



Donna hits the airwaves

You may remember our story from last month's newsletter regarding the amazing work Donna Esposito has been doing tracking down the owners of the dog tags that were donated to the Museum.

Following Donna's recent discoveries, we were contacted by ABC Radio Australia Reporter and Producer Mala Darmadi who wanted to interview Donna for a story she was preparing.

Donna and Mala hooked up via Zoom and had a wonderful chat about her work with the dog tags. If you'd like to hear that interview visit: <https://www.abc.net.au/radio-australia/programs/pacificbeat/van-dog-tags-mystery/12801034> or click the web address to take you there.

REGISTRAR'S REPORT
DESCRIPTION OF REGISTRANT

RACE	HEIGHT (Approx.)	WEIGHT (Approx.)	COMPLEXION	
White	X 5' 5 1/2"	165	Yellow	
Slavic			Light	X
	Blue	Black	Reddish	
	Gray	Red	Dark	
	Brown	Black	Freckled	
	Black	Gray	Light brown	
	Black	Gray	Dark brown	
	Black	Black	Black	

Other obvious physical characteristics that will aid in identification:
None except appendectomy scar

I certify that my returns are true, that the person registered has read and has had read to him his own returns that I have witnessed his signature on each and that all of his returns of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

Mary Williams
Registrar for Local District #1, Saline Co., Mo.
Date of registration: 5-31-45
Saline County, Mo. 195
MAY 31 1945 001
Marshall, Missouri



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Off the radar

Heading out north on the East Coast Highway towards Turtle Bay Airfield, you'll find it hard to miss the sight of some of the most beautiful beaches on Santo.

However, what you will probably drive right past, is what is known as 'Hospital Hill'. A fairly innocuous looking rise with a view from the top that takes your breath away.

It was on this hill during World War II that the US Army constructed a sophisticated early warning station to prevent an enemy invasion or attack from the north east. It was also



the site of the 31st Navy General Hospital, from which the site obviously gets its nick name.

Until fairly recently, what was actually constructed on Hospital Hill was somewhat of a mystery. South Pacific WWII Museum Project Manager James Carter, having visited and photographed the site set about finding out what and who were lucky enough to take in some of the best views on the island.

Visiting the area today, it can be clearly seen that a number of structures were located there.

To the north of the site is a large square concrete pad with angled steel supports protruding from concrete bases in each corner. Following a line along the edge of the plateau to the south, you come across two more concrete pads.

Back to the west are a number of concrete slabs and ground level concrete structures. There are also what appears to be culverts that may have been for storing or transferring water around the site. (Continued...)



Some of the many concrete footings on Hospital Hill



While just to the west of the second concrete slab where the road loops around, one would suggest was the remains of some sort of camp, given the way the road is laid out.

Research has uncovered three maps of the area. All three maps feature military map markings on the hill, including coastal artillery positions, infantry and the 'PETERSEN PT. WATCH TOWER', also labelled 'NAB SIG TOWER' (NAB - Naval Advance Base). That tower was featured in the August edition of our newsletter.

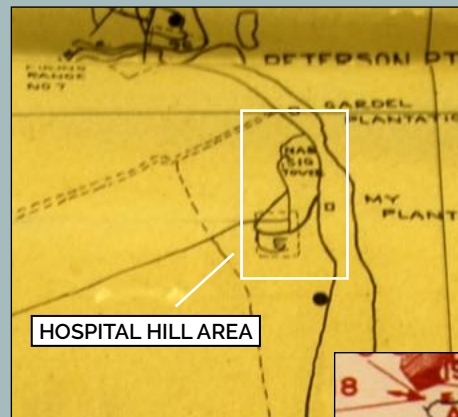
Captain 'Windy' Welch

Captain Claude H. 'Windy' Welch from Marine Observation Squadron 251 (VMO-251) was tasked with getting two radars built on Santo.

