SOUTH PACIFIC WWII MUSEUM

South Pacific WWII Museum

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Donna makes our Day.

Lendy Joel from Torres in the Banks Islands further up north, was working construction just above the Million Dollar Point area, when he came across a dog tag - but not your regular WWII dog tag.

This particular dog tag pre-dates World War II and is very simple in its design. On one side is the person's name and country and on the reverse, their service number.

This one was definitely a job for our very clever WWII historian in the United States, Donna Esposito. She agreed the dog tag was of the type that was issued between the wars. When however, would take some digging.

Yet, within 24 hours Donna had some great news for us. She had found the records of one Kenneth Eugene Day. It turns out Kenneth was born on November 2, 1921 in Pottsville, Pennsylvania to

Edmond R. and Carrie (Miller) Day. He was one of five children, with two older sisters, an older brother, and a younger brother Arlen Day (born 1931), who appears to still be alive. (continued...)

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His father was a painter and paperhanger and Kenneth attended Pottsville High School for three years before leaving to enlist in the Army Air Corps on November 7, 1939, just after his 18th birthday.

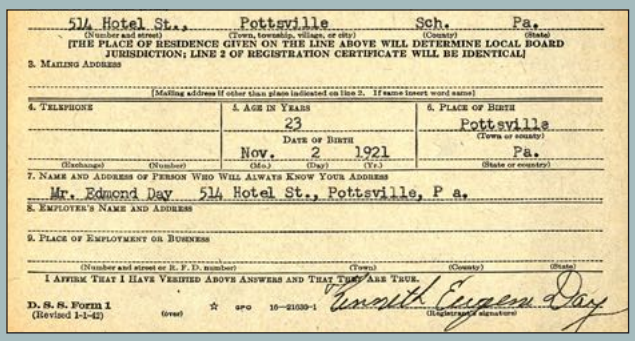
During WWII, Kenneth rose to the rank of Staff Sergeant and served as a refuelling operator with the 11th Bombardment Group in Hawaii, Fiji, New Caledonia, New Hebrides, Solomon Islands and New Guinea.

He married Gladys Williams, who served as a WAC, and they had a daughter Sheila in 1944. Sheila only recently passed away in November 2021.

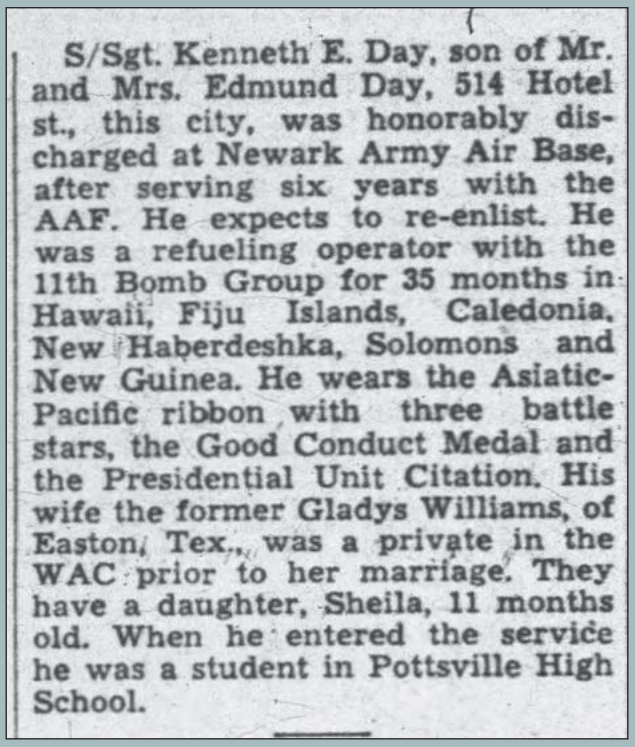
Kenneth was discharged and re-enlisted in the Army Air Forces in October 1945 and remained in the Air Force at least through 1950, serving with 373rd Reconnaissance Squadron, (VRL) Weather, at Kindley Air Force Base, Bermuda. He retired with the rank of Master Sergeant. Kenneth passed away in 2007 and is interred at the Southern Nevada Veterans Memorial Cemetery.

Unfortunately Donna hasn't been able to locate a photo of Kenneth. However she believes she has located his granddaughter and his brother. While he is now 90, he or indeed his granddaughter might be able to fill in a few blanks and provide us with a photo of Kenneth. We'll let you know how we go in future newsletters.

