

**SOUTH PACIFIC WWII
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VANUATU

South Pacific WWII Museum

Subscriber's newsletter

southpacificwwiimuseum.com

april 2026

volume 11 number 04

Anzac Day
Lest we forget



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Dawn over Segond.

Before first light on 25 April, a quiet gathering formed on the shores of the Segond Channel in Luganville. As dawn approached, the still waters—once crowded with Allied ships during World War II—became the setting for this year's Anzac Day Dawn Service.

Held at 5.00am, the service brought together members of the local and expatriate community, with all welcome, regardless of nationality, to honour their own fallen. It is a simple but powerful tradition—one that connects remembrance across generations, nations, and conflicts.

Proceedings began with members of the Vanuatu Mobile Force lowering the flags to half-mast, marking the solemn opening of the service. Long-time Santo resident Kevin Green, husband of Museum Board Member Mayumi Green, led the ceremony with quiet dignity.

As the light slowly broke across the Channel, wreaths were laid into the calm waters, a moving tribute to those who served and those who did not return. The setting itself—once a vast wartime anchorage—served as a reminder of Santo's place in the broader story of the Pacific war.

The national anthems of Australia, New Zealand, and Vanuatu followed, before the flags were raised once more to full mast by the Vanuatu Mobile Force, signalling both remembrance and renewal.

Following the service, attendees gathered at Coral Quays Restaurant for a shared breakfast—an opportunity to reflect, reconnect, and continue the tradition. As the morning unfolded, the familiar sound of coins marked the start of games of "two-up", a long-standing Anzac custom linking today's gathering with those of generations past.



Kevin Green pauses for reflection as VMF members pause before the Vanuatu, New Zealand and Australian flags. Photo – Mayumi Green.

Sincere thanks are extended to Kevin and Mayumi Green, the Australian Federal Police, New Zealand Police, the Vanuatu Mobile Force, and Coral Quays Resort for their support in bringing this important commemoration together once again.

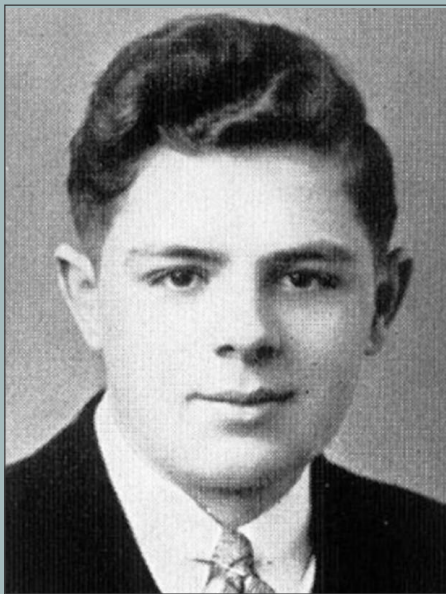


New Zealand and Australian police officers, a VMF officer and the Lord Mayor of Luganville lay wreaths at the conclusion of the ceremony. Photo – Mayumi Green.

The Long Way Home

More than eighty years after a tragic crash in the waters off Luganville, one of its lost crew has finally been brought home.

U.S. Navy Aviation Radioman Second Class Robert L. Cyr Jr. was just 19 years old when the PBV Catalina



U.S. Navy Aviation Radioman 2nd Class Robert L. Cyr.
Photo – Defence POW/MIA Accounting Agency

flying boat he was aboard crashed on take-off in Second Channel on 22 January 1944.

Two crew members, including Cyr, were never recovered and for decades he remained listed as missing in action — one of many names etched into history, but without a final resting place.



A PBV Catalina over the Pacific Ocean during World War II. Photo – War History Online.

Cyr's story is one of youth, service, and quiet courage. Enlisting at just 17, he quickly found himself flying long patrol missions across the vast reaches of the South Pacific. In just one year, he had logged an astonishing 112,000 miles in the air, operating over active combat zones including the Solomon Islands. His role, like so many in patrol squadrons, was both dangerous and vital — locating enemy forces, relaying intelligence, and, when needed, assisting in the rescue of downed airmen.



Two A-20 crew members are rescued by a Catalina crew after being shot down over Manila Bay. The aircraft had to land in heavily mined waters to get to the crew. Photo – US Archives.

