

A Beer Run, a Tragedy and a Potential Heritage Loss

Few wartime aircraft on Espiritu Santo are as well-known as B-17E Flying Fortress 41-9227, better known as Yankee Doodle Jr. For decades, its wreckage lay in the jungle not far from Million Dollar Point, one of Santo's most recognisable aviation relics and a tangible reminder of the extraordinary role this island played during the Second World War.

Built by Boeing in Seattle as Constructor's Number 2699, the aircraft was delivered to the U.S. Army Air Force as B-17E Flying Fortress 41-9227 before being ferried across the Pacific to the South Pacific theatre. It was eventually assigned to the 13th Air Force, 11th Bombardment Group, 431st Bombardment Squadron and based on Santo. Like so many aircraft that passed through Espiritu Santo during the war, it formed part of the vast

military machine that transformed the island into one of the most important Allied bases in the South Pacific.

But Yankee Doodle Jr. is remembered for more than its service record. Its story carries one of those curious wartime details that at first sounds almost comic — until the ending reminds you that war has a habit of turning the ordinary into tragedy.

On 31 December 1942, with New Year's Eve celebrations underway on Santo and the beer supply apparently running low, Yankee Doodle Jr. was tasked with a flight to Fiji to collect more beer for the festivities. It was the sort of errand that feels almost impossible to imagine today: a giant four-engined Flying Fortress (continued...)

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dispatched on a last-minute beer run in the middle of a global war. Yet that small, human detail is part of what has made the aircraft's story so enduring. It captures something of life on wartime Santo — the scale of the American presence, the remoteness of the islands, and the strange mixture of routine, boredom, ingenuity and danger that marked service in the South Pacific.



Yankee Doodle Jr. prior to its crash on Santo on New Years Eve, 1942. Photo – Various.

Piloted by Captain Jack N. Levy, with 1st Lieutenant Robert B. Andrews aboard, Yankee Doodle Jr. took off from Bomber #1 Airfield at Pallikulo bound for Fiji. It never got there. Almost immediately after take-off, the bomber crashed. The engines had not reached proper operating temperature, resulting in a loss of power on one side of the aircraft. Levy was killed in the crash, and Andrews later died of his injuries. In a moment, a light-hearted New Year's mission became a fatal accident.

The starkness of the official crash report only sharpens the irony. It records, in part, that the aircraft "...crashed Espiritu Santo on liquor ride..." Few wartime documents capture so neatly the strange contrast between the mundane and the catastrophic. What began as an attempt to keep a New Year's Eve party supplied, ended with the loss of two airmen and a bomber that would remain on Santo for more than eighty years.

Both men were officially declared dead on the day of the crash and are buried today at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at Punchbowl in Honolulu.

Captain Levy lies in Section A, Site 568, and Lieutenant Andrews in Section A, Site 326. Their story is part of the story of Yankee Doodle Jr. — and part of the reason the wreck itself matters.

For the South Pacific WWII Museum, the significance of Yankee Doodle Jr. has never rested simply in the wreckage itself. Aircraft like this are part of Santo's story. They speak not only of the men who flew and maintained them, but of the period when this island sat at the centre of the Pacific war. They are the physical traces of a time that changed Santo forever — and they are part of Vanuatu's cultural heritage.

That is why the museum has long been concerned about the condition of the site. Over many years, the wreck slowly deteriorated in the tropical environment while souvenir hunters removed pieces from it. Even in that state, however, it remained important. A wartime crash site is more than scrap metal in the bush. It is

a historic site, a tourism asset, an educational resource, and one of the few surviving links to the people and events that shaped Santo during World War II. In the case of Yankee Doodle Jr., it also preserved one of the most



A rusting spercharger at the crash site back in 2014. There was much to see back then. Photo – Karl von Moller.

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How many visitors to the site remember the wreck of the B-17 with its tail in the air. Photo – Karl von Moller.

unusual and memorable wartime stories associated with the island.

