

Ship ahoy.

The South Pacific WWII Museum was thrilled to finally have cruise ship passengers back visiting the Museum again on November 20. Throughout the morning and into the early afternoon, we had 110 tourists drop in and have look through our S.S. President Coolidge Exhibition that has been running since it was opened at the Coolidge 80th commemoration on October 26.

According to Marina Moli, the Museum's Support Officer, our visitors were most complimentary about the museum and were fascinated by the history of the South Pacific's largest supply base during WWII.

The cruise ship - P&O Pacific Adventure - is the UK-based cruise



P&O's Pacific Adventure approaches Luganville Wharf.

ship operator's newest and largest ship, on her maiden season, which she's spending in the Pacific. The 10-day cruise from Sydney, visited New Caledonia, Port Vila, Luganville and other destinations in Vanuatu before heading back to Sydney.

Official Navara Sponsors



Catch of the day.

During November, Luganville hosted the Santo Hardware fishing competition. This annual event attracts deep sea anglers from around the world.

There were nine boats this year and two of the sponsors joined the competition for this year's event - one from Fill the Container an Australian company and another from Tropex a NZ company.



The winning sailfish caught by Vincent Reibold and a fine catch of a Ryobi chainsaw made for a great day's fishing.

In total, there were around 36 anglers who took part in the competition and many fish were caught including Yellowfin Tuna, Dogtooth Tuna, Wahoo and one sailfish which was caught by Vincent Reibold, the sales rep from Tropex. His fish weighed in at 27kg fish and was the overall winner on the day.

Of course you're probably wondering what the fishing competition has to do with the South Pacific WWII Museum?



The wonderful donation by the Santo Gamefishing Club being handed over to Museum Chairman Bradley Wood.

The museum was absolutely delighted to be the recipient of an unexpected contribution of 300,000 VT from the Santo Gamefishing Club.

This donation came completely out of the blue and we were thrilled to receive it. We'd like to thank the club, it's members and sponsors for so generously supporting the Museum - particularly Rosemary and Richard Lo and Santo Hardware.

The major sponsors were:

- Tropex
- Tramontina
- Swires Shipping
- Timber Barron
- Fill the Container
- Ryobi

Other sponsors included:

- DAB Pumps
- Lino Sella
- The Espiritu
- Deco Stop Lodge
- Vanuatu Brewing Ltd
- CRC
- Vodafone
- Kubota
- Datum
- Stihl
- Safety Jogger
- Turtle Bay Lodge
- Beachfront Resort
- Lubrimaxx
- Apco Paints
- Wattyl Paints
- BND
- Tradeware

B-17 castaways.

On 9 February 1943, Captain Thomas J. Classen was serving with the 72nd Bombardment Squadron, 5th Bombardment Group (Heavy), Thirteenth Air Force, U.S. Army Air Forces in the South Pacific Area. They operated from both Espiritu Santo and Guadalcanal during this time.



Captain Thomas J. Classen, post war in his role as the Director of Operations and Training Headquarters of the Alaska Air Command.

On that day, Classen and his crew were flying a B-17 Flying Fortress bomber over Japanese territory in the Pacific, when their airplane was attacked by eight Japanese Zero fighters.

Two of the fighters were shot down and possibly two more were destroyed during the initial phase of the air battle.



A rare airworthy Japanese Zero at a recent airshow in the USA.

Unfortunately for Classen and his crew, one engine of the bomber was taken out of action, 10 of the .50 calibre machine guns were damaged beyond use, and all members of the crew were wounded.

The attack by the Japanese aircraft continued for an hour and a half, and when the fighters finally gave up, the big bomber had lost two engines and a third was damaged and not looking good.

The B-17 was limping over the ocean barely 20 feet above the water, so Classen ordered every last piece of gear be thrown from the plane in order to save weight and gain altitude. After around an hour, he was able to get the plane back up to around 800 feet, but it wouldn't last and a water landing was inevitable.



A Japanese Zero fighter attacks a B-17 somewhere in the Pacific.

