SOUTH PACIFIC WWII MUSEUM
VANUATU

South Pacific WWII Museum

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Building shared visions

The South Pacific WWII Museum had the distinct pleasure of welcoming Eric Sheffield, Deputy Chief of Mission and Chargé d'Affaires of the U.S. Embassy, for his first visit to the museum. Eric's visit follows his arrival at the new U.S. Embassy in Port Vila approximately three months ago.

Eric Sheffield and Bradley Wood visit Bomber #3 where they talk about the history of the huge airfield.

During his time with us, Chairman Bradley Wood, Project Manager James Carter (joining via Zoom), Museum Support Officer Marina Moli and volunteer Lemy Nacisse, provided Eric with a comprehensive overview of the museum's collection, its ongoing projects, and our exciting plans for the future.

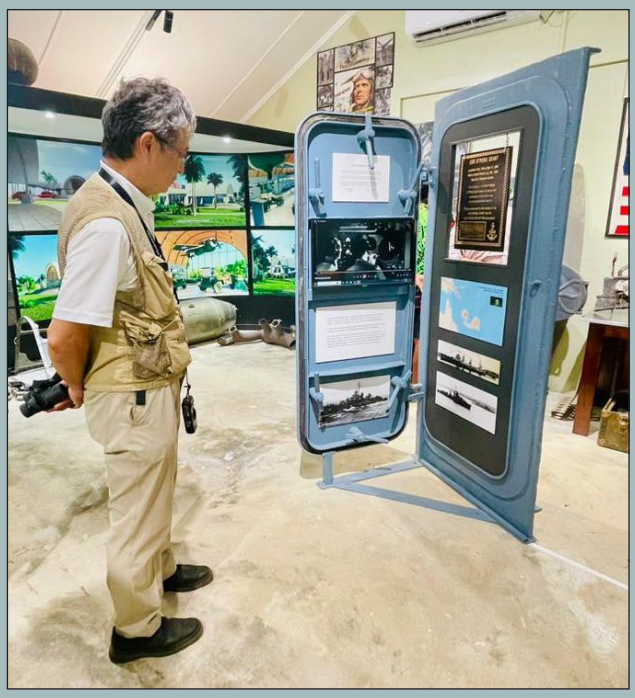
We are deeply grateful to Eric for taking the time to meet with us in such a relaxed and engaging setting. It was a valuable opportunity to discuss shared interests, and we look forward to exploring ways we can collaborate very soon.

Eric Sheffield (left), with Marina Moli and Chairman Bradley Wood outside the South Pacific WWII Museum.

Welcome Ambassador

The South Pacific WWII Museum was honoured to host His Excellency Mr. OKUDA Naohisa, the Ambassador of Japan, along with Munetoshi ISHIDA, the First Secretary for Economic Affairs and Economic Cooperation, during their visit to our museum in Luganville.

Board member Mayumi Green graciously guided the Ambassador through the museum, utilising her fluent Japanese to provide an informative and engaging experience. This allowed for a deeper appreciation of the stories and history preserved within our exhibits.



The Japanese Ambassador inspects the USS Strong memorial during his visit to the South Pacific WWII Museum.

We extend our gratitude to His Excellency for taking the time out of his busy schedule to visit the museum and learn more about the connections between the New Hebrides (Vanuatu) and Japan during World War II. Moments like these are a testament to the universal value of preserving history and fostering international relationships.

His Excellency Mr. OKUDA Naohisa, Ambassador of Japan (right) and Munetoshi ISHIDA First Secretary (Economic Affairs/Economic Cooperation) with Museum Support Officer Marina Moli.

The Ambassador and First Secretary were taken to one of the many former bunkers on the island by Museum board member Mayumi Green.

From coral pit to aviation hub

The Aviation Supply Depot on the Pallikulo Peninsula following its completion in 1943. Photo – US Archives.

During World War II, the northern end of the Pallikulo Peninsula became a centre of intense military activity. This area hosted one of Espiritu Santo's busiest ports, which included the island's largest floating pontoon dock, and was the site of the Aviation Supply Depot.

The story of the depot began on 1 November 1942, when the Supply Department of the Advance Naval Air Base was established. Its initial staff was drawn from Cub One (one of the Advanced Base Units) and Acorn Red Two (U.S. Navy Seabee advance base unit stationed at Santo), and operations commenced in a jungle clearing where the Aviation Overhaul Repair Unit (AORU) was already stationed. At this early stage, facilities consisted of just one warehouse managed by eight storekeepers. The first requisition for aviation materials was submitted days later, on 7 November 1942, under the supervision of the Officer in Charge of Cub One.

As activity increased, the need for more personnel and infrastructure became apparent. By February 1943, the Aviation Overhaul Unit had also joined the site, further straining its limited resources. Although three additional warehouses were built, the growing volume of incoming supplies quickly outstripped available storage. Outdoor storage became unavoidable, leaving materials exposed to mud and water during the rainy season. Without tarpaulins or sufficient handling equipment, the work was arduous, and the wet, soggy ground presented ongoing challenges.

