

New Museum Gallery Opens

After weeks of extraordinary effort by a dedicated team of tradesmen and our museum staff, the Museum's new gallery opened on Friday 12 January.

We were delighted to be joined by the British high Commissioner Nicolette Brent, her husband Karl – himself a former Royal Marine and Nicolette's mother who is in Vanuatu on holidays.

We were also thrilled to have Luganville Lord Mayor Hilton Toares and Betty Williams and Glenda Massing from the Reserve Bank of Vanuatu along for this special event. Also there for the opening was Vanuatu Tourism Office (VTO) CEO Adela Issachar and Santo Travel Manager Serah Ety.



Guests at the opening of the new Museum extension gather around the Museum's restored Willy's Jeep, in the new WWII gallery.

With two doorways through to the new area, Master of Ceremonies, Museum Chairman Bradley Wood invited Mayor Toares to cut one ribbon and VSA volunteer Miranda Williamson to cut the other. (continued...)

Official Navara Sponsors





The Museum's VSA volunteer Miranda Williamson with British high Commissioner Nicolette Brent and her husband Karl.

Miranda was instrumental in obtaining the grants for the renovations from The New Zealand High Commission and the Reserve Bank of Vanuatu.

A huge thanks to our sponsors, Museum staff Marina, Lyn and Miranda, our tradies, Leighton Shearer from Santo Hardware, Steve Remy from Santo Earth Works and everyone who contributed to this wonderful milestone in the Museum's progress.



The Museum's Willys Jeep takes pride of place in the centre of the new extension. A Coolidge display case is in the right of frame.



The 'Dancing Bears' have gone of public display for the first time in over 40 years. A huge favourite in Luganville.



Luganville Lord Mayor, Hilton Toares arrives at the Museum for the opening ceremony.



Museum Chairman Bradley Wood makes the official speech prior to the opening of the new Museum extension.

News In Brief

The other stories you need to know

Deputy PM drops by

Earlier in the month a very special visitor came by to see us, Deputy Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Matai Seremaiah. He and his staff were amazed at the extent of our new expansion and intrigued with the history of famous people that were in Santo throughout the war. The minister was very excited to see the dancing Bears on display. A local favourite and part of the Museum's preservation of local Santo history.



Museum Chairman Bradley Wood presents Matai Seremaiah with a commemorative Coke bottle upon his visit to the Museum.

Waimarie ki a koe Miranda

A few days after the opening of our Museum extension, we said a fond farewell to our VSA volunteer Miranda Williamson. She finished her term with us and was heading back home to New Zealand. We are so grateful to have had Miranda with us throughout 2023. She was instrumental in obtaining the funding for our renovations and worked with Project Manager

Jimmy Carter to overhaul our database of exhibits and collections - amongst all sorts of other things!



We cannot thank Miranda enough for all her hard work and infectious enthusiasm over the last 12 months. She has been an incredible asset to the museum. And let's not forget Mary O'Reilly VSA's Programme Manager for Vanuatu. A huge thank you to Mary for arranging Miranda's time with us and ensuring her visit went so smoothly.

We'll miss you Miranda and we can't wait to see where your future endeavours take you.

Elwood's final letter home

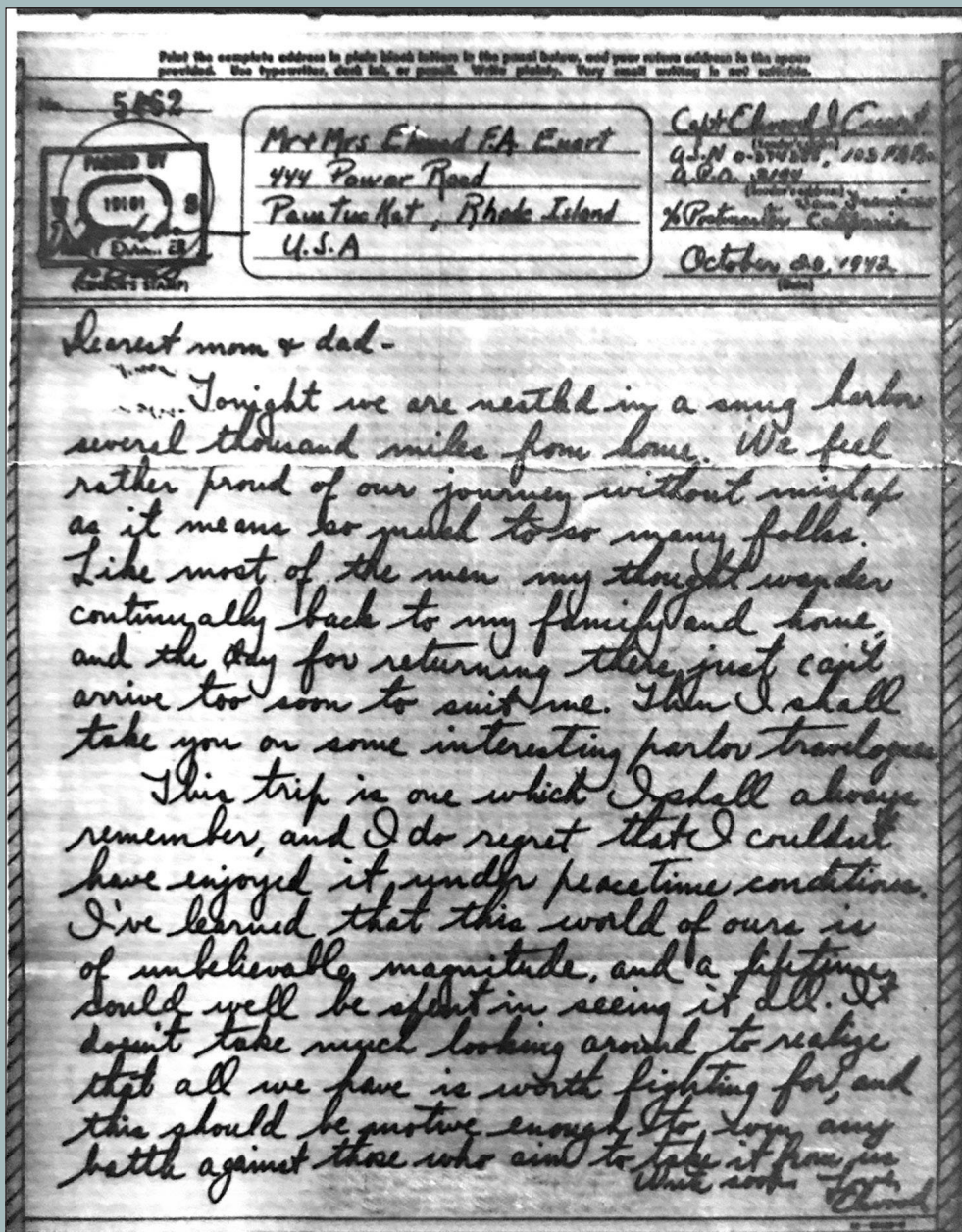
The South Pacific WWII Museum has always had a wonderful relationship with the family of Elwood J Euart – the US Army Officer who was one of just two who died on board the SS President Coolidge after it struck mines at the entrance to the Second Channel in Santo in October 1942.

