SOUTH PACIFIC WWII MUSEUM
VANUATU

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A remarkable tale of survival

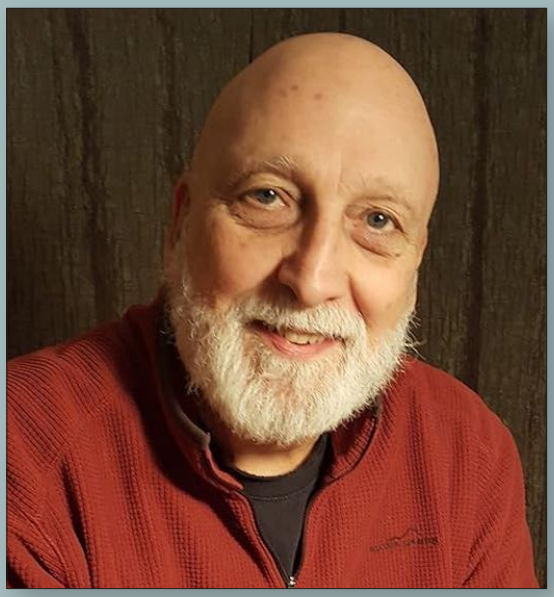
On September 5, 1943, a C-47 transport aircraft enroute from Guadalcanal to Bomber #2 Airfield crashed into Mt. Turi on Santo, not far from the museum. Of the five crew members on board, only one survived: 2nd Lieutenant Leonard G. Richardson, the navigator.

Despite suffering a broken hand, a severely fractured leg, extensive burns and a number of other injuries, Richardson miraculously endured 14 days in the jungle, dragging himself through the dense and extremely hilly terrain before being rescued by local villagers. (continued...)

The remains of the crashed C-47 as it is today lying in the jungle on Mt. Turi. Drone photo – Jimmy Carter.

His incredible story of survival has now been brought to life in a compelling new book by his son, Robert Richardson – a longtime friend and supporter of the museum.

Survival in the South Pacific not only recounts Leonard's harrowing experience but also offers a richly researched account of the South Pacific during World War II. The book explores the New Hebrides people, the establishment of Base Button on Santo, and Robert's own journey to retrace his father's footsteps back to the C-47 decades later.



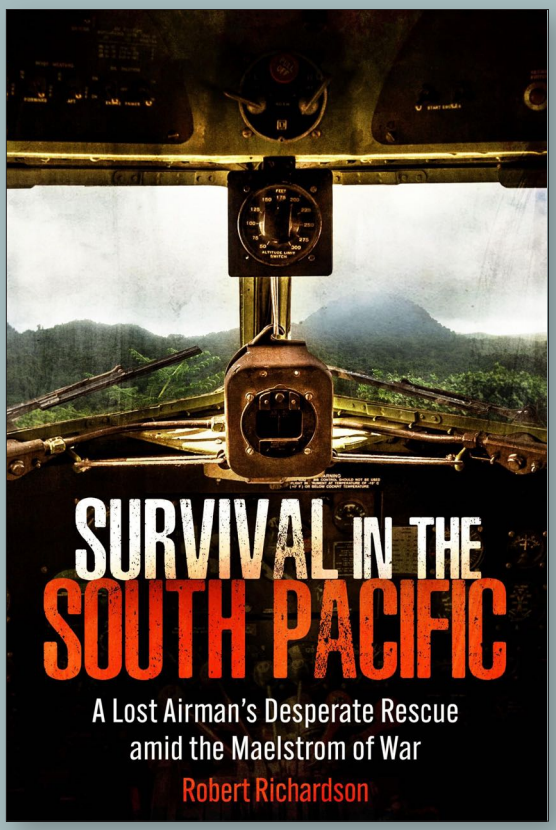
Author and friend of the museum, Robert Richardson.

Robert has generously donated copies of *Survival in the South Pacific* to the museum, with all proceeds going to support our work. The book is expected to be available in the museum around May, though we can't provide an exact date just yet—shipping to Santo is always an adventure in itself! We'll keep you posted.

Douglas Dick, who was instrumental in Robert locating the C-47 crash site, presents a copy of the book to Marina Moli at the museum.

If you can't wait, *Survival in the South Pacific* is available now on Amazon.

A heartfelt thank you to Robert Richardson for his generosity and for allowing us to share this remarkable local story with visitors to the South Pacific WWII Museum.



Robert's book *Survival in the South Pacific* is now available from Amazon.com.

Swire team drops anchor

Recently, the museum had a visit from Alex Pattison, Regional Manager - Pacific Islands and Tilly Morgan, Assistant Commercial Manager - Pacific Islands, at Swire Shipping.

Alex and Tilly arranged for the donation of a shipping container to the South Pacific WWII Museum in November 2023. That has been fitted out with shelving and is almost completely full of larger display items not requiring climate control.

The donated shipping container from Swire Shipping is delivered to the South Pacific WWII Museum in November 2023. Photo – Miranda Williamson.

Museum Chairman Bradley Wood shows Alex Pattison and Tilly Morgan around the South Pacific WWII Museum. Photo – Lemy Nacisse.

This was their first visit to the Museum and they were very impressed with the progress we'd made and how professional the museum was.

Thanks for dropping in guys. We hope Chairman Bradley Wood was a great tour guide!

Bradley Wood expalins to Alex the plans we have to build a shipping container onto the rear of our building. Photo – Lemy Nacisse.

SWIRE SHIPPING

The loss of ABSD-1 Section C

By guest contributor Andy Werback

The Bureau of Yards and Docks, a major command in the US Navy, initiated the Advanced Base Sectional Dock (ABSD) program in early 1942 following the attack on Pearl Harbour. This program aimed to provide floating dry docks to repair warships near the battle zones in the South Pacific.

