

Pacific memories resurfaced

Earlier this month, the museum was contacted by Joseph Parsons from the United States with an exciting proposal. He shared that his



Joseph Cable Wetherby in New Caledonia, 1944. Photo – Joe Parsons.

grandfather, Joseph Cable Wetherby, had taken approximately 1,000 photographs during his time in New Caledonia and other locations across the

South Pacific. He wondered if the museum would be interested in copies of these historical images. Naturally, we were thrilled by the opportunity to

expand our collection with such a significant number of WWII photos.

Taken between 1943 and 1945, the images cover a diverse range of subjects—from landscapes and local communities to ships, sailors, and daily life during the war. However, as we delved deeper into the collection, we realised it held more than

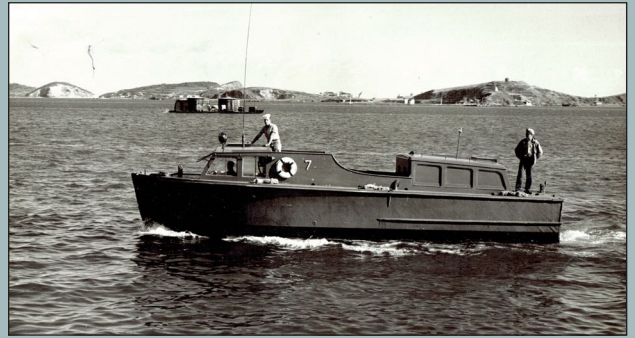
just historical value. Given the large number of officers and sailors featured in the photos, Joe and his family hope to identify as many of them as possible and connect with their families.

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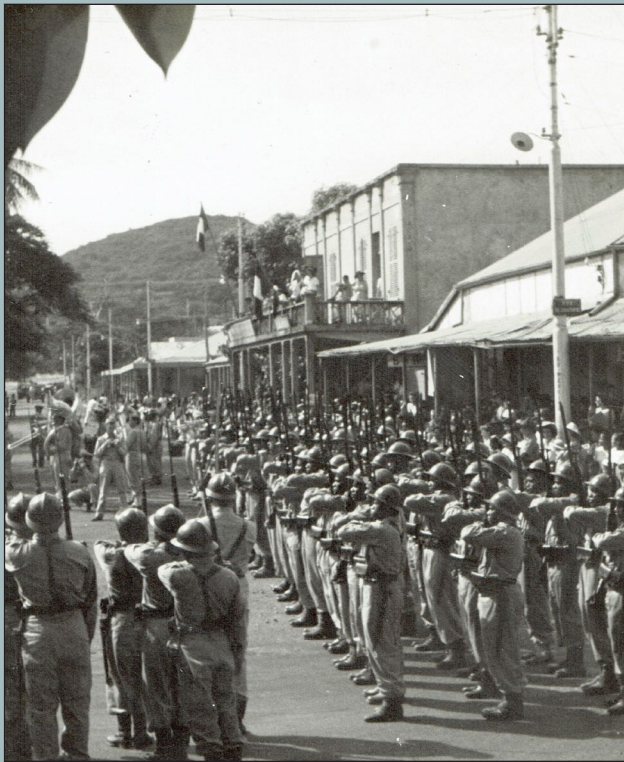


After discussions with Joe, we agreed that the original collection would be split between the Musée maritime de Nouvelle-Calédonie (the maritime museum in New Caledonia) and our museum in Santo. Since many of the images were taken in New Caledonia, their museum will receive the majority of the originals, while we will receive those specifically related to Santo.

However, thanks to Joe's generosity, we will also receive a complete set of high-resolution scans of the entire collection, ensuring we can preserve and study these remarkable photographs in their entirety.



Another photo of Wetherby's is this US Navy launch operating in the harbour in Noumea. Photo – Joe Parsons.



Joseph Wetherby took this photo of VE Day celebrations in the streets of Noumea. Photo – Joe Parsons.

One of the highlights of the collection is a series of incredible photos of Joseph Wetherby with James Michener. These are of particular interest to us, as Michener wrote much of *Tales of the South Pacific* while stationed on Santo. You can read more about his time here in this month's newsletter.

Joe has taken on the enormous task of scanning all the images before distributing the originals, and we are incredibly grateful to him and his mother for making this collection available to us. We eagerly look forward to seeing the photographs as they come through.



One of the many photos of unknown US Navy officers and sailors taken in Noumea. Photo – Joe Parsons.



A wonderful shot of locals and naval personnel relaxing while listening to a navy band perform in a rotunda in Noumea. Photo – Joe Parsons.

Legends leave their mark

During our last board meeting, we discussed ways to highlight some of the famous figures who passed through Santo during World War II. As a result, we decided to create an engaging new display for our visitors.

While we previously had signage about many of these individuals, it dated back to the museum's early days and was due for an update.



One of the new posters. This one features Gregory "Pappy" Boyington.

To bring this to life, museum board member Jimmy Carter has designed and written seven new large-format posters featuring:

- Sir Edmund Hillary
- Pappy Boyington
- Gene Roddenberry
- Charles Lindbergh
- Eleanor Roosevelt
- John F. Kennedy
- James Michener

Each poster will share a brief story about the individual and detail their connection to Santo during the war.

The posters will be prominently displayed along the south wall of the newer exhibit area. Their large-scale images and compelling narratives will naturally draw visitors through the museum, guiding them into this space and immersing them in the history of some of the island's most notable wartime residents.



How six of the seven new posters will appear in the museum. James Michener's poster will hang in a separate location.