The dog tag was found by Lendy Joel just north of Million Dollar Point.


514 Hotel St., Pottsville, Sch., Pa.
(Number and street) (Town, township, village, or city) (County) (State)
[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]
3. Mailing Address
[Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If same insert word same]
4. Telephone
5. Age in Years: 23
Date of Birth: Nov. 2 1921
(Mo.) (Day) (Yr.)
6. Place of Birth: Pottsville (Town or county), Pa. (State or country)
7. Name and Address of Person Who Will Always Know Your Address: Mr. Edmond Day 514 Hotel St., Pottsville, P a.
8. Employer's Name and Address
9. Place of Employment or Business
(Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)
I Affirm That I Have Verified Above Answers and That They Are True.
Kenneth Eugene Day
(Registrant's signature)
D. S. S. Form 1 (Revised 1-1-42) (over) ☆ 16—21539-1

Kenneth Day's draft card, located thanks to Donna Esposito.


S/Sgt. Kenneth E. Day, son of Mr. and Mrs. Edmund Day, 514 Hotel st., this city, was honorably discharged at Newark Army Air Base, after serving six years with the AAF. He expects to re-enlist. He was a refueling operator with the 11th Bomb Group for 35 months in Hawaii, Fiju Islands, Caledonia, New Haberdeshka, Solomons and New Guinea. He wears the Asiatic-Pacific ribbon with three battle stars, the Good Conduct Medal and the Presidential Unit Citation. His wife the former Gladys Williams, of Easton, Tex., was a private in the WAC prior to her marriage. They have a daughter, Sheila, 11 months old. When he entered the service he was a student in Pottsville High School.

A newspaper clipping from a local paper announcing Kenneth's honourable discharge from the military. Note the somewhat crazy spelling of 'Fiji' and 'New Hebrides'.

Of Stronger stuff.

One of the Museum's long-time supporters is the wonderfully enthusiastic Tammi Hedrick. She maintains the 'Project USS Strong' website, which is a fabulous repository of all things about the destroyer USS Strong (DD-467) - particularly for anyone who had a relative who served on the ship.

Tammi has done some remarkable work researching the ship, its history, personnel and the circumstances leading up to its sinking by a long range Japanese torpedo on July 5, 1943. Tammi's great uncle Billy Hedrick was an Ensign and Junior Communications Officer on the Strong when it went down between Kolombangara and New Georgia in the Solomon Islands.

USS Strong DD 467 launched from Bath, Maine in May of 1942, was later commissioned in August 1942. Photo Project USS Strong.

One of the amazing stories to come out of that tragedy, was that of Lieutenant Hugh Barr Miller Jr., U.S. Naval Reserves and his incredible survival story.

Having endured the attack and subsequent sinking of the Strong, Miller ended up on one of two life nets and some pieces of life raft, with 22 other crewmen. Eleven

Lieutenant Hugh Barr Miller Jr. in his 'dress blues' uniform. Photo Project USS Strong.

days later five of them - including Miller - washed up on Arundel Island, far behind the Japanese lines. Hardly the safest place to wash up, but at least it was land.

However, Miller was injured internally and shaken by a "severe haemorrhage", to the point where he thought he was going to die. Being the senior officer of the group he ordered the four men to take all the remaining equipment and rations and head to a coconut plantation down the coast, hopefully to find help.

Miller gave his shoes to one survivor but hung onto a pocket knife with broken blades and some Japanese beer bottles and two old cracker tins he used to store water in.

Following an emotional parting, Miller was left to die - or so he thought. He recounted later, "...figuring I wouldn't last long and that I might as well be as comfortable as possible, I drank all my water that first day—the 15th—after the boys left."

But the next day, Miller woke up to his surprise and actually began regaining strength. (continued...)

Two days later he was still alive. “I got to thinking about myself then and I decided I wasn’t showing up as the kind of guy I had thought I was, just to lie down and die without a fight,” Miller wrote later.

Lieutenant Miller began to take stock of his situation and soon realised that he was in the box seat to observe Japanese operations on nearby Kolobangara Island. The intelligence he could gather would be invaluable to the Allied forces, if he could just stay alive long enough to report back with his observations.

