SOUTH PACIFIC WWII MUSEUM
VANUATU

South Pacific WWII Museum

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Quake shakes museum

On the evening of 30 March, at approximately 7:45pm, Luganville was shaken by a powerful 7.3 magnitude earthquake centred just 48 kilometres east-northeast of the town.

While the tremor was widely felt, damage across the area was fortunately limited, with most impacts being superficial. Power was knocked out for several hours, and by morning the town was also without water — an unwelcome complication with a cruise ship scheduled to arrive early that day.

Museum board member Mayumi Green adjusts the glass doors on a cabinet as volunteers behind clean up broken glass.

The South Pacific WWII Museum did sustain some damage, with one of our large display cabinets toppling over. Thankfully, none of the items inside were harmed, although the cabinet itself will need to be replaced.

In the early hours before visitors arrived, our dedicated "clean-up crew" sprang into action. Thanks to their efforts, the museum was quickly restored and ready to welcome guests.

Our sincere thanks go to everyone involved — a great example of teamwork when it mattered most.

THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

The Black Oil Crisis

Some 400 or 500 years ago, a fleet of ships would be hostage to the wind. If it was not propitious to where the fleet wished to go, it could take weeks. Or opposing fleets could lay close but be unable to come to grips.

Some 100 years ago, warships were no longer beholden to the wind. Nor were they tied down to where they could find coal stocks, or colliers. For the new propulsion for fleets was oil – which gave much greater flexibility, but with a whole new set of problems.

The main objective of both the American forces and the Japanese, Henderson Field. This shot was taken in October 1942. Photo – National World War II Museum.

Like in 1942, in the South Pacific, where there came about a fuel crisis in the month of August. This was the month where the Marines had gone ashore at Guadalcanal – and the first series of massive naval battles were being fought. Not surprisingly, for an operation nicknamed Operation Shoestring, fuel was in extreme demand. For the Marines trying to keep planes flying out of Guadalcanal's Henderson Field, for the B-17 bombers operating from the first primitive airfield on Espiritu Santo, and above all, for the fast carriers that were now the cutting edge in a new way of war.

Also not surprisingly, pre-war estimates of how much it would take to supply a fleet as it fought across the Pacific against a Japanese foe were well off the mark. To be fair, no-one actually had to do it before, and the guesstimates on what ships would be needed and how many were fraught.

Rear-Admiral Robert Ghormley. Photo – US Navy Heritage and History Command.

So, when Rear-Admiral Robert Ghormley, commander South Pacific Area, in mid-August began to voice his worries about stocks in his theatre, there was an attentive ear in Hawaii where the Navy commander in chief Chester Nimitz was juggling limited resources. Ghormley pointed out that two oilers had been completely emptied by the carrier groups after just one week of normal cruising.

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On 18 August he informed Nimitz that a study based on the actual issues of oil over 23 days indicated that in less than a month, there would be a fuel shortage. He said his total of on-hand and scheduled arrivals would be gone by that time, as his combatant vessels used an average of 25,000 barrels a day, and his auxiliaries 3,000 barrels, a daily total of 28,000 barrels.

to aviation gasoline, aviation lubricants, and Diesel fuel; and requested advanced notification of tanker departures from the west coast so as to be able to plan more wisely. This detailed summary was most fortunate. The action which followed prevented any further serious shortage during the remainder of the South Pacific campaign.

By the end of the war, oilers were routinely transferring stores and munitions while conducting fueling at sea. Extra belly tanks for aircraft and containers of ammunition were often stowed on the open spar deck, as can be seen in this photo. Photo – US Archives.

Despite telling his superiors what was needed, Admiral Ghormley was soon removed from command, after criticisms that he and his staff were overwhelmed by the campaign they were fighting. In the search for greater leadership and a can-do attitude, the irrepressible Bull Halsey was bought in. But there was only so much he could do, if the black oil didn't keep coming.

As the book Beans, Bullets and Black Oil recounts:

He (Ghormley) therefore requested monthly shipments to supply that amount, with more to be supplied if additional vessels were sent to the area; said that he would soon send a similar analysis with respect

Some of the tens of thousands of drums of oil and fuel stored at Base Button on Espiritu Santo. Photo – US Archives.

