

1

00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:06,000

58 people went missing and families have never gotten closer.

2

00:00:06,000 --> 00:00:10,000

We're not looking for the perfect outline of a plane.

3

00:00:10,000 --> 00:00:15,000

No, this thing broke up either on impact or with an explosion in the air.

4

00:00:15,000 --> 00:00:18,000

This changes everything.

5

00:00:18,000 --> 00:00:22,000

So put another way, there's probably an airplane wreck somewhere in there.

6

00:00:24,000 --> 00:00:28,000

Based on all of the evidence, this is where we have to search.

7

00:00:28,000 --> 00:00:30,000

Got plans tomorrow?

8

00:00:30,000 --> 00:00:31,000

I do now.

9

00:00:41,000 --> 00:00:43,000

Oh, something down there.

10

00:00:43,000 --> 00:00:44,000

This could be it.

11

00:00:44,000 --> 00:00:45,000

That could be the plane.

12

00:00:45,000 --> 00:00:48,000

I can see something dark down there.

13

00:00:48,000 --> 00:00:50,000

Wait, what is that?

14

00:00:59,000 --> 00:01:01,000

As you might imagine, I fly a lot.

15

00:01:01,000 --> 00:01:03,000

Like, a lot.

16

00:01:03,000 --> 00:01:07,000

From jumbo jets to puddle jumpers, if it flies, I've probably been on it.

17

00:01:07,000 --> 00:01:10,000

And like the rest of the world, I was shocked a few years ago

18

00:01:10,000 --> 00:01:14,000

at the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370.

19

00:01:14,000 --> 00:01:20,000

How could something as massive as a commercial passenger plane just go missing?

20

00:01:20,000 --> 00:01:24,000

Even more surprising, this was not a singular tragedy.

21

00:01:24,000 --> 00:01:28,000

It happened before, right here in the United States.

22

00:01:30,000 --> 00:01:33,000

In the early hours of June 24th, 1950,

23

00:01:33,000 --> 00:01:37,000

a Northwest Airlines DC-4 with 58 souls aboard

24

00:01:37,000 --> 00:01:40,000

was en route between New York and Minneapolis

25

00:01:40,000 --> 00:01:44,000

when she vanished into thin air over the waters of Lake Michigan.

26

00:01:44,000 --> 00:01:46,000

Never to be seen again.

27

00:01:47,000 --> 00:01:52,000

At the time, it was the worst aviation disaster in U.S. history.

28

00:01:52,000 --> 00:01:55,000

And even today, Northwest Airlines Flight 2501

29

00:01:55,000 --> 00:02:00,000

is the only large U.S. commercial airliner that remains missing.

30

00:02:00,000 --> 00:02:03,000

And yet most people know nothing about it.

31

00:02:05,000 --> 00:02:10,000

However, a team of experts has doggedly searched for 15 years,

32

00:02:10,000 --> 00:02:15,000

hoping to find answers and provide closure for the next few years.

33

00:02:16,000 --> 00:02:20,000

They've been able to find answers for the families of the victims.

34

00:02:20,000 --> 00:02:24,000

Now, they've narrowed down the area of a possible crash site

35

00:02:24,000 --> 00:02:29,000

and new technology may finally pinpoint the exact location of the wreckage.

36

00:02:31,000 --> 00:02:35,000

So I'm taking to the skies on a mission of remembrance

37

00:02:35,000 --> 00:02:41,000

and a quest to uncover the truth behind America's forgotten aviation mystery,

38

00:02:41,000 --> 00:02:44,000

Northwest 2501.

39

00:02:46,000 --> 00:02:48,000

The first to escape.

40

00:02:48,000 --> 00:02:50,000

Explorer.

41

00:02:50,000 --> 00:02:52,000

Adventurer.

42

00:02:52,000 --> 00:02:56,000

And a guy who ends up in some very strange situations.

43

00:02:56,000 --> 00:02:59,000

That was exciting.

44

00:02:59,000 --> 00:03:03,000

With a degree in archeology and a passion for the unexplained,

45

00:03:03,000 --> 00:03:05,000

I traveled to the ends of the earth,

46

00:03:05,000 --> 00:03:08,000

investigating the greatest legends in history.

47

00:03:08,000 --> 00:03:12,000

This is Expedition Unknown.

48

00:03:17,000 --> 00:03:22,000

Our story begins at a familiar place, in a time nearly forgotten.

49

00:03:22,000 --> 00:03:29,000

New York's LaGuardia Airport in the Golden Age of Aviation, June 23, 1950.

50

00:03:31,000 --> 00:03:34,000

A friendly flight crew helps passengers check in.

