

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 410

“Stranded on Plum Pudding Island”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

By summer of 1943, the momentum was clearly on the Allied side. Allied armies were gaining ground everywhere: in the Soviet Union, in Italy, and in the Solomon Islands.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 410. Stranded on Plum Pudding Island.

The last time we talked about events in Italy was back in episode 390, when I told you about the fall of Mussolini. I want to pick up that thread today, but I also want to emphasize that the period we are in right now is quite an eventful one, and much is going on in the war on several fronts. In today's episode, I'm going to tell you a bit more about Italy, but I'm also going to reference events on other fronts, some of which we've already looked at, others of which I haven't gotten to yet, as a way of putting all these events into proper context. I may also mention a couple of other events, unrelated to the war.

It was on July 25, 1943, a Sunday, at 5:00 PM, when Mussolini visited the Italian King Vittorio Emanuele III, and was shocked to learn that the King was dismissing him as prime minister and replacing him with Marshal Pietro Badoglio. As Mussolini left the palace, he was taken into custody. For his own protection, they told him.

I already described to you how many Italian cities erupted in jubilation when the news became public, though not everyone was pleased with the way Mussolini had been treated. Among them was the King's consort, Queen Elena, who felt as a matter of principle that the palace was a sanctuary and that no Italian should fear for their freedom or safety while on the palace grounds.

Also among the dissenters was Adolf Hitler, who was infuriated by the way Mussolini was treated. (By the way, have you noticed how often I've been using the words *Hitler* and *infuriated* in the same sentence lately?) Hitler blamed the Pope and the freemasons and ordered a paratrooper division dropped on Rome to seize the new government and the royal family.

Rommel, Jodl, and Kesselring, his three most trusted military commanders, persuaded him that action would be unwise.

That very night, just hours after the King dismissed Mussolini, Operation Gomorrah, the RAF bombing of Hamburg, began. As you know from episode 399, this was only the first night of a week-long bombing campaign that would devastate the city.

The Western Allies had already cleared Italian and German forces out of North Africa and were at this moment advancing across Sicily. Italian military forces on the island put up a lackluster defense, while Italian civilians on the island welcomed Allied soldiers as liberators.

Benito Mussolini had been living in a bubble of Fascist supporters and hadn't any idea how unpopular he had become with the larger Italian public, and Italy's involvement in the war was the main reason. The Fascist War, Italians were now calling it. The Fascists had started it, and Fascism would have to be eliminated to end it.

After his arrest, Mussolini was taken to the island of Ponza, which lies about 30 kilometers off the coast of Italy. Here the Italian government kept its political prisoners, including, at this moment, a couple of high-profile anti-Fascists. Mussolini was kept in a house at some distance from those other prisoners, which seems a shame. They would have had so much to talk about. Instead, Mussolini spent much of his time on the island in conversations with the local Catholic priest. These chats may have represented Mussolini returning in his hour of need to the Catholic faith he had abandoned long ago, or it might have been simply that the priest was a pleasant person to spend time with.

In the Aleutian Islands, the 5,000 Japanese occupying Kiska began a quick and orderly withdrawal that was completed in secret, evacuating the island without tipping off either the American or Canadian militaries, who moved forward with their plan for an amphibious invasion of the island next month.

The following morning, July 26, Adolf Hitler held an emergency meeting at the Wolf's Lair with his closest advisors—Göring, Goebbels, Himmler, Speer, Ribbentrop, Rommel, Guderian, and Dönitz—to discuss the situation in Italy. The German military had already drawn up a plan to invade and occupy Italy, codenamed Operation Alaric, after the Goth king who had sacked Rome in the year 410. The name was deemed too offensive to the Italians, so it was renamed Operation Axis.

Hitler was ready to order Operation Axis put into motion at once, but his advisors talked him out of it. Rommel said the Army wasn't ready; more preparation time was needed. Hitler agreed, but instructed the Army to get ready to be ordered into Italy at a moment's notice. He insisted that Waffen-SS units lead the invasion; their "strong affinity with fascism," as the *Führer* put it, would be needed as Italy descended into political turmoil.

No one in Germany knew Mussolini's whereabouts; Hitler ordered his intelligence services to find out. His subordinates set to work on the problem. Heinrich Himmler even hired a psychic to help locate the deposed *Duce*.