USS Iowa drydocked in ABSD-2, December 1944. Photo – Andy Werback.

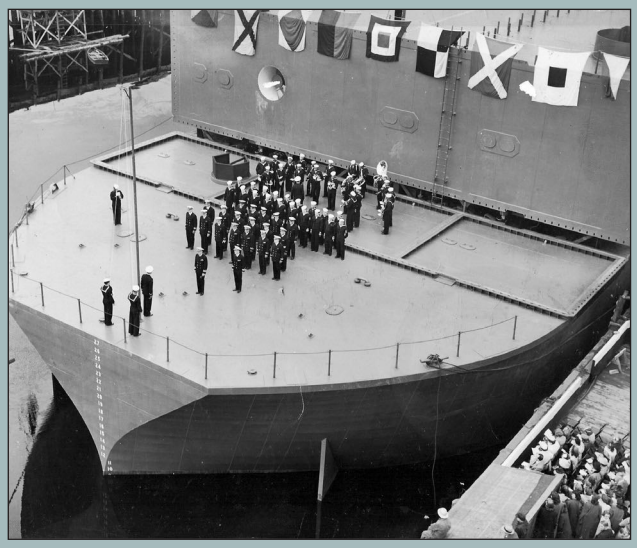
Seven large floating dry docks were constructed, the first three (ABSD-1 to ABSD-3) designed to lift Iowa-class battleships of up to 55,000 tons, while the other four had a different configuration suitable for cruisers and aircraft carriers. These were known as "ABBD" – Advanced Base Battleship Dock, and "ABCD" – Advanced Base Cruiser Dock. "ABSD" stands for "Advanced Base Sectional Dock".

A US Navy floating dry dock section – turned on its side – makes its way through the Panama Canal's Culebra Cut, 18 July 1945. Photo – National WWII Museum.

These massive structures ranged from 825 to 927 feet in length and 256 feet in width. Built in sections, each dock could be transported through the Panama Canal.

The ABBD docks were comprised of 10 pontoon sections, while the ABCD docks had seven, totaling 58 sections constructed by six different shipyards.

Efforts to develop and deploy these docks were immense. Sites for shipyards were selected, and workers



One of the enormous pontoons being commissioned, 10 May 1943 at Everett Shipbuilding Co., Everett, WA. Photo – US Archives.

were trained under the Bureau of Yards and Docks, with additional crew training conducted at Paradise Cove, Tiburon, CA. The docks coincided with the arrival of new naval warships, including Iowa-class battleships and Essex-class aircraft carriers.

Deployment of ABSD-1 to Espiritu Santo

By late 1943, the sections of ABSD-1 had been completed and were transported to Aessi Island in Pallikulo Bay, just off the east coast of Espiritu Santo. The convoy departed San Francisco on August 28 and arrived on September 24, averaging a speed of 6.84 knots.

(continued...)

The assembly of the dock began soon after arrival.

Each section consisted of a pontoon with two large wing walls. These wing walls were transported lying flat on the pontoon deck to reduce wind resistance. Once on site, the walls were raised using large jacks and a 15-ton electric whirly crane. Sections were joined by aligning pairs of gudgeons and pintles (pins and sockets), then welded together. The process of assembling the sections took over a month.

An aerial photograph of two of the pontoons in Pallikuo Bay being assembled. One wing wall has already been raised while a second is slowly being tilted into position. Photo – US Archives.

Edited early deck logs from October 1943 document the progress of the assembly:

2 Oct: Sections A, C, D, E, F, H, J, and I arrive at Pallikulo.
8 Oct: Wing wall raising began on Section A.
14 Oct Start jacking after wing wall, Section A.
15 Oct: Forward wing wall on Section B raised.
17 Oct Completed laying transverse anchor A-2.
18 Oct Completed raising forward wing wall Section B.
19 Oct Completed laying transverse anchor A-1.
20 Oct Anchoring, unloading cargo, moving Sections to permanent anchorage.
21 Oct Anchoring, moving Section B from alongside Section C (crane) to alongside Section A.
22 Oct Jacking aft wing wall Section F; move Section I alongside Section C.
23 Oct Start operations for securing Sections A and B together.
24 Oct Start raising aft wing wall Section F.
26 Oct Complete more anchors, unloading cargo.
30 Oct Complete securing Sections A & B; Complete submergence test Section A and B.
31 Oct Shift Section D to port side of Section B for purpose of placing gantry crane on Sections A and B.

The 2 November accident

On November 2, 1943, a major accident occurred when Section C of ABSD-1 flooded and sank, taking with it one officer and 12 enlisted men. The cause remains unclear, but documents suggest a compartment flooded, leading to a loss of buoyancy.

Wing walls are complete and in position on this pair of pontoons making up 20 percent of ABSD-1 in Pallikulo Bay. Photo – US Archives.

A decommissioning report from November 1956 confirms:

"On November 2, one of the compartments of Section C was flooded and the pontoon section sank with one officer and 12 enlisted men trapped inside."

The loss of Section C, which carried a gantry crane, required a replacement. A substitute section was sent from ABSD-2 in San Francisco, arriving in February 1944, allowing ABSD-1 to be completed.

Possible causes of the sinking

ABSD researcher Andrzej Demus and National Archives records confirm that ABSD-2 later donated a section to ABSD-1, while ABSD-3 provided a section to ABSD-2.

The cause of the sinking is uncertain. The pontoon sections, when empty, were highly buoyant,

(continued...)

floating with 22 feet above water and only six feet submerged. However, they were also top-heavy, especially with wing walls raised 55 feet above deck.