To address these problems, on 10 March 1943, the requisitioning process was revamped under the guidance of a lieutenant from Lion One (the major base at Santo), who took charge of streamlining operations. By 1 May 1943, a new chapter began with the official formation of the Aviation Supply Annex, Espiritu Santo. Despite this progress, storage space remained inadequate, and the influx of materials continued to overwhelm the depot. By June 1943, personnel were

The Aviation Supply Depot's quonset huts under construction in 1943. Photo – US Archives.

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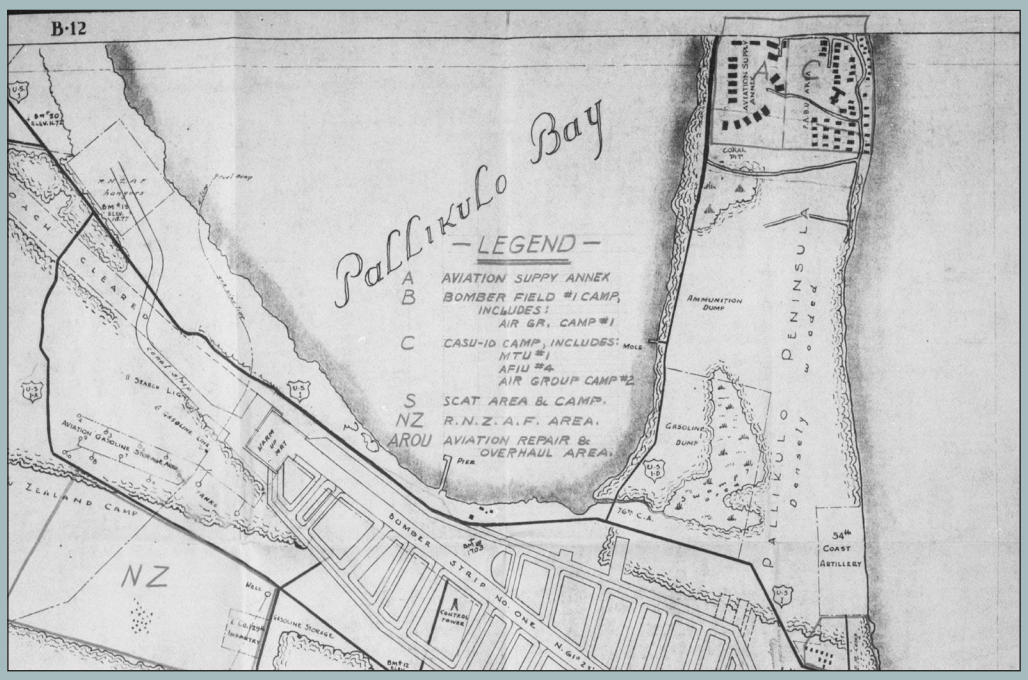
The slipways and dockside infrastructure under construction at the supply depot. Photo – US Archives.

working tirelessly to organise, stow, and inventory supplies while also managing increasing receipts and shipments. The limited workforce struggled to keep up with the workload, and living quarters had to be set up inside one of the warehouses, further limiting available storage.

Recognising the need for expansion, a new location was identified on the Pallikulo Peninsula around a large, abandoned coral pit measuring 1,000 feet (304 metres) long, 300 feet (91 metres) wide, and up to 20 feet (6 metres) deep. Its proximity to docks and airfields made it an ideal choice. By mid-1943, a Commander arrived with six officers to oversee the relocation. The move required significant effort from both the Aviation Supply personnel and AORU teams. With limited equipment—a single motor crash crane and a small finger-lift—materials were gradually transferred to the new site. Operations had to continue at both locations during the move, complicating logistics and further straining the workforce. Although the approved complement was set at 230 enlisted men, shortages of manpower meant this number was not fully reached for some time.



The Aviation Supply Depot is seen on this map of Pallikulo Bay in the top of the illustration to the right. Photo – US Archives.

The new site offered opportunities for growth but presented its own challenges. Initial construction included 20 warehouses, though delays caused by a lack of cement and timber hindered progress. Outdoor storage remained necessary, and the large coral pit itself became a hazard, filling with water and posing health risks. Eventually, it was filled with coral and dirt to provide additional storage space. Drainage was improved with help from the Seabees, and Marsden matting was laid over wooden supports to create more stable storage areas. The hot, humid climate remained a challenge, with temperatures inside storage areas reaching up to 120°F (48.8°C). Makeshift structures, dubbed "dollhouses", were built using empty crates and tarps to protect materials like drop tanks from the elements.