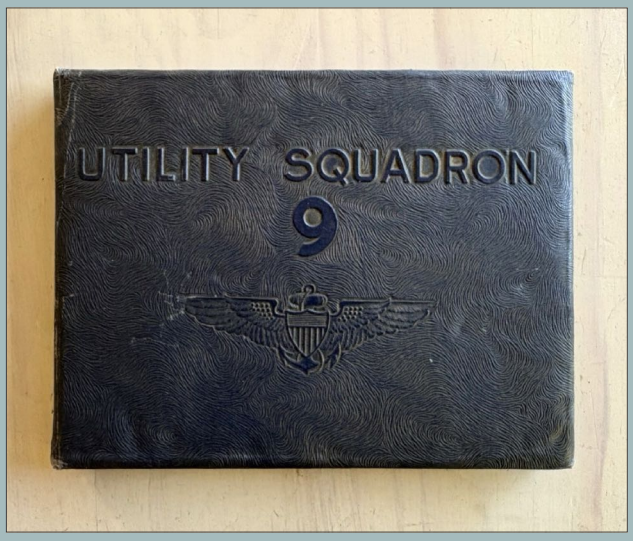
Part of the extraordinary fuel storage facilities on Aore Island servicing Allied shipping, vehicles and aircraft during the Pacific War from Base Button. Photo – US Archives.

*Based on information in Beans, Bullets, and Black Oil – The story of fleet logistics in the Pacific during World War II.

Silent Squadron Story

Back in February, a chance discovery in the United States set in motion a small but fabulous addition to the South Pacific WWII Museum's growing archive.

Edd Alexander, a volunteer at a local museum, came across an unassuming book titled Utility Squadron 9. As he flicked through its pages, two familiar names immediately stood out — Efate and Espiritu Santo. Recognising their significance, Edd did a little digging and soon found his way to us.



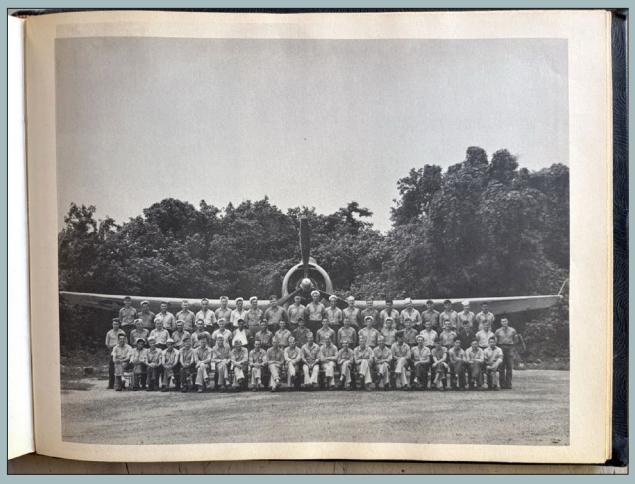
The Utility Squadron 9 Cruise Book that Edd Alexander donated to the museum. Photo – Jimmy Carter.

He reached out to our Project Manager, Jimmy Carter, with a simple question: would the museum be interested in the book? Jimmy's response was immediate — a resounding yes. Before long, the book was on its way across the Pacific.

What arrived was something rather special.

The book appears to be what is known as a "cruise book" — a type of publication produced by US Navy units during the Second World War to document their deployments, daily routines, and shared experiences. These books often combine written accounts with photographs to create a lasting record of service.

This particular volume, however, is different. It contains no written narrative at all — only photographs. In effect, it is less a book and more a visual record, a snapshot in time. Yet within those pages are numerous images we have never seen before, offering fresh glimpses into life and operations in the South Pacific.



Utility Squadron 9 in Efate - probably at Havannah Harbour airfield. Photo – Jimmy Carter.

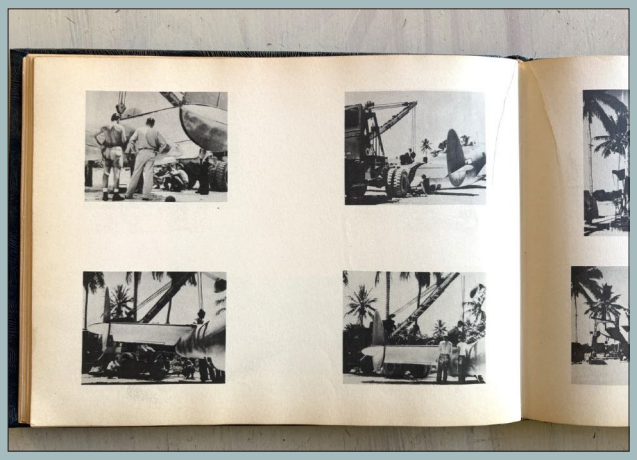
So, who exactly were Utility Squadron 9?

United States Navy Utility Squadron 9 (VJ-9), and specifically Detachment A, operated in the South Pacific during the war, with confirmed activity in early 1944. Their presence is recorded at locations such as the Havannah Harbour Boat Pool on Efate, as well as at their primary base on Espiritu Santo.

One of the sections in the book documents the work of VJ-9 on Espiritu Santo. Photo – Jimmy Carter.

(continued...)

