SOUTH PACIFIC WWII MUSEUM
VANUATU

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Just landed at the Museum

In earlier editions of our newsletter, we highlighted the incredible story captured in Robert Richardson's book, *Survival in the South Pacific* – a gripping account of his father's survival after a C-47 crash on Mount Hope, Espiritu Santo, in 1943. As mentioned in our April issue, Robert kindly donated 10 copies of the book to the museum. We've been eagerly waiting for them to arrive, and as you can see from the photos, they're finally here and our Support Officer, Marina Moli, was all smiles unpacking the box. Survival in the South Pacific is now on sale at the South Pacific WWII Museum. And for those who can't make it to Vanuatu, it's also available on Amazon.

South Pacific WWII Museum Support Officer Marina Moli with Robert Richardson's donations to the South Pacific WWII Museum.

A big thank you to Robert once again – we're sure these books will fly off the shelf in no time!

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From foxholes to footlights

Base Button's morale boosters

The heart of Base Welfare and Recreation on Espiritu Santo was the Naval Advanced Base (NAB) Theatre – arguably the most admired movie theatre in the South Pacific during World War II. Though not the largest, it was certainly the best-appointed. Performers regularly praised its facilities, which included a 5.4 x 8.5 metre

The NAB theatre on Espiritu Santo, hosting a US Navy Big Band – most likely from a visiting ship – and two vocalists.

proscenium, a 9.5 x 11.5 metre stage, and 7.3 metres of overhead clearance. Sailmakers from the 57th Seabees crafted its canvas drapes, while its lighting system featured footlights, border lights, dimmer controls, and a spotlight. A rolling screen allowed the space to transition smoothly between film and live performance.

A Thanksgiving program at the NAB theatre on Espiritu Santo featuring a large brass band and choir. 25 November 1943. Photo – US Archives.

Below the stage were spacious dressing rooms, and the original plans even included an orchestra pit. Seating evolved from simple coconut logs to benches and eventually backed seats. Designed for 2,500, capacity was boosted to 3,500 for the 1943 boxing championships – with another 500 standees accommodated during major events. Reserved seating was introduced in July 1944 for certain units after transient personnel from the Receiving Station began monopolising prime seats. A wire enclosure and an additional detail were brought in

Another view of the NAB theatre on Espiritu Santo, taken 15 February 1945. Photo – US Archives.

to manage crowds, and to reduce littering from "gedunk" (snack food) customers.

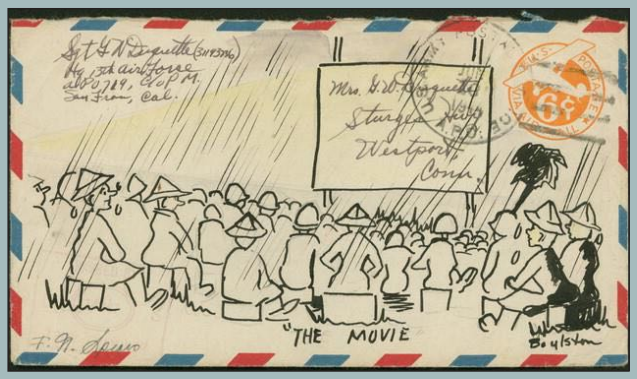
The Island's Entertainment Hub

At the time of construction, a survey counted six major movie areas on Espiritu Santo, serving multiple units with a combined seating capacity of 8,150 (absolute capacity 17,900). Only four had covered stages, and many were rudimentary – one "USO stage" turned out to be just the porch of a Quonset hut. Common issues included beer consumption, poor visitor control, and underseating, though nothing could solve the two inevitable challenges of open-air theatres: bad weather and the infamous

(continued...)

"movie wit"—those loud, self-styled 'comedians' whose interruptions were often more persistent than amusing.

Incredibly, despite frequent rain, only two wet nights were recorded during the NAB Theatre's first three weeks and not even downpours cancelled shows.



The weather wasn't always kind to movie audiences, as is depicted on the envelope of this letter from a sailor on Santo to family back home.

