

## History of Million Dollar Point

During the time of the American base on Espiritu Santo there was a need for good quality roads as well as several runways and airports. The way that they were produced at a minimal cost was to use the dead coral that washed up on the beaches of the island. This was then crushed to the appropriate size and mixed with water and a hardening agent, it was then graded and rolled to make very hard surfaces. There was a need for quite a lot of this coral and the sight that is now called *Million Dollar Point* was selected as it was easily accessed and there was an abundance of said coral.

As US Army had built a completely new township when they built Luganville, there was a need for all of the machinery to clear the rainforest that was standing there. There was also a problem with the location in that it was a low swamp area that required stabilising before any building could begin. During their time on Espiritu Santo the Americans accumulated quite a mass of earth moving equipment, trucks, cranes, forklifts and all manner of machinery. They also built multiple hospitals on the island, all of which were later pulled down.

As the war in the Pacific was coming to a close and all of the troops were being transported home to the US there was this whole township that the Americans had built and all of the machinery that they had used to build it. The big dilemma was what to do with it all? As all of the available space on the ships going home were full of troops, the US Military decided to offer all of the surplus equipment to the joint English – French government at a very cheap price. The local government made their decision not to take the offer as they believed that they would get all of the equipment for free when the Americans left.

The US Army started to stock pile all of the equipment at the large cleared area at what is now Million Dollar Point ready for their departure. The Local Government was again offered a cheap price for all of the equipment. They again refused. As the day of final departure for the US from Santo drew closer, the English and French dignitaries were invited to a fare well picnic at Million Dollar Point. Just as the festivities started the order was given to start the machines, they were then driven along the concrete jetty that was there and into the water. The bulldozers were used to push machines and piles of building materials into the water and then push coral over top and then push more out into the water. When it had all been pushed in the bulldozers were put into gear and left to drive off the end of the jetty as well. As you can imagine the English and French were very taken aback and upset that all of what they thought was going to be their equipment was now at the bottom of the ocean.

In the years after the scuttling of all of the equipment at Million Dollar Point there have been many salvage attempts - most of them unsuccessful - however one just a few years after the scuttling was quite successful. A New Zealand man came along and managed to pull one of the shallow bulldozers out of the water and after as little as changing the oil and water, as well as some of the electrics, he was able to start it. He then used this bulldozer to pull several others out and get them running. The bulldozers were then all sold to an Australian mining company. He also salvaged a lot of tyres from trucks and jeeps, some of these were sold with rims, which soon failed as the metal rims rusted out and broke. But the tyres that he salvaged and sold as just tyres were as good as new.

Today you can snorkel and dive over, in and around all of this equipment as well as two ship wrecks that are also here. You can have a look back into the history of the enormity of the military base and all of the equipment used to build and maintain such an effort back in the 1940s.