Utility squadrons like VJ-9 played an essential, if often overlooked, role in the Pacific theatre. Rather than engaging directly in combat, they provided the vital support that kept operations running. Their work included supplying forward units, carrying out specialised aircraft utility missions, and assisting in the training of personnel across the region.



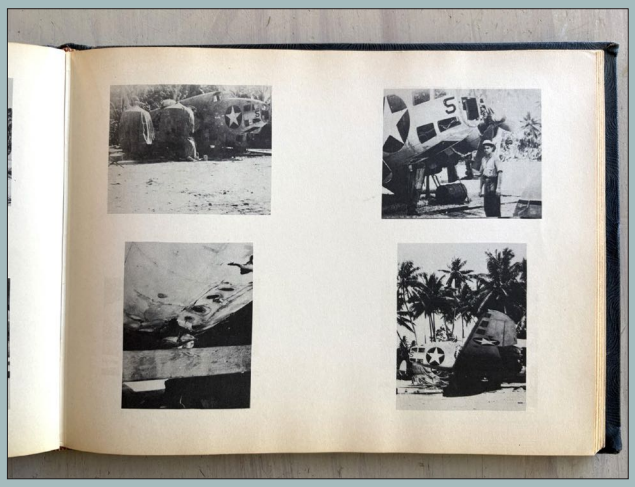
One of the fundamantal activities of VJ-9 was in support of air activities on Espiritu Santo, as can be seen in these photographs. Photo – Jimmy Carter.

A photograph already held in the museum's archives shows a VJ-9 detachment crew in February 1944 preparing to secure a jeep lighter — a small but telling moment that speaks to the practical, hands-on nature of their duties.

Utility Group 9 personnel at the Havannah Harbour Boat Pool on Efate. Photo – US Archives.

Across the South Pacific, units like VJ-9 were indispensable to the functioning of advanced bases, particularly throughout the Solomon Islands and surrounding areas. While larger formations such as Service Squadron 10 delivered broad logistical support, VJ-9 operated in a more specialised aviation support role, quietly ensuring that the machinery of war continued to move.

This newly discovered cruise book adds another layer to that story. Though silent in words, its images speak volumes — capturing the people, places, and everyday realities of a unit whose contribution was critical, even if seldom celebrated.



Photos detailing some of the interesting aircraft VJ-9 worked on while on Santo. Photo – Jimmy Carter.

It is a reminder that history is not only found in grand events, but also in the small, unexpected discoveries — and in the generosity of those, like Edd Alexander, who take the time to ensure these pieces of the past find their way home.

HELP BUILD KNOWLEDGE WITH YOUR DONATION

Just beyond the exhibits, a new chapter for the South Pacific WWII Museum is waiting to be written.

Our planned Library and Research Centre will be a place where history is not only preserved, but explored — where students, researchers, and visitors can delve deeper into the remarkable stories of Espiritu Santo and its pivotal role in World War II. It will house books, archives, photographs, and records that bring the past into sharper focus for future generations.

But we can't do it alone.

Your support, can help create a dedicated space for learning, discovery, and connection, ensuring that the history of this region is not only remembered, but truly understood.

Help us bring this vision to life.

southpacificwwiimuseum.com/donation

Survival in the South Pacific:

A Lost Airman's Desperate Rescue amid the Maelstrom of War

By Robert Richardson

A book review by Tammi Johnson

When I visited Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu in July of 2024, one of the sites they took me to was just below Mount Turi and near the village of Fanafo.

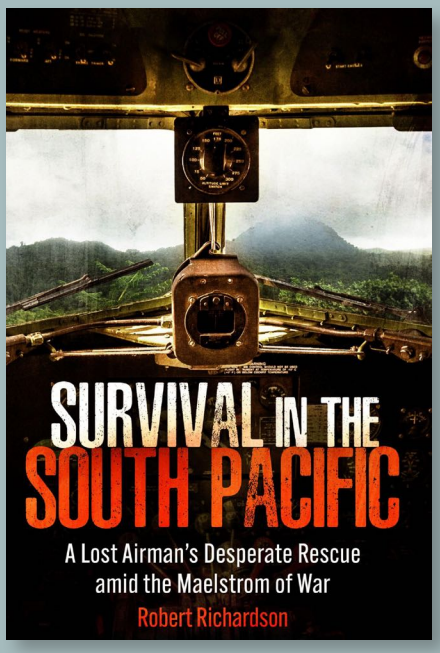
In September of 1943, five airmen belonging to the 13th AAF, 403rd T.C. Group, 64th T.C. SQ. (troop carrier squadron) based at Pekoa Airfield (current site of main island airport) were transporting military equipment and supplies between the islands in the South Pacific. The goal was to routinely drop off materials at Fighter 2 airfield at Henderson Field on Guadalcanal and return to Base Button, a round trip of over 2,000 kilometres (1300 miles), to bring plane engines from the fighter base in for repair.