The November 2 deck log provides few details, but key factors suggest:

- Structural stability: If ballast tanks flooded unexpectedly, the pontoon could have tipped.
- Open hatches: If hatches were left open, flooding could have rapidly spread.
- Electrical or mechanical failure: A malfunction in the ballast control system may have caused unintended flooding.

The only significant mention in records is that Chief Machinist Carl N. Sears attempted to prevent the flooding by sealing ventilation ducts with wooden plugs. He lost his life in the process and was posthumously awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal.

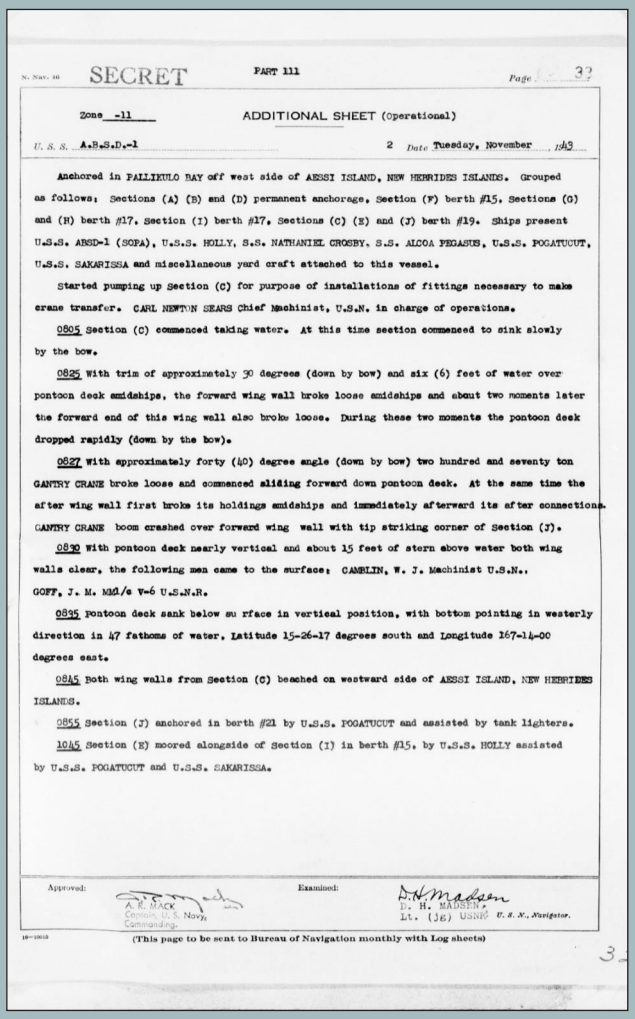
The aftermath

The exact details of the sinking remain unknown, but the event led to an official Board of Investigation. Some elements of the wing walls were salvaged, and work continued using Section D's crane to complete assembly. Admiral William Halsey, Commander of the Pacific Fleet, visited the site on November 16, 1943.

Chief Machinist Carl N. Sears' commendation was published in the Bureau of Naval Personnel Information Bulletin No. 331 (October 1944). It reads:

"The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Navy and Marine Corps Medal (Posthumously) to Chief Machinist Carl Newton Sears (NSN: 310116), United States Navy, for heroic conduct during the sinking of one of the pontoons of a floating dry dock at an advanced naval base in the South Pacific Area on 2 November 1943. Chief Machinist Sears procured wooden plugs after all men had been ordered from the engine and pump rooms and returned to the living compartments in an attempt to seal the leaks in the ventilating system. Determined to check the flooding, he persisted in his hazardous task, sacrificing his life in his efforts to prevent the vessel from sinking."

Whether the navy sent divers to investigate the sunken section remains unclear. Given its location between Aessi Island and Espiritu Santo, recovery would have been extremely difficult.



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Zone -11 ADDITIONAL SHEET (Operational)

U. S. S. A.B.S.D.-1 2 Date Tuesday, November 1943

Anchored in PALLIKULO BAY off west side of AESSI ISLAND, NEW HEBRIDES ISLANDS. Grouped as follows: Sections (A) (B) and (D) permanent anchorage. Section (F) berth #15. Sections (G) and (H) berth #17. Section (I) berth #17. Sections (C) (E) and (J) berth #19. Ships present U.S.S. ABSD-1 (SOPA), U.S.S. HOLLY, S.S. NATHANIEL CROSBY, S.S. ALCOA PEGASUS, U.S.S. POGATUCUT, U.S.S. SAKARISSA and miscellaneous yard craft attached to this vessel.

Started pumping up Section (C) for purpose of installations of fittings necessary to make crane transfer. CARL NEWTON SEARS Chief Machinist, U.S.N. in charge of operations.

0805 Section (C) commenced taking water. At this time section commenced to sink slowly by the bow.

0825 With trim of approximately 30 degrees (down by bow) and six (6) feet of water over pontoon deck amidships, the forward wing wall broke loose amidships and about two moments later the forward end of this wing wall also broke loose. During these two moments the pontoon deck dropped rapidly (down by the bow).

0827 With approximately forty (40) degree angle (down by bow) two hundred and seventy ton GANTRY CRANE broke loose and commenced sliding forward down pontoon deck. At the same time the after wing wall first broke its holdings amidships and immediately afterward its after connections. GANTRY CRANE boom crashed over forward wing wall with tip striking corner of Section (J).

0830 With pontoon deck nearly vertical and about 15 feet of stern above water both wing walls clear, the following men came to the surface: CAMBLIN, W. J. Machinist U.S.N.. GOFF, J. M. MM1/c V-6 U.S.N.R.

