



1ST STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

Copyright 1995 Agence France Presse
Agence France Presse

August 23, 1995 08:32 Eastern Time

SECTION: Financial pages

LENGTH: 774 words

HEADLINE: US firm to conduct high-tech survey near Spratly Islands

BYLINE: Sarah Jackson-Han

DATELINE: WASHINGTON, Aug 23

BODY:

A private US firm is planning a high-tech ocean survey using Hollywood graphics to map the reputedly oil-rich seabed near the disputed Spratly Islands and locate vessels lost during World War II.

Ferrumar Resources Corp., a marine recovery firm based in Alexandria, Virginia, plans a three-part expedition near the Spratly and Bonin islands -- aided by Silicon Graphics, whose computers produced special effects for Hollywood blockbusters "Jurassic Park," "Forrest Gump," "Apollo 13," and "The Hunt for Red October."

Further assistance came from Minneapolis-based Control Data Corp., which helped pinpoint "to within one square mile" the torpedo bomber flown by former president George Bush and shot down by Japanese anti-aircraft guns in 1944, Ferrumar president James Egan said.

The Ferrumar expedition aims to recover Bush's lost Avenger from the Bonin Trench, about 1,000 kilometres (600 miles) south of Japan, and locate Japanese warships sunk near the Spratlys at the end of World War II with thousands of Allied prisoners on board, Egan said.

"We know of three, but there could be eight or nine" such Japanese ships, which were sunk in relatively shallow waters about 300 metres (1,000 feet) deep, he said in an interview.

Egan has no plans to raise the warships but hopes to raise Bush's aircraft, clean it up, and sell it to a museum such as the Bush Presidential Library.

Agence France Presse, August 23, 1995

Data gathered on Ferrumar's expedition could be used by companies looking for oil beneath the Spratlys, said Harry Pforzheimer, a spokesman for Mountian View, California-based Silicon Graphics.

"Any major oil company that's doing oil and gas exploration is using our system" of three-dimensional computer visualization, along with auto manufacturers, industrial designers, and Hollywood film studios, he said.

The Ferrumar expedition is expected to last six to 10 weeks in autumn 1996 and cost between 12 million and 16 million dollars, Egan said, adding that the company is negotiating sponsorship deals with two oil companies, several Asian airlines, and a hotel chain.

Six nations have laid whole or partial claim to the Spratlys -- China, Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam -- because of their reputed oil deposits and strategic location in the South China Sea.

Despite escalating tension over the Spratlys, Egan said his team was not especially concerned about security during the mapping and remote-sensing expedition.

After five years of study, Egan and a researcher at Control Data Corp. used computerized modeling to recreate Bush's flight using available information about tides, currents, and military flight patterns. "There was a marvellously fast evolution of undersea technology becoming available to the private sector at the same time -- that was one of the by-products of the end of the Cold War," he said.

De-classified military technology has allowed unprecedented precision in micro-mapping the ocean floor, said Egan, stressing the historical aspects of the project.

"There's oil (in the Spratlys), that's for sure," Egan said. "But we're not focused on that." "The geography of the World War II era is of paramount interest today," he said, one-half century after the shooting war in the Pacific ended and a new era of Asian independence began.

sjh/jm

231425

AFP

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: August 23, 1995