In late May, the future of the site changed dramatically. Museum board member Mayumi Green visited the area and discovered that the land was being cleared for housing. Heavy machinery had moved through the site, damaging and displacing the surviving wreckage



More wonderful pieces of history lay in the jungle, relatively undisturbed until recently. Photo – Karl von Moller.

and pushing what remained of the aircraft into a pile. In a matter of days, one of Santo's best-known wartime aircraft sites was transformed beyond recognition.

The museum immediately sought to work constructively with the landowner in the hope that at least part of the aircraft might still be preserved for the people of Vanuatu.

Unfortunately, those efforts were unsuccessful, and the museum was not permitted to remove or display any part of the wreck.

That is disappointing — not because the museum believes every relic must be taken off private land, but because once sites like this are destroyed, they cannot be recreated. Their context is lost, their story becomes harder to tell, and future generations are left with one less connection to the island's remarkable wartime past. In this case, the damage extends beyond the physical remains of a B-17. It represents the loss of a heritage site that had long been part of Santo's tourism and historical landscape.

It is also important to remember that wartime relics are not simply curios or piles of old metal. In Vanuatu they form part of the nation's cultural heritage.

Heritage legislation exists to recognise and protect places and objects of historical significance. That principle matters on Santo, where the landscape still holds the remains of one of the largest Allied bases in the Pacific. Aircraft wrecks, military structures, abandoned equipment and crash sites are not just leftovers from another era; they are part of the historical record of Vanuatu itself.

This is exactly why the South Pacific WWII Museum exists. The museum does not profit from these stories. Entry is free, and every dollar raised goes back into keeping the museum open, paying local Ni-Vanuatu staff,

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caring for collections, and ensuring that Santo's wartime history is not forgotten. The museum's role is to preserve, interpret and share that history — not for outsiders, but for the people of Vanuatu, for local schoolchildren, for visiting families, and for the many travellers who come to Santo because of its extraordinary wartime heritage.

Again and again, the museum has seen what can be

in the jungle. It is the loss of a story that was at once tragic, human and unmistakably Santo — a New Year's Eve beer run that ended in disaster, and a wartime relic that survived the crash only to be imperilled more than eighty years later.

It is also a reminder of how fragile Santo's wartime heritage really is, and how urgently it needs to be understood, respected and protected.



The B-17 site today. Everything just thrown in one pile or another. Such a shame.
Photo – Mayumi Green.

achieved when relics and sites are treated as shared heritage rather than as obstacles or opportunities for short-term gain. Preserved properly, they become teaching tools, museum exhibits, tourism drawcards and sources of local pride. Once destroyed, they become something else entirely.

The loss of Yankee Doodle Jr. as a recognisable historic site is therefore about far more than one wrecked bomber



Another photo of the site with land clearing going on at an alarming rate. Photo – Bradley Wood.

The South Pacific WWII Museum will continue doing exactly that — documenting these sites, advocating for their preservation, and working to ensure that the island's remarkable wartime story survives for future generations, even when the relics themselves do not.



Inspiration on an Imperial Scale

When South Pacific WWII Museum Newsletter Editor and board member Jimmy Carter was in London recently, one museum stop was always going to be compulsory: the Imperial War Museum. For anyone involved in preserving and presenting wartime history, it is one of the great museums of the world. For Jimmy, however, this was not just a sightseeing stop. It was a chance to look closely at how a major international museum tells the story of the Pacific War — and to see what lessons might be brought back to Santo.



A display cabinet in the Pacific War section of the IWM. The simple but effective way exhibits are raised up to meet the viewer is something the museum in Luganville could look at doing. Photo – Jimmy Carter.

The Imperial War Museum's Second World War galleries are impressive in every sense. Reimagined in a major redevelopment completed in 2021, they combine large artefacts, film, sound, personal stories and carefully designed displays to tell the story of a conflict fought across the globe. For Jimmy, though, the most interesting part was how the museum handled the

Pacific theatre — a part of the war that can sometimes be overshadowed in Britain by the story of Europe.