After a near perfect ditching in the Pacific, all crew escaped the bomber and they paddled and drifted in two life rafts through blinding sun and tropical storms for more than 600 miles. On the 16th day after ditching, they made their way through a coral passage to a group of little-known islands in enemy territory known as the Carteret Group.

After being recognized as Americans, they received all the rest and comforts the war-starved Melanesian settlement could offer. On March 28, Classen with three of his crew, left their six companions on the Carterets and started making their way back to Guadalcanal by boat.

(continued...)

After seven days were up, hope of Major Classen's group having made the voyage successfully evaporated, and the others began planning to leave in a canoe.

Unbeknownst to the remaining crew, sixty-six days after the encounter with the enemy fighters, Classen and his men reached an island occupied by friendly personnel and were returned to their base. A search was soon organised for the remainder of the crew.



In the first of these photographs, the crew of the B-17 are in hiding until they could confirm the identity of the low flying aircraft - its wingtip in the top of frame. In the second shot the crew have rushed out to wave at the passing B-17.

A few days later, the sound of an aircraft was heard by the six B-17 airmen still on the Carterets. Uncertain as to the identity of the aircraft, the crew and the natives all remained hidden in their huts and behind the coconut palms. Realising it was a B-17, the crew dashed out and signalled the low flying aircraft.

The name, "Ruiz" - one of the castaways - had been painted on the life raft, so that it might be seen from the sky by a passing aircraft.

Even after being located, it was five more days until the men were taken off the island by plane. But the worst of their ordeal was over.

During all that time they were listed as Missing in Action and presumed dead.



Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher greeting the first of the Classen B-17 crew to arrive back at Guadalcanal, 11 April 1943. Left to right: Lt. Robert Dorwart, Lt. Balfour C. Gibson (shaking hands with Mitscher), Capt. Thomas J. Classen, the TBF crew member, Delmer D. Wiley, and Mitscher. Photo USMC.

Captain Classen's determination and skill contributed greatly to the escape and safe return of his entire crew. His courageous actions and extraordinary heroism earned him the U.S. Army's second highest award for valour, the Distinguished Service Cross.



A Distinguished Service Cross. Photo US WW1 Centennial Commission

A busy November.

Tourist numbers are certainly on the increase to Santo - as you can see in our cover story. But it's not just cruise ships returning to our sunny shores. Visitors from all over the world have been dropping in to the South Pacific WWII Museum to see our Coolidge exhibition. Here's a sample of the many people who dropped by to say hi.



The mystery of Private Masao Kikuchi

In early September of this year, Museum Project Manager James Carter responded to one of the many email requests the Museum receives each week from people looking for information on a relative, missing aircraft, sunken ship, or some other aspect of the Pacific War.

However, this request was very different to anything we had received prior and has led the Museum down a fascinating trail of research, involving specialists in Japan, United States and Australia.

Tatuaki Inoue, is from the Japan Association for Recovery and Repatriation of War Casualties, a Japanese governmental organisation responsible for the recovery of the remains of WWII casualties.

He was planning an expedition to Espiritu Santo to confirm the burial site of a Japanese POW named Private Masao Kikuchi, who Tatuaki believed was located in the U.S. Military Cemetery in Luganville.



The sign that was on the fence that surrounded the Espiritu Santo Military Cemetery.

The Association obtained a record of the burial dated December 2, 1942, from the U.S. National Archives. It was presumed that Private Kikuchi was a POW and possibly died during transfer from Solomon Islands to New Caledonia.

Tatuaki was looking for any information regarding this buried Japanese soldier or any other Japanese who may have died or been buried on the New Hebrides and its surrounding waters - hence his reason for getting in contact with us.

This certainly piqued James' interest and he immediately emailed back. What we know for certain is that there was a military cemetery on Santo during World War II. It no longer exists but at the time was really a 'holding' cemetery where deceased service personnel were temporarily buried on their journey home.