To help locate Mussolini, Hitler turned to a 35-year-old Waffen-SS officer named Otto Skorzeny, born in Austria. His family name is Polish in origin. In his college days, he was into fencing, which earned him a striking scar that ran across his left cheek and gave him an intimidating look.

Skorzeny had served on the Eastern Front until he was wounded in January 1942. Afterward, he was given a staff assignment in Berlin. In that role, Skorzeny began to advocate for the German military to develop commando forces similar to the ones the British were using: units that could slip behind enemy lines and organize acts of sabotage.

He had already put together a first attempt, a mission to Iran to recruit dissident minority groups in that country to sabotage the Trans-Iranian Railway, which was carrying US and British Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union.

That mission had failed, but Hitler was willing to give Skorzeny another chance. He ordered Skorzeny to locate Mussolini and plan a rescue mission. In his characteristic management style of giving his subordinates overlapping areas of authority, he assigned to Kurt Student, commander of Germany's paratroop forces, responsibility for carrying out the operation.

Also on July 26, in Washington, US Attorney General Francis Biddle announced that eight American citizens in Europe who had been broadcasting propaganda for Germany and Italy had been indicted for treason. Among the eight names is one that has come up before in the podcast: Ezra Pound. Pound had been a member of the so-called "Lost Generation" of artists who hung out at Gertrude Stein's house in Paris between the wars. A noted poet himself, Pound also played an important role in bringing the works of T.S. Eliot and Ernest Hemingway to a wider audience.

Pound and his wife, English artist Dorothy Shakespear, found the wild life in Paris not to their liking, so they moved to the Italian resort town of Rapallo. In Italy, Pound became increasingly influenced by Fascism. In 1933, he scored an audience with *il Duce*. Mussolini proved to be familiar with Pound's work and praised it, which is all any writer needs to hear. Pound became convinced that Mussolini was a singular genius and that he, Ezra Pound, through his writings, had become an influential figure in the Fascist movement.

Dorothy died in 1938. After the war began in 1939, Pound wrote articles and books defending Fascism. His literary agent in New York begged him to drop the politics and get back to writing poetry, but Pound was beyond that now. In 1941, he began propaganda broadcasts, paid for by the Italian Ministry of Popular Culture, in which he criticized the US, the UK, Roosevelt, and Churchill and said that the definition of "democracy" was "a government run by Jews." He praised Mussolini and Hitler and advocated for eugenics. And all this led to his indictment.

Also on July 26, in Dartford, Kent, an Australian-born hairdresser and active member of the Conservative Party named Eva Scutts Jagger, the wife of a physical education teacher named Basil Jagger, gave birth to their first child, a bouncing baby boy whom they named Michael Philip Jagger, though he often went by the nickname Mick. He would be an excellent student and went on to study accounting at the London School of Economics, but would never earn a degree, because he dropped out to pursue a career in music. I bet his parents were thrilled when he broke the news to them. Oh, to have been a fly on the wall during that conversation.

On July 27, the new Badoglio government in Rome announced it had banned the Fascist Party, and King Tomislav II of Croatia announced his abdication. The King was a member of the Italian royal family; he had been appointed King of Croatia by Mussolini, but had never set foot inside his realm. In Croatia, Prime Minister Ante Pavelić declared Croatia a republic.

The night of July 27-28 was the worst night of Operation Gomorrah. That was the night the RAF ignited a destructive firestorm in the city that killed some 30,000 and destroyed more than half a million homes.

The following day, Dwight Eisenhower made a radio broadcast into Italy, calling on the Italian people to lay down their arms. “You can have peace immediately,” he said, and pointed to Sicily as evidence that the Allied occupation of Italy would be a gentle one. In the United States, President Roosevelt held a fireside chat to discuss the ouster of Mussolini. He promised that Mussolini and “his Fascist gang” would be caught, tried, and punished for their crimes against humanity. The Allies promised Italians a two-week reprieve from bomber attacks, but warned that if Italy did not surrender by the end of that period, the bombings would resume.

And in neutral Sweden, a 17-year-old carpenter named Ingvar Kamprad, conceived a plan to sell furniture at a substantial discount by delivering it in pieces, with his buyers to complete the final assembly themselves. He started a business on this model and derived its name from his own initials; he called it Ikea.

I told you these were eventful times.

[music: Beethoven, *Symphony No. 7.*]

On Sunday August 1, 1943, Japan granted independence to Burma, with Ba Maw as the new nation’s head of state and prime minister. I told you about that in episode 398.