Recently Paul Vallee, Elwood's nephew, offered us copy of something quite special. The last letter from

Elwood to his parents back home, while on his journey to Santo.

It's a moving letter when you consider that just six days later, Captain Euart would lose his life saving the lives of some of his men just off the beach on Santo.

Thank you to Paul and his family for sharing such a personal piece of their family's history.



Exciting new donations

A fabulous donation to the museum in January has seen our collection of local WWII artefacts grow, with some very important pieces that will go on show almost immediately.



The fantastic SBD Dauntless canopy still in great condition – apart from the odd broken piece of plexiglass.

Phil Foster a local on Santo had been keeping the collection of interesting items in a container on his property. It was originally compiled by George Hooker, whose family owned the estatey from the 1870s until Phil bought it not that long ago. Phil decided it was time for the museum to add the items to its collection.



One of the two radios that were included in the donation from Phil. A little bit of work and it will clean up nicely.

As you can see in the photos, some of the items include a cockpit canopy we believe is from the rear gunner's seat of a SBD Dauntless dive bomber. There are two radios, one of which could have been used by a Coastwatcher or it could have come from a B-17 bomber. There's an aircraft fuel tank and a section of the left side cockpit

interior from an early 'Birdcage' F4U Corsair.

Some valuable additions to the Museum and we can't thank Phil enough for donating them to the museum.



The aircraft fuel tank that was in the collection. Again it's in beautiful condition considering its age.



One of the more exciting pieces donated to us in this left side panel from the cockpit of an F4U Corsair fighter aircraft.

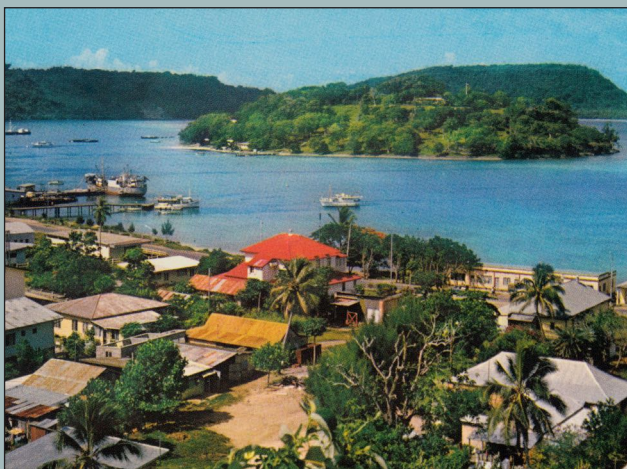


This unusual seat frame appears to be from an aircraft. Which one? We're not sure, but we'll be researching an answer over the coming months.

Announcing Condom Airways!

It could have been Vanuatu's national carrier

In the late 1950s, Port Vila was a tranquil town with a modest population, including a small group of expatriate French and British officials from the condominium government. Post-war, normalcy returned, with a noticeable presence of kids sporting American accents.



Post-war Port Vila was very different to what it is today.

Over time, an influx of foreigners seeking opportunities in the islands began, and one notable figure was Bob Paul, a spirited plantation owner on Tanna Island. Handling British affairs for the condominium, he managed a trade store, a guest house (now Tanna Beach Resort), and the coffee plantation that produced Vanuatu's coffee.

