

## Dauntless finds new home

A huge thrill for the South Pacific WWII Museum this week following the discovery of aircraft wreckage in Port Vila.

During a recent visit to the Vanuatu capital, museum chairman Bradley Wood spotted the tail and engine of what appeared to be a World War II aircraft.

Through further research and with the assistance of our dedicated Facebook followers, we confirmed that the tail section and remnants of the engine belonged to a WWII US Dauntless aircraft. These were pieces that we couldn't pass up for our museum collection.

Thanks to the incredible generosity of Jason Rakau, the CEO of Airports Vanuatu Limited (AVL), he graciously agreed to donate the tail and engine to the museum. (continued...)



The Dauntless tail leaves Bauerfield International Airport.



The radial engine as it was found at the airport.

### Official Navara Sponsors



However, we soon faced the challenge of transporting these precious artifacts to Santo.

Fortunately, Sean Griffin from Ocean Logistics came to our aid. He made arrangements for the Dauntless wreckage to be picked up by the team from Recyclecorp in Port Vila and transported to the dock, where it was loaded onto a barge for transportation north to Santo.



The Dauntless tail arrives at the museum in Luganville.

We extend our sincerest gratitude to Jason Rakau from AVL for his invaluable donation to the museum.

Special thanks also go to Rowland and Damas from AVL for their assistance with the loading process, Recyclecorp for transporting the wreckage to the waterfront, and Sean Griffin from Ocean Logistics for organising the transportation to Santo.



The radial engine looks forward to a good clean.

Once we have mounted the tail and engine, we will share further photographs of these pieces on display at the museum in Luganville.



The original rondel and star are still visible even after 80 years.



The Dautless tail under the Museum's verandah.



Another angle of the fuselage and tail of the aircraft.



# Unity Park's clean squad

Unity Park in Luganville is the home of the South Pacific WWII Museum.

The large park on the banks of the Sarakata River is a favourite for locals, particularly at lunchtime and for community events. Unfortunately, that also means we have our fair share of rubbish being left behind.

So we are very thankful to the Youth Drop-In Centre (NCYC), headed by their Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) volunteer Charlotte Brewer and Museum VSA Volunteer Miranda Williamson who have organised a cleaning program around the South Pacific WWII Museum site for 30 minutes every Tuesday.

They started their cleaning program a week ago and the photo shows just what they collected during their half hour.

Thanks to Charlotte, Miranda and their team, as well as VSA New Zealand who continue their fabulous voluntary work throughout Vanuatu.



VSA Volunteers Miranda Williamson (Left) and Charlotte Brewer (Right) with their NCYC volunteers and a whole lot of rubbish.

# Brisbane back on the radar

In early June, Santo was celebrating with the resumption of direct flights by Air Vanuatu between Brisbane, Australia and Espiritu Santo – the gateway to the northern islands.

Operated by Solomon Airlines on behalf of Air Vanuatu, the once-weekly service will be available every Thursday, with the return flight leaving later the same day.



The first Air Vanuatu flight operated by Solomon Airlines arrives at the newly renovated Santo International Airport.

On June 8, the inaugural flight landed at Santo International Airport to much fanfare. The event was attended by Vanuatu Prime Minister Ishmael Kalsakau, Tourism Minister Matai Seremaiah, and CEO of Vanuatu Tourism Office Adela Issachar Aru, as well as hundreds of locals from across the island who welcomed the flight from Brisbane.

The mid-morning departure time from Brisbane and the convenient arrival time in Santo allow for seamless connections within Australia and to other islands



A very warm welcome to the passengers on that first flight.

in Vanuatu beyond Luganville, such as Malekula, Ambrym, Pentecost, Ambae, Banks, and Torres Islands. This improved connectivity opens up opportunities for travellers to discover the diverse beauty and cultural heritage of Vanuatu.

As well as enhancing the total airlift capacity from Australia to Vanuatu, the resumption of direct flights to Santo will be a shot in the arm for tourism in the region. It not only reduces travel time for Australian visitors but also facilitates growth in tourism to the region, showcasing the natural beauty and cultural richness of Vanuatu's northern islands. Air Vanuatu's commitment to expanding its service offerings reflects the growing demand for travel to the region.



