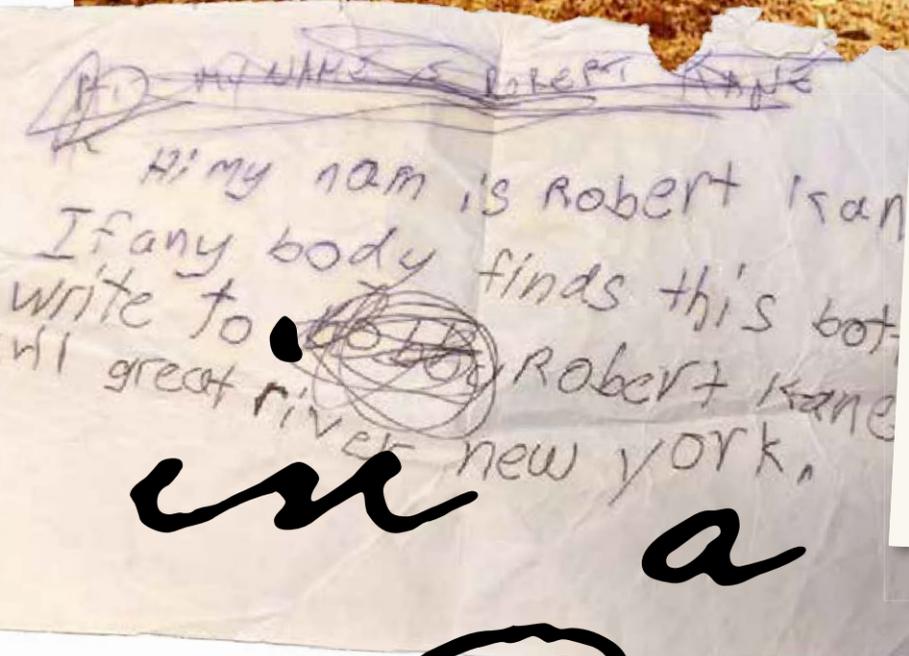




time
travel
feature

Message



Bottle

ASHBURN WOMAN SOLVES A CHILDHOOD MYSTERY – 38 YEARS LATER

BY CHRIS WADSWORTH

(far left top) The beach in Saltaire in the 1980s; (far left bottom) The note written by Bobby Kane as a child and thrown into the sea in a bottle; (left top) Ashburn resident Liz Schnelzer at the beach at Saltaire when she was 16; (left bottom) Schnelzer (on the right) with her cousins Emily, Susanna and Matt on the beach on Fire Island; (below) Schnelzer today, at the helm of her sailboat, the "Wombat."

For Liz Schnelzer, it was a magical time. Summers on Fire Island, N.Y., staying at her family's cottage in the village of Saltaire. Days were spent walking and biking up and down the long boardwalks, sailing in the sun-dappled Great South Bay or splashing in the ocean waves.

But one particular day stands out in Schnelzer's mind. It was the summer of 1982. She was a 13-year-old, swimming with her cousins, Emily and Susanna. The girls were floating and body surfing in the cool water in front of the cottage, chatting about all the typical things teens talk about, when they spotted something glinting in the sunlight beyond where the waves were breaking.

"We swam out for it," Schnelzer said. "I vaguely remember racing to be the first to reach the object. We were all pretty excited when we got to it and discovered it was a green glass wine bottle ... and inside, there was a message."

The girls hurried back to shore, dried their hands on their beach towels, kneeled in the warm sand and carefully opened the bottle. Out came a note that read, "Hi my nam [sic] is Robert Kane. If anybody finds this bottle write to Robert Kane 141 Great River New York." The note writer had originally written "Bobby" but crossed it out for the more formal "Robert."

"We could tell it was a kid because of the cute crayon drawing on the back," Schnelzer said.

A kid named Bobby Kane had put a note in a bottle and thrown it into the sea — and it would take Schnelzer, now a clinical social worker, wife and mother living in the Broadlands, nearly four decades to get to the bottom of a niggling mystery that never quite left her mind.