Malaria mosquitoes, however, were a constant nuisance, requiring full clothing for all. Island hygiene policies barred Tonkinese and New Hebridean locals from attending, though some French planters held permanent passes.

Two tickets to a live performance of 'Brother Rat'. Funnily enough the film is about cadet life at the Virginia Military Institute (VMI).

Interestingly, motion pictures weren't new to the region. The Martin Johnsons filmed tribal life on Malekulo as early as 1917, material that later featured in several books. Hollywood assistant director Stanley H. Goldsmith (later assigned to the Welfare Department) had also filmed in the islands in the 1920s, and French newsreels were arriving from Noumea as early as 1929. Even Oxford anthropologist Tom Harrisson was involved in filming "native life" with Douglas Fairbanks in the mid-1930s.

Planning and Opening the NAB Theatre

The NAB Theatre was designed by Lieutenant Behrensmeyer of the 57th Seabees and built by members of the 57th and the Third Special Seabees. Rudimentary plans were submitted on 20 June 1943, originally intending to serve just those battalions and the Receiving Station. The assumption was that the 7th CB Theatre (later 1007 CB) would be reassigned, making space for a playing field.

On 8 August 1943, the theatre was formally dedicated. Captain J.E. Boak delivered a speech underscoring the importance of recreation for morale, saying:

The Museum's two US Navy projectors from one of the many theatres on Santo during WWII.

"You have turned in, and are continuing to do so, jobs of which I am rightly proud... I know this theatre will ever more definitely serve the ends for which it is being dedicated."

The opening night feature was *The More the Merrier* with Jean Arthur, Joel McCrea, and Charles Coburn. Music was provided by the First Marine Air Wing Band. During the rest of August, the theatre hosted 21 feature films, two USO stage shows, and performances by the USS DIXIE and the 129th Infantry bands.

Another stage on Base Button and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt speaks to sailors while visiting the Fleet Recreation Centre on Aore Island. Photo – US Archives.

(continued...)

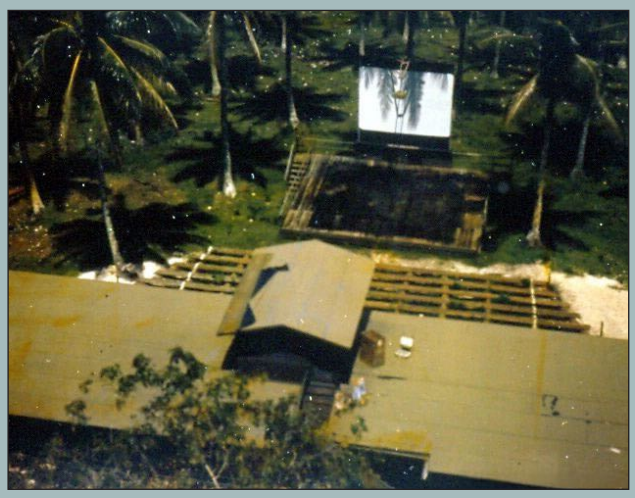
News broadcasts and recorded music were part of every program. Volunteers like Chief Pharmacist's Mate Phil Raykoff (March–July 1944) and Storekeeper First Class William F. Reilly (July 1944–April 1945), both with professional radio experience, gave nightly news readings and sports commentary.

Expanding Entertainment on the Island

As demand increased, Base Welfare and Recreation took over additional theatres, including those at the Base Camp Annex and the Receiving Station. These helped manage overflow and offered daytime showings for night-shift workers using 16mm projectors.

Even before the NAB Theatre opened, Chief Specialist Phillip Reed was coordinating a mobile movie unit that brought films to remote camps and ships. With two borrowed 16mm projectors and films supplied by the Army, the unit averaged 385 viewers per screening in June 1943. Reports from these shows often declared them a "brilliant success," though early screenings were sometimes halted by technical issues like a blown condenser.

Reed's flair came naturally – he had played a villainous chieftain in *Aloma of the South Seas*, which screened at the NAB Theatre in December 1943. When actor Ray Milland fell ill during a USO tour, Reed stepped in, touring with the show and the first three women performers in the South Pacific theatre.