NAME OF CASUALTY	RANK	DOB	DEATH	CAUSE OF DEATH	PLACE OF BURIAL
HADA, Takeo	Not Given	Not Given	18 Jun 45	Gunshot wounds	Po Cem #1, Gnanonagi, Loran, FI
HAJISAKI, Yoshimasa	L/c O	Not Given	13 Jun 44	Killed in Action	Jap Cem #2, Tindian Island, NI
HAKURA, Isosho	Sup Pvt	6191-253	3 Feb 44	Killed in Action	USAF Cem #4, Finschhafen, NG
HAKITA, Issei	Not Given	P.16259	7 July 45	Killed in Action	Po Cem #1, Guelenberg, Loran, FI
HAKITA, Junichi	Sup PWS	Not Given	2 Mar 43	Killed in Action	USAF Cem #4, Finschhafen, NG
HAUAKI, Haseji	2/c Pvt	Not Given	6 Aug 44	Gunshot wound	Buried at sea
HAGA, Kikuchi	PVC	Not Given	2 Dec 42	Killed in Action	Espiritu Santo Mil Cem, New Hebrides
HAIKAWA, Toraji	C19	Not Given	19 Jan 44	Killed in Action	USAF Cem #4, Finschhafen, NG
HAYASHI, (Not Given)	Not Given	POW 1840	16 Jun 44	Killed in Action	USAF Cem #4, Finschhafen, NG
HAYASHI, Sasa Yashii	Not Given	POW 149650	7 Sep 44	Killed in Action	USAF Cem #4, Finschhafen, NG
HAYASHI, Masao	Ltj Maj	Not Given	30 Mar 45	Bullet wound	Buried in open near JINAKI Hilltop, New Caledonia
HAYASHI, Saku	Sup Pvt	Not Given	14 Mar 45	Gunshot wounds	USAF Cem #1, Guelenberg, Loran, FI
HAYASHI, Shigeo	2/c PWS	Not Given	18 Jul 44	Fragment wound	Buried at sea
HAYASHI, (Not Given)	Not Given	Not Given	24 Sep 44	Gunshot wounds	Buried at sea
HAYASHI, Teitachi	Pvt	Not Given	Not Given	Killed in Action	Po Cem #1, Guelenberg, Loran, FI
HAYASHI, Tamiyaru	Civ	Not Given	19 Jan 44	Killed in Action	USAF Cem #4, Finschhafen, NG
HAYASHI, Hideo	Ltj PWS	6191-190	24 Feb 44	Killed in Action	USAF Cem #4, Finschhafen, NG

The document found in the US Archives by the Japan Association for Recovery and Repatriation of War Casualties, showing Private Masao Kikuchi buried in the Santo military cemetery.

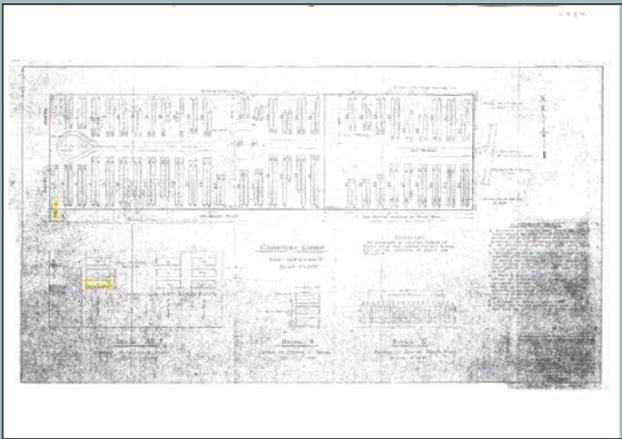
As far as Japanese soldiers go, the Museum had not heard of any being buried on the island. There was a Japanese POW camp built in October 1942, but that was only in use for around four months.

Could Private Kikuchi have died while being held at the POW camp? Possibly. Or did he die on the journey between the Solomons and New Caledonia, as Tatuaki suspected? Again, it's a possibility, but highly unlikely that his body would have been transported all the way to Santo. He would have either been buried at sea or in a grave in New Caledonia.

At this point we had the record of Private Kikuchi's burial on Santo, a plan of the cemetery that the Japanese team had located in the US Archives with Japanese grave written on it - who knows when, but not much else. It was time to bring in the experts.

Historian and long-time supporter of the Museum, Donna Esposito can find out pretty much anything we

(continued...)



