

MISSING AIR CREW

THE SEARCH FOR THE COLEMAN B-24 CREW



Missing Air Crew Project

The search for the Coleman B-24 crew

www.MissingAirCrew.com

pat@missingaircrew.com

Patrick Ranfranz

307th BG Reunion Presentation

August 2006

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Missing Air Crew Project Presentation

1. The search for my uncle:
 - John McCullough
 - Shot down over Yap Island on June 25, 1944
 - Coleman Crew, 307th BG, 372nd BS
2. Trip to Yap Island in October 2005 to search for the Coleman Crew
3. Expanded project to search for ALL crews lost near Yap Island
4. Return trip to Yap Island from September 13-29, 2006



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Background About Myself

- Patrick Ranfranz
 - Shoreview, MN
 - Cherie (wife of 18 years)
 - Genna (17 year old daughter)
 - History/Anthropology Degree
 - Thesis on The Development of Air Power
 - Vice President of Marketing with Pearson AGS Globe
 - Private Pilot
 - Certified Scuba Diver
 - Amateur historian
 - Developer of the CharlesLindbergh.com web site



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Marie McCullough & Family

- My Mother's Family
 - One of 13 children
 - Owned farms in IA and SD
 - Family moved to Covina, CA in 1943 to work for the Los Angeles Goodyear plant
 - Four brothers joined the AAF



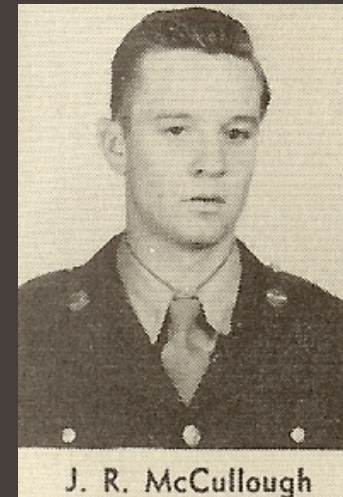
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John Raymond McCullough

- Born on December 14, 1923, in Vail, Iowa
- Entered the AAF on April 13, 1943
- Trained as a Radio Operator/Gunner
 - Sioux Falls, South Dakota
- Departed the US on February 19, 1944
- Assistant Radio Operator the 372nd BS, 307th BG



J. R. McCullough

56,916 ORIGINAL This copy to be retained by passenger

NAVAL AIR TRANSPORT SERVICE
AIR TRAVEL AUTHORITY A 49503

PRIORITY CLASS	TRIP NO. OR PLANE NO.	DATE OF TRIP	CARRIER	FROM	TO
2-A	6494N	2-28-44	NATS	HONOLULU	ESP
PASSENGER'S NAME			RANK OR RATE	PASSENGER'S WEIGHT	TOTAL BAGGAGE WEIGHT
MC CULLOUGH, J.			CORP.	170	55
PASSENGER'S SERVICE OR ORGANIZATION			PASSENGER'S DUTY STATION OR BUSINESS ADDRESS		
USA			ESP		
A. T. A. ISSUED BY (SIGNATURE)			RANK OR RATE	ISSUING STATION	DATE ISSUED
J. D. FESSIO			TR. REP.	HONOLULU	2-28-44
PRIORITY CERTIFIED BY			RANK	COMMAND	A. T. C. NO.
J. D. FESSIO			LT.	NAPO-PEARL	

THIS A. T. A. AUTHORIZES THE PASSENGER NAMED ABOVE TO TRAVEL BETWEEN THE PORTS NAMED ON NATS OR NAVY CONTRACT CARRIER AIRCRAFT, SUBJECT TO THE REGULATIONS LISTED ON THE BACK HEREOF 16-55983-1

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John Raymond McCullough

- July 7, 1944 Western Union, "...killed in action on 25 June 1944 over Yap Island."
- Brother landed on Mokerang Field, Los Negros to visit one day after the shoot down
- Limited information provided to the family after the war

CLASS OF SERVICE
This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.