0835 pontoon deck sank below su rface in vertical position, with bottom pointing in westerly direction in 47 fathoms of water, Latitude 15-26-17 degrees south and Longitude 167-14-00 degrees east.

0845 Both wing walls from Section (C) beached on westward side of AESSI ISLAND, NEW HEBRIDES ISLANDS.

0855 Section (J) anchored in berth #21 by U.S.S. POGATUCUT and assisted by tank lighters.

1045 Section (E) moored alongside of Section (I) in berth #15, by U.S.S. HOLLY assisted by U.S.S. POGATUCUT and U.S.S. SAKARISSA.

Approved: A. R. MACK Commdr., U.S. Navy Commanding.

Examined: D. H. MADSEN Lt. (jg) USNR U. S. N., Navigator.

(This page to be sent to Bureau of Navigation monthly with Log sheets)

A page from the investigation report detailing the moments leading up to the sinking of Section C in Pallikulo Bay, just off Aessi Island. Photo – Andy Werback.

Conclusion

The loss of Section C on November 2, 1943, was the only major accident resulting in fatalities among the 58 sections of floating dry docks built. Despite this tragedy, the ABSD-1 was successfully completed, providing crucial ship repair capabilities in the South Pacific during World War II.

THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

A Curtin call for Australia

Barbed wire emplacements on Manly Beach, Sydney, 1942 – Photo Australian War Memorial.

In February 1942, what modern day Australians might colloquially know as the Great Southern Land, was the only real southern land left – before the South Pole.

It was to say the least a rude shock - a year earlier, the pick of Australia's fighting men were fighting in the deserts of North Africa against Nazism

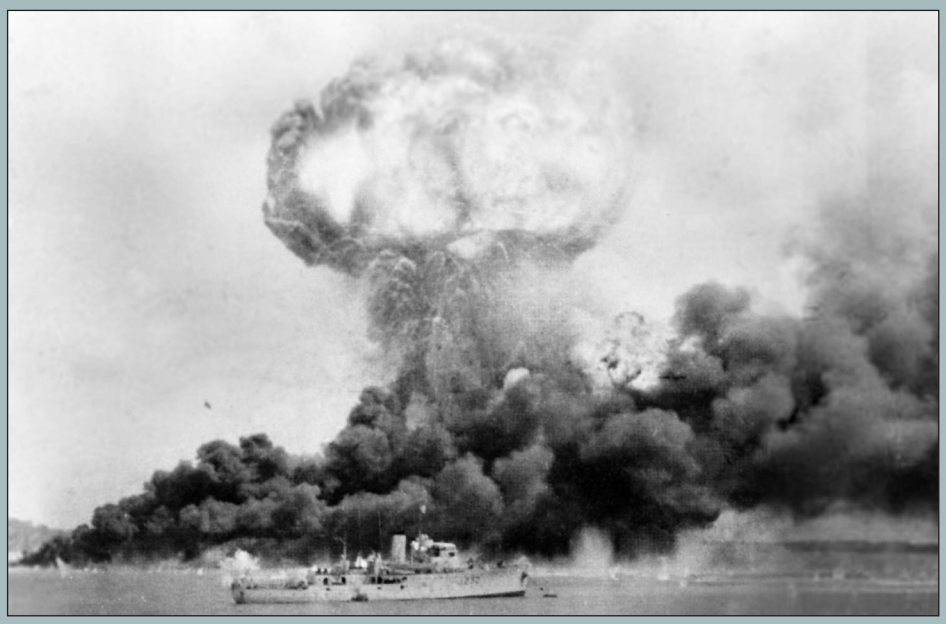
But with a deteriorating international situation in the Pacific, Australia did what it could to bolster the British Empire's front lines, anchored on the reputedly invincible naval base in Singapore. Australian soldiers thus were in Malaya when Japan launched its war on December 7th, 1941.

Illusions about the considerable land and sea barrier of the Philippines, Malaya, Borneo, and the Dutch East Indies (modern Indonesia) as a shield for Australia were soon cruelly smashed. With the US fleet reeling after Pearl Harbour, and Singapore taken in an audacious blitzkrieg on foot, by early 1942 Australia found itself the next logical target.

However, with few planes, ships or experienced soldiers left, and other Allied forces similarly stretched, a Japanese invasion would be an existential threat.

So, in February of the new, deeply foreboding year, when US president Franklin Roosevelt declared that Australia would be the main American base in the south-west Pacific, it was making a virtue out of necessity.

The only other candidate, New Zealand, was equally stretched, but also far further away. It could be an invaluable part of the hard-stretched chain, but somehow, Australia must stem the tide. The war came swiftly to the doorstep – 19 days into February, Darwin in the Northern Territory



The explosion of the MV Neptuna and clouds of smoke from oil storage tanks, hit during the first Japanese air raid on Australia's mainland, at Darwin on February 19, 1942. Photo – RAN Historical Collection.

(continued...)

suffered a punishing air attack, and Japanese forces a month earlier had captured New Ireland, as a stepping stone to Papua New Guinea's Port Moresby, and beyond.

Australian Prime Minister John Curtin welcomes General Douglas MacArthur, on his arrival to Australia at Mascot Aerodrome, 7 June 1943. Photo – Australian War Memorial.

Australia's prime minister John Curtin would declare, Churchill like, that the Battle of Australia had begun. President Roosevelt had meanwhile ordered his top general, Douglas MacArthur, to leave the doomed defence of the Philippines and travel in secret by submarine to take command of US forces in Australia.

There was precious few of those. And the supply lines to send what reinforcements existed were untested and largely unprotected. The massive base that would be built in New Hebrides (Vanuatu) and other bases were at that stage inconceivable.