The plan of the Espiritu Santo Military Cemetery from the US Archives. While the quality of the document isn't brilliant, clearly written on the left of the document are the words 'Japanese Soldier'.

ask of her. So, James passed on what we had so far to see what Donna might be able to uncover. And she didn't disappoint.

24 hours later Donna responded with some tantalising information. "The images of the cemetery layout are from later on in the war, and it's possible deceased POWs would have been moved by this point", she said. "Like the American dead, Japanese POW dead were moved and consolidated into a single cemetery at Canlubang, Luzon, according to the book "Final Disposition of World War II Dead."

LIST OF NONENLISTED PASSENGERS OF U. S. S. PRESIDENT HAYES			
at date of sailing from		for	
SPITAN		WHITE POPPY	
		Date 12/4/42	
1	2	3	4
NAME	RANK, TITLE, ETC.	AGE	DESTINATION
<u>List of Japanese prisoners</u>			
K Kikuchi Seichi	PO2e (Deck Force)	Unknown	
Fukusaki Hiroshi	Superior class sea. (Anger. Force)		
Ide Yuichi	PO1e (Deck Force)		
Takawa Takawa	Seale (Deck Force)		
Kawai Kinosharu	Seale (Deck Force)		
Yamashita Shoji	Seale (Deck Force)		
Yamashita Shigehiro	PO2e (Avt. branch)		
Isakawa Ichio	PO2e (Army)		
Saito Junakichi	superior seaman (Anger. Br.)		
Kaneko Teiti	superior seaman		
Watanabe Kokiichi	PO1e (Deck Force)		
Kanaki Tokuzo	Seale (Deck Force)		
Toyama Saburo	Yeoman 2c (RM Sect)		
Miyazaki Yoshio	Seale (Deck Force)		
Fukuda Tamahiko	Seaman		
Sinoyama Yasuobu	Seaman		
Kikuchi Masao	PO2e		

The passenger list from the USS President Hayes, that Historian Donna Esposito discovered with Private Kikuchi's name on it.

Donna went on to say that there is a possibility that Private Kikuchi's remains were missed for some reason. So, it's probably worth investigating. However, Donna feels it's highly unlikely that his remains would still be there.

She also felt that if he'd died while aboard ship, he would have been buried at sea. This was sometimes done with US personnel, even if they were not in the Navy.

However, it was going through the muster roll of the USS President Hayes on 4 December 1942, where things became interesting. His name appears on a list of Japanese POWs being transported from Base Button (Espiritu Santo) to White Poppy (Noumea, New Caledonia) along with several other prisoners.



USS President Hayes APA-20. This was the US transport ship that Private Kikuchi may have been on as it sailed from Santo to Noumea. At least that's what one set of records shows.

So, one official document shows Private Kikuchi being buried on Santo, 2 December, 1942. While another official document shows him being transported to Noumea on 4 December, 1942. Things are starting to get interesting.

Donna suggested we get in touch with Dr. Rob Thompson, an historian with the DPAA - the US equivalent of Tatuaki's organisation. They have been to Santo on a number of occasions and led the official recovery of Captain Elwood J Ewart from the Coolidge.

She also said that Dr. Colin Colbourne, lead historian with Project Recover, who used to work for DPAA and has a special interest in the American Graves Registration Service may be able to assist as well.

More emailing, as James set about making contact with Rob and Colin. In the meantime, a picture was emerging from all the research, that helped explain some of the events on Santo - yet really created just a whole lot more questions.

(continued...)

