

Digging deep

In last month's newsletter, we briefly touched on the discovery of an old bulldozer by PhD student Pierre Noel in a patch of jungle next to the old Sandberg Field in South Santo.

This former US Army airfield operated L-3 Grasshopper observation aircraft on behalf of the army. The high wing, light aircraft was used for liaison and observation missions in direct support of ground forces. However, the purpose of their presence in and around Santo remains a mystery, given that the nearest ground forces were located nearly 1000 kilometres away.

Fortunately, when it comes to our bulldozer discovery, we have now uncovered more information than we could have ever anticipated, all thanks to the invaluable contributions of Museum member Mike Lechwar from the United States.



Not much to see on an initial inspection. Our dozer would have to wait for a more thorough investigation down the track.

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Mike's mission

If you're an avid reader of our newsletters, you might recall Mike's story we featured in our January 2021 issue. In 2010, Mike, along with his son, embarked on a journey retracing the steps of his father Edward, who had been stationed in Santo during World War II. This pilgrimage led them to visit all the places where Edward had once served.

Over the past few years, Mike has become a passionate member and supporter of our museum community. In fact he generously donated his father's wartime photographic collection to us. But how does Mike's involvement tie into our recent discovery of the bulldozer?

It turns out that Mike has a unique connection to this finding. In the past, he held a senior position at Caterpillar, the very company that supplied the US military with an astonishing quantity of crawler-type tractors, many commonly referred to as bulldozers.

Base Button/Luganville owes much of its construction to the diligent efforts of the US Navy Seabee battalions, who relied heavily on Caterpillar bulldozers for various tasks, including land clearing, road construction, and most notably, the development of taxiways and runways at the three bomber bases, Turtle Bay fighter airfield, and quite possibly, Sandberg Field in South Santo.



Sandberg Field in South Santo, bulldozed through a coconut plantation.



A US Navy Seabee crawler pulling a modified 'Carry-All' minus a blade which would have made it a bulldozer..

Between 1942 and the close of 1945, Caterpillar produced an impressive 56,306 units of D2, D4, D6, D7, and D8 tracked vehicles. These machines played a pivotal role, being extensively used by the US Army Engineering Battalions and the US Navy Construction Battalions, famously known as the Seabees.

We successfully located some numbers on the drive sprocket and idler wheels. After employing forensic photographic software to enhance the images, the numbers became more distinct. This is where Mike's expertise came into play, bringing us closer to unravelling the mystery of the bulldozer's history.

Following our bulldozer discovery, we reached out to Mike, who eagerly joined our team. Initially, the dozers' discovery did not yield sufficient information for identification.

However, just last week, Museum board members, Bradley Wood, Mayumi Green, and Jimmy Carter, returned to the site with some 'local muscle' to clear away jungle and search for any identifying serial or part numbers.



Caterpillar's global headquarters in Texas. Photo Caterpillar.

Mike's first port of call in the giant Caterpillar network was a specialist group known as the Undercarriage Dozer Team. Mike felt that if anyone would know about the lower workings of a Cat dozer, they would. And so everything was sent to them for initial analysis.

However, not to put all your Cats in one basket, he also sent our photos and video to a parts specialist by the name of Usamah Loveless. He once worked in a group that answered technical questions about parts. Mike's theory was If he couldn't answer the question as to what the tractor is (or isn't), he will know where to find someone who will know.

So we waited... and waited. (Ok it was the weekend!).

Monday finally came and Mike told us he had set up phone calls with two different groups to discuss the tractor. The first was with someone who used to work in the parts technical areas. They also forwarded our



Museum member and Caterpillar detective Mike Lechwar.

package to an Undercarriage group in the mining area.

Secondly, he set up a call with a very good friend who used to be an undercarriage expert before retirement. Mike felt he would be able to draw on old resources to find out what we have on Santo.

The deadline for this edition of the newsletter loomed large, so we put the pressure back on Mike. Sure enough he came through with the goods.

Following much theorising and speculation, it came down to the Caterpillar Archives Office to finally solve the riddle.

Unfortunately for Mike it wasn't a Caterpillar. It turns out we have an International TD-9 at South Santo.



The TD-9 at South Santo, with the jungle cleared away.

