

## **s/v Soggy Paws: Rendova Harbor & JFK's PT-109 Base (Part I of II)**

St. Francis 44 (Now 46') Catamaran

Draft 3.5'

Home Port: Melbourne, FL

SSCA Members Since: January 1992

April 17-18, 2019

The below cruising summary is extracted from the blog of s/v *Soggy Paws*. It covers our first visit to Rendova harbor located on the north coast of Rendova Island just south of the big island of New Georgia in the central Solomon Islands in the western Pacific.

The New Georgia island group is about in the middle of the Solomons north and south and is part of the western string of islands. As in the rest of the Solomons, commercial charting is mostly worthless as it lacks accuracy and shoreline/reef detail. So we prepared satellite imagery of the area in advance and used that with OpenCPN to provide the accuracy and detail we needed. Sherry's Solomons Compendium, available

under the Destinations menu on the SSCA website or on our own website, now has waypoints and information on most of the possible stops in the Solomons.



Blanche Channel, with our multiple tracks from Munda (upper left), Rendova, Tetepare and New Georgia Islands, to Morovo Lagoon right.

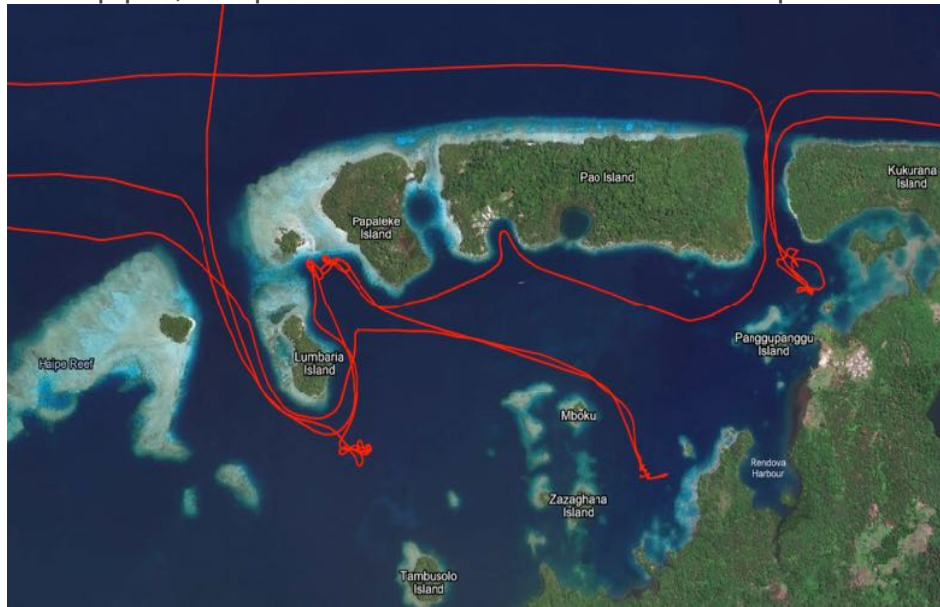
After saying goodbye to two of our buddy boats, s/v *Ocelot*, who is headed back north a little ways to store their boat in Liapari marina and boatyard for a couple of months, and *Berzerker*, who is hanging out in Munda waiting for brother Scott to fly in, *Indigo* and *Soggy Paws*, both catamarans, headed out of Munda for the next island south, Rendova.



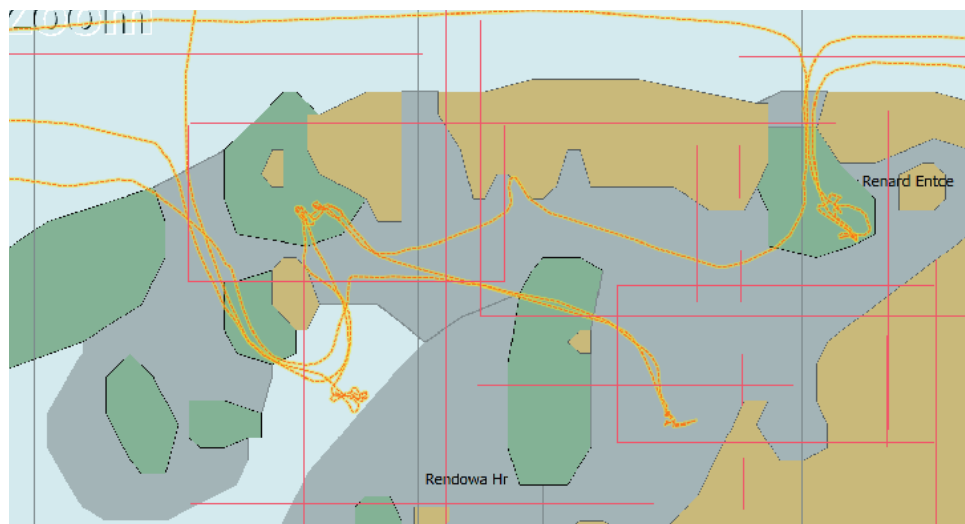
The North end of Rendova Island with Rendova Harbor on the left.