So In summary, here's what the research told us:

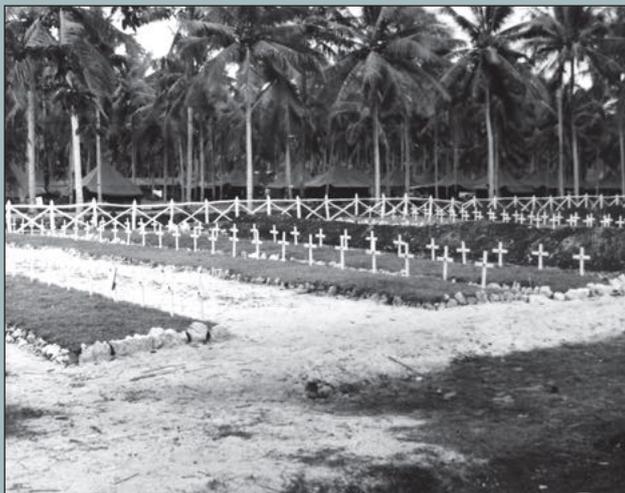
- Two different sources state that at least one Japanese POW was buried at the Military Cemetery on Espiritu Santo. A POW list includes PFC Masao Kikuchi, who is noted as "killed in action", December 2, 1942, and buried at the Military Cemetery on Espiritu Santo.
- Contradictory to the record of Private Kikuchi, a boarding list of U.S.S. President Hayes states that he was to be transferred to Noumea (White Poppy) from Espiritu Santo (Button) on December 4, 1942.
- The burial record of the Military Cemetery on Espiritu Santo shows that about one third of the cemetery land had been used to bury deceased allied servicemen.
- The Military Cemetery on Espiritu Santo was exhumed in 1945, for the reburial of the remains in Guadalcanal, which were to be re-exhumed in 1948 to be returned to their families for reburial, in a civilian or military cemetery.

- A Japanese POW prison existed in Luganville. The remains of that prison still exist, but we do not know whether it was located in the same site as the POW camp.

A few days after emailing Rob and Colin, an email arrived from Rob with some information about the cemetery, particularly, Row 1, Plot 1.



A grave being dug at the Espiritu Santo Military Cemetery, from a film shot by the 13th AAF Combat Unit.



The Espiritu Santo Military Cemetery looking to the south west. The paths between the rows was made from crushed coral.

- The Military Cemetery on Espiritu Santo does not exist at the present time.
- On Espiritu Santo, a POW camp was existed between October 10, 1942, and February 13, 1943, for Japanese prisoners.

Rob knows quite a bit about the Santo cemetery and was tracking an American interred in Plot 1, Row 1, Grave 1 - Cpl Willie Woods - who died on 14 July 1942 and was interred at that grave on 16 July 1942. A graves team reinterred him at Plot 39, Row 2, Grave 1, but not until 9 June 1944.

Information in the personnel file for the man buried in Plot 1, Row 1, Grave 2, PFC Clyde J. Hines, confirms this information.

Rob is not sure what prompted the reinterments in the cemetery, but it appears that all (or most) graves in Plots 1 and 2 were removed to Plot 39 in June 1944.

Interestingly, he said, "I have learned to never presuppose anything about WWII burials. It is possible a Japanese service member is still interred in Plot 1, but I don't see any evidence that a Japanese soldier was ever in Grave 1 other than the map you provided."

(continued...)

The grave recovery teams removed remains from Espiritu for reburial at Guadalcanal in August 1945. As such, a Japanese soldier's body could have been removed to Guadalcanal and potentially assigned an 'X-file number' and transferred to Hawaii for further analysis and interment, or the remains may have been reinterred at Guadalcanal and left there following an initial examination.



One of the grave recovery teams on Espiritu Santo loading a coffin on board a truck for transport to the cemetery.

Rob's final word, was probably the most interesting for the Japanese team. "...It is possible a Japanese service member is still interred in Plot 1, but I don't see any evidence that a Japanese soldier was ever in Grave 1 other than the map you provided."

It's not hard to appreciate that this is a huge research exercise with a great number of people searching databases and collections in many parts of the world. Which brings us to the next piece of the puzzle.

The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of Japan also weighed in earlier in November and provided some more interesting information.

According to the Ministry, there was a Japanese Army leading private (sometimes translated to lance corporal) named Masao Kikuchi who was reported dead on November 1, 1942, near Taivu Point, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands.

However, this was not confirmed by his superior officer, so there remains the possibility that this Private Kikuchi did not die there on that date but was later taken prisoner by Allied Forces.

Tatuaki and his team checked the burial list of the Japanese prisoners at the Noumea POW Camp and found that some names that are on the POW transfer list aboard the USS President Hayes on December 4, 1942, are on that burial list. But not Masao Kikuchi's name.