Mike said, "I should have known but assumed some of the configuration was different than what was found on later tractors. On Caterpillar machines, the idler is solid and the drive wheel has spokes, just the opposite of this machine. And, this TD-9 is about the size of a D4, closer to what you had originally been saying. This machine was offered as direct competitor to the Caterpillar D4."

The TD-9 took a different route by using a diesel version of the 335 cubic inch 4-cylinder engine found in the T-9, as opposed to the 414 cubic inch diesel engine utilized in the TD-35. International's introduction of the TD-9 was motivated by a desire to compete with the Caterpillar D-4, resulting in the creation of a remarkably similar tractor.



The International TD-9 at South Santo.

These two tractors shared similar dimensions and were powered by 4-cylinder diesel engines running at 1,400 rpm, coupled with 5-speed transmissions. However, Caterpillar employed a pony motor starting system, while International's approach involved starting on gasoline and subsequently transitioning to diesel. The basic International model could be crank-started, with an electric starter available as an optional feature. In 1940, the TD-9 boasted a slightly larger engine than the D-4, with a displacement of 335 cubic inches compared to the D-4's 312 cubic inches. Moreover, it generated slightly more power, delivering 44 belt horsepower in contrast to the D-4's 40 belt horsepower.

As World War II loomed on the horizon, International Harvester had already established itself as a significant player in the agricultural and construction crawler

markets. The company had an extensive line-up of highly regarded tracked tractors in production when the United States entered the war, and both military and civilian government agencies seized the opportunity to leverage these assets. Initially, civilian tractors were procured for military use, but as the conflict progressed, there was a push to standardise the types, sizes, and applications of these machines across various branches of the military. In response, International Harvester made necessary updates to align its products with the specific needs of the military.

The military classified crawlers into three broad categories: ordnance (artillery) or general-purpose crawlers, crawler cranes, and bulldozers. International Harvester manufactured both diesel and petrol-powered crawlers, with a general preference emerging—diesel engines were favoured by the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps, while the U.S. Army tended to favour



A restored TD-9 similar to the South Santo model. Photo ironmartonline.com

petrol engines for units operating in theater. In the case of the TD-9, a compact dozer, International Harvester produced a total of 23,190 units between 1940 and 1945, with the majority of these serving the wartime effort.



A Caterpillar D4 is seen pulling a load off of a Landing Craft, Medium, during a practice landing in the Pacific Theatre. Photo usautoindustryworldwartwo.com

Mike went on to say, "I'm disappointed the machine found wasn't a Caterpillar, but truth has been found. The machine is an American machine that found its way to New Hebrides, maybe during the War, maybe later. This does bring this story to an end but there could be more. While reading about the TD-9, it was noted that no examples of this machine are known to exist. Therefore, Santo has the only one known to be in existence."

Now if we could just prove that, wouldn't it be a nice consolation.

The South Pacific WWII Museum are very grateful to everyone at Caterpillar in the United States who helped identify our crawler/dozer.

Of course none of this would have been possible without the assistance of Mike Lechwar who took to this project with great passion and determination. Thank you Mike for all your help.



A version of the TD-9 with similar features to the South Santo TD-9. Both the US Army and the USMC used a version of this tractor crane based on the IH T-9 gas or TD-9 diesel crawler. The USMC version is shown here. Both featured a 2-ton crane from Trackson. The US Army version was called the tractor crane 2-ton M5 and featured a 334.5-cubic-inch, 46-belt-horsepower gasoline engine (52 horsepower on the flywheel). The USMC version had a diesel engine that displaced 334.5 cubic inches and made 44 belt horsepower. Photo Wisconsin Historical Society



The airfield that started it all at South Santo.

Through your generosity

Unobtrusively stationed by our museum's front doors, there sits a modest black box on the wall, while President Calvin Coolidge casts his contemplative gaze upon the museum. Although this box may not be a prominent relic of World War II history, it holds an importance equal to any of our exhibits.

This unassuming box is our donation box. This month, we've chosen to give it a special mention because we want to express our heartfelt gratitude to all the visitors who have generously contributed to it over the years, particularly in the past few months.



The Museum in Unity Park is about to undergo a major renovation that will double its size.

Thanks to your kind and generous donations, we raised approximately 242,000VT (approximately A\$3,200) between May and August this year. These funds are invaluable in helping us maintain the museum's operations and financing the upcoming renovations as we expand into the adjacent space next door in the coming months.