51

00:03:34,000 --> 00:03:38,000

A man pays for his seat on the spot by personal check.

52

00:03:38,000 --> 00:03:42,000

A child carries her doll on her first airplane trip.

53

00:03:43,000 --> 00:03:49,000

But what the 55 passengers aboard don't know is that this is no normal flight.

54

00:03:49,000 --> 00:03:54,000

It is Northwest Airlines Flight 2501.

55

00:03:54,000 --> 00:03:59,000

And in less than five hours, it will vanish off the face of the earth.

56

00:04:06,000 --> 00:04:09,000

To find out what happened to America's missing airliner,

57

00:04:09,000 --> 00:04:13,000

I traveled to Minneapolis, Minnesota.

58

00:04:13,000 --> 00:04:18,000

I like to think of the larger of the Twin Cities as the Paris of the Upper Central Midwest.

59

00:04:18,000 --> 00:04:25,000

And for 76 years, Minneapolis was the headquarters for what was once one of the world's largest airlines.

60

00:04:25,000 --> 00:04:35,000

We give you half the world, a Northwest Airlines.

61

00:04:35,000 --> 00:04:41,000

Though the company was swallowed up by Delta in 2010, everything that's left is here,

62

00:04:41,000 --> 00:04:45,000

in a museum covering almost a century of aviation history,

63

00:04:45,000 --> 00:04:48,000

tended over by former Northwest employee Bruce Kitt.

64

00:04:48,000 --> 00:04:51,000

Welcome to the Northwest Airlines History Center, Josh.

65

00:04:51,000 --> 00:04:54,000

I'm an aviation nerd, so I gotta say I'm in heaven here.

66

00:04:54,000 --> 00:04:56,000

Oh, you're gonna love this place.

67

00:04:56,000 --> 00:05:00,000

This is awesome. So, okay, this huge airline started when and where and how?

68

00:05:00,000 --> 00:05:05,000

Started here in Minnesota, 1926 in St. Paul.

69

00:05:05,000 --> 00:05:10,000

And like all airlines back then, started carrying the mail for the post office.

70

00:05:10,000 --> 00:05:12,000

And what's the fleet look like back then?

71

00:05:12,000 --> 00:05:16,000

The fleet, lower your expectations, two rented by planes.

72

00:05:16,000 --> 00:05:22,000

In many ways, the story of Northwest is the story of commercial aviation itself.

73

00:05:22,000 --> 00:05:27,000

Frontier years of mail and cargo service give way to the passenger era.

74

00:05:27,000 --> 00:05:32,000

And suddenly, the world is accessible to people in a way never before imagined.

75

00:05:32,000 --> 00:05:34,000

An incredible evolution.

76

00:05:34,000 --> 00:05:40,000

Well, you look at three passengers here, by the time you get to the Boeing 747, you're pushing 400.

77

00:05:40,000 --> 00:05:41,000

All in less than a century.

78

00:05:41,000 --> 00:05:43,000

All in less than a century.

79

00:05:43,000 --> 00:05:45,000

Let's talk about what it was like to be in these planes.

80

00:05:45,000 --> 00:05:47,000

Can you give me a sense of it?

81

00:05:47,000 --> 00:05:48,000

Yeah, I think I can.

82

00:05:48,000 --> 00:05:49,000

Yes, why don't you come with me?

83

00:05:49,000 --> 00:05:51,000

Sure.

84

00:05:51,000 --> 00:05:58,000

Bruce walks me through the museum, which contains artifacts from every era of Northwest history.

85

00:05:58,000 --> 00:06:00,000

So we move into the 1950s.

86

00:06:00,000 --> 00:06:02,000

This is the elegant era.

87

00:06:02,000 --> 00:06:05,000

This is the glamorous era of air travel.

88

00:06:05,000 --> 00:06:07,000

And people would dress up to travel.

89

00:06:07,000 --> 00:06:09,000

Oh, they would dress to the nines, yes.

90

00:06:09,000 --> 00:06:12,000

But they'd get on that plane and they were well taken care of.

91

00:06:12,000 --> 00:06:15,000

The seats were comfortable, kind of like a lazy boy in the sky.

92

00:06:15,000 --> 00:06:16,000

Right.

93

00:06:16,000 --> 00:06:19,000

The meal service was what they mostly wrote about.

94

00:06:19,000 --> 00:06:20,000

If people wanted to eat on planes.

95

00:06:20,000 --> 00:06:21,000

Wanted to eat on planes.

96

00:06:21,000 --> 00:06:23,000

You would have a tray put down in front of you.

97

00:06:23,000 --> 00:06:25,000

There would be China.