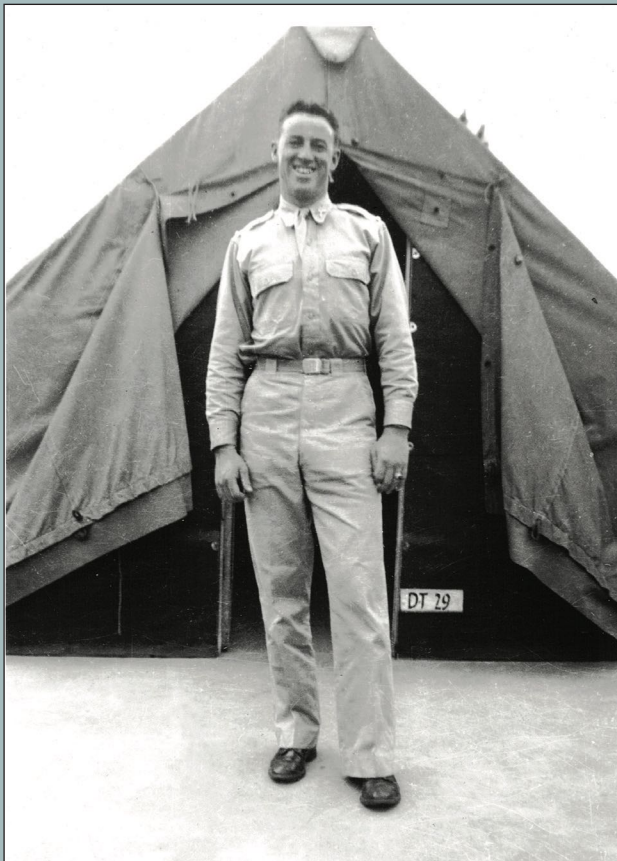
Another of the new posters, featuring President John F. Kennedy.

Euart's legacy resurfaces

The US Archives' holds an unparalleled wealth of information on the Pacific War – probably more than any other resource on the planet. Yet, much of it remains unexamined, uncatalogued and undigitised.

However, among the 13 billion pages of available records is a document (likely one of many), that recounts the history of Espiritu Santo and the vital role of the New Hebrides in the War. It is housed within the historical files of the Commander South Pacific (COMSOPAC).

Within this roughly 500-page document is a section detailing the loss of the SS President Coolidge. It reveals new information regarding Captain Elwood J. Euart – the heroic figure of the ship's sinking – details previously unknown to us. The document summarises a special report from Commander Naval Unit BUTTON to Commander South Pacific Area and South Pacific Force.



Elwood J. Euart during military training and prior to heading off to the Pacific aboard the SS President Coolidge. Photo – Paul Vallee.

The following excerpt begins with a brief summary of the events surrounding the loss of the luxury liner-turned-troopship.

"At about 0920 on 26 October 1942, the SS President Coolidge was sighted off the East entrance to Second Channel heading approximately north at high speed. In spite of the efforts of the patrol vessel, which had a pilot on board, to communicate with her she continued on her way north seaward of Tutuba Island, rounded that Island and entered the mined channel between Tutuba and Santo Islands. The shore signal station finally succeeded in warning her that she was in danger and the Master attempted to stop the ship. Before headway could be killed the Coolidge hit two mines at about 0930. The ship then swung hard right and was beached on the coral reef on Santo Island. Due to the fact that most of the headway had been taken off the ship and the reef drops off very sharply, the ship was not firmly beached and when at 1050 she turned over she slid off the reef and sank in about twenty fathoms of water.



The Coolidge begins sinking, just off the south east coast of Espiritu Santo, where she remains today. Photo – US Archives. (continued...)



Many small boats from the navy base went to the aid of the sinking ship. Air pockets can still be seen rising to the surface in this shot as the troops were coming ashore. Photo – US Archives.

"As soon as the ship was seen to be damaged and beached, all small boats and vessels in the harbor were ordered to the scene to remove passengers.

According to the report, the Commanding Officer, Naval Unit Base BUTTON ordered the immediate issuing of clothing to survivors of this 'marine tragedy' in a letter to the Disbursing and Supply Officer of the 7th United States Naval Construction Battalion.



The responsibility of finding clothing and supplies for the thousands of troops suddenly making Base Button their temporary home, fell to the 7th Seabees. Photo – US Archives.

"You are hereby authorized and directed to make such gratuitous issues of clothing as may be necessary to care for the basic needs of the survivors of a marine disaster occurring 26 October 1942.

"These issues are to be made to any and all survivors under your care, regardless of the branch of service in which enlisted, securing, if possible, the receipts of officers in charge of the various detachments involved.

"The total value of the gratuitous issue will be reported to this command for final approval."

The resupplying of clothing and other personal items was something we have been asked about before. We now know that the 7th Seabees stepped up and did what needed to be done.

The report goes on to highlight the valiant role of Elwood J Euart, as the Coolidge was sinking. It says:

"The outstanding act of heroism during this disaster was performed by an Army Captain. The Army Recreation Centre located one-half mile southeast of the junction of Routes 1 and 40, this Base, is named EUART FIELD in honour of the late Captain ELWOOD J. EUART, 0374388, Field Artillery, United States Army, who lost his life at sea in the sinking of the USAT

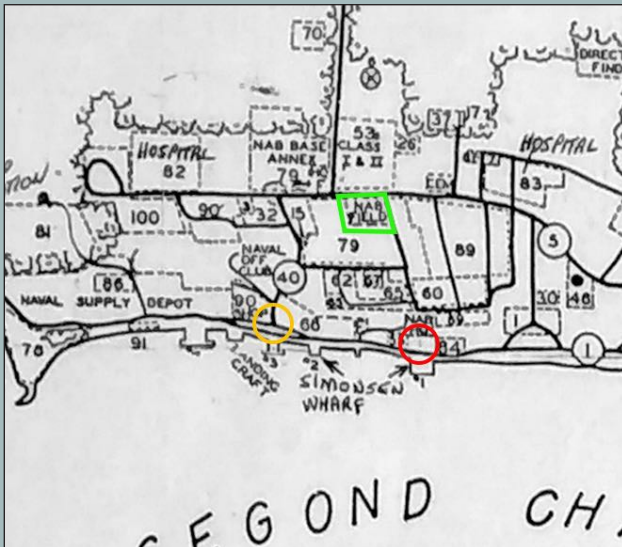
PRESIDENT COOLIDGE on 26 October 1942.

