

## Searching for an uncle he never met

*Local Patrick Ranfranz will continue his search this October near Papua New Guinea*

by **Stephen Harding**  
Staff Writer

SHOREVIEW — Patrick Ranfranz lost an uncle in the South Pacific during World War II.

He never met Technical Sergeant John McCullough, though he grew up hearing stories about him from a multitude of family members. But his quest to learn more has led to his creation of [www.Missingaircrew.com](http://www.Missingaircrew.com), a Website dedicated to finding missing aircraft that went down around Yap Island, now part of the Federate States of Micronesia, during the war.

His research also led him to become the historian for the 307th Bombardment Group Association Inc., a 36-year-old organization that includes in its membership veterans from across the U.S. and their families. The group is known to members as The Long Rangers.

"My grandparents were very upset by the loss of John," Ranfranz said. "The family did not talk about (John) a lot until I started asking questions in the 80s. By that time, nobody knew what happened to the box returned from the Pacific with John's personal effects."

The 42-year-old Shoreview resident, who is



— Submitted photo

**Patrick and Cherie Ranfranz pose with some Yap natives on their 2005 trip.**

a pilot himself, started searching for his uncle and fellow crew members in 1988 while finishing his history degree at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. He was eventually able to locate a Missing Air Crew Report and other documents that helped his family understand what had happened. In trips taken in 2005 and 2006, he and his wife

Cherie travelled to the Yap Islands for month-long trips during which they conducted more research on missing American planes, including that carrying McCullough.

McCullough was a cross-trained radio operator and gunner who was sent to the Pacific in February of 1944. He served as a replacement crew member on the Coleman B-24, pre-

pared to step in for crew members who became ill or were injured.

Though some of the circumstances are unclear, McCullough's plane went down June 25, 1944 over Yap Island, which is north of Papua New Guinea.

A number of Ranfranz' aunts and uncles had thought the plane blew up in mid-air; however, research proved that the B-

24 went down in a flat spin off the southeast coast of Yap and floated on the surface for a short time before sinking.

"If the plane had blown up in mid-air, we would not be able to locate it," he said. "However, knowing that the plane hit the water and then sank gives us a target to find the plane."

Ranfranz corresponded with Jim Kendall of Birmingham, Ala., the late former historian of the 307th Bombardment Group, over the last six years. In 2006 the group, which reunites every two years, asked Ranfranz to speak at its gathering in Seattle, Wash., where he presented information about his search. Afterward, the group sent him a truckful of boxes and file cabinets with information about group members that he now keeps in a storage locker in Shoreview.

"I immediately started working on organizing the materials, creating digital copies and a new searchable database," he said. "My historian role involves preserving the history of the 307th Bomb Group, answering questions and participating in board meetings."

He also recruited the help of Risdall Advertising Agency of New Brighton to help with the project. Risdall executives John

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and Ted Risdall have gone out of their way to support both the Missing Air Crew Project and the 307th Bomb Group, donating company services to help scan some 8,000 of the group's photographs in the past seven months alone.

"(Risdall) has always had a strong interest in my Missing Air Crew Project," he said. "They had me present the project to their entire company after my 2005 search trip."

Ranfranz now receives hundreds of questions every month from original crew members, families, newspapers, authors writing books and others. He has spent countless evenings and weekends answering questions and helping others with research.

"In short, I love to do historical research and get out in the field to locate planes," he said. "It is a very satisfying feeling to research a plane, travel to Yap and find it. We have found planes on each trip and will likely find a num-

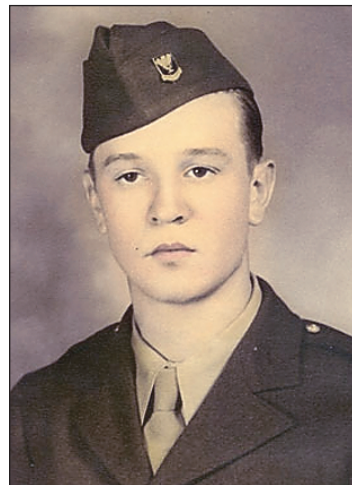
ber of new planes in October."

On Oct 3, Patrick and Cherie Ranfranz will be returning to Yap for a third time.

In 2005, they took the trip alone, but in 2006 they were accompanied by two other families who had lost family members near Yap. One of those was Sharon Conner. She lost her father near Yap when two B-24s from the 307th collided 10-to-15 miles south of the island.

"(Conner's) father is likely unrecoverable due to the depth of the ocean in that area," Ranfranz explained. "However, we took Sharon and her cousin out to the crash site and held a memorial. It was the first time she had closure to the loss of her father whom she never met."

This year when they return to Yap, Ranfranz thinks he has a good chance of locating his uncle's plane using side-scanning sonar. If he does locate the plane, he will notify an organization



— Submitted photo

**T/Sgt. John McCullough was shot down over Yap Island on June 25, 1944.**

called the Joint Prisoners of War, Missing In Action Accounting Command (JPAC) to have it recover the remains.

"Once we locate my uncle's plane, we will continue the search for all planes lost near Yap," he said. "I have researched all the planes and believe over the next 10 years we can locate a majority near the island or on the island. I can spend the rest of my life searching for planes and men near Yap."

For more information about the 307th Bombardment Group, log on to [www.307bg.org](http://www.307bg.org).

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