By 1 October 1943, the facility was officially designated as the Aviation Supply Depot, South Pacific. Its role expanded as the depot took over operations from Noumea, which ceased functioning in early 1944. The depot became a critical hub, servicing 24 local units directly and 36 more indirectly through annexes in Noumea,

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Guadalcanal, Bougainville, and Emirau. It supported a wide range of operations, including Naval Air Transport Service (NATS), Marine Aircraft Groups (MAGs), and Carrier Aircraft Service Units (CASUs). Additionally, it housed a publications centre and facilities for handling specialised equipment like catapults, arresting gear, and barrier gear.

States. By mid-1945, the Aviation Supply Depot on Espiritu Santo was formally dissolved.

Today, remnants of this vital wartime facility can still be seen on the Pallikulo Peninsula. Visitors exploring the area near the old concrete slipways may discover the slabs and ruins that once formed the backbone of the Aviation Supply Depot, a testament to its significant role in the operation of Base Button and the Pacific theatre during World War II.

The Pallikulo Bay wharf not only unloaded all manner of parts and spares for aircraft on Espiritu Santo, but even unloaded complete aircraft fresh from the United States. This SBD is being transported by pontoon barge from the wharf to Bomber #1 airfield just across the bay. Photo – US Archives.

The depot continued to grow, eventually covering 13 acres (5 hectares) with 26 warehouses, two office buildings, and a salvage area by mid-1944. Despite these expansions, storage demands consistently outpaced capacity, necessitating constant adaptations. By February 1945, as the warfront moved northward, the depot began winding down operations. Excess materials were packed for shipment, and the facility ceased issuing supplies on February 15. Over the following months, most personnel were reassigned, either to the Aviation Supply Depot in Samar, Philippines, or back to the United

The remains of the Pallikulo Bay wharf as they were prior to Cyclone Harold. The powerful cyclone destroyed the jetties on pylons. Drone photo – Jimmy Carter.

THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

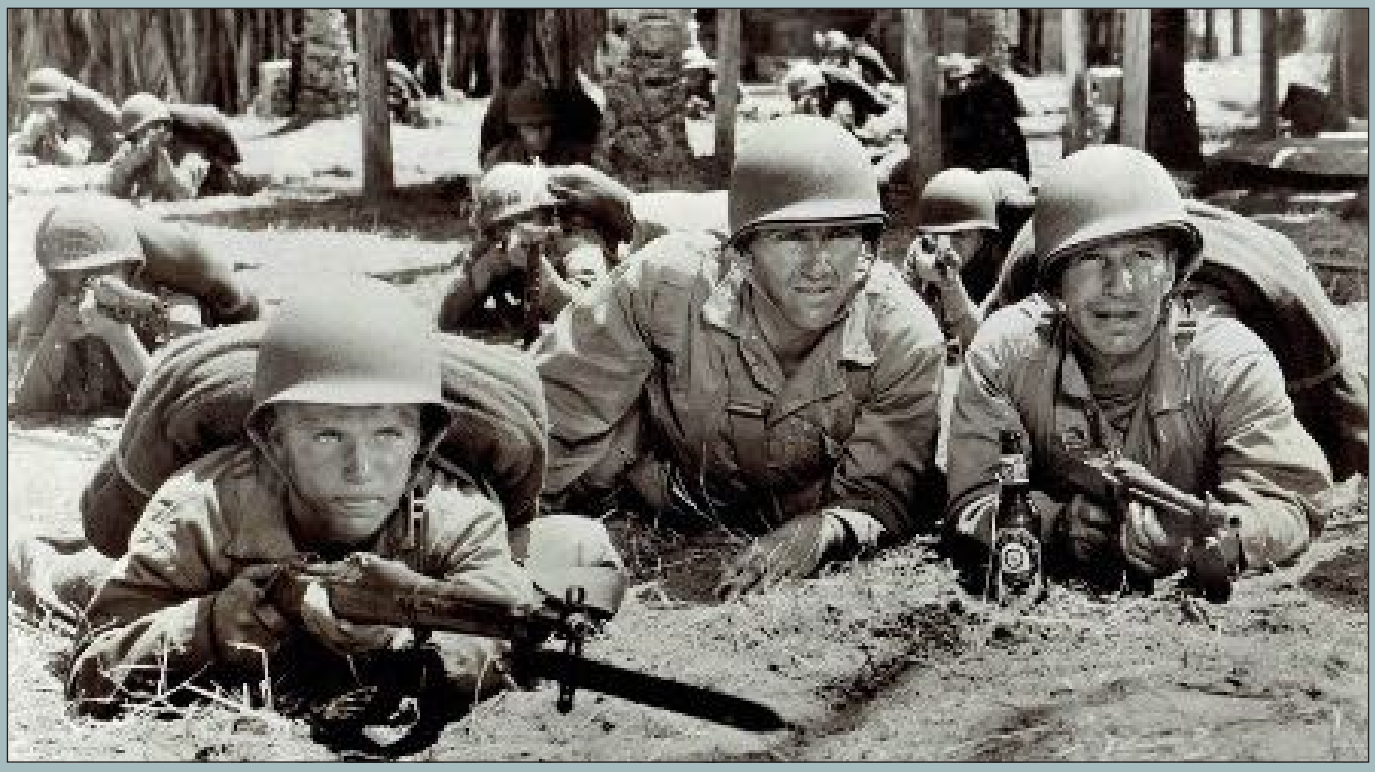
Guadalcanal goes Hollywood

The United States fought the Pacific War on many fronts – but it never forgot the Home Front was critical to it all.