Captain Euart, who was serving with a Rhode Island National Guard Unit, distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism on the occasion of the sinking of the "PRESIDENT COOLIDGE" for which, posthumously, he was awarded the Distinguished Service cross and had the eastern entrance of the main Channel at this Base named "EUART PASSAGE" in his honor."

The museum was not aware of Euart Field or Euart Passage. But thanks to the US Archives we've discovered more about this pivotal event in the WWII history of Espiritu Santo.

Unfortunately, the field is not marked on maps of base button, nor the Army Recreation Centre to the southeast. However, the Naval Advance Base (NAB) Fields are located "one half mile" to the northeast. There's a chance it may have been one of these fields.

(continued...)



The map on the left and the photo on the right shows the intersection of highways 1 and 40 in the yellow circle. The red circle indicates half a mile to the south east, where there doesn't appear to be any recreational facilities. However, around half a mile to the northwest in the green box are the Naval Advanced Base (NAB) fields. One could hazard a guess, that this is the area being referred to as Euart Field. Map & Photo – US Archives.

We should also highlight the two citations included in the document, taken from, 'General Order #11, Headquarters IV Island Command, APO #708, dated 12 October 1943, by command of Brigadier General Williamson.'

Captain Euart's two citations read as follows:

"Captain Euart, Troop Mess Officer on duty in the enlisted men's mess hall, personally checked the clearing of that area upon the alarm. Having safely reached his abandon ship station, he learned of men trapped in the hold and went there. By lashing himself to the low end of a rope he was able to hold it tight enough for men to climb up it to safety, even though the ship was badly listing. Finally, as he attempted to climb up, almost vertically by that moment, the ship careened and sank very quickly. Captain Euart exhausted himself assisting many others, whose lives were thus undoubtedly spared at the expense of his own".

And this:

"By his unselfish, heroic action, and with utter disregard of his own safety, Captain Euart conducted himself far above and beyond the call of duty, saved countless lives and gave his life that many others might live."

The discovery of these records in the U.S. Archives sheds new light on the extraordinary heroism of Captain Elwood J. Euart. His selfless actions in the face of imminent danger are a testament to the courage and sacrifice displayed by so many during the Pacific War. The naming of Euart Field and Euart Passage in his honour – though seemingly lost to time – underscores the lasting impact of his bravery.

While much of Espiritu Santo's wartime history remains hidden in archives and unmarked on modern maps, documents like these allow us to piece together the past and preserve the memory of those who served. As more records come to light, we continue to uncover forgotten details that enrich our understanding of the New Hebrides' crucial role in the Pacific theatre.



Euart's memorial on the 75th anniversary of the sinking of the ship and the loss of his life to save others. Photo – Patrick Dancel.

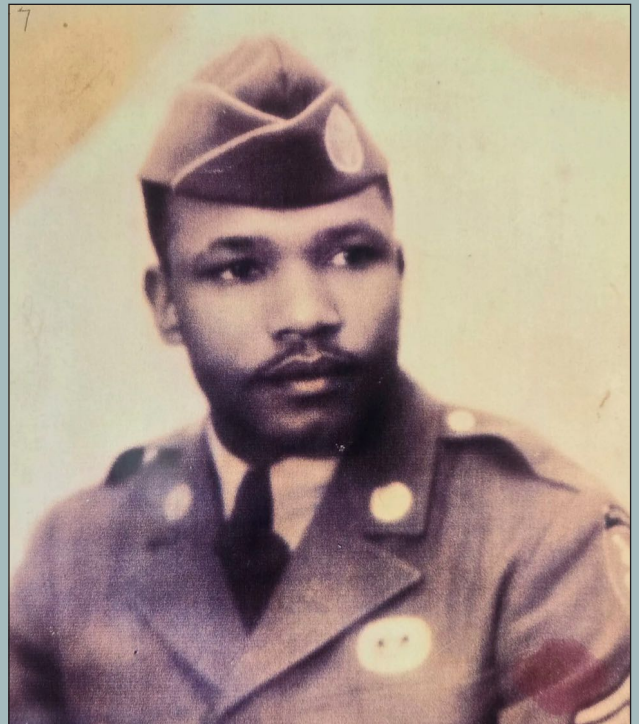
THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

Paratrooper blazes a trail

This month we're remembering not the South Pacific theatre or a specific March event from that time. Instead, we're looking at the recent death of a paratrooper at the age of 108 – in a story that honestly reads like a Hollywood movie that needs to be made.

Sgt. Joe Harris, believed to be the oldest surviving World War II paratrooper and a member of the U.S. Army's first all-black parachute infantry battalion died last month.

His unit, the 555th or the *Triple Nickels* as they were known, never reached combat as such – but did some insanely brave actions in defending the mainland United States' west coast.



Sergeant Joe Harris, of the 555th Parachute Battalion. Photo – Various sources.

In late 1944, the Japanese began a strange but well-thought out campaign to send thousands of balloons on the jet stream across to the US. Called Fu-Go balloon bombs, a sophisticated ballast system would see the balloons descend on heavily forested areas like Oregon state. About 9000 were launched, and 3 per cent of those later found.

It did not do the hoped-for damage, but it did set off

(continued...)



A Japanese Fu-Go balloon bomb. Photo – Wikipedia.

Operation Firefly, and a ban on publicising news reports of the balloons.

The 555th were deployed as part of that – tasked with its men jumping from C-47 transports into forests – and equipped to put out any blazes.