Schnelzer's first attempt to find Bobby Kane came that day in 1982. The Trixie Belden mystery fan and her cousins ran up the wooden beach stairs and across the dunes, shouting to Schnelzer's mother about the note they had found. The "Great River" mentioned in the note is across the Great South Bay from Fire Island. The excited girls and Schnelzer's equally excited mom whipped out the local phone book and tried looking up all the "Kane" listings. But Bobby Kane hadn't included a street name, and none of the Kanes in the white pages had a house number of 141.

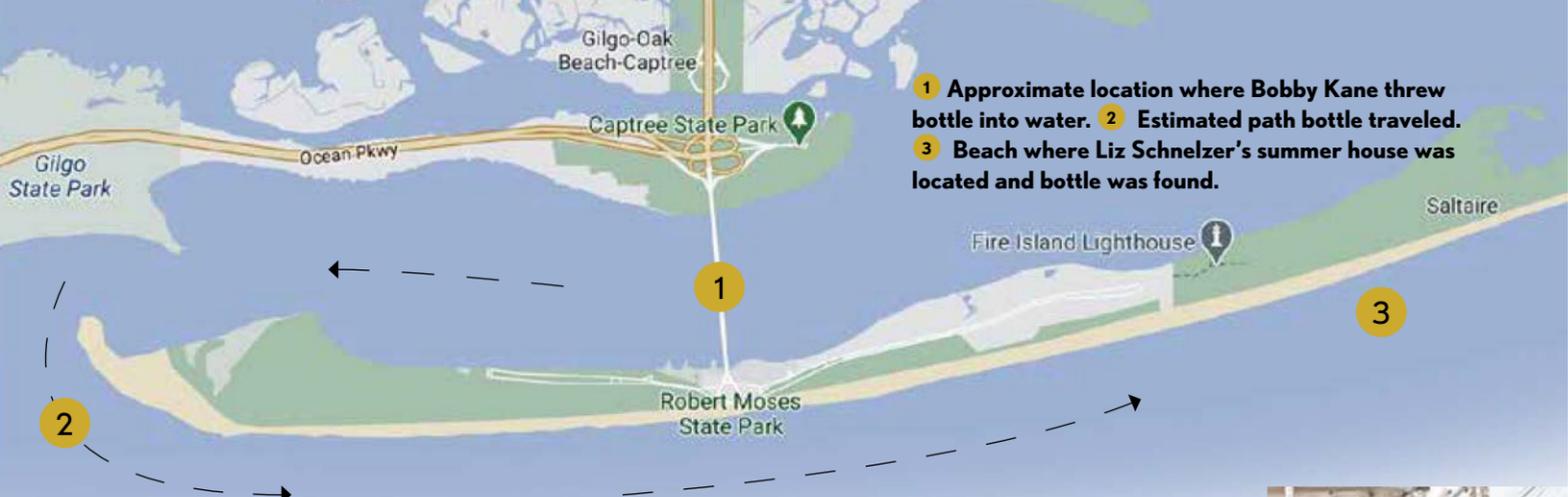
"We were so deflated," Schnelzer recalled. "Finding a message in a bottle must be a once-in-a-lifetime treat. And we felt responsible for letting Bobby know his message had been found."

But in those pre-internet days, options were limited. The mysterious note was slipped into a book and, when summer came to an end, it slipped from Schnelzer's mind.

Three years later, when Schnelzer was 16, she was cleaning her room, and the note slipped out of the book where it had been tucked away. In the moment, Schnelzer forgot that she didn't have an address for Bobby Kane, and she sat down and wrote a two-page letter to the boy.

"Hi! I hope you get this message! Several years ago, you left a message in a bottle and threw it into the ocean," she wrote, →





1 Approximate location where Bobby Kane threw bottle into water. 2 Estimated path bottle traveled. 3 Beach where Liz Schnelzer's summer house was located and bottle was found.

and went on to relay the whole story and how marvelous the whole adventure was. But quickly, Schnelzer realized she still didn't have an address for Bobby Kane, so the letter got folded up and stuck in a desk drawer along with the original note.

Flash forward to 2020 — a year unlike any other. Schnelzer, like everyone else in Ashburn, found herself spending a lot more time at home. She decided to do a little "COVID cleaning," as she called it, and happened to pull out a bin containing the contents of her old desk from her childhood home.