One of the many cinemas on base Button. this one appears to be at either Navy Hospital No. 3 or Hospital No. 6.

As permanent theatres became more common, mobile shows declined, but the need for portable entertainment remained. By June 1944, the original projectors were failing, and requests were made to replace them. One letter summed it up:

"Many of these men haven't seen a movie in three months... They are extremely grateful."

Live Performances and Local Talent

The Base's theatrical life wasn't limited to movies. The Welfare and Recreation Department also supported live performance, especially amateur productions. Specialist First Class Ira Hoffman directed these efforts, even sourcing a theatrical wardrobe from Moffett Field's Red Cross office. Shows like Brother Rat and Topic of the Tropics—a local adaptation of Lawrence Riley's Personal Appearance—were staged at the NAB Theatre and toured other bases, including the Russells, at the request of the Theatre Commander.

An interesting live performance from New Zealand sailors or Royal New Zealand Air Force personnel, possibly performing a Haka. The date is 30 July 1943. Photo – US Archives.

These performances added a much-needed sense of normalcy, distraction, and joy for servicemen stationed far from home. In many ways, the NAB Theatre was more than just a stage—it was a vital emotional anchor for those weathering the long, hard months of war in the Pacific.

THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

Bombs, blasts, and backhoes

Spend some time on Espiritu Santo, and the evidence of the vast base established there can be seen – sometimes clearly, sometimes hidden in regrowth, or built over.

In 1943, on the South Pacific frontlines, the Marines, Army, airmen, and sailors were garnering the headlines – but none of that could have happened without the Seabees of the 57th.

A concrete slab at the old Aviation Repair Depot is tucked away in the jungle and is still visible today. Photo – Mayumi Green

Seabees were skilled construction workers in civilian life, retrained with combat skills, and dispatched to underpin the massive logistical enterprise of the war in the Pacific.

The Naval Ammunition Depot (NAD) Annex, to the north of town, was likely the battalion's largest excavation and road-building effort.

It began in June 1943, when the 57th took over from another unit. Over the next three months, the Seabees cleared dense jungle and laid miles of roads in mosquito-infested ground.

The first task was to create 15 miles (24 Kilometres) of roads, cut and graded through virgin jungle – and then bomb revetments, each holding tons of ordnance, had to be dug.

Dozens of covered steel magazines were also built and earthed over.

At the project's peak, 19 bulldozers, 30 trucks, and multiple cranes and shovels worked across the site.

Rain slowed progress, but crews work in two daily 9-hour shifts, even at night for some tasks.

The magazines were rapidly filled with aerial bombs, artillery shells, and high explosives – even as construction work was continuing around them.

The amount of equipment brought to Santo by the Seabee Battalions was staggering, as can be seen in this depot on the island. Photo – US Archives.

(continued...)

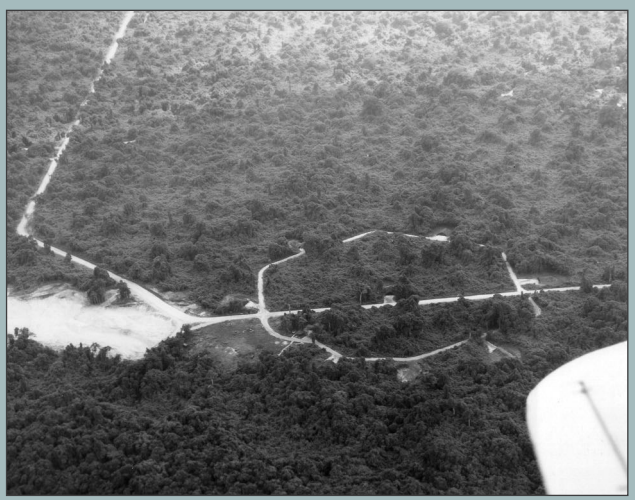
One of the many ammunition bunkers built by the Seabees that can be visited today. This was taken on a tour hosted by Museum board member and tour guide Mayumi Green.

In other words, basically the Seabees were sitting on a giant powder keg.

