

# Finding a bit of history

*Search for planes shot down in World War II somewhat successful*

by **Katie Erickson**

Associate Editor

A search for 33 U.S. planes lost over Yap Island during World War II saw some success earlier this month.

Shoreview couple Pat and Cherie Ranfranz, along with seven others, returned from the Pacific island with photos and the location of two formerly lost planes.

They didn't find the B-24 that started the search on Yap Island two years ago — the one in which Pat Ranfranz' uncle died in 1944 — but the group did find the only other B-24 believed to have been shot down near the island. The plane, piloted by Lt. Don Anthony, was shot down Aug. 10, 1944.

The find was especially memorable for Anthony's son and three grandsons, all of whom joined the search crew in Yap.

"Going to Yap I was fairly certain we were going to find the Anthony crew," Ranfranz said.

Tim Schubert, an Oregon man who had lived on Yap Island in the 1980s, heard of Ranfranz' search online and contacted him with information of plane wreckage in the harbor.

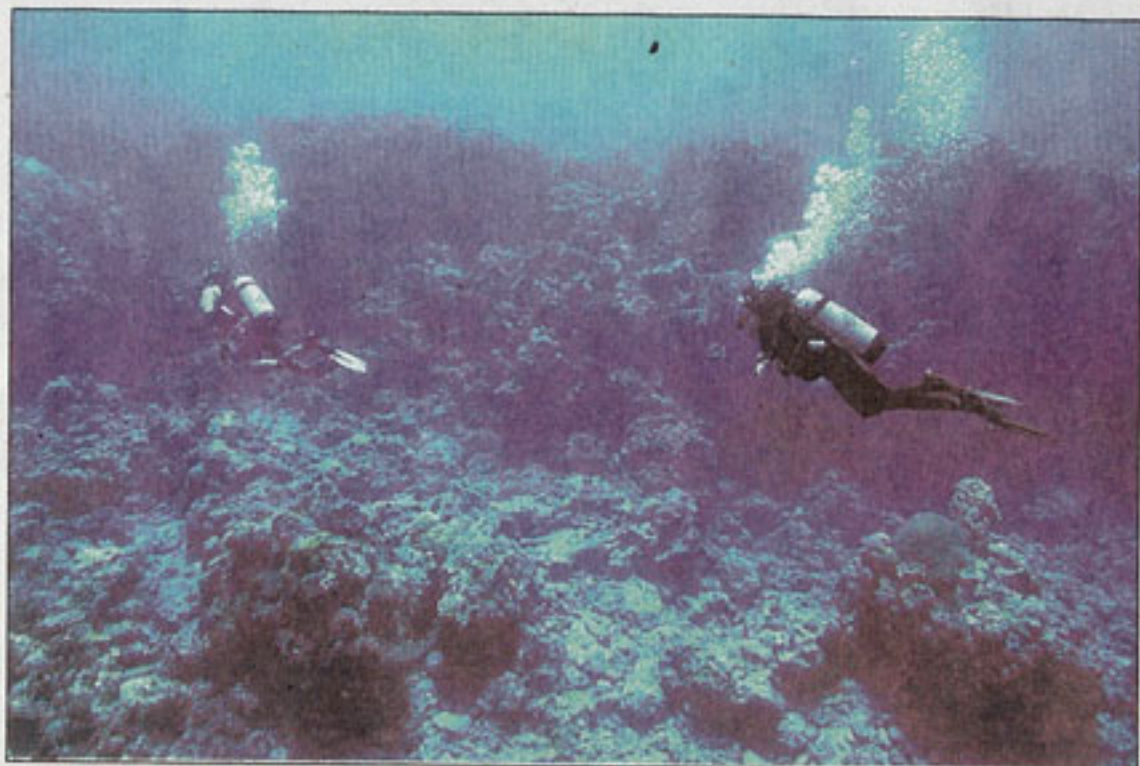
"When he started telling me what he thought he saw, I started putting the pieces together," Ranfranz said.

Yapese natives had told him last year of a Japanese plane shot down in the harbor, but the more details Ranfranz heard, the more he was certain the plane was actually a U.S. B-24.

With Schubert's detailed information, the group found the plane on their first dive. They spent three days taking photos and recording what they found, which included the plane's tail, main fuselage and lower cabin.

"A lot of the plane is overgrown," Ranfranz said, adding that it's difficult to immediately spot plane parts covered with coral.

Any piece they took up for a clos-



— Submitted photo

**Patrick and Cherie Ranfranz search underwater for a downed B-24 off the coast of Yap Island in the Pacific Ocean. The plane was shot down during World War II with Pat's uncle and other crew members on board.**

er look, they made sure to put back where it was, Ranfranz said. He doesn't want to disturb the site but rather document it for the military. He has sent two years worth of research to the Army, Navy and the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC).

JPAC is responsible for solving MIA cases, and Ranfranz hopes his research will peak their interest enough that the organization will start searching Yap with its high-tech equipment.

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– Submitted photo

**Patrick Ranfranz stands in front of a Japanese wreck from World War II. Yap Island is the site of 33 American plane crashes and an unidentified number of Japanese plane crashes.**



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Schubert also enlisted the help of relatives still on the island to guide the group to other places he remembered seeing downed planes.

The group found one of two Hellcats that had crashed in air. Ranfranz found the other last October.

This was the Ranfranz couple's second trip to the island. The initial search for the B-24 piloted by 2nd Lt. Gerald Coleman, whose crew included Tech Sgt. John McCullough (Ranfranz's uncle), has been expanded to include all 33 U.S. planes shot down on or just off the tiny island.

Overall, 110 men are listed as killed or missing in action from the 33 downed planes.

The search for the Coleman B-24 is no longer the main focus. Ranfranz ~~now believes the plane is in~~ deep enough water that it won't be found without a side-sonar scanner, which costs about \$20,000.

Though he still hopes to find the Coleman B-24 some day, Ranfranz said it's not as emotional of a search for him as it has been for the children of those lost at sea.

In addition to Anthony's descendants, Sharon Crowley Connor joined the

trip to pay tribute to her dad, Sgt. William Crowley. He was lost off the coast in water too deep to search, but she and her cousin held a memorial service for him near the site.

"I choked when I said his name, as I do every time," she wrote in a blog entry about the service. "Returning to the dock, even as salty sea spray prickled my skin, I felt peaceful. My father had fallen into the sea 62 long years ago and now his presence was being recognized. He was there, and he knew we were with him. I was happy."

Ranfranz said the ceremony touched everyone in attendance.

"We're not only searching for planes; we're finding closure," he said.

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