WESTERN UNION
A. N. WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT

1304

SYMBOLS
LL=Two Letter
NL=Night Letter
LC=Deferred Cable
NLT=Cable Night Letter
Rly Radiogram

The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.

31
To: Washington, D.C.

9:13 P.M. July 7, 1944

Mrs. Blanche H. McCullough -
330 S. Orange Ave. Corvallis

The Secretary of War desires me to express his deepest regret that your son, Sgt. John R. McCullough was killed in action on twenty-five June, over Yap Island. Letter follows.

Very truly,
Wm. H. Arnold, General

THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

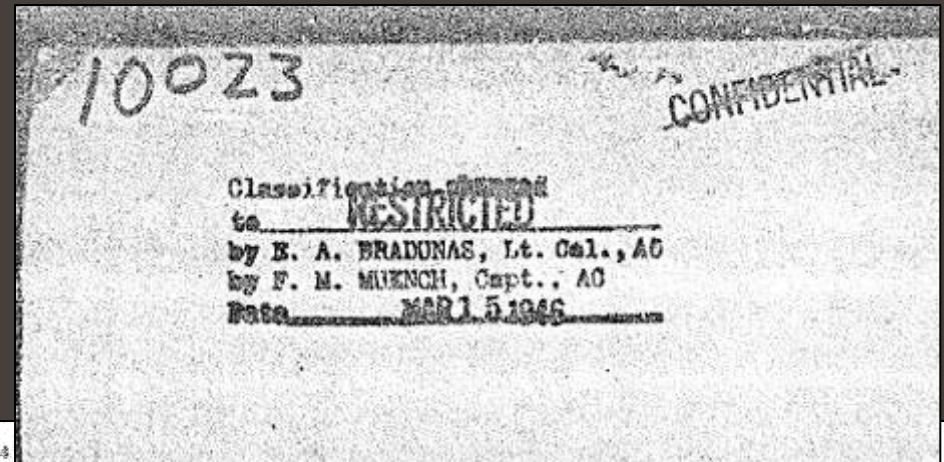
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My Search—The Start

- Always fascinated in aviation and history
- Yap has been a point of interest since childhood
 - Stories of Uncle being lost over Yap in WWII
- UWEC (1984-89):
 - Senior thesis topic
 - Received the Coleman Crew Missing Air Crew Report (MACR) #10023
 - Shared details with my family



AFPPA-14

WAR DEPARTMENT
HEADQUARTERS ARMY AIR FORCES
WASHINGTON

IMPORTANT: This report will be compiled in triplicate by each Army Air Forces organization within 48 hours of the time an aircraft is officially reported missing.

1. ORGANIZATION: LOCATION: APO # 324 COMMAND OR AIR FORCE: Thirteenth
GROUP: 307th; SQUADRON: 372nd; DETACHMENT:

2. SPECIFY: POINT OF DEPARTURE: Mokerang Field; COURSE: 1000
INTENDED DESTINATION: Mokerang Field; TYPE OF MISSION: Combat

3. WEATHER CONDITIONS AND VISIBILITY AT TIME OF CRASH OR WHEN LAST REPORTED:
Clear - Ceiling and visibility unlimited

4. GIVE: (A) DATE: 6-25-44 TIME: 1150K AND LOCATION AT LAST SIGHTED:
WHEREABOUTS OF MISSING AIRCRAFT 3 mile SE of S tip of Yap Is.
(B) SPECIFY WHETHER () LAST SIGHTED; () LAST CONTACTED BY RADIO:

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MACR Details

- Coleman Crew Shoot Down:
 - B-24J #44-40598
 - 5th BG & 307th BG
 - 370th and 372th BS
 - Target:
 - Yap Airdrome Runway
 - Revetment Area
 - Attacked by enemy aircraft about a minute and a half after bombs away



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MACR Details

- Direct hits in #2 and #3 engines from 20mm fire
- The cockpit and bombardier's compartment caught fire and flames could be seen coming out of the windows
- The plane performed a perfect loop, fell off to the right in a spin and crashed in the water 3-5 miles south of Yap
- It was strafed all the way down by the enemy pilots
- No parachutes were seen



Coleman Flight Crew - This crew was lost June 25th, 1944, over Yap Island. We have identification only for Gerald Coleman (pilot), standing at far left.