To each and every one of you who has visited us, engaged in the enlightening wartime history narratives shared by Marina, Miranda, or Lyn, or simply dropped by to say hello and explore our collection, we extend our most sincere thanks. Your support has played a vital role in propelling us to the position of the premier tourist destination in Luganville.



President Franklin D. Roosevelt on 'overwatch' for our donation box.

THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

The First Quebec Conference

There couldn't have been a bigger contrast in August 1943 between an Allied serviceman sweating it out in a Quonset hut on Espiritu Santo, and what was happening several thousand miles away in Canada.

But for our un-named airman, sailor or soldier, the decisions being made would have big bearing on where they would go next, and what they would do.

They were attending the First Quebec Conference, codenamed Quadrant. The agenda was ambitious to say the least, including a decision on Operation Overlord, what would be the invasion of France in 1944. The subjects of nuclear weapons, and the war in Italy also saw key decisions.

As for the Pacific, the leaders and their myriad staffs

approved a key change of strategy in the South Pacific. Instead of the original plan eventually to frontally assault the key Japanese base at Rabaul, which anchored the islands stretching eastward to Guadalcanal, it would now all be bypassed.

This was General Douglas MacArthur's Operation Cartwheel, a series of operations in the Southwest Pacific. A direct assault on Rabaul was at first part of the plan, now it would not be carried out.

Instead, the Japanese would find that some 100 thousand of their troops were effectively cut off, in what some dubbed the world's largest prison camp.



The Quebec Conference, Canada, August 1943 group photograph on the terrace of the Citadel in Quebec, on the occasion of the First Quebec Conference, with the Chateau Frontenac in the background. Front row: President Roosevelt of the United States and the Earl of Athlone, Governor General of Canada; back row: Mr Mackenzie-King, Prime Minister of Canada and the Prime Minister, the Right Hon Winston Churchill, MP.

In Canada, a secret conference was being held, but in no sense were those taking part nameless, unknowns. Winston Churchill and Franklin D Roosevelt. They were meeting somewhere starting in Q – but no Quonset was in sight in Quebec. Instead, the two men and their myriad staffs were meeting in the century old fortification, the Citadelle, and the magnificent Chateau Frontenac hotel.

It did not signal any lessening of the immediate fighting, but by 1944, the islands of the New Hebrides were no longer in the very frontlines.

Tens of thousands of personnel and countless vessels will however continue to pass through there as a still key base.

But because of Quadrant, the next posting for our Espiritu Santo serviceman was much more likely to be the central Pacific, or in the drive along the New Guinea coast towards the Philippines.

All of this was secret to most of the world at the time, and certainly for those doing the fighting.



Canadian Sergeant Major Emile Couture, the man who accidentally held some of the closest guarded secrets of the war. Years after the war, his story was picked up by many local and international newspapers.

But in one of those strange mishaps of history, a Canadian Sergeant Major responsible for cleaning up the venues afterwards decided to snaffle as a souvenir, a leather bound folder inscribed with the names of Churchill and Roosevelt.

Later at home that night, he discovered – no doubt to his horror - that it contained detailed plans for Operation Overlord. Hiding them under his mattress, 25-year-old Emile Couture, returned them in the morning. He was interrogated by the FBI and Scotland Yard over possible leaks.



The Couture family still has the security passes Émile Couture was granted in 1943 and 1944, to access the Château Frontenac and the Citadelle. Photo Julia Page/CBC.

When a second Quadrant conference was held in 1944, he was in fact honoured with the British Empire Medal for "services rendered".



Rt. Hon. Mackenzie King, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Rt. Hon. Winston Churchill at the Quebec Conference. Photo Wikipedia.

The crosswind hangar launch

US Naval aviation witnessed a rapid and remarkable ascent during World War II. This era marked the zenith of naval strategy, with the aircraft carrier taking centre-stage. As the prominence of aircraft carriers soared, so did the pace of advancements in carrier design and technology. Some are still incorporated into today's carrier designs, while others were ultimately abandoned. Such was the fate of the hangar catapult.

