



Gertrude Tompkins Expedition



Orientation and Training Briefing

Today we will cover four topics



- Background on the disappearance
- Research findings
- Logistics and search management
- Searchers



Background



The WASP were a vital part of the WW II war effort

- Women Airforce Service Pilots from 1942-44: 25,000 applied, 1074 served; 300 still living
- Based at 120 Army Air Bases in US
- Ferried 78 types of war planes over 60 million miles
- 38 killed in service



Fifinella



WASP wings



- Only one is still missing:

Gertrude “Tommy” Tompkins Silver:



Tompkins disappearance is one of the great remaining mysteries of World War II

- Disappeared 26 October 1944
- Took off from Mines Field (now LAX) headed for Palm Springs
- Took off westbound into the wind, intending to turn 180 degrees
- Never seen again
- Search began 3 days late due to paperwork foul-up
- No trace found in search on land or sea



WASPs Gertude "Tommy" (Tompkins) Silver (back), Micky" (Tuttle) Axton (center), and another WASP (front) are

too bad 'cause by then the stark fear had left. I taxied in, and that was it.

"It turned out the instructors were using a li...

Tommy had only been married a month when she disappeared

TROTH ANNOUNCED OF MISS TOMPKINS

Member of Wasps to Be Wed
to Staff Sgt. Henry Mann
Silver 2d of the Army

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

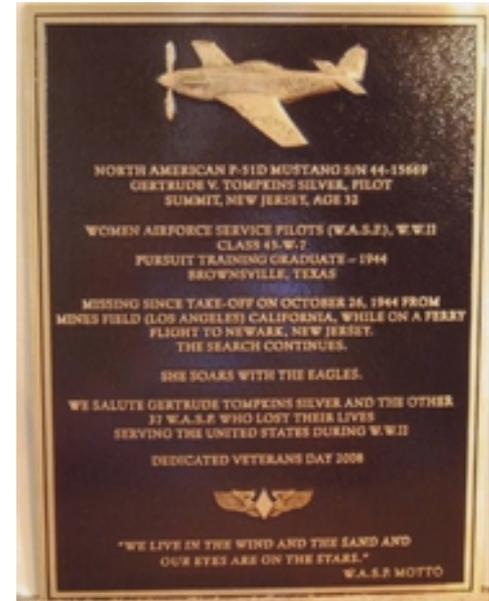
SUMMIT, N. J., Nov. 30—Mr. and Mrs. Vreeland Tompkins of Summit and Bridgehampton, L. I., have announced the engagement of their daughter, Gertrude, to Staff Sgt. Henry Mann Silver 2d, USA, son of the late Dr. and Mrs. Lewis Silver of New York.

Miss Tompkins, who is now serving with the Women's Airforce Service Pilots, was graduated from New York Preparatory School and from the Pennsylvania School of Horticulture for Women. She is a granddaughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Thomas H. Towar and the late Mr. and Mrs. Samuel D. Tompkins of Jersey City, N. J. Mrs. Guy H. Whittall of Southern Pines, N. C., and Mrs. L. T. Wade of Olean, N. Y., are her sisters.

Sergeant Silver was graduated from Phillips Andover Academy and from Yale University. He is a nephew of Dr. Henry Mann Silver of New York. The prospective bridegroom was with the Columbia University Press before entering active service.



Tompkins and her father and new husband, October 1944



Plaque for Tompkins at the LAX Flight Path Museum

Tompkins' story is still kept alive by her family, Pat Macha and the press



VETERANS DAY MEMORIAL CEREMONY
IN HONOR OF
**GERTRUDE V.
TOMPKINS SILVER**
MISSING IN SERVICE SINCE OCT. 26, 1944

PROUD BIRD RESTAURANT
Nov. 11, 2008 @ 11am
11022 Aviation Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA. 90045

*Gertrude V.
Tompkins*

RSVP by November 1st
pat@aircraftwrecks.com or call (714) 345-9210

"WE LIVE IN THE WIND AND THE SAND
AND OUR EYES ARE ON THE STARS."
W A S P MOTTO

The poster features a blue background with white stars. On the left, there is a black and white photograph of Gertrude V. Tompkins in a military uniform, looking forward. Below her is a smaller image of her in a flight suit, standing next to a biplane. In the center, there is a cartoon illustration of a female superhero with blue wings, a red and yellow suit, and a blue mask. On the right, there is a large, close-up black and white portrait of Gertrude V. Tompkins in a military uniform, looking slightly to the right. The text is arranged in a clear, hierarchical manner, with the name and title in large, bold letters. The event details and contact information are in a smaller font. The quote at the bottom is in a serif font. The W.A.S.P. motto is at the very bottom.

The WASP story is alive, too: In July the President signed a bill awarding a Congressional Gold Medal to the WASP



President:

“The WASP answered their country’s call in a time of need, while blazing a trail for the brave women who have given and continue to give so much in service to this nation since.”

Research Findings



“Tommy” Tompkins had earned her wings



- “A good pilot, a neat gal, and followed the Army flight rules carefully”
- “Very stable”
- “A very nice high class girl—she and I both graduated from fighter pilot [pursuit] school, and we both thought we were hot!”
- 32 years old in 1944
- Had 451 hours as 1st pilot or solo student + 302 as other pilot or student
- Had 46 hours in this type and 17 hours in this model
- Was IFR rated but only had 37 total IFR hours and only 3 in the last 6 months; none of these as 1st pilot



Statement by a WASP pilot who took off just ahead of Tompkins

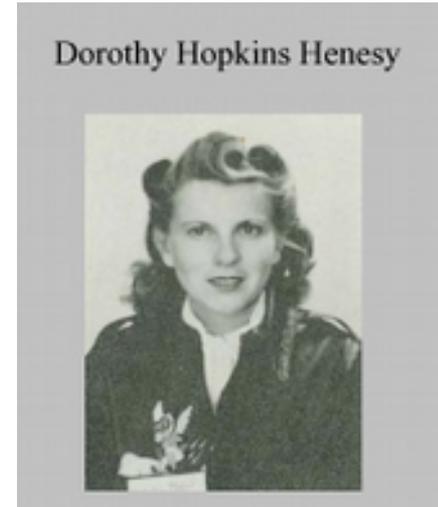
STATEMENT

4 November 1944.

I, Dorothy Hopkins, departed from Inglewood, California, 26 October 1944 about 1530. After leaving the end of the runway, I was in the haze and climbed straight ahead to approximately 2000 ft. before breaking out of the haze. I, then, made a left turn to 70° and was on the beam. At 2500 to 3000 ft., it was impossible to see the ground or water. The tops of the mountains were visible.

