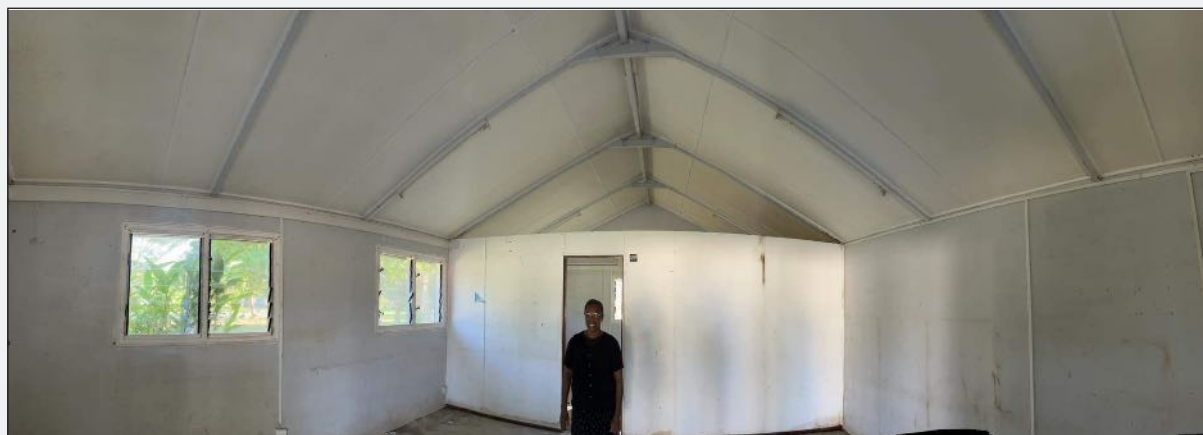


Museum secures grant for expansion

The South Pacific World War II Museum is thrilled to announce the generous grant of 800,000 Vanuatu Vatu (VT) from the New Zealand High Commission in Port Vila. This significant financial support, facilitated by New Zealand High Commissioner Nicola Simmonds, will play a pivotal role in the upcoming renovations that will transform and expand the museum.

The grant will be instrumental in almost doubling the size of the current museum, allowing for the re-establishment of a dedicated section for more general World War II exhibits. More importantly, the immensely popular SS President Coolidge exhibit will be able to remain in its current location within the present display area, providing us with two distinct exhibition zones. (continued...)



Museum manager Marina Moli inside the new space next door that will undergo renovations in the coming months.

Official Navara Sponsors



The upcoming renovations, to take place over the next month, aim to enhance the museum's capacity to educate and engage visitors with a broader range of historical content from the World War II era. This development marks a crucial milestone in the museum's mission to preserve and share the rich history of the South Pacific during this period.

Special appreciation is also extended to Miranda Williamson, our dedicated VSA (Volunteer Service Abroad) volunteer, who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to obtain this grant for the museum. Her enthusiasm has been invaluable in realising this exciting phase of development for the South Pacific World War II Museum.



The museum prior to the Coolidge Exhibition. Much the display material here will go back on display in the renovated area next door.

The South Pacific World War II Museum extends its deepest gratitude to New Zealand High Commissioner Nicola Simmonds for her instrumental role in securing this grant and for her ongoing support of the museum project. Her commitment to fostering cultural and historical awareness in the region has had a profound impact on the museum's ability to expand its offerings.

The New Zealand grant, along with an earlier grant from the Reserve Bank of Vanuatu for 500,000 VT in July– also thanks to the efforts of Miranda – provide the Museum with a much appreciated 1,300,000 VT, and a new chapter in its development.

The renovation of the museum begins this Tuesday 5th December.



L to R, Japanese Ambassador to Vanuatu Chiba Hirohisa, Australian High Commissioner Heidi Bootle and New Zealand High Commissioner Nicola Simmonds. Photo Niva Studios.



Museum's ship comes in

In yet another major donation to the South Pacific WWII Museum in November, Asia-Pacific shipping giant Swire Shipping has provided the Museum with a shipping container.

You may be wondering what we will do with it?

The plan is to attach it to the back of the Museum building during our renovations and provide a doorway between it and the new museum area. It will provide vital storage space for many of our exhibits we have at other locations.