The 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion, Fort Dix, New Jersey, 1947. Photo – US Army.

They'd been formed as part of the tentative move to desegregate the US army – something that did not happen until 1948.

As his New York Times obituary records:

Mr. Harris and his unit became the front line in fighting the blazes. Jumping from C-47 cargo planes, they wore leather football helmets with wire-mesh face masks and carried a brace of firefighting tools, including the Pulaski, a specialized tool that combines an axe and an adze.

They were trained to aim for trees, to avoid landing in dangerously rugged territory. Among their gear was a 50-foot rope that they would use to drop to the ground after getting snared in branches.

Mr. Harris performed 72 jumps, fighting fires started by the bombs as well as by lightning and other natural causes. He was honourably discharged in late 1945.



1st Sgt. Walter Morris undergoes jumpmaster personnel inspection prior to his first jump with the 555th. Photo – US Army.

The 555th was later incorporated into the 82nd Airborne Division – while Joe Harris after the war worked in the US Border Service. He lived for 60 years in Compton, California, and after retiring, became something of a patriarch to the neighbourhood.

Information from the New York Times and other news reports.

Our journey unfolds

Earlier in the month we were contacted by Moreno Aguiari, founder and editor of Vintage Aviation News. This fabulous website is one of the best in the world for information on warbirds and related aviation news.

Back in January 2023, the South Pacific WWII Museum was featured on the website. Moreno thought it was time we updated their readers on what we've been up to over the last two years.

We were so pleased with the article, we thought our newsletter readers might like to read it too. So here's a reprint of the story we wrote for Vintage Aviation News. We hope you enjoy it.



Since our first story appeared in Vintage Aviation News back in January 2023, the South Pacific World War II Museum in Vanuatu has experienced a vibrant journey over the past two years, reflecting community spirit, historical reflection, and ongoing dedication to preserving the region's wartime history.

From its inception to the present, the museum has been progressively evolving, creating not only a space for education but also a gathering point for stories and memories that shape Vanuatu's identity.

So we thought this could be a great opportunity to bring readers up to speed on the progress of our little museum, way out in the South Pacific, on an island called Espiritu Santo.

2023 a Year of Growth

January 2023 saw the museum launching into another year with a renewed commitment to engaging both locals and tourists alike. The museum continued releasing monthly newsletters to keep everyone updated on its activities, fundraising initiatives, and construction updates. This monthly digest became a crucial tool for communication, especially for those who may not be active on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Visitors can subscribe through the museum's website, receiving the latest news directly to their inbox—a move that welcomed a broader audience to the museum's ongoing narrative.

Throughout the year, the museum actively sought contributions from the community. Local residents and historians were encouraged to share their stories, photographs, and anecdotes to enhance the richness of the museum's exhibits. This outreach effort was aimed not only at collecting artifacts but also at preserving the memories of those who lived through the events of World War II, tying personal narratives to the larger historical tapestry.



Many of our exhibits have come from locals and the wider community who want to see history preserved.

(continued...)

One of the highlights of 2023 was the museum's increasing collaboration with local authorities and businesses, reflecting the community's support and involvement. This collaboration culminated in our annual 'Bigfala Sale', which helped raise funds for the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the museum, ensuring it would remain a lasting tribute to Vanuatu's wartime history.



The annual Bigfala Sale is always popular with locals and generates much needed funds for the museum. Drone photo – Jimmy Carter.

Probably the most significant event of 2023, was the completion of major renovations to the museum, thanks to generous grants from The New Zealand High Commission to Vanuatu and the Reserve Bank of Vanuatu. The project included removing walls and windows and adding new doorways, installing climate control, and preparing the new space for exhibits.

On 12 January 2024, the expanded museum was officially unveiled in a ceremony attended by dignitaries, including British High Commissioner Nicolette Brent and Luganville Lord Mayor Hilton Toares. The event celebrated the hard work of museum staff, volunteers, and tradespeople who made this milestone possible.

Reflecting on 2024

As we moved into 2024, the South Pacific WWII Museum continued to build on its foundation of engagement and education. The newsletters published during this year detailed various initiatives, including new exhibitions that came to life—showcasing artifacts that were previously hidden away and telling the stories of local heroes. Visitors could step into history, gaining a deeper understanding of the events that shaped the region during the war.



The Museum's Willys Jeep takes pride of place in the new exhibit area and is a big favourite with visitors.



The opening of the museum's new exhibit area was a huge success and was attended by local dignitaries and those that flew in from Port Vila. (continued...)

Furthermore, the museum expanded its outreach to educational institutions, organising school programs that encouraged young students to learn about their heritage. Workshops and guided tours provided students with insights into the significance of their history, fostering a sense of pride and responsibility to honour their past. Educators were enthusiastic about the museum's role in providing effective educational resources.

Community contributions

The newsletters from 2024 highlighted numerous contributions from the community. Individual stories shared in these editions brought to life the personal impacts of the war and reminded readers that history is not just a collection of dates and facts, but a tapestry woven from countless personal experiences. This effort not only enriched the museum but also created a welcoming atmosphere where every visitor could see themselves reflected in the ongoing story.

Looking ahead

With April 2025 upon us, the museum stands as a beacon of hope and history for the people of Vanuatu. Our plans for the construction of a world class museum aimed at expanding the exhibition space is a testament to our commitment to preserving history for future generations.



Everything is ready to go on the construction of our new museum. Which just did the financial backing to make it a reality.

We aim to expand our exhibition space further, ensuring a comprehensive representation of Vanuatu's and indeed the Pacific's wartime history. Plans were



Local businessman Peter Colmar and the twin machine guns he has donated to the museum from a Dauntless aircraft.

unveiled for new interactive displays that would deepen the visitor experience, making both locals and tourists feel like participants in history rather than mere observers.

