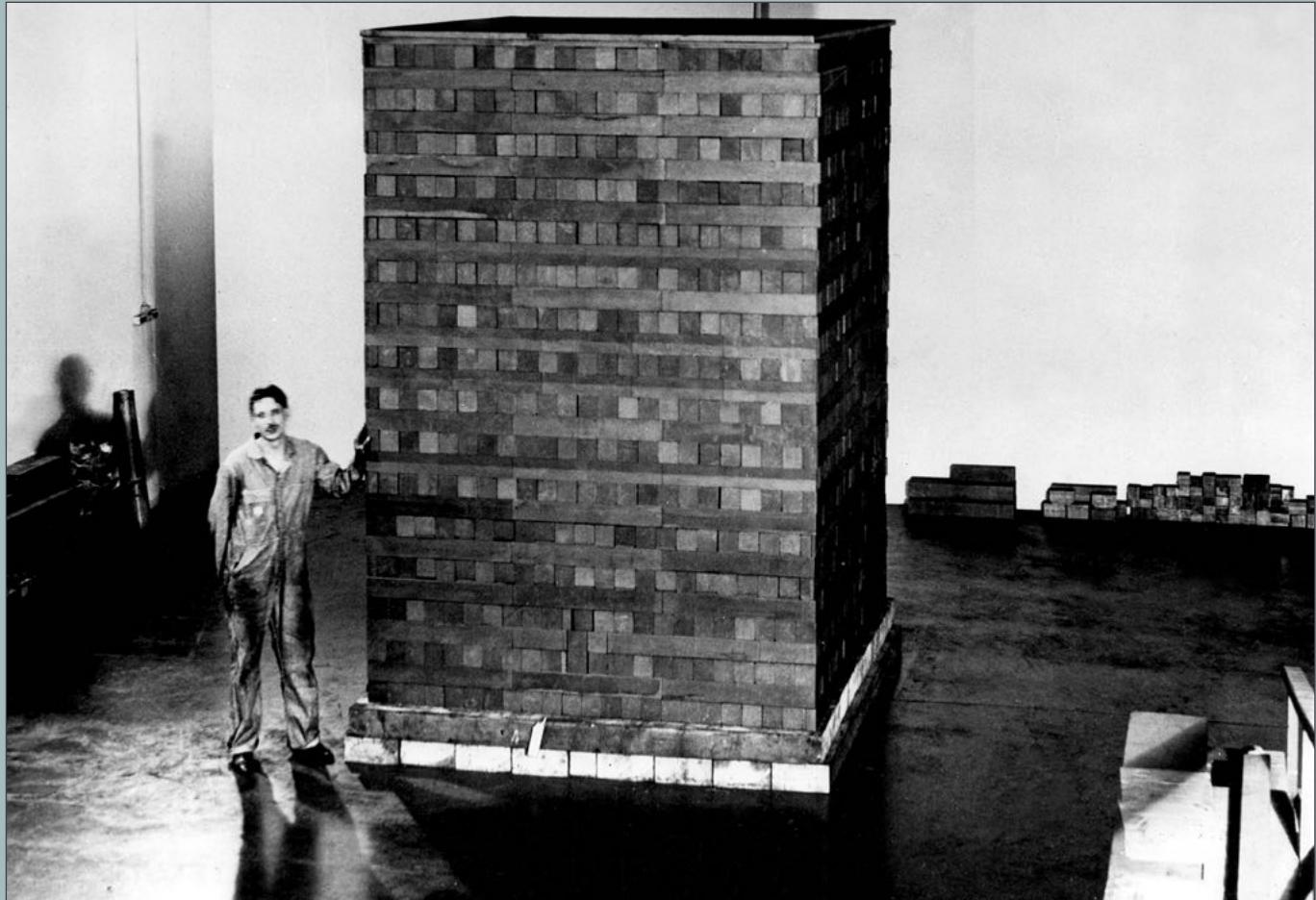
Yet for more than a few of those young men and women, the top secret work going on in the United States, in the Manhattan Project, would change their lives – and those of everyone around the world.

(continued...)



The result of the work done at the University of Chicago. The assembled implosion "gadget" of the Trinity test, July 1945.
Source: Los Alamos National Laboratory.

And while it wasn't the initial goal of the US Pacific War strategy, ultimately all those islands taken and lives sacrificed meant that In August 1945, American bombers flying from the Mariana islands would usher in the terrible age of nuclear weapons with the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.



It all really began then – amazingly less than three years earlier – with the University of Chicago test using CP-1. That was short for Chicago Pile-1, the first human-made self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction.

Fermi described the reactor as "a crude pile of black bricks and wooden timbers".