Santo laid it on for local dignitaries and guests including Vanuatu Prime Minister Ishmael Kalsakau.

As far as the South Pacific WWII Museum is concerned, this will certainly bring more people to our museum as more tourists discover the direct flight to Luganville. We're already seeing numbers grow as a result of the new route opening up with many visitors telling us they were on the Brisbane flight.

Let's hope tourist numbers continue to grow and Air Vanuatu put on additional flights from Australia direct to Santo very soon.

Tankyu tumas Air Vanuatu.

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## THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

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# The Montevideo Maru

## The secret tragedy not revealed until after the war

The worst ever Australian maritime disaster happened in wartime, but the nearly one-thousand deaths were tragically at the hands of the US Navy.

In July 1942, there were more than a thousand Australian prisoners on board the Montevideo Maru, a Japanese merchantman as she sailed through the South China Sea.

The prisoners had been captured in January 1942 by Japanese forces in Rabaul on New Britain, in the former Australian territory of New Guinea, and they were being transferred to Hainan off southern China.



The Montevideo Maru, in 1941. Picture Wikimedia Commons.

The ship sailed into the path of the American submarine, the USS Sturgeon, off Luzon island in the Philippines. American torpedoes were bedevilled by firing failures early in the Pacific war but there was no such luck for the Montevideo Maru. Torpedoed, she quickly sank, with only a few Japanese crew rescued. The prisoners, all locked below, perished.

Thanks to the efforts of the Sydney based Silentworld Foundation, and the relatives of those who died – members of the Montevideo Maru Society – the wreck of the vessel was finally found this year – fittingly just days before the ANZAC day commemoration on April the 25th.

She lies at 4000 metres depth, the same as the wreck of the Titanic.

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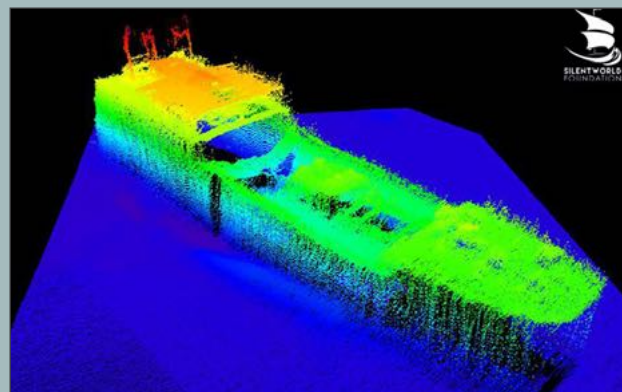
The search began on April 6 in the South China Sea, 110km north-west of the island of Luzon. After just 12 days, a positive sighting was recorded using state-of-the-art technology, including an autonomous underwater vehicle with in-built sonar.



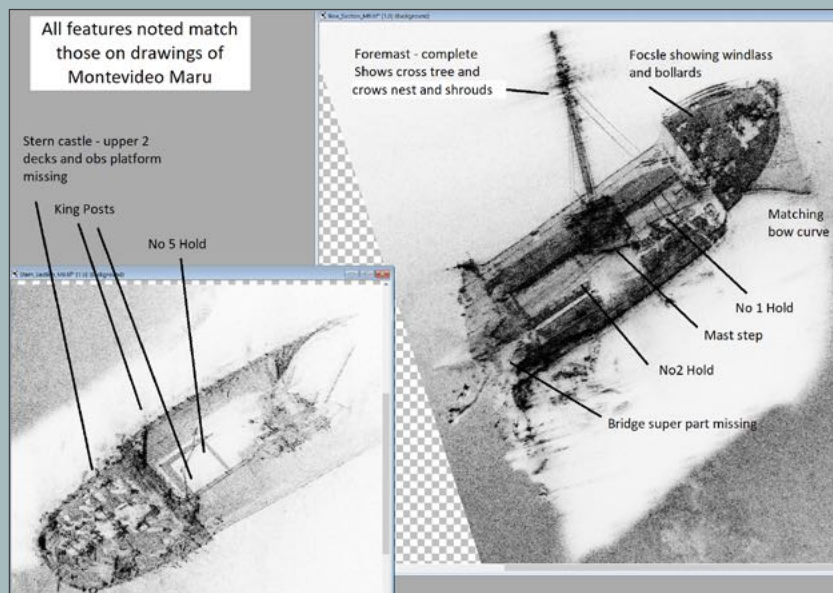
Members of the Silentworld Foundation involved in the successful search. Picture Silentworld.