On Sunday September 5th, 1943, bad weather and rain set in forcing the pilot to fly by instruments or "flying the beam." Approaching the airfield their altitude was too low and their Douglas C-47 Skytrain made a direct hit on Mount Turi, killing four of the crew and leaving one survivor, 2nd Lt. Leonard G. Richardson of Clarkston, Idaho. If you notice the author's name is similar, then you see the book in this review was well written and wonderfully researched by his son Robert.

On the plane with Richardson were radioman CPL. Joseph E. O'Connell, aged 20 of Irish immigrant parents, birthplace unknown; M/SGT. Harry Wlodarsky, age 25 from Burghill, Ohio; co-pilot 2nd Lt. Augustus W. Miller, age 23 from Avon, New York; and pilot 1st LT. Robert H. Healy, age 22 from Tiverton, Rhode Island. Of the four men lost, due to the condition of their remains three were buried together in Winchester National Cemetery, Winchester, Virginia. Robert Healy rests at the Oak Grove Cemetery in Fall River, Massachusetts.

In the book Richardson states that due to weather conditions his father advised Healy to take a coastal approach to the base at Pekoa. Healy did not heed the warning. Richardson was gravely injured. Both legs were broken along with a hand, some ribs and many internal injuries. For five days he managed to crawl and drag himself through the thick jungle before landing on a forest trail used by natives. He was spotted by locals and rescued a few days later.

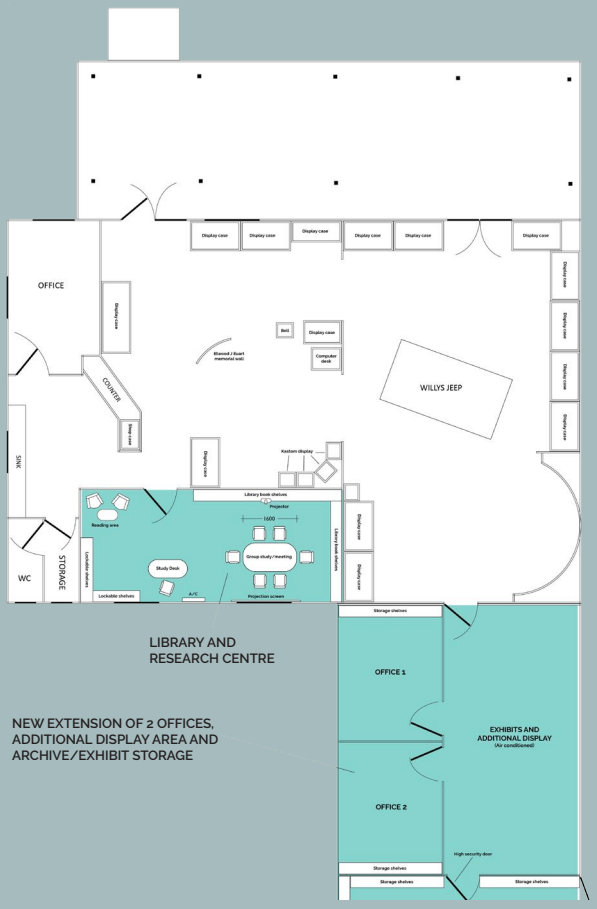
-Tammi Johnson



Now is the Moment

When we launched our campaign to build a new library and research centre at the South Pacific World War II Museum, the response was incredible.

In that first week, we saw generous support from people who believe in preserving the history of Espiritu Santo and sharing it with the world.



A plan of the proposed additions and renovations to the South Pacific WWII Museum in Luganville.

But since then… apart from donations from cruise ship passengers, things have gone very quiet.

The truth is that this project is too important to stall. This new space will protect fragile archives, support researchers, and help us tell the full story of Santo's role in World War II—properly, and for future generations.

We've been given an extraordinary opportunity through matched funding. Every dollar donated brings us closer—not just to our goal—but to doubling the impact of your support.

If you've been meaning to contribute, now is the moment. And if you've already donated—thank you. Sharing this post is another powerful way to help.

Donate here: southpacificwwiimuseum.com/donation

Together, we can make this happen.

The fundraising total as at April 1

From Normandie to Santo: A Diver's War

Every so often, the South Pacific WWII Museum receives a message that opens a door into a remarkable personal story. Recently, that door was opened by Al Lefranc, who contacted us in search of photographs to support a presentation about his father, Albert J. Lefranc Sr.

What followed was a story that stretches from New York to Espiritu Santo — and into the depths beneath Segond Channel.