Hangar catapults were integrated into the initial six Essex-class aircraft carriers, namely the Yorktown CV-10, Intrepid CV-11, Hornet CV-12, Ben Franklin CV-13, Bunker Hill CV-17, and the Wasp CV-18. Aircraft launched from the front section of the hangar bay in both directions through the expansive hangar bay doors. Extending from either side of the open hangar bay were sponson extensions, a design element that would evolve further in subsequent iterations.



An F6F Hellcat launches off USS Hornet's hangar catapult, Photo US Navy.

At first glance, the notion may appear unconventional, yet it arose out of a genuine necessity. Before the introduction of the angled deck, carrier designers grappled with the challenge of launching scout aircraft swiftly, even when the straight deck carrier was ensnared in chaos or engaged in recovery operations. The ingenious solution involved installing a catapult that traversed the breadth of the ship within the hangar bay, flanked by substantial doors on either side. This arrangement allowed for the rapid launch of one or two scout planes when the flight deck was unavailable.



Another angle of an F6F Hellcat launching off USS Hornet. Photo US Navy.

These hangar catapults were of a much shorter length, offering a swifter stroke compared to their upper deck counterparts. Furthermore, the aircraft launching from the hangar lacked the benefit of wind over the deck to assist in becoming airborne, as crosswinds were more the rule than the exception as the carrier continued on its course. Consequently, the experience for crews tasked with taking off from the hangar deck was nothing short of exhilarating.

were completely phased out during ship refits, except for one exception - the USS Hornet, where both deck catapults remained intact.

Several factors contributed to the hangar catapult's ultimate scrapping. Notably, it came at the cost of a deck catapult, and the hangar bay had to remain clear in the vicinity of the catapult when an aircraft was on alert or preparing for launch. Additionally, the



An F6F from VF-1 can be seen on the main deck of the USS Yorktown (CV-10). While below, the ship's hangar catapult is clearly visible. Photo US Navy.

Initially, the hangar catapult's significance was underscored to such an extent that it led to a redistribution of the ship's weight, resulting in the omission of the port side top deck catapult as a compensatory measure. However, this novel design element had a relatively brief existence. By 1944, they

Navy discovered that targeted training, meticulous planning, and close coordination with other carriers in a flotilla, rendered the peculiar device unnecessary. Most significantly, the advent of radar technology rendered scout planes less crucial for early warning, rendering the hangar catapult more of a hindrance than an asset.

When duty calls

In June of this year, Simon Matthews from New Zealand, paid a visit to our museum. During his visit, Simon shared some of his personal history with Marina and Miranda – the wartime experiences of his grandfather, Frank Bish, who served on Espiritu Santo during World War II. Naturally, this piqued our curiosity.

Gratefully, Simon recently sent us a copy of his grandfather's memoir detailing his time in the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) on the island.



At Espiritu Santo, Blue Section L to R. Frank Reid, Roy McIntosh, Graham Gould and Frank.

The memoir is a wonderful piece of storytelling, compelling us to approach Simon with a request to share it with our valued newsletter subscribers and readers.

Simon was delighted by our interest and graciously consented to us reproducing the memoir, which brings us much pleasure as we present it to you, albeit in a condensed form.

In the following narrative, we will delve into Frank's remarkable experiences on Espiritu Santo. In upcoming editions of our newsletter, we may also bring you some of his combat stories in a separate feature.

But before we immerse ourselves in Frank's wartime recollections, let's take a moment to learn a bit more about this humble individual.

Frank Bish, a pilot in the RNZAF, embarked on his training journey at the Initial Training Wing (I.T.W.) in Rotorua in January 1943. This marked the initial phase of his rigorous training as an aircrew member. Starting with Tiger Moths, he successfully completed his flying training on Harvards at RNZAF Base Woodbourne near Blenheim.



A Tiger Moth as used for initial flying training in not just the RNZAF, but the RAAF and the RAF as well.

On December 22nd, 1943, Frank proudly earned his pilot's wings, following which he reported to the Headquarters of the Operational Training Airfield at Ardmore on January 27th, 1944. Here, he would hone his skills flying Kittyhawks and Warhawks, mastering both day and night flights, practicing aerial combat, air-to-ground operations, air gunnery, close formation flying, enemy aircraft recognition, and much more. All these preparations were in anticipation of action in the South Pacific theatre.



20(F) Squadron at Ardmore prior to departure to the Pacific. Frank is 3rd from left in the back row.