On 26 October 1944, I saw Miss Gertrude Tompkins at Inglewood while waiting for our clearances to be signed before taking-off.

Dorothy Hopkins
DOROTHY HOPKINS,
WASP.

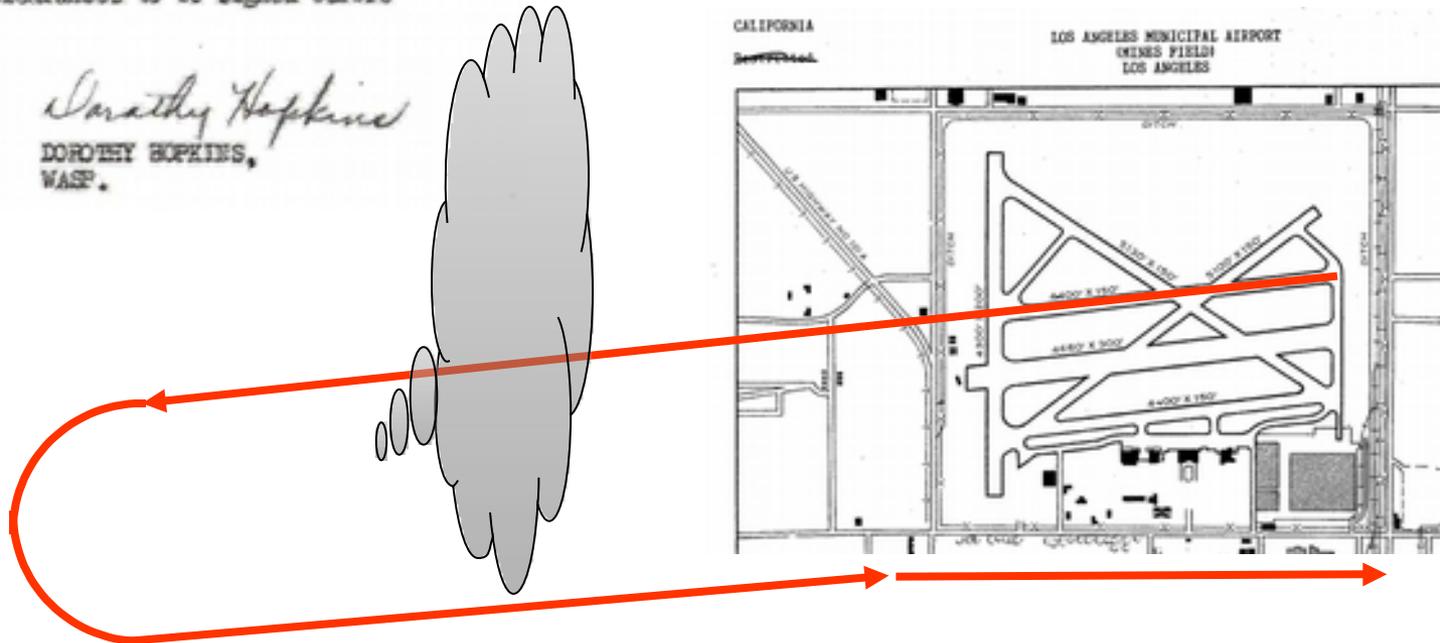


“Marine layer”
fog bank

N



250 degrees
magnetic
line of travel



Tommy was delayed by repair to the door (canopy?) of the plane

S T A T E M E N T

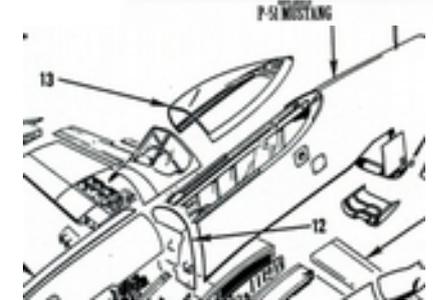
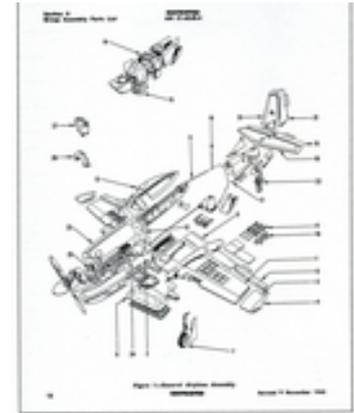
3 November 1944.

WASP Tompkins could be described as follows: distinctive looking, tall, quiet, approximately 5 ft 6 or 7 inches tall, between 30 and 35 years of age, brunette with gray streaks, and was wearing faded olive drab coveralls with painted Air Corps insignia on it.

I noticed her name on her parachute and some of her luggage.

When WASP Tompkins first came to the field, she was informed of the bent door of her aircraft and that it would take twenty minutes or so to fix it. Aircraft was taken across strip into an open area where it was going to be repaired. She stated at this time that she was in no particular hurry since she was only going to Palm Springs. I can positively say that aircraft taxied off of line to runway waiting for clearance at approximately 4:00 p.m. on 26 October 1944.

This aircraft had been released by all inspectors before it was accepted by the pilot.



MERLE DOBBINGS,
Leadman on Delivery Line.

Merle C. Dobbings



Three planes
took off but
only two came
back over the
field



INCOMING MESSAGE

HEADQUARTERS ARMY AIR FORCES FOR ACTION _____

OFFICE OF FLYING SAFETY FOR INFO _____

WILTON-SALES, NORTH CAROLINA FOR FILE _____

DATE _____



T.W.X.



TELEGRAM



ADM. NET

PAGE....2....

LATITUDE FROM COLORADO R'VER EAST TO 111 DEGREES WEST LONGITUDE.