"I found the letter I wrote to Bobby in 1985 as well as Bobby's original note," Schnelzer said. "I thought, 'Hmm, it would probably be a lot easier to find him now in the era of social media and the internet. But would that be creepy? Would he think it was some weird phishing scam?'"

(right) Bobby Kane, as a child, with his mother; (far right) Kane, today.



So Schnelzer reached out to friends on Facebook and elsewhere and asked their advice. The response was nearly unanimous. "Do it," said several people. "Not creepy at all," others chimed in. "A person sends a message in a bottle because they want to have it found," added another.

So with the help of some friends and resources available today online, Schnelzer tracked down a likely phone number for the one and only Bobby Kane. "I took a deep breath and dialed his number."

Three hundred miles away, in West Islip, N.Y., Bobby Kane answered.

"Of course, I was skeptical at first," said Kane, 45, a mortgage broker and licensed boat captain with a wife and little girl. "But I remember the whole thing. I remember the day. I remember my mom and dad and being out on the boat. I remember putting the note in the bottle and going out in the inlet and throwing it out. After two minutes, I realized — how would anybody else know that?"

Schnelzer sent Kane a photo of the original note, and hesitation and nervousness were replaced with excitement as the two began to share more and more details of the bottle, their childhoods and their shared love of the water. Email addresses were exchanged, connections made on social media and a burgeoning friendship was born.

The duo determined that Kane — who would have been about 7 or 8 years old at the time — probably tossed the bottle in the waters of the Fire Island Inlet. From there, it flowed west and south around the western end of Fire Island and out into the Atlantic Ocean where it hugged the coast and was found by the girls off Saltaire's beach. The bottle's journey would have been roughly five to 10 miles.

At one point, in the mid-1980s, Kane thought his note had been answered when he received a response from a girl living in Great Britain. It turns out his mom hadn't wanted him to be disappointed, so his parents arranged for the daughter of a friend to write to him. Years later, they told him the truth. "They had me going for a while," Kane said with a laugh.

For both Schnelzer and Kane, the story coming full circle has proven meaningful. At the top of the original note, Kane's mother had initially started writing the message. Seeing her handwriting stopped him in his tracks. "Mom passed away in 2014. It's been a tough year with all the COVID stuff going on. When I got Liz's call, it just seemed like it was a sign from my mom that everything is going to be OK."

For Schnelzer, who lost her mother to Alzheimer's last year, solving a mystery they started researching together nearly four decades ago left her with a special feeling. "I just know that my mom knows, and that it makes her happy, too."

And finally, meeting a fellow sea salt such as Kane was a fitting coda. Schnelzer and her husband, Doug, are sailors themselves with a boat on the Chesapeake Bay. They plan to sail to New York this summer and meet Kane and his family.

"Two people linked by a small slip of paper in a wine bottle set adrift in the ocean decades ago," Schnelzer said. "Sending a message in a bottle is a quintessential act of hope. I longed for that adventurous, playful act of hope — by that little kid — to be answered."



PHOTO BY ASTRI WEE



time of
our lives
feature



THE LAST TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

Ashburn veteran was the final graduate from famed World War II program

BY JILL DEVINE

The decision that changed Carl Johnson's life came in 1945, and it was one he did not make for himself. It was delivered in an envelope to his home in Bellaire, Ohio, in the form of a military draft notice.

Johnson was studying at Ohio State University to become a dentist, but he left his

textbooks behind and headed to Fort Hayes in Columbus, Ohio, for induction into the U.S. Army Air Corps. He had no idea that he would soon earn his wings and that his name would be recorded in history. You see, Johnson was the very last graduate of the now-famed "Tuskegee Airman" program, established in 1941 to train Black pilots at

the Tuskegee Army Air Field in Alabama when the U.S. military was still segregated.

"A lot of my friends were drafted before they finished high school, so I knew it was coming," said Johnson, who today is 95 and lives in the Potomac Green community in Ashburn. "I didn't get to choose, but I was glad that I got Air Corps instead of Infantry." ▶

(Left) Army aviator and Tuskegee Airman Col. Carl Johnson photographed at his home in Ashburn; (above) members of the Tuskegee Airmen "Class of '46"; Col. Johnson as a young airman.



