



**SOUTH PACIFIC WWII  
MUSEUM**  
VANUATU

# South Pacific WWII Museum

Subscriber's newsletter

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**At last. A name  
has a face.**

Merchant Seaman Robert Read

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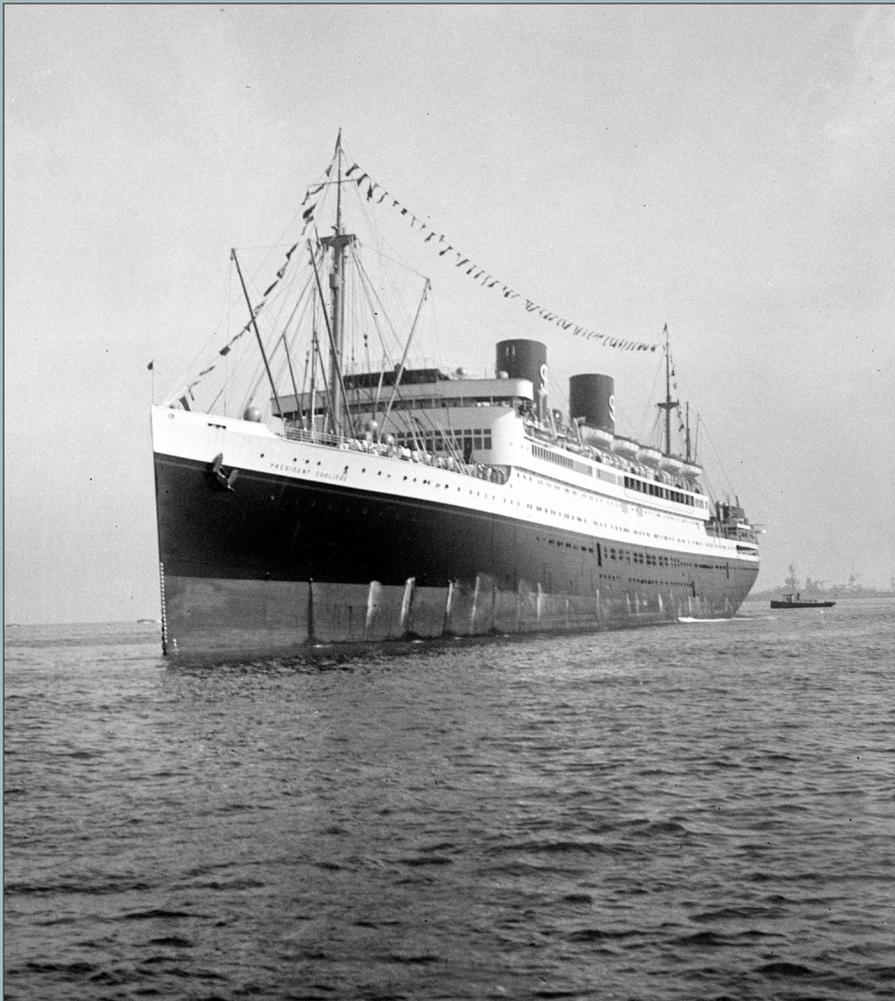


# Bringing Robert Reid home to history

*History is often shaped by the stories we tell — and, just as importantly, by the ones we overlook. In this special feature, we share the story of Robert Reid, a merchant seaman whose life was lost when the SS President Coolidge sank off Espiritu Santo in 1942, and whose name quietly faded from view while others were remembered. What follows is a deeply researched, year-long journey to restore that missing chapter, led by Museum Project Manager Jimmy Carter and supported by extraordinary archival and family research. It is a story about perseverance, memory, and the importance of recognising every life touched by war — not just the most visible acts of heroism.*

For the past twelve months, South Pacific World War II Museum Project Manager Jimmy Carter has been on a quiet but determined mission — one that began with a simple, unsettling realisation.

the SS President Coolidge, there was a name almost entirely missing from the historical record. Many readers may ask the same question Jimmy did at the time: Who was Robert Reid?



The SS President Coolidge in Los Angeles Harbour prior to being acquired for the war effort and turned into a troop ship. Photo – Los Angeles Times Photographic Archives, UCLA - Library Special Collections.

Robert Reid was the *other* man who died when the President Coolidge struck mines and sank off the coast of Espiritu Santo in October 1942. The heroic actions of Elwood J. Euart — who went back into the sinking ship and lead his men to safety before losing his own life — are rightly remembered and well documented. In September 2025, the museum unveiled a life-sized poster honouring Euart's courage.

But Robert Reid? He had all but disappeared from history.

"I felt Robert Reid deserved to be remembered," Jimmy says. "Elwood J. Euart is very well known to us, and to anyone who visits the museum. But Robert has almost been lost to time. He didn't die in a dramatic act of visible heroism — yet he lost his life in the service of freedom all the same. And for decades, we haven't known what he even looked like."

That absence — the lack of a face, a story, a human connection —

became the driving force behind Jimmy's search.

It was late in 2024 when Jimmy recognised that, despite the countless stories told about the sinking of

(continued...)

At first, the trail was frustratingly thin. Online references to Robert Reid were brief and repetitive: the other casualty, a Merchant Marine, killed on the Coolidge. There was no biography, no photograph, no sense of the man behind the name.

The breakthrough came mid-year, when the museum gained access to Individual Deceased Personnel Files (IDPFs) for those who lost their lives on and around Santo during World War II. Among them was an IDPF for Robert Reid.

293 FILE					DATA ON REMAINS NOT YET RECOVERED OR IDENTIFIED						
NAME (Last, First, Middle Initial) Reid, Robert			GRADE Fireman	PRESENT SERIAL NUMBER Z-6087							
ORGANIZATION SS President Coolidge			RACE Filipino	CREED	FORMER SERIAL NUMBER (if applicable)						
DATE OF DEATH/MIA 26 Oct 1942		CAUSE OF DEATH Sinking of Ship		PLACE OF DEATH OR PLACE LAST SEEN IF MIA Espiritu Santo Harbor, New Hebrides Islands.							
HEIGHT 5' 6"	WEIGHT N/R	COLOR EYES Brown	COLOR HAIR Brown	SHOE SIZE N/R							
DENTAL CHART											
UPPER RIGHT					UPPER LEFT						
8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1					1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8						
LOWER RIGHT					LOWER LEFT						
16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9					9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16						
X = Extracted					O = Carious					1 = Carious Non-Restorable	
FRACTURES AND/OR BREAKS None					TATTOOS AND/OR BIRTHMARK None						
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION											

A page from Robert Reid's IDPF file. Jimmy now knew his role on the Coolidge, his serial number and where he was born. Image – South Pacific WWII Museum.

At last, there was something solid.

The file revealed that Robert was a Merchant Marine Fireman, serial number Z-6087, and listed his nationality simply as "Philippine National." It was the first time Robert's identity began to take shape.

Jimmy explored the possibility of locating surviving family members, but navigating Philippine births and deaths records – without language fluency or a clear starting point – proved an overwhelming task. Instead, he turned to official Merchant Marine records, held by the United States Coast Guard.

Through that process, Jimmy finally obtained Robert Reid's DD Form 1300, a document that opened an entirely new door to his identity.

For the first time, Robert had addresses, places, and people attached to his name.

- His home of record at the time of enlistment was listed as 3036 Scott Street, San Francisco.
- His place of birth was Parang, Cotabato, Philippines.
- His mother's address was recorded in the Philippines, and a sister was listed as living in Monterey, California.

REPORT OF CASUALTY				REPORT CONTROL SYMBOL DD-P&R(AR)1664	
1. REPORT TYPE Final			2. DATE PREPARED 20250924		
3. SERVICE IDENTIFICATION					
a. NAME (Last, First, Middle and Suffix) Reid, Robert		b. SOCIAL SECURITY NO. 000-00-0000	c. RANK Unknown	d. PAY GRADE Unknown	e. OCCUPATIONAL CODE RATING 025FW
f. COMPONENT Merchant Marine		g. BRANCH USMS	h. ORGANIZATION American President Lines, 311 California Street, San Francisco, CA		
4. CASUALTY INFORMATION					
a. TYPE Hostile	b. STATUS Missing in Action	c. CATEGORY MIA	d. DATE OF CASUALTY 19421026	e. PLACE OF CASUALTY Luganville Bay, Espiritu Santo Harbor	
5. CIRCUMSTANCES The SS President Coolidge struck two mines at 0935-ship's time on October 26, 1942, while entering Luganville Bay, Espiritu Santo Island, New Hebrides Group, en route from Noumea, New Caledonia. The captain immediately headed the ship for the beach and ordered it abandoned. The ship sank within an hour. Mr. Robert W. Reid honorably served his country with his life, and represents the spirit and sacrifices of the men of the U.S. Merchant Marine.					
6. DUTY STATUS Active Duty, Merchant Marine					
7. BODY RECOVERED No					
8. BACKGROUND INFORMATION					
a. DATE OF BIRTH 19121012		b. PLACE OF BIRTH Parang Cotabato, Philippines		c. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP US	
d. RACE Unknown					
e. ETHNICITY Unknown					
f. SEX Male					
g. RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE Unknown					
9. ACTIVE DUTY INFORMATION					
a. PLACE OF ENTRY Port of Honolulu	b. DATE OF ENTRY 19410605	c. HOME OF RECORD AT TIME OF ENTRY In 1941- 3036 Scott Street, San Francisco CA			
10. INTERESTED PERSONS/REMARKS (Name, Address, and Relationship) (Continue on separate sheet, if necessary)					
Next of Kin 1941: Ms. Crestina Reid (Mother) Sumner Street, Calapan, Rizal, Philippines					
Next of Kin 1942: Mrs. James Streetman (Sister) Camp Ord, Monterey, CA					
This document, issued under the provisions of Public Law 95-202, establishes active duty for the purpose of Department of Veterans Affairs benefits.					
Decorations, medals, badges, citations and campaign ribbons awarded or authorized:					
1) Marine's Medal					
2) Victory Medal					
3) Honorable Service Button					
4) The Presidential Testimonial Letter					
5) Merchant Marine Emblem					
Dates of Service and Discharge Information: See Continuation of DD Form 1300					
FOOTNOTES: 1 Adult next of kin; 2 Beneficiary for gratuity pay in event there is no surviving spouse or child; as designated on record of emergency data; 3 Beneficiary for unpaid pay and allowances; as designated on record of emergency data.					
11. REPORTING INFORMATION					
a. COMMAND AGENCY National Maritime Center				b. SEP 26 9 2025	
9. DISTRIBUTION				10. SIGNATURE ELEMENT	
				P. A. Drayer, CAPT, USCG, Commanding Officer, National Maritime Center	
NOTE: This form may be used to facilitate the making of bonds, the payment of commercial insurance, or in the settlement of any other claim in which proof of death is required.					
DD FORM 1300, MAR 2004 PREVIOUS EDITION MAY BE USED. Aops Professional 7.0					