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My Search—On Hold

- Limited time to search for info from 1989-1999:
 - Family
 - Career
 - Discretionary funds



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The Search Continues

- The Internet opens new doors:
 - Worldwide searchable data and web sites (keywords)
 - Discussion boards
 - New information and contacts located
- Dick Beard from El Reno, OK (307th BG)
 - Lindbergh Flew with Us: . . . *one of them pointed to a P-38 about 75 yards away and said . . . "that's him"*



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The Cigarette Case

- Located Radio School classmate of my uncle's
 - David Stennick: Lodi, CA
 - Graduated from the AAF Technical School on Thanksgiving Day 1943
 - Sioux Falls, South Dakota
 - *"Good luck Dave. May we meet again in good old sunny Calif. John McCullough"*



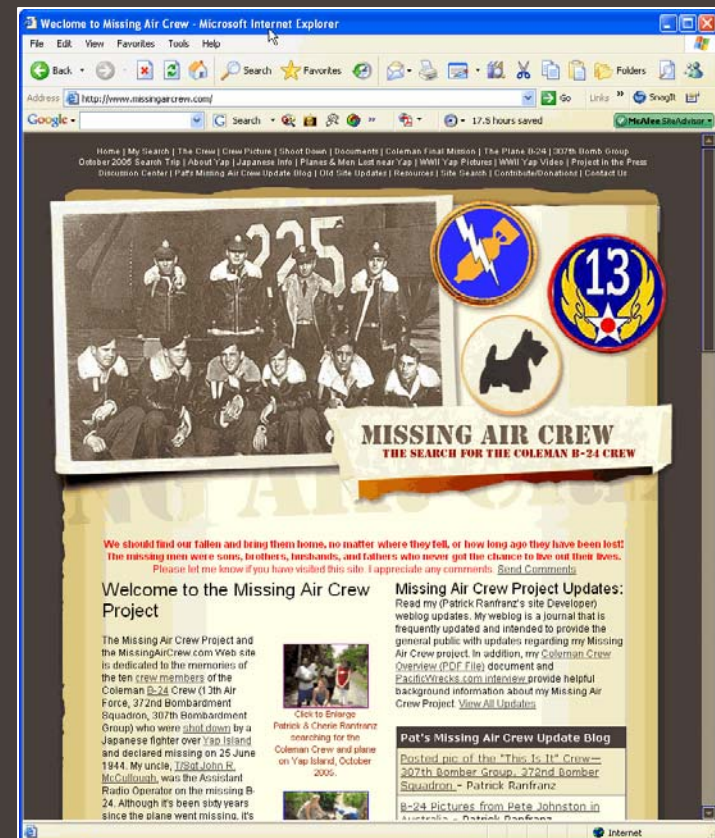
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The Missing Air Crew Project

- Developed the MissingAirCrew.com web site:
 - Started in 2004
 - Vehicle to share information and to locate information
 - Document the life's of the Coleman Crew
- Renewed effort to locate recently declassified files from the archives



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The Missing Air Crew Project

- Official histories
- Missing Air Crew Reports
- Unit records
- Mission reports
- Enemy records
- Grave Registration records
- Search and recovery records
- Individual Deceased Personnel Files
- Submarine records
- Personnel records
- Books, articles, newspapers, etc.

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New Information Located...

- **5th Bomb Group Mission Report:**
 - One plane of 307th BG was seen to crash at 9°25'30"N - 138°05'E at 1152 K
 - No survivors were seen
 - Went down in a flat spin
 - Crashed just outside the reef south of the island
 - Two enemy fighters followed this airplane down but were not strafing
 - No parachutes were seen



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New Information Located...

