

## Kicking off another big year.

Welcome to what's shaping up to be another exciting year at the South Pacific WWII Museum. Last year saw the reopening of Vanuatu's borders, which has meant the return of tourists to the 'happiest country of earth'. So in 2023 we'll be encouraging more of you to come and see us and explore this amazing island and all it has to offer. We've had plenty of visitors so far, some of which are featured in this first edition of our newsletter for 2023. We've also received some fabulous photographs from newly discovered books about WWII activities on Espiritu Santo, that were found in a research centre in San Francisco. So this month, there's less talk and more pictures, which we hope you enjoy. Let's dive straight in.



Big plans for the Museum moving forward.

### Official Navara Sponsors



# An even bigger catch.

Late last year we reported on the amazing donation made by the Santo Gamefishing Club to the South Pacific World War II Museum, following the annual Santo Hardware fishing competition.

At the time, the donation from the club was a very generous 300,000 VT. Now that the financials from the event have been completed, the Museum was delighted to have been informed that the total amount was more than expected - 338,249VT.

The monies have been allocated as a credit against our Santo Hardware account for the renovations at the museum in Unity Park here in Luganville.

Again we'd we'd like to thank the club, it's members and sponsors for so generously supporting the Museum - particularly Rosemary and Richard Lo and everyone at Santo Hardware.



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

# The best of health.

Hospitals in the New Hebrides, provided world class medical care to Navy, Army and Marine Corps personnel throughout the Pacific campaign of World War II.

In fact, on both Efate and Espiritu Santo, Base hospitals provided medical care equal to that of the big city hospitals back home.



The French hospital on Efate also treated service personnel and featured beautiful gardens and landscaping.

Base Hospital No. 2, located on Efate, arrived at Port Vila, 4 May 1942. It was the first Base Hospital established in the Southwest Pacific.

The majority of patients arrived by air as aeromedical evacuations from the combat area throughout the Guadalcanal campaign.

They were flown to an airfield 6 miles from the hospital, then transferred to ambulances for the road trip to Base Hospital No. 2. In 1944, the hospital was moved to Noumea and in July 1945 to Subic Bay.

However, with the push north on in earnest, and following the construction of the first bomber airfield in just 20 days on Espiritu Santo in July 1942, the 7th and the 15th Battalions Seabees commenced construction of the other necessary facilities to support the huge base as a whole.

Hospitals of course were some of the first to be constructed. In fact, Base Button comprised five hospitals across the south east corner of the island.

25th Army Evacuation Hospital

22nd Army Station Hospital

31st Navy General Hospital

Navy Base Hospital No. 3

Navy Base Hospital No. 6

The largest of those by war's end was Base Hospital No. 3.

The 7th Seabees erected 60 Quonset huts to be used as galleys, wards, operating rooms, dispensaries, and more for Navy Base Hospital No. 6, and initially 40 Quonset huts and warehouses for Navy Base Hospital No. 3.



An aerial view of the massive Navy Base Hospital No. 6.

Another hospital of 100 beds, including quarters, wards mess hall, operating building, and other structures, was established by the 15th as the 31st Navy General Hospital.

In cooperation with the 822nd and the 350th Army Engineers, the 15th built quarters, wards, laboratories,

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and messing facilities for the 25th Evacuation Hospital. They also provided surgery and storage buildings and handled electrical and plumbing work.

These medical facilities proved to be extremely important for the Guadalcanal campaign in the latter part of 1942.

Fast forward to 2023. A chance search by Museum Project Manager James Carter of the on-line catalogue

it contains around fifty photographs of personnel who served at the hospital along with shots of the various wards, operating theatres, mess areas, ward rooms and many other areas of the hospital. On the following pages we'll show you some of the fabulous photos from what was Santo's Base Hospital No. 3.

A big thanks again to Reference Librarian, Gina Bardi from the Maritime Research Center for her assistance in scanning the book for the museum.