98

00:06:25,000 --> 00:06:26,000

There would be silverware.

99

00:06:26,000 --> 00:06:28,000

There would be glassware.

100

00:06:28,000 --> 00:06:33,000

I mean, you're eating a meal that you would have at your best restaurant at home.

101

00:06:33,000 --> 00:06:39,000

And here you're eating it at 10,000 feet while you're traveling 200 miles an hour to wherever you wanted to go.

102

00:06:39,000 --> 00:06:43,000

Though flying is originally an exclusive playground for the Uber rich.

103

00:06:43,000 --> 00:06:48,000

By the 1950s, Northwest helps pioneer another innovation in aviation.

104

00:06:48,000 --> 00:06:50,000

Coach class.

105

00:06:50,000 --> 00:06:55,000

More seats, fewer perks, but it opens up the skies to people like you and me.

106

00:06:55,000 --> 00:07:00,000

Here we're on the cusp of mass transportation in the airline industry.

107

00:07:00,000 --> 00:07:04,000

And the fares are economical and everybody's traveling.

108

00:07:04,000 --> 00:07:13,000

As Northwest Airlines grew, they began to open some of the first international routes into Asia, rebranding as Northwest Orient.

109

00:07:13,000 --> 00:07:19,000

To publicize the move, they even rolled out ads featuring legendary comedian Buster Keaton.

110

00:07:19,000 --> 00:07:22,000

Northwest Airlines.

111

00:07:22,000 --> 00:07:25,000

The gong would always sound before he got to it.

112

00:07:25,000 --> 00:07:28,000

So it was Northwest Orient Airlines.

113

00:07:28,000 --> 00:07:29,000

It was the tagline.

114

00:07:29,000 --> 00:07:35,000

Northwest 2501 was the first leg of the new routes into Asia.

115

00:07:35,000 --> 00:07:43,000

A six hour nighttime coach from New York that would fly west before turning north over the Great Lakes to reach Minneapolis.

116

00:07:43,000 --> 00:07:48,000

From there, travelers could go on to Seattle, Anchorage and Tokyo.

117

00:07:48,000 --> 00:07:51,000

And the equipment here was a DC-4.

118

00:07:51,000 --> 00:07:52,000

Right.

119

00:07:52,000 --> 00:07:56,000

It was a four engine transport much like the one the model behind you.

120

00:07:56,000 --> 00:07:57,000

This is it right here, right?

121

00:07:57,000 --> 00:07:58,000

Yes.

122

00:07:58,000 --> 00:07:59,000

So this is the planning question.

123

00:07:59,000 --> 00:08:00,000

Right.

124

00:08:00,000 --> 00:08:01,000

This is a DC-4.

125

00:08:01,000 --> 00:08:05,000

This is the livery that it would have flown in for Flight 2501.

126

00:08:05,000 --> 00:08:11,000

The key to investigating Flight 2501 is understanding what may have happened to the aircraft.

127

00:08:11,000 --> 00:08:14,000

And Bruce here is a bona fide expert.

128

00:08:14,000 --> 00:08:17,000

Now you were a mechanic for Northwest for many years.

129

00:08:17,000 --> 00:08:18,000

Yes, many.

130

00:08:18,000 --> 00:08:19,000

26.

131

00:08:19,000 --> 00:08:20,000

What do you make of the DC-4?

132

00:08:20,000 --> 00:08:28,000

As a plane, it had a very good record that represented a quantum jump, a doubling actually of passengers that you could carry.

133

00:08:28,000 --> 00:08:35,000

If you really want to get an understanding for this plane in Flight 2501, a model is not going to show you.

134

00:08:35,000 --> 00:08:37,000

You need to go see the real thing.

135

00:08:37,000 --> 00:08:38,000

The real thing?

136

00:08:38,000 --> 00:08:41,000

A real airplane.

137

00:08:41,000 --> 00:08:49,000

To discover what may have brought down the plane, I seize a once in a lifetime opportunity at the Washington County Airport outside of Pittsburgh,

138

00:08:49,000 --> 00:08:54,000

where a fully operational DC-4 is waiting on the tarmac.

139

00:08:54,000 --> 00:08:58,000

And now we're living the Spirit of Freedom, our Tim Chope and Dave Shirtloff.

140

00:08:58,000 --> 00:08:59,000

Nice to meet you, sir.

141

00:08:59,000 --> 00:09:00,000

And look at this beauty.

142

00:09:00,000 --> 00:09:01,000

Wow.

143

00:09:01,000 --> 00:09:02,000

Yeah, you did something.

144

00:09:02,000 --> 00:09:03,000

Unbelievable.