An early photo of Col. Carl Johnson and his wife, Nancy; Col. Johnson receiving his wings; images of Col. Johnson from early in his aviation career.

Johnson remembers making model airplanes as a child. He also fondly recalls going down to the Ohio River each day and excitedly watching the airmail plane fly its route down the river to Cincinnati and Louisville and back. But he never dreamed he would one day become a pilot. He had never even been on an airplane.

Initial stops in the Army took him to Indiana and then Texas before he and 14

other Black draftees were selected for pilot training and given tickets to Tuskegee. When the Black men boarded their train, they were directed to coach seats, even though they had tickets for Pullman sleeping cars.

“The conductor said they had no Pullmans left, and we refused to go to coach, so they threatened to have the military police arrest us,” Johnson said. “We took seats

behind the engine in the heat, with open windows all the way to Alabama, and they wouldn’t let us use our meal tickets, because we couldn’t go to the dining car.”

By the time the group arrived in Chehaw, Alabama, a day and a half later, they were tired, hungry and covered in coal soot. “That was our welcome to Alabama,” he sighed.

Like all the Tuskegee Airmen, the men chosen were the best of the best, and ►



PHOTOS BY ASTRIMWEE

Images of the some of the awards, honors and memorabilia that adorn the walls of Col. Johnson's home, including (left to right) an honorary degree from Tuskegee University, a Congressional Gold Medal and a variety of other military medals.

Johnson quickly found himself soaring through the air. That doesn't mean there weren't humbling moments — like the first time he piloted a plane solo.

“I made two landings and my third landing, my last landing, I really greased it in [made a smooth landing], and I was really proud of myself. I looked over to see if my instructor was watching and that's when I ground-looped,” Johnson said with a chuckle. (A ground loop means a pilot accidentally touches a wing to the ground

causing the airplane to spin in a circle.) “I wasn't paying attention ... and it taught me a lesson. I never ground-looped again in the next 37 years.”

His time at Tuskegee produced some of the best friendships and memories of his life. A case of appendicitis delayed his training and caused him to earn his wings after his classmates, in 1946, making him the last Tuskegee Airman to graduate. The program was disbanded, and only later was it made famous through books,

documentaries and feature films, such as 2012's “Red Tails” starring Terrence Howard and Cuba Gooding Jr.

“If you had asked me back then who I was, I would have just said I was an Army pilot,” said Johnson. “No one called us Tuskegee Airmen or Red Tails back then. I never heard anyone describe us using those words until the 1970s.”

Although he entered Tuskegee too late to fly on combat missions like the airmen portrayed in the movies, he knew many of them well.

“The pilots who flew in Europe were the best group of people I have ever known,” said Johnson, who flew in the 617th Medium Bomb Squadron. “I lived with them, and we ate meals together, but I never once heard them brag about their accomplishments.”

With the war over, Johnson was discharged from the Army in 1947. He returned to finish college at Ohio State, where he met his wife, Nancy. While in school, he joined the Ohio National Guard and later returned to active

duty as an Army aviator, a role he proudly filled for the next 24 years.

During his military career, Johnson served in Korea and also in Vietnam, where he was commander of a combat aviation battalion made up of seven companies and over 1,000 men.

“The personnel that I commanded in Vietnam ... they must have thought pretty highly of me because a lot of them sent me letters after I had my change of command,” Johnson said. “They compared me with the

commander they had afterwards, and it was apparent they liked me a whole lot better.”

He received numerous awards and medals, including the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism in Vietnam. He achieved the rank of full colonel before leaving the service and going on to hold positions at the Department of Defense and the Federal Aviation Administration as well as commissioner of airports in Cleveland and deputy director of Pittsburgh International Airport.

Johnson said things greatly improved for Black people in the military during the years he served, but racism never ended completely. “I could sit in a classroom or meeting and [fellow officers] would say racist slurs or jokes right in front of me.”

Johnson recalled the time he and his wife were told by his post commander in Puerto Rico to move from the comfortable, modern quarters they were assigned upon arrival to inferior quarters once the commander realized Johnson was Black. “The kitchen sink in the new apartment was so small my wife had to use a bucket to wash dishes.”