On that January morning in 1944, everything changed.

The Catalina, part of Patrol Squadron 91, crashed shortly after take-off from Santo. Three crew members survived. Four were recovered in the days that followed. But Cyr and one other airman were lost to the sea.

For decades, the story remained unfinished.

That changed in 2022, when underwater archaeology organisation Sealark Exploration undertook a detailed search for the wreck site on behalf of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA). Operating in challenging conditions, their team

(continued..)

successfully located and documented the Catalina — a significant achievement in itself, given the passage of time and the complexities of underwater recovery in the region.

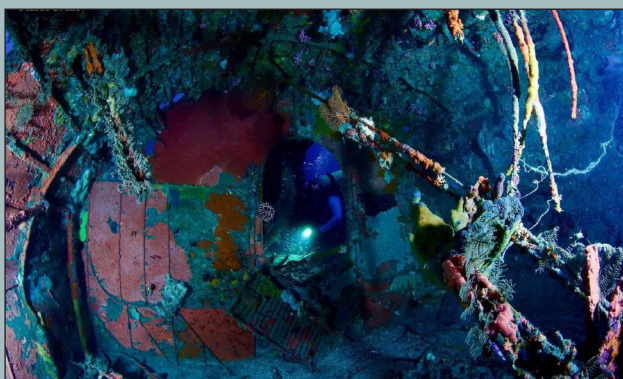


The wreck of the Catalina in which Robert Cyr lost his life. It lies 30 metres underwater in the Second Channel, between Santo and Aore Islands. Photo – Kevin Green.

But Sealark’s work did more than just rediscover a wreck.

Their careful investigation and documentation of the site laid the foundation for everything that followed. By identifying key elements of the aircraft and locating areas of interest, they enabled further recovery efforts by DPAA partners, Cosmos Archaeology, in 2024 and 2025. These expeditions recovered material evidence — including possible human remains — from the site.

From there, the painstaking process of identification began.



An interior shot of the sunken Catalina off the Santo coast. Photo – Kevin Green.

Using a combination of anthropological analysis, mitochondrial DNA testing, and historical research, the DPAA was able to confirm that the recovered remains belonged to Robert L. Cyr Jr. On 5 November 2025 — more than 80 years after the crash — he was officially accounted for.

For his family, it brings long-awaited closure.

Cyr’s name, long inscribed on the Tablets of the Missing at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, will now be marked with a rosette — a quiet but powerful symbol that he has finally been found.

He will be laid to rest with full military honours in Clearwater, Florida, alongside members of his family.



The National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii. Robert Cyr’s name, marked on a tablet of the missing, will now feature a rosette, indicating he has been found. Photo – pearlharbor.org.

It is a deeply human ending to a story that began in war.

And it is also a reminder of the enduring importance of the work being done here in Vanuatu. Thanks to the dedication of teams like Sealark Exploration — and the continued efforts of the DPAA and its partners — the waters around Santo are still giving up their stories.

Even after eight decades, they are helping bring the missing home.

Diving Into Digital History

Beneath the waters of Espiritu Santo, history is being seen in a whole new way.

In October 2025, a unique collaboration brought together Pacific Dive, Aore Adventures Sports & Lodge, and Reef Smart Guides to document some of Santo's most important World War II wreck sites — including the iconic SS President Coolidge.



Pacific Dive General Manager Joel Watson, along with dive staff Rex Moli, Ruben Bethel, and David Tonny, presenting a map of the SS President Coolidge to Museum Chairman Bradley Wood. Photo – Mayumi Green.

Using advanced photogrammetry technology, the team undertook the meticulous process of capturing thousands of high-resolution images to create detailed, three-dimensional digital models of these underwater sites. The result is a level of accuracy and perspective never before possible, allowing divers and researchers to explore the wrecks in extraordinary detail — both above and below the surface.