Swire's cargo ship New Guinea Chief delivered the Museum's container to the port of Luganville.

It will also free up some of the rooms in our current museum, one of which is to become our small research library.

VSA volunteer Miranda Williamson and part time museum staff member Lyn have recently completed the cataloguing of our current book collection into a new mini library database developed by Museum Project Manager James Carter.

We would like to sincerely thank Swire Shipping, in particular Pranay Srivastava, Commercial Manager – Pacific Islands and Tilly Morgan, Assistant Commercial Manager – Pacific Islands for their hard work and assistance in arranging the donation to the museum.

The container is now at the museum and will be moved into its final resting place over the coming weeks.



The Museum's shipping container in Luganville after being emptied of its contents and ready to go to the Museum.



With a little help from Santo Hardware's forklift, the container is dropped into a temporary location beside the Museum.



SWIRE SHIPPING

Standing by

The Crash Boats of Santo

Crash boats, alternatively known as Aircraft Rescue Boats (ARBs) or Air-Sea Rescue Boats (ASRBs), constituted a vital component of the United States' maritime fleet during World War II, specifically designed for the high-speed rescue of downed Allied aircraft crews.



A 63-foot air-sea rescue boat. The similarities between it and the PT Boats also based at Santo are quite obvious. Photo Wikipedia.

Built in four lengths to cater to varied wartime operations, standard crash boats ranged from 42 feet to larger vessels measuring 63, 85, or 104 feet. Commissioned primarily for the Army Air Forces and the US Navy, some were also transferred to Allied forces. While sharing design elements with patrol boats of the era, crash boats distinguished themselves by featuring minimal or no armament and being equipped



A crash boat crew undergoes a training exercise with a 'downed pilot'.

with essential first aid supplies. The overarching goal was to create vessels that were lightweight and swift, ensuring rapid response to downed crews.

During World War II, the Air Centre Command took charge of all US Navy air operations at Base Button in Santo. In the early months of 1944, the Air Centre Operations Department wielded control over a substantial fleet of up to 16 ARBs. These vessels, capable of reaching 32 knots, were crucially assigned to Air Centre Command by ComFairSouth, specifically for their involvement in air-sea rescue missions in tandem with air activities.



Bomber #2 Airfield clearly shows the diversity of aircraft types operating out of Espiritu Santo during WWII. Photo US Archives.

From 1943 to 1944, stationed at Santo amidst a bustling aviation landscape with over 1200 planes on the island at times, the crash boats executed numerous missions, resulting in the rescue of countless pilots and crewmen. The inherent value of these lesser-known assets to naval aviation became evident in the lives saved, substantiating the often-overlooked cost incurred, even if it ran into six figures during the 1940s.



Another Pacific-based air-sea rescue boat on patrol. The design is identical to that of the 'Elco' PT boats found throughout the area. Photo Wikipedia.

Notably, despite claims of their capacity to reach speeds of 40 knots, practical operations with Air Centre at Espiritu Santo revealed that they rarely surpassed 32 knots. This discrepancy could be attributed to the additional weight they bore during operations, including a gun mount, approximately 6000 litres (1600 gallons) of fuel, and other impediments not present under ideal test conditions. These boats typically stood on duty for two hours, primed to set sail with just a few minutes' notice. While crews and officers commonly resided onboard, alternative structures were erected on barges in certain cases, providing more spacious quarters to alleviate the crowded conditions.



This fully restored crash boat shows how tight the living quarters can be. Photo USAAF / USAF Crashboats Facebook page.

The strategic deployment of these boats at Espiritu Santo involved placement at key locations such as the Fighter Strip at Turtle Bay, Pallikulo (Dry Dock in Pallikulo Bay), Naval Air Facilities Sarakata (in Second Channel), and Pier #5 in Second Channel (near Alhena Landing). Mooring buoys near the Air Centre Boat Pool

Pier were utilised when additional boats were present. Specific rescue areas were designated based on their stationed locations.