Albert J. Lefranc Sr. was born on 21 August 1921 and, even before the war, showed a determination that would shape his life. He paid for his own welding lessons and, on 16 August 1941, joined Pipefitters UA Local 476 in Rhode Island — a membership he would maintain for fifty years. By 1942, he was working as a civilian pipefitter at the Quonset Naval Base.

The SS Normandie in all her glory circa 1930s. Illustration – naval-encyclopedia.com/

It was here that fate placed him alongside one of the most famous ships of the era — the great French liner SS Normandie.

Launched in 1935, she had been the largest and fastest passenger ship in the world. After France declared war on Germany in September 1939, the United States government interned the vessel at Pier 88 in New York.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the ship was seized by the U.S. Coast Guard on 12 December 1941 under the right of angary, transferred to the U.S. Navy, and renamed USS Lafayette. In the rush to convert her into a troopship, disaster struck. On 9 February 1942, a fire broke out while her fire suppression systems were offline and incompatible equipment hampered efforts to control it.

The wreck of the SS Normandie (renamed the USS Lafayette) lies on its side in the Hudson River, New York City, after it was destroyed in a catastrophic fire on February 9, 1942. Photo – Wikipedia.

Water poured into the ship unevenly, and she capsized at her berth — a dramatic and avoidable loss that left a lasting impression on those who witnessed it.

For Lefranc, it was an early lesson in the unforgiving realities of ships and the sea.

Another vessel would soon become part of his story — this time, far from New York.

On 4 August 1942, the destroyer USS Tucker struck a U.S. Navy mine at the western entrance to Segond Channel, Espiritu Santo. The mines had been laid just a day earlier, but crucially, the information had not been communicated to the ship. The explosion sank Tucker with three men killed and three missing. Her captain was later absolved of responsibility and would go on to become an admiral.

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The USS Tucker (DD374), leaving Norfolk Navy Yard after completion. Photo – US Navy Heritage and History Command.

Three days after the sinking, the tug USS Navajo arrived with divers who began salvaging Tucker's guns, turbines, anchors, and chains. For the remainder of the war, the wreck would serve as a training ground for Navy divers — including, eventually, Albert Lefranc.

He enlisted in the U.S. Navy on 7 October 1942 — just one day after the tragic loss of the SS President Coolidge, another victim of U.S. Navy mines at the eastern end of Segond Channel. Lefranc trained as a salvage diver at Pier 88 in New York — the very place where Normandie had met her fate. There, he learned his trade to a depth of 125 feet, completing nine months of rigorous training by 24 July 1943.

Al undergoes his diver training at pier 88 in New York City. Photo – Albert J. Lefranc Jr.

Among the lessons he carried with him was one both simple and hard-earned: it is always better to keep your head above your boots.

From New York, Lefranc travelled to San Francisco, where he was assigned to one of the most extraordinary engineering feats of the Pacific War — the Advanced Base Sectional Dock, ABSD-1.

This massive floating dry dock consisted of ten enormous sections. Eight had been completed and commissioned in Everett, Washington on 10 May 1943 under the command of Captain Andrew S. Mack. Lefranc departed San Francisco aboard one of these sections on 28 August 1943, bound for the New Hebrides. Towed across the Pacific at just six to eight knots, the journey took 35 days.

On 16 September, he crossed the Equator — an occasion marked with the traditional ceremonies of King Neptune and a celebratory "Davy Jones Locker" certificate signed by Captain Mack. On 2 October 1943, the dock sections arrived at Espiritu Santo.

Al Lefrank's 'Crossing the Line' certificate, signed by Captain Mack while on his way to Base Button on Espiritu Santo. Photo – Albert J. Lefranc Jr.

Two additional sections, built on the Gulf Coast, had already arrived in late September. Over the next three months, crews assembled the dock — raising its massive wing walls, welding steel plates, and ensuring each section was watertight. By April 1944, all ten sections were complete, forming one of the largest floating dry docks in the world.

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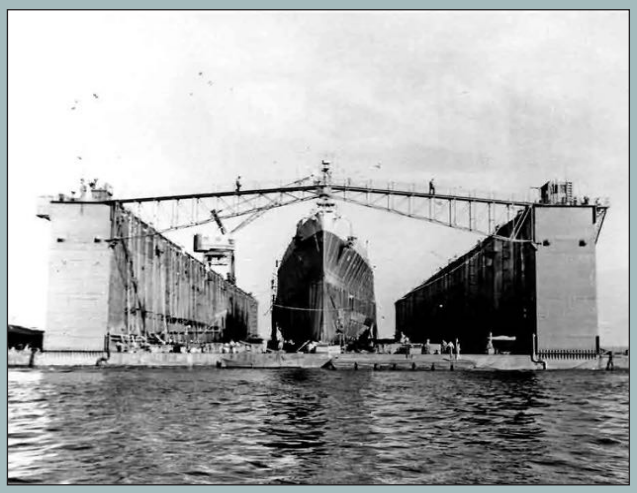


Advanced Base Sectional Dock (ABSD-1) in operation at Pallikulo Bay, Espiritu Santo. The incredibly powerful dry dock could raise any ship in the US Fleet. Photo – US Archives.