It took a number of days to verify the wreck using expert analysis from the project team, comprising maritime archaeologists, conservators, operations and research specialists, and ex-naval officers.

The Silentworld Foundation says it took many years for relatives to learn what had happened, so it hopes the discovery does give them some closure about the tragedy.



A 3D image of the SS Montevideo Maru's wreck. Picture Silentworld.



Identifying features of the wreck. Picture Silentworld.

You can read more about the sinking and the subsequent search at:

<https://silentworldfoundation.org.au/aus-media-release/>

# Have history, will travel

The great thing about having one of Santo's best known and most knowledgeable tour operators on the Museum board, is that when we have the need the services of a great tour guide, we don't have to look far, to our own Mayumi Green.

This was precisely the case in early June when Nathan Huegen, the Director of Educational Travel at The National WWII Museum in New Orleans, visited us. Nathan planned to conduct reconnaissance work in the South Pacific for the Museum's future tour programs and chose to spend a few days in Vanuatu. He had been following news about our museum and expressed an interest in visiting us to explore potential opportunities for tourism in the region.

Nathan was also seeking a knowledgeable guide to accompany him and showcase some of the WWII sites on the island that could be incorporated into educational tours of the South Pacific.



VSA volunteer with the Museum, Miranda Williamson with Nathan at the fresh fruit and vegetable market in Luganville.

Without delay, we contacted Mayumi, who owns Wrecks to Rainforests, a tour company in Luganville. In no time, she devised an exceptional two-day tour that included visits to some of our fascinating WWII sites, interspersed with delightful lunches in some of the most scenic locations imaginable.

Before joining the museum approximately 15 years ago, Nathan served as a history teacher at a college. His current role involves researching local war history sites worldwide and collaborating with local guides. Throughout his tenure at the National WWII Museum, he has travelled to 50 countries, dedicating around

**THE NATIONAL WWII MUSEUM**  
EDUCATIONAL TRAVEL PROGRAM

Travel to **27** countries covering all theaters of World War II

**5** Museum Quick Facts

- 8 million+** visitors since the Museum opened on June 6, 2000
- \$2 billion+** in economic impact
- 160,000+** active Museum members
- 8,000+** travelers, representing every US state
- 625,000+** social media followers

**30** Tour Programs operated on average per year, at times accompanied by WWII veterans

Visit **16** Overseas American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries & **189** museums on our itineraries

Travel with experts: **26** top historians with **174** published books and **47** documentary credits

ww2musemtours.org

Logos for National WWII Museum, TripAdvisor, AAA, and other awards.

A poster for The National WWII Museum's Educational Travel Program that we hope to be a part of in the near future.

The National WWII Museum is widely recognised as the leading authority on WWII history in the United States. Their Travel Program is committed to delivering the highest quality educational experiences by arranging custom-curated itineraries led by renowned historians, best-selling authors, and expert guides.



One of the many ammunition bunkers still in existence on Espiritu Santo and across on Aore Island.

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Nathan went to see Million Dollar Point for himself and was amazed by what was lying in the rocky shallows.

eight months of the year to visiting beaches, bridges, cities, and villages where crucial battles occurred and historic decisions were made.