At IWM London, the Pacific War is not treated as an afterthought. Instead, it is woven through the wider Second World War narrative, showing how Japan's rapid expansion across Asia and the Pacific transformed the war into a truly global struggle. The galleries place the Pacific alongside the European war, making clear that the fighting in places such as Singapore, Burma, Malaya, the Philippines and the



Another great example of gathering items together to tell a single story but linking it to a personal one. Photo – Jimmy Carter

Solomon Islands was every bit as consequential as events in North Africa or Normandy.

For a museum on Espiritu Santo, that approach matters. Santo's wartime story can never be told in isolation. The island was not some distant sideshow to the war. It was part of a huge Allied effort stretching across the Pacific, linked directly to campaigns in Guadalcanal, the Solomons and beyond. Seeing the Pacific War interpreted in that wider context was one of the most useful takeaways from Jimmy's visit. It reinforced the idea that Santo's relics, airfields, stories and personalities are all part of a much larger narrative —

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one that connects this island to some of the defining events of the Pacific war.

Just as striking was the way the Imperial War Museum uses objects to tell human stories. Big museums naturally have big artefacts, but the power of the Pacific material at IWM often lies in the smaller things: personal



Another personal story brought to life at the IWM through simple but very effective displays. Finding the balance between what is enough and what is too much is a constant battle for museum curators. Photo – Jimmy carter.

items, photographs, uniforms, film footage and the voices of those who lived through the conflict. The result is not simply a display of military hardware, but a reminder that the Pacific War was experienced by airmen, sailors, soldiers, prisoners, civilians and entire communities spread across a vast ocean.

That, perhaps, is where the most useful inspiration lies for Santo. The South Pacific WWII Museum may not have the Imperial War Museum's budget, its gallery space or its access to major international collections — and no, Jimmy did not return from London with plans for a multi-million-dollar redesign of Unity Park. But

what he did bring back were ideas: ideas about how to link Santo's local story to the broader Pacific conflict, how to use personal stories more effectively, and how to create displays that help visitors understand not just what happened here, but why it mattered.

In that sense, the visit was a reminder that good museum storytelling is not simply about money or scale. It is about making connections — between objects and people, between Santo and the wider war, and between the past and the visitors walking through the gallery today. If a trip to one of the world's great war museums helps spark new ways to tell Santo's Pacific War story, then that sounds like a very worthwhile research mission indeed.



The Imperial War Museum in London is one of the world's finest museums and not to be missed if you're ever in London. Photo – Imperial War Museum.

The Search for the Sydney

How Australia's Greatest Maritime Mystery Was Solved by David L. Mearns

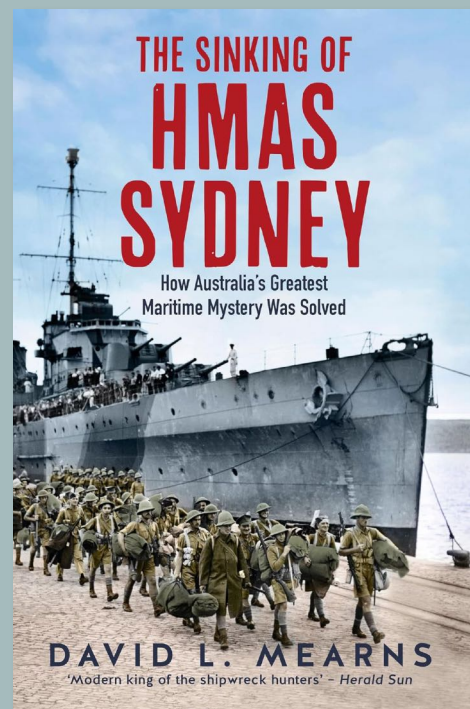
A book review by Tammi Johnson

Let me preface this review by saying this is one of the most beautifully produced books I've ever seen - from front cover, all 263 pages in between to the back, especially the cover, which when unfolded reveals complete architectural drawings of this ill-fated ship. There is a centerfold of Sydney in all her living color. Slick pages and beautiful full color photographs make diving into the story a real adventure. The loss of 645 men, however, does change the mood.