As Bob's business expanded, frequent trips to Port Vila became a necessity. Unhappy with the arduous 24-hour boat journey against the southeast wind, he decided to purchase a plane. In Australia, he acquired a Dragon Rapide aircraft and enlisted Paul Burton as the pilot. The French, however, opposed the idea of a new airline, leading to challenges from French air traffic control at Bauerfield airstrip.

Despite obstacles, the plane landed, marking the birth of "New Hebrides Airways." The condominium government responded by banning commercial flights on the plane.



A Dragon Rapide aircraft similar to the type that Bob Paul and Paul Burton purchased in Australia. Photo Wikipedia/Photographed by Adrian Pingstone.

Bob, undeterred, cleverly sidestepped the ban by selling boxes of matches at exorbitant prices, effectively offering "matches for flights." Tensions heightened between Bob Paul and the French condominium officer on Tanna, leading to the French obstructing plans for an airstrip.

When the French tried to land at Tongoa airstrip they found the runway blocked and when the British tried to land at a French airstrip, they received similar treatment. It was decided that things could only improve with a joint airline.

Bob & Paul in keeping with their high-spirited humour decided the joint condominium airline should be called CONDOM AIRWAYS and prepared a logo with a giant condom windsock on a pole, made signs and tried to get the name registered.

Just as everything was about to be given the go ahead, the typical snooty and aristocratic British Registrar of Companies put his foot down and demanded that the name be changed to something a bit more appropriate and thus Air Melanesia was born as the second choice.

(continued...)



If Bob and Paul had have got their way... we can only imagine.

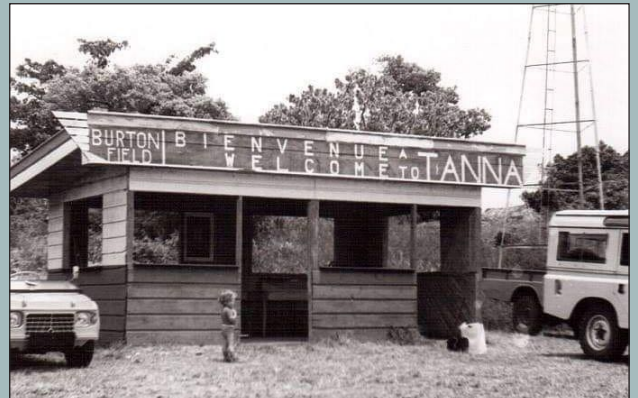
The condominium government purchased landing strips, and negotiations with landowners ensued. The funds from the new airline were invested in a De Havilland Drover aircraft. Despite ongoing French-British tensions, Air Melanesia thrived and acquired Islander aircraft. Qantas and UTA airlines managed the operation on behalf of the British and French, respectively.



With its condominium flags on the tail, VP-PAG was one of Air Melanesia's Drover aircraft operating in Vanuatu. Photo by Peter Ricketts.

In the late '60s, Dennis Buchannan, an aviation entrepreneur, acquired Air Melanesia, leading to further expansion, including ventures into Papua New Guinea with the establishment of Talair. By 1990, the Vanuatu Government took over, rebranding it as Vanair, the domestic airline under their control.

Thus, Condom Airlines became the precursor to Vanuatu's airline industry, adding another humorous chapter to the colourful history of Vanuatu.



The first Tanna airport, cut out of the jungle by Air Melanesie in the late 60's. Photo National Library of Australia.

NEW ANTI-BOMB MAYOR ELECTED IN PAPEETE

The Union Communale, a group of Tahitians who are opposed to France's nuclear testing programme in the Pacific, emerged triumphant in elections for the Papeete municipal council in October.

HEADED by Mr. Georges "Teta" Pambun, the Union Communale ended the long reign over Papeete of Senator Alfred Porci, who campaigned with the slogan "For our Papeete, vote your vote to preserve Papeete". "It's vote for Papeete" was the slogan for the French Senate.

Porci had been mayor of Papeete continuously for 24 years before the election. He has been French Polynesia's senator in the French Parliament for the past four years.

The new mayor, a 60-year-old pharmacist, is a former deputy mayor of Papeete and a former member of French Polynesia's Territorial Assembly. He is a son of a Frenchman who settled in Tahiti in 1902.

Among those who supported the Union Communale in its election campaign were two well-known anti-nuclear crusaders, Messrs. John Teuraki and Jean-Baptiste Ceran-Jerusalem.

Banned Political Parties

Mr. Teuraki, who is Deputy for French Polynesia in the French Parliament, has openly and outspokenly opposed France's nuclear testing programme in the Pacific.

Mr. Ceran-Jerusalem is a former leading member of the "Tahiti political party—the RDPT and the Papeete, Tanna, Maori"—that were banned by decree of President de Gaulle in November, 1963 (UPI, Dec. 1963, p. 13).

The banning of the two parties followed the circulation in Tahiti of petitions protesting against the "re-division" of the island by French troops for the nuclear testing project.

Fusionism Before the municipal elections, the mayor Porci made an interview with a writer from the Tahiti. Asked about his prospects, the election, Senator Porci said: "No problems. I am going to win because I know Papeete better and the citizens here know that my career is dedicated to their welfare."

Started in 1960

Mr. Burton, who was married with one daughter, was the foundation pilot of New Hebrides Airways, which started the first commercial air service within the New Hebrides in 1960.

New Hebrides Airways was founded by Mr. Bob Paul, an Australian pilot on Tanna (see p. 17). It combined with the French company Hébrides in June under the name of Air Melanesia for a trial period of six months.

