



The
BentProp[™]
Project



MISSION STATEMENT: A team of select self-funded volunteers, each with essential expertise (eg, history, aviation, diving, navigation), who are dedicated to finding and assisting with identifying Americans missing in action from WWII. Our primary focus is on locating sites containing MIAs (including POWs) and missing aircraft within the Palau Islands. We coordinate and report our activities with all appropriate authorities in Palau and the United States.

PALAU – MARINES + ARMY AIR FORCE + NAVY
Mission XIIIa (P-MAN XIIIa)
1 to 17 February 2011

Final Mission Report

Prepared by:
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Mission Leader
BentProp Project
22 January 2012

P-MAN XIIIa Final Report:

I. Team Members (all return team members):

1. **Daniel T. O'Brien: Mission Leader (California, USA)**
2. Joe Maldangesang: Master Guide, Boat Captain (Palau)
3. Flip Colmer: Assistant Mission Leader, Delta A320 Captain Naval Historian, Aviation Expert, Photographer and Former Diving Instructor (Michigan, USA)
4. Paul Schwimmer: Mission Specialist, Surveyor, Former US Army Green Beret and Ordinance Specialist (Pennsylvania, USA)
5. Rick Smith: Mission Specialist, Deep Water Scuba Expert (Washington, USA)
6. Jolie Liston: Mission Specialist, Archeologist (Palau) – part time

II. Introduction to Findings and Events

This first of two missions planned for 2011 presented some unique opportunities for the BentProp team. A professional team of scuba divers and SSS (side scan sonar) operators (PSST) working in Palau during the first half of February had offered their services to work with BentProp in their spare available time. It was decided that this opportunity with the specific goal of exclusively conducting SSS operations could not go unanswered.

Over the past 15+ years of searches in Palau, by BentProp, the missions have been mixed with land and water operations. The majority of US aircraft crash sites found and identified have been on land but the majority of aircraft have crashed into the waters of Palau. During a 16 month period of WWII over 200 US aircraft went down in the islands of Palau. In conjunction with these facts, Mr. Minoru Kamada (a researcher in Japan) has supplied BentProp Project with a 1946 map (Map 2, page 5) itemizing a series of US aircraft reported by the Japanese to have been shot down between Ngeruktabel and Babeldaob during WWII.

Since the donation of a complete SSS unit (by Marine Sonic of Virginia, USA) in late 2009, BentProp has discussed how to take advantage of this technology gift, conduct an immersion SSS course for team members and continue to compile a thorough SSS survey of the waters within the barrier reef of Palau in search of US MIA sites.

[NOTE: when service members go missing, they are initially designated as either "Prisoner Of War" (POW) or "Missing in Action" (MIA). After someone has been missing (and is not known to be a POW) for a year, the official designation is changed to "Killed in Action, Body Not Recovered" (KIA/BNR)].

Of note, this BentProp mission is the first one where Pat Scannon was not present.

The ability of BentProp team members to have flexibility in their home and work schedules was invaluable to making this special mission happen on short notice in Palau;

Dan for 18 days, Paul for 15 days, Rick for 10 days, Flip for 7 days and Joe and Jolie as time allowed in their schedules at home in Palau. This allowed for the integration of BentProp with PSST, for the 14 days they were scheduled in Palau and to utilize 2 boats with SSS, thus allowing a large area of water to be surveyed. This is an extension of the SSS initiated in 2007 by JPAC and continued by the P-MAN XI 2009 & XII 2010 teams.

The above circumstances of professionals (PSST), equipment and **BentProp members'** time have allowed us to move forward in accomplishing this large task. A plan of action was drafted for the systematic collection of SSS data in defined zones (see Map 1 page 4). This would allow for the long term plans of covering most areas within the barrier reef and methodically determining the presence or absence of aircraft crash sites. The analysis of this extensive data collection is our continuing task at hand during the time between BentProp missions. The SSS training and education we have received over the past 2 years, with regard to conducting search grids, is to ensure the collection of the data. Accordingly, a second SSS of these same areas should be done with a perpendicular grid track to the existing track and followed up with a magnetometer sweep of these areas. In the BentProp list of "lessons learned" this year is that the data collection is best accomplished by operating the SSS to maintain the integrity of the search grid, in a safe and efficient manner, maintain the integrity of the search grid, avoiding underwater obstacles, maintain the integrity of the search grid, making note of sites of interest as seen on the view screen but rely on post mission analysis, and not get distracted, sunburned, dehydrated or bored to tears (while maintaining the search grid).

The daily routine for the next two weeks was to have 1-2 BentProp members on the 2 SSS boats with 2-4 PSST members. Our daily schedule on the water started at 7am loading the boats with equipment, taking a short break back on shore for lunch and finishing by 3-4 pm and then meeting for a joint debrief session with PSST. It was agreed that we would limit the investigation of targets of interest, by scuba diving them, to the last days of the joint operation. In this way we would maximize the areas covered and data collected.