- **Japanese Records:**
 - 1045(-9) 22 B24s (in two groups) attacked Yap
 - 25 JUN: 1 B24 shot over by fighters over water near Yap but witnesses said no survivors



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Researching the Crew

- Gerald D. Coleman, Pilot
- John E., Jr. Jurica, Co-Pilot
- Martin B. Unger, Navigator
- James F. Lind, Bombardier
- Robert P. Wagoner, Engineer
- James R., Jr. Lykens, Ass't Engineer
- James R. Hurd, Radio Operator
- **John R. McCullough, Ass't Radio Operator**
- Romeo Tetreault, Gunner
- Bill Williams, Jr. Armorer Gunner



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Researching the Crew

- Documents from the archives
- Items returned to the families
- Newspaper articles
- Pictures
- Letters
- Home movies

GERALD COLEMAN IS KILLED OVER YAP ISLAND

Lieut. Gerald D. Coleman, 28,
pilot of a
the Admi
June 25

Sgt. Wagoner Is Killed

In Action Over Yap
Island in Pacific

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2nd Lt. Martin B. Unger—Navigator

- Cecile locates the MAC web site
- Family provided:
 - Documents
 - Pictures
 - Home Movie
 - Family letters from the last two years of Martin's life

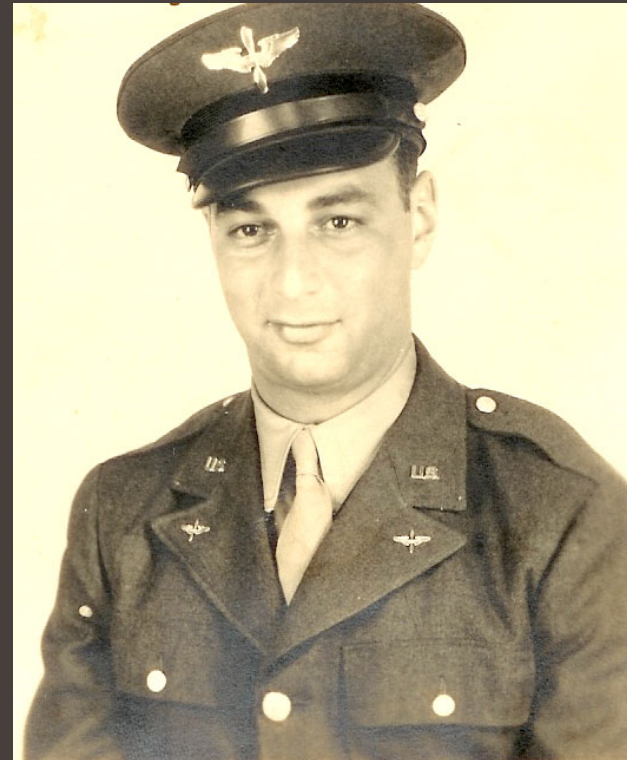


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2nd Lt. Martin B. Unger—Navigator

- June 24, 1944 Letter:
 - *"I am well & kept busy flying... You undoubtedly know from the news reports from this area that quite a lot has been happening out this way. It is encouraging news to everyone & it seems as though the beginning of the end is in sight."*



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2nd Lt. Martin B. Unger—Navigator

- Meeting with Martin's two sisters and widow in New York City
– Oct 2005
- First meeting of the three women in over 60 years