The museum's board remains committed to ensuring that it not only serves as a place of remembrance but also becomes a hub for cultural exchange. As the museum looks to the future, it remains a vital part of the nation's identity—a place where history is honoured, stories are shared and never forgotten.

Join us

We invite everyone to visit us at Unity Park, Main Street, Luganville, and witness firsthand the evolution of our museum. Open Monday to Friday, we warmly welcome everyone to explore, learn, and share in this incredible journey with us.

Together, we are not only creating a museum but a lasting legacy for generations to come. If you'd like to be a part of this, consider donating or sharing your story with us; every bit helps us keep the memories alive.

In coming months, we'll be bringing you further articles about some of the history behind what was called Base Button and the bomber airfields and more that were constructed on the island during World War II.

Japan's fishing spies

Did the Japanese ever land on Santo? World War II history would suggest no – the occasional bombing from long range seaplanes and submarines was as close as their forces would get. However, what of the years preceding the outbreak of war in the Pacific?

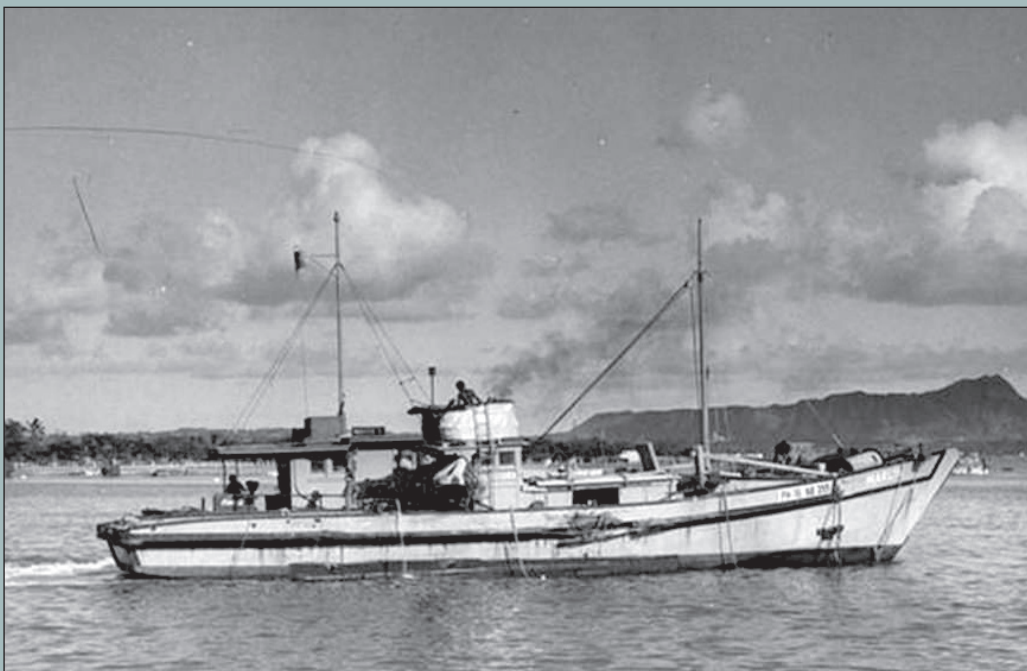
The strategic importance of the New Hebrides in any South Pacific conflict was recognised by the Japanese long before the outbreak of World War II. Evidence suggests that Japanese intelligence had already gathered extensive military information through firsthand observations, aided by the presence of Japanese fishing vessels and workers on various plantations.



A Malo plantation house circa 1890.

Around this time, Matt Wells, a Malo local who we have written of previously, was recruiting labour and frequently anchored his vessel near Japanese

sampans while travelling between islands. He observed that while some Japanese divers collected trochus shells, others were discreetly taking angular measurements of nearby hills using sextants—an activity suggesting detailed surveying rather than mere commercial fishing. Despite their proximity, the Japanese showed no apparent interest in

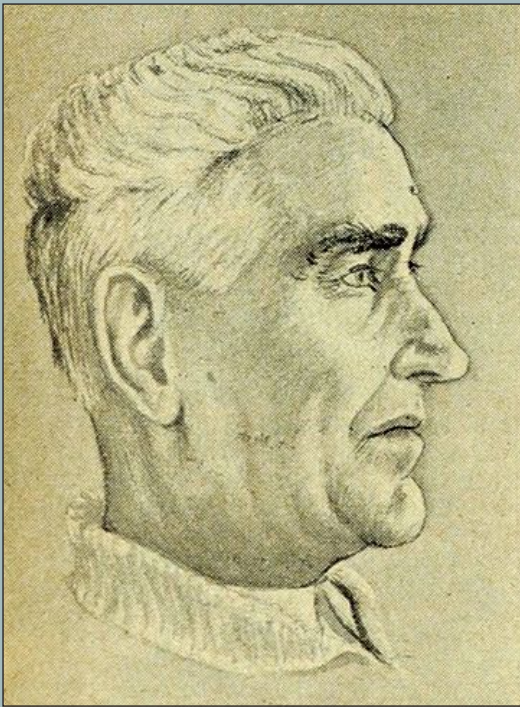


A pre-war long-range aku fishing sampan motors to sea with Diamondhead, Hawaii in the background.
Photo – Hawai'i State Archives

An established planter on the island of Malo, near Espiritu Santo, recalled that around 1910, the Japanese began arriving in the region, initially engaging in fishing and shell diving. Some established trading posts across the archipelago, while others set up small plantations, notably in Lacona Bay in the Banks Islands.

Wells' vessel or its activities, continuing their work openly. This pattern persisted for years, and once they had seemingly gathered all necessary data, many Japanese operations moved on to other Pacific islands, leaving behind a few individuals—likely observers.

(continued...)



An illustration of Matt Wells taken from a newspaper of the day.