From its anchorage at Santo, ABSD-1 became a cornerstone of Allied naval operations. It repaired an extraordinary range of vessels, from the battleships USS Idaho and USS California to light cruisers such as USS Cleveland and USS Columbia, along with countless landing ships, gunboats, and cargo vessels.

Albert Lefrank Sr takes a break from his diving duties and relaxes somewhere on Espiritu Santo. Photo – Albert J. Lefranc Jr.

For Lefranc, Santo was not just a place of work — it was also where he left traces of his own craftsmanship. During his time in the New Hebrides, he fashioned a knife from two files, shaping the blade by hand, with vise marks still visible today. The handle was built from welded all-thread and carefully arranged rings of aluminium and plastic. Balanced and precise, it could be thrown with impressive accuracy.

He also made a ring from a Monel nut, painstakingly filing out its threads. Set into its face was a Navy anchor taken from a uniform button — a small but enduring symbol of his service.

The knife created by Al Lefranc from items scrounged on Santo. Photo – Albert J. Lefranc Jr.

His work as a diver brought him back to the wreck of USS Tucker, where he trained and operated. While much of the ship had been salvaged shortly after its sinking, Lefranc is believed to have entered the captain's quarters during later dives, retrieving two ivory-handled .45 pistols. He cleaned and restored them, keeping them as personal trophies of his time beneath the sea.

At the war's end, however, strict orders were issued: no unauthorised weapons were to be brought home. Faced with the possibility of punishment, Lefranc reluctantly threw the pistols overboard. Ironically, as he later disembarked in New York, he saw other servicemen openly carrying rifles in their duffel bags.

After three years, four months, and eight days of service, Albert J. Lefranc Sr. was discharged on 15 February 1946 as a Shipfitter First Class.

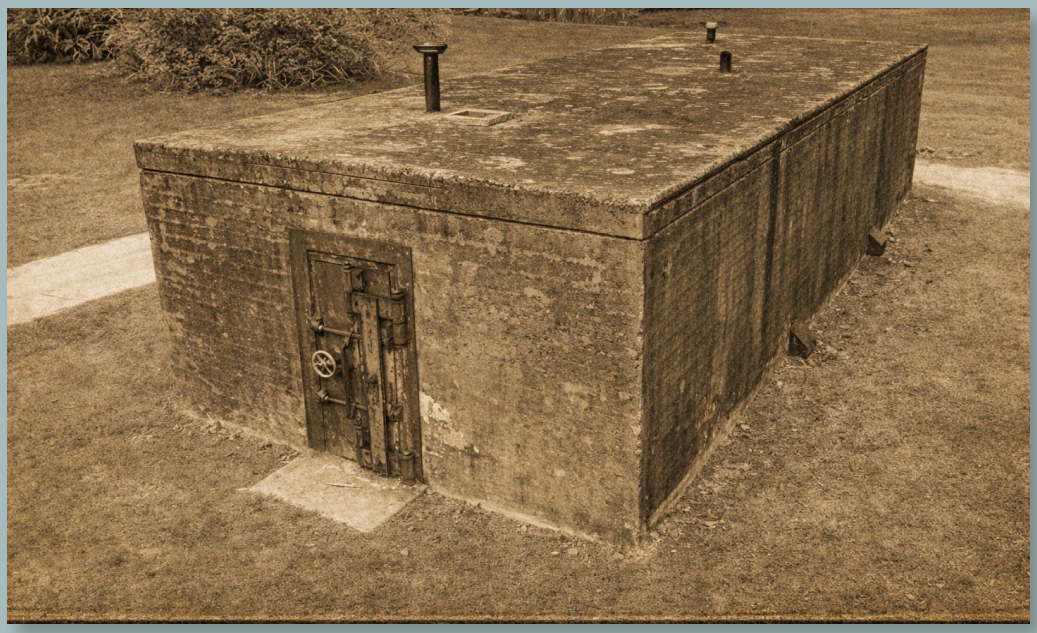
Today, his story lives on through the memories and records preserved by his family — including an album of 140 photographs taken on Santo, now being prepared for sharing with the museum.

It is a story that spans continents, shipwrecks, and survival — and one that reminds us, once again, that the history of Espiritu Santo is not only written in grand events, but in the lives of the men who served here, often far from home, doing extraordinary things in extraordinary times.

Then and Now - US Navy Bank Vault

Hidden away on Base Button during the Second World War stood one of the most secure — and least talked about — buildings on Espiritu Santo.