Mr. Burton was highly popular and widely admired in the New Hebrides for his flying skills. He took his small aircraft up in all sorts of weather, landed and took off from airstrips that would have shocked pilots in more developed countries, and did it all with a minimum of navigational aids.

Before going to the New Hebrides, he piloted planes in outback Australia. He was born in Canada 55 years ago, but went to Australia at the age of five.

Mr. Burton took off on his last fatal flight at about 11 a.m. on Friday, October 23, bound from Lenakel, on the west coast of Tanna, to the small island of Futuna, about 65 miles due east.

Two minutes after take-off, he realized that all was well. After that, nothing was heard from him.

Extensive Search

After a radio message was received from Futuna that the plane had failed to arrive, a Sunderland flying-boat, a DC-3 and an Army aircraft began an extensive search for it.

The Sunderland was in from the Royal New Zealand Air Force base at Laidlaw Bay, the DC-3 was a French Navy plane from Noumea. And the Army was under charter to Air Melanesia from a rental company in New South Wales.

The three planes were on the fourth day of their search when wreckage of the ill-fated Drover was found by a party of searchers about three miles inland.

The loss of the Drover, which was insured, completely disheartened Air Melanesia's shareholders, as its two other regular aircraft—Drover and a Dornier—were both out of action at the time of the crash.

PIONEER PILOT, SEVEN PASSENGERS DIE IN CRASH

Civil aviation in the New Hebrides suffered a severe setback in October when a three-engine Drover aircraft crashed in rugged, mountainous, bush country in the south of Tanna, killing all eight people on board.

The Europeans were: Dr. Rouzard, a French Government medical officer; the Rev. Ross Blackwell, a Presbyterian missionary from Melbourne, Victoria, who was stationed at White Sands, Tanna; and Mr. George Trigg, a British education officer on Tanna.

Dr. Rouzard's widow was expecting a baby in November, while Mr. Trigg was to have been married in November to Miss Shirley Lorton, of Gosford, NSW. Miss Lorton, a Presbyterian teacher on Tanna, has been in the New Hebrides for about 41 years.

One of the four New Hebridean fatal plane crash.

THE plane, which belonged to Air Melanesia, was piloted by Mr. Paul Burton, the pioneer pilot of internal commercial air services in the Condominium.

Three of the seven passengers on board were Europeans; the others were New Hebrideans.

The Europeans were: Dr. Rouzard, a French Government medical officer; the Rev. Ross Blackwell, a Presbyterian missionary from Melbourne, Victoria, who was stationed at White Sands, Tanna; and Mr. George Trigg, a British education officer on Tanna.

Dr. Rouzard's widow was expecting a baby in November, while Mr. Trigg was to have been married in November to Miss Shirley Lorton, of Gosford, NSW. Miss Lorton, a Presbyterian teacher on Tanna, has been in the New Hebrides for about 41 years.

One of the four New Hebridean fatal plane crash.

12 NOVEMBER, 1966—PACIFIC ISLANDS MONTHLY

Tragedy for Vanuatu's fledgling aviation industry when one of Air Melanesia's Drovers crashed on Tanna killing all on board - including pilot and aviation entrepreneur Paul Burton. Image TROVE Australia.

Base BIG Button

When the base at Espiritu Santo closed in 1946, the United States had spent approximately \$36,000,000 building the largest military complex in the South Pacific. Adjusted for inflation, that equates to around an incredible \$562,000,000.00 or roughly half a billion dollars in 2024*.

Another way of looking at the scale of Base Button is to look at what's called the Station Lists for Santo. They're a fascinating insight into every unit, branch, squadron, regiment, battalion, command and everything in between that was based on Santo at a specific time – a who's who of the base, if you will.

These are the unbelievable Station Lists for 15 August 1943.

ARMY

(Strength Approximately 21,000)

IV ISLAND COMMAND

Headquarters & Headquarters Detachment IV Island Command
 708th Army Postal Unit
 809th Signal Service Company
 Detachment 3A & 3B, 842nd Signal Service Company
 General Assessment Unit #10, 161 Signal Phone Company
 260th Signal Construction Company
 901st Air Base Security Battalion
 922nd Air Base Security Battalion
 Provisional Military Police Detachment

129th COMBAT TEAM

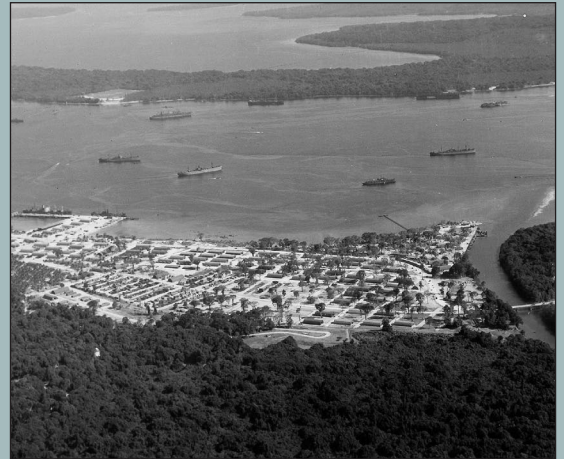
129th Infantry Regiment
 6th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm)
 Company "B" 117th Engineer Battalion (C)
 Company "B" 112th Medical Battalion

COAST ARTILLERY GROUP

31st Separate Coast Artillery Battalion (HD)
 54th Coast Artillery Battalion (Separate) (155mm)

IV ISLAND AIR COMMAND

Headquarters & Headquarters Squadron IV Island Air Command
 674th Signal Air Warning Company (Special)



Luganville and the Second Channel. Just one small area of Base Button. Photo US Archives.



