

## All the bells and whistles.

We've had some wonderful news this week leading up to the Coolidge commemoration and exhibition in Luganville.

Not only is the Coolidge's whistle complete, but Janet Frouin, the daughter of Vanuatu dive legend Reece Discombe, has confirmed that the Coolidge's original bell - recovered by her father in the 1970's - will be making its way up to Luganville from Port Vila over the next couple of weeks.

This will be the first time the bell has gone on public display and during the commemoration, it will be rung by Janet on the beach near where the Coolidge went down, following the commemoration.



The late Reece Discombe with the Coolidge's huge brass bell.

This is very exciting for us, knowing the importance of a ship's bell, particularly the one from the Coolidge, that holds a special place in the hearts and minds of so many people.

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# VTO and Air Vanuatu get behind Coolidge commemoration

Hosting an event like the Coolidge Commemoration or the Coolidge Exhibition is a huge undertaking. Putting them both on at the same time... well that's an even bigger challenge.

That's what the Board of the South Pacific WWII Museum faced heading towards October 26. Thanks to some incredible hard work by a number of people throughout Luganville, Port Vila and in Australia, everything is coming together just as we hoped it would, for what's shaping up to be a truly memorable day.

Museum Chairman Bradley Wood is absolutely thrilled to have the support of VTO. "We've been working towards this event for a very long time, so to have the Vanuatu Tourism Office behind us, makes all that hard work extra worthwhile," he said. "We can't thank VTO enough for coming on board."

The Museum would also like to thank Greg Wilson and the team at Air Vanuatu for assisting with the uplift of the special large format posters, display materials and new exhibit pieces going in the Museum for the Coolidge exhibition.

Not only do we have the exhibition materials themselves, but we also have a range of items donated to the Museum throughout the lockdown period. They couldn't be sent directly to the Museum and so they were sent to Museum Project Manager James Carter in Australia. Now of course he has to get as much as he can up to

Santo. Which is where the airline have stepped in to help.

Air Vanuatu have been a fabulous supporter of the Museum prior to lockdown and we're grateful for their ongoing support for the South Pacific WWII Museum.



We are extremely grateful for the support of the Vanuatu Tourism Office (VTO), for their sponsorship of the commemoration and exhibition. The team at VTO have been wonderfully helpful, particularly Lea, Melissa and Serah, who have gone out their way to help us wherever they can.

VTO CEO Adela Issachar Aru in announcing VTO's support, said, "historical or heritage tourism means travelling with the primary purpose of exploring the history and heritage of a place. People visiting Espiritu Santo can combine their love of history with other tourist delights like diving in order to visit the SS President Coolidge."

# Message in a bottle

Millie Ogden, CEO of 3 Link Communications in Port Vila offered to help the museum with planning for the Coolidge commemoration and exhibition. Her company will also be providing us with a satellite uplink to ensure we can livestream the commemoration on the internet. Further details of how you can watch the event will be put up on social media and our website soon.

Millie also got in contact with the Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation in the USA. Given the obvious connection between us both, she thought they might be interested in what we have planned and potentially attend the commemoration in October.



30th President of the United States, John Calvin Coolidge. His Presidential term ran from 1923 to 1929.

Within days we had a delightful response from the organisation, but unfortunately they won't be able to attend. However, as their President, Matthew Denhart explained, they wanted to do something special for us.

Matthew and his team generously organised a very special gift to be sent to the Museum, that we hope will arrive in time for the opening of the exhibition.

A letter accompanying the gift, says in part:

*We are most appreciative of your invitation to take part in the commemorative event planned for October 26, 2022 in Luganville, Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu. We regret we are unable to attend in person.*

*However, enclosed, please find a gift to your organization – an antique Moxie bottle filled with water drawn from a faucet at the historic Coolidge homestead in Plymouth Notch, Vermont. If the above-cited press reports are accurate, the same natural spring fed both this bottle*

*Ms. Ogden, thank you again. We wish you and your colleagues a successful 80" SS President Coolidge anniversary event next month.*

When the bottle and letter do arrive, we will be putting them on display with our other Coolidge artefacts. We're pretty certain the bottle will make quite a talking piece for visitors to the Museum.