The immaculately maintained grounds of Navy base Hospital No. 3 constructed amongst the coconut palms of a former French plantation.

of the Maritime Research Center of San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, uncovered a previously unknown publication relating to Base Hospital No. 3.

James immediately sent a request to the library to enquire about the book and see if it was possible to obtain a copy of it in electronic form. Within 24 hours James was contacted by the library's Reference Librarian, Gina Bardi.

Gina retrieved the book from the centre's collection and arranged to have it scanned for us, which we are most grateful for.

It turns out the book is a special souvenir publication that was made possible for each staff member who served at the hospital through Welfare Funds, or profits from the Ships Service Store of Base Hospital No. 3.



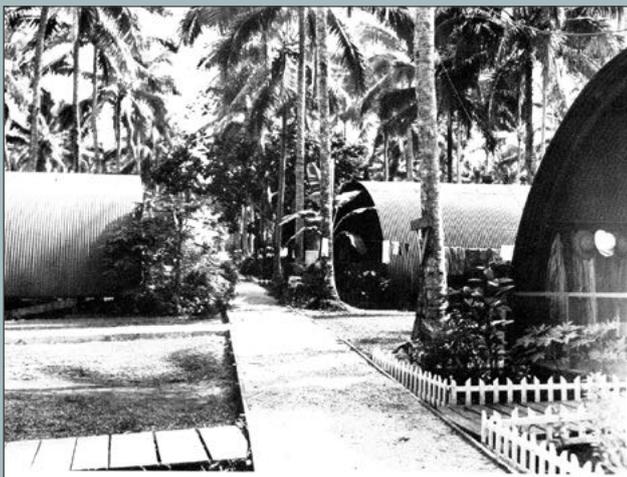
American comedian and entertainer Bob Hope visits patients at the 31st Navy General Hospital on Espiritu Santo.



Red Cross recreation hut and station library.



Ship's Store onshore.



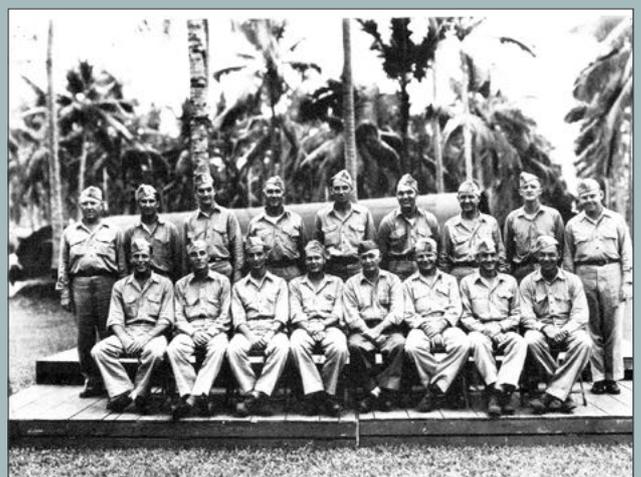
Enlisted men's quarters.



Maintenance staff.



Hospital Chapel.



The Chiefs.



Hospital Mess.



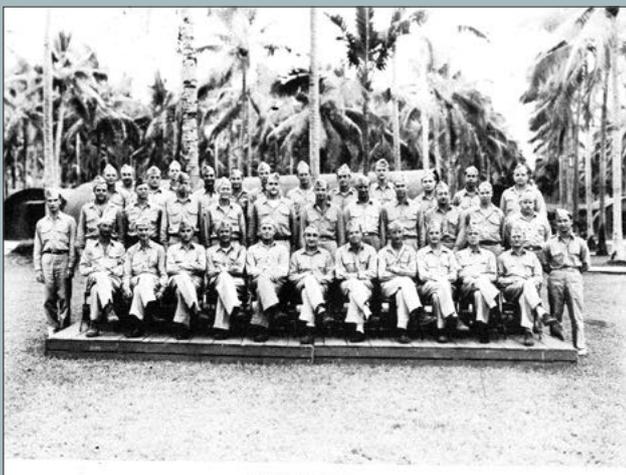
Surgical B.