From the eventually massive war economy, dubbed the Arsenal of Democracy, to the men and women who signed up to serve, home morale and motivation had to be sustained.

So, the US had no hesitation in turning another of its leading industries – Hollywood – to the war effort.

Which is why in November 1943, audiences first saw Guadalcanal Diary filling their cinema screens. The 52-minute movie was based on the book of the same name. written by war correspondent Richard Tregaskis, who had served in the famous battle for the island.



Eyes front – a still from *Guadalcanal Diary*. Photo – IMDB.

It came out just under a year after the campaign had ended – literally ripped from the front pages as they say.

The combat scenes were filmed in the US around Camp Pendleton, the camp through which thousands of Marines had, and would pass. No shortage of extras there.

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The 1943 poster for Guadalcanal Diary Photo – IMDB.

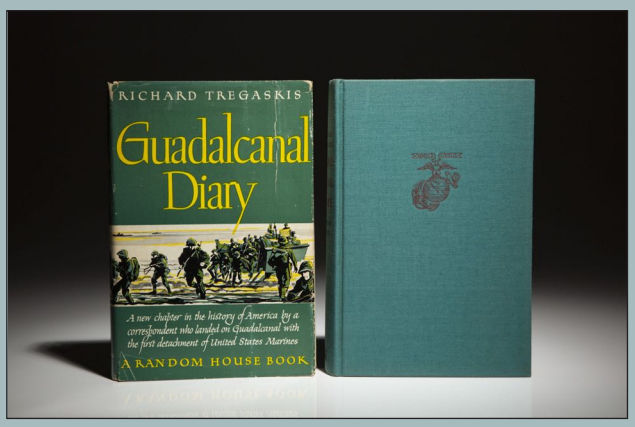
The headline stars would not be household names today – although Anthony Quinn would go on to become a big name.

Ironically for a movie intended to extol the virtues of the US fighting man and inspire others to sign up, the story centres around a patrol that went disastrously wrong on Guadalcanal.

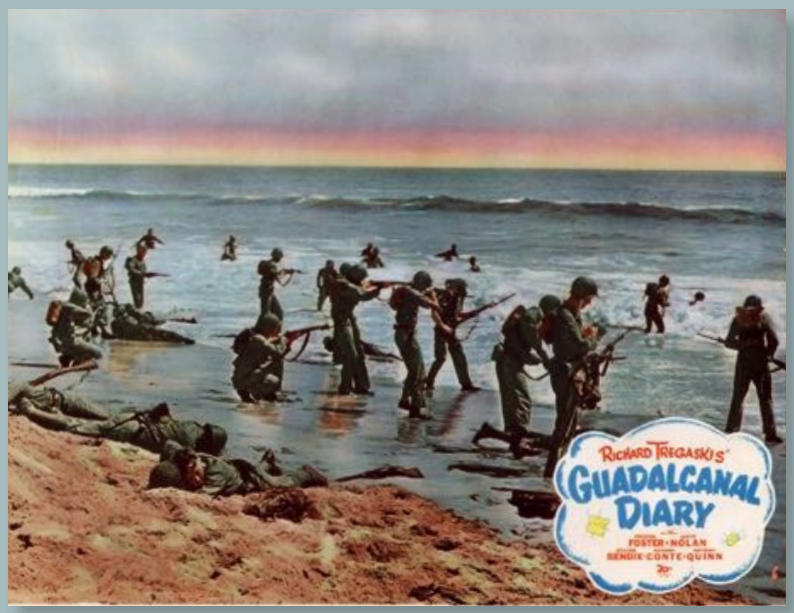
That there was a need to encourage more young American marines to the fight was underscored in the very month the movie came out.

Thousands of miles away from Main Street the marines had just endured a gruelling battle in very different terrain to the jungle.

Storming the atoll of Tarawa came at a high price, and eventually the shock of that would come home to many families at home.