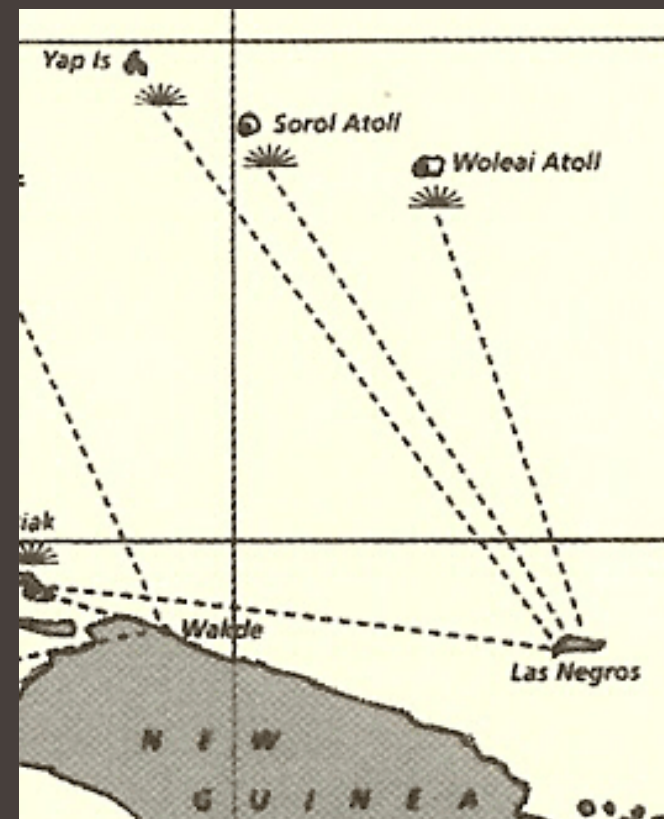


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Researching the Coleman Crew

- 1948 Activity:
 - Board of Review declared the case closed and all crew non-recoverable
- 1951 Activity :
 - Request made for all available dental records
- Search Activities:
 - No site visit to Yap
 - No search activities for the Coleman crew after the war
- 307th BG Mission Reports
 - Microfilm rolls/Converted
 - Reviewed and posted 3000+ files



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307th BG Mission Report Files

- A/C#598, Pilot, Lt. Coleman was attacked by a Zeke about one minute and half after bombs away with hits being scored on #2 and #3 engines. The cockpit and bombardier's compartment were seen with flames coming out the windows which had been shot out. The plane made a perfect loop, then fell off to the right in a spin and crashed in the water 2 miles South of the runway. It was strafed all the way down and also after hitting the water. No parachutes were seen and it is believed that all members of the crew are dead

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Determining the Crash Site

Conflicting information:

- 3-5 miles south of the southern tip of the island
 - Missing Air Crew Report
- 2 miles South of runway
 - 307th BG Mission Report
- Just off the reef south of the island
 - 5th BG Mission Report
- 2 miles south of the harbor entrance
 - Sub Report
- Off the second channel
 - Yap Elders
- Over the water near Yap
 - Japanese Report

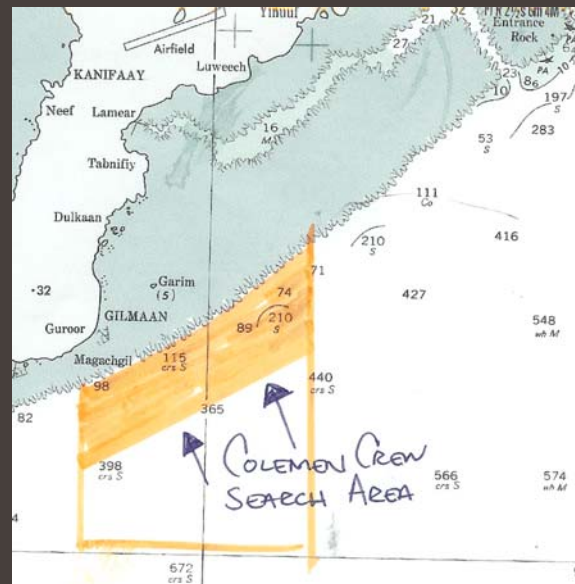
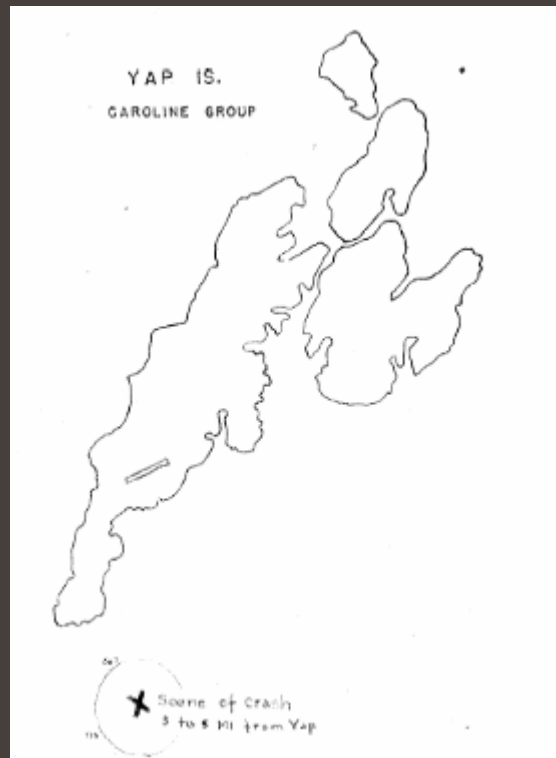