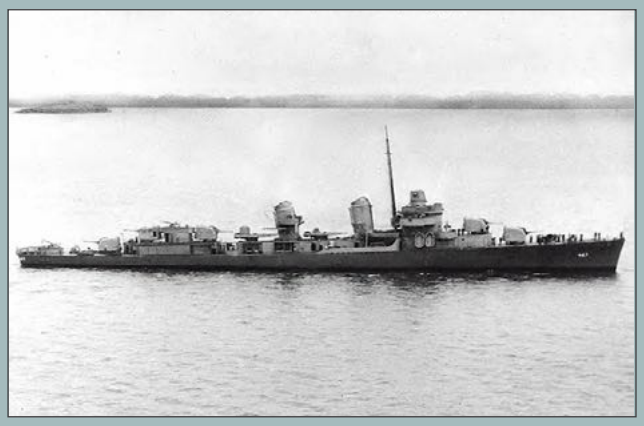
In his own words, “So I held a little conversation with the Lord, lying there on the edge of the jungle that evening, and I told Him that if He’d give me a little water, I’d get up out of there and do something about this situation.”

Arundel Island lies to the west of New Georgia island in the Solomons. Map Google Earth.

Miller went to sleep, and sure enough, by about 9.00pm it began to rain. And rain and rain. In fact for four hours the water bucketed down. Miller made the most of it and drank four tins of water, just as soon as they filled up, before going back to sleep.

The following morning after a “leisurely breakfast in bed,” consisting of more water from the cracker tin, Miller decided to hobble to a spring around two kilometres away, with some help from a staff the men had made for him before they left. It was an arduous walk as he was weak from lack of food and the coral and rocks soon shredded his bare feet. But he battled on and made it to the stream just before nightfall. Totally exhausted from his ordeal, he filled up on water and lay under a log and went to sleep.

The next day, things began to look up. Miller managed to crack open a coconut and ate some of the coconut



A heavily retouched photograph of the USS Strong taken in late 1942. Photo US Naval History Heritage & Command.

meat inside, which was the first solid food he'd had in two weeks. But of greater importance was finding shelter. That would not only protect him from the elements, but more importantly hide him from Japanese patrols, which had obviously been on the island given the beer bottles and an old Japanese blanket he found near the spring.

Sure enough, it wasn't long before a small Japanese patrol came down the beach and Miller quickly retreated to the jungle.

The patrol soon passed and if he was to survive, Miller knew he had to find a better place to shelter. For five days he searched around the spring for the perfect place. He soon found a pocket among some “great” mangrove trees, “a natural shelter, protected on all sides by thickets and branches.” It even had its own

(continued...)

The USS Strong highlines mail to the light cruiser USS Honolulu (CL-48) during operations in the Solomon Islands area, only days before her sinking. Photo Project USS Strong and USS Strong Association.

lookout, where high up, two branches crossed over each, creating a perfect perch to watch for enemy patrols.

Soon, a US PT boat attacked Japanese troop barges and supply boats in Hathorn Sound, which lay right in front of his makeshift camp. When it was all over it gave Lieutenant Miller the chance to pick over the debris that had washed up on the beach. From the body of a Japanese soldier he obtained shoes and socks, five cans of tinned beef, a belt, a bayonet, a grenade holder and two grenades.

Things were certainly looking up for Miller. Which is exactly what he did when he heard an approaching aircraft. As luck would have it, it turned out to be a US aircraft. Miller signalled to the pilot, who saw him and dropped a small package containing some iodine and Army D rations. That iodine probably saved Miller's life. He painted his bloodied and infected feet with it, which helped the cuts heal. According to Miller, "they had begun to fester and I was afraid I wouldn't be able to get around much longer."

With a new found strength and his feet heeling well, it was payback time.

Miller began attacking the contingent of Japanese soldiers on the island. When a five-man Japanese patrol went out to investigate the body that had been stripped of its useful equipment and supplies, Miller soon took care of them all with one grenade.

He then stripped those bodies of everything he could possibly use and buried the bodies. Soon, more patrols were sent out to investigate the five men that were now missing. Miller just hid and eluded the Japanese efforts to find whoever was harrassing them.

Miller continued arming himself with whatever washed ashore and soon had enough in his stash to really start making a serious nuisance of himself.

After discovering Japanese machine-gun nests along the shoreline, he went on the attack, lobbing grenades into them, just as American aircraft flew overhead. This was followed up with what appeared, by all intents and purposes, to be "bombing runs" on the nights of August 10, 12, and 14.

The following morning, a Marine Corps Avenger pilot spotted Miller frantically waving a towel at him and realised he was a westerner, "by my red beard and shining forehead."