Richard Tregaskis' book upon which the movie was based. Photo – thefirstedition.com



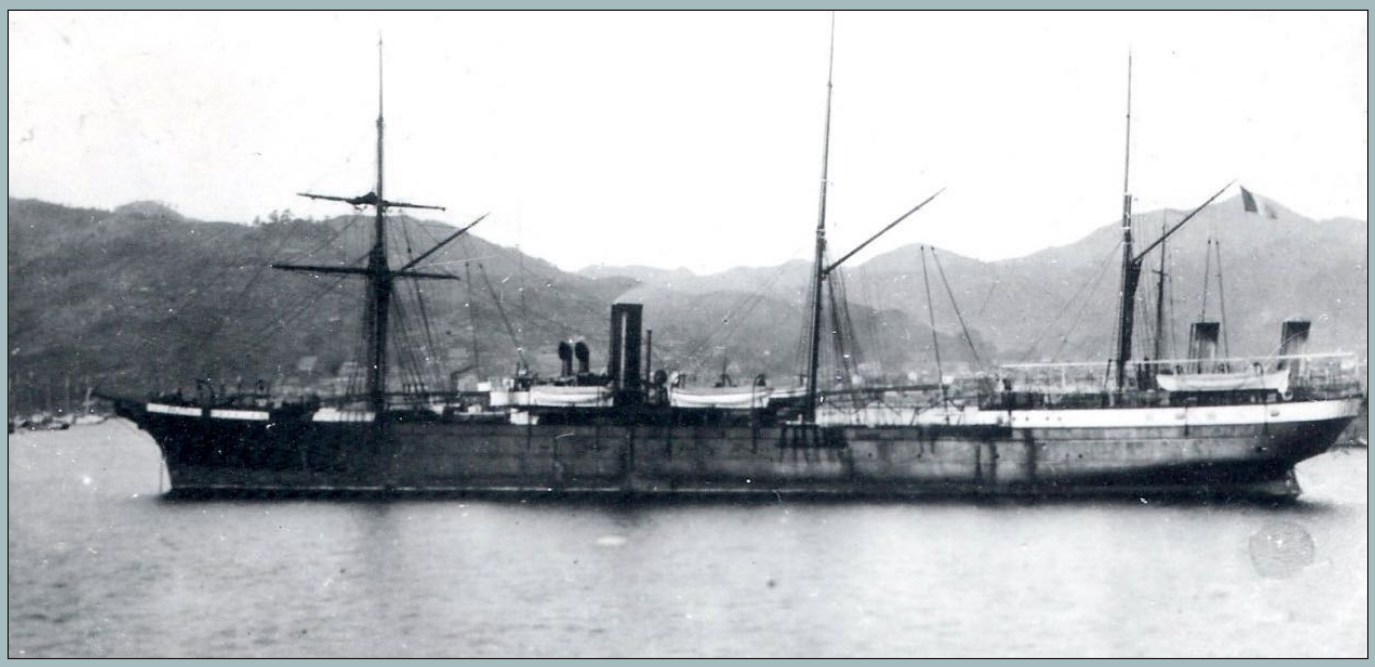
A 'lobby card' for the movie Guadalcanal Diary. Photo – IMDB.

Luganville's identity crisis

The story of Luganville's origins and its evolution over time is as fascinating as it is complex. What began as a small settlement with a distinct name has grown and transformed, often leading to confusion over its identity and literally its place in the history of Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu.

The area, largely uninhabited at the time, had only a coffee plantation operated by a courageous colonist, M. Bernier.

Despite the perceived hostility of the local native population, Bernier was determined to make his plantation a success.

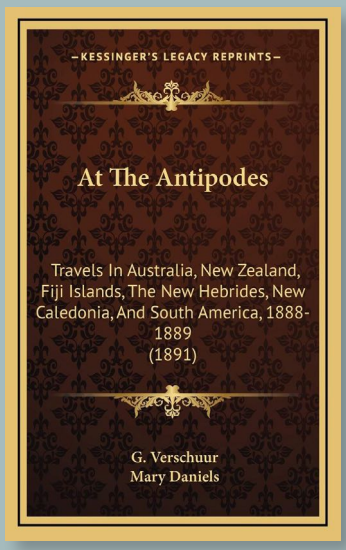


The Messageries Maritimes vessel Tanais captained by Armand Lugan – the man who Luganville was named after.

The Naming of Luganville

The name "Luganville" was first established in 1889, during a voyage of the Messageries Maritimes vessel Tanais. The ship's captain, Armand Lugan, was in the final year of his long career in the New Caledonian trade. To honour his service and character, influential passengers aboard the ship proposed naming the settlement, a nearby bay, and a river after him. Among the passengers was M. Cudenet, a Noumea-based lawyer, who led the effort to formalise the naming process.

The event is recorded by Gustave Verschuur in his book, *At The Antipodes.* Verschuur describes how the Tanais anchored in the 'Segond Canal', named years earlier after a French naval vessel under Admiral Petit-Thouars.



A reprint of Verschuur's book, At The Antipodes that details the origin of the name Luganville. Photo – Amazon.

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During a dinner aboard the Tanais, toasts were made, and M. Cudenet proposed the name Luganville. He solemnly declared:

"On May 14th, 1889, the undersigned passengers of the Messageries Maritimes Company's ship Tanais, anchored in Segond Canal, being desirous of giving to M. Armand Lugan, the captain of the Tanais, a proof of their profound esteem for his abilities and character, have decided that the name Lugan shall be given to the river flowing into the Segond Canal, and that the station founded by M. Bernier in the name of the Caledonian Company of the New Hebrides, near the mouth of the river, shall be called Luganville. The undersigned further request the Governor of New Caledonia and the Minister of Marine to cause these names to be inserted on the maps."