David Mearns discovered the story in 1996, found Sydney on March 16, 2008, and published the book detailing the location of HMAS Sydney and the German vessel who took her down, the raider HSK Kormoran (found March 12) off the western coast of Australia in 2009. Sydney was cruising southwest in the Indian Ocean heading for Fremantle on November 19, 1941, when Kormoran appeared coming in the opposite direction disguised as a Dutch freighter. Sydney was caught unawares as Kormoran dropped the Dutch flag and began firing. By the time the battle ended, Sydney was going down and taking all 645 men with her including Captain Joseph Burnett. There were no survivors. Kormoran, commanded by Captain Theodor Detmers, took damage to the engine room and ended up miles away before being scuttled with the crew ordered to abandon ship. In sinking, she lost 78 men of her full crew of 393 due to mishaps with abandoning ship and lifeboat issues. Days later Kormoran's men were rescued by 2 British vessels, the Trocas and the Aquitania.

At her commissioning, Sydney was dubbed "The Gray Gladiator". The loss of Sydney and her entire crew was the greatest maritime disaster in the history of Australia. As with Strong, relatives of these men grieving for decades never got closure until she

was found. Months later, David was invited back to Australia, to Geraldton to meet with the families and be present at a ceremony dedicated to the find. A beautiful memorial park has been built to forever commemorate and honor the ship and her men.



I bought this book years ago and had to order it from an Australian source. When I got it, the book was signed by David, evidently left over from an event. I've known him now since 2011 but have only met him face to face once at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania in 2015. Since I brought the book with me, he very kindly expanded on the signature. While in Vanuatu I met a woman whose grandfather was on Sydney and present at the ceremony in Geraldton and got to meet David - a very special connection. I've read it from cover to cover and recommend getting hold of a copy if you can.

THIS MONTH IN MILITARY HISTORY

Rolling Up Santo

June the 12th, 1946 is the date that the giant base at Espiritu Santo ceased to be, officially.

The story of the dumping of vast quantities of war material is well known, giving rise to Million-Dollar Point.



The only known photograph of the dumping at Million Dollar Point. Clearing out the base was as simple as driving everything into the sea to dispose of it. Photo – Unknown source.

It all smacked of happening at break-neck speed.

But in fact, well over a year earlier, bases like Espiritu Santo were on the tour itinerary of Farber. Not a famous fighting admiral, but one who had enabled the US fleet to roll forward on a tide of logistical excellence.

In February 1945, Admiral Farber travelled extensively in the Pacific, his task to assess whether the 'roll up' of rear area bases could be accelerated.

The war was still being fought, and no-one could say when it would end or whether an invasion of the Japanese home islands would be necessary.

The goal of Admiral Farber's survey was to identify

personnel and materials that could be moved forward to active combat zones or returned to the United States for disposal as the war moved closer to Japan.

He noted that the roll up to date had seen 140 organised units, with some 56-thousand personnel and 1.75 million tons of material, moved closer to the fighting.

In theory, another 35-thousand personnel and 2 million more tons could be moved forward.

The rub was that the frontline commanders weren't so keen. With limited port capacity, they preferred to allot it to new equipment arriving from the United States rather than used gear from rear bases like Espiritu Santo.

Ultimately, while most personnel were moved, only about one-quarter of the material Admiral Farber earmarked was actually rolled forward.

As well, the genius of the US



Rear Admiral William Sims Farber.
Photo – militarytimes.com

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pipeline to sustain a war across the Pacific was a hindrance. The pipeline was built to ship in one direction – west. Shipping material home would tie up

By then understandably, the focus was on getting the men and women home. That was a gargantuan enough task for everyone concerned.