145

00:09:03,000 --> 00:09:05,000

And how many of these DC-4s are still flying?

146

00:09:05,000 --> 00:09:08,000

Well, as we know it right now, about six in the world.

147

00:09:08,000 --> 00:09:09,000

Six in the whole world.

148

00:09:09,000 --> 00:09:10,000

Yeah, that's it.

149

00:09:10,000 --> 00:09:11,000

Wow.

150

00:09:11,000 --> 00:09:16,000

It has a unique livery, Spirit of Freedom, and I see Berlin, Berlin Airlift on the tail.

151

00:09:16,000 --> 00:09:18,000

Berlin Airlift was a humanitarian operation?

152

00:09:18,000 --> 00:09:21,000

That is correct, just after World War II.

153

00:09:22,000 --> 00:09:29,000

In 1948, Soviet troops blockaded West Berlin, cutting off all rail and road links into the city.

154

00:09:29,000 --> 00:09:33,000

In response, the United States launched the Berlin Airlift,

155

00:09:33,000 --> 00:09:38,000

and for 18 months an armada of planes, including this one, went into action,

156

00:09:38,000 --> 00:09:43,000

dropping nearly 3 million tons of supplies to the desperate Berliners below.

157

00:09:46,000 --> 00:09:48,000

How long have you been piloting this plane?

158

00:09:48,000 --> 00:09:50,000

I'm proud to say 26 years.

159

00:09:50,000 --> 00:09:51,000

Wow.

160

00:09:51,000 --> 00:09:53,000

I noticed a few oil pools underneath it.

161

00:09:53,000 --> 00:09:54,000

That's not normal?

162

00:09:54,000 --> 00:09:55,000

Yes, very common.

163

00:09:55,000 --> 00:09:57,000

For a radial engine, that's very common.

164

00:09:57,000 --> 00:09:58,000

The same goes like this.

165

00:09:58,000 --> 00:10:03,000

If there's no oil on it, or no oil under it, don't fly it, there's no oil in it.

166

00:10:03,000 --> 00:10:04,000

Got it.

167

00:10:04,000 --> 00:10:05,000

So oil's a good thing.

168

00:10:05,000 --> 00:10:06,000

Yeah.

169

00:10:06,000 --> 00:10:07,000

Well, Josh, shall we go flying?

170

00:10:07,000 --> 00:10:08,000

I think we should.

171

00:10:08,000 --> 00:10:09,000

I'm in your hands, gentlemen.

172

00:10:09,000 --> 00:10:10,000

Let's go.

173

00:10:10,000 --> 00:10:11,000

Wow.

174

00:10:13,000 --> 00:10:17,000

The DC-4 may not be the size of a jumbo jet, but don't call her small.

175

00:10:17,000 --> 00:10:23,000

Her wingspan is 118 feet, and she weighs a hefty 73,000 pounds.

176

00:10:23,000 --> 00:10:27,000

In design, she's nearly identical to Northwest 2501,

177

00:10:27,000 --> 00:10:33,000

offering me the rare opportunity to understand what may have happened aboard that fateful flight.

178

00:10:33,000 --> 00:10:35,000

That is, if I can find my seat.

179

00:10:35,000 --> 00:10:36,000

I'm going here.

180

00:10:36,000 --> 00:10:37,000

Yes, sir.

181

00:10:37,000 --> 00:10:38,000

Okay.

182

00:10:38,000 --> 00:10:39,000

There you go.

183

00:10:39,000 --> 00:10:40,000

This is me.

184

00:10:43,000 --> 00:10:45,000

Okay, David, let's have me forestart.

185

00:10:45,000 --> 00:10:47,000

Okay, password briefing.

186

00:10:47,000 --> 00:10:48,000

It is complete.

187

00:10:48,000 --> 00:10:49,000

Preflight inspection.

188

00:10:49,000 --> 00:10:50,000

Complete.

189

00:10:50,000 --> 00:10:51,000

Doors.

190

00:10:51,000 --> 00:10:56,000

Before anyone turns a key, Tim and Dave have a lengthy series of pre-flight checklists,

191

00:10:56,000 --> 00:10:58,000

and I do mean lengthy.

192

00:10:58,000 --> 00:11:00,000

Gearpins, Peter, cover, tail post.

193

00:11:00,000 --> 00:11:01,000

They're on board.

194

00:11:01,000 --> 00:11:02,000

Round of commitment, personnel.

195

00:11:03,000 --> 00:11:04,000

Posted here on the left.

196

00:11:04,000 --> 00:11:05,000

Fire and guard, fire equipment.

197

00:11:05,000 --> 00:11:06,000

Posted.

