



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

*Wil S. Hylton*

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In the fall of 1944, a massive American bomber carrying eleven men vanished over the Pacific islands of Palau, leaving a trail of mysteries. According to mission reports from the Army Air Forces, the plane crashed in shallow water—but when investigators went to find it, the wreckage wasn't there. Witnesses saw the crew parachute to safety, yet the airmen were never seen again. Some of their relatives whispered that they had returned to the United States in secret and lived in hiding. But they never explained why.

For sixty years, the U.S. government, the children of the missing airmen, and a maverick team of scientists and scuba divers searched the islands for clues. They trolled the water with side-scan sonar, conducted grid searches on the seafloor, crawled through thickets of mangrove and poison trees, and flew over the islands in small planes to shoot infrared photography. With every clue they found, the mystery only deepened.

Now, in a spellbinding narrative, Wil S. Hylton weaves together the true story of the missing men, their final mission, the families they left behind, and the real reason their disappearance remained shrouded in secrecy for so long. This is a story of love, loss, sacrifice, and faith—of the undying hope among the families of the missing, and the relentless determination of scientists, explorers, archaeologists, and deep-sea divers to solve one of the enduring mysteries of World War II.

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

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## **From Reader Review Vanished: The Sixty-Year Search for the Missing Men of World War II for online ebook**

### **Christine says**

I am reviewing an Advanced Reader Copy I won through Goodreads Giveaways.

Vanished tells the story of some of the many thousands of MIA soldiers in the Pacific Theatre of WWII. It's really a double story--one of the life of the young men lost in the conflict, and one of the people searching for them 60 years later. Author Wil S. Hylton does a great job at making you feel for all of these groups-- the heartache and loss of the missing soldiers' families, the promise of so many young lives with their attendant hopes and dreams cut short, the sense of purpose of the team that searches for military remains all over the world, and the life-changing story of the man who found the planes at Palau. The true-life tale reads like a gripping fiction, and I found myself engrossed in the book from the first page, really wanting to find out what happened to these soldiers and to the many others like them.

There are some small hiccups in the version that I read that may be corrected in the final version of the book--some narrative breaks and transitions that seem a little abrupt, or that I may have placed in a different position for clarity's sake--but they in no one take away from the emotional heart of the story being told here.

I look forward to more books by Hylton, who has a deft way with words and weaving research into a tale well worth reading.

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### **Michael Downs says**

I read an ARC of this book and found it mesmerizing. The narrative is taut, the reporting exhaustive, and the humanity expansive. I felt great affection for the World War II fliers who went missing in the Pacific and for the people who made it their life's business to find the last vestiges of those men. The story demands to be read.

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### **Sweetwilliam says**

I think most people will find this story interesting. Whether you are WWII air war historian, lover of 1940's nostalgia, a diver, archeologist, or someone interested in the POW recovery story, you will find something of interest in this book.

This was a good story and a nice read. Vanished is a testament to the long term suffering that the families of the MIAs experience even a half century after the war's end. These families never achieve that feeling of closure. I guess I did not realize how bad it could be and how this sense of ambiguity could last for generations. Families remain in limbo as to the exact fate of their loved ones until their remains are recovered and repatriated. This book heightened my awareness to the suffering of the families of the MIAs.

The story begins with Tommy Doyle who inherits a wooden trunk from his deceased mother. The trunk contains mementos and letters from his father, a tail gunner who was shot down in a B-24 over Palau.

Tommy's father, Jimmy Doyle, was listed as MIA but there were rumors that he survived the crash and made it back to the States and then abandoned his family. Tommy's uncle believed this story enough that they actually traveled to California to look for him. This is an example of the type of uncertainty that families of MIAs live with. In the back of their mind there is always the possibility that their husband, father, or grandfather somehow survived. They hold onto this uncertainty until bodies are recovered and repatriated. This is why locating and identifying the remains is relevant even to this day.

This book stands as a tribute to men like philanthropist Pat Scannon who made finding the location of these downed B-24s his life's ambition and men like Bill Belcher from the BentProp project. The BentProp Project is a volunteer association dedicated to the repatriation of POW/MIAs from the Pacific theater of WWII. It is comforting to know that there are fellow Americans that are committed to a cause such as this.

Finally, this book is a tribute to the young men that flew the B-24s that never returned home. The pages of this book bring these boys back to life one last time. By the end of the book the mysteries are solved and the missing men are repatriated. The families finally achieve the sense of closure that they had been longing for, for over a half of century.