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Determining the Crash Site



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Yap Search Trip October 2005

- Reconnaissance mission:
 - Assumption that only one B-24 was lost directly over the Island
 - Time running out to interview elders
 - Certified as PADI Divers
 - Made New contacts in Yap



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Yap Search Trip October 2005

- Setup:
 - Dive Guides/Dive Boats
 - Land Guides
 - Elder interviews
- Lacking high-end underwater search equipment
 - Side scanning sonar
 - Underwater ROV's



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Yap Search Trip October 2005

An exhausting week...

- Diving the waters around the Yap reef
- Interviewing Yapese elders
- Memorial Service for the Coleman Crew
- Unplanned:
 - Hacking through jungles
 - Crawling through mangrove swamps



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The Water Search



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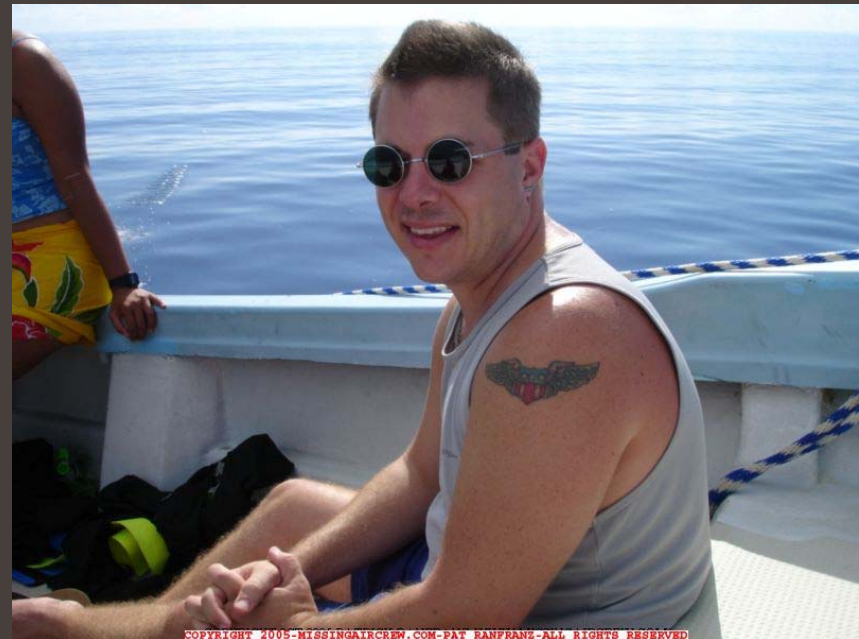
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The Water Search



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Interview with Yapese Elders

- Low Level Shoot Downs:
 - Seeing a smoking plane "the color of money" going down over the island
 - She said the plane flew very low and in a group of three
 - Watched the plane crash into the water west of the island



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Interview with Yapese Elders