Japanese soldiers in a POW camp in Noumea, New Caledonia. This was taken from a poor quality film taken in the camp.

However, this doesn't prove that Kikuchi's remains were in Espiritu Santo Cemetery. But as Tatuaki theorises, there was a soldier with the same name in the South Pacific in late 1942, and there is no evidence that Masao Kikuchi died in Noumea.

Tatuaki also wonders if there is any possibility that Masao Kikuchi was buried in a civilian cemetery, or if there existed a Japanese cemetery in Santo? There is a record of Japanese civilians from New Hebrides taken prisoner at the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941 and sent to POW and internment camps at Hay in New South Wales, Australia.



The Hay Internment camp. Between prisoners, internees and guards, the population of Hay doubled during the war. Photo Underwood Collection/Hay Historical Society)

Of course, if we could find records of burials at the civilian cemetery during WWII that would also help build a more complete picture and possibly eliminate this location from the search.

(continued...)

The Japanese POW Camp in Espiritu Santo could also provide invaluable information, particularly records of who was held there during its four months of operation.



Japanese POWs at the camp on Espiritu Santo. The exact location of the camp is still unknown.

However, it's something we have almost no information on. It has been extremely difficult finding the location of the camp as it's not marked on any of the maps we have in our collection. A trip to the US Archives would most likely provide some information, but that would require a week or more in the United States and a sizeable budget.



The United States National Archives building in Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington DC. The archives holds around 44.4 million photos and 13.8 billion pages of textual records.

Colin Colbourn also contacted James and provided a somewhat crazy theory. He said, "I think this is such a fascinating story. I'm sure there's a realistic historical reason for the discrepancy, but all I can think about is what if this Japanese soldier WAS killed, and yet another soldier gave the Americans a false name (that of the dead soldier), when he boarded the POW transport. Probably nothing that dramatic, but what a story that would be!"

Colin went through all the records he had on file, specifically those from the US Archives relating to cemetery plans/rosters and the POWs on New Caledonia, but unfortunately, he didn't locate any relevant documents.



US Army soldiers escort Japanese POWs into the POW camp on Espiritu Santo.

Which leads us to some final research from Rob.

He believes the confusion over the apparent existence of two cemeteries, the Santo American Cemetery (SAC) and the Espiritu Santo Military Cemetery (ESMC), still makes this whole endeavour a bit more confusing.

The wording in the documentation suggests that the Americans removed the bodies from the former cemetery for interment in the latter cemetery by at least mid 1944.



A body being laid to rest in the Santo military cemetery. The US flag is being draped over the coffin of a fallen airman.

He said, "I do not have any specifics about a location for the SAC, even if it may have been collocated with the ESMC. There is a possibility that Private Kikuchi's body was moved as part of this process, even if he was not originally buried in the SAC but possibly ended up in the ESMC."

(continued...)

Rob is convinced that Private Kikuchi's remains will not be found on Santo. However, he does agree that a search of the area with subsurface ground penetrating radar might be worth doing.

With that in mind, Tatuaki and his team of researchers have been granted the necessary approvals to come to Vanuatu and begin their work on Santo in the search for Private Kikuchi.

The team will be arriving in country on December 6 and various sites will be searched, and much knowledge gathered in an attempt to build a more complete picture of what occurred during the war.

Museum board member Mayumi Green will also be assisting Tatuaki, thanks to her Japanese heritage and incredible knowledge as a tour guide on Santo.

Everyone from the South Pacific World War II Museum wishes Tatuaki the very best of luck with the project, and we very much look forward to hearing the results of their exploration in due course.

We'll bring you further updates on Private Kikuchi, in future issues of our newsletter.



The Espiritu Santo Military Cemetery. If the plan found in the US Archives is correct, Private Kikuchi was buried in the left farthest corner towards the centre of screen.

THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

Task. Force.

On November 29, 1942, tension was high in what was known as Task Force William or TF67, anchored in the Second Channel of Espiritu Santo.

