

Cruise ship record

The ongoing unrest in New Caledonia has resulted in additional cruise ships being rerouted to other Pacific Islands, including Santo. Over the last month, the island saw a record number of cruise ship visits on September 14th, 15th, 17th,

19th, and 24th. While this has been great for Santo and local businesses, it has kept Marina, Lemy, and the museum volunteers extremely busy, with nearly 500 visitors. A big thank you to the museum team for their hard work.



Cruise ship passengers check out local souvenirs at the 'Mama's Market' at the cruise ship terminal.



A group of passengers arrive at the South Pacific World War II Museum for a tour of our fantastic exhibits.

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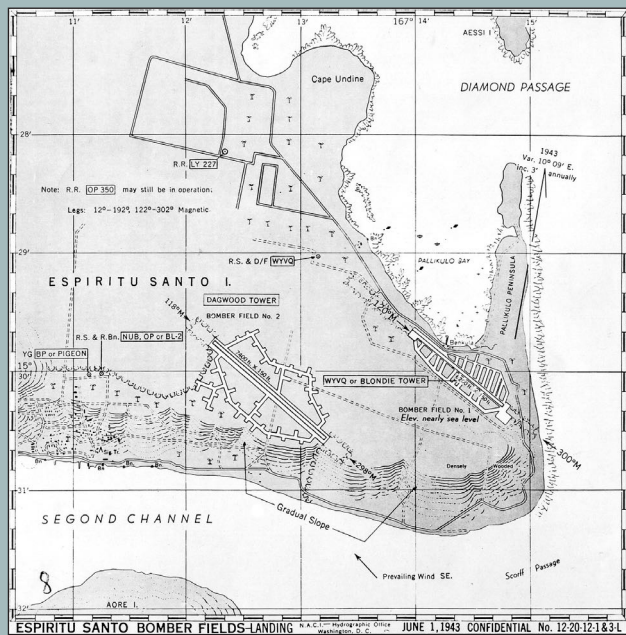


Make mine a double

During World War II, the United States Maritime Commission designed a class of merchant ships known as the 'C2 types'. Designed in 1937-38, they were an all-purpose cargo ship with 5 holds.

173 were built between 1940 and 1945. The first C2's were 140 metres (459 feet) long, 19.2 metres (63 feet) wide and had a 7.6 metre (25 foot) draft. Speed was 15.5 knots. Later, the ships of this class varied in size.

One of those ships was the S.S. Oriental. Built in Oakland California, the Oriental was delivered 18 Feb 1944.



A map of the south east corner of Santo. Scorf Passage is to the right bottom corner of the map, while the Diamond Passage is towards the right top. Map – US Archives.

On 19 March 1944 shortly after midday, the Oriental was on her maiden voyage from the United States. Entering the Scorf Passage Minefield the ship struck a mine while enroute to Pallikulo Bay for anchorage – the very same minefield that the SS President Coolidge sailed into, before hitting two mines in 1942.

The submarine chasers 629 and 1274, patrol boat 591, Admirable-class minesweeper 85 and the tugs USS POGATOCK and USS SAKARISSA were immediately sent to assist the stricken vessel. However a myriad of small craft, speed and crash boats were first to

arrive on the scene to rescue personnel.

Fortunately, there were no casualties, and the damaged ship put into the Second Channel under her own power at 1644.



USS Whiteside anchored in San Francisco Bay, circa 1948, a Type C2-S-B1 ship similar to the Oriental. Photo – Wikipedia.

She was secured to Dock #4 where the work of discharging her cargo began. As a precautionary measure, all available minesweepers were immediately sent out to sweep Diamond Passage to sweep for both moored and magnetic mines that could pose a hazard to shipping.

The ship was sold in 1947 as "Maipo", and later "Hellenic Charm" in 1966, before being scrapped in 1974.



The floating pontoon wharf at Pallikuo Bay. This was where the Oriental was due to unload. Photo – US Archives.