The United States Navy bank vault was no ordinary structure. Built of thick reinforced concrete, it protected currency,



The US Navy vault in Luganville with its impressive Mosler strongroom door to protect all manner of currencies and precious metals. The walls were made from concrete and reinforced steel.

gold reserves, and other precious assets that underpinned Allied operations across the South Pacific. Behind its formidable steel door, wealth moved quietly through the war effort — unseen, but essential.

After the war, the vault remained, its purpose long gone. Passing into civilian hands, it was eventually used as storage for a local supermarket. For decades, it stood as a curious relic, its significance largely forgotten.

Then, around five years ago, the structure was demolished — another physical link to Santo's wartime story seemingly lost.

But not entirely.

Before its destruction, the massive steel door was saved and gifted to the South Pacific WWII Museum. Today, it stands proudly on display outside the museum in Unity Park.

More than just steel and mechanism, it is a survivor — a tangible connection to a time when even here in the South Pacific, vast fortunes and global conflict were quietly intertwined.

The Mosler vault door as it is today after being moved to the South Pacific WWII Museum.

Flying Blind Over Santo

It was meant to be routine.

Somewhere high above the South Pacific, a transport aircraft droned steadily through the humid air, its cargo vital, its destination familiar. Below lay Espiritu Santo — one of the most important Allied bases in the region. Ahead, the runway at Pekoa awaited.

But Santo had a way of hiding itself.

Clouds gathered quickly over the island's rugged interior, thick and impenetrable. What had begun as a clear approach could, in minutes, become a pilot's worst nightmare. Landmarks disappeared. Horizons blurred. And the line between sky and jungle vanished entirely.

The view from Mount Tabwemasana on the west coast of Espiritu Santo. The mountain is Vanuatu's highest peak and was the location of a number of plane crashes during World War II, due to inclement weather.

For many airmen during the war, Santo was not just a base of operations — it was a hazard in its own right.

Throughout 1943 and 1944, aircraft moved constantly through the skies above the New Hebrides. Pekoa Airfield was a critical hub, feeding men, equipment, and supplies north to Guadalcanal and beyond. C-47 Skytrains, Liberators, and a host of other aircraft flew daily missions across vast stretches of ocean, often returning to Santo heavily laden or under pressure to maintain tight schedules.

But while the ocean crossings were long, it was often the final approach that proved most dangerous.

Navigation technology at the time was limited. Pilots relied on basic radio signals — "flying the beam" — dead reckoning, and visual cues whenever possible. Accurate maps of Santo's interior were scarce, and what did exist often failed to capture the true scale and steepness of the island's mountainous terrain.

And then there was the weather.

Warm, moisture-laden air rising from the jungle created sudden cloud formations that clung to the island's peaks. Visibility could drop to near zero without warning. In these conditions, a pilot descending too early — believing himself safely over the coast — could instead be lining up with a mountainside.

It happened more than once.

In September 1943, one such flight was making its way toward Santo from Guadalcanal. The aircraft, a Douglas C-47, carried crew and cargo essential to the ongoing

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The wreckage of the crashed C-47 as it lies today. The location is so inaccessible and the jungle so dense, this photo had to be taken from a drone. The open cargo door can be clearly seen in the photo. Photo – Jimmy Carter.

campaign. As conditions deteriorated, the pilot was forced onto instruments, relying on radio navigation to guide the aircraft home.

But something went wrong.

Whether it was a misread signal, an incorrect position fix, or simply the relentless pressure of weather and fatigue, the aircraft descended too low. Hidden by cloud, the rising terrain gave no warning.

On Tanna, Yasur Vocano creates its own weather sytems and creates issues for pilots if the volcano starts smoking. Photo – Paul Ma.

The impact was sudden and catastrophic.

The aircraft struck the mountains near Mount Turi, deep within Santo's interior. Of those on board, only one man survived — badly injured, alone, and stranded in dense jungle far from any known track.

For days, he dragged himself through the undergrowth, broken and disoriented, following what little instinct he had left. Eventually, he stumbled upon a narrow forest path used by local Ni-Vanuatu. It was there, by chance or fate, that he was found and rescued.

It is an extraordinary story of survival — and one that is explored in detail in this month's book review, where great museum friend and regular contributor Tammi Johnson takes a closer look at the remarkable ordeal of that lone survivor.

But this was not an isolated incident.

Across Santo, the jungle holds other stories. Aircraft that never arrived. Crews who vanished without a trace.

This Corsair crashed as the result of a collision with another Corsair during a training exercise up over Big Bay. Photo – Bradley.

Wreckage swallowed by vegetation so thick it can hide even the largest machines. Some sites were recovered in the years after the war. Others remain lost, their exact locations uncertain even today.