Despite such indignities, Johnson holds no grudges and cherishes his memories of Army service. He and his wife, Nancy, moved ▶



to Ashburn in 2012. The walls of Johnson's home are covered with photos and keepsakes from a lifetime of personal and professional achievements. After almost 67 years of marriage, Nancy passed away in 2018, and photos of her and their children and grandchildren hang side by side with military memorabilia, such as the flag that was flown over the Pentagon in Johnson's honor, his framed Congressional Gold Medal and cases of military awards and decorations.



PHOTO BY ASTRID WEE

(Left) Col. Johnson with his wife, Nancy, prior to her passing in 2018. (Right) Col. Johnson with his granddaughter, Sancia Winslow.

His granddaughter, Sancia Winslow, drives from her Round Hill home every week to help Johnson. She says growing up she was not aware of her grandfather's military

accomplishments and is just coming to realize the mark he made in history.

"He is very humble," Winslow said. "To me, 'Pap' and my grandmother were a loving constant in my life. They wanted to spend time with me and my sister, taking us to swim lessons, sledding and amusement parks. I am incredibly proud of him and I'm thankful that my own children have formed special bonds with him that they will cherish forever."

In May, the East Coast Chapter of Tuskegee Airmen, along with locals from the Ashburn American Legion, the Loudoun County Sheriff's Office and Mission BBQ honored Johnson's 95th birthday with a festive drive-by parade and celebration in front of his home.

"I was overwhelmed, actually," Johnson said quietly. "I just didn't expect anything like that. I have to admit it made me feel important, even though I'm not important. I really appreciated it. It's a memory I will take with me to my grave." 

Jill Devine is a freelance writer and former magazine editor from Loudoun County who writes for a variety of Virginia publications.

THE HUNT FOR THE LOST CLIPPER



PHOTO BY ASTRI WIEASTRI WIEE PHOTOGRAPHY

Local group of adventurers hopes to solve enduring aviation mystery

BY CHRIS WADSWORTH

(From top) A newspaper headline from the day after the Hawaii Clipper disappeared; a historical photo of the Hawaii Clipper; members of the Lost Clipper team pose for a photo outside Clyde's Willow Creek Farm in Ashburn. From left to right, Jeff Riegel, Jim Janicki, Guy Noffsinger, Steve Murphy, Stephen Clouse.

In October 2021, a meeting was held in a private dining room at the Clyde's Willow Creek Farm restaurant in Ashburn. The men who gathered are part of a team that has been slowly and carefully assembled over two decades. They are a band of brothers devoted to solving one of aviation's most enduring mysteries — a mystery that stretches around the world to the middle of the Pacific Ocean — and the quest has its roots right here in Ashburn. It's called The Hunt for the Lost Clipper.

THE ORIGIN

Over the arc of a long career, Guy Noffsinger has worn a lot of hats. Naval intelligence officer, photographer and videographer, NASA television producer and documentary filmmaker. But his latest endeavor feels like something more out of an Indiana Jones adventure.

Back in 2000, Noffsinger — who previously lived in Ashburn and currently lives in Purcellville — was a graduate student at the Joint Military Intelligence College in Maryland. He was working on his thesis, which was going to explore the search for famed missing aviator Amelia Earhart from the perspective of the Navy.

During his research, he came across a non-fiction book by author Charles Hill titled, "Fix on the Rising Sun: The Clipper Hi-Jacking of 1938."

"I thought it was an amazing story that I had never heard before," Noffsinger said. "I started going down a rabbit hole."

Almost immediately, Noffsinger changed the focus of his thesis to explore what turned out to be a mystery stretching back to before World War II — the loss of the Pan Am "Hawaii Clipper" over the Pacific Ocean, with 15 souls on board.

Noffsinger started work on his new thesis 20 years ago — and it's still not complete.

"I couldn't get to the bottom of it. I couldn't answer the questions," he said. "I knew that I had to go investigate myself."

And so, he did. Four trips so far to a remote island in the western Pacific. Along the way, he has picked up a team of fellow researchers and adventurers — including several men from Ashburn — who are as determined as Noffsinger to solve the mystery of the Lost Clipper once and for all.

THE MYSTERY

Here is the basic story of the Lost Clipper and as well as the theory posited by Noffsinger, Hill and others.