US Army soldiers being put through their paces during jungle survival training on Santo. Photo US Archives.

ANTI-AIRCRAFT COMMAND

76th Coast Artillery Regiment (AA)
Heavy 1st Provisional Battalion 77th Coast Artillery

13th AIR FORCE

Headquarters & Headquarters Squadron 13th Air Force
Headquarters & Headquarters Squadron 13th Bomber Command
Headquarters & Headquarters Squadron 13th Fighter Command
Headquarters & Headquarters Squadron 13th Air Force Service Command
13th Army Air Force Combat Camera Unit
25th Statistical Control Unit
Detachment #4, 20th Airways Communication Squadron
Detachment 17th Weather Squadron
15th Airdrome Squadron
Headquarters 403rd Troop Carrier Group
410th Signal Company Aviation

5th Bomb Group

Headquarters & Headquarters Squadron
23rd Bomb Squadron (Heavy)
31st Bomb Squadron (Heavy)
72nd Bomb Squadron (Heavy)
394th Bomb Squadron (Heavy)

307th Bomb Group

Headquarters & Headquarters Detachment
371st Bomb Squadron (Heavy)
372nd Bomb Squadron (Heavy)

4th Photo Reconnaissance & Mapping Group

Headquarters Squadron
18th Photo Squadron (Heavy)
955th Engineer Topography Company Aviation

29th Air Service Group

321st Air Service Group

Headquarters & Headquarters Squadron
9th Service Squadron
79th Signal Company Service Group
170th Quartermaster Company Service Group Aviation

344th Air Service Squadron

1748th Ordnance Supply & Maintenance Company Aviation
1749th Ordnance Supply & Maintenance Company Aviation
1960th Quartermaster Truck Company Aviation
1984th Quartermaster Truck Company Aviation
822nd Engineer Aviation Battalion



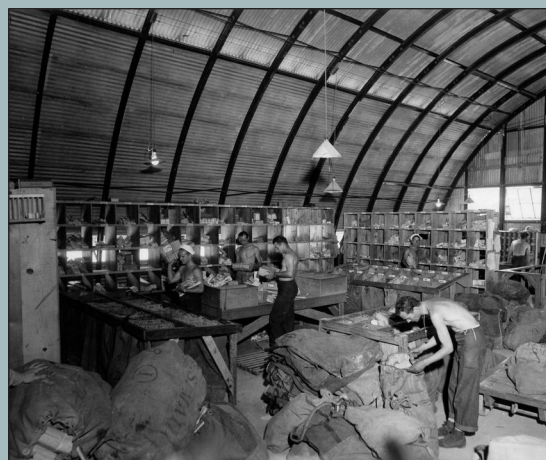
A B-17 bomber takes off from Bomber #1 Airfield on Santo. Photo US Archives.



The Air Centre Photo Lab sorting through aerial reconnaissance photography. Photo US Archives.

SERVICE COMMAND

- Headquarters & Headquarters Company Squadron Command
- 8th Special Service Company (1 Platoon)
- 350th Engineer Regiment
- 2nd Maintenance Platoon, 472nd Engineer Maintenance Company
- 2nd Platoon, 514th Engineer Depot Company
- 4th Platoon, 237th Ordnance Company BD
- 614th Ordnance Ammunition Company
- 3475th Ordnance Company (Q)
- Ordnance Detachment A
- 390th Port Battalion
- 1st Port of Embarkation
 - Casual Detachment APO 708
 - Amphibious Vehicle Detachment 4
- Company I, 23rd Quartermaster Truck Regiment
- Provisional Quartermaster Battalion
- 1st Company 98th Quartermaster Bakery Battalion (less 2nd Platoon)
 - 1 Platoon, 175 Quartermaster Bakery Company
 - Quartermaster Detachment (0051)
 - Company C 262nd Service Battalion
 - Company A 248th Quartermaster Service Battalion
 - 2nd Battalion 26th Quartermaster Truck Regiment
 - 2nd Platoon Company Detachment 63rd Laundry Battalion
 - 221st Quartermaster Salvage Repair Company I st Platoon
 - Storage Platoon, 495 Quartermaster Depot Company
 - 25th Evacuation Hospital
 - 122nd Station Hospital
 - Section1 Advance Depot Platoon I o Medical Supply Depot
 - 3rd Malaria Control Unit
 - 3rd Malaria Survey Unit
 - 26th Malaria Control Unit
 - 2nd Detachment, 217 Signal Depot Company



The main post office on Santo sorting mail. Photo US Archives.

NAVY

(Strength Approximately 14,000)

U.S. NAVY ADVANCE BASE

- United States Navy Advance Base
 - LION One
 - Receiving Station
 - Net & Boom Activities
 - Navy Ammunition Depot
- 5th Construction Regiment
 - 7th United States Navy Construction Battalion
 - 15th United States Navy Construction Battalion



One of the many US Navy ammunition bunkers on Santo and Aore Island. Photo US Archives.

