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# Dornier Recovery?

The Dornier 17 discovered last year submerged off the Goodwin Sands was back in the news again during April. New sonar images show that it is still apparently intact in about 50ft (15m) of water. It is hoped to raise the aircraft and put it on display at The RAF Museum, Hendon, which is funded by the Ministry of Defence (MoD). Due to budget constraints and the fact that the aircraft is of significant historical value the museum is bidding for cash from heritage organisations to cover the costs.

The work has now become urgent because recreational divers have now discov-

ered the wreck and souvenir hunters have started bringing bits of it to the surface. In doing so they risk prosecution, since the wreck is MoD property. If and when the bomber is salvaged, it will form part of a new Battle of Britain Beacon display which will replace the museum's present gallery devoted to the conflict.

The aim is to conserve the wreck rather than an attempt to restore it to pristine condition. As a museum spokesman said, that would involve so much work and replacement of damaged parts that the result would be nothing more than a replica.

Sceptics believe that the wreck will fall apart when it is lifted, no matter how delicate the operation. Others suggest that the much publicised Lockheed P-38 Lightning near Harlech should be lifted as a practice run for the infinitely more difficult Do 17. The P-38 is lying in shallow water just off the North Wales coast and nobody seems to be able to decide what to do with it. Should the Dornier recovery not be successful, at least an attempt will have been made. The same can be said of the P-38. If they are simply left in situ, time and tide will inevitably destroy both of these very historic relics.

## Yap Memorial

A memorial has been dedicated on the Pacific island of Yap. This has been achieved by a combined effort involving the Yap State Government, the US Ambassador to the Federated States of Micronesia, the US Navy and the Missing Air Crew Project (MACP). It displays the actual wreckage of a Grumman F6F Hellcat shot down over the island on September 6, 1944 and pays tribute to its pilot, Ensign Joseph Cox of Sand Point, Idaho. It also commemorates the hundreds of other Americans lost near this Pacific Island during World War Two.

In the historical context of the Pacific theatre, American losses near Yap were substantial, yet continue to be overlooked. Strategically located between the Philippines and Guam, Japanese-occupied Yap was targeted almost daily from June 1944 to August 1945 and cost the lives of hundreds of Americans, 110 of whom remain listed as missing in action. Pat Ranfranz of Cameron, Wisconsin, founder of the MACP, has spent over 20 years researching Yap and the stories behind each airman and his mission, hoping to preserve their memories for generations to come. He and his wife have



The remains of Ensign Joseph Cox's Grumman F6F Hellcat are now a memorial to the hundreds of Americans who lost their lives fighting for the Island of Yap. (Patrick Ranfranz/missingaircrew.com)

located numerous aircraft over the last five years and continue to seek out new sites during each visit.

Fortunately, the islanders have respected the crashes as grave sites and taken care to preserve them. Three other Hellcats and a Helldiver were lost on September 6 in operations from the *USS Enterprise*, some on land and some in the water. It is not clear what happened, either Ensign Cox and another pilot were hit by AA fire while diving on a target in Yap town, or one was hit and col-

lided with the other. A fuller account can be found on [www.missingaircrew.com](http://www.missingaircrew.com). There are a number of other American and Japanese crash sites on Yap, and Mr Ranfranz has designed and created markers and all-weather signs explaining their history. One is dedicated to a Curtiss Helldiver crew from the *USS Hornet* shot down while attacking a Japanese lighthouse on July 27, 1944. The fragmented wreckage appears to have been left untouched since a graves registration team visited the site in 1948.

## Buried in Germany

In 1946 there were still some wartime USAAF fighter groups on occupation duties in Germany. One was the 406th FG whose Republic P-47 Thunderbolts were based at Nordholz and tasked with protecting Bremerhaven, the only American port in Germany, although it was technically in the British Zone. That same year the group was ordered to return to the USA but its Thunderbolts were now obsolete. A German claims that he met former pilots of the 406th in 1994 when they returned to Nordholz on a reunion tour. They

told him that 22 or more Thunderbolts were pushed into the cutting of a disused railway track along with related spares and it was then filled in. Contemporary photographs confirm the existence of this cutting but, as usual with these intriguing stories, documentary proof is lacking. The area is still undeveloped and there is only one way to find out what, if anything, is in there!

Totally unconnected is the tale of a Northrop P-61 Black Widow night fighter unit which supposedly buried its aircraft on

a German airfield before departing. Also in Germany, North American P-51 Mustang wreckage has been unearthed during building work at Starnberg in Bavaria. A Packard Merlin engine, machine-guns and landing gear were the main clues to the type. Research via the internet soon narrowed it down to 44-72763 of the 33rd FG, based at Bad Kissingen, which crashed on July 14, 1947 after a mid-air collision. Its pilot bailed out, the other P-51 crashing some distance to the south.