That same day, the US Army’s Ninth Air Force undertook a massive bombing raid on nine Romanian oil refineries near the city of Ploiești. Romanian oil provided around a half of Germany’s liquid fuels, and all of the Luftwaffe’s aviation fuel. I’ve mentioned a few times before how concerned Hitler was with making sure the Allies couldn’t get within bombing range of these Romanian oil fields.

But here we are, because once the Axis was cleared from North Africa, these Romanian facilities came within range of B-24 Liberator bombers based in Libya. The Americans attempted some smaller raids earlier in the year, which prompted the nervous Germans to install dozens of flak cannons and fifteen radar stations in the region and base several fighter squadrons within range of the oil fields, making the Ploiești region one of the most heavily defended locations in Europe, right up there with the Ruhr Valley and Berlin itself.

The American plan was to attack, not the oil fields, but nine oil refineries in the region that converted raw petroleum into fuels. The destruction of these refineries, it was hoped, would be a major blow to the Axis war effort in Europe. This is one of those “panacea targets” that “Bomber” Harris was always deriding, isn’t it?

A great deal of planning went into this raid, which was codenamed Operation Tidal Wave. It would involve five bomber groups, including two borrowed from the Eighth Air Force, normally stationed in England. American bombing strategy involved daylight raids at high altitudes, relying on the precision Norden bombsight, but this raid would be different. Knowing that the Germans had intensive radar coverage over the target, American planners decided on a low-altitude approach that would conceal the bombers from radar detection. The Norden bomb sights, which didn’t work at low altitudes, were removed and replaced. The five bomber groups would fly parallel courses until they reached their targets. This would require some complicated flying and a lot of practice, and would be one of the biggest raids the Americans had yet attempted: 178 bombers, carrying 1,751 aircrew.

Unfortunately for the Americans, the Luftwaffe intercepted and decoded an American transmission that tipped them off that a big bombing raid was coming. The transmission did not identify the target, but they guessed that Ploiești was a strong possibility. For this reason, along with equipment failure, navigation errors, the complexity of the mission, and plain bad luck, the raid was scattered and disorganized. Barely half the planes involved made it back to Libya, and of those, 55 were damaged. Thirty-four had been shot down over Romania, two ditched in the Mediterranean, and eight landed in neutral Turkey, where their crews were interned. Three hundred and ten aircrew were killed or missing, 108 taken prisoner, 78 interned in Turkey, and four rescued by Communist partisans in Yugoslavia.

The raid managed to destroy two and damage three of the nine refineries targeted, reducing refining capacity by 40%, but the Germans used slave labor to get the damaged plants up and running again; by the end of the year 1943, the region was producing more fuel for the Reich than it had been before the raid, which must be regarded as a disappointment at best.

Even as Operation Tidal Wave was in progress, on the other side of the world, it was nighttime. To be more specific, it was early in the morning of August 2, local time, in the Solomon Islands. As the first step in Douglas MacArthur’s Operation Cartwheel, Allied forces had landed on New Georgia Island in the central Solomons. Here the Japanese had built an airfield to help bomb

Guadalcanal, and the Americans intended to take the airfield and the island. Sort of a replay of Guadalcanal, except this time the Americans are attempting to take a Japanese airfield, instead of the other way around. Combat on the island was fierce and lasted weeks.

In the waters near New Georgia Island that night, an American patrol boat designated *PT-109*, with a crew of 13, was rammed in the dark by the much larger Japanese destroyer *Amagiri*, which was returning to Rabaul after dropping off soldiers and supplies on New Georgia. The Tokyo Express was alive and well, as you see. Whether the collision was an accident or the Japanese were deliberately ramming and sinking the much smaller American boat is not clear.

PT-109 was sliced in two by the destroyer's bow. The boat's fuel exploded into flames, killing two of the crew and seriously injuring two more. Burning fuel floated on the seawater around the wrecked boat, but the watertight compartment in its bow held; the bow section remained afloat.

The commander of *PT-109* happened to be the 26-year-old second son of financier Joseph Kennedy, whose name has come up a few times before on this podcast. He was Lieutenant JG John Fitzgerald Kennedy. The younger Kennedy had grown up in his father's very wealthy family and had a reputation as a troublemaker, but by the time he enrolled in Harvard College, he had settled down and became an excellent student. He majored in political philosophy at Harvard, where he also experienced a serious back injury playing football. That back injury would plague him for the rest of his life.