The P-MAN XIIIa team continued BentProp's ongoing interactions with the Palau Bureau of Arts & Culture/Historical Preservation Office (BAC/HPO) and other agencies. **The team also continued its dialog with many key Palauans, including Palau's President Toribiong and his staff, Governor Yositaka Adachi of Koror, Mr. Shallum Etpison, the Whipps family and many others we have met and worked with over the years.**

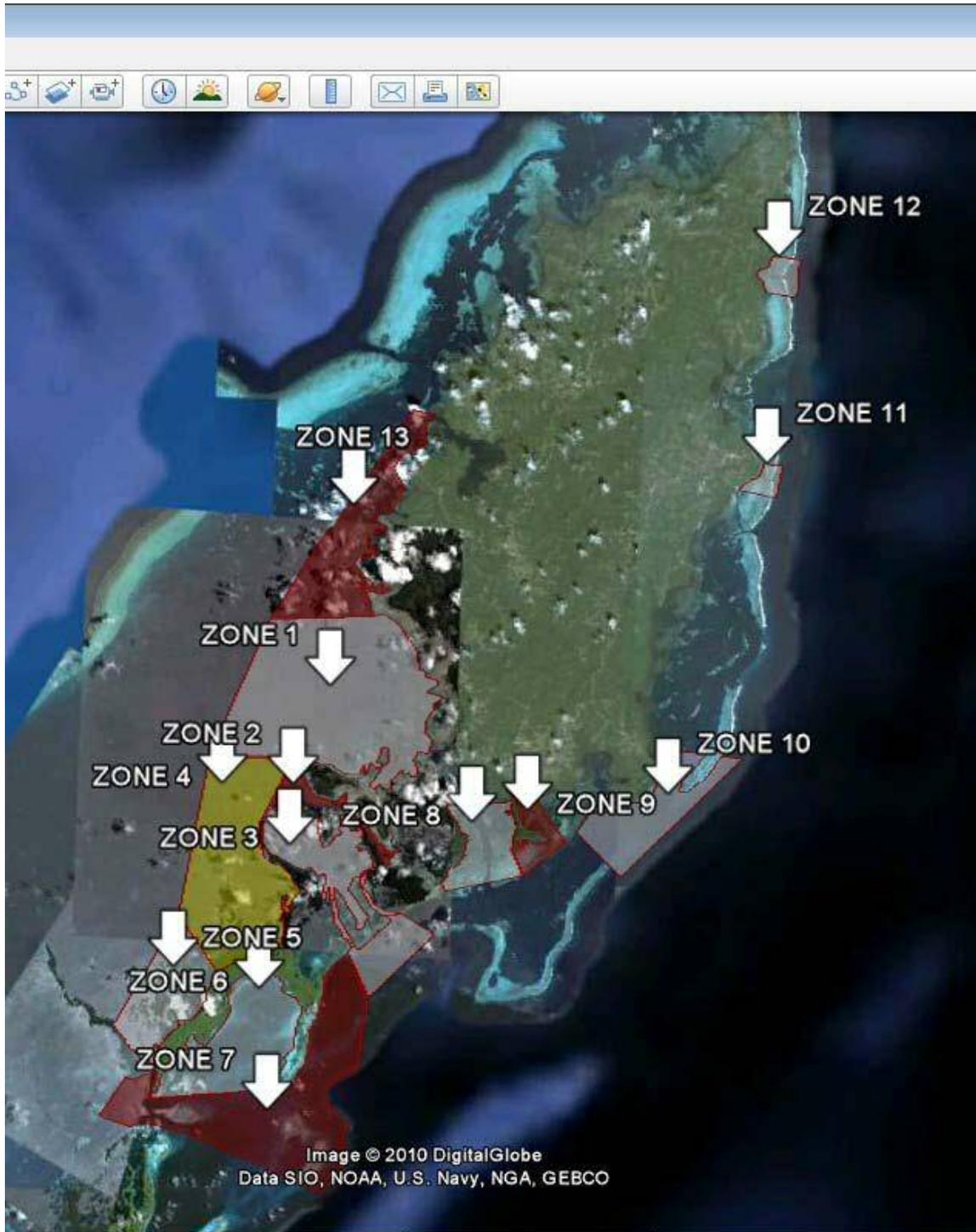
Since its inception, the BentProp Project has recognized that we are guests in Palau, an independent and sovereign country. Hence, we understand that we owe the Palauan people an explanation of our intentions before proceeding and a summary of our findings afterwards. The BentProp Project does not take lightly the generosity of the Palauan people, both on an official and informal level, and we are determined to work hard to retain the trust we have been able to create with the people of Palau. As always, the members of the BentProp Project recognize that our searches in Palau are granted by the Palauan government as a privilege. We will continue to respect the Palauan people, your rules and customs.