THIS AGENCY SPOTTED SOME POSSIBLE WRECKAGE ON FOUR PEAKS 40 MILES
NORTHEAST OF PHOENIX AROUND 1730 PWT. THIS WILL BE CHECKED IN THE
MORNING AT SUNRISE 2 NOV BY MEN ON HORSEBACK. YUMA ARMY AIR BASE IS
SEARCHING ON AREA BETWEEN 114 AND 115 DEGREES WEST LONGITUDE NORTH
FROM THEIR BASE TO 34 DEGREES NORTH LATITUDE

EL CENTRO NAVY IS COVERING AREA FROM THEIR BASE NORTH TO SHAVER SUMMIT
AND EAST TO COLORADO RIVER

IT IS KNOWN THAT AIRCRAFT DEPARTED 1540 PWT, 26 ~~NOV~~///~~1944~~/// OCTOBER 1944
AS REPORTED BY CRASH TRUCK ON END OF RUNWAY AROUND VERIFIED THROUGH
TRANSCRIPTION OF CONTROL TOWER CONVERSATION. LINE FOREMEN FOR ~~NATM~~/// NORTH
AMERICAN - C. L. LAIDO REPORTED THAT THREE ~~9/27/44~~ P-51S

INCLUDING SUBJECT AIRCRAFT TOOK OFF TOGETHER ON RUNWAY 25, BUT ONLY
TWO SEEN TO CIRCLE BACK ACROSS FIELD ON COURSE TO PALM SPRINGS. OCEAN
APPROXIMATELY 1 1/2 MILES OFF END OF RUNWAY 25, DELAY IN DISCOVERING
THAT AIRCRAFT WAS MISSING RESULTED FROM FACT THAT FLIGHT PLAN DID NOT
REACH AIRWAY TRAFFIC CONTROL CENTER. FAILURE OCCURED IN TELEPHONE
TRANSMISSION OF FLIGHT PLAN TO LOS ANGELES RADIO CONTROL TOWER. NOT YET
DETERMINED WHETHER MISTAKE BY PERSON TELEPHONING FLIGHT PLAN OR TOWER
IN RECEIVING FLIGHT PLAN. PILOT'S FATHER NOTIFIED - MR. VREELAND

3561644075

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112

Interviews by MAST with 3 WASP never before contacted re the case revealed:

- These three were likely present on the date of the accident
- Most WASP turned left (south) when taking off into the wind at Mines Field, but some occasionally turned right (north)
- Some WASP would fly straight up thru fog, but some would turn quickly to escape the fog bank