- Recalls one American bomber being shot down over the island during the war
 - Three parachutes from the plane before it crashed south of the island
 - Saw two American POWs who were taken to the island of Palau with two Catholic Priests and a Filipino family who ran the weather station on Yap



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Interview with Yapese Elders

- One 4 engine bomber shot down
 - Watched a bomber go down and saw the plane floating
 - Saw three parachutes
 - One airmen swam and two were captured by the Japanese
 - Two POWs, Catholic Priests, and a Filipino family
 - Thought the plane was a B-29



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Search for Other American Planes

- Interviews point to other American planes and crash sites:
 - Information about American wreckage in the jungle and mangrove swamps
 - Validate information from interviews
 - Decided to expand the scope of the search and project
 - Land and mangrove searches added to diving search



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Hellcat Crash Site #1



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Hellcat Crash Site #1



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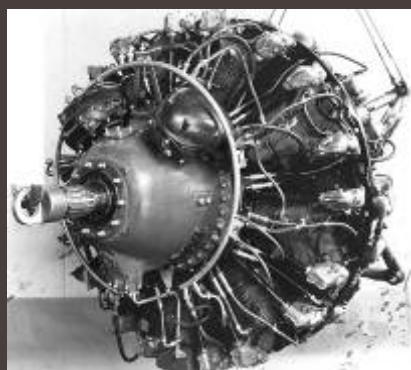
Hellcat Crash Site #2



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F4U Corsair Crash Site



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F4U Corsair Crash Site



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Japanese Wreck Sites



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Japanese Wreck Sites



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Coleman Crew Memorial Service



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Researching Yap Missions

- New research to confirm and validate information we learned through our search trip and interviews
- Example:
 - Hellcat Crash Site #1:
 - Ens. Joseph E. Cox
 - 6 September 1944
 - F6F-5 Hellcat from the USS Enterprise
 - Recovered and reburied in 1948



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Researching Yap Missions

- American losses of planes and men on missions to Yap include:
 - 33 American planes lost
 - 149 men involved
 - 110 KIA/MIA



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Expanding the Mission

- AAF
 - 10 Planes
- Navy
 - 11 Planes
 - 3 UDT Men
- Marines
 - 12 Planes
- *Location of the planes*
 - *Some planes located miles from Yap*
- Types of Planes Lost on Missions to Yap:
 - B-24
 - TBM-1C Avenger
 - SB2C-1C Helldiver
 - F6F-5 Hellcat
 - F4U Corsair
 - PBM-3D Martin Mariner

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USS ALBACORE: 4 days Searching

- Recently declassified
US Sub War Patrol
Reports
 - Spent 4 days searching
 - **25 June:**
 - 1850, Received word
that plane was down
one mile south of YAP
 - This position plotted in
2 miles south of harbor
entrance
 - Went to search for 2nd
plane reported down
near Sorel Island



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B-24 Losses on Yap Missions

- 14 June 1944 (5th BG)
- 25 June 1944
- 5 July 1944
- 13 July 1944
- 15 July 1944 (3)
- 19 July 1944
- 9 August 1944
- 10 August 1944



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Anthony Crew Lost Over Yap

- B-24's Lost Close to Yap:
 - Coleman Crew
 - Anthony Crew
- Lt. Anthony Crew (371nd BS)
 - August 10, 1944
 - Lost on way to the target
 - Shot down by AA fire over the island
 - Two crew members captured on the mouth of the harbor
 - Japanese records: Captured airmen sent to Palau



Anthony Flight Crew: Front: Anthony (P), Baker (CP). No other ID's.

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New Information

- New information shows up weekly:
 - Location of crash sites from the Yapese
 - Bomber in the harbor
 - Wreckage sites (water, land, and mangroves)
 - Pictures of wreckage
 - Gun camera film footage



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The History...