A short history of Base Button

From files held in the US Archives

The U.S. Army Forces occupied Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, on 28 May 1942. This landing was executed by Force "A," which had previously landed at Efate, approximately 225 kilometres (140 miles) to the south, on 18 March 1942. The force, commanded by Captain Roy F. Goggin, was composed of "M" Company of the 182nd Infantry, supported by a small engineering platoon.



HMS Leander made the run from "Efate" to Espiritu Santo with the 182nd Infantry on board. Photo – ozatwar.com

Headquarters were established at the S.F.N.H. plantation, located near the shores of Surundu Bay. The overall commander of Task Force "A" was Brigadier General William I. Rose, who led the force from March to September 1942. General Rose frequently travelled to Espiritu Santo and was instrumental in initiating several key projects that laid the groundwork for the



Pallikulo or Bomber #1 Airfield looking east across to the Palikulo Peninsula. Photo – US Archives.

island's development as a major base.

One of the first major construction projects was a bomber airstrip, later known as Bomber One, located just inland from Pallikulo Bay. The construction began with Company "B" of the 810th Aviation Engineering Construction Battalion, later relieved by the 7th Naval Construction Battalion. The airstrip was completed

in record time, with the field ready for use in less than ten days from the start of construction. As Bomber One neared completion, plans were already underway for a second, larger bomber strip, Bomber Two, which would be built parallel to Bomber One, somewhere between Pallikulo Bay and the Second Channel.

There were also unofficial

reports suggesting plans to allow planes to taxi between the two strips, though this never eventuated. Bomber Two's construction began in November 1942, led by Company "B" of the 810th Battalion and the 15th



Pekoa or Bomber #2 airfield looking north. Photo – US Archives.

Naval Construction Battalion. The terrain on which this field was built had previously been a cotton plantation, with the taxiways carved through dense jungle. Native labourers from nearby islands, including Aoba, Pentecost, Malo, and Malekula, (continued..)



Bomber #2 airfield during construction. Marston matting is being laid by Navy Seabees. Photo US Archives.

were brought in to assist with the construction. Bomber Two officially opened on 6 January 1943, and featured a coral base runway covered with Marston matting along its entire length.

The first Army Air Corps unit to operate out of Espiritu Santo was the 11th Bombardment Group, which had relocated from Hawaii and was under the command of Colonel LaVern G. "Blondy" Saunders.



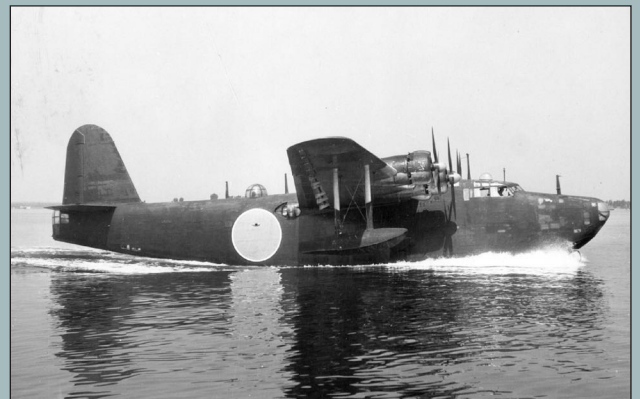
Rear Admiral John S. McCain, Sr. (left), with Colonel L.G. Saunders (middle) and Major General Millard Harmon (right) at Espiritu Santo, August 1942. Photo – US Navy/US Archives.

The Navy had already been operating OS2U planes from the old Seaplane Base at Alhena Landing before the Army Air Corps arrived. To support the construction and operations of Bomber One and Two, two small barge landings were built in Pallikulo Bay. These landings were used to unload bombs, fuel, and planes, as well as other material and supplies.