The Allies were not to know that the Japanese army had, wisely, decided that an actual occupation of Australia – with its vast space, and just a few major cities – was not feasible.

But it could be cut off. The race to turn Australia into the bulwark, and then the springboard, had begun in earnest.

General Douglas MacArthur's wartime office at the MacArthur Museum in Brisbane. The South Pacific WWII Museum visited this fascinating museum in January. Photo – Bradley Wood.

A Planter's Island Story

By guest contributor Dennis Strand

Following our story in the October 2024 newsletter about local Malo landholder Matthew Wells and his role in the establishment of Base Button, we were contacted by Dennis Strand.

After reading the article, Dennis reached out to share that his grandmother, Catherine (Kate) Wells, was Matthew's elder sister. Kate took on the responsibility of raising Matthew after their mother died of typhoid in Sydney in 1886. At the time, she was just 15, while Matthew was only two years old.

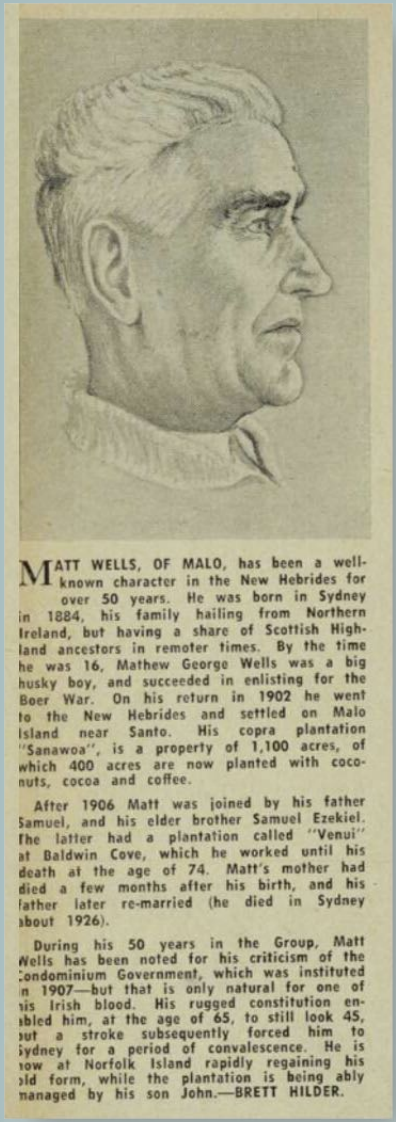
Dennis has spent time exploring his family history, a journey he describes as one that "has led me down many wonderful paths." He shared new information about the Wells family's time in the New Hebrides, and we thought it would be an interesting follow-up.

The New Hebrides and the Wells Family

The Wells family had a strong connection to the island of Malo in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu). From the early 1900s to the 1950s, various members of the family—including Samuel Wells and his children Samuel, Daniel, Matthew, and Rebecca—lived and worked there as planters. They managed plantations producing copra (dried coconut meat), coffee, and cocoa for export to Australian and international markets.

How and why they first came to the New Hebrides remains unclear, as their prior work history does not suggest experience as planters. However, according to a newspaper article by Brett Hilder—a ship captain for the Burns Philp Company and an accomplished artist—Matthew arrived in the islands in 1902 after serving in the Boer War in South Africa.

According to the MyHeritage website, Matthew married a local woman, May Marie Tarusa, with whom he had two sons, Tommy Tarusa Wells and John William Wells. The same records also list Jane Hooker as a partner, with whom he had a son named George Hooker.



MATT WELLS, OF MALO, has been a well-known character in the New Hebrides for over 50 years. He was born in Sydney in 1884, his family hailing from Northern Ireland, but having a share of Scottish Highland ancestors in remoter times. By the time he was 16, Mathew George Wells was a big husky boy, and succeeded in enlisting for the Boer War. On his return in 1902 he went to the New Hebrides and settled on Malo Island near Santo. His copra plantation "Sanawoa", is a property of 1,100 acres, of which 400 acres are now planted with coconuts, cocoa and coffee.

After 1906 Matt was joined by his father Samuel, and his elder brother Samuel Ezekiel. The latter had a plantation called "Venui" at Baldwin Cove, which he worked until his death at the age of 74. Matt's mother had died a few months after his birth, and his father later re-married (he died in Sydney about 1926).

During his 50 years in the Group, Matt Wells has been noted for his criticism of the Condominium Government, which was instituted in 1907—but that is only natural for one of his Irish blood. His rugged constitution enabled him, at the age of 65, to still look 45, but a stroke subsequently forced him to Sydney for a period of convalescence. He is now at Norfolk Island rapidly regaining his old form, while the plantation is being ably managed by his son John.—BRETT HILDER.

Pacific Islands Monthly : Vol. XXVII, No. 6, 1957.

Dennis shared a personal family memory:

"My mum knew him well. He was hospitalised in Sydney for extended periods in the 1950s, and she used to visit him. She always said what a refined gentleman he was and how much he disliked Sydney and city life, where 'the only thing that mattered was money.'"

Matthew later passed away on Norfolk Island, where he is buried. It is likely that he still has descendants living on Malo today.

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Brett Hilder wrote in 1957:
"On his return in 1902, Matt went to the New Hebrides and settled on Malo Island near Santo. His copra plantation, 'Sanawoa,' was a property of 1,100 acres, of which 400 acres were planted with coconuts, cocoa, and coffee. After 1906, Matt was joined by his father, Samuel, and his elder brother, Samuel Ezekiel. The latter had a plantation called 'Venui' at Baldwin Cove, which he worked until his death at the age of 74."