Rosa Lea Fullwood



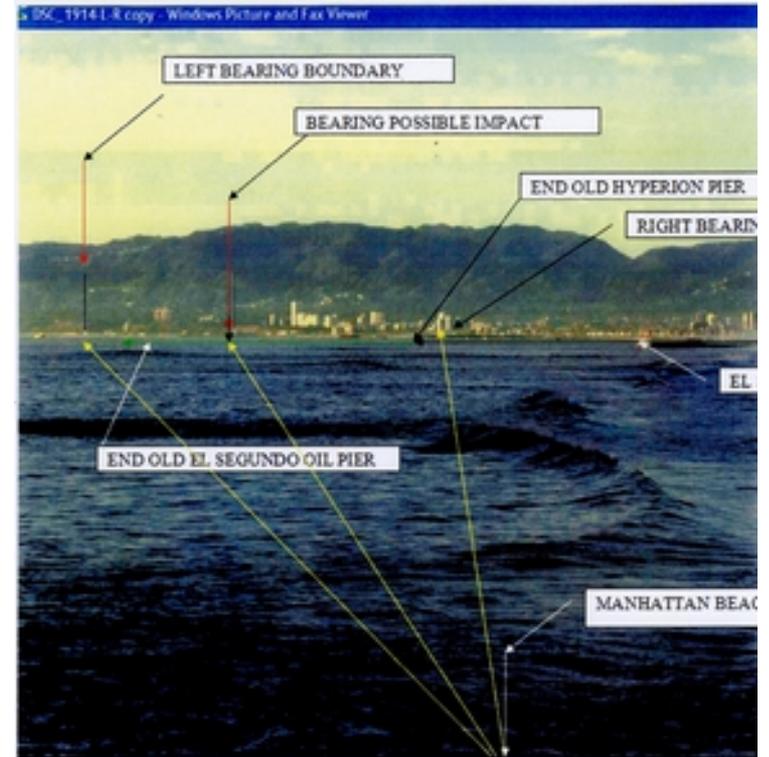
Barbara Willis
Heinrich



Jean Landis

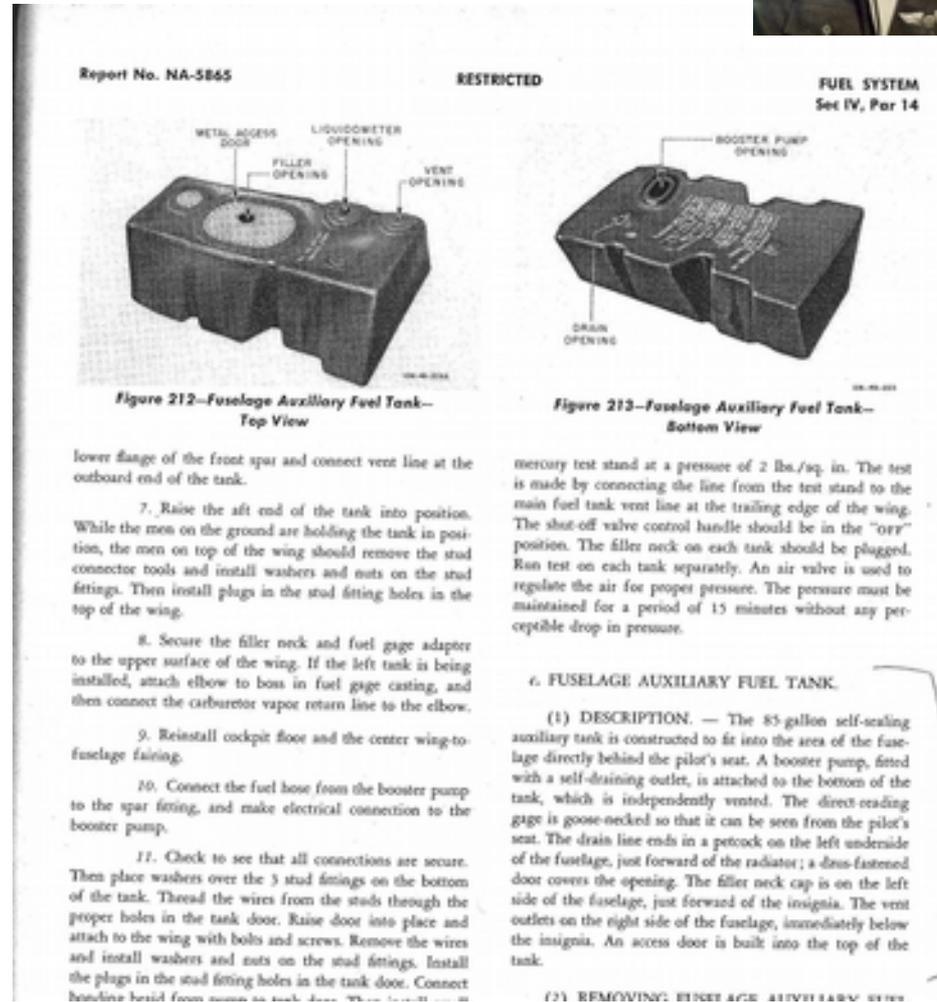


A possible eyewitness to the crash places the plane NW of Manhattan Pier



Possible causes of the crash

- Disorientation in fog bank
- Distraction from malfunctioning canopy
- Center of gravity problem caused by full fuselage gas tank behind pilot
- Engine failure
- Other



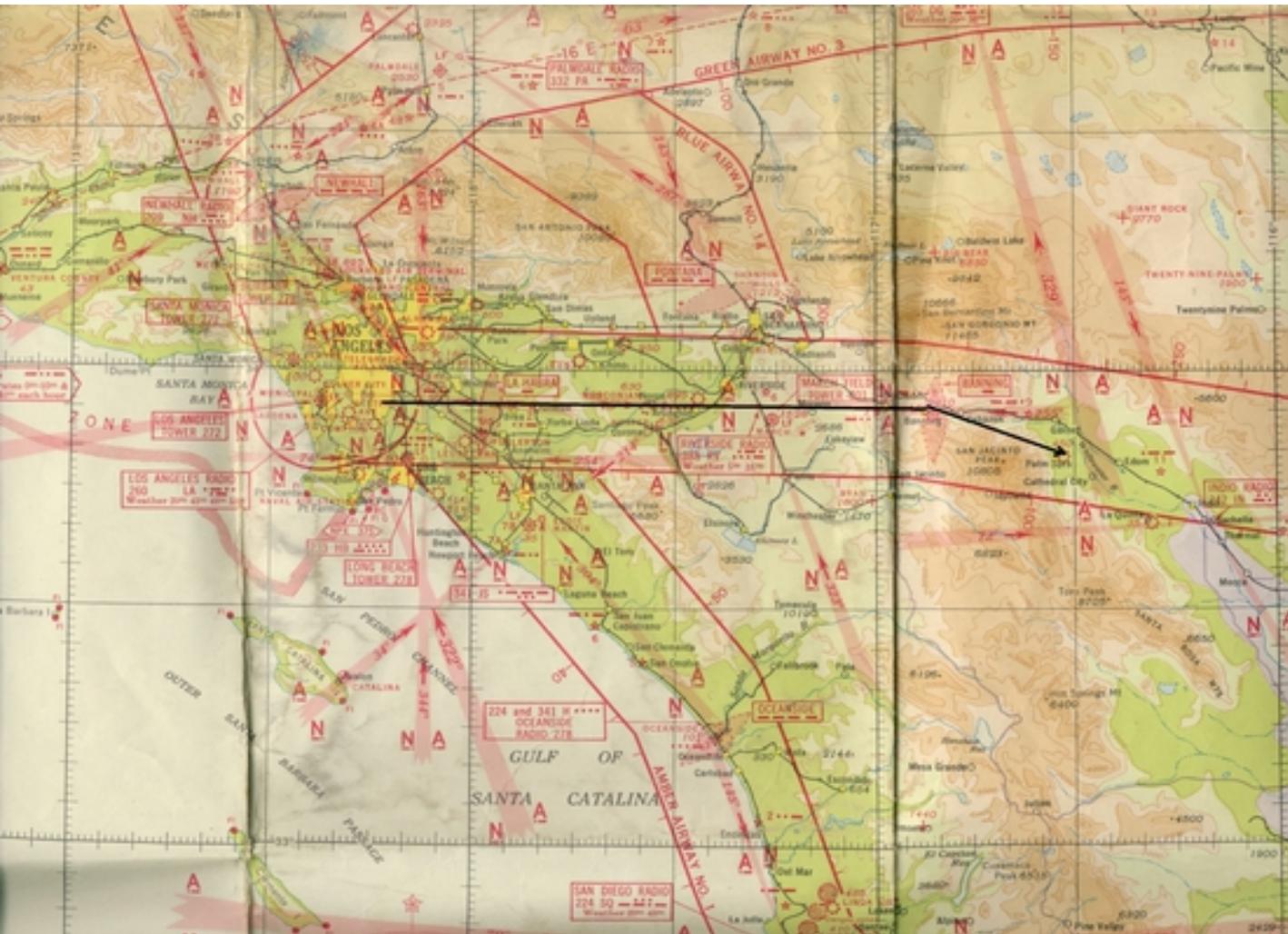
Chuck Yeager autobiography:

