

No Time Limit for the Fallen

Soldiers and sailors who died in foreign lands long ago might finally be headed home, thanks to two amendments on the defense authorization bill that the House passed last week.

In 1804, Lt. **Richard Somers** and the 12 members of his crew died in waters off Libya while trying to launch a daring attack during the First Barbary War. Their ship was filled with explosives to blow up the enemy fleet while it sat in Tripoli's harbor. But the explosives detonated prematurely, killing all aboard. They were buried in mass graves in Tripoli.

House Intelligence Chairman **Mike Rogers**, a Michigan Republican and Army veteran who saw the graves in 2004, and Rep. **Frank A. LoBiondo**, R-N.J., say it's time to return the remains. "It's something important in

the military ethos that we leave no man behind," Rogers says. "I don't care if it's two days, 20 days or 200 years later."

Their amendment would require the Defense Department to recover and identify the sailors and give them a military funeral, once NATO operations in Libya end.

Another amendment might finally lead to the return of three men entombed in the ice of Antarctica. In 1946, Navy sea-plane *George I* crashed during a mapping mission over Thurston Island. Six survivors were rescued, but the bodies of three crash victims lie buried below at least 100 feet of packed ice. To complicate matters, the glacier is shifting and will eventually fall into the sea.

The Navy has cited concerns about operating safely in Ant-



CRASH SITE: In 1946, survivors buried three victims under a wing.

next year, although he hopes that the Navy will do the recovery.

The amendment offered by New York Democrat **Timothy H. Bishop** declares that the Defense Department should "pursue all feasible efforts to recover, identify and return" the sailors' bodies.

In both cases, the efforts would probably be handled by the Joint

arctica as the main obstacle. **Lou Sapienza**, a deep-glacier recovery specialist and advocate for the victims' families, says the project is reasonably safe. In the absence of government action, he plans to lead a survey expedition in December to find the crash site and intends to excavate the men

POW/MIA Accounting Command, a task force set up in 2003 to consolidate recovery efforts. With a \$70 million budget, the group focuses on finding remains from World War II onward, although it has also made recoveries dating from the Civil War.

— **ALEXANDER C. HART**