



---

[\[ HOME \]](#)

**MIA HUNTERS - LATEST PRESS RELEASE:**

Press Release : 7/27/07

**MISSION IMPOSSIBLE - ACCOMPLISHED**

As many as 60 WWII MIA's, lost in time for over 62 years, may be coming home, the result of three daring MIA Search Missions in the jungle of Papua New Guinea by all-volunteer Americans, mostly senior citizens whose average age was 60 including three women.

Organized by MIA HUNTERS, the three groups made hazardous treks into jungle not previously visited by white people. Each volunteer paid their own way, expected no thanks, reward or recognition but had one united objective - find our MIA's. Each of the volunteers signed a pledge not to disturb aircraft crash sites where remains of the crews may lay at rest. Instead, they map the sites, photograph and video wreckage to identify the specific aircraft and provide all the information required by the US Army's MIA recovery teams to later excavate the sites and retrieve the remains. Contact MIA HUNTERS if you want a more complete briefing on these Search Missions.

END

Contacts:

MIA Hunter Bryan Moon: Telephone (507) 263-7050

MIA Hunter Christopher Moon: Telephone (952) 440-2226.

**SEE NEWS ARTICLES BELOW:**

Cannon Falls Beacon

Thursday, July 19, 2007

# MIA Hunters locate nine crash sites

## American volunteers help with search

by Nancy Busiahn

Nine World War II American and Japanese aircraft crash sites were located, mapped, and inspected during Cannon Falls adventurer Bryan Moon's latest trip to Papua New Guinea. Twenty-one volunteers undertook three separate missions at two week intervals in May of 2007. Their discoveries could include remains of as many as 60 MIAs.

Moon planned and led the group and operated the base camp in the town of Lae. While readying all the necessary supplies and equipment for the group, he also sent scouts into additional areas to look for more crash sites. One of these scouts discovered a Japanese airfield, abandoned following the war, with two "Betty" bombers partially overgrown by the jungle. This discovery was so dramatic, Moon said, he had to go see it.

The focus of all three missions was to locate the remains of American MIAs missing since World War II. They located a phenomenal nine crash sites, which were mapped, photographed, and inspected.

An American flag is placed at the site of the American planes, and a prayer was offered for the deceased crew. Each crash site is treated as hallowed ground, Moon explained, and everything is left undisturbed. All of the volunteers were required to sign a pledge not to remove anything from the wreckage.

The removal of military dogtags is strictly forbidden, Moon added, but villagers have already removed them in some cases, and he makes every effort to acquire them from the natives.

Some of the missing airmen had been buried by the natives and, oftentimes, the sites are well-kept and respected by the villagers.

Four of the volunteers had made a similar trip with Moon in 2006, and served as mission leaders. David Donkers, a pilot from Nerstrand, participated in all three missions this year. The other mission leaders were John Ripinger of Schaumburg, Illinois; Curt Hills of Rochester, and Joe Goggin of Red Wing.

Most of those making the trip were from Minnesota: 76-year-old Ralph Stillman of Deephaven; Rod Stickler of Ham Lake; Jack Greenshields of Stillwater; Edward Hanton of St. Paul; Chris Funke and Peter Rogers of Minneapolis; Rich Carron of Lakeville; Dayle Radde of Norwood; Ron Cassellius of Cottage Grove; Bernhard Friel and Karen Johnson, both of Mendota Heights; and Donkers daughter Susan who, at 21 years, was the youngest member of the group.

Rounding out the group were David and Carolyn Maki of Breckenridge; Colorado; Carl Plummer of Sarasota, Florida; David Norton of Clearwater, Florida; and Keith Phillips of Mill Valley, California.

The group included six individuals over the age of 70; Moon was the oldest at 79. Each made the trip for a different reason, Moon said, the most common being a family member who had served in the military.

This is only the second time Moon has opened a trip to volunteers. To the extent that he can determine them, he said, he does everything he can to eliminate risks.

The first priority is always the lives of the volunteers, but something unexpected usually happens. "No two missions are the same," Moon said. Last year, several volunteers survived an attack by hostile tribesmen, and later had to be rescued from the top of a mountain by helicopter.

All the volunteers are dedicated to the mission, and they know the risks. Each gets his affairs in order before leaving home. They also paid all their own expenses, estimated in the neighborhood of \$10,000.

With the help of native porters, they carried all their own supplies through jungles filled with ants, spiders, scorpions, snakes, and crocodiles, in temperatures peaking at 94°. They visited villages and stayed with natives who had never before seen a white person. They crossed fast-flowing rivers up to chest-deep by raft, rubber tire, or dugout log canoe.

Karen Johnson slipped a note under Moon's door the night before her group left home base on the first mission. "If I die during the time of our mission, please dig a hole and bury me on site — take pictures to document for family and insurance, but go on to complete the mission."

The list of MIAs located includes eight missing US airmen, but villagers at the site of the P47 aircraft also spoke about 30 American soldiers who had been executed by the Japanese. Another crash site contained both American and Japanese planes; villagers here reported the burial of 10 Japanese in the village.

Superstition and a fear of crash sites was not uncommon among the villagers, Moon said. One village claimed a crash site had been haunted for more than 50 years but trembling earth and engine noises ceased after the remains of two MIAs were removed following an earlier mission.

The search for one target site had to be aborted after five hours crossing fields and making a near-vertical climb. Their native guide was unable to find the site, but the approximate location was recorded and included with the information, including photographs, maps, and GPS readings, that will be sent to both the US Army MIA Recovery Center in Hawaii and the Japanese military for possible recovery and identification of the remains, Moon said.

Moon said that many times he doesn't learn the end of the stories. All his volunteers were told up-front to expect no thanks, no reward, and no recognition, he said.

