

## Solomons take flight

It has taken a lot of hard work and negotiation by some exceptionally dedicated people, but it was finally announced in late June that Santo would once again be connected to Australia via a direct flight to Brisbane.

Solomon Airlines have stepped up and announced they would be operating flights from 4 July.

To say the news was an enormous relief to everyone on Santo is an understatement.

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Tourism operators, business owners, locals and of course the museum, are all excited beyond words to have Santo reconnected to the outside world. For the first time in months, regular tourists would get to experience everything the northern islands have to offer. And experience the amazing service from Solomon Airlines.

To ensure everything is in place for 4 July, Solomon Airlines Commercial Manager John Wopereis and key staff members visited Santo around a week ago. Following meetings with local tourism operators, he visited the South Pacific WWII Museum.

John was most complimentary about the museum and was very impressed by what he saw, saying he wished there was something like it in Honiara – he said we'd be very welcome up in the Solomons.

During his visit to the museum, Chairman Bradley Wood presented John with a WWII Santo Coca-Cola bottle. Something we hope will sit on his desk and remind him of his trip to Santo.

And who knows, maybe a sister museum might be on the cards in the future? If it is, we might just ask John for his bottle back.



Museum Chairman Bradley Wood presents Solomon Airlines Commercial Manager John Wopereis with a WWII Santo Coca-Cola bottle.

Prior to the Solomon Airlines flights, the only way on and off the island was via small charter flights from Port Vila or the ferry. While that might seem like a fun way to see a bit more of the neighbouring islands, the trip from Vila takes 30 hours!



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## THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

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# Midway and the New Hebrides

In June 1942, perhaps the single most decisive naval action in history took place in the central Pacific, off an island called Midway.

The Japanese, with a vastly bigger fleet, set out to capture the US-held island – and sailed into an ambush by three American aircraft carriers. In a few short minutes and hours, the elite of the Japanese fleet, four fleet carriers and their veteran pilots, were lost.

There were many reasons for the Japanese failure, but overwhelmingly, it was that the US had superior foreknowledge of what was coming, and thus could set a trap that might work.



US Dauntless Aircraft dive on Japanese carriers during the Battle of Midway.  
Pic - worldofwarships.eu

Given how sensitive that intelligence was, one might have thought it was kept within a very tight circle centred on Pearl Harbour and the heart of US Navy operations.

But clearly not – because even in the – then – relative backwater of the New Hebrides, other parts of the US military were in on the secret, at least to some degree. We know this because of an excerpt from a history of the time, written by the late Lieutenant Ritchie Garrison,

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Midway Atoll, several months before the battle. Eastern Island (with the airfield) is in the foreground Pic - US Archives.

who was based in Efate from the very start of the US presence which would later grow vastly larger.

In June 1942 however, very little was grand about their resources, as is recounted here in this extract.

*"Initially our link to the outside world was provided by a much travelled worn and ancient 4-piper U.S. Navy destroyer left over from World War One.*



The US destroyer USS Crowninshield (DD-134), was a '4-piper destroyer left over from World War One.' Pic - Wikipedia.

The ship had been in Manila when war started before- then in the Dutch East and Australia and was it on its way to Hawaii and the West Coast.

It had been temporarily assigned to Efate to provide

*radio communications until we could establish our own main radio station - this would take time as we had to unload the equipment including generators to set it up and start operating.*

*The old destroyer had been through so much that it really could not be an effective fighting ship until it was overhauled and was practically out of supplies. The crew was in rags, and they were delighted to see so many U.S. troops with plenty of equipment and plenty of food and clothing.*

*One of my tasks as assistant G2 was to visit with the captain of the destroyer twice daily in order to determine what intelligence his radio had picked up. The ship's radio and crypto facilities were very limited but the big picture of the Pacific in those critical days was available - it was through these channels that we learned much about the battle of the Coral Sea on May the Fourth and our losses. Later we learned about the impending Japanese action against Midway and something about the movement of our forces in that direction.*



Japanese aircraft carrier Akagi in April, 1942 during the Indian Ocean Raid as seen from an aircraft that has just taken off from her deck. The aircraft on the flight deck preparing for takeoff are Aichi D3A Type 99 dive bombers. Pic - Naval History and Heritage Command.

*Since the source of the information was intercepted and decoded Japanese radio transmissions, secrecy was vital.*

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USS Yorktown (CV-5) is hit on the port side, amidships, by a Japanese Type 91 aerial torpedo during the mid-afternoon attack by planes from the carrier Hiryu, in the Battle of Midway, on 4 June, 1942. Pic - Naval Heritage and History Command.

*I can well remember one morning when I visited the captain and his tiny cabin; he closed the door and then pulled a decoding machine message tape out of his shirt pocket.*

*The tape talked about the impending Battle of Midway in some detail. I took the tape to show General Chamberlin.*

*On arrival at our headquarters, I immediately saw the general privately and briefed him, showing him the tape and then burnt it in the general's ashtray."*

The rest the say, is history.