In addition to copra planting, Matthew was also a businessman who opened a trade store. Historical records suggest that independent traders and planters played a crucial role in the expansion of indigenous copra production. These stores provided local communities with imported goods such as food, alcohol, tobacco, and tools in exchange for copra.

Elderly residents recall that two trade stores operated on Malo: one at Asawan, south of the mission at Avunatari, run by an Englishman known only as "Steven," and the other at Biau plantation on the northwest coast, owned by Matthew Wells.

Matthew's headstone at Norfolk Island Cemetery.
Photo – Dennis Strand.

Samuel Wells

Samuel Ezekiel Wells (1869–1944) was another key figure in the family's history. Records show he married Elizabeth Randall in 1892 at Junee, and they had a son, Matthew Ezekiel, the same year. However, electoral rolls and enlistment documents suggest Samuel and Elizabeth did not live together.

Around 1906, both Samuel senior and Samuel junior joined Matthew on Malo Island. Later, Samuel junior established his own plantation, Venui, on the south coast of Espiritu Santo, where he remained until 1934.

That year, he gave up his property and returned to Australia. A newspaper article, "Copra Grower's Plight in New Hebrides," details his departure.

Copra Growers' Plight In New Hebrides.

AUSTRALIANS SUFFER.

SYDNEY, Monday.—"If Great Britain or Australia will do nothing for their planters in the New Hebrides, this group of islands may as well be handed over to the French," said Mr. Graham Kerr, director of a British-owned plantation, at Santo, who arrived in Sydney in the Morinda. "The present situation is impossible so far as British interests are concerned," he said. "Markets are closed to them. British products, principally copra, are hit by a crippling duty if shipped to France, and if they are shipped to Australia, the highest rate of duty is imposed, notwithstanding that the principal wants of New Hebrides are obtained from or through Australia.

"It is said that the largest British company operating in the New Hebrides has found it necessary to form a French company to take over its trading operations.

"Others will have to follow suit unless something is done to protect British interests. Australia could help matters by allowing British products from the New Hebrides to enter Australia on the same footing as products of other countries coming under the terms of the Ottawa Agreement. French products go into France duty free and are further assisted by high bounties to counteract the present low prices."

Messrs. Robert Watson and S. Wells, two Australian planters, have given up their plantations because of the unfavorable position of British-produced copra. Their return in the Morinda leaves only two Australian planters remaining at Santo, where there were originally 21.

"Although we are Australians on plantation land owned by the Australian Government, we have been treated as foreigners," they said.

[The New Hebrides is administered jointly by British and French High Commissioners.]

Advocate (Burnie, Tas. : 1890 - 1954), Tuesday 25 September 1934, page 1. Article – Dennis Strand.

Although he may have retained a financial interest in the plantation, electoral records from the 1930s list him as a retired gentleman living in Sydney's western suburbs, described as a "planter" or a man of "independent means." By 1935, he was living in Naremburn on Sydney's north shore, where he was recorded as a "produce merchant," possibly acting as an agent for imported copra.

Samuel senior, the father of Matthew Wells, spent about ten years on Malo with his sons before returning to Sydney, where he passed away in 1915.

Another branch of the Wells family also had a tragic connection to the New Hebrides. In 1918, Ezekiel Wells (Samuel senior's brother)

(continued...)

and his son William travelled to the region, though it is unclear whether it was a business trip or a visit. Tragically, on January 12th, their boat was caught in a tropical cyclone near Sanma, and both men were lost at sea. Ezekiel was 78 years old, and William was 49.

Samuel Wells. Photo – Dennis Strand.

Beccie Wells

A fourth member of the Wells family, Rebecca Ann (Beccie), also lived in the New Hebrides. Before moving there, she worked as a nurse at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney. She later married Scottish-born planter David Reid Barclay (b. 1872), and they had two children: John Reid Barclay, born on Malo in 1913, and Helen, born in Blayney in 1917.

Little is known about their time in the islands, but by the late 1920s, David was applying for oyster leases on the central coast of New South Wales. By 1930, the couple had relocated to Gosford and later settled in Brisbane, where they lived for the rest of their lives. David passed away in 1959 at the age of 87, and Beccie followed in 1964, aged 86.

Daniel Wells

The fifth Wells family member to spend time in the New Hebrides was Daniel. He initially trained as an electrician before enlisting in the 5th Battalion of the Australian Commonwealth Horse (New South Wales) in 1902. The battalion set sail for the Boer War in May of that year but arrived too late to see active service.

Matthew had already left a few months earlier with the 1st Battalion, which participated in the final months of the war.

Daniel later enlisted in the Australian Army again in May 1915 and was deployed to Turkey with the 13th Battalion, 6th Reinforcement. He landed at Gallipoli on August 2nd, 1915. Just five days later, he was killed in the fierce battle for Lone Pine.

Trooper Daniel Wells, Durban, South Africa, 1902. Photo – Dennis Strand.

A continuing legacy

Matthew Wells likely has many descendants still living in Santo today. According to *MyHeritage*, his son Tommy Tarusa Wells (1910–2006) may have had as many as ten children.

Interestingly, there is still a property named Venui at Baldwin Cove on Espiritu Santo, not far from Malo. Perhaps one day, some of the Wells descendants will visit it again—it even appears today as Venui Plantation Oceanfront Villa on Airbnb!

We would like to thank Dennis Strand for reaching out and sharing his family's history with us.

If you have any further information about the Wells family, please contact Dennis at:
dvstrandxx@outlook.com

Blazing trails, holding ground

By guest contributor Robert Richardson

Espiritu Santo was crucial to the success of the Guadalcanal Campaign, all the while being itself vulnerable to Japanese attack. The Army had previously sent a garrison force to Santo, but the troops assigned were aboard the USS President Coolidge when it struck defensive mines and sank in the eastern approach to the Segond Channel in late October 1942 - an event described in the October 2021 issue of the South Pacific WWII Museum Newsletter.