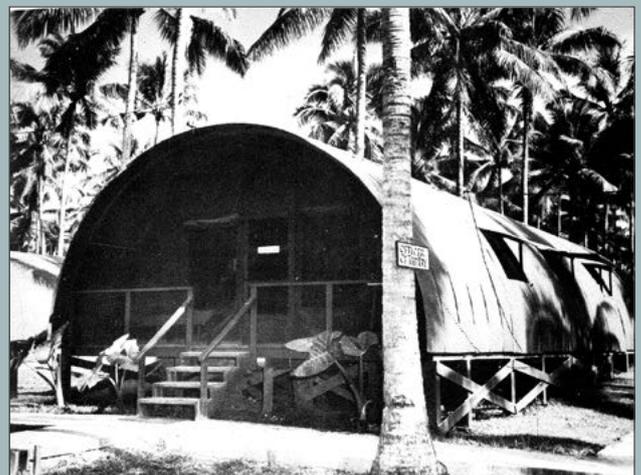
Outdoor Movie Theatre.



The Nurses.



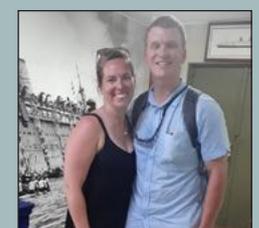
The Officers.



Officer of the Day's Office.

# A big start to 2023.

As we mentioned, on our cover this month, tourists are returning to Vanuatu - from all over the world. We can't thank you all enough for dropping by and showing your support for the Museum. From the feedback we're getting, you all love the Coolidge exhibition and the plans we have to take the Museum to the next level. Fingers crossed this is the year.



# Cross that bridge.

The Sarakata River bridge. One of the most recognisable landmarks in Luganville. Over the years the bridge has been built and rebuilt many times - most notably during World War II.

Base Button was a very big base. In fact, the biggest in the South Pacific. As a result, the amount of vehicular traffic using the bridge - particularly with the huge warehouse and storage facility on the west side - increased dramatically. So much so, a more substantial bridge needed to be constructed.



The old steel Sarakata River bridge in the 1950s.

Once again, thanks to Gina Bardi from the Maritime Research Center and James' detective work, another book was discovered in the wonderful collection of the Maritime Research Center of the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park.

Although you could hardly call it a book. More of a photographic record of the construction of the Sarakata River bridge from September 1942 to July 1943. The bridge was designed by the 5th Naval Construction Regiment and constructed by the 44th US Naval Construction Battalion (Seabees).

Gina has very kindly scanned this book as well and we have great pleasure in presenting some of those scans to you - along with a few others we've collected along the way.



Looking toward west bank 1 September 1942.



Looking towards west bank. 9 ton water tank truck. 5 September 1942.



Looking toward west bank. Work taken over by Navy.



Piling on east bank. 10 July 1943.



Looking toward west bank. 15 July 1943.



Raising the first pontoon stringer, looking toward the west bank. 25 July 1943.



Piling on east bank. 15 July 1943.



Looking downstream. 26th July 1943.



Crane and pontoon stringer hitting the water. 25 July 1943.



Start of raising of Pontoon stringer, looking towards west bank. 3 August 1943.



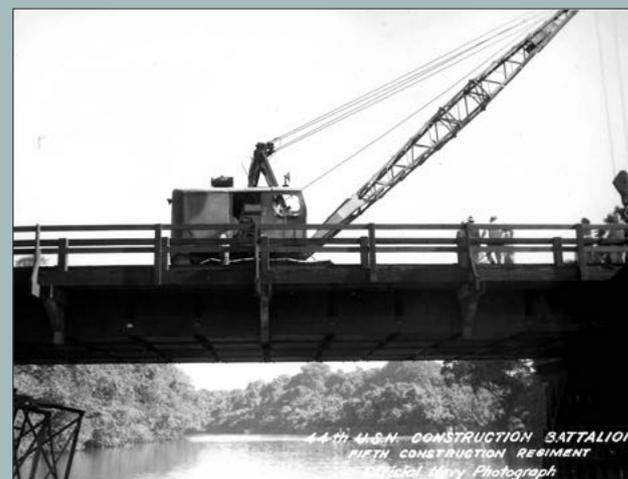
Pontoon stringer in position to swing over. 3 August 1943.