THE ULTIMATE HIGH

49

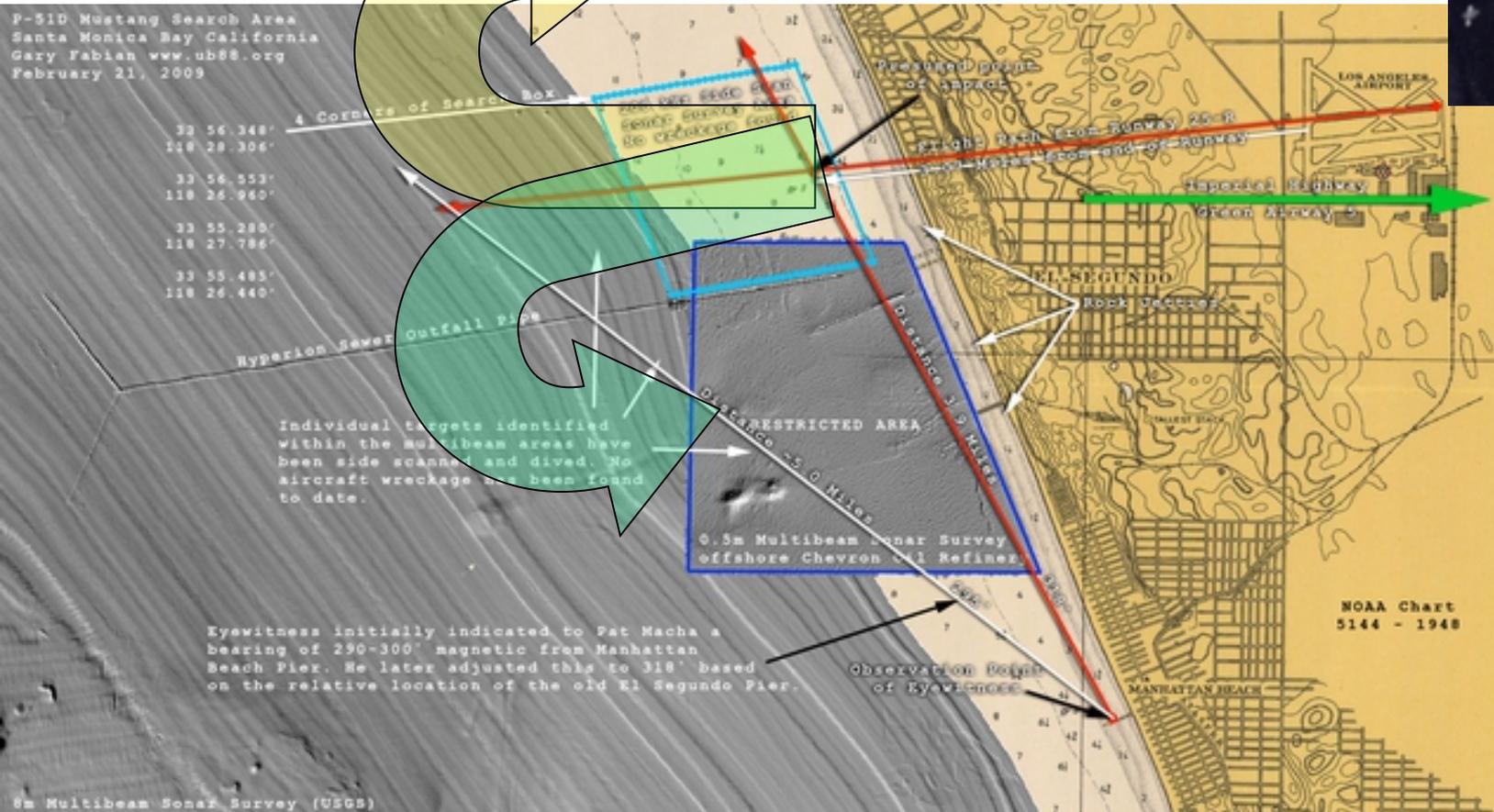
into the cockpit. You ask him if anything is wrong, but there never is, so you crawl in and strap yourself to your seat. A thick piece of armor plating protects your back; behind that is an eighty-five-gallon tank of high-octane aviation gasoline. You look up at the sky, thickly overcast as usual, and check out the instruments and especially the oxygen system. You'll be flying at 30,000 feet most of the day. You're about now for engine start, hearing

Tompkins was headed for Palm Springs



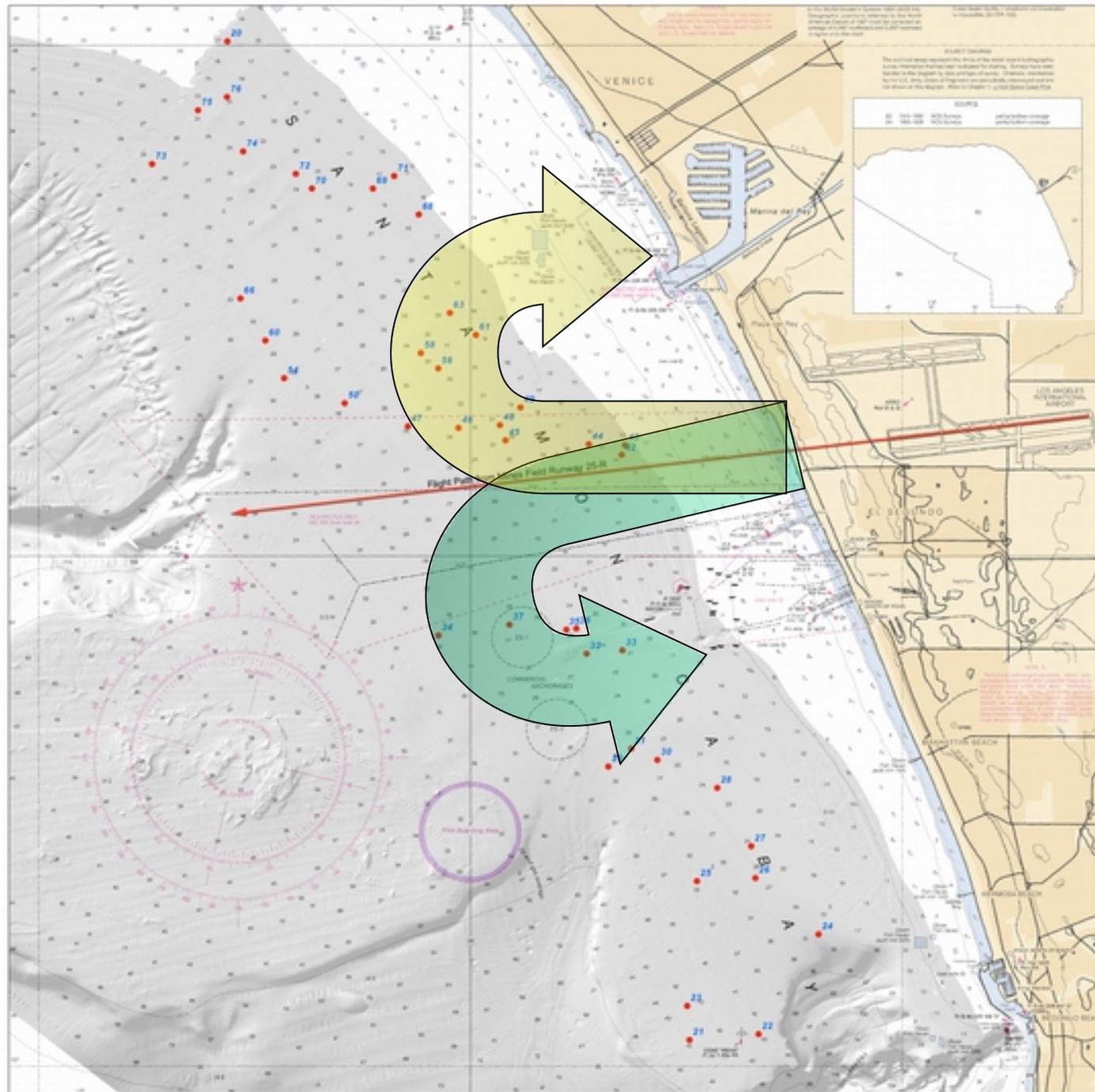
She could have crashed on land, and there is even a report, now discounted, that her plane was found in the mountains.