Developed by the Metallurgical Laboratory at the University, it was built under the west viewing stands of the original Stagg Field. Although the project's civilian and military leaders had misgivings about the possibility of a disastrous runaway reaction, they trusted Fermi's safety calculations and decided they could carry out the experiment in a densely populated area. The rest, as they say, is history.

CP-1 and its lattice of graphite blocks assembled beneath the football stadium at the University of Chicago.



Stagg Field at the University of Chicago. CP-1 was constructed in a disused area under the grandstand.

A letter from the Chairman



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December 31, 2021

Hello everyone,

As another year comes to a close, I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you all for your support for the South Pacific WWII Museum throughout 2021.

It's been another difficult year for pretty much every tourism operator in Vanuatu. However, in the case of the Museum, our fantastic Museum Board guided us through the ups and downs and we are going into the new year with a great deal of confidence and renewed passion.

To all of you who follow us, subscribe to us, post on our social media or just stop in now and then to see what's new, we very much appreciate the interest every one of you has shown for the Museum project. I very much hope you'll continue supporting us in 2022.

To our Navara sponsors and their representatives - Bank South Pacific, Vodafone, Air Vanuatu, LCM, Henry Cumines, Tropex Exports, the Thiele boys and Bob Hill - we couldn't have kept going without your help. Thank you to each of you and your respective companies for your continued support.

I'd especially like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to Rosemary and Richard Lo from LCM. Your support in 2021, including the generous donation of the WWII bank vault door to the Museum, was deeply appreciated.

To all the donors who contributed to our fundraiser at the beginning of the year, those of you who purchased items from our Bigfala Sale and the visitors who contributed to our donations boxes at the Museum, airport and the 'Tu', a huge thank you to every one of you too.

I would also like to express my gratitude to those who donated items to our collection. From photos, letters and other ephemera, to very personal items and souvenirs from family members who served on Santo and even the SS President Coolidge. I cannot thank you enough for your generosity.

Lastly, I would like to thank our Board - Bill, Mayumi, Mary, Rayman and Jimmy, as well as Lengkon and Marina at the Museum, for all your hard work. I know it hasn't been an easy year for us, but thanks to your hard work, we're going into 2022 in great shape, with some very exciting plans in store.

Take care and we look forward to hopefully seeing you in Santo in the very near future.

Tankio tumas,

Bradley Wood
Chairman
South Pacific WWII Museum

A Quonset hut or a Nissen hut?

Espiritu Santo is known throughout the world for, amongst other things, the number of World War II buildings still standing today, despite 80 years of earthquakes, cyclones and a harsh salty environment.



One of the many surviving Quonset huts in Luganville, Espiritu Santo.

Yet even after all that time, those distinctive semi-circular buildings are still sometimes referred to as 'Nissen' huts. While the Nissen hut featured a similar curved roof design, and indeed some were built on Santo, the bulk of the buildings were of a more familiar name.



A British Nissen Hut on the left, features an almost squat design when compared to a Quonset hut on the right. Photo: 390th.org

During World War II, the U.S. Navy had a requirement for a building that was light, could be easily transported, assembled by a 10-man crew in one day - using only hand tools, was available in a range of sizes and could withstand the rigors of military life. Quite a list of requirements. However, in 1941, the requirements were more than met and the 'Quonset' hut was created.

Amazingly, when dismantled, the Quonset hut was lighter and took up less space than the canvas tents with wooden frames that it essentially replaced. (continued...)



Nissen talking to Acting Coy. Sgt. Major Frederick TE Skinn, 29th (Advanced Park) Coy. Royal Engineers, in front of a Nissen hut in 1917.

It was based on the original British Nissen hut that had been developed by the English military 25 years prior. However, the American version had to be redesigned and renamed, as the inventor of the British version, Lt. Colonel Peter Nissen, a Canadian officer in the Royal Engineers during World War 1, held a number of international patents.

The Quonset derived its name from the location it was first built, the Davisville Naval Construction Battalion Centre at Quonset Point, Rhode Island. Strategically it was the perfect location, as the nearby Construction Battalion Centre was creating Quonsets for the adjacent Advanced Base Depot for shipment around the world - including Espiritu Santo.