(Clockwise this page) An archival photo of the Hawaii Clipper before its disappearance; team member Bob Perry operates a ground-penetrating radar device; Esther Saucedo, holding up an old newspaper clipping about the Hawaii Clipper. Her father, Jose Maria Saucedo, was one of the pilots on the doomed plane; a photo of famed aviator Amelia Earhart prior to her disappearance in 1937. (Facing page) The Lost Clipper team poses for a photo on Tonowas Island in the Chuuk Lagoon during the fourth expedition to the island in 2018; a glass vial the team found on the site of a former Japanese military dispensary.



The Hawaii Clipper was a Martin M-130 flying boat, meaning the plane could land on water. It was part of the fleet of Pan American Airways, generally known as Pan Am and, at the time, the largest international air carrier in the world.

In July 1938, the Hawaii Clipper began Trip 229, a regularly scheduled 60-hour flight from San Francisco to Manila in the Philippines. It island-hopped along the way, stopping at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, then Midway, Wake Island and Guam.

At 11:39 a.m. local time on July 28, 1938, the Hawaii Clipper took off from Guam for the final leg to Manila. Three hours and 27 minutes later, the plane lost contact with radio operators. It disappeared — somewhere over the vast deep blue waters of the Pacific — with six passengers and nine crew members on board and was never heard from again.

A U.S. Army transport ship in the area found an oil slick along the Hawaii Clipper's path and oil samples were taken, but they were never confirmed to be linked to the lost plane. The official ruling is that the Hawaii Clipper must have crashed — but be it from mechanical failure, rough weather, pilot error, no one knows.

Or do they?

THE THEORY

Based on more than two decades of research, Guy Noffsinger thinks he knows what happened to the missing plane — and believe it or not, it ties to the famous mystery of Amelia Earhart, who disappeared almost exactly a year earlier, in July 1937.

Noffsinger and others believe that at least some of the passengers and crew on the Hawaii Clipper were working for the U.S. government — that they had been told they were on a secret mission to transport \$3 million in gold-backed banknotes to organized criminals within the Japanese Navy who were allegedly holding Earhart ransom.

Only it was a ruse, and the Japanese were actually after the new, long-distance engines on the Hawaii Clipper. They feared their own airplanes were less advanced and the new high-tech engines on the Clipper would give the United States an advantage in the run-up to World War II, which was already brewing.

The theory goes that two Japanese hijackers disguised as mechanics crept on board in Guam and hid in a cargo hold. This is based on FBI interviews at the time with Marine sentries who said they gave two mechanics access to the plane in the

overnight hours. Once the plane was over the ocean, the Japanese agents took over the plane, forced it to land and took the passengers and crew prisoner.

The prisoners were allegedly taken to Tonowas Island, in the Truk Lagoon, part of what today is called Chuuk Lagoon in the Federated States of Micronesia. There, they were executed and buried in a cement slab, and the Hawaii Clipper disappeared into the mists of the growing Japanese war machine.

THE TRIPS

The theory may sound far-fetched, but there is evidence to support nearly every aspect of it, says Noffsinger. In 2002 and 2004, he traveled alone to Tonowas Island, using the money he raised selling his collection of vintage military helmets. On the island, he interviewed family members of eyewitnesses who relayed stories about the prisoners decades before.

Along the way, he teamed up with longtime friend and Broadlands resident Jeff Riegel, a filmmaker.

"Usually history doesn't intrigue me, but the way this guy told the story — it was contagious," Riegel said. "I kind of forced



myself on him and said, 'Hey, do you need some help with this?'"

Help indeed. The two men traveled around the United States — Massachusetts, Florida, New Hampshire, Texas — and to Canada as well, interviewing people with connections to the story.

Then, Riegel accompanied Noffsinger on his third trip to Tonowas in 2014.

"My first impressions were that it was like a third-world country,' Riegel said. "They hadn't paved a road since we blew [the Japanese military] up in '44."

Based on accounts from locals, the men were looking for that concrete slab. They knew it was roughly 30 feet by 60 feet and oriented so it was pointing north. But there were at least 1,100 concrete slabs scattered around Tonowas — where to start?