Robert Reid's DD Form 1300 file revealed even more personal details about him, including all-important home addresses. Image – United States Coast Guard.

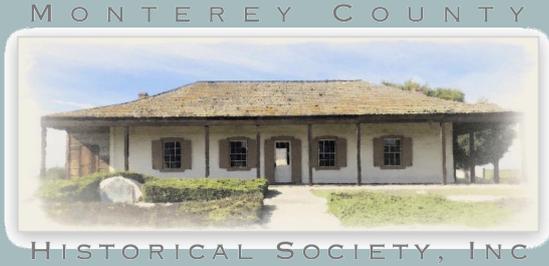
Crucially, the DD Form 1300 permitted Jimmy to formally request Robert's complete personnel and sea service records from the US archives (NARA). The request was submitted – and then delayed, caught among thousands of others, following staffing dismissals and a major budget impasse in Congress.

With nothing to do but wait, Jimmy followed another lead: Monterey, California, USA.

Through virtual research, he contacted

(continued...)

the Monterey County Historical Society, explaining his search and the connection to Robert's sister. The response was immediate and generous. Jimmy was soon put in touch with volunteer researcher Shelley McFadden, an expert in family histories.



"She said she'd see what she could find," Jimmy recalls. "And within days, she came back with more than I ever imagined."

What Shelley McFadden uncovered was not simply a family tree, but a portrait of a large, widely scattered family shaped by service, migration and war.

Robert Reid was born on 12 October 1912 at Ludlow Barracks, Mindanao, in what was then the American-administered Philippines. His father, Burt Julian Reid, was a veteran of the Spanish-American War who remained in the Philippines as a civil engineer after his military service. His mother, Cristeta de Saavedra

Larracas, was born in Cotabato City. Together, they built a life that bridged two nations and produced a remarkable family.

Robert was one of at least eleven children — possibly more — and Shelley was able to document the lives of those siblings across decades and continents. Their stories reflect both the opportunities and the profound costs of the 20th century.

The eldest daughter, Margaret Isabella Reid, married Frederick Wilhelm Berner and died young, leaving behind a child who was raised within the wider Reid household. Robert himself — known within the family as Bobby or Bobbie — would die at just 30 years of age aboard the SS President Coolidge, his final resting place remaining in the wreck itself off Santo.

This California, US Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists for 1882-1959, shows the arrival of Robert Reid's parents to the United States. Burt and Cristeta Reid's names are listed in the bottom half dozen names. Image – Shelley McFadden/ancestry.com.

Robert Reid's birth certificate - U.S. Carded Birth Records in Military Hospitals, 1884-1916 for Burt J. Reid. Image – Shelley McFadden/ancestry.com.

(continued...)

1336 - Scott St. 288-A

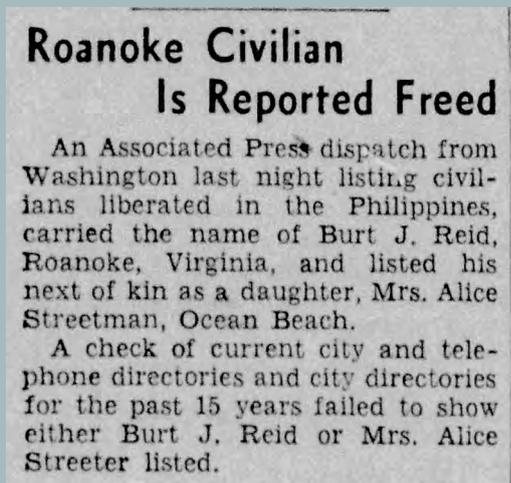
SERIAL NUMBER 3586	1. NAME (Print) CHARLES LARACCAS REID	ORDER NUMBER 288A
2. ADDRESS (Print) 10th AVE. BALINTAWAKEST, CALOOCAN RIZAL, P.I.		
3. TELEPHONE	4. AGE IN YEARS 25	5. PLACE OF BIRTH PARANG
	DATE OF BIRTH March 3 1915	6. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP U. S. A.
7. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS MR. BURT JULIAN REID		8. RELATIONSHIP OF THAT PERSON FATHER
9. ADDRESS OF THAT PERSON 10th AVE. BALINTAWAKEST, CALOOCAN RIZAL, P.I.		
10. EMPLOYER'S NAME AM. PRES. LIVES - Pres. Coolidge		
11. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS		
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.		
REGISTRATION CARD D. S. R. FORM 1		Charles L Reid (Registrar's signature)

Charles Laraccas Reid WWII Draft Registration - Dated: 23 Nov 1940. Interestingly, ancestry.com indicates that he was also connected to the SS President Coolidge. Image - Shelley McFadden/ancestry.com.

Another brother, Charles Larracas Reid, also lost his life in service. Born in 1915, Charles served in the European Theatre during World War II and was killed in January 1945. Two brothers, two wars, two continents — a stark reminder of how deeply this family was touched by global conflict.

Several sisters' lives illustrate the family's continued connection to military service. Alice Reid married U.S. Army officer James Streetman, who was stationed at Fort Ord in California during the war years. This connection later proved vital in reuniting family members after 1945, when relatives were recovered from the Philippines and resettled in the United States.

Other siblings went on to live long lives across California, Oregon and Texas. Elizabeth "Betty" Reid



Burt J. Reid Civilian Liberated in Philippines. Clipping - The Roanoke Times, Roanoke, VA, Monday, 26 Feb 1945, Page: 3/ Shelley McFadden.

Redding lived to the age of 94. Cora Reid later married U.S. Navy Captain Oscar D. Brown Jr., a veteran of both the Korean and Vietnam wars, and is buried in a national cemetery. The family's story continued to intertwine with service long after Robert's death.

**Cora R. Brown**



**ARLINGTON** — Cora R. Brown, 75, a homemaker, passed away Wednesday, Feb. 20, 2002 in Fort Worth.

**Memorial service:** 3:30 p.m. Monday, Moore Funeral Home Chapel, Arlington.

**Memorials:** In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made in Cora's memory to Odyssey HealthCare Inc., 1200 Summit Ave., Suite 770, Fort Worth, Texas 76102.

Cora R. Brown was born Dec. 1, 1926 in Manila, Philippines. Cora was a loving and faithful wife who supported her husband in a 24 year Navy career. She was the wind beneath his wings.

**Survivors:** Husband of 45 years, Oscar Brown; brother, Jimmy Reid; sisters, Elizabeth Redding, Evelyn Pope and Nora Sharp; niece, Ethel Skelton.

Moore Funeral Home-N. Davis Drive  
Arlington, (817) 275-2711

Cora R. Brown Obituary - Star-Telegram, Fort Worth, TX, Sunday, 24 Feb 2002, Page: 7B page: 35). Image - newspapers.com/ Shelley McFadden.

What emerges from Shelley's research is a picture of a large, close-knit family shaped by duty, displacement and resilience. Robert Reid was not an isolated figure lost at sea — he was part of a living, (continued..)

breathing network of brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews whose lives unfolded in the long shadow of war.

Yet still, one vital piece was missing: a photograph.

Jimmy pursued another avenue through Find A Grave, where Robert Reid had been memorialised online. That connection led him to Micah Mallory, who had created the memorial. Through her research, Robert's draft card was located – filling further gaps, but still no photo.

**1. NAME (Print)**  
 Robert Reid  
**ORDER NUMBER**  
 1673-D

**2. ADDRESS (Print)**  
 1336 Scott St. Suisun Calif

**3. TELEPHONE**  
 29  
**4. AGE IN YEARS**  
 29  
**5. PLACE OF BIRTH**  
 Suisun  
**6. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP**  
 U.S.A.