A Growing Settlement

Initially, Luganville served as the agency for the Compagnie Calédonienne des Nouvelles-Hébrides. Two rivers flanked the settlement as it developed: the Rene and Sarakata. Though these names persist today, the original Luganville Bay remains on charts. Nearby, the French Government Agency, a hospital, and a Roman Catholic Mission were also established.

A poster for Messageries Maritimes' ships.

The French Government, along with commercial entities like Burns Philp, consistently referred to the area as Luganville. However, during World War II, the arrival of American forces introduced an additional layer of complexity. They created a vast military base around the Segond Channel, with Luganville relegated to a small 'suburb' of what they called "Santos." The name "Santos," likely borrowed from similarly named places in Latin America, was unofficial and used primarily by the uninformed. Those in authority never formally adopted it, and it faded after the war.

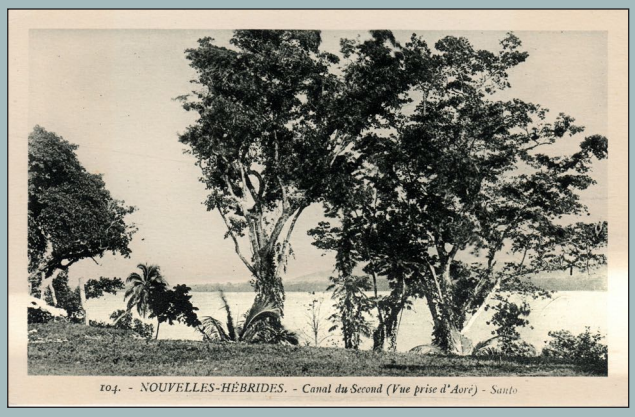
A montage of maps from World War II clearly shows Luganville (in a red square), down to the south west, just north of the Seaplane Base. This was the location of the original Luganville township. Map – Mike Lechwar.

Post-War Changes

Following World War II, the area where the vast majority of Quonset huts and storage areas were located, called Santo (today's Luganville) expanded significantly. While the original Luganville further west, continued to lose its identity. Santo township grew rapidly, particularly around the new wharf area. Government departments and main stores moved from the original Luganville sites to the wharf's vicinity. As a result, Luganville became an outer suburb, while the consolidated township took on the name Luganville at some point presumably in the late 1950s/1960s. Today, the name Santo is used to reflect the island's identity rather than the specific settlement.

The current location of Luganville soon after the war and prior to its rapid expansion.

From its origins as a small settlement named in honour of a French sea captain to its transformation into a vital World War II base and beyond, Luganville's story is one of evolution and adaptation. While the names have shifted over time — from Luganville to Santo and briefly "Santos"— the history of this area remains an integral chapter in Espiritu Santo's rich past.



A postcard of the Canal du Second around the time of the visit by the Tanais and Captain Lugan.

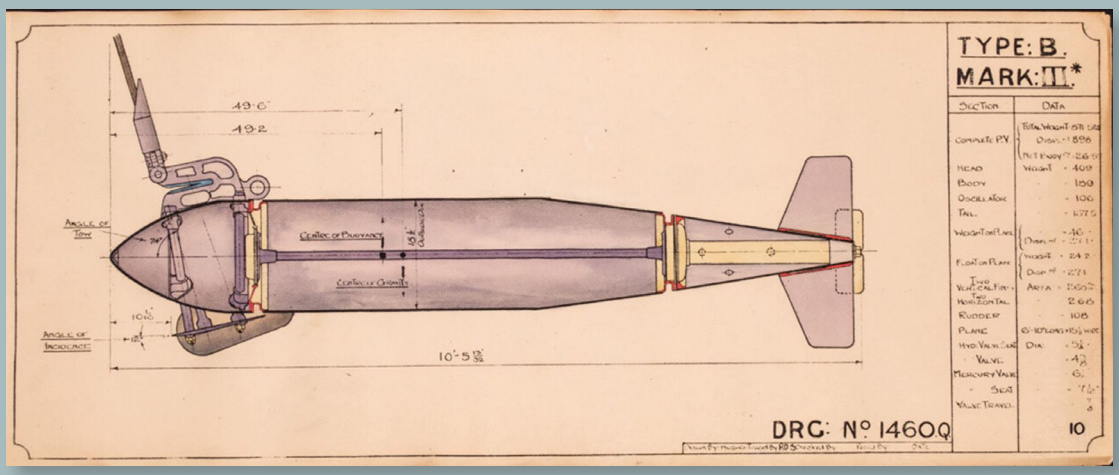
A fabulous aerial shot of Luganville in the 1950s.