Equipment yards like this one on Santo were full of perfectly operable machinery that could have been shipped to the front lines. The problem was logistics. Photo – US Archives.

port space for fresh shipments to the frontlines. Such were the problems of a war economy so prodigious that turning it off would be no easy matter.

While Espiritu Santo in fact played a big role as a staging area for the massive invasion of Okinawa, the countdown to its closure had really begun, and towards the strange end that saw perfectly serviceable trucks and bulldozers driven into the sea.



More equipment at Santo awaiting dumping at Million Dollar Point. Such a waste for perfectly serviceable equipment. Photo – US Archives.

Information sourced from US Naval Logistics in the Second World War, by Duncan Ballantine, 1947 (reprinted 1992).

The Docks That Powered Santo

To understand wartime Santo, it helps to stop thinking of Base Button as a single naval base and start seeing it as a working waterfront spread around the Second Channel. The Americans did not build one great wharf and call the job done. They built a network of 23 docks, piers and landing places stretching along the

the everyday workhorses of the harbour: Dollar Dock, Finger Dock, and the numbered Piers 1 to 5, where cargo ships could unload the endless flow of fuel drums, ammunition, vehicles, rations, spare parts and engineering stores needed to sustain a major advance base. Nearby sat the Fighter #1 Crash Boat Pier, linking



Santo's main dock in 1944. It sat roughly at the rear of where Santo Hardware is today. Two Liberty Ships are tied up and unloading supplies that will go into the enormous warehouse complex to the left of the photograph. Photo - US Archives.

Luganville shoreline, out toward Pallikulo, and across the water to Aore and nearby islands. Together, they turned Espiritu Santo into one of the busiest military harbours in the South Pacific.

A January 1946 "Docks - Public Works Records" list preserves the names of those facilities, while the wartime Base Button map shows how they were laid out across the harbour system. What emerges is a base whose waterfront was divided into working zones, each with its own role in keeping ships, aircraft and men moving north to the Solomons.

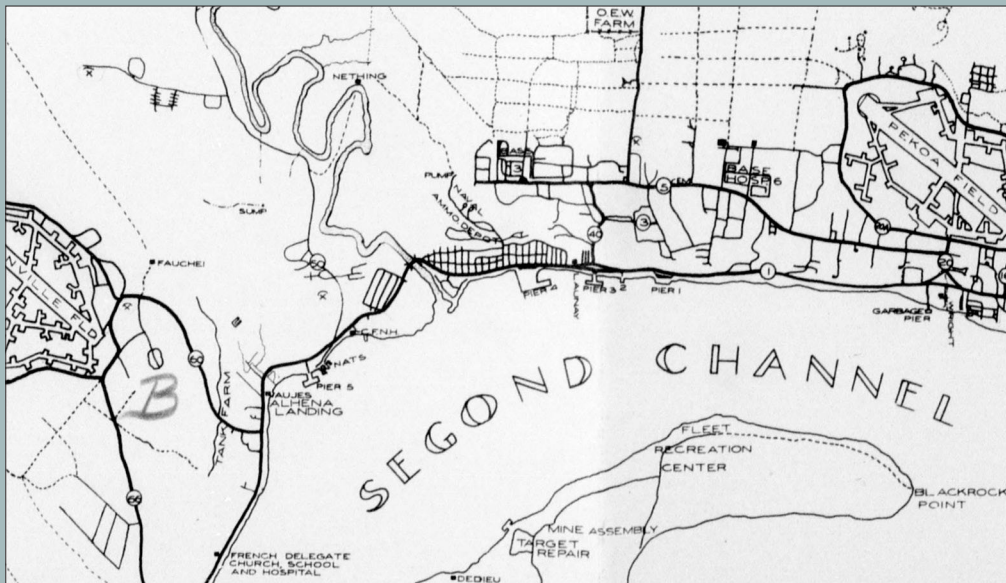
The heart of the system lay along the main Base Button waterfront on the Second Channel. Here were

the harbour directly to Santo's air operations, while Pier 6 Boat Repair and the Boat Pool supported the small craft that swarmed around the anchorage.