36th United States Navy Construction Battalion
40th United States Navy Construction Battalion
11th United States Navy Construction Battalion
57th United States Navy Construction Battalion
1007th Construction Battalion Detachment
3rd Special Navy Construction Battalion
Aviation Overhaul & Repair Facility
Field Overhaul Unit (B-3)
Carrier Aircraft Service Unit No. 10
LION One Hospital
United States Navy Hospital No. 3
Amphibious Boat Pool
Motor Torpedo Base No. 2
Transient Camp (B-1)



The CASU 10 Armoury. Edward Lechwar stands in the doorway.
Photo Edward L Lechwar Collection /South Pacific WWII Museum.

COMMANDER, AIR SOUTH PACIFIC

(Detachment) COMAIRSOPAC
VS-55 (Scouting 55)
VP-51 (Patrol Squadron)
Fleet Air Command South Pacific

MARINES

(Strength Approximately 4,000)

Branch #1, 1st Base Depot, Fleet Marine Force

FIRST MARINE AIR WING

Headquarters Squadron 1st Marine Air Wing
WMD-154 (Photo Squadron)
Marine Air Group-11



Marine Corps Corsairs at Turtle Bay Fighter Airfield on Santo.
Photo US Archives.

*Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.

Trading places

In our never-ending search for first-hand information about life on Base Button during the war, we are always very grateful to receive emails from the relatives of service personnel who were stationed on Santo.

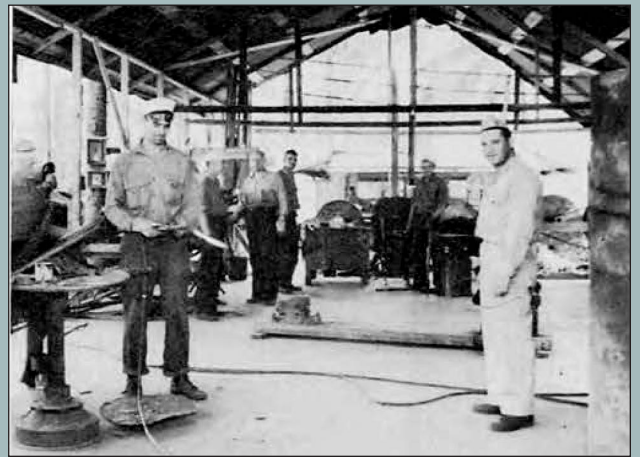
So, we were delighted when Marcy Schramm in the US contacted us about a bow and three arrows her father traded for his navy knife with local Ni-Vanuatu villagers from Malekula. Marcy wanted to find out more about her dad's trade, and we wanted to know more about her dad.



Merrill Firebaugh in his official US Navy photograph.

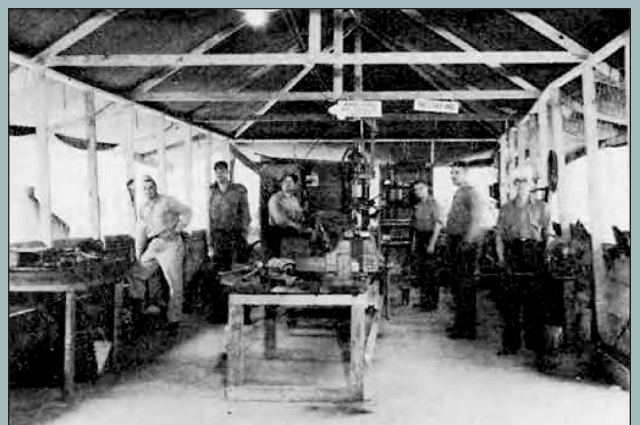
Merrill Firebaugh was a member of Company C, Platoon 1 of the 44th Construction Battalion (Seabees) that landed on Santo on 18 March, 1943. The 44th undertook the operation of two coral pits, and the construction of storage tanks, Hospital #6, the boat pool, five piers, utilities for various camps, and the floating dry dock camp. They built the telephone system for Base Button, the water system, the Sarakata River Bridge, Torpedo Storage Magazines, the Drum Filling Plant and much more. An astounding amount of work prior to the battalion leaving Espiritu Santo for Manus on 4 April, 1944.

After the war, Merrill created an oral history of his time on Santo and recorded everything on tape. Marcy transcribed those recordings, and the following are excerpts from his recordings – specifically about the trades he and other sailors made with the local Ni-Vanuatu villagers.



The 44th Construction Battalion blacksmith shop on Santo. Merrill is the sailor in the left foreground of the photo holding a blowtorch. Photo Naval Heritage and History Command.

“Our battalion was designated to make roads and air strips for the bombers and fighter planes and whatnot. This island we were on was about 50 miles wide and 85 miles long. It was a good size island, but this was the biggest of the lot. Not very far from us. I think the other island where the head-hunters were was called Malekula.



The 44th Construction Battalion machine shop on Santo. Merrill is the sailor second from the left. Photo Naval Heritage and History Command.

(continued...)

"We were on this island in this compound for several months. It wasn't bad working conditions. The only bad thing was the humidity was terrible. And the rain. It would rain and you'd wish the sun would shine. Then the sun would shine, and then it would rain again and kind of cooled off again. And you'd wish the sun would shine again. There never was no halfway. It was either hot with sun, or it was cold with rain.

