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Press Release – Immediate.

#### LOST WW.II BOMBER WITH MIA CREW FOUND IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA JUNGLE.

Just returned from a perilous MIA search and rescue mission are nine Americans aged from 14-78. Each self-financed their participation in a mission whose objectives was to find and identify an American WW.II bomber and its crew missing for over 62 years. They were basing their planning on reports by friendly natives with whom they had previously worked and who would guide them deep into the Papua New Guinea jungle 140 miles from the nearest town.

MIA HUNTERS, the only US civilian MIA search organization, based in Minnesota, planned the mission. The nine Hunters would be the first white men to penetrate so far into the jungle in the area of the reported crash site of the US bomber, believed to be a B-17 Flying Fortress. They were not to know how life-threatening the mission would become.

First sign of trouble was upon arrival at the Papua New Guinea town on Lae. At the airport they were met by an armored bus bearing the inscription LUXURY COACHES – GUARD-DOG SECURITY. The two uniformed drivers were armed, one with a machine-gun. They ushered the Hunters aboard for the one-hour journey to their base hotel in Lae.

The following day was spent equipping the group with food, water and other supplies for the trek into the jungle which would be on foot. Biggest load problem would be water, three liters a day per person which equated with reserves to ten cases of water – 120 bottles. It was planned that the Hunters would be supported by 20 porters to carry the bulk of the load to the top of a 4,000 foot mountain, a location nearest to the reported crash site of the missing bomber.

The Hunters were up the next morning at 5.00am. Breakfast of sausage, bacon, eggs, toast and coffee was to be their last meal for the next 15 hours. A bus, laden with the nine-man search

team, their supplies and two educated English-speaking tracker/guides, Michael Roy and Martin Kupen, headed out of town for 125 miles to a roadside village where the arduous trek on foot would begin.

The Hunters then realized they had landed in the middle of a land dispute between neighboring tribes. They were met by Giamuki Dampit, native chief of the mountaintop village of Samaran, the closest village to the reported bomber crash site. However, the first half of the trek lay through the territory of another unfriendly native chief, a course, which it turned out, made Giamuki's porters very nervous and which would later cause the group's plan to stay together, to fall apart with near fatal results.

Weather was clear but recent downpours had swollen rivers the Hunters had to cross. Beyond these a terrain of rocks slowed their progress, during which time the porters bearing all the food and water had gone on ahead, apparently concerned for their safety in the territory of their hostile neighbor.

First casualty was team leader Bryan Moon who, at 78, was the oldest in the group. A diabetic and recent heart attack survivor, the 90 degree heat and now 12 hours without food, he collapsed from fatigue at the foot of the mountain, the boarder between Giamuki and his hostile neighbor's territory. A lean-to provided the only shelter from the torrential rain which had begun. Giamuki, Michael Roy and two native porters stayed with Bryan through the night, lighting a small fire. There was no food as this had gone on ahead, but one of the two porters had been carrying one of two 24 cases of local beer. The five weary and hungry travelers consumed all but two cans during the night.

Bryan had earlier directed his colleagues, who could make better time, to go on ahead. But the worst of the journey was yet to come. From the base of the mountain it was another 3,000 foot near vertical climb to the top along a slippery, narrow path barely two feet wide. It began to rain continuously as darkness fell. Guide Martin led the way with a small flashlight as they edged their way slowly upwards.

Their path lay across a narrow ridge line exposed on both sides to a 1000 foot drop. One slip during the long climb could have been fatal. It happened to Hunter Joe Goggin, a retired President of Red Wing shoes, MN. His slip caused him to fall on a Python snake from which

he was pulled away by his colleagues renaming him forever "Python Joe." It was 7.30pm by the time the group staggered into the village of Samaran at the top of the mountain led by 14 year old Michael Molenaar, the doctor's son. They were the first white men to ever get to Samaran. The villagers, apparently delighted with their new guests, vacated their largest thatched hut for the Hunters.

Miraculously, eight Hunters had reached their first objective – Joe Goggin, John Rippinger, a Schaumburg, IL president of a finance company and an air display pilot, Curt Hills, a property manager from Rochester, MN, Gene Kreinbring, a car-leasing manager from Rochester, MN, Rich Macrafic, adventurer, pilot and IBM software engineer from Rochester, MN, David Donkers, pilot and the Mission's camping, and catering expert from Nerstrand, MN, plus the Mission's Doctor, Karl Molenaar and his 14 year old son Michael, both from Cannon Falls, MN. It was 15 hours since they began their journey.

David cooked them a meal. With Bryan at the base of the mountain in an unknown condition, they discussed rescue options. It was decided that two separate attempts would be made while five Hunters would proceed the next morning to attempt to reach the crash site. First to volunteer an immediate descent in the dark of the perilous 3000 foot was David who would take a small stove and food to Bryan. Having just climbed the mountain, he began a marathon return trip in rain and darkness with one guide and a flashlight. He reached the lean-to later that evening and promptly came face-to-face with a scorpion. A machete removed the problem. David cooked, what seemed to Bryan the best meal of his life – Chicken soup followed by fried Spam washed down from the fast diminishing stock of beer.

At the top of the mountain, a second rescue by Doctor Karl Molenaar and his son Michael would be launched the next morning. This was further prompted by Michael's condition which was worsening. He was experiencing dizziness, nausea, breathing difficulty and other symptoms aggravated by the climate, weather and fatigue.

At the mountain's base, Bryan had recovered sufficiently the next morning to attempt the climb to Samaran escorted by David, Michael Roy, Giamuki and three porters. They fortunately vacated the lean-to early, as shortly after, a war party from the neighboring tribe raided the site and

destroyed the shelter. They then posted a sign written on tree bark. It said simply "Pass this sign and you will be killed."