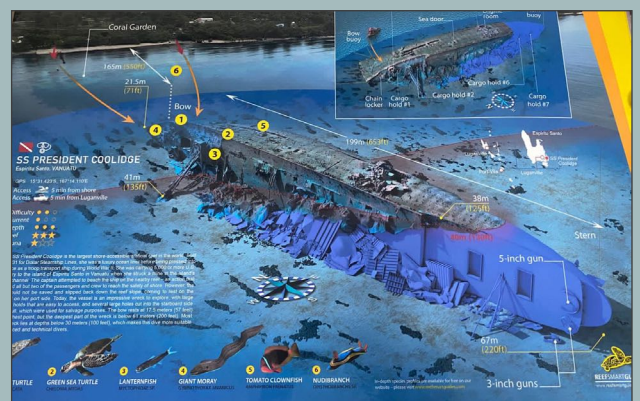
Reef Smart Guides, a Canadian company based in Montreal, has been at the forefront of this technology since its founding in 2016. Their work spans more than 20 countries, mapping everything from coral reef systems to historic shipwrecks. In some cases, their models extend inside wrecks, offering virtual access to spaces that are difficult — or impossible — to safely explore in person.

For Santo, this represents an important step forward in preserving and interpreting its underwater heritage.

More than just dive sites, these wrecks are historical artefacts — silent witnesses to the events that shaped the Pacific War. By digitally recording them in such detail, they can now be studied, shared, and experienced in ways that protect the sites while expanding access to them.

As part of this project, Pacific Dive has generously donated a selection of these digital maps to the South Pacific WWII Museum, helping to ensure that this history is not only preserved, but made accessible to a wider audience.

It is a great example of how modern technology and local expertise can come together to keep Santo's wartime stories alive — not just beneath the water, but for generations to come.



The Turtle bay Corsair (top) and the Coolidge wreck (bottom) two of the stunning dive guides donated to the museum by Pacific Dive. Photos – Bradley Wood.

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Records of Courage

The story of Lieutenant (jg) Keith Norman Sherlie continues to find its place on Espiritu Santo—this time not through memory alone, but through the tangible record of a life lived in service.

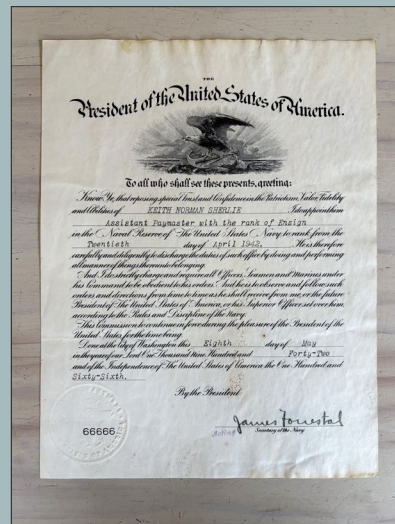
Following his earlier donation of his father's Purple Heart medal, Ross Brennan has now entrusted the Museum with a collection of Keith Sherlie's personal papers. These include his Certificate of Service, promotion documents, and photographs of a young naval officer in uniform—formal records that quietly trace the arc of his wartime journey.

alongside his medal, these documents will sit just metres from where the destroyer's story is remembered—anchoring Sherlie's personal experience firmly within the wider narrative of the ship and her crew.

There is something uniquely powerful in seeing such items up close. A certificate signed, a promotion earned, a photograph taken before the realities of combat fully unfolded—each piece offers a quiet, human connection across time.



A portrait photo of Keith Sherlie in his Dress Whites. Photo – Ross Brennan.



One of Keith Sherlie's promotion documents. Document – Ross Brennan.

Where the Purple Heart speaks to a single moment of sacrifice, these newly donated items tell the broader story. They document progression, responsibility, and the steady movement of a young man from civilian life into the demands of war in the Pacific.

For the Museum, donations like this are invaluable. They move history beyond dates and events, allowing visitors to encounter the individuals behind the story. In preserving these papers, Ross Brennan has ensured that his father's service is not only remembered, but understood in fuller detail.

Together, they add depth and texture to the story already told at the USS Strong memorial. Displayed