"I suppose it took 6 months to get our base camp set up with our tents. We had a real nice place for our tenting area. We had avenue streets and we named them. In time we put coral on the streets, like gravel back home.

"One time we were down to the bay and a canoe like vessel came in from Malekula Island. We watched these fellows come in and they were told that they couldn't trade with the soldiers on Espiritu. So they came across the bay with things that they had made. Bows and arrows, homemade knives of wood, woven

baskets and other things like that.



The bow and arrows Merrill traded.

"This particular day, Tommy and I were down at the bay. The boat of these black natives came in from Malekula and they had a lot of things in their boat. They couldn't talk with us and we couldn't talk with them. But they offered us the trinkets they had to sell. But we tried to trade for money, but they shook their head. They didn't want money. Most service men carry a Navy knife with a loop where you fasten it to your belt, so it's always handy if you need it in an accident or emergency or whatever.

"I was talking with this one big black fellow and man

he was tall and well built. He could have picked me up and thrown me in the bay if he wanted to.

"I'll bet he was at least 6-6, really robust and black as coal. (Merrill was 6ft 2in). He noticed my Navy knife hanging on my belt and he pointed to that and he offered me a bow and arrows. He extended them out to me, so I made the same motion that he would take the knife and I would take the bow and arrows. And he nodded his head, so we would make the trade.



A US Navy WWII Mk 1 Combat Knife of the type Merrill would have traded for the bow and arrows. Photo Sailor In Saddle.

"We could buy all kinds of these knives at that time for 50 cents apiece. So, we made a trade, a deal. They would trade for something that they could use. We would get stuff at the PX that we could buy and trade to them, which was a good deal. Other times we'd go out into the jungle. We would go in there and we would



US Sailors on Santo often traded with the local Ni-Vanuatu for items they simply couldn't get. Fresh fruit, such as pineapple was often traded for useful items the natives could use.

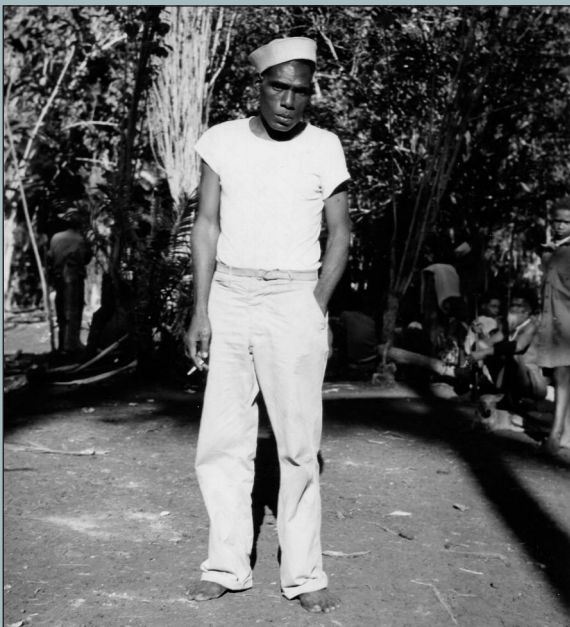
(continued...)



Bows and arrows and other hunting implements were very popular with US military personnel on Santo. Here, Navy officers visit one of the local villages and trade their goods for locally made items. Photo Don Garber Collection/South Pacific WWII Museum.

take a lot of cigarettes and knives we would buy at the PX again and be prepared to make a trade with these natives in the jungle.

"The natives had all kinds of fruits like pineapple, watermelon, musk melon. Edible things they raised for their own eating which was natural. So, at base we didn't have any watermelon. They didn't send any of



A Santo Ni-Vanutu wearing a sailor's uniform. Note the lack of footwear as per Merrill's description. Photo US Archives.

those delicacies over for us in the service. So, we'd go out there and trade cigarettes for watermelon and musk melons and garden stuff. We'd bring back as much as we could carry.

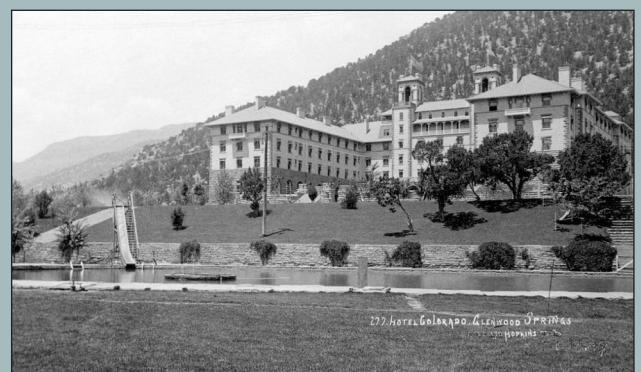
"A lot of these natives would wear our uniforms, jackets. But the shoes, that was something else again. Their feet were bare foot, always. But they did always love to have a pair of shoes, whether they could wear them or not. And they and many a native would walk around with the shoestrings tied and looped around their neck and going barefoot. Now you could look at their feet and at the shoes and you could understand why. Their feet had never been contained in a shoe and were half again as wide as an average man's shoe. The toes were never together because there was nothing to cramp their toes.

"We had been on this island – the 44th – for better than a year. In the meantime, I was telling you about how damp it was over there. I guess I went into the service with some arthritis. Well, that humidity over there didn't make it any better and I got worse and worse and worse.