Following his graduation in 1940, his senior thesis, which examined the events leading up the war in Europe, was revised and published in book form, with the title *Why England Slept*. The title is a play on the title of a book Winston Churchill published two years earlier, *While England Slept*. Kennedy's book became a best seller in both the United States and the United Kingdom.

He had planned to go to law school, but with war in Europe and in Asia, he decided instead to enlist in the US Army, but they discharged him because of his back injury. In 1941, he attempted to enlist in the US Navy. This time he got in and was able to stay in, thanks to his influential father pulling a few strings on his behalf. For the benefit of you young people, I'll explain that once upon a time in the United States, wealthy and well-connected people used their connections to get their children *into* the military. I know this is hard to believe, but trust me, it's true.

But I digress. In that early morning of August 2, by the light of flaming gasoline, Kennedy was able to gather the surviving ten members of his crew, including the two wounded, and bring them to the bow section of their boat, which was still afloat. Kennedy ordered them all to hang onto the bow and await rescue.

They waited about ten hours. By then, it was midday, the tropical sun was beating down on them and the bow was taking on water. There was also the danger they'd be discovered by the Japanese, in which case, they would be taken prisoner, if they were lucky. Kennedy and his crew could see several islands, but odds were they might encounter Japanese troops on any of them.

Then they noticed a very small island, which appeared to be uninhabited. For the benefit of my American listeners, the island was about the area of two American football fields laid side to side. For the benefit of the rest of you, I'm told that football pitches vary some in size but are roughly equivalent to an American football field, so close enough for our purposes. A very small island, no matter which is your preferred sport. The British, who had administered the Solomon Islands before the war, had named this one Plum Pudding Island, because of course they did.

Plum Pudding Island was small, but it had trees and vegetation where the survivors could hide from any passing Japanese ship and get out of the sun. What it did not have was a source of food or water. Kennedy and his crew swam six kilometers, or three and a half miles, to get to the island. One sailor was too injured to swim; Kennedy pulled him along to the island by the straps on the sailor's life preserver. Did I mention that Kennedy had also been on the swim team at Harvard?

Not far away from where the Americans were hiding was the much larger island of Kolombangara. Kolombangara is conical in shape; it is essentially a big volcanic cone rising out of the ocean. A number of rivers flow down the cone, so it has fresh water, enough to support thick jungle growth. The island was sparsely inhabited by the native Solomon Islanders, and the Japanese had an outpost there.

The Allies also had an outpost on that island. An Australian naval officer named Arthur Reginald Evans was maintaining a secret observation post on the peak of the volcano. Evans saw the fireball when *PT-109*'s fuel exploded and reported it by radio. When the news got back to *PT-109*'s base, they sent planes from the Royal New Zealand Air Force to search for survivors. The New Zealanders spotted the wreckage of *PT-109*, but could find no trace of the crew. At the base, they presumed the crew of *PT-109* had all perished, and held a memorial service.

A few hours later and on the other side of the world, in the Mediterranean, British and American forces were advancing in Sicily, but the American commander, General George Patton, was not on Sicily that day; he was on Cyprus, visiting wounded soldiers at the 15th Evacuation Hospital. There he encountered a soldier who appeared uninjured. Patton asked him what was wrong with him. The soldier was suffering from what they called shell shock during the last war and battle fatigue in this war. The soldier replied to Patton, "I guess I just can't take it."

Patton exploded with rage. He slapped the soldier in the face with his gloves. Hospital personnel and other wounded soldiers watched in astonishment as Patton dragged the hapless soldier outside and kicked him in the butt while shouting, "You hear me, you gutless bastard? You're going back to the front!"

In some armies of this time, notably the Japanese Army, striking a subordinate was considered an officer's prerogative, but in the United States Army, it was and is a court-martial offense.

The next day, Winston Churchill and the British Cabinet met to consider a proposal to send an emergency shipment of wheat to India to help relieve the developing Bengal Famine, which I told you about in episode 386. The Cabinet voted not to send the shipment.

In the Pacific, Lieutenant Kennedy and his crew had gone two days without food or water and it was becoming clear they could not stay on Plum Pudding Island any longer. The lieutenant and his second in command, Ensign Leonard Thom, organized the crew to swim to another island. This island, called Olasana Island, was visible from their location, and it was larger. This was a risky move, as they would have to swim close to four miles, or six kilometers, to reach it. Fortunately, they all made it. Their new island did not have a source of fresh water either, but it did have coconuts, which was something.