Jungle was cleared at a pace of about 1 mile per week using bulldozers

Roads were then built with compacted coral hauled from pits as far as 10 miles away

The bomb revetments were laid out on cleared spurs from the main roads, forming “arms” where ordnance could be isolated in the event of accidental detonation



An aerial view of one small segment of NAD that was spread over many hectares. Photo – US Archives.

The coral used in the project was extremely hard and difficult to extract. Initial attempts to dig directly into the coral bank failed – and drilling and blasting couldn’t keep up with demand

Bulldozers eventually “panned” coral into stockpiles, which could then be scooped by shovels.

The buried magazines were steel structures protected from aerial observation and blast damage by thick layers of earth. Once a coral floor was laid steel crews erected prefabricated magazine shells. Once in their stride, crews could finish one full magazine per day.

The remote jungle setting offered its own distractions – the undergrowth teeming with wild chickens – a source of menu supplementation if the birds could be caught for egg laying.

A drone video frame of one of the NAD bunkers with its protective soil spread over the top. Image – Jimmy Carter.

Jungle conditions included clouds of mosquitoes, but thanks to regular atabrine dosing, malaria was largely kept under control.

The 57th would work on many Espiritu Santo projects before leaving in 1944 to take their expertise to islands closer to Japan.

Farther north on the South Pacific frontlines, the Marines, Army, airmen, and sailors were garnering the headlines – but none of that could have happened without the Seabees of the 57th.

This information comes from the 1946 book history created for the 57th battalion and those who served within it. You can visit the museum’s interactive map site and clearly see where the NAD was situated.

Santo's Mobile Pearl Harbour
Triage in the tropics

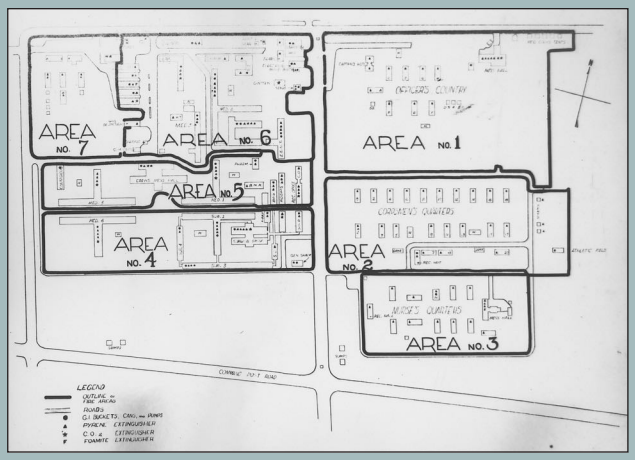
Base Hospital No. 6 at Base Button on Espiritu Santo, was born out of the U.S. Navy's extensive advance base construction program during World War II. This global initiative required immense planning and logistics. To streamline the process, the Navy developed "functional components" – pre-packed, standardised units of men, materials, and supplies. These components were designed to be assembled into complete bases, shipped out, and made operational with everything from paperclips to bulldozers.

LION One had to be built somewhere before it was shipped. The gigantic Port Hueneme in California was where that took place. Photo – US Navy.

The system became a kind of "mail-order catalogue" for naval infrastructure, allowing for efficient training, shipping, and deployment. Crates were marked by importance, and bases could be built and launched as unified commands. The largest of these was the LION base, equivalent in scale to pre-war Pearl Harbour, composed of 73 components, over 8,000 men, and 129,000 tons of equipment and gear. Smaller CUB bases were about a quarter the size.

In early 1943, LION One – the first major unit to deploy under this system – was shipped to Espiritu Santo. Unloading the five echelons of LION One took hundreds of men three months of continuous work. Within this massive operation was a critical component: a medical unit that would become U.S. Naval Base Hospital No. 6.

The hospital was originally formed as part of LION One at Moffett Field, California, under Captain J.E. Boak, USN, and was commissioned on 15 July 1942, with Captain L.W. Johnson (MC), USN, as Officer-in-Command of the medical facilities.



A plan of Hospital No. 6 at Base Button on Espiritu Santo highlighting the designated 'Fire Areas'. Illustration – US Archives.

The medical staff underwent combat-style training before departing the U.S. on 18 January 1943, arriving on Santo in February 1943.