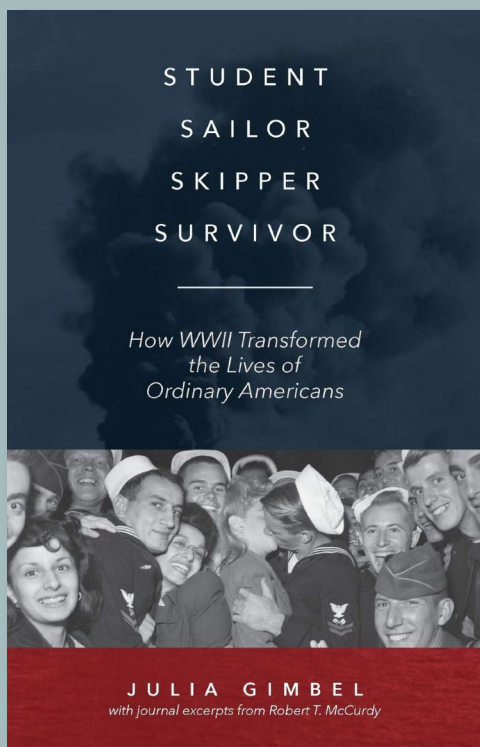
Alongside the USS Strong memorial, Keith Sherlie's story continues to unfold—now told not only through acts of courage, but through the personal records that survived with him.

Student Sailor Skipper Survivor

How WWII Transformed the Lives of Ordinary Americans

A book review by Tammi Johnson

As I do these book reviews for the newsletter I try to make sure to mix it up with books written by or about the stories of both men and women. Men historically have more books on the shelf, so when I run across a good book by a woman it sticks with me; especially when she's writing about the experiences of her father who came back from the war as a survivor.



country developed these training programs with the military to stave off going broke when all their students went off to fight in the war. As a graduate of the 90-day wonder program he shipped out from San Francisco on the USS Ommaney Bay CVE on February 11th, 1944, on the way to Brisbane and his assignment serving on board the LCT 977, a "Landing Craft Tank". The ships duties according to www.navsource.net included to "land heavy vehicles, including tanks, directly onto beaches." After spending years at sea, he arrived home in June 1946 to continue his education via GI Bill at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and earned a law degree. Robert married his love Muriel and raised five children, including the author. He passed peacefully in 2010.

Robert's story originated in a high school project assigned to his grand-daughter Lena in 2014. As Julia sat with Lena (Lena got an A on the project) going over a journal written years after his service ended, the idea for a book of his story was born. Julia went far beyond that project with her daughter, interviewing other veterans who had similar experiences to help fill in aspects of her father's story not covered in the journal. Her book was released in 2020 by Orange Hat Press and is available on several online sources including Amazon. I recommend it because of all the personal excerpts from his journals included in the book. They help to truly understand the life of a man at war, at sea.

Robert T. McCurdy was born May 7th, 1921, in Madison, Wisconsin. As war was declared, Robert was a college student, a group highly recruited by the military for the officer's training program. He went through the V-12 program implemented as of July 1st, 1943, then went on to the V-7 Ensign training at Columbia University in New York. Many colleges across the

Tammi Johnson
Project USS Strong DD467

THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

Kittyhawk with Claws

Kittyhawk fighter bombers, often famously painted with shark mouth nose art.

The plane shown left, NZ3072, is famous however for its much different artwork, and the pilot pictured, Flying Officer Geoff Fisken. He is considered to

have been the top scoring ace from Commonwealth countries in the Pacific, with at least 11 kills.

Fisken had already cut his teeth against the Japanese over Singapore, claiming two aerial victories, flying obsolescent Brewster Buffalo fighters. No mean feat.

Wounded, he was evacuated back to New Zealand before Singapore fell, and then during 1942 and 1943, was part of the expansion of the RNZAF. One of the important airfields was Hood

Aerodrome in Wairarapa, a farming valley region in the lower North Island.



Fighter ace Geoff Fisken next to his famous P40. RNZAF official photograph, colourised by Daniel Rarity.

April 1943 was a major month for the Royal New Zealand Air Force in the Pacific as it began to move squadrons into the frontline of the New Hebrides and Guadalcanal.

Espiritu Santo would become home to many units, serving as a base, particularly for units staging forward airfields such as at Guadalcanal.

Two fighter squadrons were deploying from that month, No 14 and No 15. Both flew



A RNZAF P-40 Kittyhawk at the Air Force Museum of New Zealand. Photo – Air Force Museum of New Zealand

Fisken, actually born further up the east coast of the island, soon made plenty of ties in Wairarapa – including a girlfriend.

But the famous aircraft art shown above, particularly the black tom cat, had nothing to do with him.