The SS Presidemt Coolidge sinking off the coast of Espiritu Santo. Photo – US Archives.

But with Guadalcanal in Allied hands by February 1943, the IV Island Command implemented a Joint Army-Navy plan for the defence of Espiritu Santo. The Army was charged with the defense of Naval installations, anchorages, airfields and logistical installations, and with executing land patrols to identify likely enemy landing beaches and trails leading to the base. New Army units committed to the garrison force included the 129th Combat Team, the 54th Coast Artillery Battalion, and the 812th Coast Artillery Battery.

The 129th Combat Team arrived at the Segond Channel on March 11, 1943 with two battalions of Infantry and a Field Artillery battalion and arrayed itself in an arc from the Sarakata River to the Fighter Field at Turtle Bay. And it immediately began establishing both a Main Line of Defence (MLD) and an Outpost Line of Resistance (OPLR).

An effective OPLR required that observation posts and fields of fire for heavy machine guns and mortars be established for the entire line. At the time there were no roads in the island's mountainous and densely forested hinterlands, and no detailed maps existed.

The jungles of Espiritu Santo are dense, often mountainous and almost impenetrable in many places. Photo – Don Garber.

Establishing the OLR would require a boots-on-the ground assessment by the infantry and combat engineering forces on the island.

In early June a patrol was assembled from the Army's Combat Engineers, from IV Island Command, from the Navy, and from the Intelligence Section (S2) of the 129th Infantry. Also assigned were seven enlisted men from the 129th, a French guide, and 22 native carriers.

The 129th was well-prepared for the jungle traverse that lay ahead. Prior to its arrival at Santo, the 129th had served in the garrison force for Viti Levu, the main island of the Fiji group, and had undergone extensive night maneuvers in preparation for the combat that was to come for them later.

On the morning of June 3rd,the patrol jumped off from the 129th's command post near the Segond Channel shore and moved northwesterly toward the Renee River. Passing through the village of Laboue, the patrol

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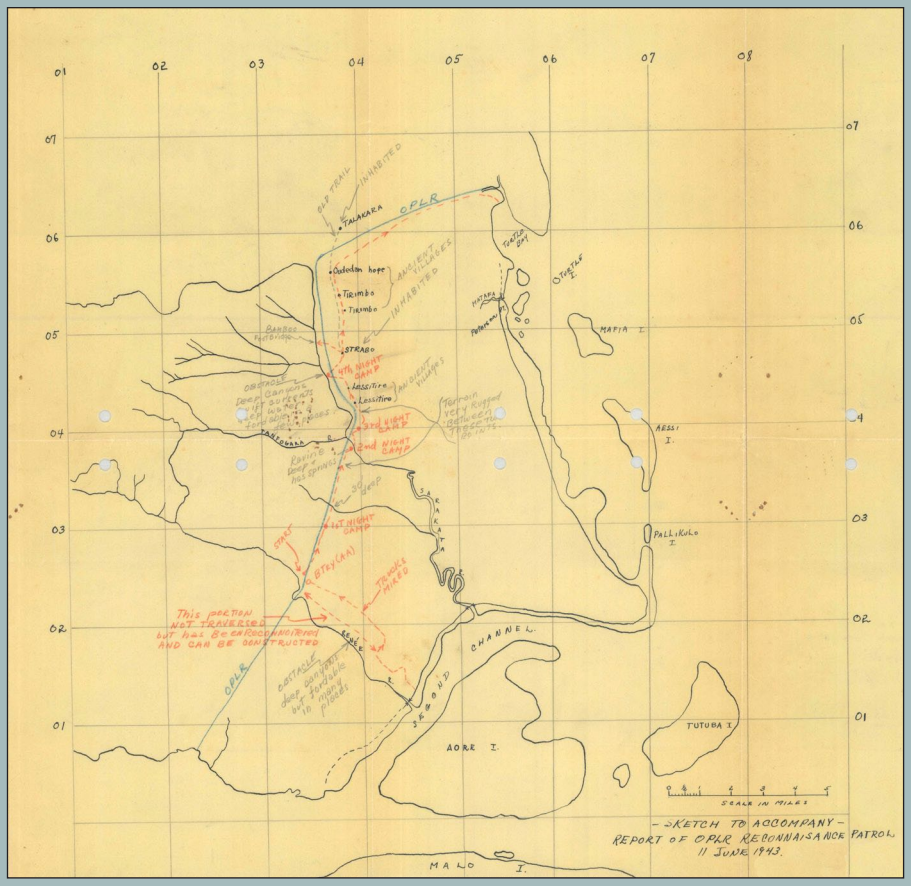


A sketch taken from 'Report of OPLR Recce Patrol June 3 - 7, 1943'. Quite a journey through very thick jungle. Map – Robert Richardson.

turned northward into a region of dense underbrush and jungle growth – Santo's famous "dak bush" (dark bush). For the next 5 days the patrol would see the sun for just three hours.

A lead cutter hacked a rough path just wide enough for one individual to pass. Five other cutters followed, widening the trail to about three feet. An axe detail blazed trees and cut heavy growth, and further to the rear a draftsman paced distances, checked directions and plotted the OPLR.

The patrol stalled when the native cutters refused to cut the woody vines that hung down, snake-like, from the jungle canopy, believing that doing so would disturb the spirits of the jungle and cause them to be bitten by a poisonous snake. But after a patrol member made the first cut with no ill-effects the native cutters quickly and efficiently set about cutting.