The site chosen for the hospital was a 60-acre (24 hectare) coconut grove on a hillside, ranging from 55 to 58 metres above sea level. While well-drained and shaded, the area turned muddy in heavy rains. No malaria-bearing mosquitoes were found on the grounds, though they were present nearby. To combat disease, a Malaria Control Unit was established and proved highly effective, drastically reducing sick days caused by dengue and malaria.

Sanitary challenges abounded. Epidemics of a dengue-like illness sidelined up to 12% of personnel at times, and piles of rubbish across the island provided breeding grounds for insects. A joint Army-Navy board was convened on 18 April 1943, and Lieutenant Commander Joseph A. Beauchemin (MC), USNR, was appointed Sanitary Officer. His inspections and reports led to major improvements in hygiene across the base.

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An aerial panorama of Base Hospital #6 at Espiritu Santo, from the south-east. Of greatest interest in this photograph, is the way the buildings have been cleverly built under the coconut palms canopy to provide as much camouflage and sun protection as possible. Photo – US Archives.

Despite frequent rains, mosquito-borne illness, and outbreaks of dengue fever, construction of the hospital buildings began on 27 March 1943 under Commander A.G. Churchill (MC), USNR. Just 65 days later, on 1 June 1943, the hospital formally opened. Initially, buildings were raised on coconut logs, but these quickly decayed in the tropical climate and had to be replaced with creosoted timber. Even treated wood had a lifespan of just 18 months in Santo's harsh conditions.

Hospital wards and quarters were built from Quonset huts – 6 by 11 metres – adapted for tropical use with added ventilation. Three huts formed a "T" shape to house 150 patients with minimal staff. Central hubs connected to these formations contained diet kitchens, exam rooms, and storage. The Operating Suite was built in an "H" layout, with two Quonsets on each side of a central screened frame structure. These housed supply rooms, four operating theatres, an anaesthesia room, and other facilities.

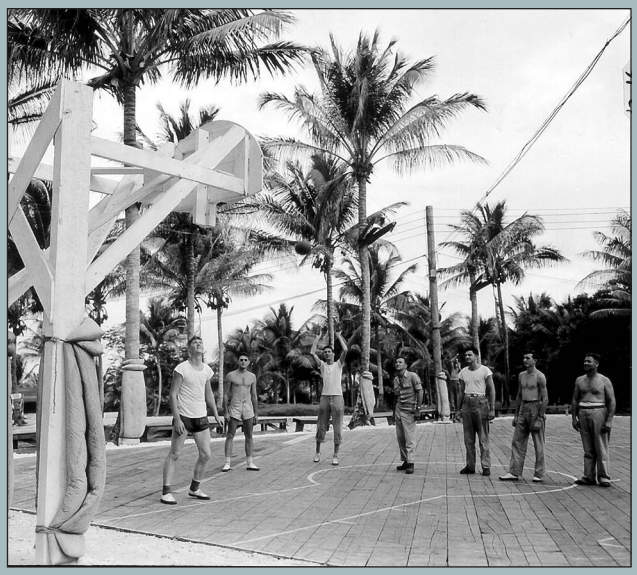
The officers' quarters were well ventilated and comfortable, with Dallas-type huts offering more privacy than Quonsets. Nurses arrived on 7 December 1943 and were housed in similar huts, with their area surrounded by a 4-metre-high wire fence for privacy and security. Their mess was independently managed and overseen by a Ship's Cook First Class. Corpsmen lived in Quonsets between the officers' and nurses' areas, with space later expanded by adding double bunks as the hospital grew.

The mess hall, a screened frame structure with a concrete floor, served both patients and staff. Army B rations formed the basis of meals, with fresh meat arriving in good condition. Other supplies, like powdered eggs and bacon in rock salt, were less appealing. Food for bed patients was delivered hot via the ward kitchens. Despite lacking a separate diet kitchen, inspections ensured food safety and hygiene.

The Corpsmen's quarters at Hospital #6. Again the idea of building under the palm canopy provides camouflage from aerial surveillance and shade from the sweltering summer sun. Photo – US Archives.