Mayumi's tour took Nathan, along with Miranda Williams, our museum VSA volunteer, and her family, who happened to be in Santo for a vacation, to some of the finest WWII sites on the island. They explored the B-17 wreck, Turtle Bay fighter airfield, Bomber #3,

In the near future, Nathan will return to the United States and we hope WWII tours of Santo will be included in The National WWII Museum's list of destinations.

We eagerly anticipate the opportunity to welcome tour groups to Vanuatu in the not too distant future.



The crashed B-17 bomber site, just south east of the old Bomber #1 Airfield on Pallikulo Bay.



Not a bad spot for lunch. Port Orly beach with Chez Louis just to the left.

Million Dollar Point, and many other significant locations. They also enjoyed a memorable lunch at the renowned Chez Louis in Port Orly, boasting a view that must be seen to be believed.



# A salute to the Fighting Forty

During World War II, the United States Navy's 40th Naval Construction Battalion, also known as Seabees, played a significant role in the Pacific Theatre on Espiritu Santo.

While many other Seabee battalions played a just as vital role in the establishment and ongoing upgrading of Base Button on Santo, the 40th also achieved much in their time on Espiritu Santo.

In the late 1930s, as the prospect of war with Japan loomed, the U.S. Navy began a massive base-building program in the Pacific, utilising civilian contractors. However, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and the United States' entry into the war, the use of civilian labour became impractical. Rear Admiral Ben Moreell, commander of the Bureau of Yards and Docks, recognised the need for a militarised construction force and proposed the activation and organisation of Naval Construction Battalions (Seabees).



ADM Ben Moreell, CEC, USN: Founder of the Seabees and shaper of the modern Civil Engineer Corps. Pic Naval History and Heritage Command.

These units were composed of men recruited from the construction trades and trained in ground combat by the Marines.

On March 5, 1942, the Seabees were officially designated as such and were given their motto, "Construimus, Batuimus" (We Build, We Fight). They quickly established themselves as an essential component of the Allied war effort, constructing vital bases not only for the Navy but also for the Army, Marines, and Allied forces worldwide. One of the

significant endeavours of the Seabees during World War II was the construction of sections of the Naval Advance Base on Santo.



The enormous Naval Construction Battalion Centre, Port Hueneme, California. Home of the Seabees and the place where the idea of 'flat-packed' Advanced Bases was born.

Espiritu Santo served as a crucial staging area and support base for the Allied forces in the Pacific. The Seabees played a pivotal role in developing this base, which became the first large advance base constructed in the Pacific and the second-largest base in the theatre by the war's end outside Hawaii. They built essential infrastructure, including airstrips, roads, barracks, hospitals, supply depots, and port facilities, to support Allied operations in the region.

The battalion comprised four construction companies, representing various trades and totalling around 224 men. These companies worked together under the direction of the battalion's headquarters company, which provided specialised skills and administrative support. Through collaboration with other Seabee battalions and the regimental staff, they efficiently completed many high-priority construction projects on the island.

Each battalion was incredibly proud of what they did during the war – which is completely understandable when you read a battalion's 'cruise book'. These comprehensive histories of each battalion are richly detailed with photos and text covering their activities throughout the world.

(continued..)



One of the many Seabee cruise books, that have now been reprinted and are now available on Amazon.

To the delight of Seabees fans and those with a personal attachment to the Seabee battalions of WWII, the cruise books have been reprinted and are available for purchase on Amazon.

The following text is taken from the 40th cruise book and covers their time on Espiritu Santo. It has been reproduced as it was written.

*The Seabees work has been so well publicised that at best, this story can only be a variation of the original stories of the Seabees.*



A map from the 40th Seabee's cruise book depicting their travels during World War II.

*This book then is not an attempt to glorify that work, but rather a casual record of the way we lived and worked over a period of twenty-one months in the south seas of our work in the New Hebrides, New Guinea and the Admiralty Islands during which time we travelled some twenty-two thousand miles.*

*When we first came out we had the usual confused idea of what we were to do. We worked and waded through strange and unfamiliar tasks and terrain, and altogether managed to get our work done, sometimes despite ourselves. But even then, we found certain pride in seeing how much our work amounted to in the final score*

*Our history as a battalion actually began on that morning in December when we entrained from camp, with the band rather facetiously playing, "California here I come" as we settled down in the typical comfort of a troop train.*



The 40th's cruise book contains a few humorous illustrations of life on board ship as they sailed from the US to Espiritu Santo.