**7. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS**  
 Mr. Marlin  
**8. RELATIONSHIP OF THAT PERSON**  
 Uncle

**9. ADDRESS OF THAT PERSON**  
 1336 Scott St. Suisun Calif

**10. EMPLOYER'S NAME**  
 Seaman

**11. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS**  
 Seaman

**12. SIGNATURE**  
 Robert Reid

Robert Reid's draft card was located by Micah Mallory and once again added more detail to the story. Image – Micah Mallory.

Then, in December, the long-awaited response arrived from NARA.

Thirty-three pages of valuable material – discharge papers, medical reports, telegrams, Certificates of Service. And finally... two photographs of Robert Reid.

Jimmy remembers the moment clearly.

"After more than a year of searching and years of just wondering, suddenly there he was," he says. "A face. A young man looking back at us from history. It stopped me in my tracks. Robert Reid was no longer just 'the other man' who died on the Coolidge.

**STATEMENT OF SERVICE**

Name of Vessel	Nationality of Vessel	Station and Type of Vessel	Class of Rating	Rating of Rating	Date of Report	Date of Discharge	Master's Name
Fres.	U.S.	Steer	12,560	Wiper	5/19/41	5/11/41	C.A. Pierce
Taft	U.S.	Steer	6,413	Wiper	6/28/41	7/15/41	S.E. Smith
Belknap	U.S.	Steer	21,936	Wiper	3/10/42	3/13/42	H. Nelson
Coolidge	U.S.	Steer	21,936	Wiper	7/31/41	11/30/41	Leknes
American	U.S.	Steer	21,936	Wiper	3/14/42	5/8/42	H. Nelson
Polk	U.S.	Steer	5,924	Fireman	12/27/41	2/7/42	L.D. York

**Total Sea Service: 6 Mos. 2 days.**

Reid's Statement of Service shows he held the position of 'Wiper' (someone who keeps the engine spaces clean), in the engine room of a number of ships, before being promoted to Fireman. Image – US Archives NARA.

He was someone's son, someone's brother – a man with a life, a past, and a future that was taken far too early.

**PHOTOGRAPH**

Whoever receives or has in his possession with intent to unlawfully use, or uses or exhibits a certificate to which he is not lawfully entitled; or alters, changes, counterfeits, forges, or steals such a certificate, or unlawfully has in his possession any blank form thereof, or aids or abets the perpetration of any of the above, shall be liable to a fine of not more than \$5,000, or imprisonment for not more than 5 years, or both.

Port of Honolulu Date June 5, 1941

I, Robert Reid, hereby acknowledge receipt of

book No. \_\_\_\_\_, and/or

Certificate of Identification No. Z-6087

Certificate of Efficiency as Lifeboat Man No. \_\_\_\_\_

Certificate of Service as Wiper No. B-501445

Certificate of Service as \_\_\_\_\_ No. \_\_\_\_\_

I have read and fully understand the law and penalties for acting, illegal possession, and other misuses of the same, and the duties and responsibilities in connection therewith.

Robert Reid  
 (Applicant's signature)

I HEREBY CERTIFY that I have examined the above-named applicant and he has satisfied me as to the truth of his statements. I have accordingly issued him the above documents.

Robert K. Williamson  
 U. S. Local Inspector  
 (Signature and official title)

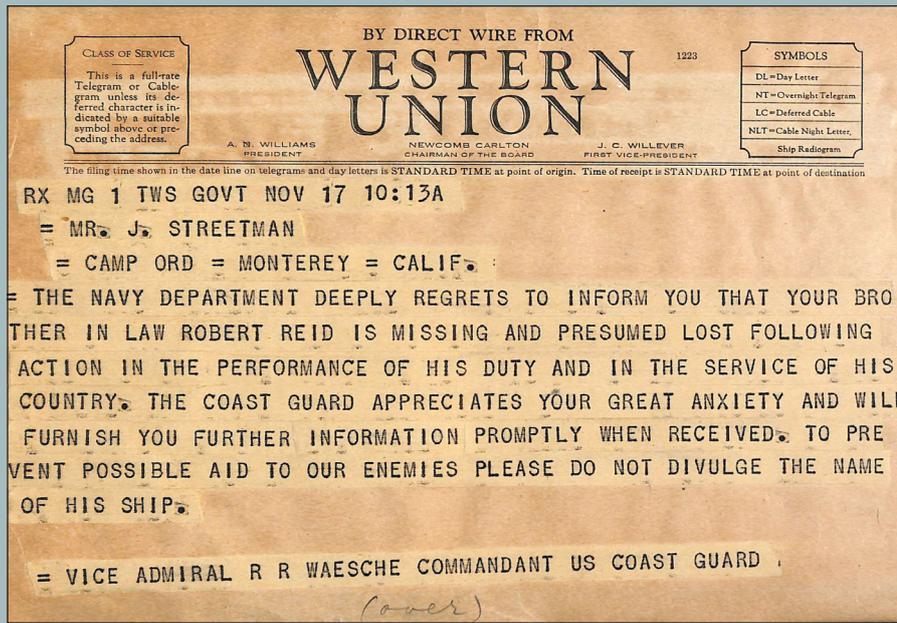
**FINGER PRINTS**  
 (Left hand) (Right hand)

Being able to put a face to his name felt like restoring something that should never have been lost. This wasn't about rewriting history – it was about completing it. About finally acknowledging Robert's service and sacrifice and giving him the recognition he has been denied for more than eighty years."

The next step is clear.

The South Pacific World War II Museum will now create a dedicated poster display honouring Robert W. Reid – placing him in the Museum's Coolidge area, where he belongs. It will tell his story, show his face, and ensure that visitors understand that two men lost their lives when the President Coolidge sank.

(continued...)



The South Pacific WWII Museum extends its heartfelt thanks to Shelley McFadden of the Monterey County Historical Society for her extraordinary research and generosity; to Micah Mallory for uncovering Robert's draft card; to Autumn Burkholder of the United States Coast Guard National Maritime Centre for guiding the records process; and to George Fuller, Archives Specialist at the National Archives and Records Administration, for his assistance in locating and digitising Robert Reid's files.

The telegram addressed to Reid's brother-in-law notifying the family of the death of Robert Reid on the Coolidge. Image – US Archives NARA.

Because of their collective efforts, a forgotten seaman has finally been brought home — not to a grave, but to memory.

This project is about more than a display. It is about balance, fairness, and memory. It is about recognising that history is made up not only of famous names and dramatic acts, but also of quieter sacrifices that deserve equal respect.

At last, Robert Reid is no longer lost to history.

Form 883 Book No. 2 6087

RECORD OF CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE  
ISSUED TO QUALIFIED MEMBER OF THE ENGINE DEPARTMENT

Name Robert Reid Rating Fireman  
Address 1336 Scott St San Francisco Calif  
Citizen of U.S.A. Native, naturalized or alien P.N.  
Date of Birth Oct 12 - 1912 Place of Birth P.S.  
Serial number of certificate C59695  
Date of issue of certificate MAY 18 1942  
Kind of waters for which issued Ocean  
Issued by U. S. Board of Local Inspectors at San Francisco, Cal.  
John P. Tibbette  
Harry V. Barbieri  
U. S. Board of Local Inspectors

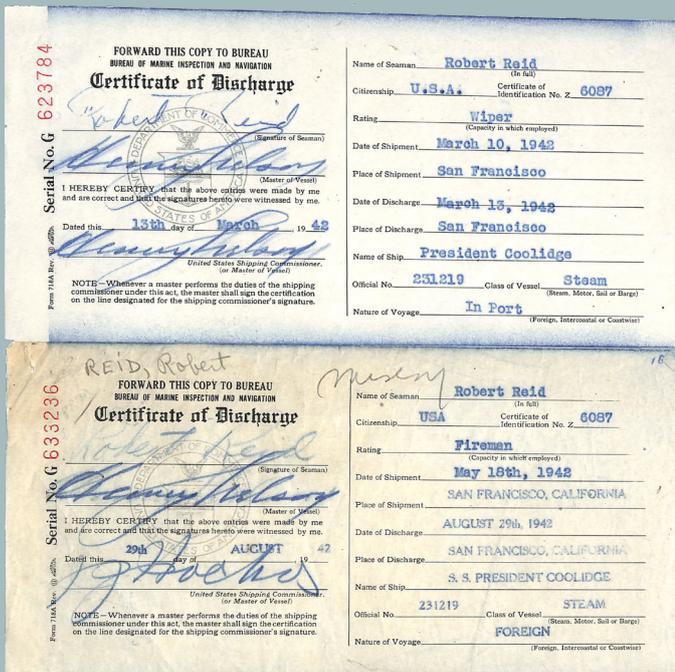
(To be forwarded to Bureau)

Rated qualified member of the Engine Department upon examination as to his knowledge of the duties of \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Seaman Robert Reid

Thumb Print

Reid's Record of Certificate which ensured he was qualified to work in the engine room of the Coolidge. Image – US Archives NARA.



Two of Reid's Certificates of Discharge from time aboard the Coolidge prior to joining it for its voyage to Santo. Image – US Archives NARA.