By 1930, Wells was recruiting native labour along the west coast of Espiritu Santo when he made another intriguing discovery. While anchored near a river to replenish fresh water, he was approached by local Santo villagers who offered to ferry water to his ship for a shilling per can. Curious, he asked why they were accustomed to this arrangement, and the villagers explained that Japanese fishermen had been paying them the same rate to supply their sampans.



The Japanese fishermen were fishing for trochus shells. Prized for their colour and the thick layer of 'nacre' on the outside of the shell, they can grow to around 13cm in length.

His interest piqued, Wells pressed for more details. The villagers described how the Japanese had ingratiated themselves with the local population by offering gifts – calico, knives, tinned salmon, and other trade goods. They also recalled how the Japanese would invite them aboard their boats for communal meals, sharing large pots of rice mixed with canned salmon. As they ate together in the Japanese fashion, conversations turned to the islands themselves. It was then that the visitors revealed their intentions: the Japanese, they claimed, would one day take over the New Hebrides, driving the white men out.



Vanuatu's much prized trochus shells have even appeared on postage stamps.

Twelve years later, in the early months of 1942, the Japanese were rapidly advancing through the Pacific, and one of the U.S. Navy's most pressing concerns was the urgent establishment of forward operating bases to halt their progress.

Fortunately for the New Hebrides, the Americans acted swiftly, constructing a significant base on Efate, followed by the massive Base Button on Espiritu Santo – the largest U.S. military installation in the South Pacific. This decisive move ensured that the ominous warnings from the Japanese visitors' years earlier never came to pass.

Pulitzer in Paradise

One of the new display posters we've created was for arguably the most famous face to reside in Santo during the 1940s. James A Michener was a lieutenant in the US Navy and spent quite some time living on the island. But it's what he created while based on Santo, that he is most remembered for.

The following is the copy that appears on the poster we have created for Michener. It's quite a remarkable story.

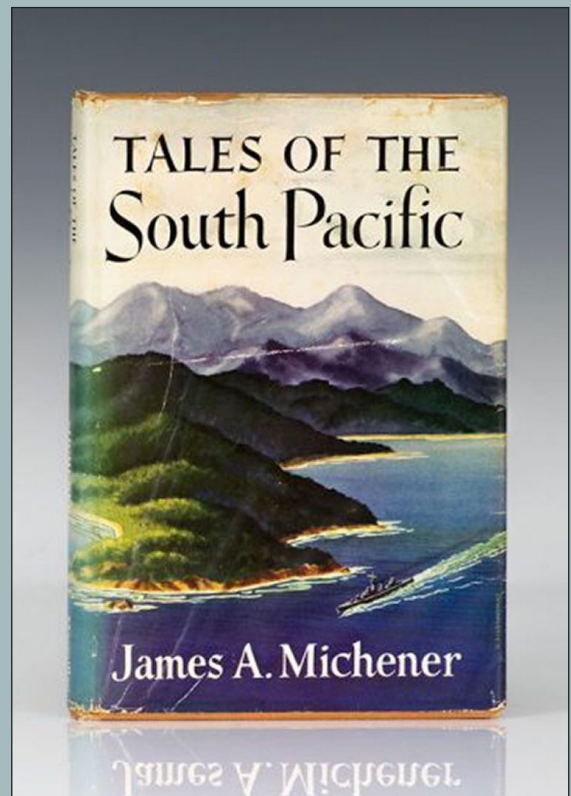
James Michener, born on 3 February 1907, was an acclaimed American author whose literary career spanned more than four decades. Raised by his

Michener authored more than 40 books, most of which were sprawling, multi-generational sagas set in diverse locations around the world. His works included *Hawaii*, *The Drifters*, *Centennial*, *Alaska*, and *Texas*. Among his non-fiction works were *Iberia*, a reflection on his travels in Spain and Portugal, and his memoir, *The World Is My Home*. Yet, his first major success came from a story set thousands of kilometres away from his hometown — *Tales of the South Pacific*.



James Michener in his US Navy pith helmet in 1944.

adoptive mother, Mabel Michener, in Doylestown, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Michener grew up with a love for literature and an insatiable curiosity about the world. Despite never knowing his biological parents, he found his purpose through storytelling, eventually becoming one of America's most beloved writers.



The book that started it all. Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*.

When the United States entered World War II, Michener felt compelled to serve his country, despite being exempt from military service as a Quaker. He enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1944 and was stationed as a naval historian in the South Pacific, where his role enabled him to travel extensively throughout the region. Although his duties were not combat-oriented, his journeys took him across seventeen islands, where he documented life among soldiers and civilians alike. This unique position gave him unparalleled insight into the war's impact on both military personnel and local communities.

(continued...)



James Michener revisits Vanuatu after the war. Here he rings the gong for a ferry to take him to Erakor Island Resort. Photo – Various sources.

One of the most significant locations in Michener's wartime journey was Espiritu Santo, the largest island in Vanuatu. Santo became a central hub of American military activity in the South Pacific, and Michener found himself in the midst of a bustling, makeshift city of Quonset huts, airfields and military camps. The island, once an idyllic Pacific paradise, suddenly became vibrant and chaotic, serving as both a sanctuary and a reminder of the war's proximity.

Michener's relatively high status as a publications officer afforded him some privileges — a Quonset hut, a jeep, and access to small boats for island-hopping. This mobility and freedom to observe daily military life would prove invaluable to his future literary endeavours. He also enjoyed the unspoken advantage of being mistaken for the son of Vice Admiral Marc Mitscher, a misconception that allowed him even easier access to key areas and influential figures.

During his time on Santo, Michener read voraciously to pass the time between assignments. His literary tastes ranged widely, but his hunger for knowledge and storytelling never waned. He shared his passion with other officers, forming a discussion group that met

weekly to exchange ideas and insights on diverse topics. The group became a refuge for intellectual conversation amid the grind of military duty. One evening, during one of these gatherings, a fellow officer posed a question that struck Michener deeply: "What are you studying, Jim?"

