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LEADER-TELEGRAM

# A journey back

*UW-Eau Claire graduate to seek uncle lost in plane crash during World War II*

SHOREVIEW, Minn. (AP) — A Web designer will go to the other side of the world this fall to look for an uncle he never met, who died during World War II near a tiny Pacific island that most people have never heard of.

"He went off to war and was lost, never accounted for, never searched for," said Pat Ranfranz, the nephew of assistant radio operator John McCullough and a UW-Eau Claire graduate.

"Yet now we know where he lies."

On June 25, 1944, McCullough and nine other airmen set out in their B-24 bomber to destroy a Japanese landing strip on the island of Yap. About 90 seconds after the bombs hit, Japanese fighters rose up and carved into the six-plane formation.

McCullough's plane pulled

back and did a complete loop before crashing into the water. Two of its engines were destroyed by gunfire. The cockpit was on fire. Military records show no parachutes were seen as the plane sped downward.

Ranfranz discovered his uncle's story while working on his senior thesis at UW-Eau Claire in 1989. Since then, he had devoted countless hours of research to learning the crew's fate and pinpointing the downed plane.

With a rough idea of where the plane crashed, Ranfranz and his wife, Cherie, will go to Yap Island in Micronesia in October to look for the B-24, which may be in up to 3,000 feet of water.

"We're hoping to find someone who says, 'We witnessed that shoot-down,'" he said. "We're hoping for a lucky break."