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Review of *Vanished: The Sixty-Year Search for the Missing Men of World War II*

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Vanished: The Sixty-Year Search for the Missing Men of World War II. WIL S. HYLTON. 2013. Riverhead Books, New York. xiii + pp. 239. \$27.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-59448-727-9.

Reviewed by Mack Cristino, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

On the morning of September 1st, 1944, B-24J Liberator bombers departed Wakde Airfield off the Northern Coast of Papua New Guinea with the go-ahead and clear skies. The B-24J Liberator bomber plane 42-73453: nose and tail identifier 453, and the eleven men aboard were assigned to a bombing mission against central Koror in the Republic of Palau. Japanese forces were gradually losing control of the islands and the 307th Bombardment Group, commonly known also as the Long Rangers, were tasked with delivering a crushing blow of bombs to further loosen their grasps. Liberator 453 was met with vicious bursts of Japanese anti-aircraft artillery, causing it to crash into a shallow reef lining southeast Babeldaob. It was never found, and the men were never accounted for. Wil S. Hylton details the gripping stories of the Big Stoop crew, depicting their personal lives before and during their service, as well as their familial backstories. Hylton also captivates readers detailing the compelling story of Dr. Patrick Scannon's collaborative, hopeful, and devoted ten-year search for the plane and the missing airmen. His book is one of sincere reverence and appreciation for their ultimate sacrifice.

Hylton opens his book with the story of Tommy Doyle, the son of Big Stoop Boy Staff Sergeant Jimmie Doyle of McKinney, Texas. Tommy was at the fresh age of a year and some months old when his father was sent off to the war in 1944. He never had the chance to know his father, and the very little that he knew about him was what his mother told him. That was hardly anything at all. She told him simply that his father's plane went down near some islands in the Pacific Ocean and that was the end of it. Hylton describes that Tommy struggled with his mother showing no outward signs of mourning. There was little talk, if any, about her late husband or

whether she even cared for or missed him at all. Tommy also had a hard time making sense of the stories that some of Jimmie's brothers were on about. Tommy overheard once that his father had survived the crash, gone into hiding, and started life anew with daughters and another wife. Hylton now begins to tell us the story of Tommy's upbringing. Despite the hardships, Tommy grew into a hard-working young man, whether it be learning in the classroom, playing football, and doing the odd jobs he can make ends meet for him and his mother. Into his young adulthood, he met his future wife Nancy and the two were inseparable since. Hylton paints this vivid picture of Tommy's life over the years and details his internal struggle with dealing with his father's mysterious disappearance. Almost everything having to do with his father Jimmie was a blur to him, even into his adulthood. Nancy was supportive of Tommy throughout their lives together, encouraging him in due time to open both his heart and the mysterious box that he inherited from his mother of his father's belongings and letters from combat. It wasn't but six years after reading Jimmie's letters that Nancy caught wind of a search for a missing B-24 Liberator airplane being spearheaded by Dr. Patrick Scannon during her own search for answers. On Tommy's behalf, she inquired about more information leading to this search, and the bond between Dr. Scannon and the Doyles' grew strong and everlasting from that point forward.

In the next chapter Hylton introduces us to Dr. Patrick Scannon, a chemist and physician who formed and works for a biotechnology company called Xoma Corporation based out of Emeryville, California. Scannon is described as hard-working and dedicated to whatever projects he has undertaken. When the opportunity for a trip to the Palau islands presented itself by his skilled scuba diver coworker, Chip Lambert, Scannon was enthusiastic to suit up in his own gear and put into practice what he had learned as an amateur diver himself. Scannon longed for more excitement in his life, and Hylton describes vividly Scannon's enthusiasm for a breakaway from

his grueling work weeks and a much-needed vacation. Lambert explained his plan, starting out with the search for the Japanese trawler that George H.W. Bush sunk flying overhead Palau in 1944. The sunken trawler incident was a hotly debated one, as it was still unclear if it was an unarmed crew or not. Either way, they would find the sunken ship and those answers to make a documentary to turn a profit that would fund their main expedition in searching for *Yamashita's Gold*. Lambert and his colleagues were interested in this 'treasure hunt' of sorts, but Scannon soon found that he was interested in something far more fulfilling; Scannon found himself captivated, sinking deeper into the pacific reef surrounded by a submerged forest of metal entanglement. It was clearly an American plane and with that, came the assumption that there were Americans below the water's surface and trapped within it. Thus, Hylton begins to outline the lifechanging toll that this discovery takes on Scannon and enlightens readers of the birth of his projects to bring the forgotten men home. To Scannon, the real treasures lie in providing closure to the hearts of families who wonder day and night what happened to their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons all that time ago.