On 23 February 1943, Brigadier General R.E.S. Williamson activated the Service Command at Espiritu

Santo, with a primary mission to coordinate efforts with the U.S. Navy to transform the island into the largest supply point in the Pacific, south of Pearl Harbor.

Until 20 November 1944, the island was under the Army's IV Island Command. However, after this date, control shifted to the Navy under Commodore H.B. Meckley, USN (Ret), with Colonel R.G. Howie commanding all Army units. The 13th Army Air Force also became a prominent unit stationed at the base.



The Japanese H8K flying boat, of the type that attacked Santo on six occasions. Photo – The Economic Times.

In the early stages of the base's development, enemy action was a constant threat. All personnel were required to maintain foxholes and always carry small arms with ammunition. The first enemy bombing occurred on the night of January 21-22, 1943, when four Japanese aircraft dropped 11 to 18 bombs southeast of Bomber Two, though no damage was reported. The following night, between midnight and 12:30 a.m., one or two enemy bombers dropped 14 bombs near Bomber One, though none landed directly on the strip. Three men were wounded, but equipment remained undamaged. The bombs used were a mix of anti-personnel and fragmentation types.

Further attacks occurred on the night of January 27-28, when one aircraft dropped 15 bombs in the jungle west of Aore Island without causing damage. Another bombing raid took place on February 21-22, with six bombs targeting Bomber Two. Two bombs struck Bunker #6, damaging a U.S. bomber. The remaining bombs were either duds or missed their mark, though they left deep craters.

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Additional air raids and submarine attacks continued sporadically throughout 1943.

Espiritu Santo's strategic importance was immense, largely due to its geographical location. Situated just north of New Caledonia, the island was a prime target for the Japanese, who could have used it as a staging ground for an attack on New Caledonia or Australia. From a defensive perspective, the island would have been a key stronghold in the Japanese outer perimeter.

Conversely, its occupation by Allied forces proved crucial to operations against the Japanese. The island's value was first realised in July 1942 when American forces used it as a base to bomb Japanese positions on Guadalcanal, less than 1000km (650 miles) away. Planes from Bomber One struck at enemy ground troops and supply lines, helping to pave the way for the U.S. invasion of Guadalcanal on 7 August 1942. The invasion was supported by aircraft from Espiritu Santo and nearby aircraft carriers.



The main wharf in what's now Luganville was big enough to support six standard 100ft x 40ft Quonset Huts, a huge warehouse and more. Photo – US Archives.

From that point onward, Espiritu Santo played a key role in supporting Allied operations throughout the Pacific. As the front lines advanced northward, beyond the range of immediate protection, the island base expanded to serve as a major supply and shipping point. By December 1943, Espiritu Santo had become the largest naval, supply, and airbase in the Pacific, west of Pearl Harbor. Its facilities grew rapidly to accommodate the increasing demands of the war, and by 1944, it had earned the reputation of being "the most efficient large supply base in the Pacific area." The

base's primary function was to stockpile and distribute supplies to the fighting fronts by air and sea. Cargo handling capacity improved dramatically with the construction of multiple piers and docks in Pallikulo Bay and Segond Channel, allowing up to seven Victory ships to dock simultaneously by early 1943.

Espiritu Santo also became a critical evacuation center. The first mass evacuations of casualties



Pallikulo wharf was an extremely busy operation unloading much in the way of aircraft and aircraft parts. Photo – US Archives.

by sea occurred in September 1943, and later that month, air evacuations to New Zealand and rear bases commenced. Direct air evacuations to the U.S. began in December 1943. During the Battle of Guadalcanal, Espiritu Santo served as a vital naval airbase, staging area, and supply hub. Navy Patrol Squadrons 24 and 91 operated from Segond Channel Seaplane Base, supporting U.S. forces at Guadalcanal. Meanwhile, heavy and medium bombers from Bomber One conducted relentless bombing raids against Japanese targets in the Solomon Islands.

