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## World War II hobbyist solves a family's decades-old mystery

The fate of Los Angeles pilot Lt. Moszek Murray Zanger had been unknown to his three nieces until Henry Sakaida, who studies WWII air combat incidents, stepped in.

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Villagers from the Vudal settlement who helped uncover a U.S. Marine Corsair fighter that crashed in Papua New Guinea in late 1944 gather after markings on the plane were identified. Pilot Lt. Moszek Murray Zanger bailed out but was killed by the Japanese. Zanger's three nieces stand behind the USMC flag (left to right): Andrea Talbutt, Marcy Hanigan and Susan Nishihira. Holding the Papua New Guinea flag is Veline Wesley, who found the Goodyear marking on a fragment that everybody had been searching for. In the rear between Wesley and Talbutt in sunglasses is Henry Sakaida, a Temple City researcher who had discovered for the sisters what had happened to their uncle. Expedition leader Justin Taylan is kneeling in shorts and a hat at front left. (Justin Taylan / April 18, 2012)

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Photo: Lt. Moszek Murray Zanger



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For old soldiers at monthly Concord meeting, a recall of duty

After 31 years, military historian and researcher Henry Sakaida has finally closed his most perplexing wartime investigation.

Sakaida is a retired Temple City nursery owner whose hobby is studying World War II air combat incidents and then tracking down dogfight participants in hope of turning old enemies into friends.

He's back home after taking three sisters, including one from North Hollywood, to a remote South Pacific island jungle where their uncle disappeared in late 1944 after bailing out of his Marine Corps Corsair fighter.

The fate of Los Angeles pilot Lt. Moszek Murray Zanger had been unknown to nieces Marcy Hanigan, Andrea Talbutt and Susan Nishihira until Sakaida stepped in.

It was 1981 when Sakaida first learned from Australian military records that several Japanese prisoners of war had seen a downed American pilot in captivity in March 1945. In the reports, the Japanese airmen remembered his name as "Zanga."

Sakaida researched Marine fighter squadron records from the National Archives and discovered the captured pilot's actual name was Zanger. The documents indicated he had collided with his wingman's plane while patrolling over Rabaul, Papua New Guinea.

Zanger parachuted out of his Corsair as it spiraled 4,000 feet down and slammed into the jungle. His wingman managed to limp back to base in his damaged plane.

The Japanese reported that Zanger had been shot and killed shortly after his capture when he grabbed a sword and

attacked two guards while trying to escape.

But Sakaida learned that a forensic study of Zanger's remains when they were recovered by the U.S. showed he had been beaten, not shot.

Further research showed that the downed pilot had tried to flee the island in an inflatable dinghy and was captured by a Japanese Navy patrol boat. He was kept chained inside a hut, malnourished, for about six months before being killed and buried near an airstrip, according to Sakaida.

Hoping to include the Zanger incident in his book "Siege of Rabaul," Sakaida in 1997 discovered through a Freedom of Information Act request that the flier was later reinterred somewhere in Los Angeles.

Sakaida began calling local cemeteries. One memorial park operator said the name Zanger might be Jewish and suggested that Sakaida call the Home of Peace Cemetery in East Los Angeles. Zanger's grave was there.

Soon visiting the cemetery, Sakaida left a Post-It note on Zanger's grave marker in hope of contacting surviving family members. He heard nothing, however.

It turned out that Zanger's mother had remarried, changed her name and died in 1976. His father had died in 1982, but the death certificate mistakenly listed his last name as "Sanger."

So the circumstances of their uncle's disappearance had been a mystery to his three nieces. Their mother had spared them the sad details of her brother's death and eventual burial in Los Angeles. When she died in 2009 at age 92, her daughters decided to piece together their family's Polish-immigrant history on their own.

The trio was flabbergasted when Talbutt typed the name of the man they knew as "Uncle Mike" into an Internet search engine. They discovered on <http://www.pacificwrecks.com> that Sakaida had researched Zanger's disappearance.

They contacted him through the nursery, where as a boy Sakaida honed his interest in aerial dogfights by building model warplanes and then crashing and burning them in the back of the



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"Instead of me tracking them down, they tracked me down," said Sakaida, now 60. "I turned over a thick folder I'd collected about him and told them that we all should someday go to Rabaul."

Last month, they did.

Pacificwrecks' Justin Taylan found the coordinates of the Corsair's crash site and helped plan the expedition. Familiar with Pacific Islanders and the local etiquette in Papua New Guinea, he suggested the group arrive with items to give to villagers.

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**whiskey Man** at 9:48 PM May 28, 2012

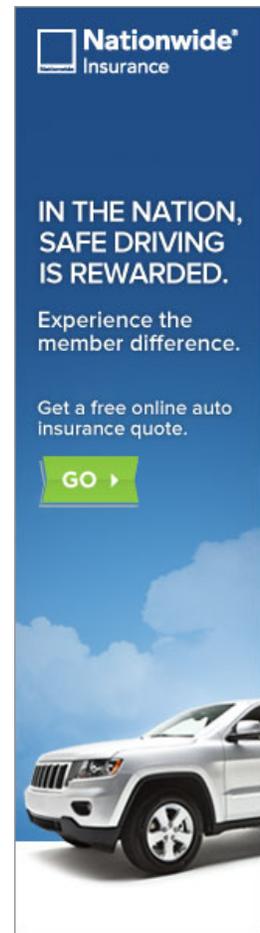
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**marktravers21** at 7:44 PM May 28, 2012

Wonderful article and thanks Mr. Sakaida. It brought a tear to my eyes. I guess you'd have to have lived through those World War II years, like I did, to appreciate what you did to really understand the emotion one feels for those who served and gave their lives for us. Thanks L.A. Times for the human interest story and thanks again, Mr. Sakaida.

**DecentDiscourse** at 7:09 PM May 28, 2012

I don't get it. Why all the fuss for a bit of wreckage when they already knew what happened and where he was buried before they went to the island? I'm happy for them and all of that, but there's not much payoff in reading this entire story.



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