198

00:11:06,000 --> 00:11:08,000

Before such a, it is complete.

199

00:11:08,000 --> 00:11:14,000

Okay, start sequence will be 3421, and we're going to run on all the main tanks, 1234.

200

00:11:14,000 --> 00:11:15,000

Roger.

201

00:11:15,000 --> 00:11:18,000

Okay, turning three.

202

00:11:18,000 --> 00:11:23,000

Turning two, three, four.

203

00:11:27,000 --> 00:11:31,000

The first of the four 80-year-old engines springs to life.

204

00:11:31,000 --> 00:11:32,000

Okay, maybe not springs.

205

00:11:32,000 --> 00:11:33,000

Coughs.

206

00:11:33,000 --> 00:11:34,000

Board clear.

207

00:11:36,000 --> 00:11:40,000

Turning two, three, four.

208

00:11:41,000 --> 00:11:44,000

One by one, the other engines are carefully ignited.

209

00:11:44,000 --> 00:11:45,000

Coming in dry.

210

00:11:47,000 --> 00:11:49,000

We have oil pressure.

211

00:11:49,000 --> 00:11:50,000

Shilpa's holding steady.

212

00:11:55,000 --> 00:11:56,000

Oil pressure.

213

00:11:58,000 --> 00:11:59,000

Time for a check is complete.

214

00:11:59,000 --> 00:12:00,000

Hold the lever, eights.

215

00:12:00,000 --> 00:12:01,000

Thank you, sir.

216

00:12:01,000 --> 00:12:02,000

Thank you, ma'am.

217

00:12:02,000 --> 00:12:03,000

Attention to fly.

218

00:12:03,000 --> 00:12:05,000

She's anxious to fly, like that.

219

00:12:05,000 --> 00:12:06,000

That makes two of us.

220

00:12:06,000 --> 00:12:08,000

Okay, Dave, you ready?

221

00:12:08,000 --> 00:12:09,000

I am ready, sir.

222

00:12:10,000 --> 00:12:12,000

Advise, we're taking the runway.

223

00:12:16,000 --> 00:12:20,000

The pilot's coax her forward, and we taxi out onto the runway.

224

00:12:22,000 --> 00:12:23,000

Cross check both sides.

225

00:12:23,000 --> 00:12:25,000

We'll take a check is complete.

226

00:12:25,000 --> 00:12:26,000

Okay, here we go.

227

00:12:29,000 --> 00:12:32,000

The DC-4 roars as it gains speed.

228

00:12:35,000 --> 00:12:36,000

350.

229

00:12:37,000 --> 00:12:40,000

And we're quickly running out of tarmac.

230

00:12:42,000 --> 00:12:51,000

Until finally, the nose lifts up, and we soar into the sky.

231

00:12:52,000 --> 00:12:57,000

Our destination, the truth about Northwest 2501.

232

00:12:57,000 --> 00:12:59,000

Unbelievable.

233

00:13:07,000 --> 00:13:25,000

I'm investigating the case of America's vanished airliner, Northwest Flight 2501, which disappeared over Lake Michigan in 1950 and has never been found.

234

00:13:26,000 --> 00:13:34,000

To learn about the fateful trip, I'm taking an exclusive flight on one of the last operating DC-4s on Earth,

235

00:13:34,000 --> 00:13:38,000

expertly flown by pilots Dave Shirtliff and Tim Cho.

236

00:13:38,000 --> 00:13:40,000

Okay, muscle play of the time.

237

00:13:40,000 --> 00:13:41,000

Power.

238

00:13:42,000 --> 00:13:48,000

First observation, now that I'm up here, this instrumentation pretty much looks like what it looked like in 1950.

239

00:13:48,000 --> 00:13:49,000

Yes, it does.

240

00:13:49,000 --> 00:13:53,000

We don't have a big screen to tell us where exactly we're at all the time.

241

00:13:53,000 --> 00:13:55,000

We still use a navigation chart.

242

00:13:55,000 --> 00:13:56,000

Right.

243

00:13:56,000 --> 00:14:03,000

And Northwest 2501, when these guys are navigating across the country, they're not being tracked in real time, right?

244

00:14:03,000 --> 00:14:04,000

By radar.

245

00:14:04,000 --> 00:14:05,000

No, they're not.

246

00:14:06,000 --> 00:14:11,000

Unlike today where planes are tracked using a network of ground radar stations.

247

00:14:11,000 --> 00:14:19,000

In 1950, civil aircraft would have to manually check in with airport towers as they traveled and receive instructions as they progressed.

248

00:14:19,000 --> 00:14:24,000

Air traffic control was primarily done with blackboards and people who were very good at math.