As the war progressed and the Allied advance pushed further north, Espiritu Santo gradually outgrew its role as an advanced airbase. At its peak, Bomber Three housed over 650 planes, some of which bore as many as 17 Japanese "kills" on their fuselages. Throughout the war, the base had logged more than 200,000 flights, contributing significantly to the Allied effort in the Pacific.

THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

The tragic disappearance of NZ3526

The war was over. And those who had done and supported the fighting were no doubt turning their thoughts to returning home and their peacetime lives.

Yet nothing was ever risk free, even once the shooting had ceased. Air transport claimed many lives during the war – aviation over long distances was simply much less safe than it is today.

So, on 24 September 1945, a New Zealand Dakota with four crew and 16 passengers took off, heading for Auckland, New Zealand. It never landed.

Here's the description by Air Force Museum, New Zealand.

'The RNZAF suffered its largest loss of life in one day when Dakota NZ3526 disappeared on its way home from the Pacific islands.

The transport aircraft from No. 40 Squadron took off from Pallikulo Field on Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) at 5.30am, bound for Whenuapai. On board were four crew and 16 passengers, all New Zealand airmen returning home from active service. At 9.06am, NZ3526 sent out a 'standby, standby' message, but radio contact was then lost.

Despite a large-scale search by Catalina, Dakota, Hudson, and Liberator aircraft over several days, nothing more was heard or seen of NZ3526 or its crew and passengers.

The most likely explanation is that the Dakota suffered a catastrophic structural failure in turbulent air conditions,



The RAF airman doll carried as mascot and good luck charm by pilot Flying Officer Jack Hoffeins. He did not carry it on the flight of NZ3526. Photo – Air Force Museum, New Zealand.

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similar to weather described by an aircraft following 25 minutes behind, which was forced to climb to avoid the turbulence.



An RNZAF Dakota on Espiritu Santo, sometime in 1944. Photo – National Library, New Zealand.

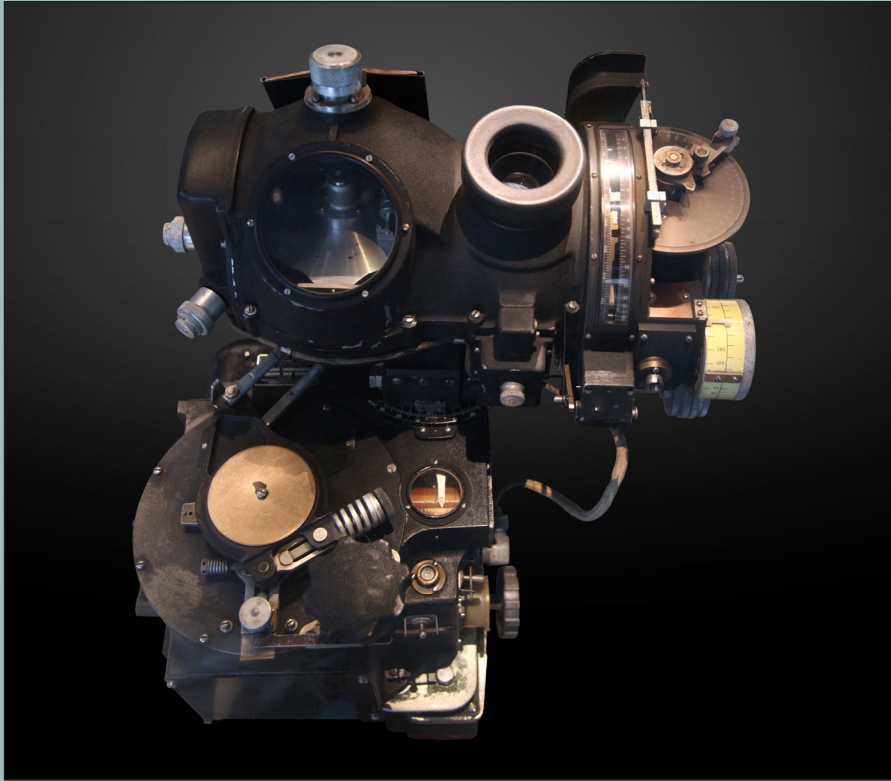
No trace has ever been found of NZ3526 or the personnel on board, and they are commemorated on the Bourail Memorial in New Caledonia.'

