



A wartime inflight photo of a TBM "Avenger" torpedo bomber. (Photo courtesy Grumman Aircraft Archives)

Major effort underway to retrieve President Bush's sunken warplane

Assisted by sophisticated computer systems, a group of high-tech companies headed by the Ferrumar Resources Corporation in Alexandria, Va., are currently launching an effort to rescue a missing piece of American history—President Bush's World War II aircraft.

During the summer of 1944 the greatest aircraft carrier battle of the war took place in the Philippine Sea (the "Great Marianas Turkey Shoot"). This was quickly followed by the invasions and liberations of Saipan, Guam and Tinian. Supporting each of these historic actions was America's Task Force 58 under the command of Admiral Marc Mitscher. One of the 15 aircraft carriers within this armada was the USS San Jacinto, which was home to Torpedo Squadron VT-51. Among the squadron's dozen or so TBM Avenger torpedo bomber pilots was George Bush.

48 years ago, 615 miles south of Japan in the Bonin Islands, Lt. (jg) George Bush was shot down during a dawn raid against a heavily-defended radio station on the island of Chichi Jima.

Bush was piloting his "Avenger" in a standard glide bombing run when it was struck by enemy gunfire, which forced him and his two crewmembers to bail out. Bush, the only one to survive the mission, was rescued later that day by the submarine USS Finback. Recently President Bush briefly referred to his experiences aboard the Finback in his acceptance speech to the Republican National Convention in Houston.

The ambitious deep-sea recovery program to retrieve Bush's missing aircraft is known

as "The Bonin Trench Expedition." It is the creation of James Egan, a private businessman and the President of Ferrumar Resources, a project development firm based in Alexandria, Va. Research work and feasibility studies for this project began in the mid-1980s, and Ferrumar completed the Expedition's operational planning earlier this year.

Ferrumar decided that before it would undertake expensive at-sea operations to search for this missing artifact, it had to first localize the points where Bush's aircraft entered the ocean surface and where it eventually settled on the seabed. It was immediately apparent that some form of enabling technology had to be employed to statistically reconstruct Bush's mission. A sophisticated process of elimination began.

In 1989 Egan presented this



A 1944 photo of Lt. (jg) Bush seated in his TBM Avenger torpedo bomber while on the carrier flight-deck. (White House file photo)

challenge to Control Data Corp. (CD) of Minneapolis, Minn. CD had already pioneered the use of advanced mathematical and statistical techniques for recreating and solving cartographic puzzles. In 1985 it had undertaken a similar project for the National Geographic Society to reconstruct Columbus' 1492 track across the Atlantic to determine his most likely first landfall.

A team of scientists under the direction of the late Robert Lillestrand, a CD Vice President and noted Arctic explorer who held 20 U.S. and foreign patents, spent over a year performing computerized analyses of the data Ferrumar had amassed about the President's mission. By early 1990, they were able to conclusively position the President's vintage aircraft inside a one square mile sector of the ocean floor.

Ferrumar's operational plans for expedition are fully developed and the firm has assembled a strong team of partners. However, according to James Egan "financing is needed to pull everything together and launch the Expedition."

The semi-tropical Bonin islands are widely seen in Japan as a second Hawaii, since they possess rich fishing waters, brilliant beaches and unique seascapes. From 1639 to the nineteenth century the mariners of the seven leading maritime powers either sighted, explored or claimed ownership of the Bonins. A little known feature of these isolated islands is that they have been a outpost for New Englanders and their descendants for the last 160 years. The Bonins were originally settled in 1830 by an American

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sailor from Essex County, Mass., named Nathaniel Savory. In 1843 one of the Bonins' other founding fathers, an African-American cabin boy named Washington, established his roots on Chichi Jima by jumping from his American whaling ship during a port call. During the 1940s some of Savory's descendants were drafted into the Japanese Army (one, ironically, even served in the Emperor's Guard). The isolated Bonins lie midway along a chain of islands extending north from Guam to the Japanese islands. They are on the western edge of one of the world's largest and deepest underwater canyon systems known as the Bonin Trench.

There are many opportunities

still available to enterprising individuals and companies seeking to promote their commercial interests through underwriting such a high-visibility project. Special events which garner extensive media attention are a rapidly-growing alternative to traditional advertising as a means for reaching consumers.

Discussions have been underway for some time between Ferrumar and "two wealthy entities" that Egan believes are the most logical candidates for the Expedition's lead sponsor. "Each owes their current freedom to the actions and decisions George Bush made as a young warrior and much later as our Commander-in-Chief," said Egan. "In simple terms, funding the recovery of this important artifact of American history would be a fitting tribute to the leader of our nation by those who officially describe President Bush as their 'Liberator.'"

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