

For immediate release
Contact: Robert E. Hyman, 202-342-5485
Lew Toulmin, 301-942-6062

Search to Start Again for the “Last Missing WASP” of World War II

An expedition of explorers, divers, and airplane and marine archaeologists from across the country, including some international participants, will gather this fall in the Los Angeles area to restart the search for Gertrude Tompkins Silver, the last missing member of the Women’s Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) of World War II.

According to expedition spokesman Lew Toulmin, a member of The Explorers Club and a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, “The WASPs were absolutely vital to the war effort. They ferried all types of aircraft over 60 million miles from factories to shipping locations on the east and west coasts. Gertrude Tompkins Silver was one of these WASPs, and she disappeared in the Los Angeles, California area on 26 October 1944, while flying a P-51-D Mustang. She is the last missing member of this famous and dedicated group, and her disappearance is one of the great remaining mysteries of World War II.”

G. Pat Macha of Los Angeles, who has written three books on aircraft archaeology and has been researching this case for over 10 years, stated, “We hope we can solve this case soon, so that we can bring closure to the family, including Gertrude’s 100-year-old sister whom is very much rooting for us. We have interviewed a possible eyewitness to the crash, who was only a boy at the time, and that has helped our analysis quite a bit.”

On July 2, 2009, President Obama signed a bill awarding a Congressional Gold Medal to the 300 surviving WASP for their service. The President remarked, “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.”

Gertrude Tompkins Silver had only been married a month when she took off at about 4 pm from Mines Field -- now Los Angeles International Airport – headed for an evening landing at Palm Springs. She took off into the wind, into an offshore fog bank, a common late-afternoon weather condition in Southern California. She never arrived at her destination. Due to a paperwork foul-up, the search did not get under way for several days, and while the eventual search of land and sea was massive, it failed to find a trace of Silver or her plane.

Expedition members theorize there are several possible causes for the Silver crash. The most likely cause is pilot disorientation in the fog. But other possibilities include distraction due to a faulty canopy, problems with the center of gravity in the Mustang,

and problems with the engine. Said Toulmin, "If we manage to find the plane, the remaining wreckage may be able to shed some light on the cause of the crash." Toulmin added that a member of the expedition's team has already found another old aircraft in the water off Los Angeles which they are still trying to identify, but which they are sure is not a P-51-D.

Robert Hyman, a Fellow of The Explorers Club and one of the leaders of the expedition, stated, "our expedition will bring together an integrated team of skilled experts to try and find this plane. This effort is also being assisted by members of the Missing Aircraft Search Team (MAST), which recently contributed to finding a missing Cessna airplane, tail number N2700Q, in Arizona. The team includes experts in search theory, expedition management, diving and historical research. Our team has located and interviewed three WASPs who were apparently present the day Gertrude disappeared, who had never before been interviewed about this case. And we have conducted numerous other interviews and undertaken scenario analyses of the possible causes of the accident. We are very excited about this expedition, and have our fingers crossed that we can solve this great mystery in the next few months."

VETERANS DAY MEMORIAL CEREMONY
IN HONOR OF
GERTRUDE V. TOMPKINS SILVER
PROUD BIRD RESTAURANT
Nov. 11, 2008 @ 11am
11022 Aviation Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA. 90045

RSVP by November 1st
pat@aircraftwrecks.com or call (714) [REDACTED]

"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 small illustration of a biplane. In the center, there is a black and white photograph of Gertrude V. Tompkins in a military uniform, with a signature of her name overlaid. To the right, there is a larger black and white portrait of her. A cartoon illustration of a woman in a red and yellow outfit with blue wings is also present. The text is arranged in a clear, hierarchical manner, with the event title and honoree's name in large, bold letters.