By month's end, Frank had officially become a pilot with No. 20 Fighter Squadron R.N.Z.A.F. He was soon informed that he would be transported to Espiritu Santo on April 17th by a transport aircraft departing from Whenuapai.

And with that, we hand over the storytelling reins to Frank himself.



Frank Bish's girlfriend earlier in the war, would become his wife after his return. This is Jo outside her home at 19 New St. Ponsonby in 1944.

My last day before departure to the Pacific was bright and sunny. I spent the morning re-packing my kitbag, adding a few extra items as advised by a list supplied to us all beforehand, including such items as a basic first aid kit, a 'hussif' (needles and cotton etc.) and two or three books.

In the afternoon I made my various goodbyes to all and sundry, including a final call at Jo's home. (Jo was Frank's girlfriend at the time and later became his wife). It was a strange feeling. I had returned to camp many times, to different places over the past three years but this time it was different. I was heading off on a very different trip this time!

At the appointed hour of 10pm we boarded the Air Force transport vehicle behind the G.P.O. as ordered and were on our way out to Whenuapai Air Base. Here we bedded down in the familiar four men huts, ready to be called at 6am to board our aircraft, a 41 Squadron Douglas Dakota.



A Royal New Zealand Air Force C-47 aircraft comes into land on a tropical island airfield in the South Pacific.

These aircraft, which were mainly used for the transport of supplies, were fairly basically set up internally for the carrying of passengers. Seating for the twenty or so of us consisted of a long metal box-like seat which ran down the body of the plane on each side. We piled our kitbags and other odds and ends on the floor in the middle. The flight to Espiritu Santo, a small island at the northern end of a group of islands now known as Vanuatu would take about 10 hours.

There was no heating provision and at around 10000ft. things could get fairly cold, so we draped what we could find over us and settled down to what was a long and fairly arduous trip, reading, some playing cards and some trying to catch a little sleep to make up for their indulgences the night before.

About half-way through the flight, our C.O. Sholto Duncan moved around the plane to tell us that he had received a signal by radio that on arrival at Santo we would not be equipped with the familiar Kittyhawks or Warhawks, but we would be the first Squadron to be equipped with the new Vought F4U fighter, a number of which were being assembled and test- flown at Santo ready for our arrival.

This news excited us, because although we had not seen these planes we had heard of their success and knew that their performance characteristics were far superior to the machines we had been flying.

Eventually, late in the afternoon, our Dakota wheeled around over coral atolls and we descended to our landing at Pallikulo strip, a narrow channel cut between two rows of coconut palms in a copra plantation. As we left the aircraft with our gear the first thing that hit us was the heat, a sudden contrast from aboard the plane. We stood there, in a loose group, looking about us at these unfamiliar surroundings, our minds full of awe at a scene we had only seen the likes of in the movies, or in books. Probably only one or two of our senior officers had ever been out of New Zealand before. The days were yet to come when a flight to the Pacific, or Australia would become commonplace for the average person.

close to them was their size. They were half as big again as the P.40s we had been flying! The propeller was the largest ever fitted to a single-engine aircraft, 13ft. 6 inches in diameter to cope with the tremendous power output of the 18 cylinder engine. To accommodate this, the designers had fitted inverted gull-wings to give the prop ground clearance.

The cockpit was over ten feet above the ground and to gain access to this the pilot would push the toes of his issue suede boots first into one spring loaded recess in the lowered wing flaps, then the right foot into another on the fuselage below the cockpit. To do this in the tropic



Bomber # 1 Airfield was located adjacent to Pallikulo Bay and at the end of the Pallikulo Peninsula seen to the right of this shot.

After a while some American 4x4 trucks arrived and we loaded our gear and clambered aboard, our minds a mixture of anticipation tinged with a little apprehension. Everything about us seemed to bring home the fact that here and now as R.N.Z.A.F. personnel, we were coming under the overall control of the Americans, COMSOPAC.

We were off-loaded by a large wooden-floored hut which was to be our home while we were here. There were about ten stretchers along each side, with a basic wooden cupboard alongside each.

Over each stretcher was suspended a large mosquito net. We stowed our gear and in small groups wandered back down to the strip to have our first look at our new "charges".