(continued...)

Much of the hospital's furniture came from reverse lend-lease and was poorly suited to tropical conditions, often breaking under heavy use. The Army Quartermaster provided food supplies, which were generally good and plentiful. Electricity initially came from mobile units but was connected to the island's main circuit on 26 August 1944. Water was chlorinated at the source and tested weekly, and although toilet and bathing facilities were fewer than typical hospital standards, they were satisfactory. Seven Dodge ambulances were on loan and proved sufficient for patient transport.



The basketball court at Hospital No. 6 was very popular with patients – particularly those from the USA. Photo – US Archives.

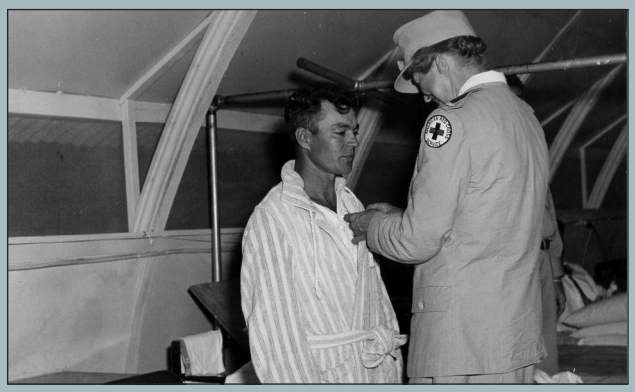
Early recreation was limited, but over time, a baseball and softball field—dedicated to Commander Churchill—was developed. A basketball court was added, and by late 1944, the hospital hosted boat trips, barbecues, and movie screenings for patients and staff. The Red Cross ran a library and games room in the former chapel, while a new chapel accommodated growing religious attendance. Captain E.G. Mott (MC), USN, who took command on 27 September 1944, expanded recreational offerings with sailboats, a speedboat, horseback riding, and more sports courts.

From the beginning, the hospital functioned under the command of Captain Boak as part of LION One. It became a separate command on 2 August 1943, with Captain Johnson formally taking command and Commander O.A. Smith (MC), USN, as Executive Officer.

Bed capacity increased from 600 to 1,000 on 12 July 1943 following a visit by senior Pacific commanders. Leadership then passed to Captain T.S. Morning (MC), USN, on 7 October 1943, and later to Captain Smith on 11 January 1944, with Churchill as Executive Officer. Under Smith's tenure, the hospital became a treatment centre for fatigue and neuroses, with ten psychiatrists joining the staff.

Hospital No. 6's lavishly decorated outdoor cinema. Photo – US Archives.

By 1943, the hospital treated 329 officers, 4,001 enlisted men, and four nurses, with 1,193 surgeries and nine deaths – eight from combat and one from a transfusion reaction. In 1944, it treated 457 officers, 7,846 enlisted men, and 32 nurses, performing 1,621 operations and recording only two deaths. In total, 12,671 patients were admitted, with about 12.5% evacuated for further treatment – mostly neuropsychiatric cases. Despite receiving many battle casualties from forward areas, the overall death rate remained under one percent.



First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt presnts a Purple Heart medal to a patient at Hospital No. 6. Photo – US Archives.

On 1 February 1945, orders were received to dismantle and prepare for redeployment to a forward area, bringing the operations of Base Hospital No. 6 to a close.

Stars Under the Stars

Probably the most memorable chapter in Santo's rich theatrical history involves the story of the USO Entertainment Units. While the Army's Special Service Officer always managed the berthing and routing of these groups, the performers were made available to the Navy as well – and were warmly welcomed and greatly appreciated by Navy personnel.

Over the course of 27 months, between Joe E. Brown's visit in March 1943 and the arrival of a concert group led by soprano Enya Gonzalez in May 1945, Santo hosted 27 USO units of varying style and calibre. Brown's pioneering visit featured just himself and an accompanist, reflecting the limitations of the time.

A publicity photo of Joe E. Brown from the radio program Those Websters. Photo - Wikipedia

Early tours were restricted to all-male casts and small ensembles – typically no more than three members – due to transportation constraints and the lack of accommodations for women performers.