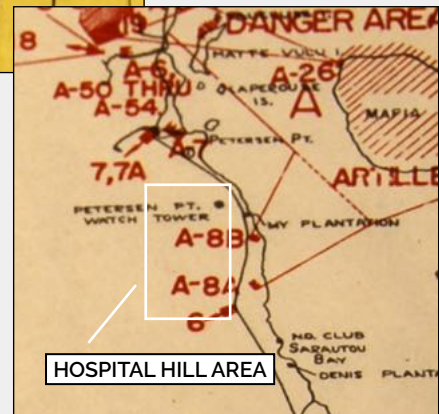
In August 1942, the first location chosen was far up north on Cape Cumberland. By September 4, 1942 the radar was operational in one of the most remote areas of Santo, protecting its northern approaches from surprise attack.



A VMO-251 Wildcat at Turtle Bay, with its distinctive squadron crest on the engine cowling. While flying the Grumman F4F Wildcat during World War II, the squadron participated in numerous Pacific campaigns including Guadalcanal, Southern Solomons, Santa Cruz, Luzon, and the Southern Philippines.



Two of the US military maps we had obtained from the US Archives that clearly indicate the Signal/Watch tower on the northern end of 'Hospital Hill'. The upper image suggests another area at the southern end where the road loops around.



On September 6, Welch was pegged by Admiral McCain to install the second radar station just near Turtle Bay. He selected the Petersen Plantation for the site due to its location and the fact it already had access roads. He then commandeered a construction battalion and after clearing the coconut palms, construction was relatively straightforward and the radar was up and running very quickly. Within the space of two months, the Marines of VMO-251 established two fully functional radar stations on Santo. (Continued...)

Pearl Harbour radars

The radars on Santo were the SCR-270 (Set Complete Radio model 270). One of the first operational early-warning radars of WWII. In fact, the same radars that detected the Japanese aircraft approaching Pearl Harbour.

Looking at the footprint of the antenna mast in the photograph of a fixed SCR-270 unit (as opposed to the mobile version), it appears to be similar in size to the concrete pad and footings on Hospital Hill.

Aerial reconnaissance photographs taken on April 22, 1943, include the northern area of Hospital Hill. The shot is entitled 'Radar and Searchlight' and based on that title alone, one could surmise that this was the location of the SCR-270 radar.

In another shot taken around a month later on May 18, 1943, a new building has been constructed right next to the slab we believe the radar tower was on. The building appears to have the approximate dimensions of the building in the SCR-270 photo.

The SCR-270 radar. This is not the radar on Santo.

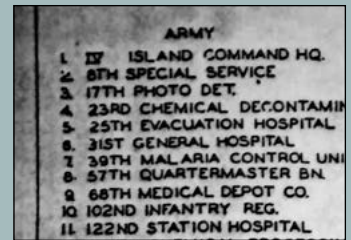
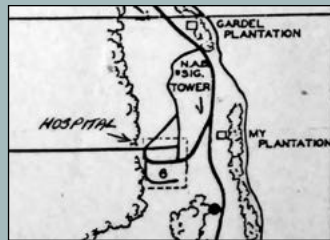


Not just any hospital

Until quite recently, we couldn't be certain which hospital was on Hospital Hill and its exact location.

However, a copy of another map had actually been donated to the Museum by a Santo local many years ago. When he heard about our research, he said check the map. No one knew of the map's existence and after a thorough search it was located. Sure enough, the **31st Navy General Hospital** was marked on the map. The very hospital that Bob Hope visited on July 1, 1944!

After months of research, we now know for certain that Hospital Hill was home to a watch/signal tower, a searchlight, a sophisticated radar, artillery, infantry and of course a hospital all sharing some of the most stunning views on the whole of Espiritu Santo.



Mail call

Battleships, frigates and destroyers are probably the first thing that springs to mind when you think of the US Navy. But what about mail - good old-fashioned letters and parcels?

Navy Post Offices (NPOs) and Fleet Post Offices (FPOs) were military branches of the main New York City Post Office - and there were a lot of them scattered around the world.

By April 1945 there were 3,457 post offices on Navy vessels, 857 Navy post offices at foreign bases and 567 at domestic shore stations. A total of 4,881 mail facilities attached to the Navy alone.