# A nurse's story returns

During World War II, the US Army 25th Evacuation Hospital on Espiritu Santo was a lifeline for soldiers returning from the Solomon Islands, New Guinea, Guam, and Saipan. Among the remarkable nurses who served there was Angelina Mango, a young woman from Upton, Massachusetts, whose courage, skill, and compassion left an enduring mark on the island.



Angelina Mango (second from left), and some of her fellow Santo nurses in dress uniform. Photo – John Anderson and sources.

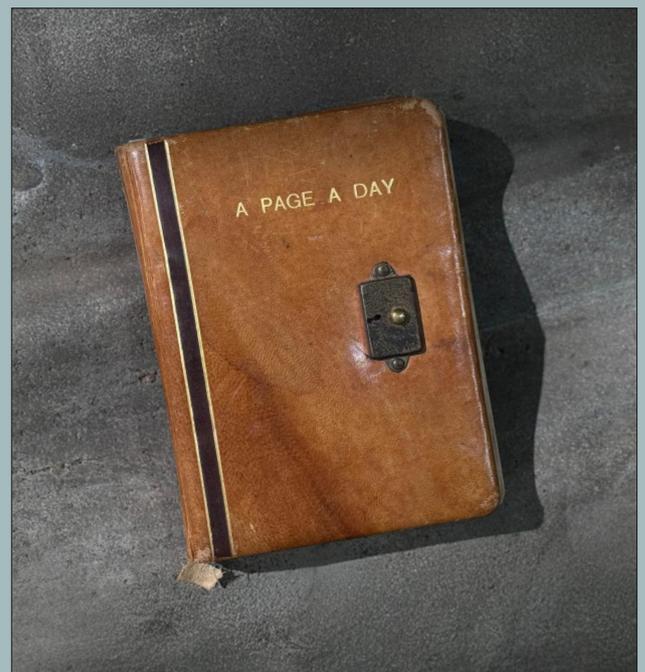
Angelina joined the Army Nurse Corps in 1942, just as the war in the Pacific intensified. She endured long voyages, tropical illnesses, and the daily pressure of caring for hundreds of wounded men. Her diary, kept diligently throughout her service, records the challenges she faced—from treating malaria and dengue to caring for soldiers with severe battle injuries—alongside moments of joy, friendships, and even romance. It was on Santo that Angelina met her future husband, 1st Lt. Gustavus “Andy” Anderson Jr., and their story of love blossomed amidst the chaos of war.



1st Lt. Angelina (Mango) Anderson, Capt. Gustavus Anderson, 1st Lt. Blanche L Scherman, Colonel Walter Stevenson. Photo – John Anderson.

Years later, Angelina's son, Dr. John Anderson, discovered her military records, photographs, letters, and diary. He was determined to preserve and share her story. In 2020, during the height of pandemic lockdowns, John reached out to the South Pacific WWII Museum for assistance in producing a presentation about his mother's service. Museum Project Manager Jimmy Carter suggested a short video would bring the story to life more vividly than a conventional slideshow.

Over weeks of careful collaboration—script writing, research, and editing—John recorded voiceovers from his home in Baltimore while Jimmy edited the footage from Melbourne, Australia. The result was a heartfelt, detailed account of Angelina's experiences on Santo, illustrating both the harsh realities of war and the personal resilience of the nurses who served. The video, now available on the Museum's YouTube channel, captures the spirit of Angelina Mango and the dedication of her colleagues in the 25th Evacuation Hospital.



Angelina Mango's wartime diary that her son and museum supporter Dr John Anderson has donated to the museum. Photo – Lemy Nacisse.

(continued..)



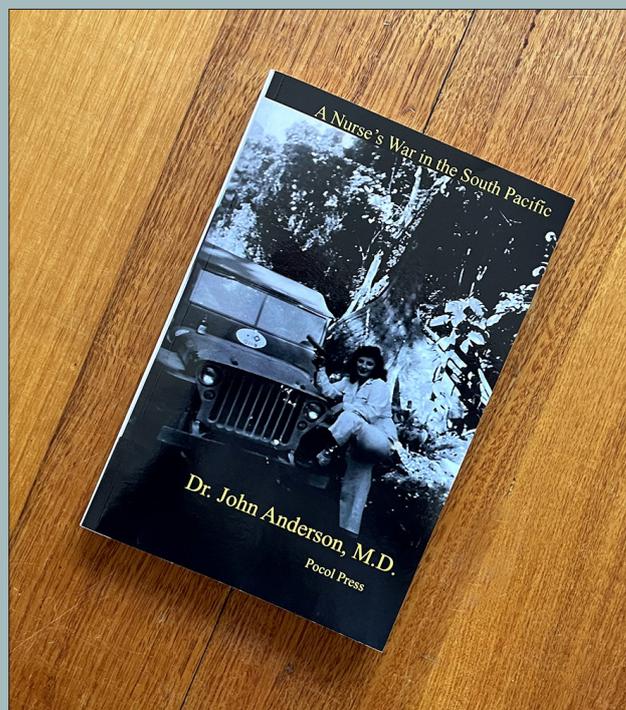
On her recent visit to the museum, Susan Bayliss presents Angelina Mango's diary, photos, newspapers and other precious keepsakes to Museum Support Officer Marina Moli. Photo – Lemy Nacisse.

Recently, the diary made its way to the Museum in a very special way. Susan Bayliss, whose father also served at the 25th Evacuation Hospital, personally carried the diary on a cruise to Santo.

John Anderson entrusted the diary and other materials to Susan, who then delivered them to the Museum. This extraordinary connection—through a family who shared the same wartime service—ensured that Angelina's diary arrived safely and directly into the care of the Museum.

The Museum is deeply grateful for John's generosity and Susan's role in bringing this treasure to us. We are committed to preserving the diary to the highest standards and, in time, displaying it so visitors can experience Angelina's first-hand account of life on Santo during the war.

This diary is more than a record—it is a living link to the past, a testament to courage, service, and humanity amidst the turmoil of war. Through her diary, and John and Susan's dedication, Angelina Mango's legacy continues to inspire and educate new generations.



John Anderson's book, *A Nurse's War in the South Pacific*, brings his mother's wartime experiences to life and is available at amazon.com Photo – Jimmy Carter.



Angelina and Gustavus' marriage certificate, was also donated to the museum. Document – John Anderson.

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## THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

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# The logistics behind Okinawa

Iceberg is second only to D-Day as the largest amphibious invasion in history. Half a million personnel and 1500 ships would take part.

The United States suffered over 49,000 casualties, including approximately 12,500 killed—including

the Navy's highest toll in a single campaign due to relentless kamikaze attacks. Roughly 110,000 Japanese soldiers were killed, while an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 Okinawan civilians perished.

While the battle took place on Japan's doorstep, its success was rooted in the massive logistics engine at Espiritu Santo. Under the leadership of Commodore R. O. Glover, Commander Service Squadron South Pacific Force, the Second Channel served as the primary "mother base" for the forces preparing for the assault.



Logistics on a scale never seen before in combat. The fleet forms up in Ulithi Atoll as seen from an aircraft from the USS Cumberland. Photo – Reddit/US Navy.

Looking at lines on a map, of the battle of the Pacific, it can be easy to assume that Espiritu Santo and the New Hebrides eventually became a backwater.

After all, the Solomons were largely secured or left to wither on the vine during 1943, and in 1944 the US demonstrated an unrivalled ability to send ships, planes, and troops deep into the islands much closer towards Japan.

But perhaps Espiritu's greatest role would come in the lead-up to and undertaking of Operation Iceberg – the invasion of Okinawa. As the old analogy goes, if the fighting was the visible part, much larger but invisible, was the logistics behind it.



In the most spectacular kamikaze strike of the Okinawa operation, Lieutenant (junior grade) Shunsuke Tomyasu flew his Zero into the USS Enterprise (CV-6), and the detonation of the plane's 500-kilogram bomb blasted the carrier's forward elevator more than 400 feet into the air.

Photo – US Naval Institute.

(continued..)

Crucially, the staging for the invasion was decentralized to prevent logistical bottlenecks. The Southern Attack Force (Task Force 62), was staged and logistically supported in the Guadalcanal and Florida Island area.



Base Button on Santo was staggering in its size and its ability to equip and supply US forces over and over again with everything they needed for Operation Iceberg, was why it was chosen as the support hub for the Southern Attack Force. Photo – US Archives.

Because the Southern Force was positioned in the Solomons, Espiritu Santo became its vital support hub.

Commodore Glover dispatched a sophisticated fleet of floating repair facilities from the Second Channel to these forward staging areas.



The numbers are staggering. By July of 1943 the Americans were erecting fifty 10,000-barrel fuel-oil storage tanks on Aore Island (where this photo was taken) at Espiritu, as well as tanks holding 20,000 barrels of Diesel fuel, 17,000 barrels of motor gasoline, and twenty-three 1,000-barrel aviation-gasoline tanks. The tank farms and fifty 10,000-barrel storage tanks were connected with a pipeline system and pumps capable of handling 350 gallons a minute. Photo – US Archives.

One of the most significant achievements of the Espiritu Santo command was solving the chronic "spare parts" problem. In many previous Pacific operations, ships had to go into battle with jury-rigged repairs due to a lack of components. However, nearly every ship in the Southern Attack Force departed for Okinawa with its full allowance of spare parts and general stores.