Among the most ambitious and artistically significant of all the USO units was the company of 17 African American musicians who, in March and April 1945, presented a nearly complete stage production of Porgy and Bess – a full-scale musical performance that left a lasting impression.

Soprano singer Polyna Stoska was a favourite opera singer who toured many bases throughout the South Pacific. Photo - Various sources.

Over time, Santo welcomed several celebrated concert artists, including solo soprano Polyna Stoska, sopranos Agnes Davis and Enya Gonzalez, tenors Frederick Jagel and Felix Knight, bass-baritone Kenneth Spencer, violinist Jan Rubini, pianist Stephen Hero, and the great violinist Isaac Stern.

Yet for many Navy men stationed on Santo, the high point of USO entertainment came in August 1944, when two of the biggest names in American show business – Bob Hope and Jack Benny – arrived with their respective star-studded troupes. Their visits, almost back-to-back, created a wave of excitement across the island. The ensembles included glamourous screen personalities such as Carole Landis, Frances Langford, Martha Tilton, and Patty Thomas, as well as comic talents like Jerry Colonna and virtuoso harmonica player Larry Adler.

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Bob Hope, whose arrival had been postponed several times, finally landed on 10 August. Jack Benny followed soon after, arriving on 27 August. Both performers followed an intense two-day schedule that included four open-air shows designed to accommodate the largest possible audiences, along with more intimate performances at base hospitals – where wards were crowded with casualties from the recent Marianas campaign.

Bob Hope shares a joke with soldiers at the 31st General Hospital on Espiritu Santo in 1944. Photo – US Archives.

The response was extraordinary. Hope's show drew a crowd of 18,000, many of whom sat in the mud to watch the performance at NAB Field. Benny's show, which took place just weeks later, brought in a slightly smaller crowd of 15,000, but their reaction was electric. As the base newsletter *The Santonian* reported:

While this crowd is enjoying the Bob Hope show at Richardson Theatre on Kwajalein Island, it's typical of the packed audiences he commanded wherever he went. Photo – US Archives.

Jack Benny and Carole Landis, greeted by a pair of delighted officers as they landed on one of the South Pacific islands; in uniform here, for the shows Jack stuck to civvies.

"Putting on a solid hour and twenty minutes of nothing short of terrific entertainment, and sprinkled, just right with sparkling sugar, the Jack Benny show was hailed as the most outstanding USO performance ever staged here... When the crowd of close to 20,000 who viewed the show Sunday night at NAB Field started to leave after the final number, there was not one who did not agree that the performance that they just saw outshone the Hope unit which appeared here a few weeks back by leaps and bounds..."

Bob Hope and Jerry Colonna perform on stage in Espiritu Santo in 1944. Photo – Still frame from film held in the US Archives.

Beyond Hope and Benny, several other Hollywood stars made successful appearances on Santo. Joe E. Brown returned to enthusiastic audiences, as did entertainer and dancer Ray Bolger. Leading man Randolph Scott performed with help from comic relief Joe Donita, while Ray Milland and actress Martha O'Driscoll also brought welcomed moments of laughter and glamour to weary servicemen stationed far from home.

(continued...)

This is the incredible list of USO Performers who appeared in Navy Theatres on Santo between March 1943 and May 1945:

Joe E. Brown
Johnny Mervin
Jim Burke
Bob Gilchrist
Marty Sunshine
Jan Rubini
Frank Mitchell
Hadie White
Ray Whitely
Abe Sher
Jerry Lawton
Stan Kevanaugh
Peter Kova
George Prentice
John L. Fogarty
Felix Knight
Poogie Poogie (magician)
Ralph Thomas
Ray Bolger
Ten Jack Little
Perker
Jackie Heller
George Finkelberg
Bobby del Rio
George Stalzer
Ralph Kirk
Bob Ripa
Lou Lawrence
Lew Fennard