*When the dust settled from its ancient carpets, We found to our dismay that we weren't headed northwest, but south. Rumours flew thick and fast. The bets were even on England, Africa and South America. But we still didn't know two days later when our "crack" limited finished the eight-hour run from Davisville to Norfolk.*

*Too weak to offer further resistance, we meekly lined up on the wharf. Strong hearts quailed when we saw The "leviathan" berthed there, a cross between The first Fulton steam-boat and the Hoboken Ferry! The "Willie P" as we learned to affectionately call her was hardly the ship to inspire confidence in a train-sick bunch of landlubbers.*

*Christmas day was spent aboard ship and two days later, we sailed into a misty, stormy Atlantic. As if the indignity of the quarters in the hold were not sufficient for this bunch of recent civilians, the storm did its best to make the towering tiers of bunks lie horizontal.* (continued...)

*It didn't do our stomachs any good either. In the time honoured tradition, pork was served for chow. The fish enjoyed it.*

*After a grinding, rushing storm off Cape Hatteras, we suddenly slipped into the green waters of the Caribbean. And so began our great voyage... through the Panama Canal... and out into the vast stretches of the Pacific past the lonely Galapagos Islands.*

*After weeks of nothing but sea and sky, we crossed the Equator and became shellbacks. Then came the lazy days in the horse latitudes. As we entered the South Pacific. Windless, waveless seas, blistering tedious days with only the glistening flying fish to break the landless sea. Then out of the green waters, islands rose on the horizon.*

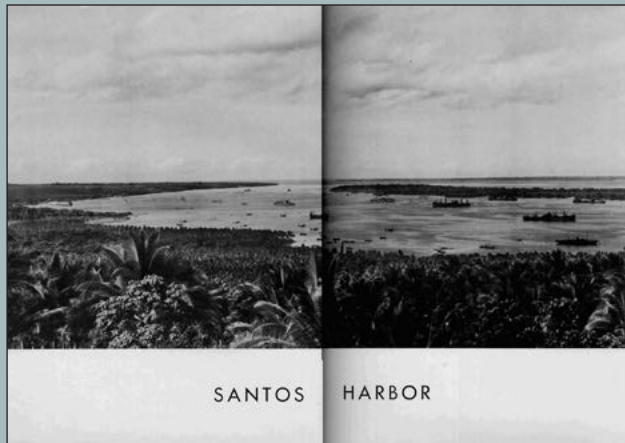
*Little by little the path in the jungle widened. Day and night the work went on and slowly the machines drove the jungle back.*



Clearing a path through the jungle on Santo.



Bomber #3 was a massive job on a mountain plateau.



The 40th cruise book includes this photo of Luganville Harbour complete with the misspelling of Santo.

*We sailed across the international date line and entered the region where the Southern Cross shone so brilliantly at night. Then, after forty-two days and nights, we steamed through a channel of palm-covered islands, past the coral reefs and anchored in the off-shore waters of our new home – Santo harbour.*

*Millions of yards of coral surfaced our roads and the strip miles of taxiways were laid as a never-ending stream of equipment moved up and down.*

*We managed to find time for amusements and gave thanks in our own way. We even launched a ship.*



This was the ship the 40th crew launched on Santo.

*We literally moved the jungle and where there had been forgotten groves we brought in our equipment. From the jungles, we cut our timber. With coral, we made our roads. We built our camp in the groves with what utilities we could muster and in the midst of the mud we fashioned small comforts.*



Quonset huts built by the 40th under palm trees.

*Our equipment was small against the jungle but when we had to, we repaired and rebuilt and made this our home.*

*Steel frames and coconut logs were joined. Man-made light towers replaced the banyan trees. And steel buildings rose beneath the coconut palms. (continued..)*



The garbage pier built to the east of Luganville.