The question forced Michener to confront the unsettling realisation that, despite his constant reading and reflection, he was not truly studying anything meaningful. This moment of introspection became a turning point. That night, as he walked back to his quarters — a modest, mosquito-filled quonset hut lit by a flickering lantern — he began to write. The story that poured from his mind and onto the page would become *Tales of the South Pacific*.

The book drew influences from many places and people he encountered during his time in the Pacific. Michener admitted that the character Bloody Mary was based on a Tonkinese woman of the same name who lived and worked on the Ratard plantation on Santo. Additionally, the mystical Bali Hai, a prominent setting in the book, had nothing to do with Hawaii as some assumed, but was instead inspired by the island of Ambae, which lies off Santo's east coast. Even today, Ambae's volcanic silhouette can be seen fading in and out of the low cloud and humid haze, evoking a dreamlike quality that Michener captured so vividly in his writing.

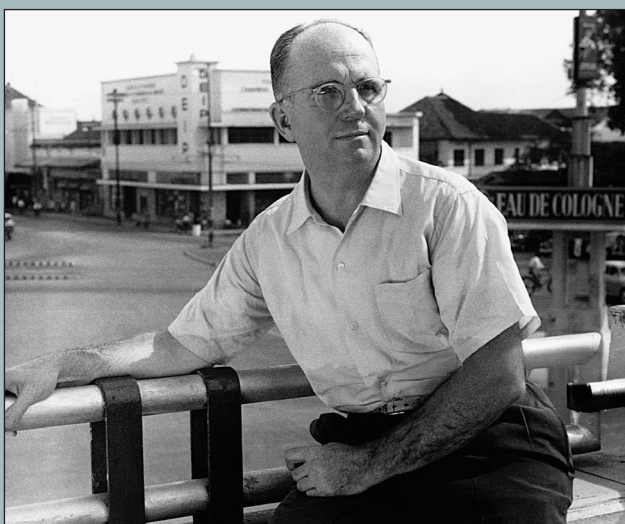
Published in 1947, *Tales of the South Pacific* became a literary sensation, earning Michener the Pulitzer Prize



Ambae appears on the horizon out of the cloud and mists that often completely conceal it. This photo was taken from the very spot where Michener would meet with his discussion group at the 31st General Hospital. (continued...)

for Fiction in 1948. Its success led to its adaptation as the Broadway musical South Pacific by Rodgers and Hammerstein, which premiered in 1949 and later became feature films in 1958 and 2001. The acclaim of both the book and its adaptations not only launched Michener's career but also established him as a master storyteller capable of blending historical fact with compelling human narratives.

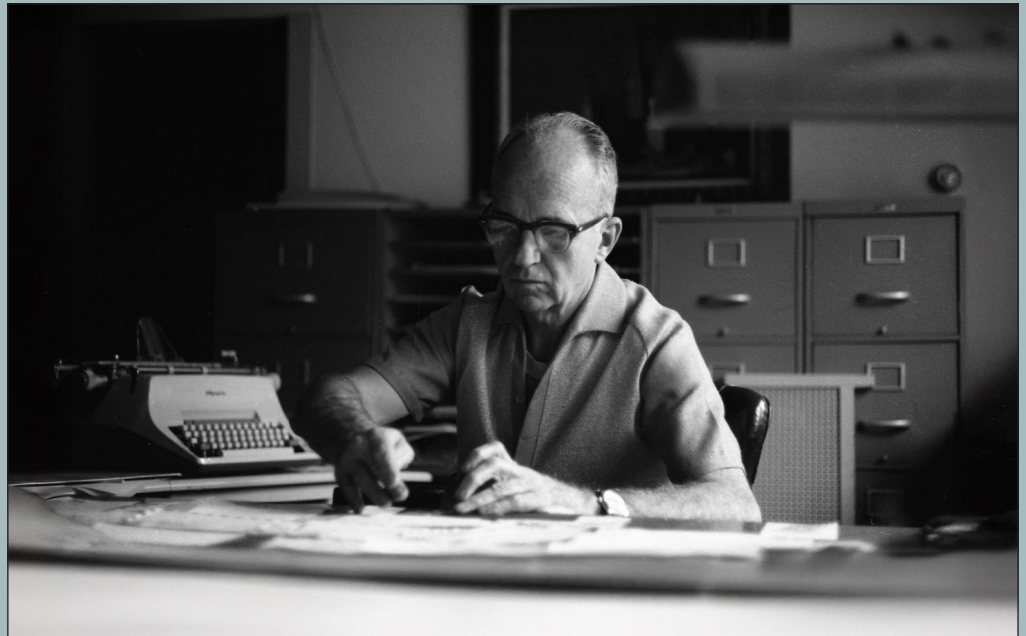
Reflecting on his time in the Pacific, Michener acknowledged that the combination of isolation, camaraderie, and raw emotion fuelled his creativity. The gritty reality of military life on Espiritu Santo and the contrasting beauty of the island's landscape shaped his writing profoundly. The stories of ordinary soldiers and their extraordinary experiences became the heart of his tales, preserving the legacy of those who served in the South Pacific theatre.



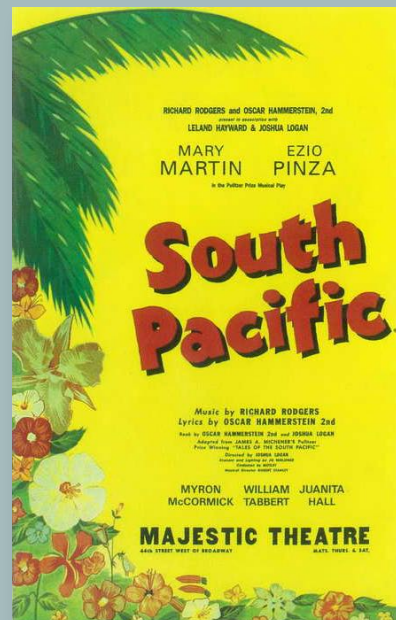
James Michener poses for the camera in an unknown location, post war. Photo – Various sources.