- Sgt. Hilary Gilbert
 - Shot down twice over Yap Island
 - Kizer Crew, July 15, 1944
 - Anthony Crew, August 10, 1944
- Lt. John K. Beling
 - Helldiver from the USS Yorktown, July 26, 1944
 - Capt of the USS Forrestal on July 29, 1967



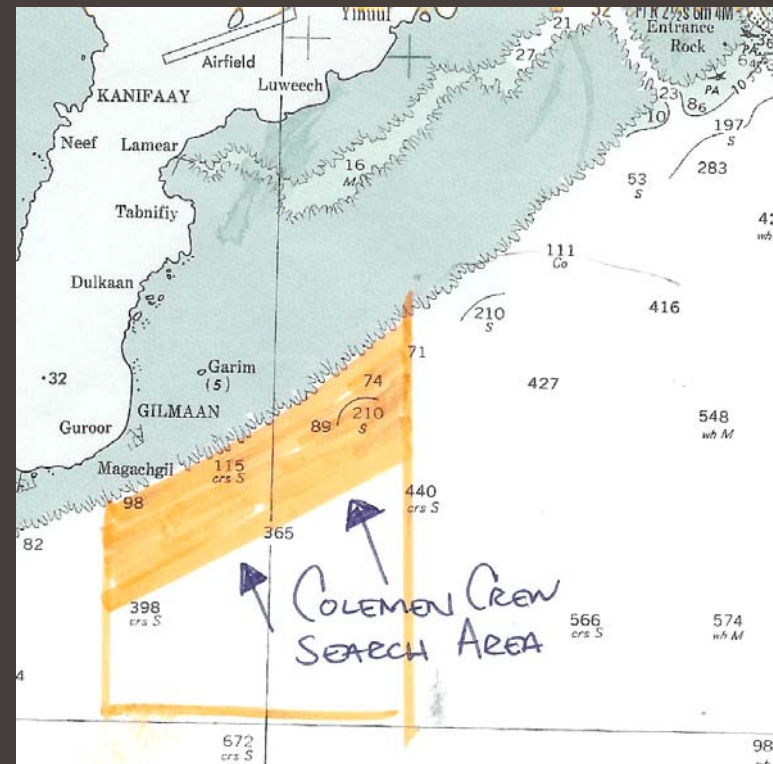
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Returning to Yap: Sept 13-29, 2006

- Comprehensive research about ALL American losses
 - Planes and men
- Multiple crash site locations identified
 - Land, mangrove swamps, and water
- Searching:
 - Planning 20+ dives to search for the planes
 - Searching land and mangrove swamps
- Targeted search area for the Coleman Crew



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Returning to Yap: Sept 13-29, 2006

- Nine people traveling to Yap from three different 307th BG families who lost men on missions to Yap:
 - Coleman Crew
 - June 25, 1944
 - Diederich Crew
 - July 15, 1944
 - Anthony Crew
 - August 10, 1944



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Diederich Crew

- Sharon Crowley Connor & Cousin Kathy:
 - Daughter of Sgt. William Edward Crowley
 - Lost July 15, 1944
 - Collision of two 307th BG B-24's south of Yap
 - Holding a memorial service for the Diederich and Saylor Crews



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Anthony Crew

- Anthony Family
 - Five members of the Lt. Don Anthony family
 - Son and wife
 - Three grandsons
 - One grandson traveling from Iraq
 - Found the MAC web site from Iraq last Winter



Anthony Flight Crew: Front: Anthony (P), Baker (CP). No other ID's.

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MissingAirCrew.com

- Look updates on the MAC web site
 - Posting search updates
 - Pictures
 - Journals



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The Missing Air Crew Project

- Locating the unaccounted for men and planes who were lost near Yap Island during WWII
- Researching and documenting the history of the 307th Bomb Group and it's men



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307th Bombardment Group History

- Posting:
 - Searchable database of mission reports
 - 3000+ mission reports
 - Individual Crew web pages
 - Picture libraries
 - Etc.
- Seeking:
 - Documents
 - Letters
 - Pictures
 - Etc.



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Thank You

- Thank you to everyone who has helped!
 - Too numerous to name individually

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***“A man is not dead
until he is forgotten”***

Questions