

# Franklin Nash: Consummate Hereford Breeder and So Much More

*Editor's Note: In honor of all veterans and in commemoration of Veterans Day on November 11th, we are bringing you this incredible story of Hereford breeder Franklin Nash and his military involvement in World War II. This article is written by his daughter Julie. Another of Franklin's daughters, Jane and her husband Mike Deewall, raise Herefords in Kansas.*



Franklin Nash

by Julie Nash

Franklin Nash was the kind of man that a person meets once and remembers forever. Most reading this probably knew him, or at least heard of him, as a long time Registered Hereford breeder with a nemoral presence. Franklin was absolutely a Hereford man. He lived and breathed Hereford cattle. Pulling him away from his Colorado ranch for anything other than a trip to look at a bull, was difficult. Actually, it was impossible. Still, there was more to Franklin than his cattle. He was a renaissance man, under the big gruff exterior, that fought for the arts in life and in schools. A man that befriended painters, jewelers, sculptors, and musicians. An avid reader that could reference the classics. But there was one aspect of Franklin that overshadowed these others: he was a true American hero that laid down his very existence for his country. A regret that

Franklin often talked about was not being the first in his county to enlist the day that Pearl Harbor was bombed. He felt there would be no more ranching, no more Herefords and no more America if those offered agricultural deferments took them.

Franklin Nash started his World War II experience as a radio operator with the 410 Signal Company at Henderson Field on Guadalcanal. Finding this job to be a bit tame, even after earning a Bronze Star for staying in the control tower and safely guiding Allied pilots

to the ground while under heavy enemy bombardment, Franklin wrangled himself a more exciting job with the Australian Army's Coastwatchers.

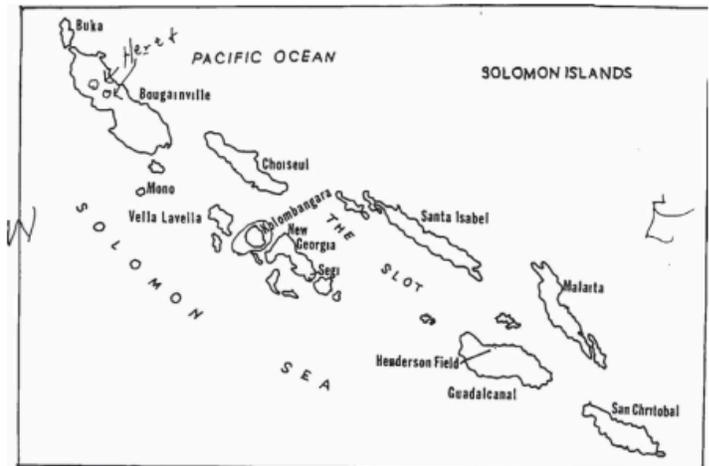
The Coastwatchers were men who had grown up in the islands of the South Pacific. Their mission was to hide on Japanese occupied islands in pairs, with native support and spy on bases and troop movements while recovering downed Allied pilots and occasional sailors. This was extremely dangerous work. The men had amazing survival and tracking skills as well as intimate knowledge of native culture. The job required sneaking behind the Japanese lines and remaining undiscovered for months at a time. Being discovered resulted in death by beheading. This barbaric end met several brave Coastwatchers.

Most of us have never heard of the



Franklin with his 1960s truck.

placements ranged from northern New Zealand and Guadalcanal all the way

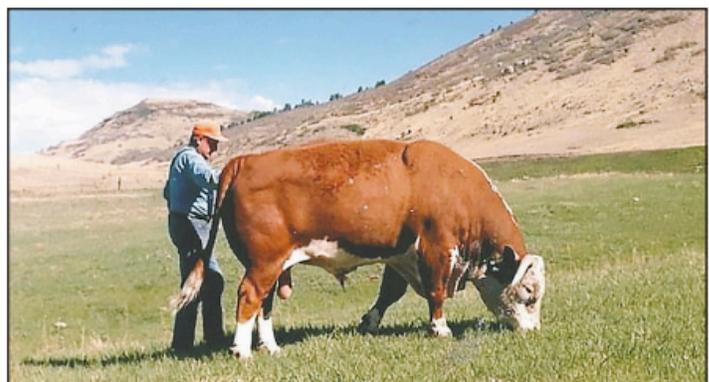


stealthy Coastwatchers, who turned the tide of the war against the Japanese in the "Slot" of the South Pacific Theatre. If you have seen the musical "South Pacific," it is about one of these men. If you are old enough to remember the Robert Conrad television series, "Black Sheep Squadron," you have an inkling of the where and what the Coastwatchers did. These unbelievably brave men were placed on Japanese held islands via submarine or dugout canoe. Their

to the Philippines This area became known at the "Slot."

Franklin was considered the only true Coastwatcher that was also an American. The only American allowed to go solo on the islands with native support or with one other Coastwatcher. Later in the war an occasional American radio operator was placed with a Coastwatching team but never as a solo op-

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# Franklin Nash...