We'd like to thank Matthew Denhart and the staff at the Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation for their wonderful gifts. The bottle and its accompanying letter, will make beautiful additions to the Museum's S.S. President Coolidge collection.



The bottle of spring water in the Moxie soft drink bottle at the presidential homestead.

*and the one used in the 1931 christening of the SS President Coolidge.*

*Moxie was the President's favourite soft drink and this bottle was actually found here on the premises. We hope this new artifact will be a welcome addition to your celebration, and may be kept at your museum if appropriate.*

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## THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

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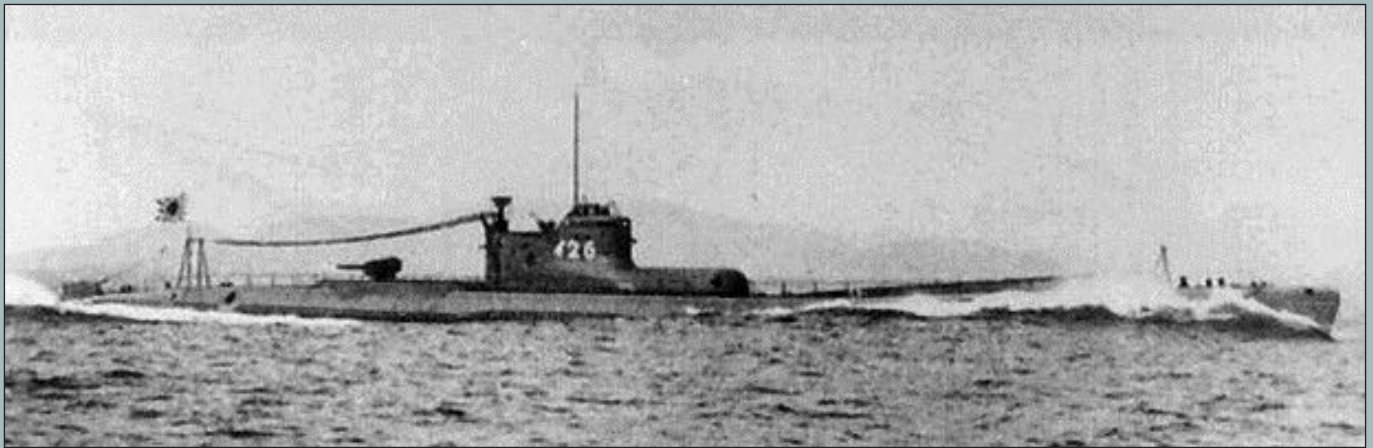
# Deep-six

In September 1943, four US destroyers near Espiritu Santo were involved in the sinking of a Japanese submarine, the I-25.

Not much is clear about the sinking – and even which of the four US vessels could claim the kill. Some sources even put the sinking at late August.

I-25's first patrol took it to Pearl Harbour, where it was part of the screening force. It then joined other submarines off the thoroughly alarmed west coast of the United States.

By February 1942 it set sail for the South Pacific with the task of reconnoitring Sydney, Melbourne, Wellington, and Auckland harbours. It had completed all these dangerous tasks by the middle of March – quite a feat of nerve and skill by both the sub, and its seaplane



I-26 was a sister submarine to I-25. Both were B1 Type submarines, 108 metres in length and holding a single 'Glen' seaplane in their deck hangars.

It was a strangely undramatic end for a submarine that in two years of patrols, fitted in a remarkably varied war record that made many headlines.

We commonly think of submarines as stalking merchant ships. That's what the German U-boats, and eventually the US submarines, did with such deadly affect.