The indigenes worked hard. When not swinging machetes they carried the patrol's equipment, personal baggage, rations and water. The patrol commander reported: "Natives are strong but lack stamina. They would put on a real performance of work in the forenoon, but my mid afternoon was all in. I think they were a bit apprehensive about our purpose in cutting through unknown territory. Every evening, they prayed or sang hymns."

On this first day, the patrol reached the halfway point roughly between the Renee and Sarakata Rivers – a very respectable two miles of rough trekking from its starting point.

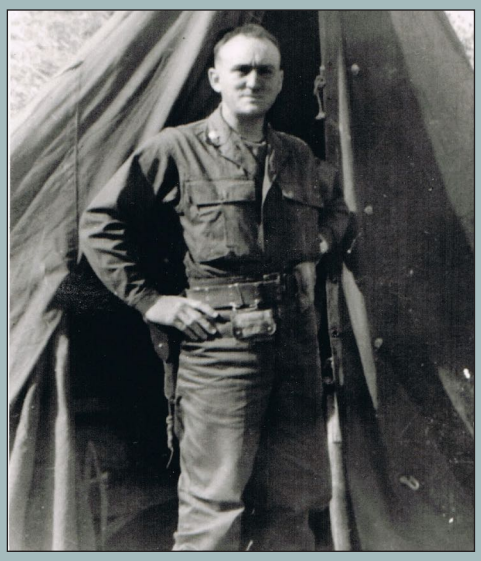
On day two, the patrol continued toward the Sarakata and began to encounter rougher terrain – deep gullies, streams, nearly impenetrable stands of bamboo.

It's dense, it's damp and incredibly humid. The Santo jungle as seen when Museum staff and members treked in to find a crashed Corsair aircraft. Photo – Karl von Moller.

(continued...)

By late afternoon the terrain steepened, and the bush grew denser. At dusk the patrol made camp along the Sarakata, just below its confluence with the Tanfogara River, having traversed about 2.5 miles since morning.

The senior intelligence officer on the patrol, Regimental S-2 Capt. Maurice Naudts reported that "Following the frequent rain squalls the soil on Santo soon became a sea of gooey, stinking, slimy mud.



Maurice Naudts in February 1951. Photo – Robert Richardson.

Every evening, no matter how exhausted the patrol was, it was a nightly ritual to treat blisters, cuts, bruises and insect bites. If we were near a stream, we stripped down and had a cool bath and were diligent in taking our daily dose of Atabrine. The men slept on a pile of leafy jungle growth, taking turns keeping watch and maintaining a smoky fire to ward off insects."

On day three the patrol crossed the Sarakata, climbed the steep, heavily wooded east bank, followed a knife ridge that paralleled the river, and sent scouting teams to the north and south.

Finally turning eastward, the patrol called it a day after having covered just 800 yards since morning. "This was the roughest piece of ground covered so far. Not only rugged but covered with a mass of entangled thick branches from the ground to the treetops. It was necessary to tunnel through this mess almost every foot of the way". But the patrol learned that the steep ridges would make excellent observation posts to the west, south and north – an important element in the OPLR.

On day four the patrol continued northward, roughly paralleling the Sarakata. Encountering ancient but now abandoned villages, traversing a number of deep ravines, and struggling through dense bush, the patrol still managed to cover 3 miles, making camp just south of the village of Strabo.

Continuing northward on day five, the jungle began to thin, and before noon the patrol reached a well-defined cross trail leading to Strabo. After a rest stop, the patrol continued along a clear trail through the ancient but uninhabited villages of Tirimbo and Oudedan Hope toward the village of Talakara. Later in the day the patrol followed yet another trail heading eastward that brought them to the head of Turtle Bay at nightfall. Over five days, the patrol covered a tough 18 miles.

It reported that the route could be bulldozed into a master trail in a week or so and could be negotiated with no great difficulty by a comparatively large patrol with baggage and provisions. In dry weather, it could be traversed by jeep.

Within a few days the patrol's results were transferred to a terrain map, creating a proper Outpost Line of Resistance complete with observation posts and defensive positions along the high ground to the east of the Renee and Sarakata Rivers.

A rare colour photo of Base Button's PT Boat base at the mouth of the Sarakata River in the left of frame. The huge Segond Channel anchoarge is filled with ships of all types and sizes. Photo – US Archives.

The 129th began jungle training exercises and required all troops to traverse the OPLR and practice establishing defensive positions in order to halt any Japanese attempts to attack the island's airfields or naval installations.

Inspiring everyday heroes

They may not always be the most popular people in sports – but without the referees there wouldn't be any game to watch.

Flying his flag for Vanuatu – referee Jeremy Garae. Photo – Vanuatu Daily Post.

Just ask Jeremy Garae – who wants to see more Vanuatu referees on the local and eventually international scene.

He is the only FIFA badged assistant referee from Vanuatu and will be helping officiate a World Cup qualifier match between Fiji and New Zealand in Wellington, New Zealand, on March the 21st. The 36-year-old described his selection as a historic moment.

He told the Vanuatu Daily Post newspaper that he was proud to be representing Vanuatu on such a grand stage.

Football's growing in popularity in New Zealand and potentially 30-thousand people will turn out for the match under lights.

Jeremy says he's looking to perform at his best, hoping to progress further in the global football arena.

And he's encouraging young people and football enthusiasts in Vanuatu to consider a career in refereeing – helping put the country on the world map.

"If we are a football-loving nation, why do other Oceania countries, where football is not the main sport, have 5–10 referees while Vanuatu has only me?" Jeremy told the Daily Post.

Vanuatu's World Cup qualifying campaign on the field ended in round two, following defeats to New Zealand and Tahiti.

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

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