U.S. Navy Torpedo Squadron 6 (VT-6) Douglas TBD-1 Devastator aircraft are prepared for launching aboard the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise (CV-6) at about 0730-0740 hrs, 4 June 1942. Pic - Naval History and Heritage Command.



# The Bigfala returns to Unity Park

Earlier in June, the museum opened its tent flaps to locals in Luganville for our annual Bigfala Yard Sale. As our biggest fundraiser of the year, the event featured a wide range of household, workshop, and building items available at heavily discounted prices.



The friendly, hardworking crew behind the Bigfala Yard Sale.



'Museum Boss' Marina worked closely with the Santo Hardware crew to ensure everything ran smoothly.

Once again, building supplies were the hottest selling items. This year, the event raised over 950,000v (almost AU\$12,500), significantly supporting the museum for 2024.

A big thank you goes to Santo Hardware and its fabulous staff, who went out of their way to assist with the running of Bigfala.



Another happy customer at the Bigfala Yard Sale.



# Bang without the boom

The Royal New Zealand Navy (RNZN) – at the request of the Government of Vanuatu – successfully removed five explosive Second World War 1000-pound bombs from Port Vila Harbour this week.

Chief Petty Officer Diver Jarron Williams, who led the dive team, mentioned that the method they used was the least disruptive in the sensitive maritime conservation area.



Republic of Fiji Navy and RNZN personnel prepare to launch the Remote Environmental Monitoring Unit (REMUS) for a survey of the seabed, with HMNZS Manawanui in the background.

Supported by Vanuatu officials and operating from HMNZS Manawanui, five Maritime Explosive Ordnance Disposal Divers from HMNZS Matataua confirmed the location of the Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) and used a low-order charge to crack the bombs open.

Using a low-order charge to crack the ordnance open is a method they've successfully used in other Pacific nations with such as Tuvalu, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands.

Once the bomb is opened, it floods with seawater, rendering the explosive ineffective. "Of course, there's no big boom like you might see in the movies, but it's much safer for marine life and better for the environment," Williams added.



A diver from HMNZS Matataua prepares a low-order charge on one of the bombs. Pic - NZDF.



A 1000lb bomb after it has been cracked open by a low order charge. Pic - NZDF.

The NZDF noted that rendering these ERW safe means the Government of Vanuatu can proceed with plans to dredge the channel and entrance to Port Vila Harbour, ensuring continued access for all harbour users.

# Welcome Gabby

The South Pacific WWII Museum is thrilled to welcome Gabby Brinez-Pardo as an intern for six weeks.

Gabby, a history student at Presbyterian College in Clinton, South Carolina, has a keen interest in museum collection curation.



Gabby hard at work rearranging exhibits in the museum.

She has eagerly embraced her role here and has been tasked with the challenge of rearranging our displays with a stronger storytelling approach.

Her passion and dedication have resulted in exhibits that now follow cohesive themes or narratives, enhancing the museum experience for our visitors.

Gabby still has more work to do, on the museum's database and with the labeling of new items that have come out of storage. We eagerly anticipate seeing the final results of her efforts, before she returns home to the United States.



One of the museum's cabinets that Gabby has relaid out and made even more interesting to visitors and tourists.



Sorting cabinet keys and making it easier to find specific items has been part of Gabby's work over the last couple of weeks.



# A new visitor record

On Sunday, 30 June, the Carnival Splendor docked in Luganville. Marina, Lyn, Jimmy, and Gabby were on hand to meet and greet everyone, though we had no idea just how many people would come through.

Between 8:30 am and 2:30 pm, we welcomed 559 very keen tourists to the museum – a new record for our recently expanded building.

We also sold many souvenirs, including stickers, soaps, Coke bottles, and WWII original Coke bottle caps, which brought some much-appreciated income to the museum.



The Carnival Splendor in port.

Thanks to everyone for dropping by and to Carnival Cruise Line for its ongoing support of Santo.



# Inspiring everyday heroes

Twenty years apart, two sets of heroes stand out.

In 2024, the Vanuatu football team reached the final of the OFC Nations Cup at Freshwater Stadium, Port Vila, thrilling their home crowd.

They faced New Zealand, recalling their historic upset 20 years earlier when they defeated the Kiwis 4-2 in Adelaide. A triumph celebrated as the greatest in Oceania football history despite New Zealand's World Cup appearances.



The all-conquering Vanuatu team in 2004. Oceania Football Centre Pic.



Seimata Chilia (left) and David Chilia (right) were part of the Vanuatu team that defeated New Zealand 20 years ago. Pic- OFC Media.

Captain David Chilia and his cousin Seimata Chilia fondly remember the match, a defining moment in Vanuatu football history.

Despite challenges like a month-long tour from Samoa's qualifying rounds to Adelaide's winter without proper gear, local support and community donations helped the team.

The game, unfortunately, wasn't televised in Vanuatu, and the VHS copies were lost in a cyclone, leaving memories cherished but inaccessible to future generations.

Though Vanuatu lost 3-0 in the recent final, they remained heroes to their home crowd, who cheered them on until the end.

**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](mailto:info@southpacificwwiimuseum.com)  
web: [southpacificwwiimuseum.com](http://southpacificwwiimuseum.com)