Pier 5 to the west of town near the Boat Repair Pool in 1944. Photo - US Archives.

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A close up of a section of a map created around 1944. Half a dozen of the main docks along the Second Channel in Luganville can be seen including Pier 5 in the previous photo. Map – Unknown source.

This same waterfront also included Net Storage and NATS, located west of the main dock concentration near the Drum Refill Plant, showing how closely harbour operations were tied to the naval support facilities spread along the shoreline.

Moving east, the dock system extended into the Pallikulo sector, where the list records Pallikulo Dock and the nearby Ammo Dump. This was no accident of geography. Pallikulo was tied to bomber and support installations inland, and it made sense for more hazardous or specialist work to be pushed away from the busiest central waterfront. Ammunition handling, bulk stores and support for nearby operational areas could all be separated from the congestion of the main harbour while remaining connected to the wider Base Button network.

Across the channel on Aore and the nearby islands, the waterfront became even more specialised. The list includes Fuel Pier (Aore), Mine Assembly (Aore) and Marine Railway (Aore)—names that reveal Aore's role as the industrial back room of the base. Fuel storage and transfer were concentrated there, along with mine

work and a marine railway capable of hauling craft from the water for repair. Also listed are Fleet Training (Aore) and CBMU 538, while farther out were docks serving the Net Depot at Aessi and the Anti-Aircraft School on Aulapa Island. These were not casual add-ons; they show how far the naval base extended beyond the shoreline of Luganville itself.

The dock list also records how these structures were

built. Some were coral fill, others pile-platform, and others pontoon. It was classic Seabee construction: use the method that suited the coastline, the task and the urgency of war. By January 1946 many were already



Santo's Main dock, 'Pier 4' in 1943. Docks 3, 2 and 1 can be seen in the left of the shot. Photo – US Archives.

marked simply as "poor," a sign of how hard they had been worked and how quickly the wartime base was being abandoned.

Yet for a few extraordinary years these 23 docks did exactly what they were built to do. They transformed the Second Channel from a quiet tropical waterway into the maritime engine room of Base Button—the working edge of a base that helped sustain the Allied advance across the South Pacific.

Torpedoes, Tropics and Teamwork

Just over a kilometre east of today's South Pacific WWII Museum, tucked away on the shores of Second Channel, stood one of Base Button's most specialised – and least remembered – wartime facilities. It wasn't an airfield, a hospital or a supply depot. It was the Torpedo Overhaul Shop, where some of the Pacific War's most powerful naval weapons were stripped down, repaired and prepared for battle.



Men of 49th Seabees constructing 'runways' for torpedo trucks at what would become the torpedo repair shop on Santo. September 1943. Photo – US Archives.

Yet before a single torpedo could be overhauled, the United States Navy first had to create this remarkable facility from scratch in the middle of a tropical island thousands of kilometres from home.

That task began in July 1942, when two officers and fifty-six enlisted men assembled at Moffett Field, California, to form a new Torpedo Overhaul Shop unit destined for Espiritu Santo. Under the command of Lieutenant S. W. Thompson, the men spent months training at the Naval Air Station's Torpedo Shop in Alameda, learning every aspect of servicing torpedoes, from complete overhauls to routine maintenance. Their preparation extended

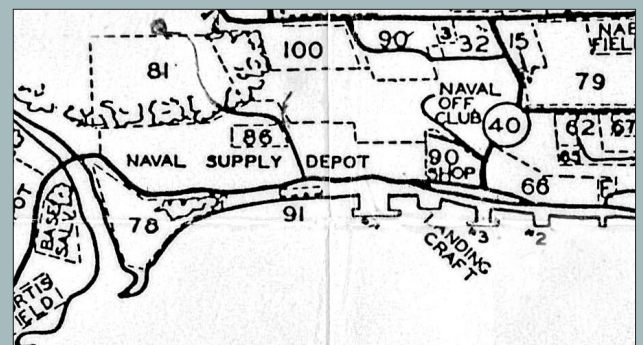
beyond the workshop, with military drills, jungle warfare training and physical conditioning ensuring they were ready for life in the South Pacific.

