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## Paul Allen and the Lexington

It's been a red letter month for honoring the sacrifices made in the war in the South Pacific, with the amazing discovery by Paul G Allen and his team of two sunken warships, the USS Lexington and the USS Juneau.

Paul Allen is a billionaire philanthropist who founded Microsoft with Bill Gates.

He has dedicated himself to many causes, including climate change, technology and science – but he also finds time to pursue his passion in military history.

One of his projects is an underwater submersible – and it has now discovered the site of the Lexington. The Lady Lex was sunk by Japanese carrier planes during the Battle of the Coral Sea, west of Espiritu Santo.

The battle, fought over May 7-8 1942, was a draw, but was the first significant check for the Japanese in the Pacific War.

If that wasn't enough of an achievement, on St Patrick's Day the team uncovered the wreck of the Juneau, a light cruiser that was torpedoed in action off Guadalcanal. It limped out of action towards Espiritu Santo but was again torpedoed, fatally this time, by a Japanese submarine. Over 600 sailors perished.

*Image: USS Juneau before it sunk. On March 17th its wreckage was discovered in the South Pacific. It sunk during the Battle of Guadalcanal, killing 687 men including all five of the Sullivan brothers. (Source: US National Archives).*



Paul Allen's submersible has earlier found the wrecks of the famed heavy cruiser USS Indianapolis and the Japanese super battleship Musashi.

The Museum project has congratulated Mr Allen, and we hope we may be able to display some of his remarkable undersea footage for visitors to the project office.

## The Jeep

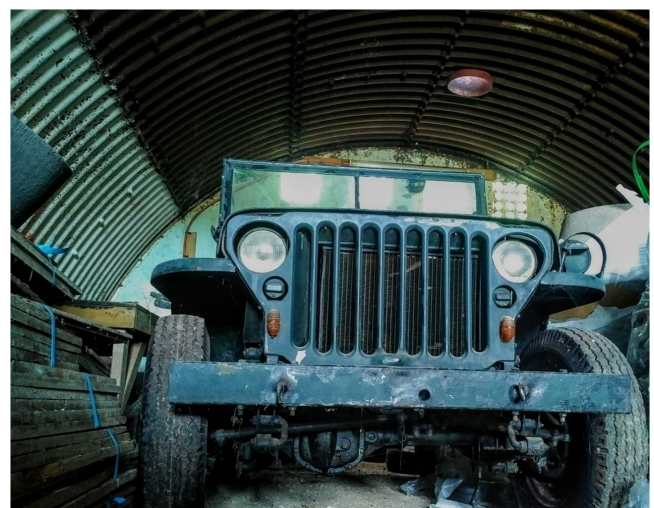
One of the Museum's star assets has not been hidden many metres undersea, but instead out of sight in a Quonset hut in Luganville town.

The Jeep was donated to the South Pacific WWII Museum by Janis Sheen & her late husband Daryl Sheen.

That's the Willy's jeep which this month has come out of storage so that its restoration can begin. It was in good form after being stored inside a wartime ammunition bunker for the past few years.

While we have more research to do on its history, we understand in its earlier life it was used in a movie in Australia.

We'll keep you posted on the progress in getting the jeep back on the road.



## This month in South Pacific War History

Every newsletter we will be highlighting some of the history of that particular month in the war in the South Pacific.

This month in 1942 saw the appointment of General Douglas MacArthur on March 18<sup>th</sup> as the commander of the Southwest Pacific Theatre by US president Franklin Roosevelt.



There's no bigger, more divisive and controversial character in the Pacific War than General MacArthur.

His army defending the Phillipines was doomed to eventual surrender and the decision was made to evacuate MacArthur to Australia to begin organising the defence there against the still-expanding Japanese assault.

If he had had his way, General MacArthur would have had command over the South Pacific theatre that covered the New Hebrides. But that instead came under the control of the US Navy, rather than the US Army – setting the scene for the fierce battles to come.

## Success finding a Kiwi family

Last month we highlighted the story of a piece of wood found in Luganville which bore an inscription from James Walcott, a New Zealand serviceman based here in 1944-45. His words included his address in the southern New Zealand city of Dunedin.

We wrote a story for the local newspaper and they ran a piece in their reader's column, appealing for any family members to come forward.

Mr Walcott is deceased, but his daughter Jude was alerted to the story and has made contact.

You can read more here, under the heading Vanuatu Timber:

<http://bit.ly/2DGiA88>

The museum hopes in due course that we can learn more about James Walcott and further help his family unearth a special bit of their past.

## A cruise ship comes visiting



The Carnival Spirit had to skirt around the remains of Cyclone Hola to reach Espiritu Santo on March 10, but for around a hundred passengers, it was a chance to see our museum project office and its exhibits.

The museum office always opens on cruise ship days, and we average around 70 to 100 visitors each time. It's a great chance to talk to people about what we're doing. We find people are very interested and often surprised to learn about the island's massive wartime role.

For us, it's also an opportunity to confirm that once we build a museum here, it will have a ready tourist audience, as well as drawing a constant stream of ni-Vanuatu people.

## Become a member and get our new 'The Santonian' newsletter

Have you become a member of the Museum yet? Our members are committed to seeing our museum realised. You can become a member [here](#).

Next month sees the first edition of what we're calling 'The Santonian' newsletter, exclusive to Museum members. It will offer much more content about the many fascinating stories of the South Pacific war on Espiritu Santo.

Become a member, and receive 'The Santonian'.

In addition, signing up adds your name on a commemorative plaque that will hang in the museum once construction is complete.

 **PayPal** Help us build the South Pacific WWII Museum  
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“Inspiring everyday heroes”



Managed by Elwood J Euart Association (INC)  
Vanuatu Charitable Trust No. 039632, Phone +678 37000  
P O Box 850, Luganville, Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu  
Email: [info@southpacificwwiimuseum.com](mailto:info@southpacificwwiimuseum.com)  
Website: [www.southpacificwwiimuseum.com](http://www.southpacificwwiimuseum.com)