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Amateur historian paves way for POW/MIA Accountin Micronesia

By CHARLIE REED

Stars and Stripes

Published: June 22, 2011

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Patrick Ranfranz has spent nearly 20 years and \$100,000 search carrying his uncle when it was shot down over the Pacific Ocean 67 years ago.

The plane and its 10-man crew were shot down by the Japanese off the coast of Yap, a tiny islan Guam and the Philippines. Driven by his family connection, Ranfranz began researching the illanthropology major in college in the 1980s.

"It's was a family mystery that turned into a passion," said the 45-year-old marketing executive

He's made five trips to Yap since 2005, but to no avail.

However, his decades-long pursuit has gotten a boost from the U.S. military: <u>The Joint POW/M</u> for the first time earlier this month.

Commonly known as JPAC, the Hawaii-based joint command travels to different parts of Asia a mission to repatriate 78,000 U.S. troops who died fighting overseas in World War II. The comm 10,000 U.S. troops who died fighting in Korea, Vietnam and other conflicts abroad but whose b

The JPAC team will spend a month on Yap building upon some of the field work and historical a includes information on a dozen other U.S. crash sites and aircraft he has located over the years

"I'm extremely proud of that," said Ranfranz, who last year helped Yap tourism officials turn a j a World War II memorial.

"The end-all has always been for JPAC to come and do a recovery mission (on Yap)," said Ranfr locating."

JPAC researchers — a mix of active-duty military and civilian personnel — will interview locals a missions to the island according to a IPAC press release. After that comes the painstaking procesure.

crew which has eluded, and fascinated, him for so loo o last year enlisted researchers from the prestigious V

iental in JPAC's mission to Yap, command spokeswoi

private "wreck hunters" can be tricky.

The command maintains a policy of "neither encouraging nor discouraging" amateur historians "If we encourage them too much, we could jeopardize the existing sites," she said.

But Mark Noah, founder of the nonprofit History Flight, disagrees. He is trying to establish a waclosely with JPAC.

"The idea is to help augment the public sector with private sector money and increase the level of a Miami-based commercial pilot and World War II buff.

History Flight helped Ranfranz on Yap, and since 2003 has provided assistance and direct fund expeditions aimed at recovering World War II-era troops, Noah said.

Of the 78,000 servicemembers still missing from the war, only about 28,000 are recoverable, at 70 identifications per year, it would take JPAC the next four centuries to recover all the remains

"Our job is not to be obstructionists," Noah said. "But we've got to increase the capability for thi reedc@pstripes.osd.mil

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