Before they could even leave the United States, another challenge awaited. Every piece of specialist machinery needed to establish the workshop had to be collected from naval depots across the country. Some equipment

was diverted from other units, while precision machines arrived from torpedo stations on both the east and west coasts. By February 1943, the workshop had been packed aboard ship and was on its way to Santo.

The unit arrived on Espiritu Santo on 7 March 1943, only to discover that its new home wasn't quite ready. For almost a month the men remained aboard ship while accommodation and workshop foundations were completed. Once ashore, construction gathered pace. By early May, three large Quonset huts stood side by side, linked by concrete runways that allowed torpedoes to be safely moved between each building. Shop

One serviced aircraft torpedoes, Shop Two handled fleet torpedoes, while Shop Three housed the machine



The Torpedo Shop is shown as 'g1' in this close up from a map of the base. It is just to the east of the PT Boat base, no. 78. Map – US Archives.

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February 1943. Unloading torpedoes from the USS CHANDELEUR (AV 10) in Santo harbour.
Photo – US Archives.

shop, spare parts and the final preparation area where completed torpedoes were made ready for issue. Nearby magazines stored finished weapons, while explosive components such as detonators and boosters were kept separately under strict security.

Although originally intended to support local operations, the workshop quickly became one of the Navy's most important facilities in the South Pacific.

Torpedoes arrived from aircraft carriers, destroyers, submarines, motor torpedo boat squadrons and naval air stations throughout the theatre. Every weapon was carefully dismantled, inspected, repaired, reassembled and tested before returning to service.

Operating such a facility in the tropics presented its own challenges. Santo's relentless humidity and salt-laden air encouraged rust and corrosion, forcing technicians to develop special preservation techniques. Propellers were regularly turned by hand while in storage, protective

oils were applied to internal components, silica gel was used to absorb moisture, and delicate gyro mechanisms were housed in air-conditioned rooms to maintain their accuracy. Even transporting torpedoes around the island could become difficult when tropical downpours turned roads into rivers of mud.

As the workload increased, so did the workshop's responsibilities. It became the South Pacific's principal overhaul centre for torpedo exploder mechanisms and later the region's central source of spare parts. Personnel also travelled to operational units, training aircraft crews in the correct handling and maintenance of aerial torpedoes after combat experience showed that valuable



Navy personnel haul the propulsion sections of torpedoes on trolleys into the torpedo overhaul shop in February 1944. Trunks of destroyed palm trees from along the beach area have been dumped beside the road. Photo – US Archives.

weapons were sometimes being damaged before they were ever launched.

One incident highlighted just how important the workshop's role had become.

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After several torpedoes supplied to the aircraft carrier USS Essex were found to be less than battle-ready, overhaul procedures were carefully reviewed and quality-control measures tightened. It was a timely reminder that lives at the front depended upon the skill, care and attention to detail of the sailors working quietly behind the scenes on Santo.

The numbers tell an impressive story. Between May 1943 and May 1945, the Torpedo Overhaul Shop received more than 2,650 torpedoes, successfully overhauled more than 2,500, and returned over 2,100 fully serviced weapons to the fleet. Aircraft carriers including USS Saratoga, USS Essex, USS Bunker Hill, USS Independence and USS Princeton, together with numerous destroyers and submarines, all benefited from the expertise of the Santo workshop.



The USS Saratoga landing aircraft, 6 June 1935. Photo – US Navy.

As Allied forces advanced steadily towards Japan during 1945, Espiritu Santo's role as a forward base gradually diminished. The Torpedo Overhaul Shop was eventually closed, its equipment transferred to other bases and its experienced personnel reassigned. Like so many wartime facilities on Santo, it quietly disappeared into history.