There's a twist to the story The plane was piloted by Flying Officer Jack Hoffeins. He carried a mascot and good-luck charm while on operations with No. 213 Squadron RAF in the Middle East and later, No. 267 Squadron over Italy, during World War Two. But on his last fateful flight, for some unknown reason he left the doll behind.



A C-47 takes off from the Turtle Bay Fighter Airfield on Espiritu Santo. Photo – US Archives.

The sights of Espiritu Santo



A Norden bombsight on display at the Imperial War Museum in Duxford, with the stabiliser assembly attached. Photo – Imperial War Museum.

The Norden bombsight was a groundbreaking piece of technology used by the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) and Navy during World War II, as well as by the United States Air Force in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

It represented one of the earliest tachometric designs, which combined optical systems, a mechanical computer, and an autopilot for an innovative approach to precision bombing. For the first time, a bombsight could not only identify a target but also steer the aircraft toward it. Unlike its predecessors, which could only estimate ground speed and direction, the Norden bombsight directly measured both critical variables.

This advancement allowed for greater precision, especially when paired with its onboard analogue computer that continuously updated the bomb's projected impact point as conditions in flight changed. In addition, its integrated autopilot adjusted to shifts

in wind or other atmospheric effects quickly and accurately.

The combination of these features promised unparalleled accuracy for high-altitude, daytime bombing. During pre-war testing, the Norden demonstrated a circular error probability (CEP) of just 46 meters (150 feet), an astonishing level of precision for that era.

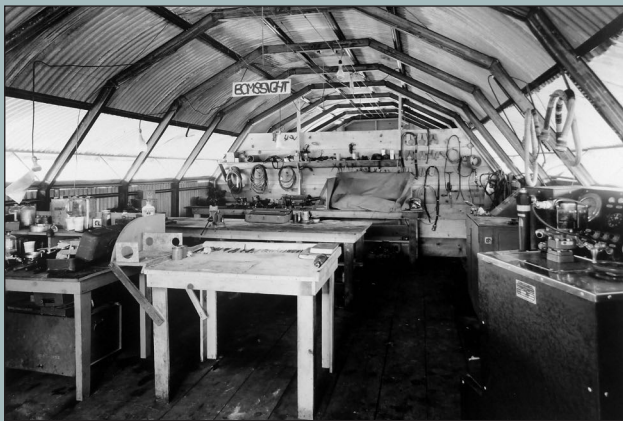
With roughly a million dollars' worth of bombsight equipment and related materials stationed on Espiritu Santo, it became essential to establish top-tier storage and maintenance facilities locally to ensure their optimal function. Commander Air Centre was tasked with helping the Aviation Repair and Overhaul Unit set up the necessary infrastructure to maintain bombsights for aircraft.



Enola Gay bombardier Thomas Ferebee with the Norden bombsight on Tinian after the dropping of the Little Boy atomic bomb.

The arrangement outlined that bombsight equipment would be housed in the area and made available whenever needed by operational forces.

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VMD-154's instrument shop on Santo probably wasn't quite up to the new standards for protecting sights from humidity. Photo – US Archives.

Additionally, torpedo bomber (VTB) aircraft were required to have Column "A" bombsight equipment reinstalled before departing the area.

To protect the sensitive equipment from the damaging effects of Santo's high humidity, proper storage facilities were essential. Hot-locker space was deemed necessary to prevent moisture-related damage. An estimated 175 bombsights, 50 stabilisers, and 50 Stabilised Bombing Approach Equipment (SBAE) units – mechanical autopilots designed to complement the bombsight – required storage, alongside additional equipment for stock and future distribution.

