

# Navy Cools to Antarctic Plan

The Navy isn't in a spirit of southbound adventure this winter, to judge by its recent announcement that it will not support a plan to recover the remains of three U.S. servicemen trapped in Antarctica for the past 62 years. A team of adventurers led by Seattle photographer **Lou Sapienza** had joined with descendants of the men — members of an ill-fated 1946 mapping mission aboard a PBM-5 Mariner seaplane — to lobby the Navy to provide \$1.3 million in the recovery effort. But late last month, Navy Secretary **Donald C. Winter** wrote to the backers of the plan to declare that “the difficulty and risk involved with a recovery is too great.”



**THOSE LEFT BEHIND:** Maxwell A. Lopez, top, Wendell K. Hendersin and Frederick Warren Williams.

Winter also stressed that the Navy sometimes elects to leave the bodies of deceased servicemen at the site of their downed ship or airplane — citing the celebrated case of the sailors who died aboard the *USS Arizona*, which the Japanese sank during their 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor. But Sapienza insists Winter's reply is off base. The weather in the section of Antarctica where the remains are located is actually relatively good for the continent, he says, and his crew — veterans of a 1990s expedition to Greenland that recovered a World War II-era P-38 Lightning known as “Glacier Girl” — are well-suited to the task. And he says the comparison to the *Arizona* is particularly misleading. “This is not a national monument where people can go and visit the remains of their loved ones,” he says of the remote grave. Sapienza says surviving family members of the three aviators remain unanimous in support of the mission.

In the meantime, mission supporters are renewing efforts to win congressional backing for the plan. One of the victim's descendants, **Betty Jean Spencer**, is represented in the House by Illinois Republican **Mark Steven Kirk**, who is drafting a resolution to pressure the Navy to reverse its decision.

— SHAWN ZELLER