Furthermore, Espiritu Santo served as the specific staging ground for the 27th Infantry Division, which acted as the Floating Reserve. This allowed these troops to remain in a secure rear area until they were summoned to the high-casualty fighting on Okinawa.

That did not take long.



Members of the 27th Infantry Division, a New York State National Guard unit, come ashore on Makin Island, November 1943. The 27th's losses for the campaign came to nearly 4,000 officers and men. The survivors were sent to Espiritu Santo and spent the next six months recuperating and training before departing for Okinawa on March 25, 1945. The New Yorkers came ashore on Okinawa on April 9, 1945. Photo – Warfare History Network.

The primary source for this article is *Beans, Bullets and Black Oil*, the definitive retelling of the logistics behind the war in the Pacific.

# William's second salvo

In the October 2025 issue of our newsletter, we shared the story of William Stevens, who generously donated a brass handwheel from one of the anti-aircraft guns aboard the SS President Coolidge – a remarkable addition to our collection.

This month, we are delighted to report that William has once again added to the museum's growing collection, with several thoughtful and historically rich donations.

The first is a commemorative teaspoon marking the inauguration of President Calvin Coolidge – a small but fitting piece that will sit perfectly within our Coolidge collection and adds a personal, human scale to the story of the ship.



The silver Calvin Coolidge teaspoon donated by William Stevens. Photo – Jimmy Carter.

William has also donated two particularly special items: a pair of United States military medals classified as “new old stock.” These medals were never issued and remain in their original boxes, complete with uniform ribbons — a rare find in such pristine condition.

The first is the American Campaign Medal, established on 6 November 1942 by Executive Order 9265, signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. It recognised service within the American Theatre of Operations during World War II.

The second is the Asiatic–Pacific Campaign Medal, awarded to members of the U.S. Armed Forces who served in the Asiatic-Pacific Theatre between 1941 and 1945. Created under the same executive order, the medal's obverse was designed by Thomas Hudson Jones, with the reverse by Adolph Alexander Weinman — a design shared with several other WWII campaign medals.



The two medals donated by William. On the left is the American Campaign Medal and on the right is the Asiatic–Pacific Campaign Medal. Photo – Jimmy Carter.

We are now considering the best way to display these medals so they can be properly appreciated by visitors.

Our sincere thanks to William Stevens for his continued generosity, support, and interest in the South Pacific WWII Museum.

# Diplomacy meets history

Amid recent changes to U.S. Embassy staffing across the Pacific, the South Pacific WWII Museum was pleased to welcome Sally Waley, Political and Economic Section Chief at the U.S. Embassy in Port Vila, who was visiting Santo with her fiancée in late January.



Bradley Wood explains the roles of famous people we have immortalised in posters along one wall of the museum. Photo – Lemy Nacisse.

Museum Chairman Bradley Wood hosted the couple for a guided tour, sharing the story of Espiritu Santo's extraordinary role during World War II and the immense scale of Base Button at its wartime peak. Like so many visitors before them, Sally and her fiancée were struck by the sheer size and significance of the Allied presence on Santo, and by the lasting impact it continues to have on Luganville and Vanuatu today.



Nothing like having the chairman put on a show for visiting VIPs. He can really tell a story. Photo – Lemy Nacisse.

The visit also provided an opportunity to discuss the Museum's work more broadly. Bradley spoke about previous engagements with U.S. Ambassadors, noting the genuine enthusiasm shown for the Museum's mission, while also acknowledging that progress has not always matched intent. These conversations are an important part of building understanding and momentum for the future.

We greatly appreciated the time Sally and her fiancée made to visit the Museum during their stay on Santo. We look forward to keeping in touch and exploring opportunities to further strengthen our relationship, as we continue to share and preserve this important chapter of shared history.



From left to right, Museum Board Member and volunteer, Lemy Nacisse, Sally Waley, Museum Support Officer Marina Moli and Museum Chairman Bradley Wood.

# Surveying silent skies

Sealark Exploration continued its investigation of WWII MIA and aircraft crash sites around Efate Island in January 2026, undertaking an intensive program of research both on land and underwater. The aim of the work was to gather intelligence on unresolved WWII MIA sites, record abandoned American airfields, and create detailed archaeological records of known aircraft crash locations.

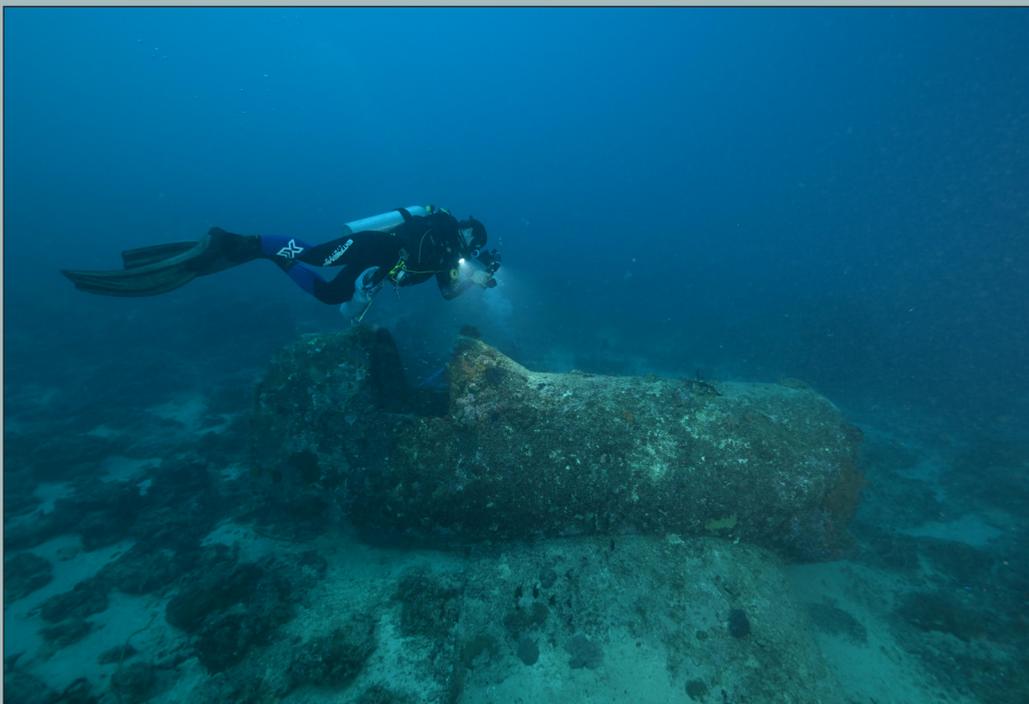
During the expedition, two submerged F4U-1 Corsair sites were documented using photogrammetry, while a land-based Corsair site was recorded through 3D photography and videography. Significantly, two Corsair sites were fully identified by serial number



One of the most challenging sites surveyed was the so-called "Deep" Corsair, located in the channel between Quion Hill airfield and Pele Island. Strong,

constant currents made the dive demanding, but meaningful progress was achieved. The aircraft, originally resting on the reef top, had been backwashed by cyclonic seas to a depth of 29.3 metres, with its engine separated at 19.6 metres. Over the past decade, repeated mechanical wave action from frequent cyclones has also broken off the empennage, which has

not yet been relocated.



Mack Stevenson scientifically records the site with video. Photo – Ewan Stevenson.

for the first time. Interviews with locals also revealed information on six previously undocumented aircraft crash sites, an unexpected and valuable outcome. Based on Sealark's documentary research and compilation, there are at least 36 aircraft known to have crashed in the waters off Efate Island, with at least 37 associated MIA aviators.

Sealark Exploration determined that this site requires urgent survey due to its environmental vulnerability. Although non-destructive, "no-take" serial number identification methods were employed, severe corrosion remains a challenge, though further options are being explored.

(continued..)



Note the 'lump' in the canopy indicating an early 'Birdcage' model of Corsair. Inside the lump was mounted a Liberty 749 rearview mirror. Photo – Ewan Stevenson.

Due to its conditions and remote location, the site is not frequently dived.

Sealark Exploration extends its sincere thanks to Peter Whitelaw of Sailaway Charters and Willie Kenneth, a Ni-Vanuatu from Worasiviu Village on Pele Island, for their outstanding organisation and local expertise. Diving support was provided by John Warmington of Critterspotter.com (also known on Facebook as critterspotterjohn). During a surface interval, the team



A delightful lunch in the shade at Worasiviu village, Pele Island. Left to right, John Warmington, Peter Whitelaw and Mack Stevenson. Photo – Ewan Stevenson.

was warmly hosted at Willie's village, where a generous lunch – including a much-praised chicken casserole – was enjoyed by everyone.

Willie Kenneth also led and managed the diving operations, earning praise for his reliability and precision. A committed conservationist, he maintains a coral farm off his village and runs snorkelling tours. His coral farm and surrounding reef are widely regarded as among the best in the area, with visitor pick-ups easily arranged from Emua Wharf.



Sealark divers continue documenting the Corsair as Willie Kenneth swims towards camera. Photo – Ewan Stevenson.

Divers are advised that the Deep Corsair lies in strong, continuous current and should only be attempted by fit, experienced SCUBA divers. Willie Kenneth can be contacted via Facebook at "Pele Island Coral Garden Tour."