A beautifully restored US Navy Grumman J2F 'Duck' similar to the one that rescued Lieutenant Miller off Arundel Island.

It wasn't long before a US Grumman J2F 'Duck' rescue seaplane arrived. It landed just 2,000 yards from the Japanese base on Kolombangara Island and seemed to have landed without being noticed by the Japanese. According to Miller, " the crew of that plane, composed of absolutely fearless men, didn't hesitate an instant."

They soon saw Miller was too weak to make it out to them so they inflated a rubber boat and rowed in to get him.

Miller hurried back to his campsite and collected all the enemy items he could carry and made his way back to the beach. He met Marine Corps Major Vernon A. Peterson, commander of the rescue party and explained to him the importance of the items he had from an intelligence gathering point of view. Peterson soon loaded up the rubber boat and took everything out to the Duck , before returning for Miller.

The rescue party soon took off and remarkably they didn't encounter any resistance from nearby Japanese forces.

Miller's first request of his rescuers, by the way, was for a cigarette. And then food. He recounted later, "We had returned to Munda in time for lunch that day, August 16, and it was my first real meal since the night of July 4.

(continued...)

I had lost forty pounds during the forty-three days I was missing, but I started then and there to get it back."

Miller spent two days at Munda on New Georgia Island recovering from his ordeal. But more importantly, he spent most of that time debriefing everything he saw, providing vital intelligence information to the US Navy.

Miller soon after his rescue with a Japanese flag he recovered as part of his intelligence haul. Photo pacificparatrooper.wordpress.com

Other survivors from the Strong were picked up by ships, while others made it to nearby islands. However, all weren't so lucky and 46 officers and sailors - including Tammi Hendrick's great uncle Ensign Billy Hendrick - lost their lives that night of July 5, 1943.

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt presents Lieutenant Hugh Bar Miller Jr the Navy Cross. In the left of shot is Admiral William 'Bull' Halsey. Photo pacificparatrooper.wordpress.com

Miller managed to survive for 39 days on Arundel island. His extraordinary efforts did not go unnoticed and in spite of internal injuries that he suffered during Strong's sinking - and for his bravery - Lt. Hugh Barr Miller Jr was later awarded the Navy Cross, personally bestowed on him by United States First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt.

Hugh Barr Miller passed away June 21, 1978.

If you'd like to know more about the USS Strong and its remarkable history, visit Tammi's website at **projectuss-strongdd467.com**

The USS Strong as she is today. The ship lies in 1000 feet of water on the floor of the Kula Gulf north of New Georgia island. The ship was only found three years ago by the crew of the research vessel Petrel.

THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

Get Yamamoto.

On April 18, 1943, a formation of Japanese aircraft flying over Bougainville Island was set upon by a flight of US P-38 Lightnings. They sent several planes down in fire, including one irreplaceable one – a bomber carrying the top Japanese admiral, Isoroku Yamamoto.

It was no fluke. Codebreakers had discovered the flight path of the admiral and his itinerary, down to the minute. It was information that was actionable – about something that was yet to happen.

Two fully restored P-38 Lightnings of the type that shot down Yamamoto's plane over Bougainville.

The breakthrough had come four days earlier. In that time, codebreakers delivered an assessment to the very top of the US fleet, Admiral Chester Nimitz. An attempt could be made, but should it be made? This doesn't seem to have been a matter of sensibilities about whether commanders should try to deliberately target and assassinate their counterparts.

Instead, the questions Nimitz asked were whether killing Yamamoto – the architect of Pearl Harbour – would see him replaced by someone more capable. The answer was no.

Secondly, could using the information signal to the Japanese that the priceless breaking of their naval codes was ongoing – leading to them to change their ciphers. Weighed against that, was the likely heavy blow to Japanese morale that would be struck.

(continued...)

Nimitz decided to go, and authorised the theatre commander, Admiral Bull Halsey, to arrange the strike. There is no documentary evidence that the decision rested higher – with ultimately, President Roosevelt.

An artists impression of the attack on Yamamoto's 'Betty' aircraft over Bougainville.

The mission itself was a feat of complex planning – and could have gone awry at any point if Yamamoto's flight – which was a tour of Japanese airbases in the Solomons – had suddenly been altered.

There was no mistaking the jubilation at the highest level over the success – although Halsey in typical fashion complained jokingly that he had been cheated of being able to put Yamamoto in chains and lead him up Pennsylvania Avenue.