The target search area is off LAX

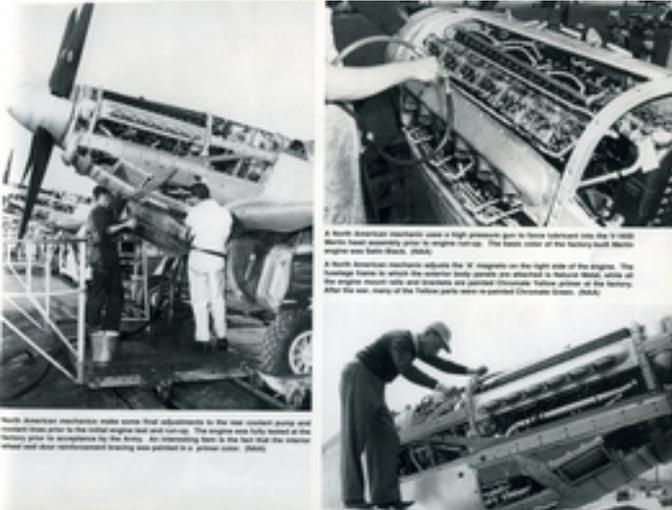




The search is driven by anomalies spotted on USGS underwater databases within the general target area

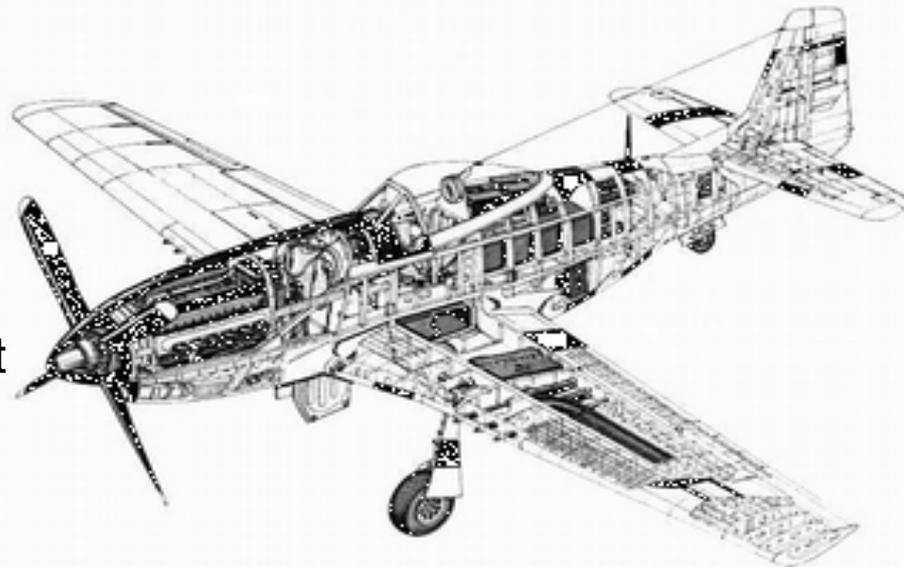


The target: P-51-D Mustang



Key items that might survive:

- Wheels and tires
- Engine, esp. crankshaft
- Machine guns
- Seat armor
- Note: **no** drop tanks



North American Aviation stamped most of its plane parts

10/16/52

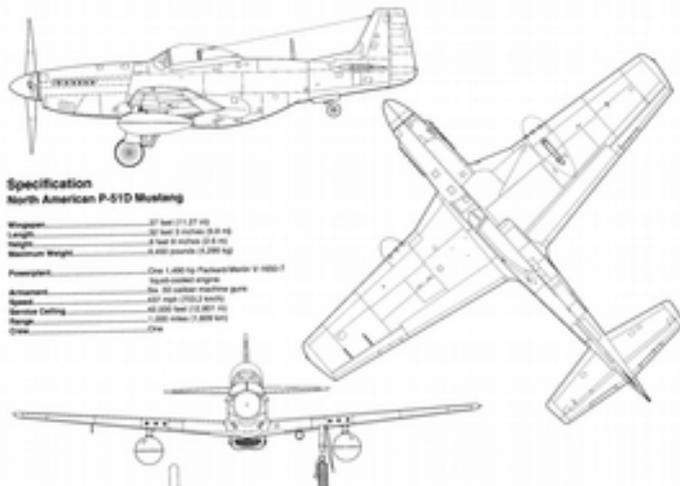
NAA F-51D
44-72798
USAF



PART NO
106 14001-1
SERIAL NO
1062 4282
INSPECTORS
MAY 10
MAY 7
DATE
8-1-52

10/16/52

NAA F-51D
44-72798
USAF



The targets underwater will look rather different



A romantic view

Pieces may be hard to spot...