The work by Sealark Exploration adds important detail to the growing record of WWII aviation activity around Efate, ensuring that both the aircraft and the men associated with them are documented, protected, and remembered.

# Bones of My Grandfather

## By Clay Bonnyman Evans

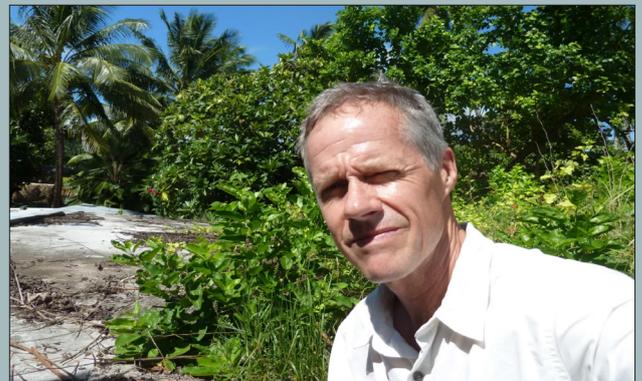
A book review by Tammi Johnson

Every WWII veteran has a remarkable story. Some, however, are so extraordinary that there may not be another that compares. Such is the case with this book by Clay Evans. Over the decades I've had the pleasure of meeting or coming in contact with sons, daughters, nieces and nephews and grandchildren of these men and women. Clay is the grandson of Alexander Bonnyman, a casualty of the Battle of Tarawa on Betio Island in late November 20-23rd of 1943. Many of the family members mentioned above have researched and even written about their relatives or ancestors, some have published books. But not one of them had an experience like Clay, being present on this island far out in the South Pacific when the remains of his grandfather were found and positively identified – by a gold tooth.



Marine 1st Lt. Alexander Bonnyman, Jr. Photo – Clay Bonnyman Evans.

For many years Clay had worked hard to locate his grandfather's remains and bring them home to bury with his family in Tennessee. Several trips to Betio in the Marshall Island group and working with Mark Noah and History Flight finally paid off. There were many obstacles to overcome, in particular the intervention and control by JPAC (Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command), now renamed the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA and under new management). According to their mode of operation, no one else was allowed to do this type of recovery work. History Flight works completely independently, uses different funding sources with predominantly volunteers. In sharing their information on their finds on Betio, JPAC proceeded to shut them



Clay Bonnyman Evans atop "Bonnyman's Bunker," where his grandfather was killed on November 22, 1943. Photo – Clay Bonnyman Evans.

down and tried to shut them out of the recovery, including denying Clay access to the recovery efforts. Says Noah, "One of my strongest points is that I'm hard as nails, and I've never taken shit from them [JPAC]. They tried to undermine me every way they could. They started their big slander campaign, and it blew up in their faces. But they didn't know me very well, and every time they pulled anything, we doubled down and made our efforts even more successful."

(continued..)

Clay won the battle in the long run. On June 1st, 2015, Marine 1st Lt. Alexander Bonnyman, Jr. was found. Clay had a video recorder at hand, but these are his words



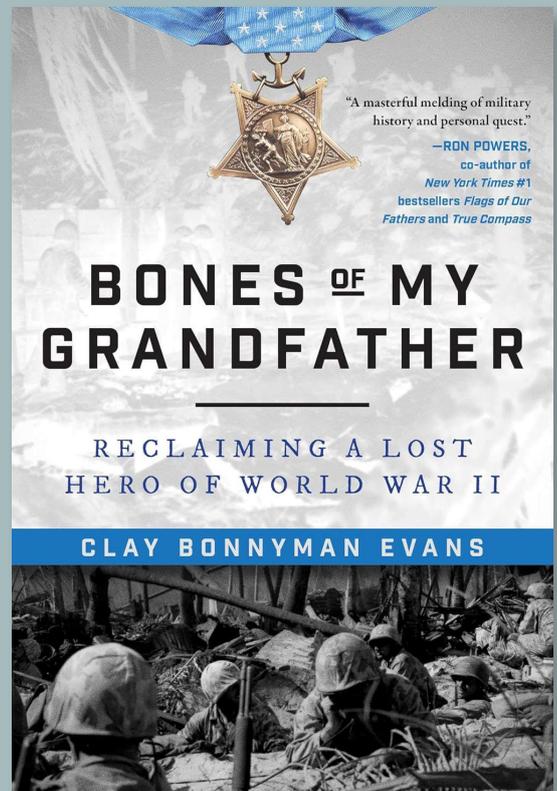
The skeletal remains of First Lt. Alexander Bonnyman Jr., with gold dental work visible. Photo – Clay Bonnyman Evans.

“I should have steadied my hand and kept the video camera rolling. Instead, my body yielded involuntarily to a sudden, powerful yearning to freeze everything around me so I could experience that instant fully, for as long as I desired. I found myself thinking – as I often do – about Tolkien's great quest story, *The Lord of the Rings*, thinking that this was how Frodo and Sam must have felt at the end of their seemingly impossible quest, the world collapsing around them.”

Lt. Bonnyman was a tall man with a gold tooth that solidified his identity in Cemetery 27 where the remains of many of the 1,100 Americans killed were interred.

There is so much emotion to this story that cannot be captured in a book review. I highly recommend this book and be prepared to have big feelings.

Tammi Johnson  
January 2026



# Young volunteers make space

Late in December, Museum volunteer and board member Lemy Nacisse was mentoring a team of young people visiting Luganville. During their time on Santo, the group generously volunteered across a range of community projects — and we were fortunate to have them lend a hand at the Museum as well.

Lemy's team wasted no time getting to work and did an outstanding job sorting, organising and restoring order to the container. Thanks to their efforts, everything is now clearly laid out and easy to access — a huge help when Marina needs to find equipment at short notice.

It's a perfect example of how teamwork and community spirit quietly make a big difference behind the scenes at the Museum.



The volunteers faced a considerable challenge getting everything out and making the space useable again. Photo – Lemy Nacisse.



Museum Support Officer Marina Moli was so grateful for all the work the volunteers did. Photo – Lemy Nacisse.

One task high on our wish list was tackling the Swire shipping container. Over the past 12 months it had become home to several large, stored exhibits, including aircraft parts, along with various ancillary items used at the wharf during cruise ship visits. Inevitably, it had become a little crowded and in need of a thorough tidy-up.



Larger aircraft parts were taken out, sorted and repacked in the container. Photo – Lemy Nacisse.

# Cruise crowds come ashore

Our December newsletter went out a little earlier than usual and so we missed the opportunity to share some of the late-month cruise ship activity at the museum.

On 23 December, Voyager of the Seas dropped anchor in Luganville, followed just days later by MS Regatta, which berthed at the Luganville wharf on 28 December. Then on 2 January, Carnival Splendour paid us a visit.

Museum Support Officer Marina Moli and board member Lemy Nacisse were kept exceptionally busy welcoming guests and sharing the museum's stories.

A big thanks to Lemy's quick thinking, additional volunteers from YWAM who stepped in to help manage the Regatta crowds and to everyone who pitched in and helped make both visits a success.



# Then and now - Havannah Harbour

Recently, Museum advisor, military historian and font of information regarding crashed aircraft in the Pacific, Ewan Stevenson, was in Efate with his son. Their mission was to document as many of the crashed aircraft in the area as possible. Ewan is

one of the founding directors in Sealark Exploration, a not-for-profit organisation focused on surveying and preserving aircraft wrecks throughout the Pacific.

Based on photographs of the harbour airfield in 1943 supplied by the South Pacific WWII Museum, Ewan and his son matched the original with new photos taken from their drone.

The airfield was swallowed up by jungle until recently when local developers cleared it again. The plan is to get the airfield up and running again as part of the new Havannah Harbour marina project.



The Havannah Harbour airfield as it was back in 1943. The airfield was located on the northern coast of Efate Island. Photo – US Archives.



Havannah Harbour airfield as it is today, following clearing of the jungle as part of the new Havannah Harbour project. Photo – Ewan Stevenson.

# Where war met wards

By Dr John Anderson

*Every so often, a story finds its way to us not through an archive or an artefact, but through personal connection and long dedication. This detailed history of the 25th Evacuation Hospital is one such story. Written by long-time museum supporter John Anderson, it is the result of many months of careful research into a unit whose presence on Espiritu Santo saved thousands of lives and quietly helped underpin the Pacific war effort. John's interest is deeply personal — his mother, Angelina Mango, served at the 25th, and her own story appears elsewhere in this issue. Together, these articles help illuminate not only how the hospital came into being, but what daily life and service looked like for those who worked there. What follows is an incredibly comprehensive and invaluable account of the 25th Evacuation Hospital's journey, from its formation in the United States to its service in the New Hebrides, the Philippines, and Japan.*

## THE BEGINNINGS

On 25 March 1940, L.C. Vonder Heidt, administrator of West Suburban Hospital in Oak Park, Illinois, received a letter from Major General James C. Magee, Surgeon General of the U.S. Army. The letter requested that the hospital, "assume the responsibility of organising from those officially associated with the hospital as outlined below, the 25th Evacuation Hospital."



West Suburban doctors 14 June 1942. Photo – John Anderson & sources.

This new unit was to be made up of 40 officers, 60 nurses, and 300 enlisted men, and designed as a 750-bed mobile hospital for the urgent care of casualties in the Combat Zone.