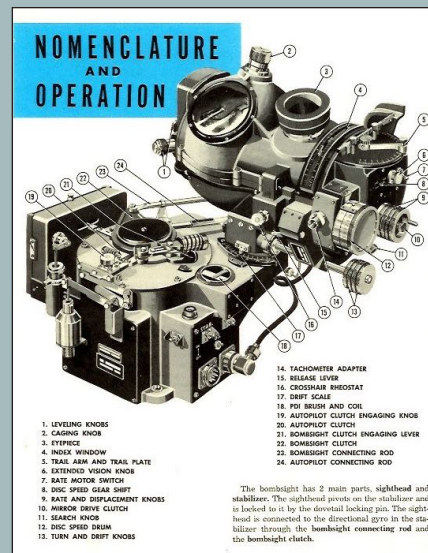
Air Centre Command secured an entire Quonset hut to be converted into a hot-locker, complete with concrete floor, to address these storage needs.



The Norden bombsight at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, California. This example is only the bombsight itself; it does not include the associated autopilot that would normally connect to it on the bottom. Photo – Allan J Cronin.

The repair and overhaul of the bombsights was taken extremely seriously, with the Bombsight Overhaul Shop required to submit monthly reports to Commander Fleet Air, South Pacific. These reports detailed any changes in the number of bombsights and equipment in storage, reflecting the critical nature of maintaining the devices in the challenging tropical conditions.

Ensuring the bombsights remained as accurate as possible in such environments was certainly a difficult task. Ultimately, the difficulty of field maintenance was one of the reasons behind the bombsight's once-top-secret status being downgraded, with the equipment even being publicly displayed in November 1944.



A page from the Bombardier's Information File (BIF) outlining the workings of the Norden Bombsight. Photo – warfarehistorynetwork.com

Despite extensive maintenance efforts, field improvisations like the hot-locker provided the bombsight with the best possible chance of success. However, the realities of wartime usage revealed significant limitations. In reality, only approximately 5 percent of bombs dropped by the Eighth Air Force landed within 1,000 feet of their intended targets. On average, 500-pound bombs dropped in Europe missed their mark by an astonishing 1,673 feet.

Even so, despite its shortcomings, the Norden bombsight remained a marvel of wartime technology, emblematic of both the ambitions and limitations of mid-20th-century military innovation.

The ace of aces

Those familiar with the Pacific War are likely know of the incredible exploits of Major Gregory "Pappy" Boyington, the legendary US Marine Corps combat pilot ace. His leadership of VMF-214, or the "Black Sheep Squadron," during World War II earned him a place in aviation and indeed World War II history.

Known for his tenacity and 'all guns blazing' attitude both in the skies and on the ground, Boyington was legendary when flying the Vought F4U Corsair and was awarded the Navy Cross and the Medal of Honor for his bravery and achievements. Over his career, he shot down 28 enemy aircraft.



Major Gregory "Pappy" Boyington during World War II. Photo – US Archives.

Espiritu Santo shares in this remarkable chapter of military history. The Black Sheep Squadron, under Boyington's command, was based at Turtle Bay Fighter Airfield on the island's east coast during the later part of 1943. Recently, a copy of Boyington's extensive 856-page personnel file was obtained by the South Pacific WWII Museum from the US Archives, providing us with a fascinating look at this iconic figure.

Boyington was born on December 4, 1912, in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. His passion for aviation led him to study aeronautical engineering at the University of Washington in Seattle. After completing his education, he enlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve on 15 June



Aviation Cadet Gregory Boyington taken during his flight instruction at Naval Air Station (NAS) Pensacola, 1936. Photo – US Archives.

1935. Just a year later, he was appointed as an Aviation Cadet, and by 2 July 1936, he had completed his flight training at Pensacola, Florida, earning his wings and a commission as a Second Lieutenant in the regular Marine Corps.