...so check each site carefully

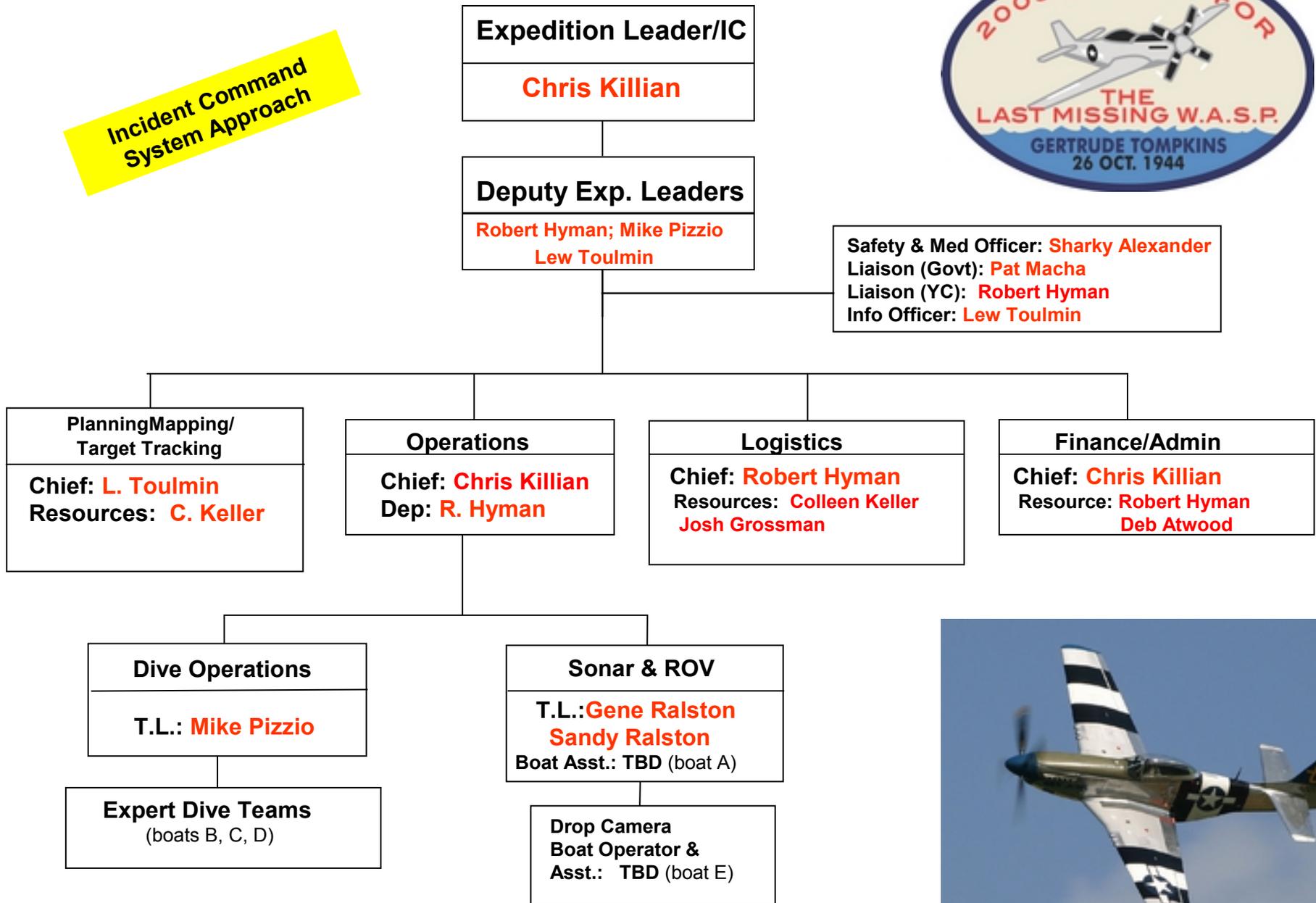
Logistics and Search Management



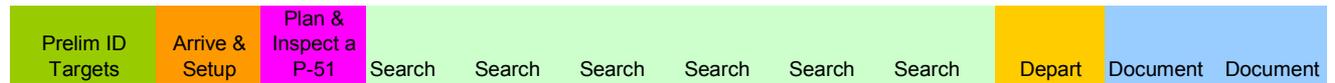
The Gertrude Tompkins Expedition



Incident Command System Approach



The Team will deliver hi time on task



Sept--Oct October

Sep 28--Oct 2 Sat 3 Sun 4 Mon 5 Tues 6 Wed 7 Thurs 8 Fri 9 Sat 10 Sun 11 Mon 12 Tues 13 TOTAL DAYS

#	Name	Skill/Task	Sep 28--Oct 2	Sat 3	Sun 4	Mon 5	Tues 6	Wed 7	Thurs 8	Fri 9	Sat 10	Sun 11	Mon 12	Tues 13	TOTAL DAYS
1	Alexander, Sharky	Diving		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			9
2	Armstrong, Brian	Diving		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			9
3	Armstrong, Heather	Diving		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			9
4	Atwood, Deb	Logistics								1					1
5	Boat Capt 1	Boat capt				1	1	1	1	1	1				6
6	Boat Crew 1	Boat capt			1	1	1	1	1	1	1				7
7	Boat Crew 2	Boat capt			1	1	1	1	1	1	1				7
8	Brooks, Scott	Diving			1	1				1	1				4
9	Citelli, Joe	Diving		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			9
10	Crowell, Dan	Diving		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			9
11	Fabian, Gary	Targets								1					2
12	Grossman, Josh	Logistics		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			9
13	Hott, John	Diving			1	1				1	1				4
14	Hyman, Robt	Logistics		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		10
15	Jacoway, Robin	Diving		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			9
16	Keller, Colleen	Search theory		1	1						1	1			4
17	Killian, Chris	Mgmt	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	14
18	Killian, Mike	Support		1	1						1	1			4
19	Macha, G. Pat	Mapping		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			9
20	Meistrel, Bob	Boat capt				1	1	1							3
21	Morgan, Jeff	Diving			1	1				1	1				4
22	Mundo, Sparky	Boat capt			1										1
23	Pizzio, Mike	Dive leader		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			9
24	Raine, Kendall	Diving			1	1				1	1				4
25	Ralston, Gene	Sonar	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			14
26	Ralston, Sandy	Sonar	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			14
27	Rasmussen, Capt Dave	Boat capt TC		1	1										2
28	Rasmussen crew #1	Boat crew		1	1										2
29	Rasmussen crew #2	Boat crew		1	1										2
30	Sotis, Peter	Diving		1	1	1	1	1							5
31	Smith, Capt Skip	Boat capt TC		1	1										2
32	Smith, Skip crew #1	Boat crew		1	1										2
33	Support -- local 1	Support			1	1				1	1				4
34	Support -- local 2	Support			1	1				1	1				4
35	Toulmin, Lew	Info		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11
36	Walker, John	Diving			1	1				1	1				4
37	Whittall-Scherfee, Ken	Support									1	1			2
38	Whittall-Scherfee, Laura	Support		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			9
39	Whittall-Scherfee, Guy	Support									1	1			2
40	Wylar, Bob	Boat capt				1					1				2
Totals each day			13	23	33	28	20	20	18	27	31	19	Total Days		237