In response, the hospital board sent a telegram:

"Be advised the staff and Board of Trustees have unanimously endorsed proposal reorganising evacuation hospital 25." However, no further action was taken until after the attack on Pearl Harbor. On 13 December 1941, the hospital board sent another message to the Surgeon General:

*"IN VIEW WAR EMERGENCY WEST SUBURBAN HOSPITAL BOARD OF TRUSTEES HAVE DIRECTED FULL MEASURE COOPERATION AND IMMEDIATE REORGANISATION 25TH EVACUATION HOSPITAL UNDER INTERIM DIRECTION DR. W.J. POTTS."*



West Suburban nurses 14 June 1942. Photo – John Anderson & sources.

Dr. W.J. Potts was commissioned a Lieutenant Colonel on 2 January 1942, and began recruiting medical staff and enlisted personnel. A veteran of World War I, where he served as a sergeant in the Chemical Warfare Division, Potts was appointed head of surgery.

(continued...)

Another WWI veteran, Dr. H.E. Swantz, was named head of medicine.

## TRAINING

After a parade held in their honour on 15 August 1942, the unit reported to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, a military installation named after Major General Leonard Wood, a surgeon who had earned the Medal of Honor for his service in the Apache-Indian War.



The nurses march down Lake Street, Oak Park, Chicago. Photo – John Anderson & sources.

At Fort Leonard Wood, their training regimen was comprehensive. It included aircraft recognition, marching drills, full-pack marches, calisthenics, gas mask drills, rifle assembly and disassembly, and target practice.



The nurses begin their training at Fort Wood. Photo – John Anderson & sources.

Following their merger with nine officers and 227 enlisted men from the 23rd Evacuation Hospital, the 25th Evacuation Hospital was officially authorised to consist of 47 officers (including 34 from the

Medical Corps, 3 from the Dental Corps, 8 from the Administrative Corps, 1 from the Quartermaster Corps, and 1 from the Chaplain Corps), 52 nurses, and 318 enlisted men. The unit was activated on August 24, 1942, under the command of Colonel Morgan C. Berry. Colonel Walter H. Stevenson was named Executive Officer, Captain Oscar J. McNabb was the Pharmacist, First Lieutenant Thomas S. Cummings held an undefined position, Second Lieutenant Guy M. Ashmore was Quartermaster Corps Officer, and First Lieutenant Loretta C. Carmody was appointed Principal Chief Nurse.

On 3 September 1942, a group consisting of 42 officers, 33 nurses, and 245 enlisted men travelled by train to Fort Ord near Salinas, California, where they continued their training. Once more personnel were added, bringing their numbers to 47 officers, 51 nurses, and 319 enlisted men, they boarded the U.S.S. Rochambeau on 23 October 1942.



The Rochambeau in October 1942. Photo – Wikipedia.

Formerly the French vessel Marshal Joffre, the ship was joined by five other vessels, escorted by the U.S.S. Raleigh, across 5,386 nautical miles to Noumea, New Caledonia. The journey was fraught with difficulties. Potable water ran low after the Great Lakes-trained crew mistakenly used it to wash the anchor and then forgot they were at sea, leaving the water running. The ship also experienced mechanical failure when its steering mechanism broke, causing it to circle at sea without its convoy.

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The MS Boschfontein upon which some of the unit travelled to Port Vila from Noumea in late 1942. Photo – Stichting Maritiem Historische Data.

Before reaching Noumea, the ship experienced two General Quarters alarms. Upon arrival, the nurses disembarked, as First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt had expressed concern about their proximity to combat zones. The rest of the unit transferred to the M.S. Boschfontein, which departed on 15 November 1942, bound for Port Vila on Efate Island in the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu). From there, they travelled to their final destination, Base Button (A.P.O. 708) on Espiritu Santo Island, arriving 20 November 1942.

to transport coral for building roads and sourcing potable water. Supplies for constructing the hospital and living quarters were minimal, so they quickly began salvaging wood and other building materials from wherever they could.

Construction of mess halls for officers and enlisted men began on 6 December 1942, at the Surunda Plantation just south of Surunda Bay. The site was far from ideal—strewn with cattle droppings, rotting coconuts, husks, and palm fronds — and plagued by flies during the day and mosquitoes at night. Building materials came from departing units and the Navy. Supervision of the construction was handled by Dr. Harold Sofield, an orthopaedist with carpentry experience from working with his grandfather. Early progress was delayed by a bout of dysentery, but with the eventual acquisition of a water truck, refrigerator, and lighting generator from a departing unit, the mess halls were completed by 24 December 1942. Shortly afterward, they were followed by the construction of a bakery and garbage incinerators.



Pallikulo Bay pontoon dock. It was here the doctors and nurses came ashore in November 1942. Photo – US Archives.

Disembarkation at Pallikulo Bay on 28 November 1942, was challenging due to limited dock space, a shortage of vehicles, and deep mud. Much of the unloading had to be done manually. With only a jeep and a 2½-ton truck available, they used these vehicles

## HOSPITAL ENTRANCE

In January, construction began on permanent medical facilities with the relocation of the Dental and E.E.N.T. (ear, eye, nose, and throat) departments from tents into Dallas huts. A ship's deck house was repurposed to store alcohol and narcotic drugs, while another was used for a barber shop and the Post Exchange. The first Quonset hut constructed at the hospital site became home to the radiology department.

Dr. Leonard Saxon recalled that on 15 March the operating rooms for orthopedic and general surgery were opened. They dealt with wounds from shrapnel and bullets, including numerous compound fractures. Unfortunately, head and chest wound victims often

(continued...)

died before reaching them, as field hospitals near the front could only provide limited stabilisation.

As casualties from the Solomon Islands, New Guinea, Saipan, and other Pacific battlefields continued to arrive, challenges remained. In the spring of 1943, Army hospitals on Efate and Espiritu Santo, despite improvements, were still markedly inferior to Naval hospitals.



Accommodation tents at the 25th were built on stilts to ensure the massive downpours in the wet season didn't wipe out the nurses quarters. Photo – John Anderson & sources.

The Navy's facilities boasted prefabricated buildings, connecting corridors, linoleum-covered floors, enameled beds, and ample supplies of linens. Soldiers couldn't help but notice the disparity, particularly since much of the Navy's medical equipment had been removed from Army hospital



A typical operating theatre at the 25th. Very different to those of the Navy theatres down the road. Photo – John Anderson & sources.

lists to save shipping space. Major General J. Lawton Collins noted that these differences negatively impacted both morale and efficiency.



The difference between a Navy operating theatre on Santo (as shown here) and those at the 25th are fairly obvious. Photo – US Archives.

Meanwhile, a chapel was established in a ward tent, and sections of pontoon barges were used to build showers for officers, enlisted men, and nurses. On 21 January 1943, two minor Japanese bombing raids occurred a mile from the hospital site. Remarkably, the very next day, the American Red Cross arrived to begin assisting the hospital, and a movie theatre was also established.

On 8 February 1943, the hospital officially opened with 180 beds and admitted its first 48 patients — many suffering from malaria — who had previously been treated at a Navy facility. Radiology services began the following day, and on 24 February the hospital was transferred from Base Operations to Service Command. By month's end, a Quonset hut ward and a hospital laundry had been completed, increasing capacity to 225 beds, all occupied.

To accommodate personnel, pyramidal tents were set up — two-man tents for officers and six-man tents for enlisted men. Three prefabricated buildings from New Zealand were also erected and fenced in preparation for the arrival of 49 nurses from New Caledonia on 7 March. The nurses began work the next day, navigating mud and rain in slacks, GI shoes, or rubber boots.

On 15 March 1943, the Surgical Service opened in a double Quonset hut featuring three

(continued..)

operating rooms, a scrub area, sterilising room, dressing and shower rooms for staff, and multiple storage rooms. Additional ward and service buildings were constructed by the 882nd Engineer Service Battalion and the Navy's 15th Construction Battalion.



Doctors and nurses standing outside one of the newly completed hospital wards. Photo – John Anderson & sources.

The hospital's first patient evacuation occurred on 22 March, when 60 patients were transferred to the U.S. Pinkney. The next day, hospital capacity increased to 672 beds with 529 patients. After four more buildings were completed by month's end, capacity rose to 750 beds, with 636 patients in care.



Inside a ward at the 25th. Photo – John Anderson & sources.

A patient surge in April required an emergency expansion of 145 beds, raising the patient count to 852. At that time, 33 percent had malaria and 10 percent had dengue. By 18 April, the Medical Service operated 31 wards with 497 beds and 382 patients, the Surgical Service had 12 wards with 264 beds and 174 patients, and the Evacuation Service had 11 wards with 201 beds and 67 patients.



The Officer's Club at the 25th. Photo – John Anderson & sources.

In May, recreation clubs for officers and enlisted men were built and furnished with tables, chairs, bars, movie screens, radios, and record players to boost morale.

By July 1943, the hospital had 750 beds in permanent structures and an additional 750 beds available in emergency tent wards. The full hospital complex included a variety of structures: one Dallas hut, one triple Dallas hut, eight Quonset huts, five Stand Steel huts, six double Stand Steel huts, two New Zealand Temperate Zone huts, twelve New Zealand Tropical Zone huts, one double and five triple New Zealand Tropical Zone huts, two ship's deck houses, three mess halls, and 100 pyramidal tents.