Beyond their primary role, a select number of Crash Boats, typically two, were outfitted with special towing winches and radio equipment for collaboration with the South Pacific Aircraft Training Unit (SPATU). This involved towing various targets for practice bombing, torpedo runs, and rocket firing exercises, proving indispensable to the training regimen of SPATU.

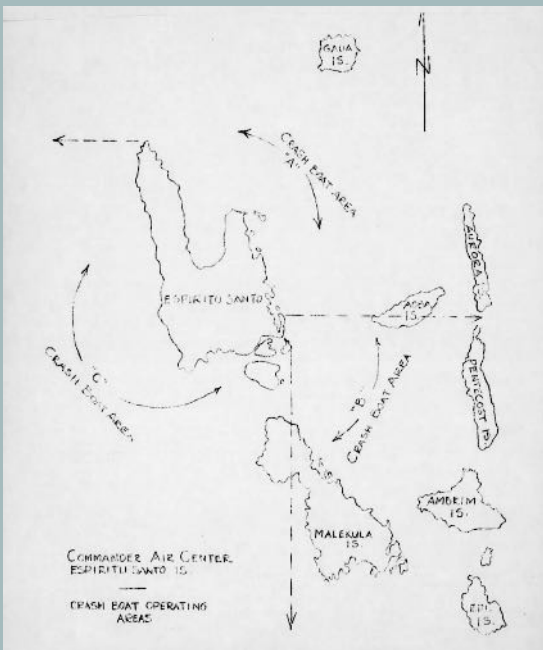


The small boat harbour at Espiritu Santo. The Alhena dock where the crash boats were stationed is in the top right of the image. Photo US Archives.

In addition to their formidable contribution during exercises, these crash boats invested over 60 hours of running time in a single week when assisting in various missions. When not engaged in rescue operations, training exercises, or other assigned duties, they patrolled the vicinity of their designated areas, safeguarding crash frequencies and maintaining communication with Pallikulo Tower. Their readiness to respond to any emergency aligned with their primary mission was unwavering.

Moreover, the Crash Boats participated in a spectrum of "extra-curricular" activities, including expeditions to remote spots on Espiritu Santo or neighbouring islands. These missions served to transport urgent cases to local hospitals, catering to the needs of French and English residents of the Condominium. The boats also facilitated the transportation of coast watchers to and from isolated outposts, navigating treacherous reef-girt shores with rubber boats.

(continued...)



The crash boat operating areas around Espiritu Santo were divided into three areas of operation. Illustration US Archives.

One memorable incident involved a commander's insistence on going ashore in a dingy against the crew's advice, resulting in capsizing in the surf. While the Crash Boat sped away on another mission, it later returned to find the commander, stripped of his clothes, huddled over a fire on the beach, having traded his attire to the natives for matches and lunch.

Crash boats also played a vital role in delivering urgently needed material and supplies to outlying units, including radar stations. Noteworthy instances include the transportation of Admiral Daniels of the Royal Navy and his party of eight officers to Efate. The journey, undertaken due to unfavourable weather grounding all planes, covered 240km (150 miles) in around six hours of challenging navigation through heavy seas. The skipper Lieut. W.E. Johnson received commendation for his commendable efforts in the face of such treacherous conditions.

These versatile boats also facilitated divers and their equipment in recovering bodies, obtaining information, and inspecting submerged aircraft in shallow water. Their strategic deployment in such endeavours contributed to the development of a local good-neighbour policy, where they served Condominium officials and planters in various capacities, reciprocating for the favours extended to the Allied forces.

The duties performed by these fast and sturdy craft were indeed manifold, justifying their existence and demonstrating their worth and utility. Considering the relative youth and inexperience of their skippers and crews, coupled with the challenging weather and adverse conditions often encountered, it is indeed remarkable that none of these boats suffered any serious damage while under the operational control of Air Centre on Santo.

In instances where the Crash Boats were employed to put pilots and loading officers aboard incoming carriers, aircraft transport vessels, or task forces when more than 30 kilometres (20 or more miles) from port, they navigated these challenging manoeuvres with only minor damage to their superstructures. As squadrons, training units, and air facilities gradually moved forward, the number of these craft stationed on the island diminished, eventually reducing to two.