The following day, August 5, Lieutenant Evans, the Australian observer who had first reported sighting the fireball when *PT-109* was destroyed, was not convinced that the entire crew had died. He enlisted two coastwatchers, Biuku Gasa and Eroni Kumana, to make one last attempt to search for survivors. I told you about coastwatchers in episode 362; they were native Solomon Islanders who acted as observers and scouts for the Allies. And sometimes more, as you can see here. There was some risk in sending Gasa and Kumana on this mission, but two native men paddling between islands in a dugout canoe would not be that unusual. They would blend in with other residents of the islands and would be unlikely to draw the attention of the Japanese.

Kennedy and his crew were, of course, unaware of this. Kennedy and Ensign Barney Ross, the only other officer among his crew, swam a half-mile to investigate another, still larger island—this one called Naru. On that island, they hit the jackpot. They found a dugout canoe that contained a barrel of potable water and some packages of Japanese crackers. They took the canoe and its cargo and began paddling back to Olasana Island.

As luck would have it, Gasa and Kumana were passing by at the same time and spotted the two Americans on Naru Island. At first, they took them to be Japanese and steered clear of them, but when they observed the two paddling to another island in a native's canoe, well, this was not typical Japanese behavior. They became curious and followed.

The coastwatchers caught up to the Americans on Olasana Island. There were communication difficulties, as neither of the coastwatchers spoke much English, but the Americans eventually conveyed to the coastwatchers that they were indeed the survivors from *PT-109*. Gasa and Kumana then shared some of their own food and offered to go to *PT-109*'s base and let them know they had found survivors. The coastwatchers got hold of a piece of coconut husk and suggested Kennedy write a message on it. Kennedy carved a brief message into the husk with a knife, relating that there were 11 survivors and the bearers of the message knew where they were.

That same day, in Russia, the Red Army's Operation Kutuzov offensive, part of the Battle of Kursk, captured the city of Orel. You'll recall that Stalin ordered an artillery salute in Moscow,

in honor of the soldiers who liberated the city, beginning a tradition that would continue after the liberation of other Soviet cities, and for this reason, Orel is known to this day as the “City of the First Salute.”

On August 6, the two coastwatchers, Gasa and Kumana, left Olasana Island in their canoe. When they stopped at another island to rest, they reported their discovery of the stranded Americans to another native coastwatcher. They then continued on, paddling all day and all night to reach the American base. This other coastwatcher, meanwhile, brought the news to Lieutenant Evans, the Australian observer. Evans arranged for two other coastwatchers to take a canoe full of provisions to the starving Americans, along with a message asking Lieutenant Kennedy to accompany the coastwatchers on their return trip to Kolombangara and meet with Evans personally. Kennedy agreed. The coastwatchers had him lie down in their canoe and covered him with palm fronds, so the Japanese wouldn't be able to see him.

The following day, August 7, Italian authorities moved Benito Mussolini from Ponza to a different island: La Maddalena, just off the northern coast of Sardinia, where there was an Italian naval base. It seems likely they made this move after hearing something about German efforts to discover Mussolini's location.

In the Solomon Islands, the exhausted Gasa and Kumana reached the American naval base and delivered the message Kennedy had carved into that coconut shell. The base commander was suspicious of the natives, but soon after their arrival, he received a message from Lieutenant Evans, confirming that eleven Americans had survived. On August 8, two patrol boats were dispatched; one to rescue the survivors, the other to scout ahead and watch for Japanese ships. Gasa and Kumana came along to show them the way. The patrol boats traveled slowly and quietly, at a speed of about 12 knots, to minimize the chances they would be spotted. They made a prearranged rendezvous with Kennedy on the shore of Kolombangara Island after sunset on the 8th and picked him up. They then proceeded to Olasana Island and picked up other ten survivors early in the morning of the 9th.

On August 10, General Patton was visiting a different evacuation hospital, this one on Sicily, where he encountered another soldier suffering from battle fatigue. Patton asked him what was wrong with him and the soldier replied, “It's my nerves...I can't stand the shelling anymore.” Patton replied, “Your nerves, hell. You're just a God-damned coward, you yellow son of a bitch!” and slapped him.