| Components | | Title | Number required | Total officers | Total men | Appropriated funds | Appropriated supplies | Pct. of total |
|--------------------------|--|-------|-----------------|----------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| Code | | | | | | | | |
| STANDARD LION | | | | | | | | |
| D13.0..... | Cobbler and Tailor Shop (Large)..... | 1 | 0 | 11 | 70 | 125 | 61 | |
| D20.0..... | Diamond Wire Fence (Large)..... | 2 | 6 | 62 | 56 | 54 | 58 | |
| H1.0..... | Ship Repair (General)..... | 1 | 22 | 720 | 8,700 | 7,500 | 66 | |
| H2.0..... | Shoe Repair (General)..... | 1 | 2 | 24 | 40 | 40 | 75 | |
| H3.0..... | Acetylene Generating Plant..... | 1 | 0 | 9 | 100 | 240 | 77 | |
| H19.0..... | Typewriter Repair..... | 2 | 0 | 2 | 14 | 20 | 77 | |
| G2.0..... | Dispensary—200 Men..... | 1 | 20 | 20 | 1,800 | 3,000 | 82 | |
| G3.0..... | Dispensary—100 Men Bed..... | 1 | 12 | 12 | 150 | 200 | 85 | |
| G13.0..... | Sub-Dispensary Dental..... | 4 | 4 | 4 | 18 | 86 | | |
| G15.0..... | Prosthetic Laboratory..... | 1 | 1 | 3 | 15 | 38 | 98 | |
| H17A.0..... | Photo Laboratory (Large)..... | 1 | 1 | 0 | 14 | 59 | 103 | |
| J1.0..... | Base Ordnance Shop..... | 1 | 1 | 15 | 100 | 255 | 109 | |
| J2.0..... | Base Gun Cleaning Shop..... | 2 | 2 | 40 | 40 | 40 | 100 | |
| J3.0..... | Ammunition..... | 1 | 1 | 12 | 7 | 7 | 110 | |
| J3D.0..... | Standard Magazine..... | 1 | 0 | 0 | 205 | 157 | 110 | |
| J4.0..... | Gasoline..... | 1 | 1 | 1 | 12 | 37 | 111 | |
| J4B.0..... | Mine Disposal..... | 1 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 30 | 111 | |
| J4C.0..... | Base Demolition..... | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 8 | 111 | |
| J5.0..... | Torpedo Depot (Medium)..... | 1 | 2 | 48 | 200 | 200 | 112 | |
| J6.0..... | Base Engineering Shop..... | 1 | 1 | 8 | 40 | 15 | 117A | |
| J10.0..... | Fire Control Shop..... | 1 | 1 | 44 | 50 | 130 | 117A | |
| J12A.0..... | Net Compound (Large)..... | 1 | 2 | 27 | 80 | 16,900 | 120 | |
| J12B.0..... | Net Compound (Small)..... | 1 | 2 | 27 | 120 | 120 | 121 | |
| J13A.0..... | Personal Equipment for Enlisted..... | 28 | 0 | 55 | 308 | 125 | | |
| J13B.0..... | Personal Equipment for Officers..... | 210 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 125 | |
| STANDARD LION—Continued | | | | | | | | |
| N1A.0..... | Camp (50 Men)—Tents..... | 2 | 0 | 50 | 450 | 940 | 127 | |
| N2A.0..... | Camp (100 Men)—Tents..... | 3 | 0 | 42 | 417 | 816 | 159 | |
| N3A.0..... | Camp (150 Men)—Tents..... | 3 | 0 | 24 | 240 | 570 | 130 | |
| N4A.0..... | Camp (250 Men)—Tents..... | 3 | 0 | 6 | 142 | 298 | 131 | |
| N6A.0..... | Bakery (3,000 Men)..... | 1 | 0 | 15 | 35 | 49 | 156 | |
| N7A.0..... | Meat (10,000 Men)..... | 3 | 0 | 102 | 300 | 8,184 | 144 | |
| N9.0..... | Base Encrescent (100 Men)..... | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1,173 | 1,878 | 335 | |
| N10.0..... | Educational Services (Large)..... | 1 | 2 | 0 | 25 | 40 | 127 | |
| P2.0..... | Construction Equipment (Large)..... | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1,155 | 3,948 | 141 | |
| P5.0..... | Base Maintenance and Supply (Large)..... | 2 | 14 | 540 | 9,000 | 2,800 | 142 | |
| P6.0..... | Wooden Piers..... | 2 | 0 | 0 | 40 | 40 | 143 | |
| P9.0..... | Wooden Pier..... | 4 | 0 | 0 | 2,322 | 4,290 | | |
| P12A.0..... | Fire Protection—Build..... | 8 | 1 | 8 | 80 | 210 | 145 | |
| P12B.0..... | Fire Protection—Equipment..... | 2 | 0 | 0 | 30 | 30 | 147 | |
| P12C.0..... | Fire Protection—Piping..... | 2 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 20 | 147 | |
| P13.0..... | Pre-Embarkation (100 Men)..... | 1 | 0 | 0 | 350 | 400 | 148 | |
| Q2.0..... | Pre-Embarkation (100 Men)..... | 36 | 0 | 0 | 36 | 108 | 149 | |
| LION totals | | | | | | | | |
| P1.0..... | Construction Battalion (Medium)..... | 220 | 8,684 | 32,454 | 107,720 | | | |
| P1.0..... | Construction Battalion (Large)..... | 34 | 1,054 | 1,880 | 3,500 | 81 | | |
| P1.0..... | Construction Battalion (Regt.)..... | 116 | 3,797 | 6,773 | 18,193 | 140 | | |
| LION and CB's total..... | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | 275 | 8,345 | 86,127 | 129,423 |

From the Catalogue of Advanced Base Functional Components. The Lion Advanced Base and its major components - all 107,730 tons of it.