Back in Loudoun County, Noffsinger and Riegel were joined by Ashburn Farm resident and political consultant Stephen Clouse, who became fascinated with the story after hearing about it at a backyard barbecue.

"There are two types of history. The

history that is known and the history that is not known," Clouse said. "The more insidious is the history that is omitted. I think [omitting the true story of the Lost Clipper] is intentional and the question is, 'Why?'"

Clouse soon looped in his friend, a trained law enforcement officer whose name you might recognize: Steve Murphy.

Murphy, a longtime Broadlands resident, is a retired agent with the Drug Enforcement Agency. He was part of the team that hunted and brought down drug kingpin Pablo Escobar. His story was turned into the hit Netflix television show "Narcos." (Murphy was profiled in the July 2020 cover story of Ashburn Magazine.)

"Going to Miami as a DEA agent in the 1980s was an adventure," Murphy said. "Going to South America pursuing Pablo Escobar was an adventure. When I retired, the adventures were kind of over. So, this was the start of a whole new adventure."

Murphy's DEA partner, Javier Peña, also joined the team. He helped Noffsinger conduct a key set of interviews with the children of one of the lost Pan Am pilots, which confirmed many of the critical details.

Murphy, Clouse and Riegel joined Noffsinger on a fourth trip to Tonowas in 2018. Each trip — coupled with copious amounts of research and interviews conducted in the United States — had helped the team finally narrow down its focus to a specific parcel of land. It was the spot where they believed the bodies of the murdered passengers and crew had been hidden.

The site was a former Japanese military medical dispensary recorded in old photos➔

THE TEAM



GUY NOFFSINGER
Purcellville
(lived seven years in Ashburn previously)
Founder, Chief Historian



JIM JANICKI
Phoenix, Md.
Engineer, Technical Advisor



JEFF RIEGEL
Broadlands
Communications



BOB PERRY
Boston, Mass.
Ground Penetrating Radar Expert



STEPHEN CLOUSE
Ashburn Farm
Strategic Researcher



OLLIE DALE
Auckland, New Zealand
Cinematographer



STEVE MURPHY
Broadlands
(recently moved to Orlando, Fla., area)
Lead Investigator



BILL STINNETT
Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia
Local Subject Matter Expert, Local Government Liaison



JAVIER PEÑA
San Antonio, Texas
Lead Investigator

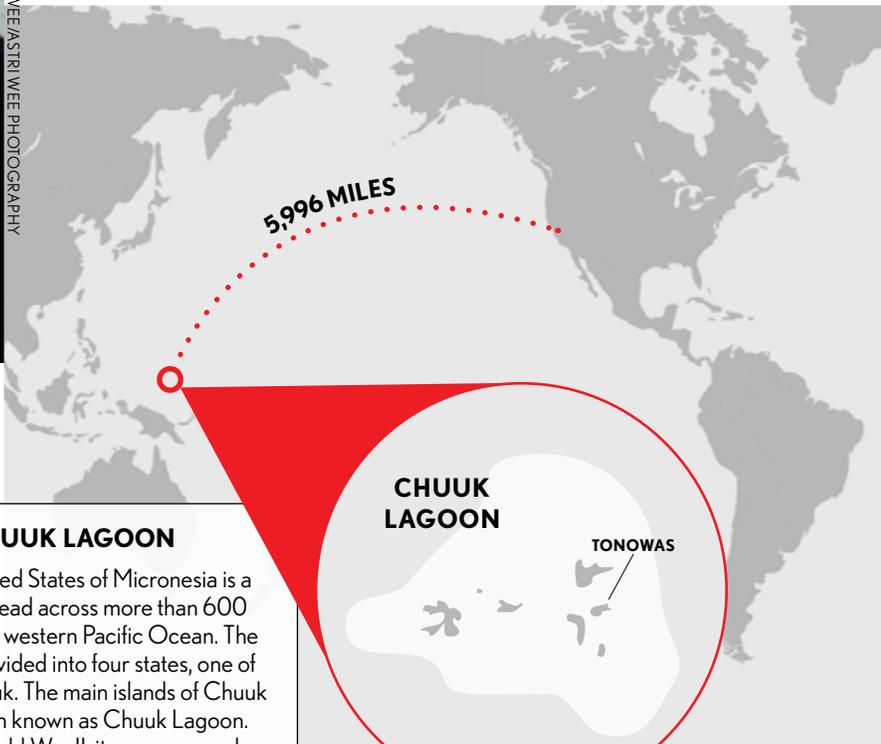


MYRON HASHIGUCHI
Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia
Local Cultural Expert



The Lost Clipper team at a lunch meeting at Clyde's Willow Creek Farm in October 2021.