A hand-coloured photograph of Crash boat P-671 that operated in the South West Pacific Region. Photo uscrashboats.org

The culmination of their service at Espiritu Santo occurred on May 15, 1945, when the remaining two USAAF crash boats were transferred to the Naval Advance Base, Espiritu Santo, marking the conclusion of their invaluable time on the island. This conclusion signifies not only the end of an era but also underscores the enduring legacy of Crash Boats, which, through their varied and commendable contributions, left an indelible mark on the annals of maritime history, throughout the world, during World War II.

THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

Stepping stones to Rabaul

The battle for Mono and Stirling

On November 1st, 1943, the British flag once again flew over Falamai, the capital of the Treasury Islands, part of the Solomons group and nearly 500 kilometres (310 miles), northwest of Guadalcanal.

As with so many islands in the South Pacific theatre of war, very few would have known anything of the Islands before the conflict broke out – and one could venture that has largely remained true ever since.

Falamai, a small village, was in ruins – after bombardment four days earlier by a US taskforce.



The Union Jack flies over the devastated Falamai village, Mono Island, 1943.
Photo Archives New Zealand/svrehua.wordpress.com/2017/05/17/the-treasury-islands

War had come to it because the Japanese held the two islands of the group, Mono and Stirling. For the Allies, their capture would move their advance closer to the main Japanese base at Rabaul – making it easier for air attacks, and to tighten the noose around the increasingly cut off defenders. It would also draw attention from bigger landings at nearby Bougainville.

Operation Goodtime, as it was codenamed, was in fact a historical oddity. Most of the troops landing were from the New Zealand 3rd Division and this would be the largest opposed landing undertaken by Kiwi troops since the infamous Anzac landings at Gallipoli in Turkey in 1915.

The 3rd Division was something of a makeshift formation – understrength as manpower shortages began to bite the New Zealand homeland, (continued...)

and the country continued to supply the more famous 2nd Division fighting in Italy and provided substantial airpower in particular in the South Pacific.



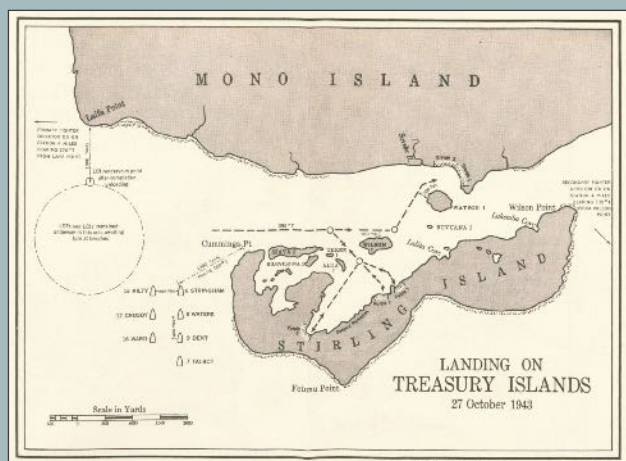
A New Zealand mortar squad on Mono Island. Photo Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

Fortunately, the landings went much better than those of 1915, and after 12 days, the islands were largely secured, despite sometimes strong Japanese resistance, and air raids against the beachhead.

The US 87th Naval Construction battalion had also landed, and after joining in the fighting, went to work constructing an airfield. More than 200 soldiers died or were wounded on each side.



New Zealand and U.S. forces unload cargo from LST 485, Purple 2 Beach, Stirling Island. Photo Archives New Zealand/svrehua.wordpress.com/2017/05/17/the-treasury-islands



The landing sites for US and NZ forces on Mono and Treasury Islands. Photo US Naval History and Heritage Command.

In February 1944 the 3rd Division took part in equally successful landings at Green Island, but its fate was already sealed. New Zealand no longer had the men to support two divisions and the 3rd was disbanded, 4000 of its troops sent to fight instead in the very different climate and conditions of winter on the Italian front.

A little Hope goes a long way

In the midst of World War II, Bob Hope, renowned comedian and entertainer, undertook a series of USO tours aimed at boosting the morale of American soldiers stationed in the South and South West Pacific. In July and August of 1944, Hope, along with members of the USO, performed a total of 79 shows in the region.