Reportedly Fisken arrived on Guadalcanal where his squadron (continued..)

commander pointed him at a Kittyhawk with the cat painted on. A cat? Well, that was the work of some US aircrew who had to patch up the plane in New



14 Squadron pilot Geoffrey Fiskin standing in front of NZ 3072 P-40 'Wairarapa Wildcat' at Guadalcanal. 14 Squadron RNZAF was flying during the Solomon Islands campaign at the time. Photo – Masterton District Library.

Caledonia when it had a mid-air scrape. The cat was their unit symbol.

Geoff Fiskin then wrote home and asked for advice on what to call his new plane. As recounted, he said: "Why did we call it the Wairarapa Wildcat? When the plane was given to me to fly in Guadalcanal, they asked me, what are you going to call him? It had a big black cat, my mechanic was from Wairarapa, the rigger came from Wairarapa, the aerial armourer came from Wairarapa and my girlfriend came from Wairarapa, we had to call it Wairarapa something."

At the same time the name was added, eight Japanese flags were painted next to the cat.

Despite the iconic name, Fiskin only flew Wairarapa Wildcat nine times, and only once in action, where he shot down two Zeroes. He added another three kills in another Kittyhawk at the squadron.

In December that year, he was repatriated due to the injuries from his earlier war wounds and discharged. His Wairarapa Wildcat fought on with No 14 squadron.

Eventually in March 1944 it was sent back to New Zealand and used for training. Militaries having no

thought for future legend, the artwork was painted over. The aircraft was in a scrapyard for many years, until finally being destroyed.

Fiskin himself lived a long life farming in Wairarapa and elsewhere, raising six children with his wife Rhoda, and dying in 2011, well into his 90s.



Two RNZAF ground crew standing by the wing of a P-40 Kittyhawk which is damaged on the leading edge. The muzzles of the .50 cal machine guns are at left. Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands. From Geoff Fiskin's personal collection. Photo – Masterton District Library.



RNZAF P-40 NZ 3064 of 16 Squadron under repair. The tailplane and rudder have been removed, with the rudder showing damage. Another P-40 in front has the engine cowling removed. In the background are other aircraft, some with parts missing. From Geoff Fiskin's personal collection. Photo – Masterton District Library.

Santo's Soda Story

During World War II, Santo was transformed almost overnight into the largest Allied base in the South Pacific. By mid-1942, more than 100,000 troops had passed through the New Hebrides. It was a place of intense activity — airfields, supply depots, shipyards — but also of isolation, heat, and long stretches far from home.



An original WWII Coca-Cola bottle from Espiritu Santo. This particular one originated at the Oakland, California plant in 1944. Photo – Jimmy Carter.

And in that environment, small comforts mattered.

Few things symbolised “home” to American servicemen more than an ice-cold Coca-Cola. Recognising this, the Coca-Cola Company made a remarkable commitment: every U.S. serviceman, wherever he was in the world, would be able to buy a Coke for five cents. It was a promise that would reshape the company — and leave its mark on places like Santo.

Across the Pacific, Coca-Cola established mobile bottling plants and deployed so-called “technical observers” — often nicknamed Coca-Cola Colonels

— to bring production as close to the front lines as possible. In total, 64 bottling plants were established overseas during the war.

But Santo presented a unique challenge.

With no bottling plant on the island, Coca-Cola had to be shipped in from the United States. Bottles arrived full — but there was no practical way to return, clean, and reuse them. As the war progressed, thousands upon thousands of empty bottles began to accumulate.

When the conflict ended, and the vast American presence on Santo was dismantled, those bottles — like so much other equipment — were simply left behind.

Many were dumped at what we now know as Million Dollar Point - some suggest over a million bottles were dropped into the sea. Others found their way into the jungle or were scattered across former camps and operational areas. Over time, nature did the rest.

Today, those bottles are still here.

Along the shoreline at Million Dollar Point and neighbouring Million Dollar Beach, intact Coca-Cola bottles regularly wash ashore. Elsewhere, they are uncovered in gardens, unearthed during everyday work, or found tucked away on islands such as Aore and Mavea — quiet remnants of a much louder time.



Military Police officers toast with their Coca-Colas at a “Retreat Club,” July 21, 1945. . Photo – US Archives.

(continued...)



Coca-Cola marketing continued throughout the war featuring men and women from all of the services and the all important 5c at the base. Photo – Coca-Cola.