Looking toward west bank. 4 August 1943.



Cranes on the new and old bridge. 9 August 1943.



40-ton Northwest crane looking upstream from old pontoon bridge. 9 August 1943.



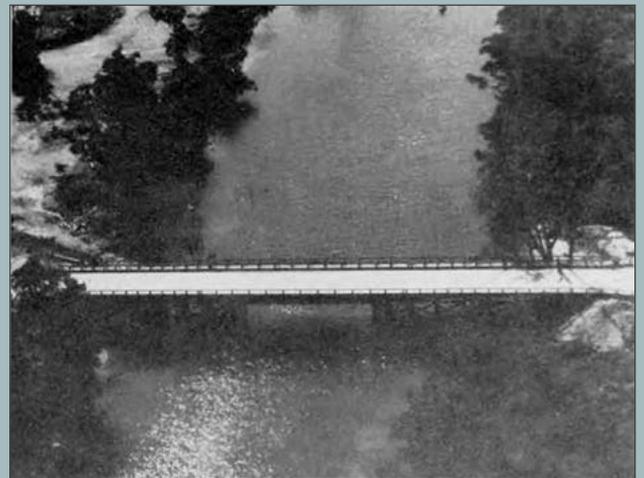
Approach to east side of Sarakata River bridge. 4 August 1943.



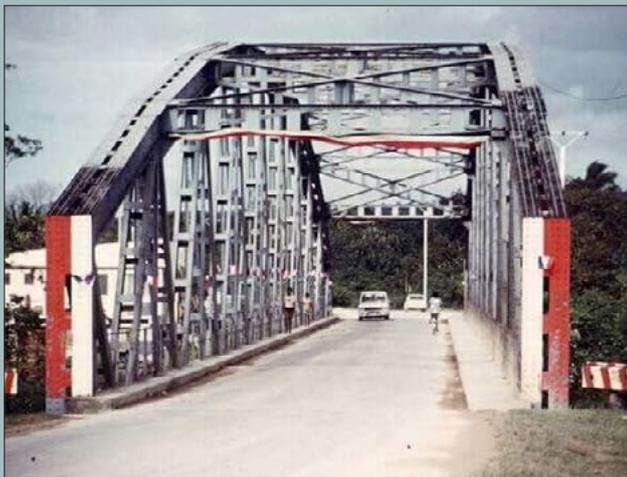
Following a crane collapse, the twisted remains of the crane lie over the pontoon stringer, floating in the river.



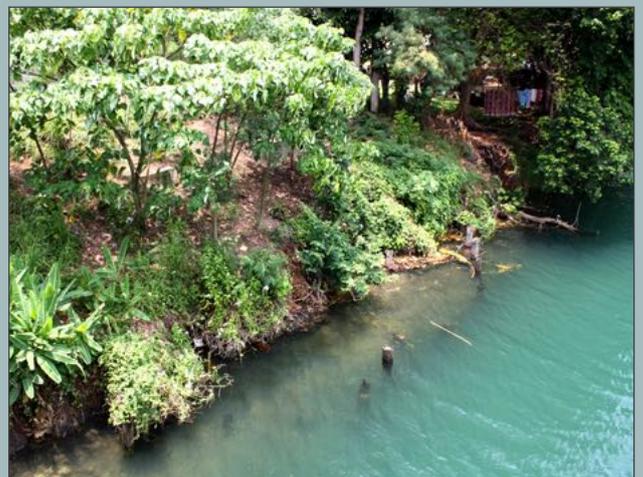
The Sarakata River today looking toward the current concrete bridge.



The completed Sarakata River bridge in late 1943.



The steel Sarakata River bridge in the 1960s.