Snipping the Sea Threat

During World War II, naval mines posed one of the most significant threats to Allied naval and merchant shipping. These hidden dangers, laid by Axis forces, could wreak havoc on unsuspecting vessels, sinking ships or severely damaging them with devastating efficiency. To combat this menace, the U.S. Navy turned to a remarkable tool of ingenuity and engineering: the paravane.

By the time World War II began, paravane technology had become a critical element of mine countermeasure strategies.

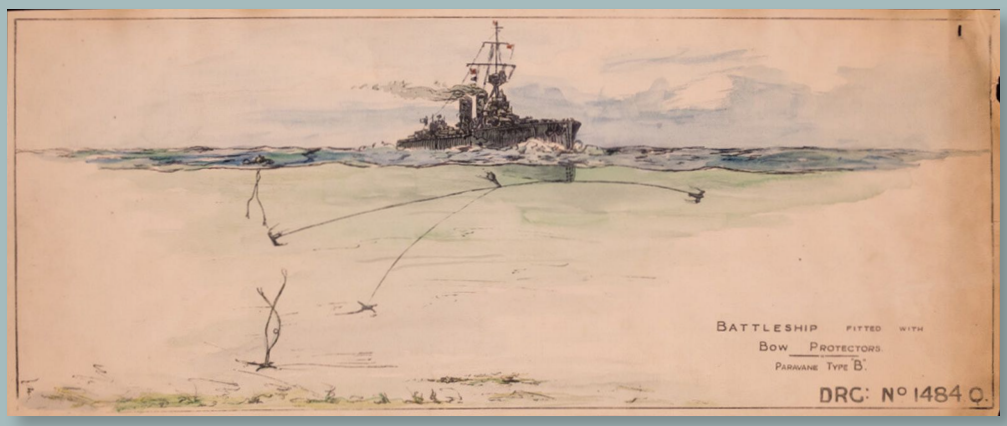
The device itself was relatively simple in design but highly effective. Shaped like a small torpedo, it was equipped with cutting mechanisms and stabilising fins that allowed it to glide underwater at a controlled depth. When deployed, the paravane would create a sweeping arc through the water, using its wire or chain attachments to snag and sever the mooring lines of mines.



Engineering plans for the Type B, Mark III paravane. Note the cable cutting blades shown in blue on the top of the mine sweeping device.

A paravane is a torpedo-shaped device towed alongside or behind a ship, designed primarily for cutting the mooring cables of underwater mines. Once a mine's cable was severed, the buoyant mine would float to the surface, where it could be safely destroyed by gunfire or other means. The development and deployment of paravanes represented a major leap in naval technology, ensuring that critical shipping lanes and harbours remained navigable during wartime.

During World War II, the U.S. Navy relied heavily on paravanes to protect ships traversing mine-laden waters. Battleships, cruisers, and even merchant ships in convoys were often equipped with these devices as a standard precaution. In the Pacific Theatre, where Japanese naval mines were a common hazard, paravanes were essential in ensuring safe passage for supply and combat vessels.



Battleship, with bow protectors: paravane type B. c1916 – Institution of Mechanical Engineers.

The concept of the paravane originated during World War I, credited to the Royal Navy in the United Kingdom. Recognising the effectiveness of this device, the US Navy quickly adopted and refined the technology, integrating it into their fleet operations.

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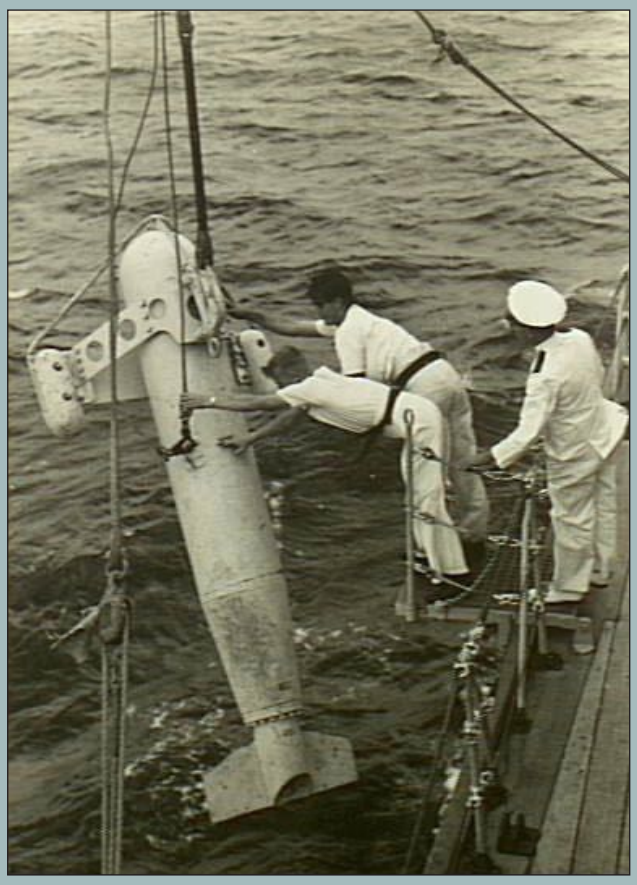
Paravanes were especially critical during amphibious assaults. Before landing troops on enemy-held shores, minesweepers equipped with paravanes would sweep the waters, clearing a path for troop transports and landing craft. This method was used extensively in key battles such as the invasions of Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.