The Japanese however saw their submarines primarily as a sort of cavalry for their surface fleet, carrying out reconnaissance missions and targeting enemy warships.

So, they built big submarines as a rule, with long ranges, and in the case of the I-15 class, able to even carry a stowaway floatplane.

The Yokosuka plane was a two-seater, disassembled and put in a hangar in front of the conning tower. It would be piloted by intrepid warrant flying officer Nobuo Fujita.

crew. These were bases the Japanese simply had no other way of monitoring.

(continued...)



Famed Japanese seaplane pilot Nobuo Fujita who took off from the submarine and took incredible aerial photographs of Australia and New Zealand.

Patrol Number 3 shows how far these big Japanese boats could range. From the South Pacific, I-25 sailed to the icy climes of the Aleutian Islands, carrying out further scouting for the upcoming northern arm of the

With the US coast defences fully alert, and the I-25 surviving one aerial attack, it called off the mission, although sinking some targets of opportunity on the way.



One of Fujita's remarkable shots of South Melbourne taken from his seaplane. The industrial areas were of great interest to the Japanese. Photo - Charles Daniel Pratt and State Library of Victoria.

Japanese Midway operation. Strangely, the I-25 had been in dry dock at Yokosuka shipyard on April 18, 1942, when the audacious American Doolittle raid occurred. Bombs hit a warship right next door to I-25. It was this bombing mission that is often attributed with spurring Japan to launch what proved to be the disastrous Midway campaign.

From the Aleutians, I-25 caused something of a scare on the coast off Oregon, bombarding shore forts.

Oregon was to be the destination again for I-25 on its fourth war patrol, and one that would see it remembered in history. The mission showed the degree to which Japan had no way of striking effectively at the huge industrial base of the United States. But it definitely was ingenious.

It was to drop incendiary bombs on the forests of Washington state, triggering it was hoped devastating wildfires. Two out of the three raids were carried out, but with no real effect. However, these attacks were the only time that the mainland United States was ever bombed by enemy aircraft.

Certainly, the most surprising, and surprised of those, would have been the Russian submarine, L-16. It was hit by a torpedo from I-25 off the US west coast while running on the surface with a fellow Russian submarine. They were sailing from Vladivostok via the Panama Canal. All hands onboard were lost, while I-25 thought it had sunk a US sub. Japan and Russia were at that time neutral towards each other.

Her next two war patrols were into the crucible of the Solomons, running supplies to the starving troops on Guadalcanal, and trying to whittle down the growing US naval superiority.

Her seventh, and last, took her to the New Hebrides. Her mission was to fly reconnaissance over the mighty and swelling base at Espiritu Santo. This was carried out on the night of August 23, and the pilot reported seeing three battleships and a number of smaller vessels.



A seaplane being launched from a Japanese submarine.

It was the last message ever received by the Japanese Combined Fleet from I-25, which was presumed lost by October of 1943.

Not on that last mission was warrant flying officer Fujita. He flew reconnaissance elsewhere until 1944 then became a trainer of Kamikaze pilots. Surviving the war, he later would be invited to Brookings, Oregon, in 1962, near the scene of his historic firebombing. It would mark a long reconciliation with his former enemies.

# Blowing off steam.

Last month we reported on the incredible progress being made with the restoration of the S.S. President Coolidge whistle in Luganville.

We're delighted to report that we've reached another milestone. The whistle has been polished, reassembled and is now complete.



The completed Coolidge whistle ready for testing and tuning.

It's been quite a journey for the almost 100 year old brass whistle that sailed the world for over 10 years, was drafted into the war, sunk, recovered 30 years later, before spending 40 years under Allan Power's veranda.

The plan from here is to mount the whistle on a sturdy base and devise a way of connecting a large air hose to it. From there testing and adjustments will take place over the next couple of weeks to 'tune' the whistle to get the best possible sound from it. (continued...)



The whistle's bell was in poor condition when it arrived at the Museum.