The primary search facility in MDR is Pacific Mariners YC



To MDR ↑

Locations Near King Harbor Yacht Club



LAX

Search Area

Dockweiler RV Park & Search HQ



Gertrude Tompkins Expedition House

606 N. Ardmore
Manhattan Beach

Holiday Inn Xp

Albertson's Grocery

King Harbor YC

Dive N Surf Dive Shop

Museum of Flight
off map 2 mi SE

COSTCO

Little Co of Mary Hospital

WALMART



Key instructions

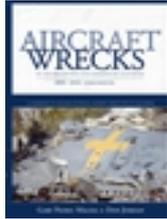
- **Safety first**
- Authorities Having Jurisdiction have been advised of our search
- Be careful with the King Harbor & Pacific Mariners YCs and other donated, rented and loaned facilities, RVs and vehicles
- We will all sign liability waiver forms
- Refer all press and public inquiries to the press relations officer – Toulmin
- Filming and picture taking will be done, there will be a writer from *Smithsonian Air & Space Magazine* – & other outlets--if you do not wish to be filmed or mentioned please advise
- **Safety last**



Searchers



The search has several key organizational relationships



Aircraftwrecks.com, led by Pat Macha, has been researching the Tompkins case for 11 years and has helped keep interest alive



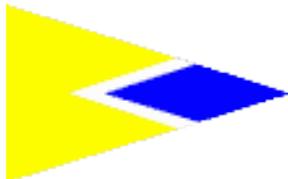
UB88.org, led by Gary Fabian, found California's only German submarine – one of the state's most elusive shipwrecks -- and pioneered the methods used in the Tompkins case



MAST was formed after the Steve Fossett case, helped find N2700Q in AZ, and is working other "cold case" aircraft disappearances



The Pacific Mariners Yacht Club is the "friendliest YC in MDR" and has kindly allowed us to use their facilities and slips during the search. Thanks!



King Harbor Yacht Club will generously allow use of their great facilities, including parking, dock and various member's vessels. Thanks!

We have some great team members



Mark "Sharky" Alexander, 21 yrs of diving, PADI Master Instructor, CCR instructor, cave certified, USCG 50 ton Master, paramedic, diver med tech, Military & History Channel



Brian & Heather Armstrong, with 30 years of deep water technical diving, rebreather experience, worked on the recovery of a B-25 Mitchell bomber in South Carolina



Deborah Atwood, Director of Corporate Affairs, Mars Corp., climber, explorer, worked on Search for Steve Fossett Expedition, Society of Women Geographers



Scott Brooks, PADI instructor, trimix experience, wreck and cave diver, member of *UB-88* sub expedition, dove on *Andrea Doria*, *Triple Crown*, *USS Wilkes-Barre*



Joe Citelli, diving 28 years, mixed gas, cave diving, CCR Author, "The Practical Aspects of Deep Wreck Exploration," Worked on Lake Murray B-25 recovery in SC

More great team members



Dan Crowell, ex-Seeker, underwater videographer, worked on “Deep Sea Detectives,” Military and History Channel, member, the Explorers Club



Gary Fabian, maritime historian, sport fisherman, found the German *UB-88* sub, looked for missing hydrogen bomb off the coast of Georgia, worked extensively on Tompkins case



Josh Grossman, explorer, certified EMT, recently climbed Kilimanjaro, member of the Explorers Club



Robert Hyman, explorer, mountaineer, photographer, climbed to the high points of most US states, led various Explorers Club expeditions, member of MAST



Robin Jacoway, President of DeepOutdoors technical diving equipment firm, CCR instructor, worked on the 2009 *Monitor* expedition

More great team members



Colleen Keller, search theorist with Metron Corp., pilot, FAA certified mechanic, SCUBA diver, co-founder of MAST, worked on Fossett search and search for Air France Flt 447 off Brazil



Chris Killian, re-discovered over 100 mis-located planes, SCUBA diver, trained air observer, former reserve lieutenant with county sheriff dept., co-founder of MAST



G. Pat Macha, author of 3 books on airplane archaeology, researched this case for 10+ years, hosted History Channel's "Broken Wings," extensive publications & speaking engagements



Jeff Morgan, over 4000 dives, Commander, San Bernadino County Sheriff's Dive Rescue Team, SCUBA instructor, dive medic, Trimix, Nitrox, hyperbaric chamber operator



Mike Pizzio, FBI Special Agent, member of FBI's Miami Underwater Search & Evidence Response Team, certified deep water diver, member of The Explorers Club

More great team members



Kendall Raine, Mging. Dir. investment bank, key diver on *UB 88* sub, steamer *Brother Jonathan*, & Convair B-36 D; assisted LA County Sheriff in drowning recoveries



Gene & Sandy Ralston, recovered 65+ drowning victims using sonar and their ROV and search boat; worked on Laci Petersen, Natalee Holloway & other hi profile cases



Peter Sotis, owner of Add Helium technical dive training School, and of the Decostop, on-line tech forum with 20,000 members; Instructor in Trimix, Wreck, CCR and Cave Diving



Lew Toulmin, MAST member, Explorers Club member, worked on successful N2700Q search, author of *Manual on Finding Lost Aircraft*, emergency management specialist



John Walker, 5000 dives, Wreck and Cavern Instructor, working Diver with Pacific Marine Services, volunteer with LA County Sheriff's Office Dive Team, expert in gear fabrication, worked on *UB-88*

THANKS!!!



Comments or questions?