James Michener continued to write prolifically throughout his life, but *Tales of the South Pacific* remained a defining work, setting the stage for his literary achievements to

come. Though he passed away on October 16, 1997, his stories continue to resonate, capturing the complexities of war and the spirit of those who lived through it.



Michener at his desk, believed to be in one his Pennsylvania homes. It was dated 1967. Photo – University of Northern Colorado's Robert Vavra Collection of Michener photographs.



The original South Pacific Broadway poster.

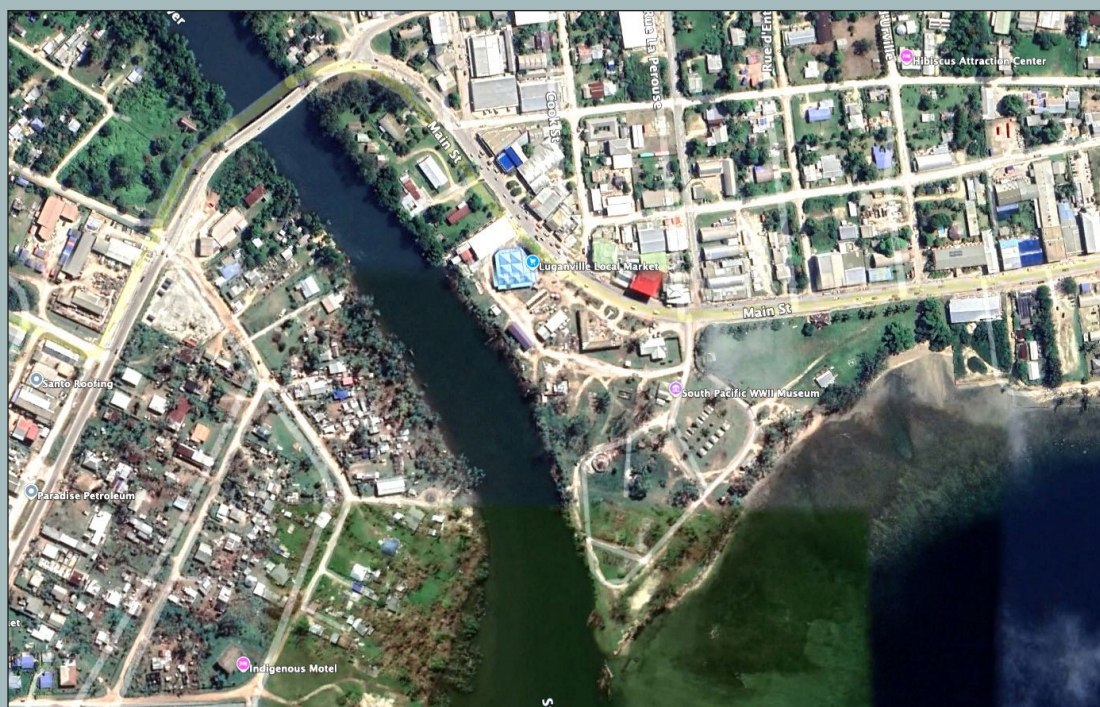
Espiritu Santo was not just the backdrop for his writing; it was the crucible that forged his identity as an author. In that simple, lantern-lit shack, surrounded by the sounds of the jungle and the distant hum of war machinery, James Michener transformed his wartime experiences into enduring literature, telling the stories of those whose lives intersected with history on a remote Pacific island.

Anchoring the museum's story

We've often spoken of the PT Boat base that was situated on the site of the museum during the war. We thought it was time we showed you what it looked like – then and now, in this fascinating comparison.



The PT Boat base (centre) with the Sarakata River to the left and the road bridge built by US Navy Seabees. The hundreds of Quonset huts no longer survive, but many are still standing around town. Photo – US Archives.



The PT boat base as it is today with the South Pacific WWII Museum in the centre towards to top of the peninsula. The southern tip of the area has been eroded away taking with it the PT Boat slipway, clearly visible in the 1943 image. Photo – Google Earth.

Inspiring everyday heroes

If there's something Vanuatu is never short of, it's sunshine.

So, with many scattered island communities, it makes sense to turn to the free resource to help provide off-grid power, thanks to ever-improving solar panels and new technology coming on line.

Australia's government is rolling out what's called Renew Pacific – a programme to do that across a

explain more and to partner with local businesses, NGOs, community organisations and other groups who might like to apply for grants, which are now open.

As proof of the concept in action, the first project has just been opened on Malekula island.

Australian High Commissioner Max Willis and Vanuatu's Minister of Climate Change Ralph Regenvanu were in attendance for the launch at Betervet village in the island's northeast.



Local children celebrate the installation of solar power in their village. Photo – Renew Pacific.

Overall, the two-year project will bring solar-powered water pumping systems to eight rural communities across Vanuatu's Santo, Paama, Tanna and Malekula islands, improving water security and sanitation for over 4,700 people.

It will also equip 24 health centres and schools with solar systems and battery storage, providing reliable, clean, and affordable energy.

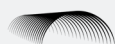
number of Pacific nations, including Vanuatu, spending around 75 million Australian dollars.

It's a five-year programme that funds locally-led projects, improving services like lighting, clean water, healthcare, education, agriculture and more.

It's recently held an information day in Port Vila to

An additional Renew Pacific project will benefit around 80,000 people in Vanuatu's most remote communities, delivering reliable 24/7 energy to healthcare services for the first time.

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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