249

00:14:24,000 --> 00:14:28,000

They would take the pilot's reports and then estimate where everyone would be.

250

00:14:28,000 --> 00:14:32,000

Then do it all over again when the next reports came in.

251

00:14:34,000 --> 00:14:38,000

In the case of 2501, they left LaGuardia to fly west.

252

00:14:38,000 --> 00:14:41,000

Because of flying west, they depart LaGuardia at 7.31.

253

00:14:41,000 --> 00:14:43,000

Beautiful summer evening.

254

00:14:43,000 --> 00:14:44,000

Like this?

255

00:14:44,000 --> 00:14:45,000

Just like this.

256

00:14:45,000 --> 00:14:47,000

55 passengers on a crew of three.

257

00:14:47,000 --> 00:14:48,000

Crew of three.

258

00:14:48,000 --> 00:14:51,000

So there would have been a pilot, co-pilot and a flight attendant, right?

259

00:14:51,000 --> 00:14:52,000

Correct.

260

00:14:52,000 --> 00:14:54,000

The initial light was very comfortable.

261

00:14:54,000 --> 00:14:56,000

You were having no issues at all.

262

00:14:56,000 --> 00:15:02,000

Cruising at 6,000 feet, the first few hours of the flight passed uneventfully.

263

00:15:02,000 --> 00:15:08,000

Being a night flight, many of the passengers no doubt tried to sleep during the trip to Minneapolis.

264

00:15:08,000 --> 00:15:13,000

At 10.20 p.m., Flight 2501 crosses into Ohio.

265

00:15:14,000 --> 00:15:19,000

Two and a half hours after departing LaGuardia, they reported in Air Cleveland,

266

00:15:19,000 --> 00:15:22,000

requesting an altitude change to 4,000.

267

00:15:22,000 --> 00:15:23,000

Descending to 4,000?

268

00:15:23,000 --> 00:15:27,000

Yeah, this is an unpressurized airplane, so you can't go too high.

269

00:15:28,000 --> 00:15:32,000

Today, we cruise at high altitudes in pressurized airplane cabins,

270

00:15:32,000 --> 00:15:35,000

which allow us to travel safely without oxygen masks.

271

00:15:35,000 --> 00:15:40,000

Flight 2501, like all commercial flights of the time, was unpressurized.

272

00:15:40,000 --> 00:15:44,000

So they generally had to fly under 10,000 feet.

273

00:15:45,000 --> 00:15:49,000

There's a reason, though, that we don't want to fly today below 10,000 feet, right?

274

00:15:49,000 --> 00:15:52,000

All of your weather turbulence is down at those levels.

275

00:15:52,000 --> 00:15:53,000

Right, exactly.

276

00:15:53,000 --> 00:15:57,000

So they probably wanted to descend to just get underneath whatever clouds were already there.

277

00:15:57,000 --> 00:15:59,000

Yes, there would be one reason to go down.

278

00:15:59,000 --> 00:16:03,000

30 minutes later, they were requested by Air Traffic Control to descend to 3,500 feet.

279

00:16:03,000 --> 00:16:06,000

Because of the conflicted traffic with another plane that was eastbound,

280

00:16:06,000 --> 00:16:09,000

who had just come out of that same weather.

281

00:16:09,000 --> 00:16:13,000

So at that point, they may have had an idea that they were headed toward a storm system.

282

00:16:13,000 --> 00:16:16,000

Yeah, they had proclamation with the public swathes there.

283

00:16:17,000 --> 00:16:22,000

Though the pilots knew about a storm, they had no idea of how bad it really was.

284

00:16:22,000 --> 00:16:26,000

Northwest 2501 copy, descend 500 feet.

285

00:16:27,000 --> 00:16:34,000

At a weather station at Manitowoc, Wisconsin, meteorologists recorded a 115-millibar drop in air pressure

286

00:16:34,000 --> 00:16:39,000

and wind gusts of 71 miles an hour as the squall rolled through.

287

00:16:39,000 --> 00:16:45,000

Flight 2501, unaware of the storm's intensity, would be flying directly into it.

288

00:16:47,000 --> 00:16:53,000

Continuing west, the pilots check in with the control tower at Battle Creek, Michigan, as scheduled.

289

00:16:53,000 --> 00:16:57,000

Northwest 2501, position Battle Creek.

290

00:16:57,000 --> 00:17:01,000

Estimating Milwaukee, 2337.

291

00:17:01,000 --> 00:17:05,000

What's the last radio call we know of from Flight 2501?