Throughout his early military career, Boyington served with various aviation groups and aboard naval carriers, eventually being promoted to First Lieutenant in November 1940. He was then assigned as a Naval Aviation Instructor at Pensacola.

However, in August 1941, Boyington resigned from the Marine Corps to join the First American Volunteer Group, more commonly known as the "Flying Tigers." This group was formed to assist the Chinese during their conflict with Japan. Over the following months, Boyington flew more than 300 combat hours as part of the Flying Tigers before the group disbanded in July 1942.

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Boyington (centre) takes a smoke break with squadron mates John Farrell (left) and John Croft. Since arriving at the AVG base at Kunming, China, Boyington was frustrated by a lack of action. Photo – US Archives.

Following the end of his time with the Flying Tigers, Boyington returned to the United States and successfully applied for reinstatement in the Marine Corps. By November 1942, Boyington was on his way to the South Pacific to continue fighting in the war.

On 1 June 1942, VMF-214 was activated at Ewa Naval Air Station on Oahu, Hawaii. The squadron was initially known as the "Swashbucklers" and was stationed on Guadalcanal. After completing their duties at Henderson Field, the squadron disbanded briefly, only to be reformed in August 1943 on Espiritu Santo. It was at Turtle Bay Fighter Airfield that Boyington took command of the newly reconstituted squadron, now called the "Black Sheep."

The squadron under Boyington's leadership was composed of 27 pilots who came from all over the South Pacific. Some were seasoned veterans who had been detached from their original squadrons due to illness or other reasons, while others were replacements fresh from the United States. Despite the diversity of experience among the pilots, they all

shared one thing in common – a burning desire to get into combat.

However, these pilots initially faced challenges. Military command was reluctant to allow them to form a new squadron and put them into action. But Boyington and Major Stan Bailey, who would later become the squadron's executive officer, campaigned tirelessly for the chance to prove themselves. Their persistence paid off when headquarters finally gave permission for the squadron to form, albeit with the stipulation that they had less than four weeks to train and become combat ready.

With just eight Corsairs at their disposal, Boyington and his men trained relentlessly, flying day and night. Their efforts soon paid off. After honing their skills, the Black Sheep Squadron deployed to a forward base on Vella Lavella, from where they launched a series of aggressive combat missions. Within the first month of action, the squadron shot down 58 Japanese aircraft, 55 of which were Zeros. Boyington himself was credited with downing five enemy planes during his first mission.

On 3 January 1944, Boyington led a force of 48 American fighters, including four from the Black Sheep Squadron, on a mission to sweep over Rabaul, New Guinea. He was the tactical commander of the flight and was seen shooting down his 26th enemy aircraft. However, in the chaos of the ensuing dogfight, Boyington became separated from his squadron and



Marine Fighting Squadron 214, commanded by Boyington, poses for a group photo on Turtle Bay fighter airfield, Espiritu Santo, with an F-4U Corsair in the background, 1943. Photo – US Archives.

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did not return. Despite extensive search efforts, he was declared missing in action.

Unbeknownst to his comrades, Boyington had been rescued by the Imperial Japanese Navy submarine I-181 and taken to Rabaul as a prisoner of war. He spent the remainder of the war in Japanese prison camps, including the infamous Ōfuna and Ōmori camps near Tokyo. His capture was never officially acknowledged by the Japanese, and as a result, Boyington was not registered with the Red Cross as a POW. For 20 long months, he endured captivity, unaware of the honour that awaited him back home.

Even while missing in action, Boyington's bravery had not gone unnoticed. In April 1944, he was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions on 3 January 1944. The citation reads in part:

"For extraordinary heroism above and beyond the call of duty as Commanding Officer of Marine Fighting Squadron TWO FOURTEEN in action against enemy Japanese forces. Consistently outnumbered throughout successive hazardous flights over heavily defended hostile territory, Major Boyington struck at the enemy with daring and courageous persistence..."