Among the notable stops during this tour was Espiritu Santo, where on August 10 and 11, Hope and his team entertained soldiers, sailors, and Marines. In addition to these performances, they visited five hospitals on the island, including the 31st General Hospital on 'Hospital Hill' not far from Turtle Bay Airfield.



The entertainer's entertainer. Bob Hope was performing for US service personnel well into his 80s. Photo various sources.

Accompanying Bob Hope on the tour were Frances Langford, Patty Thomas, Jerry Colonna, and Tony Romano, forming a diverse ensemble that catered to the varied tastes of the military audience.

The collective efforts of the troupe aimed to provide entertainment and distraction for the servicemen amidst the challenges of war.

A distinctive feature of Bob Hope's tours was his commitment to visiting military hospitals wherever he went. Regardless of the location, he made it a point to spend time talking to injured personnel.



Bob Hope knew how to make anyone laugh. Here, three patients at the 31st General Hospital are obviously enjoying time with the man himself. Photo med-dept.com

His dedication was exemplified in his visit to the 31st General Hospital on Espiritu Santo, where he engaged with wounded soldiers, offering a brief respite from the hardships of war.

These hospital visits were not mere gestures for publicity; rather, they reflected Hope's genuine gratitude and empathy towards those who had sacrificed for their country. The impact of these encounters extended beyond momentary joy, creating lasting memories for the wounded soldiers and reminding them that their service was appreciated.



Patty Thomas, Frances Langford, Jerry Colonna, Tony Romano and Bob Hope visit those soldiers who couldn't make it to the live performances. Photo various sources.

(continued...)



Patty Thomas of the Bob Hope Show doing a 'Boops-a-Daisy' dance at the Richardson Theatre on Kwajalein Island. Photo US Archives.

The 31st General Hospital on 'Hospital Hill' served as a microcosm of the emotional impact of Hope's visits. Wounded soldiers, amidst their recovery, found solace in the diversion provided by the entertainers. The psychological boost from these encounters complemented the medical care, fostering a sense of camaraderie and resilience among the servicemen.

The ensemble's collective talents played a crucial role in the success of the USO tours. Frances Langford's voice, Patty Thomas's comedic skills, Jerry Colonna's eccentric humour, and Tony Romano's musical abilities kept everyone entertained no matter where in the world the troupe found itself.

As the USO tours progressed through the Pacific, Bob Hope became a symbol of hope and resilience. His charisma and wit not only entertained the troops but also served as a reminder that, even in challenging circumstances, the human spirit could endure.

The laughter shared in makeshift theatres, on hospital beds, and in remote Pacific islands became a source of strength during a tumultuous period in history.

Bob Hope's USO tours in the Pacific during World War II remain a significant chapter in the war's history. They were more than entertainment; they were a means of providing a temporary escape for those on the front-lines and in hospitals.

Bob Hope's legacy continues to inspire, underscoring the idea that, even in difficult times, humour has the potential to provide solace and healing.



Huge crowds gathered at the Richardson Theatre on Kwajalein Island to see the Bob Hope USO show perform July 25, 1944. Photo US Archives.



An SBD Dauntless dive bomber flies over Turtle Bay Airfield in October 1943. Photo US Archives.

Turtle Bay Fighter Airfield, also known as Fighter #1 or Kirby-Schuster Field, played a crucial role as Santo's sole dedicated fighter airfield during the war. While plans were underway for additional bomber airfields, there was consideration given to the idea of constructing a second fighter strip on the island.

In a letter dated May 21, 1943, from Commander Aircraft, South Pacific to the Commander Naval Base, Espiritu Santo, the proposed location was outlined approximately five kilometres (three miles) south of the Renee River. This area, a few miles west of the Second Seaplane Base, was detailed with a schematic sketch that could be adjusted to fit existing contours.

The plan included provisions for hardstands to accommodate 100 fighter planes with 60-foot wing spans. Due to similarities with the surface of Fighter #1 at Turtle Bay, it was anticipated that Marston matting

would be necessary for the strip. An aerial photograph from the South Pacific Photographic Interpretation Unit illustrated the proposed site.



Sandburg Field, built by the 27th Division for their observation aircraft.