Today, little remains to remind visitors that this peaceful stretch of Second Channel was once home to one of the busiest torpedo workshops in the Pacific. It never fired a torpedo, commanded a warship or featured in dramatic battle reports, yet its contribution was no less important. Every torpedo that left the workshop represented

countless hours of painstaking work by skilled technicians whose efforts helped keep Allied ships and aircraft in the fight. Like so much of Base Button, the Torpedo Overhaul Shop reminds us that victory in the Pacific depended not only on those at the front, but also on the thousands of dedicated men working tirelessly behind the scenes.



Base Button's PT Boat Base was located just to the west of the Torpedo Overhaul Shop on Santo. Photo – Supplied.

Information for this article was sourced from *A Naval History of Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, 1945* by Lieutenant D. W. Kralovec.

Then and now - Pallikulo Dock

During Santo's wartime years as Base Button, two main docks helped keep one of the South Pacific's busiest Allied bases supplied and operating. One stood behind what is now Santo Hardware, while the other occupied the western side of the Pallikulo Peninsula. This western wharf played a key role in handling the steady flow of cargo needed to support Santo's air

operations, with aircraft parts, general spares, equipment and other essential supplies unloaded here in vast quantities.

From the dock, much of this material was moved to the aviation warehousing area further down the peninsula.

Other loads were transferred to smaller craft for delivery across the bay to Bomber #1 airfield, or north along the east coast to Turtle Bay fighter strip.

To cope with the constant movement of ships and cargo, the Americans built a substantial shore facility and moored a large pontoon wharf alongside, allowing supply vessels to tie up and unload quickly.

Today, the scene is almost unrecognisable. The wartime dock area has given way to an industrial waterfront, with bulldozed land, felled log stockpiles, rusting barges and decaying equipment replacing the bustle of one of Santo's once-vital military supply points.



Pallikulo dock on the Pallikulo Peninsula in a photo taken in March 1944. Photo - US Archives.



The dock area as it is today in this photo taken in August 2024. The yellow line shows the location of the main dock during World War II. Photo - Google Earth.

Inspiring everyday heroes

On Pentecost, recovery from the big cyclones is still a work in progress. Homes and gardens have been rebuilt, but the trees, river sources and coastal areas that took a hit will take much longer to come back. That is where planters like Petro Bulevahka, from Bwatnapni in Central Pentecost, are trying to make a difference.



Petro Bulevahka's whitewood nursery on Pentecost – Photo Hilaire Bule.

Mr Bulevahka is preparing to ship six hundred whitewood seedlings to Epi, in Shefa Province, after people there placed an order with his nursery. For him, it is a big moment. In 20 years of working with whitewood, this is the first time he has received an order from another island or province. He says it shows more people are thinking seriously about tree planting, not just as conservation work, but as part of how families can earn and plan for the future.

The interest also says something about where farming is heading after years of storm damage. Kava remains important in Vanuatu, but Mr Bulevahka says people are realising they do not have to put everything into one crop. Whitewood can sit alongside yams, taro, banana, kava, cacao, coffee and fruit trees such as oranges. In other words, a plantation can be a mix of food, cash crops and trees that protect the land.

That mix matters for islands like Pentecost, battered by Category 5 cyclones in recent years and still recovering forest cover. Under a climate change programme, another 5,000 seedlings will be distributed across North Pentecost, Central Pentecost 1, Central Pentecost 2 and South Pentecost. The plan is to replant around river sources and coastal areas, backed by local by-laws declaring river sources protected areas, with water committees set up to manage them.

Mr Bulevahka's nursery now has 5,600 plants, including seedlings for Epi and another five hundred bound for Maewo for the national agriculture show next month. He is also collecting seeds from his plantation, where more than 1,000 whitewood trees are over 20 years old.

Thank you to the original article in the Vanuatu Daily Post, by Hilaire Bule.

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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