In most parts of the world, vintage Coca-Cola bottles are prized collectors' items. On Santo, they remain surprisingly common — a rare case where history quite literally rises to the surface.

Many of these bottles carry their own stories. The distinctive green tint — known as "Georgia Green" — came from the original glassmaking process, later deliberately replicated using iron and copper. But wartime shortages meant that, from around 1942, many bottles were produced in clear glass instead, before returning to green after the war.



Almost a cliché on the beaches around Million Dollar Point. This Coke bottle was washed up onto the rocks at the legendary dumping ground. Photo – Akira Tachikaw.

Turn one over, and you may find the mark of where it was made — Oakland, Los Angeles, San Francisco — tracing a path from American factories to a remote Pacific island.

They are small details, but they speak to something much larger.

During the war, more than five billion bottles of Coca-Cola were consumed by U.S. forces worldwide. What began as a morale booster became something more — a symbol of home, of normality, and ultimately, of American presence across the globe. The infrastructure created to supply that demand would go on to fuel Coca-Cola's post-war expansion into a truly global brand.

But here on Santo, the story feels different.



Soldiers of the 133rd Field Artillery Regiment, Battery C of the 36th Division, dug in March 2, 1944, on the front lines near San Michele, Italy, get their first Coca-Cola in more than a year. Photo – Various sources.

These bottles are not just relics of a marketing success or a wartime logistics effort. They are fragments of daily life — moments of respite between long shifts, patrols, and uncertainty. They speak of young men far from home, finding a small connection to something familiar.

And decades later, they remain.

Scattered along beaches, hidden in the soil, or revealed by the tide, they are a quiet reminder that even in a place defined by war, it was often the smallest things that meant the most.

Lindbergh Goes to War

Charles Lindbergh arrived in the South Pacific in 1944 not as a serving officer, but as something far more unusual—a civilian determined to return to war.

By then, he was already one of the most famous men in the world. His 1927 solo flight across the Atlantic had made him a global icon. Yet his pre-war stance—arguing the United States should avoid involvement in Europe—had placed him at odds with President Franklin D. Roosevelt. When war came after Pearl Harbour, Lindbergh offered his services but was refused reinstatement in the military.



Charles Lindbergh standing beside The Spirit of St. Louis. The custom-built, single-engine monoplane aircraft used by Charles Lindbergh for the first solo, non-stop transatlantic flight in May 1927. Photo – Wikipedia.

Instead, he found another way in.

Working first with Henry Ford on B-24 bomber production, and later with Vought Aircraft on the F4U Corsair, Lindbergh became a technical advisor. But

desk work was never going to be enough. In April 1944, he quietly left San Diego for the Pacific as a civilian representative—officially there to observe and advise, unofficially determined to do much more.

His route took him across the Pacific to Espiritu Santo, then one of the most important Allied bases in the region. From Santo, he began visiting forward airfields across the Solomon Islands, flying with Marine and Navy squadrons operating the powerful Corsair fighter.

It didn't take long before observation turned into participation.

On 22 May 1944, Lindbergh flew his first combat mission, escorting torpedo bombers to Rabaul. Over the following weeks, he carried out a series of missions across New Britain and New Ireland, strafing Japanese positions and even dropping bombs—despite technically being prohibited from engaging in combat.

For Lindbergh, the war was no abstraction. It was immediate, dangerous, and deeply personal. He flew low over enemy positions, faced anti-aircraft fire, and operated alongside young pilots for whom this was daily reality.

But his most significant contribution was yet to come.

After time with Corsair squadrons, Lindbergh moved west to New Guinea, where he joined the 475th Fighter Group—an all P-38 Lightning unit of the U.S. Fifth Air Force. It was here that his analytical mind and flying skill would leave a lasting mark.

The P-38 was a formidable aircraft, but it had a limitation: range. Fighter escorts could not always accompany bombers on long-distance missions, leaving them exposed over enemy territory.

Lindbergh believed this could be changed. (continued...)



A beautifully restored P-38 Lightning aircraft. This was the type of aircraft Lindbergh began experimenting with to gain incredible range from the high performance fighter. Photo – Vintage Aviation News.

Flying with experienced combat pilots—including leading aces—he began experimenting with engine settings. By reducing engine revolutions while increasing manifold pressure, he found a way to dramatically conserve fuel without sacrificing performance.