Harold Maysent
Bud Casanova
Bob Dearborn
Earl Baxter
Buck Harris
Randolph Scott
Joe DeRita
Ray Milland
Mary Elliot
Francine Fay (Twice)
Rosita Moreno
Tommy Hanlon
Nellie Clark
Shirley Wolcott
George Rabone
Billie Mayshell
Alexander Zakin
Polyna Stoska
Isaac Stern
Frederick Jagel
Kenneth Spencer
Freddie Robinson
Flo Robinson
Julie Gardner
Ann Lewis
Don Cummings
Ross Wyse
June Mann
Peggy Alexander

Irving Harris
Bob Hope
Jerry Colonna
Frances Langford
Patty Thomas
Tony Romano
Jack Benny
Carole Landis
Martha Tilton
June Bruner
Larry Adler
Irma Lowe
Judith Wirkman
Garien Roberts
Agnes Davis
Stephen Hero
Rand Smith
Enya Gonzalez
Marguerite Jackinoff
Henry Jeckson
Martha O'Driscoll
Beryl Cuffe
Sid Marion
Sid Gould
Quita Brazil
Joe Darby
Ann Pritchard
Bobbie Martin
Jack Mann

Ruth Foster
Randy Merriman
Phyllis Daye
Evelyn Hill
Linda Jordan
Bill & Pearl Wilson
John Gerth
Frances Brock
Bobby Johnson
William Veasey
Eloise Uggams
Audrey Vanderpool
Gladys Goode
Sol Bryson
George Marshall
Josiah Albright
Robert Woodland
Thomas Moseley
Dave Davies
Catherine VanBuren
Carmine Brown
Judy Latimer
Elizabeth Scott
Frank Richard
Rima Rudina
Esther Miller

Then and now

Another interesting comparison this month. We're looking east along the waterfront in Luganville. The first thing you'll notice is that the area to the right of the main wharf in what was Base Button, has been reclaimed creating the land where Asco Motors, Santo Hardware, etc, are now situated.

During WWII, the main wharf in Luganville had the capacity to have two cargo ships in port and unloading at the same time. That capacity has now been moved to Luganville's main wharf further east.

Asco, on Luganville's main street, is the long building with the almost white roof in the centre of the colour photo and the new Toyota Hilux vehicles out the back on the grass.

What's amazing is just how many Quonset huts were built in Santo at the time. Those on the wharf were the biggest in Santo and by all accounts had the appearance of six aircraft hangars in a row.

The amount of supplies kept in Luganville for resupplying US Navy ships was staggering, hence all the storage capacity throughout town.

Today, most of the Quonset hits are gone and replaced with large modern buildings and new businesses. If you walk around town, particularly in the streets behind the main street, you'll see quite a few Quonsets still in use. Luganville's current wharf is in the top left of the image with its red roofed admin and customs buildings visible.

Inspiring everyday heroes

If you've visited or lived in Vanuatu for any length of time, you'll know the privately driven taxis and vans are everywhere. They're an important local employment

ReGor founders Gordan Alick and his niece Rehab Saul.
Photo – Vanuatu Daily Post.

and essential for many to get quickly around town at a reasonable cost.

This is generally a very usable system – and a great way to meet local people and hear the gossip.

But now in the capital Port Vila, a ride-hailing platform is being trialled that could make things quite different.

Co-owned by Gordan Alick and his niece Rehab Saul, the venture introduces a ride-hailing platform designed specifically for Port Vila. The name 'ReGor' is a combination of the founders' names—Rehab and Gordan.

"The idea behind ReGor Express is to digitalise the current transportation service and go fully digital," Gordan Alick told the Vanuatu Daily Post recently.

They have two apps: one for folks who need a ride (ReGor Riders) and one for the drivers (ReGor Drivers). You tap the app, pick where you want to go, and a close-by driver sees your trip and picks you up. GPS shows the car in real time.

It's target audience is tourists, parents and those needing assured , safe transport.

Now they're setting out on a 12-month business incubation process with V-Lab and YumiWork - programmes funded by the Government of Vanuatu .

One smart part of the app is that mums and dads can plan rides for their kids and see where they are. No more lost fare or wrong turns.

The first test from March to May had some snags. Most old drivers found the app hard to use. They missed ride calls and got lost in the tech.

But that's all part of the learning curve. And we're sure the drivers will still want to tell you what is what!

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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