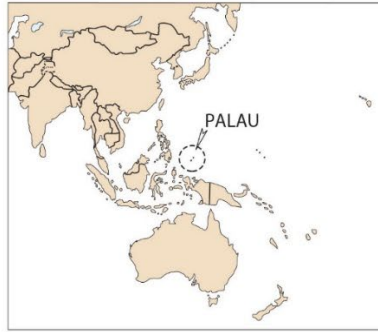
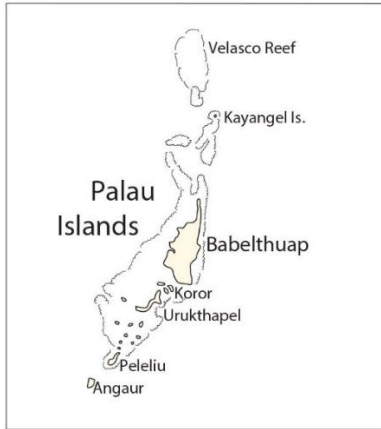
Hylton describes the birth of Scannon's project: Bent Prop. This project is known today as Project Recover. It takes years of compiling clues and outlining plans to begin the search for the B-24 Liberator piloted by 2nd Lieutenant Jack Arnett. This was the plane of Doyle and the Big Stoop Boys crew. Sibling B-24 aircraft, piloted by Captain William G. Dixon and 2nd Lieutenant Glen R. Custer were deployed with separate bombing missions and were both also shot down by Japanese anti-aircraft. They crashed towards Koror; Custer in May of 1945 on a mission to take out anti-aircraft installations and Dixon on a similar bombing mission to Arnett just a few days before him. Scannon was able to account for the Dixon plane, as this was the aircraft wing identified as the one he saw on his trip to the islands and the very one that ignited

the spark. He was also able to find Custer, as the aircraft's left wing was located just a mile away from Dixon's final resting place. This left the mystery of Arnett's plane. With thorough search and many trials and tribulations, Scannon gathered information and resources to set out on the mission to bring Jimmie Doyle and the rest of the Big Stoop Crew home.

Scannon's mission approach was one of social and expert collaboration. Scannon valued the stories, memories, and accounts of the indigenous Palauan peoples and the families of the missing crew. He also sat down to interview and visit fellow Long Ranger veterans of the 307th Bombardment group. Scannon goes on to share that these accounts were invaluable to the search for the missing men. The heartfelt pleas from their loved ones and comrades touched the heart of Scannon and were heard far and wide by the many experts who soon also devoted themselves to the search. Hylton describes Scannon's recruitment of scientists, archaeologists, and divers to his fulfilling project. These collaborations formed the heart of this book.

While Hylton does a fantastic job of extensively outlining the turning points and shifts in strategy of the war in the Pacific, I wish to further emphasize instead the efforts of Dr. Scannon, his recruits to the project, and the DPAA (known then as JPAC) as the heroes and main characters of his story. The recovery was made possible by the collaborative expertise of many. Divers were able to conduct the physical excavation, but not before the archaeologists could ensure safety and implement the ethical protocols in proceeding with it. The scientists of JPAC were able to make the identifications of the bodily remains, but not before forensic anthropologists deemed it of skeletal significance. It is through these many vantage points and areas of profession that allowed for this story to be written, and I credit Hylton in his intentions in the writing of this book to be of reverence for the fallen and appreciation for the many devoted to the project. I cannot stress enough the value of scientific and social collaboration for

conducting future projects like these; projects that solve the mysteries of the missing servicemen and women, resulting in bringing them home. The stories of their ultimate sacrifices can be shared, and the hearts of their loved ones can finally rest in closure. I cannot possibly think of a more fulfilling purpose.



GISGeography (2023) "Map of Palau – Cities and Islands" <https://gisgeography.com>