

The Bermuda Triangle of the Far West

The country is full of bizarre mysteries and unanswered questions: UFO sightings, haunted locations, Bigfoot, and no one has any idea what happened to Amelia Earhart. But down in sunny Arizona, resting at the bottom of Lake Havasu's vast body of water in Mohave County, there's another freak abnormality to add to the ever-growing list. Perhaps forever lost on the floor of the reservoir are two rather large World War II planes that crashed into the lake and are submerged in the dark water and the silt. The oldest of the two has been down there for nearly eighty years, and the question isn't why no one can get them out. The real question is, where have they gone?

On August 4, 1943, a Pursuit P-40 aircraft piloted by Glen D. Benson crashed in the lake due to engine failure. Benson survived to tell the tale by using his parachute, but the plane sank into the water. Diving teams spent years attempting to locate the aircraft to no avail.

Nearly 17 years later, on January 2, 1960, a war surplus North American AT-63 single-engine fighter also went down, allegedly due to the carburetor freezing up. The crash led to the deaths of two brothers from San Bernardino, who were in the area for duck hunting. The bodies of the two men were recovered, but the plane had mysteriously vanished.

For nearly 80 years, these two aircraft have been residing somewhere in the lake, and their loss has become something of an enigma. The main tourist attraction of the city of Lake Havasu, besides the London Bridge and the miniature lighthouses, is of course, the lake itself. Scuba diving is an important pastime here, and the lake is incredibly popular for diving hobbyists. One of the more well-known areas is Miller's Folly (or Paddle Wheel Wreck), a '70s-era sunken party boat that rests at the bottom of Skier's Cove. This raises the question of why a power boat can be easily discovered and become a tourist attraction, but an enormous 30-foot-wide fighter plane could just utterly disappear. Considering Lake Havasu's deepest point is about 90 feet, even those who live in the area have a hard time justifying this oddity.

"The deepest point in the lake is closer to the dam," said Terence Concannon, President/CEO of Go Lake Havasu. "But where the planes could have landed is something closer to around 40 to 50 feet deep. For as long as the planes have been down there, it's surprising that someone wouldn't have come across them, even by accident."

Since the deep end of an average swimming pool is about 12 feet deep, 50 feet isn't exactly the Mariana Trench (the deepest oceanic trench on Earth). So, these missing vessels should be easily found, and the local government has been set on doing so. In 2014, the Lake Havasu City Convention & Visitors Bureau placed a \$1,000 reward for photographic evidence and GPS coordinates of the planes. "It's not some Loch Ness monster down [there]," said Doug Traub, CEO of the CVB at the time. "These

are two real planes piloted by real people. These mysteries attest to the commitment of our servicemen and women and the eternal lure of the skies above."

The reward got the attention of Joel Silverstein, Lake Havasu's Scuba Training & Technology Vice President and Chief Operating Officer. He led a four-person search party in 2014, armed with a proton magnetometer to map the lake area where the planes may have crashed



and investigate any deviations. Unfortunately, despite his experience in the field and the necessary tools, Silverstein emerged from the water empty-handed, as did others who attempted to find the planes.

79 years on, the two planes still lie dormant somewhere at the bottom of the lake. While their locations are still a mystery, it should be known that the \$1,000 reward offer was never repealed, and clearly, the Convention & Visitors Bureau wasn't the only interested party. "The offer has never been rescinded, so if anyone can find the planes, Go Lake Havasu will gladly pay up," promised Concannon.

Everyone loves a good mystery. These types of puzzles are a part of the very fabric of America. But if an avid diver or two are ever in search of adventure, there's a mystery waiting to be solved—in the Bermuda Triangle of the Far West.