For the historian, Vanished contains many interesting stories such as how Charles Lindbergh as a civilian flew with the Marines and the Army Air Corp on actual combat missions. One mission Lindy returned with 290 gallons of fuel while the other pilots had to turn back because of low fuel. He demonstrated to McArthur that the P38's range could be extended from the published 570 mile to 700 miles by reducing RPMs and thinning out the fuel mixture. Lindy promised to teach pilots how to do this. With that McArthur changed his strategy to bomb Palau from Wakde and said that this was a gift from heaven. Lindbergh accompanied the US P-38 pilots on their initial flight to Palau and was almost shot down by a zero on his tail.

Another interesting anecdote was about the Japanese POW camps in WWI. The Japanese WWI camps were "a model of civility and respect" and "...many of the camps were so comfortable and accommodating that they seemed like small towns." The German prisoners were allowed to open bakeries and other shops that the Japanese civilians would frequent. The author asks what happened in the few years between WWI and WWII that made the Japanese POW camps "like the Nazi machinery of death ... [that made them] so dehumanizing that it can be difficult to comprehend?" In fact, the author points out that the Japanese POW camps were 10X worse for the American soldier than the German POW camps.

Again, I think most people will find this story interesting.

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## Mike says

I was lucky to get an early copy of this book, and can't say enough about it. Taut, tragic, thrilling--it unfolds like a mystery and ghost story. Hylton is an unparalleled storyteller, and a deep-diving reporter, who's returned with a story of a lifetime here. For years, I've followed his work in major magazines from The New York Times Sunday Magazine to Harper's to GQ and Esquire, and I would put him at the top of the heap as a writer. His stories have ranged from political profiles to faraway journeys, always told in a direct voice that never pulls its punches. This clear-eyed honesty is what gives his work such power, and here he takes us brilliantly into the past, to World War II, its heroes and the families who waited for their return. To say more would be to spoil it. You must read this book!

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## Douglas Lord says

Take a gander over at the 940s call number : the shelves of libraries all over this great land are jam-packed with the stories and history of World War II. It is an area of constant circulation and fascination for readers, and this is a worthy addition. On a 1993 vacation to Palau, normal dude Pat Scannon sees the wreckage from a B-24 Liberator, one of America's "eighteen-ton behemoth" bombers. Though clunky and clumsy, they were an essential component of America's Clutch Win. The wreck starts Scannon wondering about the war and the men inside the plane. Why is the wreck here? Did the men survive? As a historian, Hylton does an amazing job of transferring Scannon's growing obsession to the page, writing with a lyricism that borders on fiction. Yet the book manages to retain a journalistic remove as it twines together the strands of a much larger story. Hylton skillfully telescopes from the war's bigger history to individual stories, exploring everything from the backstory of investigator Pat Scannon to Jimmie Doyle, an impossibly handsome member of one of the crashed B-24s, and overarching information about the two-headed Nimitz/MacArthur campaigns in the Pacific. The one man pipe dream soon turns into a full-bore project with partners and staff on expeditions. "It wasn't about the thrill of adventure, or finding a pot of gold," says Scannon. "It wasn't even about finding lost planes. It was about memory. It was about preserving the past."

VERDICT This combination of military, social, and personal histories makes for compulsive reading.

Hylton's efforts and extensive endnotes take "painstaking research" to new heights. Combined with writing that has clearly been edited down to the bone, this must have taken forEVER to pen, but the reward from this labor of love is an intuitive, discerning look at one aspect of comprehension.

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## Sam Sattler says

Astonishingly, more than 56,000 World War II American troops are still missing. Even more astonishing (at least to me) is that two-thirds of all missing soldiers from the entire last century were lost in World War II's Pacific theater. Now, Wil S. Hylton's *Vanished* offers new insight into the sixty-year search that has still turned up such a small percentage of the missing men.

*Vanished*, at times, reads more like a novel than a nonfiction account of the combination of tenacity and luck that sometimes results in remains being found and identified. Hylton makes this happen by focusing on one specific B-24 crew that was shot down somewhere in the vicinity of Palau, a remote South Pacific island that was for a brief time one of the war's hotspots because of its relative nearness to Japan.

The author, via journals, old letters, eyewitness interviews, and family interviews, follows the crewmembers from the beginning of their military service, through their preparation to fly on the B-24, right up to the moment of their disappearance. In the process, Hylton individualizes several of the men, reminding the reader that they, and those they left behind, were not so very different from any of us. They had hopes and dreams and big plans for the futures that would so suddenly end. And, sadly, those they left behind most often are still wondering what their loved one's final moments were like and where they are. The lucky survivors will someday get that kind of closure; the unlucky ones will die before their lost men are recovered.

*Vanished* is a reminder that not everyone has given up on finding these men before their immediate families are all gone. There are some good, dedicated men and women out there who devote a good bit of their spare time (and sometimes their own money) to continue the search. Be they archaeologists, scientists, ex-military personnel, deep-sea divers, or simply modern day explorers, these men deserve our thanks.