Called an Advanced Base LION, the portable base was transported and assembled on Santo by US Navy Seabees, thereby creating a large proportion of what was to be named 'Base Button' on the island.

So what was a LION?

Think of LIONS and the smaller CUBs and ACORNS as IKEA for the military. Pre-prepared, flat pack bases that were packaged up and ready to be shipped with Navy Construction Battalions all over the world. (continued..)



A truck, part of a LION component, being unloaded in Santo.

It was quite an astounding exercise in logistics to bring all the elements together which included everything you could possibly think of to build a large town.

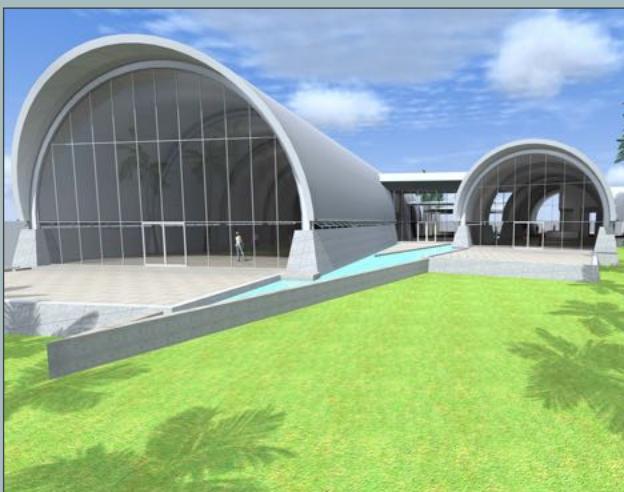
From the construction nails, timber, tools and vehicles to erect the buildings to the office chairs, filing cabinets and typewriters to go in them. However, this description simply doesn't do the LION justice when you consider the sheer scale of it.

In fact, a standard LION with its hundreds thousands of components weighed in at an astounding 107,730 tons and sometimes took months to unload - depending upon the port facilities at the time.

Lion One quite literally transformed the once sparsely populated southeast corner of Santo into a sizeable town or more correctly speaking, a city. In fact the US



Quonset warehouses line the shore in what is now the town of Luganville.



The proposed South Pacific WWII Museum is heavily influenced by the classic Quonset design.

Military erected more than 3174 Quonset huts, Dallas huts, New Zealand huts, SSAR huts and other buildings, 1236 tents, and 165 magazines to house military operations!

In total between 1941 and 1945, the U.S. military mass-produced more than 150,000 Quonset huts, that were shipped and erected in theatres of war worldwide.

Today many of those Quonset huts are still used for a myriad of different applications in and around Luganville. Some are used for storage, others as automotive workshops and garages to store vehicles.

Of course, it's the Quonset that forms the basis of the design for the future South Pacific WWII Museum. Stage 1 of which will be revealed in coming months!

Inspiring everyday heroes

Vanuatu is a big place – not only that, it is spread across many different islands with many people living days away from a settlement.



Volunteers at work to get people vaccinated. Picture courtesy of the Vanuatu Daily Post.

That's made the country's covid-19 vaccination programme even more challenging.

That's where this month's Inspiring Everyday Heroes step in.

They are more than 50 volunteers working for the Vanuatu Red Cross Society in the provinces of Torba, Malampa and Tafea.

The group has been recruited by the Society and then trained by the Ministry of Health to assist medical

health teams in each province.

A high number of volunteers were recruited by the National Society and trained by the Ministry of Health to assist the Medical Health team in their respective provinces.

TORBA's Provincial Health Center Administrator, Steven Nako told the Vanuatu Daily Post that Red Cross help had been instrumental in the rollout across five different islands.

He says the volunteers already know the local community they are working with, so have been in charge of providing information, registering people, and doing the paperwork once they are vaccinated. As an example, volunteers were part of the mobile health team deployed in Motalava, Gaua, Merelava, Torres, Vanualava, and Ureparapara with a target to ensure nearly 6200 people are vaccinated.

Volunteers have to travel long distances by vehicle, boat and walk from village to village, and house to house, but say they enjoyed it because it is a great experience.

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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