The shock in Japan was immense. Yamamoto's death was concealed for a month. On the American side, the intercept was recorded as just another routine air clash in the South Pacific – no doubt part of a cover story. US audiences only learnt of the death when it was announced by the Japanese.

The true story of how the mission was achieved did not emerge until the 1970s. The admiral's body however was recovered by the Japanese shortly after the attack, and he was given a state funeral in Japan.

And the scavenged remains of Admiral Yamamoto's plane can still be found on Bougainville today.

Yamamoto's aircraft as it was in the jungle in the 1980's.

Hawaii's little known heroes.

Following the surprise attack on Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941, Airman First Class Shigenori Nishikaichi, who had taken part in the second wave of the attack, was having serious mechanical problems with his A6M2 Zero aircraft.

Airman First Class Shigenori Nishikaich.

Aerial view of Niihau Island in Hawaii, looking south west from the north. Photo Christopher P. Becker (polihale.com) September 2007.

Prior to the Pearl Harbour attack, the Imperial Japanese Navy had determined that a number of islands around Hawaii were uninhabited. Should any aircraft be damaged in the raids on Pearl Harbour, they could land on one of the islands and await rescue by submarine. Niihau was one of those islands.

Unfortunately for Nishikaichi, he crash-landed his Zero in a field where native Hawaiian Hawila Kaleohano was standing.

At this time, Kaleohano, and in fact all the residents of Niihau, were unaware of the attack at Pearl Harbor, but knew from newspapers that the relationship between the U.S. and Japan was not good, to say the least.

Kaleohano however, recognised Nishikaichi and his plane as Japanese and while the pilot remained dazed from his landing, Kaleohano seized Nishikaichi's pistol and papers.

(continued...)

At the same time, everyone who had now gathered at the crash site treated Nishikaichi with courtesy and traditional Hawaiian hospitality, even throwing a party for the Japanese pilot later that afternoon.

As the Hawaiians could not understand Nishikaichi, who spoke only Japanese, they sent for Ishimatsu Shintani, who was married to a native Hawaiian, to translate.

Shintani was briefed on the situation prior to speaking to the Japanese pilot and exchanged very few words with him before leaving with no explanation. The Hawaiians then sent for Yoshio Harada, who was born in Hawaii but was of Japanese ancestry, and his wife Irene, who were the last of the Niihau population of Japanese ancestry on the island.

Nishikaichi told Harada of the attack on Pearl Harbour, but Harada chose not to share the information with the Hawaiians gathered nearby. At that point the Haradas decided to help Nishikaichi escape. But first they had to retrieve his papers, which Kaleohano refused to return.

Nishikaichi's crashed Zero on Niihau Island.

News of the attack on Pearl Harbour finally reached the island by radio and the locals confronted Nishikaichi and this time Harada translated what was said about the attack.

Nishikaichi was taken to the Harada's house and a guard posted on the residence. Later that night Harada and the Japanese pilot attacked the lone guard, while Irene Harada played music on a phonograph to hide the sounds of the struggle with the guard..

After a brief confrontation, Harada stole a shotgun and Nishikaichi got his service pistol back. They then headed to Kaleohano's house to get the pilot's secret documents back.

(continued...)

Kaleohano happened to be in his 'outhouse' at the time when he saw the two men frog-marching the 16 year old guard towards his home.

When he thought they weren't looking Kaleohano ran from the outhouse. Harada and Nishikaichi fired at him, missing him but alerting locals in a nearby village. Kaleohano told them to evacuate, but they didn't believe his far-fetched story. That was until the young guard escaped and ran to the village. Soon the residents fled to caves, bushes and distant beaches on the island.

With Kaleohano fleeing into the jungle, Nishikaichi, Harada and one of their Hawaiian captives, then removed one of the plane's two 7.7-mm belt-fed machine guns and some ammunition. They torched the plane and proceeded back to Kaleohano's house. Thinking the top secret papers which included maps, radio codes and Pearl Harbour attack plans were probably inside, they set fire to the house.

Ben and Ella Kanahele who stopped Nishikaichi from escaping. Photo timeline.com

On Saturday December 13, Harada and Nishikaichi captured Benehakaka "Ben" Kanahele and his wife Kealoha "Ella" Kanahele. They ordered Kanahele to find Kaleohano, keeping Ella as a hostage.

Kaleohano however was rowing toward Kauai with five others. Ben knew of their escape plan and pretended to look for him. He soon became worried about Ella and returned, telling Nishikaichi that he could not locate Kaleohano.