The first thing that struck us as we stood on the ground

heat was hard enough as we tried it here, but we would soon learn that with full gear on, shoulder holster and revolver, ammunition belt for the pistol around our middle, jungle knife in its holster strapped to our right leg, Dalton computer strapped around our left knee, jungle pack strapped to our back (a large, flattish foam rubber lined zipped bag which contained survival gear such as compass, flares, shark-repellent, etc., etc., and weighing seven or eight pounds) and over all this our seat type parachute with self-inflating dinghy and bottle was a real test of strength and endurance.

On top of all this, we wore a canvas flying helmet from which trailed leads to our radio earphones and a rubber face mask and tube to connect to the aircraft's oxygen supply. Phew!! It still makes me tired to think of it. No wonder the ground crew would have the engine running, with a ground crew member standing on the inner wing

by the cockpit, holding the cockpit harness ready to pass over the pilot's shoulders, so that he could strap himself in with a sigh of relief.

Mind you, this state of affairs was still ahead of us, to be adopted when we moved onto the forward area. At this stage we would only need flying suit, helmet, parachute and dinghy - so we would become packhorses of the air by degrees.



Royal New Zealand Air Force Vought Corsairs are lined up at Bomber #1 airfield at Pallikulo Bay on Espiritu Santo.

From the strip we wandered a short distance through the palms and bush to the beach and the water's edge. The scene was "picture postcard" stuff and we were suitably impressed.

A mile or two off the shore was a smallish island. It was almost conical in shape and presented a beautiful picture against the background of the deep blue sea. I have never forgotten that scene. It was some years later that I found out that it was that island which inspired "Bali Hai" in James Michener's book "South Pacific".



Another angle of Bomber #1 on Santo. This time the shot is taken looking north up towards the golf course.

He was stationed there at the same period. We were told that up until the war, the island had housed a school for the daughters of the local wealthy plantation owners and had been evacuated as the Japanese advanced down the Pacific.

The camp boasted quite reasonable facilities... a large mess-room, serviced by American G.I.s, a picture theatre where we sat in rows made by the nailing of long planks to the stumps of coconut palms cut down from the plantation rows.



Some theatres on Santo were better than others. This very neat one was located at Hospital #6 on the island.

As we arrived and departed from the evening film the sound system would blare out the music of Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller or Benny Goodman, played on the new 12" long playing records, which had just arrived from the States. I had somehow or other managed to bring up from Auckland with me a small, wind up gramophone in a light tan leather covered case and a few pop style records (78's). This proved very popular with the members of the squadron, who used to want to play their particular favourites. One of these was a song "We're the couple in the Castle", which young Brian Shearer from Wellington used to always be asking me to play. He was to die in a mid-air collision with another member of the squadron, Johnny Castleburg (I can't remember where he was from), a few weeks later. I have never, ever forgotten that record, and occasionally when I remember Brian that song runs through my mind. He was a nice guy!

Around this time I had another unusual experience. There was a jetty on the harbour near the camp, to which at that time was moored an American submarine. Some of the Officers and crew members used to share a drink or two with us of an evening, either in the canteen, or as often as not in one or other of our tents.

One evening, two of the Officers from the sub were in our tent and one of them asked us if we had ever been inside a sub? We of course said No, with which they asked the three of us to join them at the jetty the next morning and they would take us out for a short trip.



The USS Gato was one of many US submarines operating in the South Pacific and around the New Hebrides. It could have been this class of submarine that Frank and his mates ventured out on.

We were there at the appointed hour and clambered on board and up a ladder to the conning tower. From there we climbed down another ladder inside, into the bowels of the sub. Within a short time we were moving out into the sea. Once out sufficiently far from the shore, the Officer standing near me said, "we will take a short dive now". With this I suddenly began to feel a little uneasy and somewhat claustrophobic. Seated close to me were a couple of the crew members facing some large wheels and on the orders from the Officer they began to revolve these. There was a vertical metal pole alongside me and as the floor under me began to assume a marked downward slope, I gripped this with my right hand very, very firmly! So firmly, in fact, that after a couple of minutes my hand went quite white, as probably did my face too. I was really quite frightened. Having completed this task, one of these two sailors turned to me and said "Say guy, are you one of those Kiwis who fly those Corsairs near us?" I nodded my head. "Man", he said, "you wouldn't catch me up in one of those!"