He describes his volunteers as "American heroes."

"Maybe that's what it takes — present-day heroes to find these wartime heroes!"

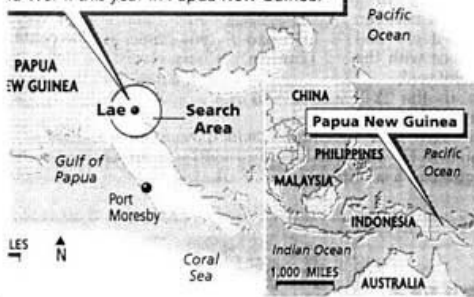
Moon, his wife Cecily, son Christopher, and Christopher's wife Dona, are the founders of MIA Hunters, a nonprofit group that has conducted 19 previous missions and discovered 57 MIAs. Some searches have been made at the request of family, but all services are provided free-of-charge.

# LOST, NOT FORGOTTEN

MIA Hunters, a Minnesota-based group started by a former Northwest Airlines executive, scours remote lands in search of the remains of American aviators missing in action during World War II.

BY MARICELLA MIRANDA  
Pioneer Press

group MIA Hunters of Randolph, Minn., located 12 crash sites of missing aircraft from World War II this year in Papua New Guinea.



Chris Funke took a trip back in history this year to a place where so many lost their lives. He hoped to get closer to his father's memories of fighting in the South Pacific during World War II.

Funke, 46, of Minneapolis, and 21 other travelers made three separate visits in May and June to Papua New Guinea — a country known to have dozens of WWII crash sites with U.S. crew members waiting to be found.

That's where MIA Hunters, like Funke, come in.

"Our generation has not really had to sacrifice much. (The trip) was an opportunity to try and pay back the sacrifices

of (my father's) generation," Funke said Wednesday. "I wanted to experience what he and his friends in that generation experienced."

Funke's father served four years in the Navy during WWII. But his father often dreamed of joining the Army Air Corps, a predecessor of the Air Force.

"If he had made it in the Air Corps, we may be searching for him," he said.

MIA Hunters, which recruits travelers to search for WWII aircraft crash sites, located 11 sites with an estimated 20 crew members during its last missions to Papua New Guinea, said Bryan Moon, president and mission director for the group, which is based in the Dakota County community of Randolph.

MIA HUNTERS, 10B

10B M THURSDAY, JULY 19, 2007

ST. PAUL PIONEER PRESS WWW.TWINCITIES.COM

## CONTINUED FROM THE LOCAL COVER

### MIA Hunters

(continued from Page 1B)

The sites had seven U.S. military aircrafts with an estimated eight crew members, and five Japanese bombers with at least a dozen crew members, according to the group.

Moon will prepare a detailed report for each crash, which he'll give to U.S. officials with the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command in Hawaii. Investigators will search for the remains based on a priority list and return them to the United States for identification.

Details on the Japanese crash sites will be given to the Japanese government.

MIA Hunters does not dig up remains, Moon said.

Staff Sgt. Elizabeth Feeney, a spokeswoman from JPAC in Hawaii, said historians at JPAC are familiar with MIA Hunters. They were aware of their visits to Papua New Guinea.

There are 78,000 American MIAs of World War II, of which 35,000 are thought to be recover-

#### SEEKING AN MIA?

Those searching for American MIAs from World War II can contact MIA Hunters by calling Bryan Moon at 507-263-7050 or visiting [www.miahunters.com](http://www.miahunters.com).

able, reported JPAC. Those deemed unrecoverable were lost at sea, in some cases entombed in sunken vessels.

Many crew members were lost in Papua New Guinea on Black Sunday — April 16, 1944 — when bad weather led to 37 U.S. planes going down in the country's jungles.

Moon began using his pension as vice president of marketing for Northwest Airlines to help fund MIA Hunters and look for missing airmen for families free of charge. But 15 years of traveling left him with little choice but to charge those interested in accompanying him on the trips for their expenses. Travelers paid \$10,250 each to go to Papua New Guinea.

MIA Hunters has completed 19 missions in various countries. The group has found 57 airmen from the United States and elsewhere as well as a woman who was an American Red Cross worker. Four discoveries were Minnesotans.

But the rules for MIA Hunters haven't stop natives in Papua New Guinea from removing some remains, Moon said. Villagers gave Moon pieces from U.S. and Japanese aircrafts.

The natives also brought back human remains. Faced with the dilemma of abandoning the remains, Moon brought the bones back to the United States to give to investigators.

Villagers also told the group that 30 U.S. soldiers were executed and buried in an area of Papua New Guinea, and 10 Japanese soldiers were buried in a village. Group organizers say it's only a matter of time before the WWII generation dies and those stories are lost.

Bernie Friel, 76, of Mendota Heights, traveled on the third mission with MIA Hunters. The former city planning commissioner and retired attorney remembers being 11 years old when Pearl Harbor was attacked and 15 years old when World War II ended.

"I missed being in it by only

two years," Friel recalled.

After having a heart attack at the age of 38, Friel began traveling as a hobby. His group — the third trip Moon led — found crash sites with two Japanese and two U.S. aircrafts.

Friel stepped on a snake while hiking up a flowing stream. He also floated down a river on a slowly leaking, large inner tube with other travelers, as a guide directed them.

The last mission took a turn for the worse when Moon caught a throat infection, which made him so weak he couldn't walk and he was admitted to the hospital for two weeks in the United States.

Moon, 79, decided before leaving on the first trip that he wouldn't hike to the crash sites. In the future, Moon said he will plan the missions at home and let others do the traveling.

"I generally don't worry too much. I knew I was in trouble, but it would work its way out," Moon said. My "real concern is we're going lose somebody out there."