(continued from page 16)

erative as Franklin was. How in all that is holy, did a rancher from Colorado “wrangle” this job? Well, that is a story. The Australian Coastwatchers had a leaky little tent/headquarters on Guadalcanal. No furniture, always muddy, trouble procur-

ing things like paper and typewriters. Enter Franklin Nash. The man was the ultimate problem solver.

Through a series of offers and trading with his own command staff and solving the problems the Coastwatchers were having in their leaky little tent and lack of furniture, Franklin got himself released to the Australian Army



His medals, including Bronze star, Legion of Merit and The King George Medal which is Australian.



Franklin in the Islands.

and ensconced into the Coastwatchers. Franklin remarked that it was a good thing he knew how to make desks and chairs out of orange crates so he could make the right impression.

Franklin’s American commanders just thought he was insane to want to go into something so much more dangerous than a daily bombing by the Japanese. Maybe they assumed it was better for the Australians to deal with someone so “stark raving mad” as one officer described him. Franklin was technically AWOL while all the paperwork was being handled in those pre internet times. The armies of two nations came to an agreement, even with the paperwork several months behind, and Franklin was officially transferred to the Australian Army.

The job of Coastwatcher held a huge appeal for Franklin. Tracking: he was already a master as anyone who rode a horse with him on his Colorado ranch could see. Living away from “civilization” and being isolated-perfect for a rancher. Solving problems on his own-again, exactly what ranchers do every single day. The Aussie Coastwatchers were skeptical but became convinced of this furniture building, problem solving American in short order.

Franklin Nash had a very keen mind

that led him to the why and how of any situation. For Franklin, the question was: how do we win this war as soon as possible? Waiting for each day’s visit from Japanese airplanes wasn’t to his liking, nor did he see it as a winning strategy. The Allies needed a way to be the offense, instead of defense, to ultimately win the war. The Coastwatchers provided the “how” of this equation and Franklin Nash was all about being part of the “how.”

Franklin embarked via native canoe, hidden under banana leaves to the Solomon Islands north of Guadalcanal. He spent from May to September of 1943 on the Island of Kolombangara and from November 1943 to April of 1944 on the Island of Bougainville. Supply drops were rare and there were no trips back to pseudo civilization in between. It was Franklin, a native policeman, and either Coastwatchers Reginald Evans or Forbes Robertson on those islands alone with hundreds of enemy troops. They watched the skies during the days and the seas at night, dutifully radioing troop movements to Allied forces. Camps were moved every few days to avoid enemy patrols that searched for the watchful spies that reported their every move.

So much time in the jungle mean



Franklin with a Solomon Island Native during his time as a Coastwatcher.

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over a month of accumulated leave time for Franklin. When he did get his one break between island assignments, Franklin headed to Australia to work on a cattle station. He wrote to his parents and sent them several months of back pay with instructions to "buy a few more registered heifers". Even the daily battles of World War II were unable to erase Hereford cattle from Franklin Nash's mind.

Franklin didn't really like to talk about his war experience. That didn't mean it was a secret because men always found him. These men had searched diligently for him in those pre internet days. Most were downed pilots or gunners that he had rescued and hidden until they could be taken back to safety. There were many men like this and sometimes Franklin didn't even remember them. They remembered him. Some became lifelong friends and visited the Nash Ranch every summer. Some were Australian and called yearly. Others were historians looking for information about the War. One who visited was the author and NYU history professor, Walter Lord. Dr. Lord wrote the book, *Lonely Vigil* about the Coastwatchers and Franklin has a big part in that story. Franklin is in a *Time Life* book on the South Pacific in WWII, several articles and William Doyle's more recent book, *PT 109*.

Franklin was partnered with, Reginald Evans, the Australian credited with saving John F. Kennedy and the crew of PT109. Reginald called every summer, and he and Franklin would reminisce over this time in the islands. They snickered about how any other PT Boat captain whose vessel was in the path of a Japanese destroyer and run over by that destroyer would have lost their commission. History obviously sees the infamous and deadly incident differently. Franklin, and more often, Reginald Evans are mentioned in several PT109 accounts.

Twelve years after Franklin's passing, his family was contacted by yet another author interested in Franklin's War experiences. Fifteen years after his death, *Military History Magazine* knocked on their door. Franklin was the kind of man that wasn't concerned with bragging rights. He actually threw

his war medals out, including one that the Australian embassy in Washington wanted him to come receive in person. He declined the embassy invitation, "just put it in the mail." The Australian Embassy should have included a Hereford bull along with the medal to entice Franklin away from his ranch. Luckily, Franklin's wife, Louise, rescued the medals gave them an honored place in the family home.

Franklin was possibly the most physically fearless person many have met, a legendary Hereford breeder who embodied the grace and courage of the Greatest Generation.



Franklin with the Australian Coastwatchers. He is front row far right

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