In addition to the Medal of Honor, Boyington was also awarded the Navy Cross. His Navy Cross citation described his leadership during a fighter sweep over Rabaul, where he took down another enemy aircraft



Former US prisoners of war pose for a photo aboard USS Reeves in Tokyo Bay, Japan. Boyington stands second from left. Photo – US Archives.

under extreme conditions. The citation praised Boyington's "tenacious and fearless" approach and highlighted how his leadership inspired his men to achieve remarkable results.

After the Japanese surrender in August 1945, Boyington was liberated from the Ōmori prison camp and returned to the United States a national hero.



President Truman awards Pappy The Medal of Honour at a ceremony at the White House. Photo – US Archives.

On 5 October 1945, President Harry S. Truman personally presented Pappy with the Medal of Honor at a ceremony at the White House in Washington DC.

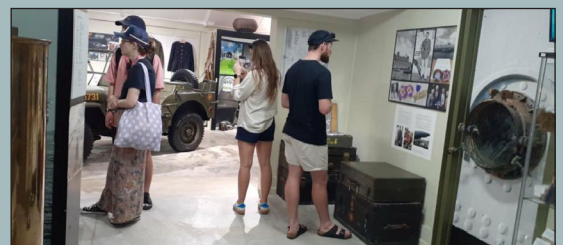
Boyington's personal life was deeply affected by the war and his somewhat 'extreme' lifestyle. He had three children from a previous marriage – Gregory Jr., Janet Sue, and Gloria – who lived with his mother in Washington. His wife, Frances Baker Boyington, resided in Los Angeles, California, during his service.

From his days as a Flying Tiger in China to his command of the Black Sheep Squadron, Boyington's legacy as one of the most decorated and daring fighter pilots of World War II remains unparalleled.

His indomitable spirit, relentless determination, and unmatched skill continue to inspire generations of aviators.

What a month!

The cruise ships have been coming one after the other throughout September and there's no let up in sight. There are more scheduled for October, which is great news for Luganville and the us at the Museum. Here are a few shots of some of the visitors we've had come through this month.



Inspiring everyday heroes

Our heroes this week are those involved with the latest efforts by the Fred Hollows Foundation to provide better eye health for people in Vanuatu. The foundation is famous throughout the Pacific for providing the expertise that can't be met by local medical services.

Recently it's been on the island of Tanna, with an outreach clinic funded by the Foundation.



Dr Andronico Ly from VCH Eye Clinic at work at the Tanna outreach clinic
Photo – Fred Hollows Foundation.

Danstan Tate, coordinator of the Eye Clinic at Vila Central Hospital told the Vanuatu Daily Post newspaper that the funding covered travel and accommodation costs for the medical team.

He says for the past five years, many residents have been screened at Tanna's Lenakel Hospital, but financial constraints and mobility issues have hindered their access to necessary surgeries in Port Vila.

During their week on the island, the medical team performed eye surgeries on 72 patients. In addition to the surgeries, 205 individuals received eye consultations.

One nurse shared a touching story about a woman who hadn't seen for four years and regained her sight. The emotional reactions from patients post-surgery were profound, with one elderly father shedding tears of joy upon seeing his family clearly for the first time in years. "For many of them, this truly feels like a miracle," she said.

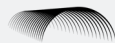
The team included two ophthalmologists, Dr Kasso from the Northern Provincial Hospital (NPH) Eye Clinic and Dr Andronico Ly from VCH Eye Clinic, along with a registered doctor and five eye nurses.

The next planned outreach is set for Epi Island, where more lives can potentially be transformed.

Professor Fred Hollows, who died in 1993, was a New Zealand ophthalmologist who spent much of his career working with remote communities in Australia, and then in the Pacific.

You can easily support their work by donating to the Fred Hollows Foundation NZ, at www.hollows.org.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
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