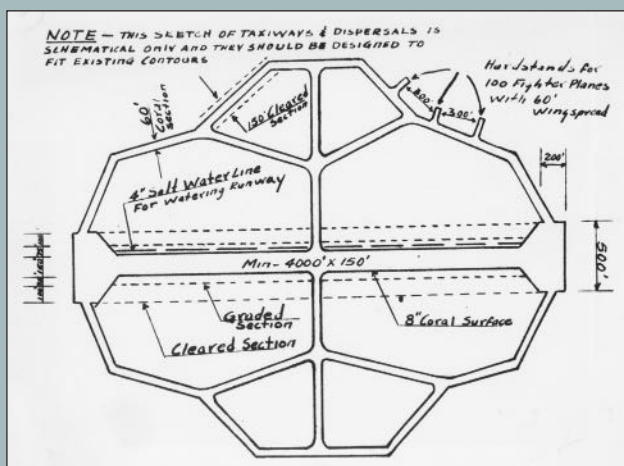
As we have reported in previous issues of our newsletters, in 1944, the 27th Division constructed a short landing field west of the proposed Fighter Field Two. This field, extending to the water's edge, served Piper Cub observation planes.

(continued...)



The 'secret' Fighter Airfield #2 shown as a rudimentary drawing on this aerial photograph to the south west of Luganville. Photo US Archives.

Another fighter field concept never progressed beyond the planning stage occurred in mid-1942. Mr. William Torrie Robertson of St. James and St. Philips Bay, Espiritu Santo, recounted being approached on his "rancho" by armed forces officers about building a fighter strip in the northern part of the island, closer to the Solomons. Fighter Strip Two, intended to accommodate a Marine Fighter Group or a Carrier Air Wing, was planned beyond existing leases.



A plan of Fighter Airfield #2 found in a document about air operations on Santo. Illustration US Archives.

The intention was to house a Marine group, including Four WF and one utility Squadron, with facilities for 225 officers and 1200 men. However, for unspecified reasons, plans for the northern airfield were put on hold.

Mr. Matt Wells of Malo Island, residing just five kilometres from the proposed strip, shared a story related to the change in plans of the US military.

The property involved, a coconut and coffee plantation owned by Mason-Barrau of Noumea, faced opposition from Mr. Jim Daly, the Managing Director of Mason-Barrau. Daly argued for building the strip in virgin jungle to avoid destroying the mature plantation, actively opposing the original plan. It's believed that pressure from influential figures, potentially from the governments at Noumea and Suva, led to the abandonment of the project.

In retrospect, the change in plans likely saved significant sums of money for the parties involved – particularly the military.

By mid-1943, with the diminished threat of Japanese invasion, discussions around business interests became more 'tenable' on Espiritu Santo.



Another view of Sandburg Field not far from the Renee River. An almost unheard of airfield only brought to light by the South Pacific WWII Museum in the last couple of years.

Inspiring everyday heroes

There have been no hotter tickets in the South Pacific this past two weeks than those for the Sol2023 Pacific Games.

The Pacific Games are dubbed the region's Olympics, and are held every four years.

Solomon Islands was host this year, in what organisers say was a highly successful gathering.



Everyone was celebrating at the closing ceremony of the 2023 Pacific Games. Photo Pacific Games news service.

Locals certainly agreed with the opening and closing ceremonies in particular sold out, and 10-thousand or more gathering in Honiara at the weekend to farewell the athletes.

24 nations took part, with 5000 athletes attending, while events were shown to a worldwide audience via the internet.

New Caledonia were the Games superpower, with 82 golds, comfortably topping the medal table across the 24 sports.

The closing ceremony commenced with the Games' thousands of volunteers parading around the National Stadium in Honiara, recognising their immense contribution.

And it would not have been the Pacific without some stunning cultural performances to bid farewell.

The night ended with a concert featuring Solomon Islands artists and a spectacular fireworks display.

Vanuatu of course was among the competing nations – so congratulations to all those who took part, and those who came home with a total of three gold, five silver and 11 bronze.

Tahiti – which finished second in the medal count – will host the next extravaganza in four years' time.

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



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