In the early days of Base BUTTON, mail from the United States regularly took three to four months to reach Espiritu Santo and in some cases, mail remained in transit for up to seven months!



Mail Arrives at the FPO after being offloaded from a Navy ship November 1943

FPO BUTTON, officially designated as Navy Post Office 140, began operations in late January 1943.

All US Navy mail was dispatched through the Fleet Post Office which was located near Pier One not far from the communications centre.

With over 50,000 personnel based on Santo during 1943/44 it's not hard to imagine the vast volumes of mail coming and going from Santo. In fact, in late 1944 over one million pounds (500 tons) of parcels were handled in just one month!



Why have one postal service when you can have four?

In addition to the Navy's Mail service, the Army, Marines and Army Air Force had their own postal systems and regularly faced a mountain of mail not unlike their counterparts in the Navy. In March 1944 the Army dispatched and received over 200,000 items of mail through Santo.

An icon of the South Pacific

Burns Philp was a major Australian shipping line and trading company that operated in the South Pacific from the late 1800s until around the 1970s when its shipping business declined.

At its peak it had offices and branches throughout Australia in Townsville, Normanton, Burketown, Thursday Island, Cairns, Charters Towers, Sydney and Brisbane. It was also operating a large branch in London and its South Pacific interests were vast covering New Guinea, Norfolk Island, Central Pacific, Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Java, Wellington and of course New Hebrides.

Recently, friend of the Museum Dr Stuart Bedford, who is a Fellow in the School of Culture, History and Language at the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra came and visited us at the Museum.



The original Burns Philp Santo store in 1953.

Stuart is often in Vanuatu doing archaeological research.

On his visit he mentioned he had some photographs of Santo back when the Burns Philp stores opened in Luganville - the first of which was just 5 years after the huge Allied base closed on Santo. The collection is quite incredible and is part of the Noel Butlin collection, in the Burns Philp archives at ANU.

The photos show the incredible range of products Burns Philp offered locals on Santo despite its relatively remote location.

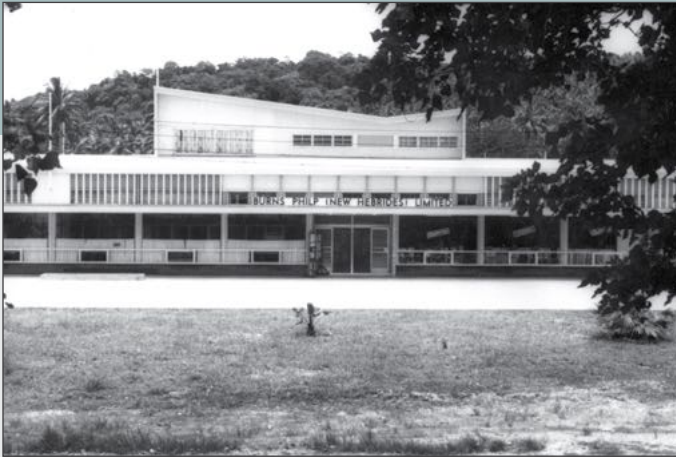
Some of the collection we've already put up on the Museum's Facebook page. However, for those not on social media, we thought we'd share some of the wonderful shots from Burns Philp Luganville in our newsletter.



Christmas in the original store December 1952.



The interior of the original Burns Philp Store in Luganville 1953.



Burns Philp's new store in Santo November 1961.