## Andy says

This was an amazing, gripping, and at times suspenseful read that documents one man's sudden overwhelming desire to find out what happened to three B-24 Liberators shot down near Palau in the Pacific theater of World War II. Hylton does a great job of describing Pat Scannon's current-day journey of research, travel, interviews, heartaches, and elation in discovering the mystery of what happened to those lost B-24's, and shows a masterful job of interweaving that with the very personal back story of the men on those ill-fated flights. I literally had goosebumps at times while reading this. The book also does a good job at conveying just how many of our servicemen are unaccounted for in the Pacific theater, and the incredibly long odds people like Scannon and his Bent-Prop Project face in shedding light on the mysteries surrounding them. I recommend this book for anyone, especially the patriotic and those with interests in aviation and World War II.

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## Claire says

I received Vanished as part of a Goodreads giveaway.

Vanished tells the story of an air crew that disappeared on or around the island nation of Palau, alternating modern day chapters of the excavation with reconstructed events around the final mission, as well as the personal lives of the men lost.

It was a very well-told story, and the back-and-forth structure was very effective. Most interesting was the insight on so-called "MIA families" who suffer a unique sort of grief, that of not knowing. I enjoyed getting to know all the characters, both the scientists, researchers, and descendants of the crew in the 1990s-2000s and the soldiers themselves. As someone who isn't a big WWII history buff, it was an interesting read; however, I feel like I would have gotten more out of it had I a real interest in the period.

Definitely recommended, especially for fans of WWII and military history.

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## Carol says

**The Hook** - The non-fiction choice for our Fourth Tuesday Book Group and a penchant for this kind of book.

**The Line** – *"The human impulse to bury the dead is as old as civilization itself."*

**The Sinker** – In the author Wil S. Hylton's words *"The first time Pat Scannon went to Palau, he wasn't sure what he was searching for. Vanished: The Sixty-Year Search for the Missing Men of World War II begins when Patrick Scannon, MD, PH.D., joins a scuba expedition seeking a Japanese Ship in 1993. This quest changes quickly when the crew is offered the opportunity to find a Japanese trawler, the first combat kill of George H. W. Bush, a naval aviator. Yes, that George Bush, our 41st President. It gets even more interesting when Harper Magazine publishes an article that alludes to an old document stating *strong circumstantial evidence that George Bush committed a war crime as a rookie naval pilot*"* The trawler is found and the mystery is solved leaving Scannon and his wife Susan time to enjoy a vacation but rather than hitting the

tourist sites they are hooked and instead spend the next days exploring World War II wreckage. It is here Scannon finds the wing of a plane, an American plane. *"I just came around that bend in the coral, and I was a different person."* The hunt for wrecked planes and their missing men of World War II becomes a lifetime mission. Hylton tells Scannon's story, his quest to bring the boys home, unite their remains, allowing a proper burial with some sense of closure for the families.

Scannon states *"When he scoured the archipelago with sonar, when he hung in the open doorway of a Cessna, when he slogged through the jungle and traversed the channel on yet another rainy day, he wasn't searching for the dead. He was searching for the living."*

Narrative non-fiction always provides me with food for thought. Wil S. Hylton intersperses the search for five downed planes with stories of the crews and the missing men's families. One, Tommy Doyle is quoted early in the book. He often wonders what happened to his father and how his own life would have been different if he had come home from the war. At first look I thought what makes this need to know so important but on reflection I think I came to a better understanding. Pauline Boss says this phenomenon is grief heightened by uncertainty (pg.89). She calls it *"ambiguous loss"* (pg. 90). *"Whether it's the sudden disappearance of a child or the slow erasure of a parent by dementia, the grief process is disrupted because so much of grieving depends on the knowledge and acceptance of what has happened."*

I do remember hearing about B-24's, The Liberator, the "iron coffins" that Scannon was seeking. What amazed me was the number of these produced for war, 18,000. This was more than all other planes. To give this figure perspective only approximately 1,500 Boeing 747's have been built. More impressive than the sheer number of planes built was that 12,000 salaried women were hired to meet production needs.

The last chapters of Vanished: The Sixty-Year Search for the Missing Men of World War II are brutal but end on a poignant note. Patrick Scannon and the men and women who work with him to bring our missing war dead home are to be admired. Wil S. Hylton has provided us with another important piece of history from World War II and a compelling read.

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## Chris says

Poignant tale of the men who died and remain unfound throughout the world and those they left behind . It's also the story of the men and women who seek them. It's military history, archaeology, genealogy, and a good mystery yarn all rolled into one. This book read like a magazine article which was its genesis. Better maps and more photos would have made it better. We are introduced to so many characters-photos would have facilitated keeping them clear and distinct in your mind's eye. Instead of a flyleaf with pictures grouped together we get one grainy photo at the introduction of each chapter-probably a publisher cost cutting issue. Not a single photo of the citizens of Palau who guided the searchers appears. The cover photo was taken by Tim Heatherington who was killed in Libya and shot the film Restrepo. The author is donating a portion of the profits of this book to the ongoing search for remains in Palau. Perhaps the most startling and depressing takeaway from this book is that it is dedicated amateurs who are finding our heroes and not the US government - JPAC in Hawaii. Sadly once JPAC gets involved it seems to take even longer to bring them home.