The mill kept the Seabee carpenters well supplied.

*We built a garbage pier a lumber mill and camps for other outfits. Some, like resorts. For some culverts, we used oil drums others were of concrete. And where the jungle had stood, the airstrip took form.*

*On the water front, we assembled pontoons and built barges and on one of the barges in a welter of steel we erected a seventy-five-ton crane. Pontoons and water-front work were a major part of our job.*



Seabees from the 40th Battalion stand next to many pontoons joined together to make up one big floating pontoon.

*When the rollers were finished and the first plane had landed, we felt our job had been completed – Bomber Three, New Hebrides.*

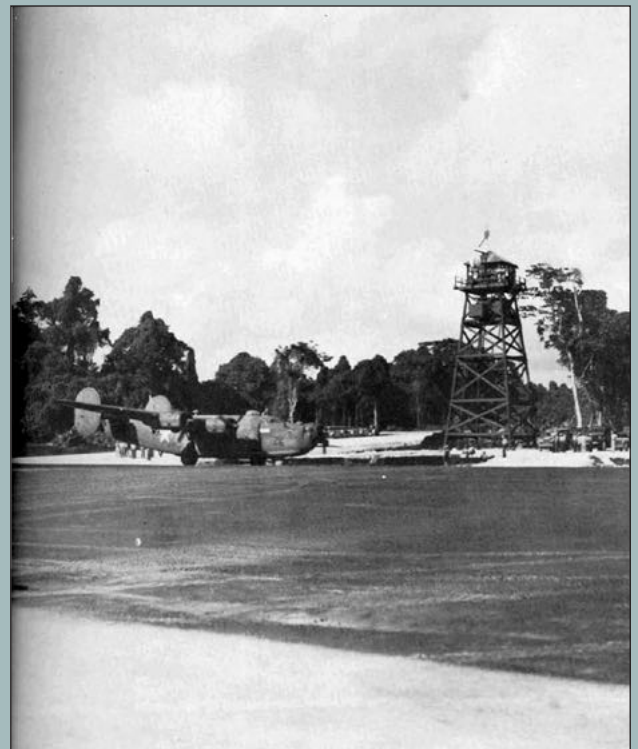
The work of the 40th on Santo might have been its first deployment, but certainly wasn't its last, having deployed to New Guinea, Eniwetok, Saipan and Okinawa before war's end.

In the final words of the cruise book as they left Santo, the author says, *'We sailed out of the Hebrides, into the Coral Sea and up past the Great Barrier Reef of Australia till we raised New Guinea in the distance'..*

Those stories we'll leave for another issue of the Museum newsletter.



The amazing Bomber #3 Airfield cut out of the jungle on a mountain plateau, by the 40th Construction Battalion.



The arrival of the first B-24 aircraft on Bomber #3 signalled the beginning of the end for the 40th Seabees on Espiritu Santo.

# Inspiring everyday heroes

Tradie is Australian and New Zealand slang for tradespeople. The carpenters and builders, who you'll see around building projects big and small.

Mostly the tradespeople are trades-men. Because it's still a profession dominated by men.

But holding a hammer and running a skillsaw isn't just something males are good at, and this past month, a group of young Vanuatu women have been getting a taste of the profession, thanks to the Australia Pacific Training Coalition.



Checking out the Tradie Life.  
Picture courtesy of the Australian High Commission, Vanuatu.

The four women have recently taken part and completed a Building and Construction Taster Pilot program.

It's to encourage them to look at further training in carpentry.

APTC allows students to learn about basic knowledge and skills in building and construction, work safely in the construction industry and basic knowledge in carpentry

They joined 16 APTC carpentry students for a work experience placement at the Vanuatu Women's Centre,



A carpentry student at work in Port Vila.

Port Vila. The students have been repairing cyclone damage to numerous VWC buildings as part of their certificate training.

Here's hoping it's given them the confidence to become, as one Australian women carpenter calls herself, a Tradie Lady.

**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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