292

00:17:05,000 --> 00:17:12,000

After Battle Creek, the 1213, they requested to continue their descent to 2,500 feet.

293

00:17:12,000 --> 00:17:14,000

First, like they do to turbulence.

294

00:17:16,000 --> 00:17:19,000

Make sure everyone seatbelt is fast.

295

00:17:20,000 --> 00:17:28,000

As they approach Lake Michigan, the wind kicks up and at only 3,500 feet, they feel every gust.

296

00:17:29,000 --> 00:17:36,000

Control, Northwest 2501, request permission to descend to 2,500 feet. Do you copy?

297

00:17:37,000 --> 00:17:38,000

They would deny this.

298

00:17:38,000 --> 00:17:39,000

And why is that?

299

00:17:39,000 --> 00:17:41,000

Due to another airplane in the area.

300

00:17:41,000 --> 00:17:43,000

And at that point, does the pilot say where he is?

301

00:17:43,000 --> 00:17:48,000

Yes, he did. He reported that he was in the vicinity of Benton Harbor, Michigan.

302

00:17:49,000 --> 00:17:54,000

2501 was flying on a kind of highway in the sky called an airway.

303

00:17:54,000 --> 00:17:56,000

This one was red 57.

304

00:17:56,000 --> 00:18:00,000

On that route, they were supposed to cross the lake over the town of Glen.

305

00:18:00,000 --> 00:18:05,000

Yet the pilot claimed he was near Benton Harbor, almost 50 miles to the south.

306

00:18:05,000 --> 00:18:10,000

Assuming his position was correct, why did 2501 go off course?

307

00:18:10,000 --> 00:18:14,000

It's a mystery that has never been fully explained.

308

00:18:15,000 --> 00:18:18,000

And then, what do we hear from them after that? Anything?

309

00:18:18,000 --> 00:18:19,000

Nothing after that.

310

00:18:19,000 --> 00:18:20,000

That's it.

311

00:18:20,000 --> 00:18:21,000

That's it.

312

00:18:24,000 --> 00:18:34,000

At 12.15 a.m. on June 24, 1950, Flight 2501 flies into the heart of a massive storm and disappears.

313

00:18:43,000 --> 00:18:48,000

Her fate isn't a mystery for long though, as grim clues begin to wash ashore.

314

00:18:49,000 --> 00:18:54,000

At the time, it is the worst air disaster in American history.

315

00:18:59,000 --> 00:19:05,000

With only six of these planes still flying in the world, I don't know that I'm going to get another opportunity to ask this question.

316

00:19:05,000 --> 00:19:10,000

You fly a DC-4. What do you think happened to that flight?

317

00:19:10,000 --> 00:19:17,000

Well, I think he went over the lake into a very severe thunderstorm of extreme turbulence.

318

00:19:17,000 --> 00:19:26,000

And he either had structural failure or he just encountered a downdraft situation that he couldn't overcome and ended up in the lake.

319

00:19:26,000 --> 00:19:30,000

You literally mean winds pushing down on the plane and they're too low to recover out of that?

320

00:19:30,000 --> 00:19:31,000

That is correct.

321

00:19:31,000 --> 00:19:35,000

Well, and it is possible to have turbulence bad enough to break this plane apart.

322

00:19:35,000 --> 00:19:36,000

It is, yes.

323

00:19:36,000 --> 00:19:37,000

Wow.

324

00:19:38,000 --> 00:19:46,000

Sitting in one of the few DC-4s left in the air, this is perhaps the closest I'll ever get to being in the shoes of the passengers aboard 25.

325

00:19:47,000 --> 00:19:56,000

It's a terrifying thought to imagine this plane flying in a storm and even worse to imagine what came next.

326

00:19:59,000 --> 00:20:03,000

But thankfully, on today's flight, Tim and Dave are navigating in calmer weather.

327

00:20:06,000 --> 00:20:08,000

Well, listen, I really appreciate you guys having me up here.

328

00:20:08,000 --> 00:20:11,000

Thank you, Josh. We're delighted that you would be on board with us.

329

00:20:11,000 --> 00:20:13,000

Okay, let's get ourselves back to the airport here.

330

00:20:14,000 --> 00:20:18,000

Tim brings the plane around and begins the landing procedure.

331

00:20:18,000 --> 00:20:22,000

It's every bit as detailed as the one he used for takeoff.

332

00:20:25,000 --> 00:20:26,000

Okay, landing gear down.

333

00:20:27,000 --> 00:20:28,000

What are you doing down?

334

00:20:31,000 --> 00:20:32,000

Landing check.

335

00:20:32,000 --> 00:20:34,000

Handles down, pursuers up, figuring lights.