## Nancy Steinle gummel says

Vanished : The Sixty Year Search for the Missing Men of World War II by Wil S Hylton is an indepth study of the search for the remains of fighter planes and their crew lost in the Pacific Battlefield. It all started with Pat Scannan and his wife Susan went on a trip with a film crew for stories of downed aircraft and buried treasure. Scannan was hooked when he found part of a propeller in the waters of Palau. For the next 20 years he returned and did methodical search and he researched archived military records. He did it for the sake of bringing closure to the families of the MIAs. The book also details the lives of some of the crew members and their families. Tpac the military organization that searches for all MIAs from all conflicts and peacetime accidents, welcomed Scannan and his efforts locating downed planes.

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## Paul says

Actual rating: 3.5.

I heard an interview with the author on NPR. I'm interested in the Pacific bombing campaigns of WWII, and had read Laura Hillenbrand's Unbroken last year, so I knew right away I'd want to read this one too. As soon as I could get to my desktop computer I ran a Google search for "Will Hilton." I came up empty-handed. Fortunately, I remembered the book's title, which at least is spelled the way it sounds, and was able to order a copy from my local library (sorry, Wil, just having a little fun at your expense).

I'm no expert on what passes for popular writing about WWII in the Pacific, but my impression is that the Army Air Corps' bombing campaigns have been less covered than the fighter and attack campaigns flown by the Navy. True, much has been written about the B-29 bombing campaign against the Japanese homeland, but comparatively little about the island bombing raids conducted by B-24s and their crews.

I was also drawn in by the detective and forensic aspects of Hylton's story, the finding of wrecks missing for 60+ years, the determination of what had happened to the missing crewmen from those wrecks.

I was delighted to find a book that helped fill in some of the blanks in my knowledge of the B-24 campaigns, and when it comes to crafting a suspenseful story about finding lost planes and crews ... a story that would make a damn fine thriller novel, no less ... Hylton delivers. There are even villains, and boy are they ever: the Japanese and their kempai Gestapo.

I wish Hylton had included a few more photos. That's my only criticism.

I could not put this book down. I devoured it. I want more.

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## Sarah W says

In 1944, a b-24 crashed, leaving its crew MIA and their loved ones bereft and without closure. After decades of searching and unanswered questions, clues are slowly pieced together and the story of what happened is revealed to the dedicated team of scientists and researchers who refused to give up the hunt.

This true story of the journey towards discovery and answers brought me to tears on more than one occasion. It is easy to relate to the men, as we see them through their correspondence with loved ones as well as information gleaned from their family after the fact. It is also easy to understand the pain those loved ones must have felt after the loss of their son, husband, father, brother, or friend. I began to sympathize with the families and crew and found myself hoping that the story somehow ended differently. It really takes the men from being a number in a statistic about KIA/MIA to being real, tangible people who lived, loved, worried, laughed, and died fighting for their country.

At times, the story did seem to unfold in a slightly tedious way, unveiling clues only after a sometimes lengthy background explanation. But once the clue was revealed, it did make sense as to why it was included and my attention was recaptured by the story. It was good to see, also, the extent to which the researchers etc went to in order to bring the lost men home and how they truly cared about what they were doing.

Overall, "Vanished" was moving and enlightening and painted a real, accessible picture of the struggle to find these lost men and bring their tragic story to a close.

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### **Jeff says**

Well, although it kept my interest, it didn't turn out like I thought it would. I was hoping for some "grand revelation" about how the missing guys survived the plane crash and ended up in some secret government mission, etc. That, of course, is not anywhere near what the book is about. It's very similar to *Hunting Warbirds: The Obsessive Quest for the Lost Aircraft of World War II* in that there's a guy who becomes obsessed with finding a WWII aircraft crash. Where the Hoffman book recalls in agonizing detail how men attempt to get a B-29 to fly again, this Hylton book flips back and forth between the most recent decade and 1944, and illustrates the details that lead up to the finding of a B-24. Along the way, some mysteries are uncovered that the reader never has the satisfaction of finding out the answers to. Fairly quick read, but nothing special here.

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### **Pat says**

I couldn't put this book down - it is an amazing story of one man's quest to find airmen missing during WW2 in the waters off a small island in Micronesia . It is also the story of the devastating grief families go through when their loved ones are never found. I highly recommend it

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