Nishikaichi realised what was going on and knew Ben was lying to him. Harada told Kanahele that Nishikaichi would kill him and everyone in the village if Kaleohano was not found immediately.

Soon Kanahele and Ella, started to see fatigue in their two captors and as Nishikaichi handed the shotgun to Harada, the Kanaheles jumped them.

Nishikaichi went for his pistol that was in his boot. Ella grabbed his arm forcing it down as Harada pulled her off the Japanese pilot. He then shot Ben Kanahele in the groin, stomach and upper leg.

Remarkably, Ben was still able to pick up Nishikaichi and hurl him into a stone wall, knocking him unconscious. Ella then bashed his head with a rock, killing him. Harada turned the shotgun on himself and committed suicide.

After the incident, Ella Kanahele went for help. Ben Kanahele was taken to Waimea Hospital on Kauai to recuperate and was awarded the Medal of Merit and Purple Heart. However, Ella did not receive any official recognition for her brave efforts.

On December 14, military investigators, the six Hawaiians who had rowed to Kauai, and the owner of the island, Aylmer Robinson arrived back on Niihau. The pilot's papers, including local maps, money and other items for use if forced down, were turned over and the crashed Zero was examined and eventually recovered.

What's left of the crashed aircraft now resides in the Pacific Aviation Museum in Pearl Harbour.

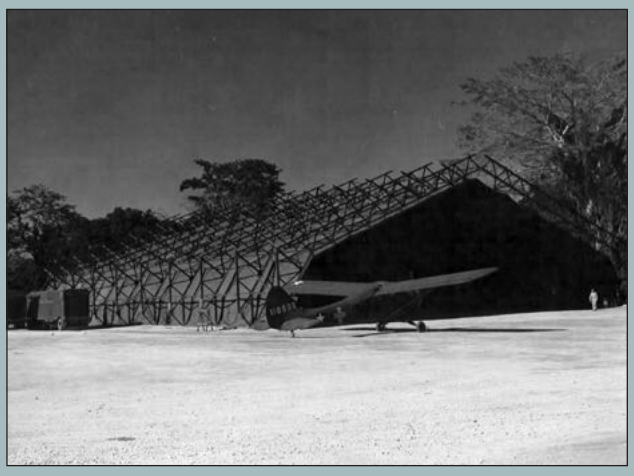
The rusted remains of Nishikaich's Zero in the Pacific Aviation Museum, Pearl Harbour.

From the Archives.

The US Archives are one of the Museum's favourite places to find information - particularly photographs - of Base Button on Espiritu Santo during World War II. We recently found around 100 new shots that we've added to our collection and thought we'd share some of them with you. The descrptions came with the original photos.

Men of Detachment 4, 20th Airways Communications Squadron, 13th Air Force at work in the code room at Espiritu Santo. November 4, 1943.

An incomplete Quonset hut used to shelter boxes of photo supplies from the 18th Combat Mapping Squadron on Espiritu Santo, March 1943.



Combat hanger and Bomber #2 constructed by the 822nd Engineers at Espiritu Santo, September 1943.

A 13th Air Force landing strip (Bomber #3), at Espiritu Santo, October 11, 1943.

Crews man the Interceptor Command Plotting Board at Espiritu Santo, June 2, 1943.

Inspiring everyday heroes

Our Inspiring Everyday Heroes this month are the people who are working to get Women's Rugby on the front foot in Vanuatu.

Vanuatu's first ever women's rugby 7s team which competed in their first ever Oceania championship in 2019. Photo Fiji Live.

Women's rugby is one of the fastest growing team sports in the world. Player numbers are around 2.7 million in professional leagues.

This year in October, the top teams will take part in the World Cup in New Zealand, held every four years to find the best women's team in the world.

The fans are loving it – big crowds turn out to watch test matches at major stadiums in Europe and the UK.

This month in the Vanuatu Daily Post, the newspaper's sports editor Anasilini Natoga made a call for Vanuatu Rugby to do more to give the women's code a lift.

She says it's not enough for the sport to limit women to cut down versions of the game – like seven-a-side. She's calling for a domestic competition and international tours.

Anasilini writes that women's rugby is one of sport's great success stories, and represents the single greatest opportunity for growth in the next decade. Her full article, which you can read here, sets out some ideas for what to do next:

http://bitly.ws/qADR

As she puts it - Vanuatu women's rugby is surging. Its next chapter will be even bigger!

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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