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'MIA Hunters' Seek Those Lost Overseas



Reporting
[Heather Brown](#)

(WCCO) On this Memorial Day, there are still 88,000 Americans missing in action from World War II through the First Gulf War. While the U.S. military sends investigators across the world to excavate sites every year, there simply more people and aircraft than they can handle. Sometimes, they rely on volunteers groups to locate crash sites or burial locations for the first time.

[MIA Hunters](#), a non-profit, volunteer group based out of Cannon Falls, has completed 23 missions to locate, recover and return lost World War II American airmen and bring them back for burial in the U.S.

"They served our country, it's time to come home," said MIA Hunters Mission Leader Bryan Moon.

In May, he led a group of eight men and one woman from Minnesota and Florida to the north coast of Papua New Guinea. It was a spot taken over by the Japanese in 1942 to stage an assault on Australia.

Each volunteer paid their own way and signed a pledge they would not touch anything they found. They understood the conditions are difficult, including hilly terrain in 90 degree weather with 100 percent humidity.

Moon said he uses native guides to locate wreckage. Many of the sites never been seen by white people but have been known the natives since World War II. From there, he researches the information, contacts witnesses and recruits his group to travel.

It was the first trip for World War II history buff Gary Stinar.

"It was an enlightening adventure," he said. "It's very physical and it got a little tough in some instances but it was well worth the effort."

In one village, a native guide led them to three American bombers. They suspect that area was an emergency landing field.

A short trip away, the wreckage of P-38 fighter sat in the middle of a village.

"You wonder, you know how, were they living, were they dead," said MIA Hunters Mission member Karen Johnson, "What the last part of their lives was."

It took an entire day to hike to a B-24 Liberator bomber that's now used as a playground. Members found human remains nearby. The group recorded the information on the bomber to forward to military to eventually locate its pilots and passengers.

The group also brought home 21 American dogtags. The natives had gathered 35 within their villages over the past few years.

All of this information, including GPS coordinates, will be passed on to the Joint Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Accounting Command based in Hawaii. Each year, JPAC identifies about 100 individuals and return them to their families. [Click here for more information on how you can help without tampering or disturbing sites.](#)



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