Shortly later we returned to the harbour and the jetty and clambered up and out into the sunlight. Terra Firma never felt quite so good to me!

After undergoing a comprehensive two-week orientation with the brand-new Corsair aircraft, Frank, along with some of his squadron embarked on a journey to Guadalcanal. It was there that Frank's extensive training would truly face its ultimate trial.



A squadron of Royal New Zealand Air Force Vought Corsairs over the Solomon Islands.

Frank's journey took him on three tours across the Pacific, encompassing various air bases like New Caledonia, Guadalcanal, and Los Negros. In his trusty Corsair, he engaged in sustained combat operations in Bougainville and Rabaul. Eventually, Frank returned to his homeland, New Zealand, where he where he married his sweetheart, Jo, in February 1948.



Frank and Jo after the war attending a ball.

Best seat in the house

When does a chair transcend its mere functionality as a seat? When it's a Goodform chair.

In a small World War II museum nestled in Vanuatu, you wouldn't typically anticipate encountering a chair regarded as one of the world's finest. This particular piece gracing the museum's collection found its way to us through a generous donation from South Santo locals, Pierro and Leslie, approximately six years ago. However, it wasn't until recently that we unearthed the intriguing backstory of this chair's origin.

A petite oval plaque discreetly affixed to the chair's back unveiled the key to unravelling its identity.



The all-important oval plate on the back of the chair might be a little worn, but is still easily readable.

The General Fireproofing Company of Youngstown, Ohio, embarked on the production of aluminium institutional chairs in 1929, introducing their renowned GoodForm line in 1932. By 1943, they boasted an impressive array of over eighteen models of aluminium side chairs. In that same year, the company proudly declared, "No material is more ideally suited to a specific purpose than Aluminium to chair construction." Aluminium, with its inherent lightness, offered enhanced portability, coupled with strength, fire resistance, welded joints, and an essence of modernity in its design and expression.

Interestingly, Wyeth Furniture of New York currently showcases this identical chair within their extraordinary collection of pieces crafted by the world's most esteemed furniture designers—names like Hans J.

Wegner, Frank Lloyd Wright, Ole Wanscher, and many more. We were astounded to discover that our humble chair was held in such high esteem.



Visually, the Museum's GoodForm chair isn't in perfect visual condition, but structurally it is. Of course we're going to leave it with its original US Navy paint scheme and undercoats.

Described as "an early GoodForm arm chair in its original finish, crafted from cast and formed aluminium, featuring a slatted undulating back and a slender leather pad atop the backrest," this chair is attributed to GoodForm, with its exact year of creation remaining a mystery.

It was manufactured by General Fireproofing in the 1930s in the USA and now boasts an astonishing current value of US\$4,800.

It's truly remarkable that a chair, which likely spent the war tucked behind the desk of an administrative clerk somewhere on Base Button, has ascended to such extraordinary value and recognition.

Inspiring everyday heroes

The Museum is part of Vanuatu’s tourism sector, but there’s no doubt that the industry has taken a literal battering in the past few years – with damaging cyclones and a global pandemic.

It’s hugely exciting then to see the return, after four years, of Tok Tok Vanuatu.

Participants are gaining firsthand product updates and experiencing the adventure destination this country offers.

Some 40 international wholesalers and partners are engaging with 63 Vanuatu tourism businesses, including a group specifically exploring Tanna and Santo islands.



An airport arrival for Tok Tok Vanuatu. Photo VTO / Vanuatu Daily Post.

This is an international gathering of visiting tourism delegates who meet with local tourism operators.

The Vanuatu Tourism Office (VTO) is strategically collaborating with the travel industry in their primary markets: Australia, New Zealand, and New Caledonia.

The last study into tourism, done by VTO in 2022, showed the Australian market contributes 59%, New Zealand accounts for 22%, and 8% is from long-haul markets like the US, Europe, and Asia.

The study highlighted that 68% of visitors come for leisure, with 13% for business purposes.

It’s estimated that each visitor spends over US\$2,199 per trip, injecting new funds into the country’s economy.

And of course, the remarkable World War II story told by our museum should be on the itinerary of many of those visitors! Welcome back to Tok Tok Vanuatu - and the heroes working to get tourism back and thriving here.

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



South Pacific WWII Museum
 Unity Park, Main Street,
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