## PATIENT TREATMENT STATISTICS

Not unexpectedly for a tropical location, the majority of admissions to the 25th Station Hospital were due to infectious diseases and neuropsychiatric conditions. From 13 February 1943 to 31 January 1944, the only detailed patient data available was that recorded by Dr. Nick Ferri. While his notes mention that 13,647 patients were admitted during that period, his detailed records covered only the 1,500 patients treated in his Medical Service ward. Of these, over 500 were malaria cases, more than 200 were dengue, and about 100 suffered from psychoneurosis or bomb concussion — together accounting for more than half of the cases. Even senior officers like Commanding Officer Colonel Morgan Berry and Chief of Medical Service Lt. Col. Henry Swantz fell ill with malaria, experiencing fever, chills, nausea, and diarrhea. (continued...)

As the war progressed northward, more comprehensive records became available for 1944. That year, the hospital treated a total of 6,177 patients: 3,480 medical and 2,697 surgical. Neuropsychiatric cases made up a significant 21.7% of all admissions. Notably, only 492 patients (8%) were battle casualties, and just 317 major operations were performed.

Total patients admitted to ward	1500
Total patients admitted to hospital	13047
Maximum number of patients	82
Average days in ward per patient	12.72
Patients returned to duty	694
Number of deaths	1
Patients sent to general hospital	806
<b>TOTAL MALARIAL FEVER</b> 501	
@ESTIVO AUTUMNAL	211
@TERTAIN	201
@MIXED and UNCLASSIFIED	60
@CEREBRAL MANIFESTATIONS	6
@HEMOGLOBINURIA	8
@F.U.O. (Probable malaria)	60
CHOLANGITIS	213
CHOLANGITIS without malaria	73
DENGUE	222
GASTRITIS ENTERCOLITIS COLITIS	73
ASTHMA BRONCHITIS	42
ARTHRITIS	39
CARDIAC and ARTERIAL HYPERTENSION	41
ULCERS, STOMACH and DUODENAL, CLINICALLY	29
PNEUMONIA	15
DERMATITIS	33
NEURITIS	16
CHOLECYSTITIS	4
DIABETES MELLITUS	2
ANEMIA, SIMPLE, SEVERE	6
PSYCHONEUROSIS BOMB CONCUSSIONS	100
TUBERCULOSIS, PLEURISY	22
MUMPS	26
TYPHOID FEVER	1
DIPHTHERIA	1
FILARIASIS, under observation for	9
TRACHOMA	1
TONSILLITIS	7
E.E.N.T. CASES	30
PARASITIC INFECTIONS	12
@Uncinaria Americana	6
@Ascaris Lumbricoides	2
@Oxyuris Vermicularis	4
MISCELLANEOUS	42

NOTE: 11.5% OF ALL PATIENTS ADMITTED TO HOSPITAL TREATED IN WARD. 12 46.5% WERE RETURNED TO DUTY 53.5% EVACUATED TO GENERAL HOSPITAL.

Capt. Nicholas A. Ferri MC.  
Miss O'Rourke - Miss Wilson - Miss Pestiau - Miss Atwood

A fascinating record kept by Dr Nick Ferri between 13 February 1943 and 31 January 1944 detailing the type and number of cases seen by his ward in just 11 months. Image – John Anderson/Leonard Saxon MD.

Photographs from the time show that traumatic injuries were frequently managed at the hospital. Casting became a routine surgical treatment, not only for fractures but also for soft tissue injuries.

This practice was influenced by Dr. J. Trueta's methods during the Spanish Civil War, as described in his book *The Treatment of War Wounds and Injuries*. He promoted extensive debridement of dead or contaminated tissue, followed by immobilisation using plaster casts.

## THE 25th MOVES TO THE PHILIPPINES AND JAPAN

On April 29, 1945, the 25th Station Hospital boarded the SS Sea Perch (later renamed the SS Gopher State) and departed for Batangas in the Philippines, arriving on May 13. The hospital was reconstructed at the new site but remained closed to patients until August 12.



The USS Sea Perch is launched in early 1945. Post war she would become the USS Gopher State. Photo – Wikipedia.

By that time, the war was nearing its end, and only a small number of war casualties were treated. The last patient was admitted on 27 August.



Batangas, Philippines in ruins. The hospital was rebuilt there, but saw very few war casualties. Photo – John Anderson & sources.

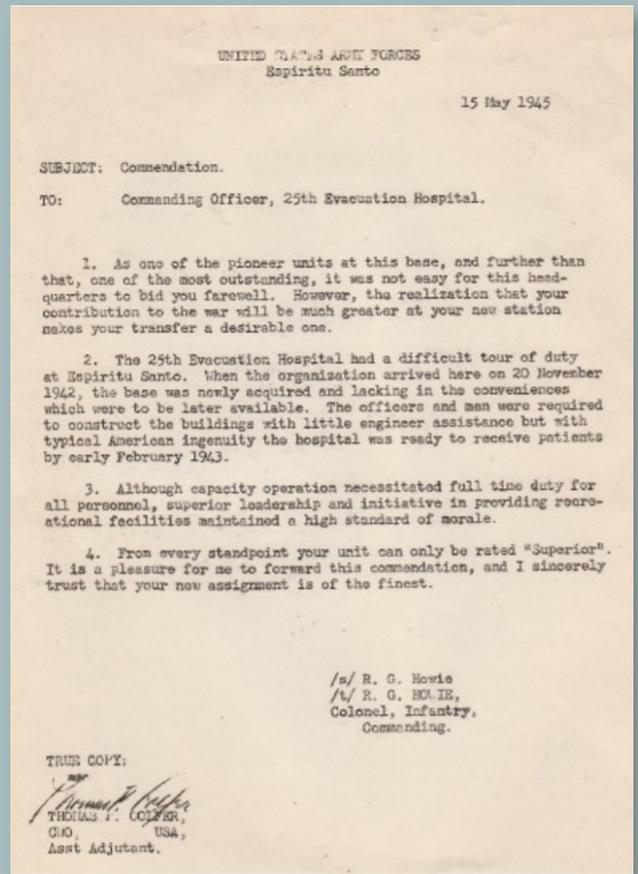
Throughout this period, eleven nurses and an unknown number of enlisted personnel were sent home due to illness. By 31 August, all but ten of the nurses had returned to the United States for discharge. The hospital relocated to Manila on 19 September and then to Agoo on 7 October.

(continued...)

There, it was joined by 54 additional nurses and four American Red Cross workers before embarking on the USS Queens for Sasebo Harbor, Kyushu, Japan, arriving on 14 October.

Once in Japan, the nurses were housed in the Postal Savings Building in Fukuoka while the male staff continued to Kokura, where they established a 200-bed hospital inside the Tamaya Department Store. The nurses rejoined the unit on 31 October. In November, the 13th General Hospital and the 123rd Station Hospital joined them, with deactivation plans already in place. The 25th left Japan aboard the Sea Perch on 12 November, arrived in Seattle, and by 1 December 1945, all remaining members had received a general discharge.

In recognition of its service, the 25th Station Hospital was awarded a Meritorious Unit Commendation by the Secretary of the Army on 5 September 1951. It was briefly reactivated during the Korean War but was permanently disbanded in 1953. Decades later, in September 1989, the U.S. Senate formally acknowledged the hospital's contributions during its time on Espiritu Santo.



The letter of commendation awarded to the unit for its exceptional performance while posted to Espiritu Santo. Image – John Anderson and sources.



A fantastic shot of the enlisted men of the 25th Evacuation Hospital. Photo – John Anderson and sources.

# Inspiring everyday heroes

The recent National Geographic Pristine Seas expedition to Vanuatu has marked a quiet but historic milestone. Marine scientist Ada Sokach became the first female Ni-Vanuatu researcher to descend 600 metres into the deep ocean, travelling in the state-of-the-art submersible Argonauta during surveys off the Reef Islands in TORBA Province.



Ada Sokach during a presentation at Jill's Café. Photo - Vanuatu Daily Post.

As the submersible slipped through the blue layers of the sea, Sokach described the rapid fading of light. By 600 metres, sunlight had vanished entirely, replaced by

the cold darkness of the deep. Yet life persisted. Bobtail squids drifted past the viewing dome, small deep-sea fish darted over the sand, and basalt walls revealed fleeting movements of scorpion fish and squat lobsters.

For Sokach, the dive was both humbling and exhilarating. The Argonauta, capable of reaching depths well beyond those explored on this mission, offers a rare glimpse into one of Earth's least-seen environments. "To witness it firsthand as a Ni-Vanuatu scientist was deeply meaningful," she said.

The expedition aimed to document Vanuatu's deep-sea biodiversity and fill significant gaps in marine knowledge. Sokach described encounters with nautilus, soft corals, schooling breams, and one unexpected sight: deep-sea urchins grazing on algae nearly 600 metres below the surface — algae she had seen floating in lagoon waters the day before. It was a powerful reminder of the ocean's interconnectedness.

Alongside the submersible work, Sokach assisted with deep-water camera deployments and conducted SCUBA surveys on reef systems, collecting data vital to future conservation. As she reflected, the deep sea is not just a place of discovery — it is part of Vanuatu's story, and its future.

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



**SOUTH PACIFIC WWII**  
MUSEUM

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