For the men who flew these routes, the danger was ever-present — not always from enemy fire, but from the environment itself. A moment's miscalculation, a shift

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in weather, or a faulty reading could turn a routine flight into disaster.

During a navigation and training exercise, P-40F 'Pee Wee', along with three other P40s, encountered a severe storm front, forcing a crash landing on the island of Erromango. Here the famous aircraft is recovered by Australian aviation enthusiasts prior to its restoration.

And even after the war, those dangers did not disappear.

Bomber Number 3 Airfield, notable for its asphalt surface, transitioned in the 1950s and 1960s into a civilian airport — what would become known as Luganville Airport. Yet its elevated position, combined with Santo's persistent low cloud and unpredictable weather, continued to challenge pilots. On at least one occasion, those same conditions contributed to the crash of a civilian passenger aircraft — a stark reminder

A TAI DC-3 passenger aircraft that ran into trouble and ran off the runway at Luganville Airfield circa 1957. Photo – JD Field.

that the island's hazards were not confined to wartime.

And yet, the flights continued.

They had to.

The war in the Pacific depended on constant movement — of supplies, of aircraft, of people. Santo was a lifeline, and the skies above it was its arteries. Every successful landing at Pekoa meant another step forward in a campaign that stretched across thousands of miles.

But for those who never made it, Santo became something else entirely.

The landing gear of a crashed RNZAF Corsair is inspected by a team from the South Pacific WWII Museum. Photo – Karl von Moller.

Today, much of that history remains hidden — scattered across mountainsides, buried beneath jungle, or resting quietly beneath layers of time. Occasionally, fragments resurface: a piece of wreckage, a name in a record, a story passed down through families.

Each one adds to our understanding of what it meant to serve here.

Because while Santo is remembered as a place of construction, logistics, and support, it was also a place of risk — where even the act of arriving safely could not be taken for granted.

And in the clouds above its peaks, that danger was always waiting.

Inspiring everyday heroes

Veteran journalist Dan McGarry, who was a former editor of the Vanuatu Daily Post,, has died at the age of 62.

McGarry, had fallen after a trip to Papua New Guinea earlier this month, from where he had to be evacuated to Brisbane to undergo a heart bypass.

But he faced complications during his recovery and had remained in critical care for the past few weeks.

Radio New Zealand Pacific reports tributes have been pouring in from across the region – calling him a fearless and formidable journalist.

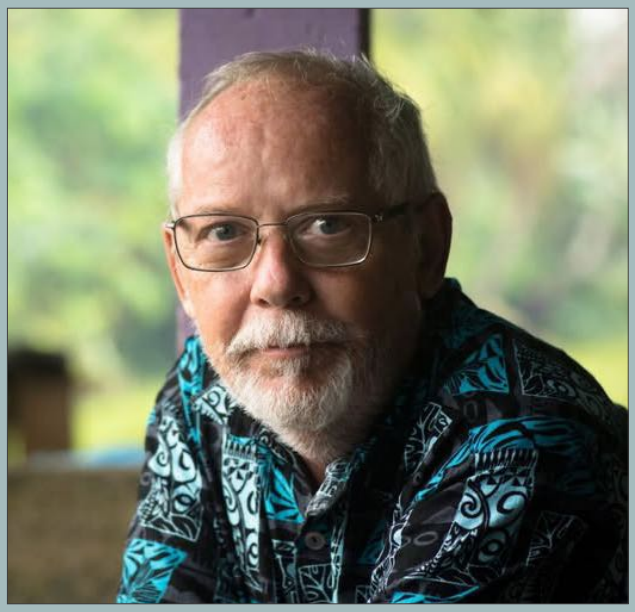
McGarry was Pacific editor of the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project at the time of his passing and has left behind his wife and children.

Aubrey Belford, who was a co-editor with McGarry at the reporting project, said in a Facebook post, McGarry was an absolutely dominating presence in Pacific journalism and in the region more generally. "Dan was compassionate, sharing, and always motivated by a sense of justice and the common good," she told RNZ Pacific.

"When home in Vanuatu he loved nothing more than finishing his day with a shell or more of kava, satisfied in the knowledge he had found his place in the world."

Another friend and colleague, Andrew Gray, added: "After a hard life he finally found happiness in Vanuatu, and he did a lot more for the country than people appreciate. Last time I saw him he was planning his retirement at Lalwori."

RNZ Pacific manager Moera Tuilaepa-Taylor said McGarry's presence will be missed. "Dan McGarry was one of the best - a champion of the truth."



A Pacific journalism leader, Dan McGarry. Photo – Supplied.

Honouring the past to empower and inspire the next generation.

SOUTH PACIFIC WWII MUSEUM
VANUATU

South Pacific WWII Museum
Unity Park, Main Street,
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