It's only 5 miles as the crow flies from where we were anchored in Munda to where we anchored in Rendova, but it's a 15 mile trip by boat, because there's a large reef system protecting Munda that has to be navigated around. It was an easy trip for us in flat calm windless conditions.

The American forces took Rendova in the fall of 1943 during their island hopping campaign up the Solomon chain. It had been a year since their initial attack on Guadalcanal in August of 1942. Rendova was a good harbor from which US PT boats could attack Japanese shipping in the area. It was also close enough to the big Japanese air base in Munda for allied guns to reach and only about 170 nm from our air bases on Guadalcanal. There are many WWII relics ashore in the jungles, including a war material scrap pile, and planes in the water and on land to explore.



Satellite image of greater Rendova Harbor indicating our tracks and three anchor spots. The track just SE of Lumbaria Island is where we found a well preserved US P-39 Lightning fighter 90' underwater.



CM93 chart of same area. Note lack of accuracy & shoreline & depth detail.

We had a few reports from cruisers around 2010-2011 about armed boardings in the middle of the night, in Rendova Harbor. But we asked the local diving operation, Dive Munda, they didn't know of any problems in recent years. So we anchored in the eastern end of the harbor, next to the village. The only problem we had while there was too many friendly kids! We dinghied ashore and were greeted by Daniel, who is the recently deceased chief's son, and also the head man in the Catholic church. He was very friendly and spoke good English. The chief had recently died, and the village had not yet decided on a new chief. Apparently being chief in the Solomons is not hereditary.



The Church



Daniel and his Youngest Son

Daniel gave us a tour of his small village, and also took us to a man who had some World War II "relics" from the war to show us.



World War II relics on display.  
Wartime Coca Cola bottles and ammunition.



Old French Coin dated 1933!

Everywhere we went in the village, we were followed by a gaggle of kids.



Liz from *Indigo*, and our troop of kids



The kids, assembled (mostly)

The next morning, we went in our dinghies to the World War II 'PT Boat Base' on Lumbaria Island, where John F Kennedy was based with PT109 for a few months. He left from here for his well-known disaster with the Japanese destroyer near Gizo, about 30 nm NW.

Commodores and 2019 Seven Sea Award Recipients Dave and Sherry McCampbell



Editors Note: Join us next month as the crew of s/v *Soggy Paws* explores the World War II base of John F. Kennedy and home to PT 109!

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Editor's Note: Last month, in Part I of this article, the crew of s/v *Soggy Paws* explored some of the World War II base of John F. Kennedy and home to PT 109. Now in Part II, they continue their exploration on land and under water.



Entrance to the former PT Boat Base, actually probably the mess hall and officers' quarters.



PT Boat Base sign and a couple of WWII relics.



A 30 caliber machine gun.



A memorial to JFK sponsored by a local official.



Right now the museum is housed in an open building. The display items are meager because during "The Troubles" (a local uprising against the government in 1999-2003), the museum was destroyed and all the items stolen. So now they are trying to rebuild the museum. The owner, Mr Nicely Zongahiti, is now building a concrete block building that can be properly secured. He is in partnership with the very well stocked WWII museum in Munda who will soon replenish his displays.



Very deteriorated military helmets, probably US



Various weapons and other relics.



Canteens, mostly US, battle lantern, mess kits and a possible mortar barrel.



US Coke & beer bottles & bowls.  
During the war green Coke bottles were continental US made,  
clear are made overseas.