PHOTO BY ASTRI WEASTRI WEE PHOTOGRAPHY



and maps. It was under construction in 1938. That's when eyewitnesses had reported the 15 Americans from the Hawaii Clipper were murdered and entombed in concrete as the slab was poured.

The dispensary is long gone, and a house stands on the land today. On Trip 3, the team dug up the floor of the house but found nothing. On Trip 4, they used ground-penetrating radar around the site. It recorded something buried under the earth, but that turned out to be large rocks, not bodies.

The team was stumped until Clouse — who had experience in the construction industry — noticed some remnants of poured concrete next to the house. The men soon discovered that a slab had been there, but it had been bulldozed in 1970 after a typhoon swept across Tonowas.

The team poked around in the overgrown ravine behind the spot and found a set of concrete steps — the same steps that appeared in photos of the old dispensary. They paid a team of locals to spend the night hacking away and removing all the underbrush and vegetation and, when they returned the next day, found a debris field filled with the former concrete slab. If the victims were indeed once in that slab, they were now buried in this field of garbage and old concrete.

Using metal detectors, the team found World War II-era medicine bottles that would have been at the Japanese dispensary and — even more critical — they found a vintage tie pin and buttons consistent with the type worn by Pan Am pilots in the 1930s.

"We were electrified," Clouse said. "I said to Guy, 'You're probably standing only a couple of inches above where they are.'"

THE FUTURE

And now comes the harsh reality of conducting an expedition such as this. The

CHUUK LAGOON

The Federated States of Micronesia is a country spread across more than 600 islands in the western Pacific Ocean. The country is divided into four states, one of which is Chuuk. The main islands of Chuuk dot a lagoon known as Chuuk Lagoon. (During World War II, it was commonly called Truk Lagoon.) Millions of years ago, the area was an underwater volcano that erupted. The remnants are today's islands. One of those islands in the Chuuk Lagoon is Tonowas, where the Lost Clipper's passengers and crew may have been taken.

discovery of the tie clip and the steps came on the team's last day on Tonowas in 2018. When traveling halfway around the world, with schedules and permits and boat rides and flights that happen only on certain days, when it's time to go, it's time to go.

Their time on the island was up with no opportunity to follow up on their latest discovery.

So now, the team is back in Ashburn and Purcellville and elsewhere as they work toward what they are calling Expedition 5. This will be the return trip to Micronesia, to the Chuuk Lagoon and the island of Tonowas. This will be their chance to finally pull up those chunks of cement and hopefully find the final resting place of 15 Americans who — one way or the other — were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Originally, the team was looking to return to the Pacific in 2020, but the COVID-19 pandemic quickly put an end to that. Now, they are aiming for 2022.

Team member Jim Janicki, who lives in the Baltimore area, came up with a plan to aid in the search. A certified search dog

handler himself, he is overseeing the addition of several highly trained cadaver canines to Expedition 5 — dogs trained to sniff out bodies, even after 80-plus years. Hiring the dogs is expensive and transporting them halfway around the world, along with their handlers and a veterinarian, adds to the cost. So, the team is working with investors and raising funds to help support the search for the Lost Clipper.

One possible route — strike a deal with television producers to turn the Hunt for the Lost Clipper into a reality TV show.

"Everyone wants to hear a good story and there's nothing new in Hollywood," Noffsinger said. "Here is a chance to tell a story no one has ever heard."

The Lost Clipper team was close to a deal with one cable network, but a rival channel debuted a series that touched on Amelia Earhart. That was too close in theme, and it squelched the deal.

But the Lost Clipper gang is not deterred.

"I feel more excited than I have ever been about this project. More alive. More attuned," Noffsinger said. "We are this close. It's like running an endurance race for 20 years and now I can see the finish line. And it's not just me alone anymore. I've picked up an entire team and we're going to cross that line together."