The results were immediate and transformative.

Where pilots had previously operated within a limited radius, Lindbergh's techniques extended their range by hundreds of miles. Missions that had once been impossible—long-distance escorts, deep strikes into enemy territory—were suddenly within reach.



Charles Lindbergh in the cockpit of a "J" model P-38 Lockheed Lightning at Hollandia in July 1944. Photo – Avionslegendaires.net

Within weeks, the 475th Fighter Group was flying longer missions than ever before. What had been six to eight hour operations stretched to ten hours. Aircraft could now reach distant targets and return safely—something that had not been considered feasible.

Lindbergh did not just explain the theory—he proved it in the air.

Flying regularly with the 475th, he completed dozens of combat missions, often returning with more fuel than any other pilot. His methods quickly spread beyond a

single unit, benefiting the entire Fifth Air Force.

In the midst of this work, he also demonstrated that he could match the combat performance of the men he flew alongside.



Maj. Thomas B. McGuire Jr., the second-highest scoring American ace of World War II, chats with Lindbergh, who lived in a hut at a Pacific base in 1944. Lindbergh was there to train the pilots in a technique for conserving fuel on long-distance missions. Photo – Air Force Museum.

On 28 July 1944, during a mission over Ceram in the Dutch East Indies, Lindbergh shot down a Japanese Ki-51 "Sonia"—his only confirmed aerial victory. It was a remarkable achievement for a civilian observer, flying unofficially in combat conditions.

Yet it was also a moment that highlighted the unusual nature of his presence.

(continued...)

Lindbergh was not a commissioned combat pilot. If he had been shot down and captured, he would not have been treated as a prisoner of war, but potentially as an unlawful combatant. He flew with that knowledge—and still chose to go.

His growing visibility eventually caused concern. General George Kenney, commander of the Fifth Air Force, recognised both Lindbergh's value and the potential political consequences if anything happened to him. In August 1944, he ordered Lindbergh grounded.



The man who grounded Charles Lindbergh General George Kenney. Photo – US Air Force.

By then, the damage—or rather, the benefit—had been done.

Lindbergh's fuel-saving techniques had already reshaped air operations across the region. Fighters could now escort bombers over far greater distances, improving protection, increasing strike capability, and contributing directly to Allied success in the closing stages of the Pacific War.

He returned to the United States in September 1944, having spent nearly five months in the Pacific.

His time there had been unconventional, at times controversial, and largely unofficial. Yet among the pilots and crews who flew with him, there was little doubt about his impact.

Many believed his contribution went far beyond his single aerial victory. By extending the operational range of Allied aircraft, Lindbergh had helped make possible missions that would otherwise have been out of reach.

And it had all begun, quietly, with his arrival in the South Pacific—via places like Espiritu Santo.



Charles A. Lindbergh in the cockpit of a Chance Vought F4U-1 Corsair, Green Islands, Solomon Sea, May 1944. Photo – National Air & Space Museum.

Today, his story sits slightly apart from the more familiar narratives of the war. It is not the story of a conventional officer or decorated squadron leader, but of a man who refused to remain on the sidelines.

Denied a uniform, he found another way to serve.

In doing so, Charles Lindbergh became not just a symbol of aviation achievement, but an unlikely and highly effective contributor to the air war in the Pacific.

Then and now - White Sand Point

At first glance, the calm waters of Havannah Harbour reveal little of their wartime past. Today, the shoreline is dotted with villas, manicured lawns, and the quiet rhythm of a luxury resort. But in 1942, this same stretch of coast was alive with activity, serving as a vital seaplane base at the very edge of the Allied advance.