The cruisers and destroyers were on 12 hour alert to dash to the Solomon Islands, once intelligence had identified Japanese fleet moves towards the contested island of Guadalcanal.

But clues were meagre during the wait – the US South Pacific forces knew an attempt to run troops and supplies through to the island would be made, but with what and when was much less certain.



USS Pensacola (CA-24) underway at sea, September 1935.

But at 1940 Admiral Carleton Wright received orders to prepare to depart with his force at the earliest possible moment, and to proceed at the best possible speed to intercept an enemy group of 6 destroyers and 6 transports which was expected to arrive off Guadalcanal the next night.

He directed Task Force William to make all preparations necessary to get under way immediately and advised that his ships would be ready to sortie at midnight.

Three hours later COMSOPAC ordered Admiral Wright to proceed to intercept the Japanese off Tassafaronga on the north-western shore of Guadalcanal.

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The destroyers got under way at 2310, the cruisers at 2335.

The whole Force cleared the well-mined, unlighted harbour of Espiritu Santo without incident and shaped its course.



TF67 heads for Guadalcanal on November 30. Fletcher (foreground) is followed by Perkins, Maury, Drayton, and the cruisers (far distance).

They were unknown to them, sailing into one of the worst defeats in US naval history.

The four cruisers and six destroyers ran into eight Japanese destroyers (with no transports to slow them down), some carrying supplies. Despite the advantage of radar, the US force gave away its position, exposing itself to a flurry of deadly Japanese torpedoes. One cruiser was sunk, and three badly damaged.



USS Minneapolis at Tulagi with torpedo damage, December 1, 1942. Photo Wikiwand.

The survivors would straggle into Espiritu Santo. The US Navy had many lessons to absorb, but they would eventually be learned.

The return of the Bigfala.

For the past two years, our largest annual fundraiser, the Bigfala Sale was on hold - for obvious reasons. The South Pacific WWII Museum is delighted to announce that early next year, possibly in March, the Bigfala Sale will be back in Unity Park, Luganville.



The range of products on sale at the Bigfala Sale is extremely diverse. We can't wait to see what Hamish has lined up for us in 2023.



The crowds we had on most days even surprised us. Corrugated iron and building supplies were top sellers.

Thanks to the incredible support of Hamish Saunders and the team from GMID Australia in Melbourne, they will be supporting the event again, with a fabulous line up of products for us to sell.

At the 2020 Bigfala Sale, we raised in excess of 700,000vu (approx A\$9,400), which enabled us keep the museum open during the lockdown period.



The Bigfala Sale promotional poster from 2020.

Hamish has been a very generous supporter of the Museum for some years, and we would like to take this opportunity to thank him and GMID for their ongoing support into 2023.



Hamish Saunders from GMID presents Museum Chairman Bradley Wood with the funds raised at the 2020 Bigfala Sale.

Inspiring everyday heroes

Voting is sometimes easy, sometimes hard. But in some countries, voting is the simple bit. Then you have to get the ballots somewhere to be counted.

Vanuatu recently had an election, and members of the Vanuatu Mobile Force – a group of volunteers in the military who support the police – had the job of helping get completed ballots in from remote areas. Some were sent by helicopter, others by truck and in some cases the journey was made by foot.

Our hero this month is Private Samuel Bani, along with hundreds of others who undertook the task. Samuel was one of those carrying ballots on foot.

He told Radio New Zealand about the perils of the journey in from central Espiritu Santo.

"The journey was so slippery - the road was flooded, there was no bridge, so we had to cross the (Jordan) river by foot. At some points the river reached my chest. It's so dangerous while it's raining."

"The journey was so tough, the current is so strong. We nearly lost the ballot boxes because the tide was so strong, it's so dangerous."

The team of three picked the boxes up in Sanma Province.

"We had to run four hours to reach the place, then we slept one night in a village then we walked seven to nine hours up the hill to reach Vunamele."



Bringing in the vote – Private Samuel Bani and team members
Photo Private Bani and Radio New Zealand.

Samuel had a message for the new government – make sure to strengthen the infrastructure in rural areas, so that people don't have to risk their lives to make long journeys.

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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