

# Relics of Naval Aviation's Past

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The legacy of some Navy aircraft and the crews who flew them remains long forgotten in the mountains of Oahu, Hawaii. As in other remote locations, aircraft that crashed during missions lie untouched and draw the interest of amateur aviation archeologists. The sites can be visited and photographed but they must not be disturbed without a permit from the Naval Historical Center in Washington, D.C., which manages all U.S. Navy historic ship and aircraft wreck sites, on both land and underwater.

The remains of an aircraft that crashed during the Korean War are scattered on one site in Oahu. Navy patrol aircraft flew throughout the Korean area of operations, and participated in the blockade of North Korea, keeping merchant shipping and fishing fleets under surveillance and deterring hostile submarine activity. Patrol aircraft participated in

minelaying, dropped flares for air strikes and conducted weather reconnaissance and search and rescue operations.

Patrol Squadron (VP) 7 arrived in June 1953 from Naval Air Station (NAS) Quonset Point, R.I., less than one month before the armistice on 27 July. It was the only Atlantic Fleet patrol squadron to deploy to the war zone. VP-7 was equipped with P2V-5 Neptunes and was based at NAS Iwakuni, Japan, from which the squadron patrolled the Sea of Japan and the Yellow Sea.

VP-7 departed from the western Pacific in January 1954. On 21 January, the eight-man crew of aircraft HE 10 (BuNo 124874) executed a missed approach at NAS Barbers Point, Hawaii. The aircraft turned toward the center of the island rather than turning out over the ocean, and impacted the Waianae Mountain range at approximately 2130.



Top, VP-7's P2V-5 BuNo 127765 circa 1953 is similar to the aircraft that crashed on Oahu in 1954. Above, the severed vertical stabilizer of P2V-5 BuNo 124874 lies near the tail section at the aircraft crash site.



Above, the U.S. white star insignia can be seen on the left wing fragment. Left, one Wright R3350-30W engine rests next to a tree. Below, the BuNo is visible on the tail section. Below middle, part of the word NAVY remains on the left wing. Below bottom, the 20mm tail gun turret.

The crewmen lost in this mishap included pilot Lieutenant (jg) Walter J. Hanzo; Ensigns Gerald M. Hazlett and Wilbur D. Cooper; ADC John R. Staples; AD2 Joseph D. Beczek; AM2 Paul M. Koheler; AT2 Joseph M. Maksymon; and AT3 Richard K. Brown.

Today, the aircraft rests on a steep slope where a broken tree stands testament to the force of the impact. Many small trees have grown up near the site and countless twisted pieces of metal are scattered around. Authorities long ago removed the remains of the crew, along with the guns and some of the electronics. The tail section, including the tail gun turret, is the largest piece of wreckage remaining. The bureau number under the left tail is in perfect condition, almost as if it were painted yesterday. Evidence of the crash and fire can be seen on the fuselage and various parts. A left wing section still bears the insignia of a white star on one surface and the letters NA as part of NAVY on the



other. One of the 3,700-horsepower Wright R3350-30W engines sits next to the fuselage and the other is further down the slope. It is believed that a large amount of wreckage was either lost to the post-crash fire or buried in the earth. No excavation at the site is permitted. Even rearranging parts of the aircraft to take photographs is forbidden.

Crash sites like this one have historical and educational value. The Navy emphasizes preservation and minimizes recovery by



outside parties. Without a permit, the policy is strictly "Look but don't touch." On public land, there are laws that protect the wrecks.

Amateur archeologists should keep in mind that these sites are silent memorials to those who served and sacrificed in both war and peacetime. 



P2V-5 BuNo 127764 shows the minelaying configuration used during VP-7's 1953 deployment.

See the website of the Underwater Archeology Branch of the Naval Historical Center at [www.history.navy.mil/branches/nhcorg12.htm](http://www.history.navy.mil/branches/nhcorg12.htm) for the Navy's guidelines and archeological research permit application on ship and aircraft wrecks.

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