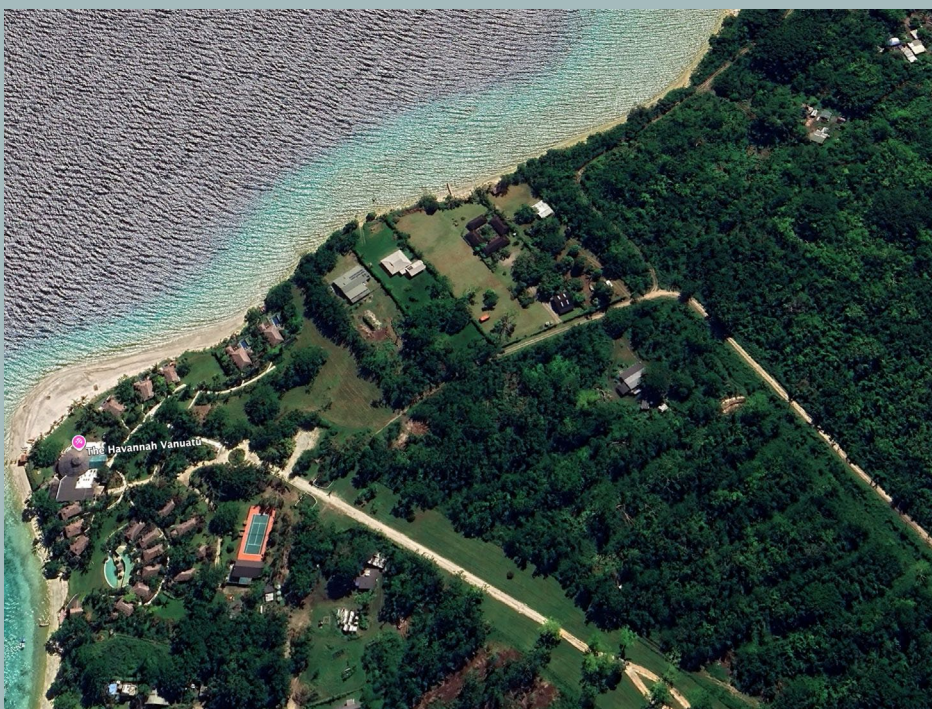


6 December 1943. The Seaplane base, White Sand Point, Efate Island. From an altitude of 2,000 feet and a focal length of 161mm, looking northeast. Photo – US Archives.

Built by U.S. Navy Seabees, the base supported squadrons of PBY Catalina flying boats—long-range patrol aircraft that operated far beyond the horizon. From here, crews flew reconnaissance missions, hunted submarines, bombed Japanese positions, and carried out daring air-sea rescues. The harbour itself became a working airfield, with Catalinas moored across the water and hauled ashore via coral ramps lined with Marston matting.

Look closely at the modern landscape and traces of this past begin to emerge. The road that now takes visitors into the resort follows the line of a former taxiway, once used to move aircraft between hardstands and the water's edge. Where guests now arrive in comfort, ground crews once worked under pressure, preparing aircraft for missions that could stretch for thousands of kilometres.

The transformation is striking—but the geography remains unchanged. Beneath the tranquillity of Havannah Harbour lies a story of endurance, innovation, and the far-reaching air war fought across the South Pacific.



The Seaplane base area as it is today with Havannah Vanuatu resort occupying most of the land. Photo – Google Earth.

Inspiring everyday heroes

It's been graduation week at the very end of April for the students of the University of the South Pacific's Emalus Campus in Port Vila, with sub-centres across the islands, including in Luganville on Espiritu Santo.

We'd like with this feature to salute everyone who has graduated this year, but our eye was caught by a story in the Vanuatu Daily Post about one graduate, Isaac Abraham. As reported by Nicholas Mwai, his journey to graduation was shaped by life in the remote Santo Big Bay bush.

From his home, reaching the nearest road is a journey few would attempt daily. It means walking for three to four hours and crossing the Jordan River again and again.

"We cross the river 32 to 34 times before reaching home or the main road," he said. "There is no transport. We walk, and sometimes we have to stay overnight before continuing to town the next day."

Each trip was physically demanding, carrying school supplies weighing between 20 and 40 kilograms across hills and river crossings. Supporting him throughout was his father, Mathias Malavari.

"I thank my dad. What I needed, he provided," Abraham said.

From 2021 to 2025, Abraham completed a Bachelor of

Commerce, majoring in Economics and Human Resource Management.

Now, he hopes to inspire others from rural communities:

"Do not give up. Challenges will end, and your hard work will pay off."



Isaac Abraham places his graduation cap on his father, Mathias Malavari. Photo by Nicholas Mwai, Vanuatu Daily Post. Photo – Vanuatu Daily Post.

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



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Luganville, Espiritu Santo
Vanuatu

info@southpacificwwiimuseum.com
southpacificwwiimuseum.com