Meanwhile the doctor and son accompanied by two porters bearing the medical kit and supplies were descending, not knowing of the dangerous situation developing at the foot of the mountain. Part way down they met Bryan, David, Michael Roy and their escorts. After some discussion, Michael, the most reliable of all the guides, was reassigned to the Doctor's group who, with two porters would continue their descent and again make the long trek through hostile territory to the roadside village from where they could catch a bus to Lei.

At the foot of the mountain they came face-to-face with the neighboring war-party. Immediately, the two porters from Tamaran turned around and with the doctor's medical kit, food and supplies, promptly retreated back up the mountain leaving guide Michael Roy with the doctor and his son to face a critical confrontation. It took some negotiating by guide Michael to persuade the hostiles to permit them to pass unharmed and three hours later, again crossing swollen rivers, they made it safely back to the road, and from there, by bus to the hotel in Lae.

Five Hunters were left at the top of the mountain, Joe Goggin, John Rippinger, Curt Hills, Gene Kreinbring and Rich Macrific. These five would attempt to reach the bomber's crash site. Next morning they began another grueling four-hour round-trip trek led by villagers along more precipitous jungle paths until they reached the area the bomber had struck and disintegrated. Parts of the aircraft were unreachable and spread over a wide area. The five Hunters planted an American flag and said a prayer for the MIA crew still entombed in the wreckage. They retrieved small sections of the bomber and took photographs, evidence of their achievement in becoming the first white men to see the bomber since it took off on its last fatal flight in 1943. Because of the scattered remains, positive identification of the aircraft was only partially successful, but subsequent events would change this.

Victoriously bearing the bomber remains, they returned to the village of Tamaran late afternoon to meet Bryan, David, Giamuki and party entering the village after an eight-hour climb up the mountain. Having found the lost bomber and mapped its location, the mission had achieved its primary objective. There remained the need for positive identification. This would require another lengthy visit to the crash site, perhaps covering several days. There was also the problem of how

to get safely off the mountain given the warning of the neighboring tribe.

It was decided to give the Tamaran leaders a clear briefing of the aircrafts distinguishing elements, namely, numbers from the tail section as yet unfound, dog-tags of crew members or the manufacturers plate affixed to the cockpit's console. The villagers agreed to mount another search to retrieve one or more of these identifiers and to get them to Michael Roy for shipment back to MIA HUNTERS.

To get safely off the mountain and avoid a confrontation with the hostiles would require a rescue by helicopter. Fortunately a forty minute walk from Samaran offered a helicopter landing site at The Nambamati Repeater Station on an adjacent mountaintop. The Hunters reached the station and negotiated with the single policeman operating the station for use of a hut as nighttime sleeping quarters and use of his communication systems to contact a helicopter service. His telephone was out of service but Hunter John Rippinger had thought to bring a satellite telephone and with this they attempted to contact one of the only two available services. One had no pilot for another five days. The other service had its helicopter grounded with mechanical problems but thought they could pick up the group the next day at 8.00am.

David cooked the group a meal which they hoped would be their last on the mountain. A leach was seen clinging to Bryan's leg and was unceremoniously removed by a swipe by a Machete leaving behind what may be the only diabetic leach in the country. The group settled down for the night in the hut.

No helicopter arrived the next morning at 8.00am and a new time of 10.00 am was forecast. This too failed to materialize and 4.00pm was the next forecast. It gets dark shortly after 6.00pm so when the helicopter failed to show at 4.00pm, the Hunters made plans for another overnight and a possible walk-out the next morning since they were out of options. However, at 4.15pm the rescue helicopter arrived flown by an Australian pilot. The relief of the Hunters was palpable. It took two trips to remove the Hunters and remains of their equipment to the roadside village. Most of their food and water was gone. They had barely enough for one more meal. But they left the villagers what remained, together with tents, tools, a watch, sleeping bags, cooking utensils and later added a Kerosene lantern, two new machetes and an axe. They asked the villagers what was their greatest need. The reply was aluminum sheets to build huts. Upon return to Lae,

the Hunters each contributed to the purchase of 20 ten-foot aluminum sheets to meet the villagers need. Perhaps the most original left-behind was a solid oak toilet seat donated by Doctor Molenaar.

But the expedition members were safe. A mission which had begun with some anticipated risks had escalated into a survival test. Their camaraderie for each other and their determination had brought them safely home. None of the Hunters expected any compensation. Or thanks. Or recognition. Their reward would be in the knowledge that the return of the bomber's MIA crew to their families was reward enough.

Their remains nearly 38,000 WW.II American MIA's to be discovered.

The average of the adult expedition members was 59 and a half.

The coordinates of the crash site plus directions on how to reach it are being given to the US Army MIA recovery unit in Hawaii. It is their responsibility to recover MIA remains, confirm scientifically their identity and then return the remains to their families.

*Because of the success of this mission, a new chapter of WW.II MIA rescues is beginning. MIA HUNTERS, a Bryan Moon family organization, has never previously taken a group on an MIA search mission but has discovered 54 MIA's from 18 previous expeditions. They are now recruiting a growing list of volunteers to accompany subsequent missions, some of which will be led by volunteers from this mission who have now made such searches a reality. MIA HUNTERS can be reached at (507) 263-7050. See also: [miahunters@aol.com](mailto:miahunters@aol.com)*

Attachments: Photographs of the mission members and their contacts plus pictures by MIA HUNTERS.