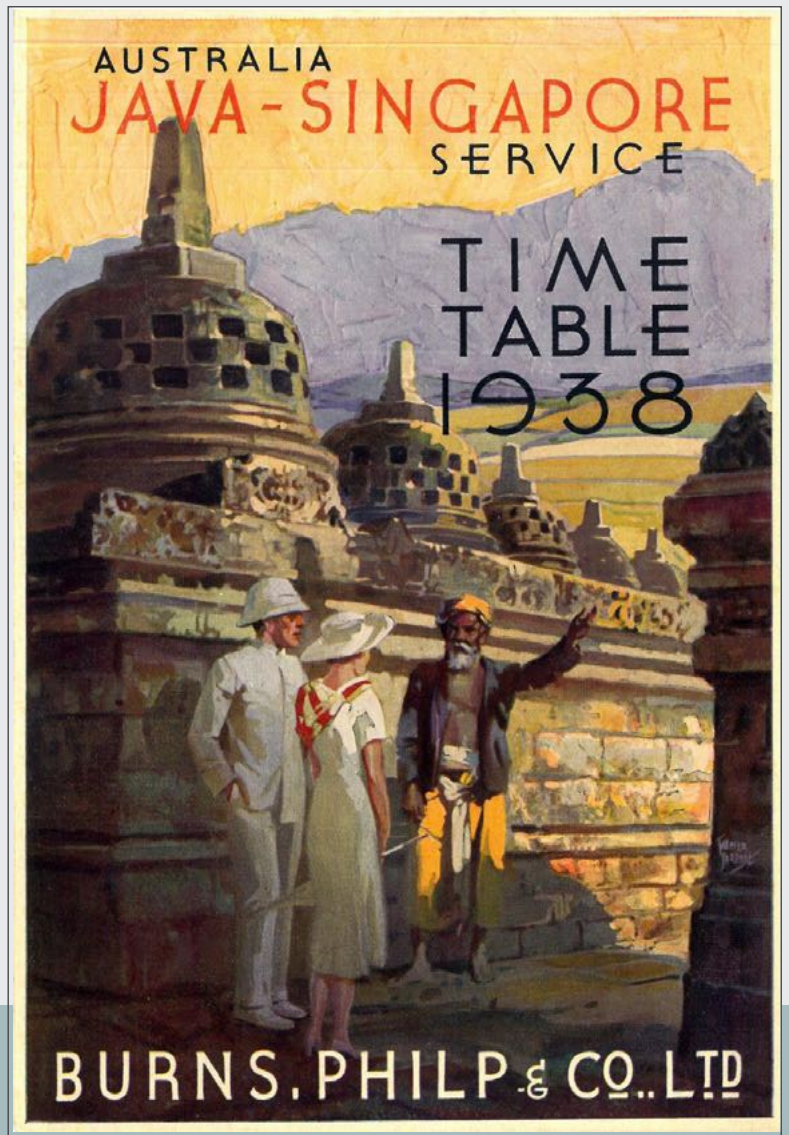
Santo Branch retail store September 1961.



Groceries section Santo store February 1964.



Santo Branch men's section September 1961.



Burns Philp reflected the glamour of travel to exotic destinations in all its posters.

Inspiring everyday heroes

Our hero this month is someone who has done an extraordinary amount of charity work for the people of Vanuatu - on Espiritu Santo, its surrounding islands and on Efate and other islands down south. It's the Museum's very own Secretary, Mayumi Green.



Mayumi (left) and the Big Heart Island Vanuatu volunteer team.

Following cyclones and other natural disasters that hit our beautiful country, Mayumi is always one of the first to put up her hand from her Toyota Hilux and offer to do what needs to be done - whatever it takes.

Her Facebook group 'Big Heart Island Vanuatu' began following the destruction from Cyclone Pam in 2015. Its aim was to provide relief to as many people and villages



A relief package sent to Nokonbok village in on Central Pentecost.

as possible through fundraising and donations.

Following its success, Mayumi and her group of incredible volunteers continue to provide help when and where it's needed. And this year the unbelievable devastation caused by Cyclone Harold, has kept Mayumi busy around the clock since April.

The team's relief work will continue well into 2021. We can't thank Mayumi enough for all she has done.

Maybe you'd like to thank her too with a donation to Big Heart Island Vanuatu? This can be done via the gofundme page set up by Matthew Lo. You'll find the page here: <https://gf.me/u/yqq3sf>

Or if you want to see the work being undertaken, visit the Big Heart Island Vanuatu Facebook page here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/BigHeartIslandVanuatu/>

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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