The remains of the 1943 bridge piles can still be seen in the river at low tide from the current bridge.

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## THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

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# Fly by night.

The Battle of Rennell Island took place at the end of January 1943, and was a curious footnote to the Guadalcanal Campaign which – although the US did not quite grasp it at the time – had been won.

Unable to get supplies to its troops on the island, the Japanese in late December resolved to carry out a mass evacuation.

The US Navy thought the preparations it detected were in fact another offensive to recapture the island by the Japanese.



The US taskforce underway the day before the Battle of Rennell Island – the USS Chicago, right centre in the distance, will be sunk during the action. Photo Naval History and Heritage Command.

At the same time, the US wanted to replace and withdraw exhausted Marines from the island.

That is how Task Force 18, with the heavy cruisers Wichita, Chicago, and Louisville, two escort carriers, three light cruisers, and eight destroyers, came to be escorting a convoy of four transports.

It was under the command of Rear Admiral Robert C. Giffen, new to the Pacific, a sailor of the old battleship navy, and not at all in tune with air operations.

As his force entered the danger zone, Giffen decided to detach his slow escort aircraft carriers, and press on with faster ships to Guadalcanal.

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But unfamiliar with air attacks, he sailed in a formation better suited to countering submarines.

The Japanese knew that TF18 was coming, and as dusk began to fall, radars on the US warships began to pick up many planes approaching.



Rear Admiral Robert C. Giffen.

Admiral Giffen thought himself safe though with night approaching. He was wrong, as the Japanese were ready to carry out their first night aircraft attack.

Thirty-one "Betty" and "Nell" bombers carrying torpedoes struck – and after twenty minutes, two torpedoes slammed into the cruiser USS Chicago.

The next day, the Japanese returned – putting four more torpedoes into Chicago as she limped away, with the rest of the US force unable to prevent the loss.

The Japanese made much of the battle, although in truth it changed nothing about the strategic tide that had moved against them.

Admirals Halsey and Nimitz pilloried Giffen's performance, and the loss of the cruiser greatly embarrassed them.

Chester Nimitz swore that if anyone leaked the news of the Chicago's sinking, he would have them shot.

Amid that, the Japanese were pulling off a spectacular evacuation.. But wars are not won by retreats.



The Mitsubishi G4M 'Betty' bomber, releasing its torpedo. Photo aviation-history.com



The torpedoed cruiser USS Chicago (CA-29) low in the water on 30 January 1943.

# Inspiring everyday heroes

Leina Isno is to become the first ever ni-Vanuatu researcher to conduct health research in Vanuatu.

The student of New Zealand's University of Otago will research a disease called scrub typhus in Vanuatu.

Scrub typhus is a potentially life-threatening disease that is spread by mites that latch onto human skin. It's a serious threat in Vanuatu, with a fatality ratio of 6 per cent.

Leina is a Professional Practice Fellow at Va'a o Tautai – Centre for Pacific Health and she's received funding from the New Zealand Health Research Council to conduct her research.

She's going to be the first ni-Vanuatu health sciences PhD candidate and will receive \$NZ260,000 over 36 months from the HRC to investigate the disease.

Leina, who is from the Denemus tribe, says when she was doing her masters, she decided her next project would involve "giving back" to the people of Vanuatu.

She talked to some colleagues, and they recommended she meet with Professor John Crump, who did research in Vanuatu with World Vision.

She wants to build upon the work already done in the region and hopes a vaccine for scrub typhus will be an outcome of this research, but also wants to encourage

the Vanuatu government to prioritise funding the highly effective antibiotic treatment doxycycline.



Leina Isno, with Professor John Crump . Photo Otago University.

She also wants to educate her people about the dangers of the disease.

Leina may have moved away from Vanuatu two decades ago to pursue a nursing career, but her relationship with the nation has remained strong.

She is a female chief in her tribe, and she also works with the South West Bay Tourism Association Committee to help small business owners in Vanuatu get back on their feet after natural disasters.

**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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