For someone who wants to visit the museum that doesn't have their own boat, the best way is to go to the Agnes Hotel (<https://www.agneshotelsolomon.com>) or Dive Munda (<http://www.divemunda.com>), in Munda, and take a day trip over with them.



Lovely orchids on Luberia Island grounds

As we got ready to raise anchor to move to another anchorage, the kids came back! Liz generously handed out cookies in exchange for photos of the kids in their canoes.



**The kids in their canoes getting cookies from Indigo**

Once we had had a good look around Luberia Island and Nicely's museum we asked him if there were any other relics of WWII in the area. He told us he could show us the

PT Boat berthing and repair area, the US Naval hospital and the trash pile on Pao Island. This we did with him over two separate days. It always pays to ask these kind of questions or you will miss many interesting sights! Photos are below.



The remains of a PT Boat dock at the WWII repair and docking facility at a lagoon on the south side of Pao Island



The road foundation is still visible leading from the PT Boat repair facility to the trash pile and west end of Pao Island



A concrete foundation for one of the WWII Naval hospital buildings on Pao Island.



Nicely and an unknown concrete foundation in the WWII Naval Hospital area.



Only dinghy landing access to the WWII trash pile is now sadly a logging area.



WWII road foundation leading back to the hospital area on Pao Island



A WWII radio base plate with vacuum tube sockets still in place.

Separately on another trip we explored two US WWII planes sunken in the lagoon. One is a US Bell P-39 Airacobra interceptor fighter and the other is a US Douglas SBD Dauntless dive bomber.

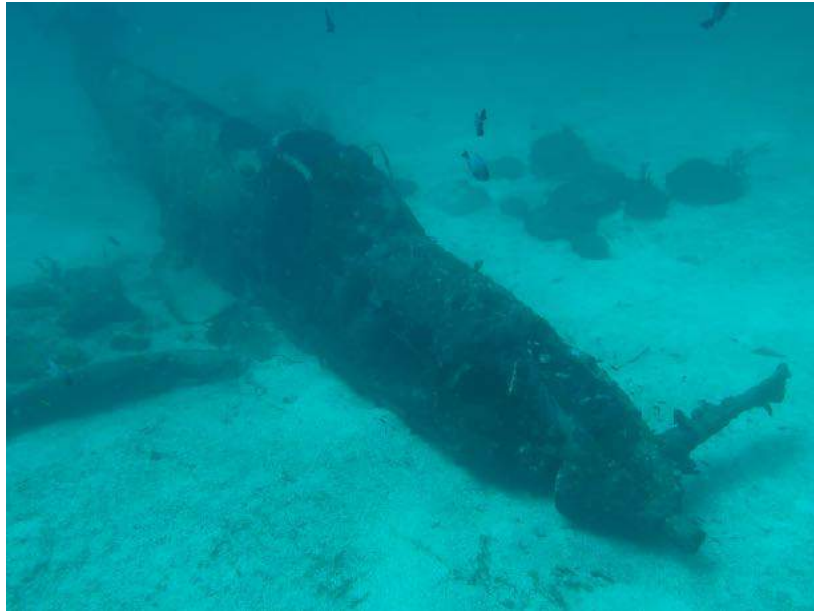
The P-39 is in 100' of clear water on a sand bottom just SSE of Luberia Island. It is a recent find, history not well documented.

The SBD was shot down by Japanese anti-aircraft fire during a bombing run on Munda airfield in July 1943.

Both pilot and crew were unhurt and returned to duty. It is in about 40' of murky water at the west end of the lagoon.



Douglas SBD Dauntless dive bomber.  
Photo Courtesy Pearl Harbor Aviation Museum  
<https://www.pearlharboraviationmuseum.org/>



The P-39 was a very capable Army Air Corps fighter with an inline inverted V engine and three blade prop



The front of the P-39 shows the prop and 37 mm cannon with its barrel extending through the center of the prop and engine almost back to the cockpit.





The P-39 resting on the sand with its cockpit to the right



The 3 blade prop and radial engine of the SBD Dauntless resting on the muddy bottom.



Sherry at 35' inspecting the coral encrusted remains of the SBD. Both pilot and crew survived this accident and it is well documented.

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