The BentProp Project also feels that, as we are investigating historical matters concerning our forces during WWII, we owe the American people a summary of our efforts. Accordingly, we coordinate our activities, as appropriate, with the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, Hawaii (JPAC), the U. S. Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC), Washington, D. C., the U. S. Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA), as well as the Embassy of the United States of America in Palau. We send confidential (For Official Use Only) reports to these agencies, as appropriate, and we also provide a non-confidential version to the public through our website: www.bentprop.org.

The members of the BentProp Project express our deepest gratitude for the spirit of cooperation, patience and interest that we receive from each person and organization.

The P-MAN XIIIa proposal incorporated plans *solely* for the continuation of our search for American sites of possible MIAs, and for preliminary evidence at those sites, which suggest that American MIAs and/or POWs remains may be present. We have no plans or intentions for excavating or removing human remains or associated artifacts. We will not remove, or permit anyone to remove for us, any artifacts or remains from such sites, unless specifically directed and approved by BAC/HPO (in concurrence with JPAC) to do so. As always, the P-MAN team will document findings with GPS coordinates and photographs. Should we discover evidence of human remains, we will immediately notify BAC/HPO and JPAC and cooperate in any follow-up actions as directed.

III. Map 1: Overview of Key Proposed Targets under Investigation for P-MAN XIIIa; Zones 1-7 are the key SSS search areas for 2011: (see APPENDIX for full proposal)



Map 2: from 1946 Japanese sources, potential aircraft crash sites:



IV. P-MAN XIIIa Summary of Mission (attachments with details for each event follows below):

1. Permitting Process:

- The P-MAN XIIIa team conducted SSS search missions in the waters of Palau during 1-16 Feb 2011, after receiving:
 - Memorandum of Agreement from the Bureau of Arts and Culture (BAC) covering the SSS search proposal.
 - Permits from the governors of Koror (written) and Office of the President (written).
- Beyond meeting with the Bureau of Arts and Culture, courtesy calls were made with President Toribiong, Koror State Office, US Embassy and the US Civic Action Team.

2. The sole objective of this team was to conduct SSS surveys of specific underwater locations around Arakebesan, Malakal and Ngeruktabel. These locations are referred to as: Zones 1-7, Map 1 (page 4). As time allowed and potential targets were identified the final days of the joint operation were utilized to scuba dive some targets.

- Zone 1: 6 days of SSS were dedicated to this area. 3 scuba dives were made by PSST to investigate sites of interest.
- Zone 2: 3 days of SSS were dedicated to this area. Snorkeling in 1 area of interest.
- Zone 3: 5 days of SSS were dedicated to this area. 1 scuba dive on object of interest by PSST.
- Zone 4: 7 days of SSS were dedicated to this area. 9 scuba dives on sites of interest by PSST.
- Zone 7: 2 scuba dives were made on an area of potential aircraft debris, reported and lead by a frequently visiting diver who was aware of our interest in aircraft crash sites.
- Zones 5-13: these areas were not covered by SSS at this time.

No definitive new discovery of identifiable aircraft debris was made on any of these dives. In areas where no manmade debris was reported, the information obtained will assist in the creation of a profile of features that correspond to unique terrain changes, odd features of coral heads and smooth ocean floor and sonar anomalies in a constantly changing dynamic ocean.

All dives on SSS targets were conducted by PSST members due to the depth and limited bottom time. Since the average depth was over 110 feet, each diver would only make a single dive in a day. A system was developed for reacquiring the targets with SSS from

boat #1, dropping a weight with rope and buoy attached and moving onto the next target. Boat #2 with the dive team would send a single diver down the rope to investigate the site. A safety diver and 3-4 divers, 1 each for the additional targets planned, were also on board boat #2. Boat #2 would retrieve the weight and buoy and move onto the next dive site.

Thanks to the team effort by all, 4 dives were made on 13 Feb and 9 dives were made on 15 Feb.

During the post mission year the analysis of the SSS data has yielded over 60 potential sites of interest, so far, that the team will investigate in the future. These potential targets are attached to this report, **“2011 potential BentProp targets”**, as one page documents with an image from the SSS and corresponding data to allow for the reacquisition of these targets.

Also included in a separate file, “Ships Wrecks”, is the image and location data with the larger shipwrecks noted on our surveys.

A Google Earth kmz file is included that includes the Zones searched, potential targets and shipwrecks.

3. P-MAN XIIIa team provided, per its protocol, a preliminary confidential summary of its findings, before leaving Palau, to BAC/HPO, Office of the President of Palau, Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), Naval History & Heritage Center (NHHC) and the US Embassy.