On August 12, a pre-recorded radio address by President Roosevelt was broadcast to the Philippines. This particular date was chosen because August 12, 1943 represented the 45th anniversary of the day American military forces captured the city of Manila during the Spanish-American War, episode 5. Roosevelt pledged that after the war, the United States would support the creation of an independent Republic of the Philippines. Under the provisions of the

Philippine Independence Act, which Congress had passed in 1934, before the war, Philippine independence had already been scheduled to be granted on July 4, 1946.

In Sicily, the Wehrmacht began its withdrawal from the island in the face of the Allied advance and the collapse of Italian resistance.

On August 13, Italy having not surrendered, the Allies announced the end of the moratorium on bombing. The RAF bombed the industrial cities of Turin and Milan early in the morning, and the American Army Air Forces bombed Rome by daylight. The Americans also bombed an arms factory in Austria, the first Allied bombing in Austria and a demonstration that no corner of the Reich was safe from Allied air strikes any longer.

On August 14, in another demonstration of growing Allied air power, American B-24 Liberators based in Australia bombed the island of Borneo for the first time, striking the oil refineries at Balikpapan, while in Italy, the Italian government declared Rome an open city, meaning that Italy would withdraw all its military forces. Under international law, that meant the Allies no longer had a legal justification for bombing it. That same day, the Red Army retook the city of Belgorod.

August 15 was the day US and Canadian forces invaded the island of Kiska, in the Aleutian Islands, but as you already know but they didn't, the Japanese had already evacuated the island.

Two days later, August 17, Axis forces completed the evacuation of Sicily, leaving the island under Allied control. It was also the first day of the Québec Conference, but I already told you all about the Quebec conference, so perhaps here would be a good place to stop for today.

I thank you for listening and I'd like to thank Fred for his kind donation, and thank you to Hugh for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Fred and Hugh help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone always, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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And I hope you'll join me next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we continue our narrative through the Québec Conference and beyond, as the Allies continue their advances. From the Top, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. The news of John Kennedy's disappearance and subsequent rescue became a major news story in the United States. *The New York Times* headlined an article: KENNEDY'S SON IS HERO IN PACIFIC AS DESTROYER SPLITS HIS BOAT. Published reports emphasized Kennedy's role, sometimes overlooking the other members of his crew. Kennedy, Leonard Thom and Barney Ross, the three officers on PT-109, were awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal. Injuries Kennedy sustained during the ordeal aggravated his back problems.

John F. Kennedy, as I'm sure you know, went into politics after the war. While serving in the US House of Representatives, he had his staff track down the commander of the *Amagiri*, Hanami Kohei, who also went into politics after the war. Kennedy and Hanami exchanged letters and planned to meet when Kennedy visited Japan, but unfortunately, Kennedy died before that meeting could take place.

In 1962, country music singer and songwriter Jimmy Dean released a song, "*PT-109*," about Kennedy and his crew. The single reached number 2 on the Billboard country music chart and number 8 overall. The following year Warner Brothers released a feature film with the same title starring Cliff Robertson as Kennedy. While a few earlier Hollywood films had depicted Franklin Roosevelt while he was President, these were typically quick appearances, incidental to the story. *PT-109* was the first Hollywood film that depicted an incumbent US President in a major role.

PT-109 toys and models were popular with boys of my generation in the 1960s, and Plum Pudding Island was renamed Kennedy Island, which I think we all can agree is a nicer name.

As for the two coastwatchers who rescued the crew of PT-109, Biuku Gasa and Eroni Kumana, Kennedy invited them to his Presidential inaugural in 1961, but officials in the Solomon Islands would not allow them to attend, as they were uneducated men who didn't speak English, and the officials felt they would not make suitable representatives of the Solomon Islands.

In 2002, a National Geographic Society expedition located the wreck of *PT-109*. The expedition then became the subject of a television special in the United States. Members of the expedition also met with and interviewed Gasa and Kumana. Max Kennedy, the late President's nephew, who was part of the expedition, gave each of the men a bust of his uncle. The Kennedy family, the National Geographic Society, and other donors contributed money to buy a house for each of the men and their families.

Biuku Gasa died on November 23, 2005, at the age of 82. Eroni Kumana died on August 2, 2014. His exact date of birth is uncertain, though he is believed to have lived to the age of 96.

[music: Closing War Theme]