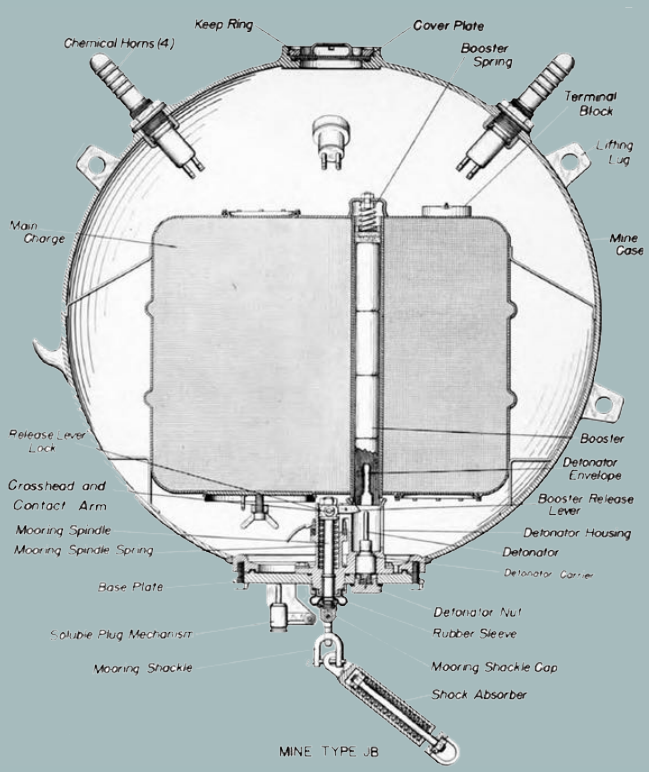
Royal Australian Navy ratings hauling a paravane aboard a minesweeper during training at sea. c January 1940. Photo – Australian War Memorial.

Additionally, paravanes played a vital role in the Atlantic Theatre. German U-boats frequently laid mines near Allied ports and shipping lanes to disrupt supply lines. The US Navy's use of paravanes helped neutralise these threats, allowing convoys to deliver troops, equipment, and supplies to Europe.

While paravanes were highly effective, they were not without limitations. They required precise deployment and were often less effective in deeper waters, where mines might be suspended below the reach of the cutting mechanism. Additionally, the process of towing paravanes could reduce a ship's speed and manoeuvrability, making it more vulnerable to other threats like submarines or aircraft.

Despite these challenges, the paravane proved to be an invaluable tool in mine countermeasures during World War II. Its effectiveness helped save countless lives and ensured the success of critical naval operations.

A paravane in its transport position, mounted to the superstructure of the USS Texas in San Jacinto State Park, near Houston Texas. Photo – Wikipedia.



A cross-section illustration of a Japanese Type JB sea mine of the type hunted by paravanes. Illustration – michaelhiske.de

Inspiring everyday heroes

Vanuatu was once on the frontlines of the largest war ever seen - but now the country once known as the New Hebrides is taking up a different global fight.

December sees the country take a climate change case to the International Court of Justice.

Vepaiamele - who will turn 16 while part of Vanuatu's delegation to The Hague - will be representing the voice of young people in the Pacific.

Vepaiamele, who is helping Vanuatu in its globally-significant court case. Photo – Save the Children.

It is a landmark case, beginning five years ago with a group of law students studying in Vanuatu discussing how they could help bring about climate action.

Now, for the first time, the 15 judges of the International Court of Justice have been requested to give an advisory opinion on the obligations of states in respect of climate change.

98 states and 12 international organisations are set to participate in the public hearings.

"I've experienced many cyclones," Vepaia told Radio New Zealand: "It can be kind-of terrifying."

She lists the challenges faced by her community: increasingly fierce cyclones, missed education, destroyed crops, food shortages, flooded gardens, damaged homes, widespread climate anxiety and fear.

Vepaia has been inspired by her mother – the first female Ni-Vanuatu judge – and her grandmother – a poet and gender equality advocate.

"As a young Ni-Vanuatu girl, I feel the effects of climate change every day of every year," she said.

"Every cyclone, our classrooms are destroyed, our homes are flattened to the ground, and hospitals and communication towers are ripped apart. And then there's also the mental health impacts, and we don't really talk about it that much, but it can really cause anxiety in children and young people."

At home, she is part of Save the Children's NextGen Youth Ambassador initiative - who have funded her trip to the Netherlands. She is also an advocate for women's rights and climate action in Vanuatu,

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

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