"The doctor came to the camp one day, examined me and said, "man, I've got to get you in the hospital". Sick Bay was just across the road. I don't know how I got over there, but I was in the hospital for quite some time.

"Well, it came a time when the 44th was to move and I was stuck in the hospital for some weeks. The 44th was all gone. Pulled out to the Marshall Islands to the north and got into some real heavy fighting up there."

Eventually, Merrill was sent back to the United States to convalesce. Travelling by aircraft, ship and numerous trains, he found his way to Glenwood Springs Resort in Colorado for recuperation and ultimately his discharge from the US Navy, and back into civilian life.



Glenwood Springs Resort prior to its temporary acquisition by the US Navy during World War II. Photo hotelcolorado.com

THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

A meeting of minds

The fantastic photo below, was taken on January 20, 1943, on the USS Curtiss at Espiritu Santo. At left is Admiral Chester W. Nimitz and to the right, Admiral William F. Halsey.

The body language may suggest Nimitz is the junior in the relationship – but in fact it's the other way around. We'd love to know what the nature of the discussion was – a little over a year into the Pacific War. Halsey has been in the role of theatre commander for only a few months, but the tide was already turning slowly. Nimitz meanwhile commanded the whole shooting match, the entire US Navy.



Nimitz and Halsey on board the USS Curtiss while moored in Luganville harbour.

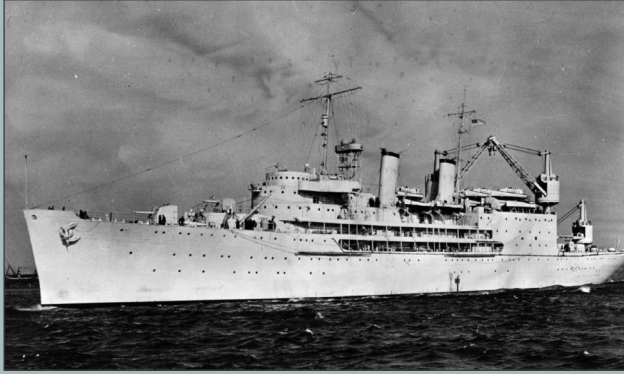
What we do know is that the two men were friends from some time back – as in a delightful anecdote we came across in the Defence Media Network website.

It starts with January 1942, when Nimitz selects Halsey, then a vice-admiral, to lead some early retaliatory aircraft carrier raids in the immediate wake of Pearl Harbour.

(continued...)

The story goes on:

Though Nimitz had a reputation of appearing unemotional, he had a great sense of humour that he used often to help alleviate tension. As Nimitz escorted Halsey down the wharf from where Halsey would



The USS Curtiss (AV-4) the first purpose-built seaplane tender soon after her completion in 1940.

embark, Nimitz, wishing to lighten the mood, recalled a meeting al fresco Halsey had outside New York City's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel the previous year.

The occasion was a conference with the admirals, naturally, in full dress uniform, with golden oak leaf "scrambled eggs" on their cap brims and a "fruit salad" of medals on their chests. The day's meetings having finished, Halsey was waiting for the hotel's doorman to hail him a cab.

Nimitz was standing behind Halsey when a drunk approached Halsey and slurred, "Shay, doorman, get me a cab."

The offended Halsey stiffly replied, "I'll have you know, sir, I am an admiral in the United States Navy!"

"Zat's all right," the drunk replied. "Then get me a boat."

As Nimitz delivered the punch line, they reached the end of the wharf.

Gesturing to the vessel that would take Halsey to his flagship, Nimitz smiled and said, "Well, there's your 'boat,' Bill!"



Another photo of the admirals on Santo. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief, Pacific, visits Vice Admiral Aubrey W. Fitch's ComAirSoPac headquarters at Button, Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, on 16 June 1943. Present are, from left to right: Major General Ralph H. Mitchell, USMC; Major General Holland M. Smith, USMC; Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, USN; Vice Admiral Aubrey W. Fitch, USN, and Admiral William F. Halsey, USN Collection of Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, USN. U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command Photograph.

Inspiring everyday heroes

It's the New Year of course, and new beginnings. That's very true when it comes to those who have been selected to further their studies overseas with foreign scholarships.

New Zealand's Manaaki scholarship is an example where Ni Vanuatu scholars are supported to study in Fiji and New Zealand – and eventually bring back new skills to help their country in key areas. Manaaki is a Maori concept that broadly means to cherish, conserve, and sustain.

These past few days, the successful group has been having a pre-departure briefing with the New Zealand High Commission – so they can get the most out of living in a different culture and excelling in their studies.

Just to give you an idea, these are the sorts of qualification areas that our scholars will be studying - climate change and the Environment, Disaster Risk Management , Education, Food Security and Agriculture, and Health.

We hope everyone's very excited about their year ahead, and that it's also great inspiration for others to think about applying – because the new year is

also when a new round of scholarships open up for applications.

So maybe a year from now, you or someone you know can be part of the next group of scholars.



Some of the 2024 Manaaki New Zealand Scholarship Awardees heading to various institutions in New Zealand for Study – with High Commissioner Nicola Simmonds. Photo NZHC, Vanuatu.

Applications open for one month, starting February the 1st – and more information can be found on the website <https://www.nzscholarships.govt.nz>

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,
Luganville, Espiritu Santo
Vanuatu

email: info@southpacificwwiimuseum.com
web: southpacificwwiimuseum.com