The heavy brass base of the whistle. Compressed air gets forced through the base, exiting via the circular gap around the top.

The Museum would like to thank Yves Lau for donating his time to the restoration and the turning of the replacement main shaft and the beautiful brass nut on top.



Like a nod to its former residents, the whistle has had its parts made in a former U.S. WWII Quonset hut in Luganville, now home to LCY Garage.

We would also very much like to thank Yves parents, Mr and Mrs Lau for their generosity in providing the workshop space at LCY Garage, where Yves worked on the replacement parts.



Yves Lau looks very happy with the decorative brass nut he has turned on the lathe that screws on top of the completed whistle.



Mr and Mrs Lau - we believe back in the 1980s - with a few Santo locals.

We also want to thank Rommel Tugalon from Santo Hardware and the Santo hardware workshop, for the amazing job he did stripping down the whistle into its component parts and more importantly, rebuilding it again. It literally took weeks to get the pieces apart without damaging the brass. Rommel did it, and everything went back perfectly.



Rommel Tugalon is holding the badly corroded steel rod that holds the whistle together. Yves turned and threaded a new one to fit the whistle.

This was a big job, and the South Pacific World War II Museum is extremely grateful for everyone's efforts.



# Inspiring everyday heroes

It's been two and a half years since Cyclone Harold hammered Vanuatu and the outside world saw some heart-breaking pictures of devastation. But there's always some other disaster ready to come along elsewhere.

So, aid agencies that respond to disasters, and work longer term in the Pacific, have to think of ways to show what work needs to be done and the benefits it can bring.



Rugby star Dan Carter and some young friends, on Pentecost Island – photo UNICEF New Zealand.

Which is why one of the superstars of world sport has been making headlines this week with a visit to some of the islands of Vanuatu.

Dan Carter is a New Zealand rugby union player, once considered the best in his position in the world. For any American readers, think Tom Brady. Now retired, Carter is also an ambassador for the aid agency UNICEF.

Rugby isn't a huge game at all in Vanuatu, but the Carter name is known. In the wider Pacific, where rugby is played and world-class players emerge regularly, he is very well known. Indeed, without Pacific rugby, the game in New Zealand would be much weaker.

Not that any of that probably mattered too much to hundreds of smiling schoolkids when Carter visited an area on Pentecost Island that was ruined in the April 2020 cyclone. Hospitals and schools have not yet been repaired.

Indeed, it seems they made more of an impression on the sports star than possibly the other way round.

"Children here are just so grateful no matter their upbringing and the trauma they have suffered," he told the New Zealand Herald newspaper.

"They don't live with a lot but their gratitude, their smiles, their energy was infectious. You walk away from these communities feeling inspired yourself."

Carter this month raised more than \$500,000 during a Kickathon to support water and sanitation programmes in the Pacific, before travelling to Vanuatu.

And besides the smiles, and the publicity, he left behind a few rugby balls. So, you never know, there could be a young Vanuatu superstar on the way in just a few years' time.

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

# In focus



The first image to appear on our new **Photo In Focus** page is a wonderful montage that has become a favourite amongst museum followers.

It depicts the late Milton Staley who was the first veteran to become a member of the South Pacific WWII Museum.

Milt survived the sinking of the Coolidge and travelled back to Santo in 2008 with his nephew Richard Staley to again stand on the beach where he came ashore. Richard took the shot as Milt looked out to where the ship went down.

The almost ghostly image of the Coolidge listing was obviously taken on October 26, 1942 not long before she sank. That photograph was stripped into the image of Milt following his visit, by photographer Will Dunningway.

Incredibly, Milton went on to land at D-Day, making him one of the few soldiers to fight in both the Pacific Theatre and the European Theatre during World War II.

With the Coolidge commemoration just weeks away, we thought we'd republish this wonderful photograph from our archives.

WWII Coolidge survivor, war hero and veteran Milton Staley sadly passed away on January 20, 2019.



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