336

00:20:34,000 --> 00:20:35,000

Flaps.

337

00:20:35,000 --> 00:20:36,000

Flaps 30.

338

00:20:36,000 --> 00:20:37,000

Flaps 30.

339

00:20:37,000 --> 00:20:38,000

100.

340

00:20:38,000 --> 00:20:39,000

Down at 700.

341

00:20:40,000 --> 00:20:41,000

98.

342

00:20:41,000 --> 00:20:42,000

Down at 70.

343

00:20:43,000 --> 00:20:44,000

700.

344

00:20:45,000 --> 00:20:46,000

95.

345

00:20:46,000 --> 00:20:47,000

Handle, handle.

346

00:20:47,000 --> 00:20:48,000

Handle.

347

00:20:48,000 --> 00:20:49,000

Handle at idle.

348

00:20:50,000 --> 00:20:51,000

85.

349

00:20:51,000 --> 00:20:52,000

Down at 700.

350

00:20:52,000 --> 00:20:53,000

80.

351

00:20:59,000 --> 00:21:01,000

We got hydraulics.

352

00:21:03,000 --> 00:21:04,000

5,000 better.

353

00:21:04,000 --> 00:21:05,000

Okay, keep the stick back.

354

00:21:05,000 --> 00:21:07,000

Roger, good stick.

355

00:21:09,000 --> 00:21:11,000

Tim, can I open my eyes? Are we alive?

356

00:21:12,000 --> 00:21:13,000

Yes.

357

00:21:14,000 --> 00:21:15,000

Oh, what a thrill.

358

00:21:16,000 --> 00:21:18,000

When the plane safely touches down,

359

00:21:18,000 --> 00:21:22,000

I realize how much I take modern air safety for granted.

360

00:21:22,000 --> 00:21:24,000

In the 1950s on a DC-4,

361

00:21:24,000 --> 00:21:28,000

you never had the luxury of forgetting the dangers of flying.

362

00:21:28,000 --> 00:21:30,000

I need a drink. Come on.

363

00:21:32,000 --> 00:21:35,000

I've flown in Northwest 2501's doppelganger.

364

00:21:36,000 --> 00:21:39,000

Now, it's time to go find the original.

365

00:21:42,000 --> 00:21:43,000

Coming up.

366

00:21:45,000 --> 00:21:47,000

That's brand new information.

367

00:21:47,000 --> 00:21:48,000

This changes everything.

368

00:21:48,000 --> 00:21:49,000

So put another way,

369

00:21:49,000 --> 00:21:52,000

there's probably an airplane wreck somewhere in there.

370

00:21:52,000 --> 00:21:53,000

That's where my money would be.

371

00:21:53,000 --> 00:21:54,000

That looks like debris.

372

00:21:54,000 --> 00:21:55,000

This could be it.

373

00:21:55,000 --> 00:21:57,000

Josh, I think I've done something.

374

00:21:57,000 --> 00:21:58,000

You got debris.

375

00:21:58,000 --> 00:21:59,000

You got debris.

376

00:22:10,000 --> 00:22:14,000

On June 24th, 1950, Northwest flight 2501

377

00:22:14,000 --> 00:22:18,000

vanished over Lake Michigan on her way from New York to Minneapolis

378

00:22:18,000 --> 00:22:20,000

and has never been found.

379

00:22:21,000 --> 00:22:24,000

To learn about the details of her fateful flight,

380

00:22:24,000 --> 00:22:28,000

I took a ride in one of the few DC-4's still in the air.

381

00:22:28,000 --> 00:22:31,000

We now know that weather almost certainly took down the plane,

382

00:22:31,000 --> 00:22:34,000

but we're left with one massive mystery,

383

00:22:34,000 --> 00:22:36,000

the location of the wreck.

384

00:22:39,000 --> 00:22:40,000

I grabbed some wheels

385

00:22:40,000 --> 00:22:43,000

and put Pennsylvania in the rear view mirror.

386

00:22:48,000 --> 00:22:49,000

I'm headed down into Michigan

387

00:22:49,000 --> 00:22:53,000

to meet with author, researcher, and friend Valerie Van Heest.

388

00:22:53,000 --> 00:22:55,000

I had a chance to work with Valerie recently

389

00:22:55,000 --> 00:22:59,000

as we searched for a famous shipwreck known as the Griffin.

390

00:22:59,000 --> 00:23:02,000

Working alongside Great Lakes explorer Chris Cole,

391

00:23:02,000 --> 00:23:06,000

Valerie and I dove Lake Huron off the coast of Canada

392

00:23:06,000 --> 00:23:09,000

for the explorer LaSalle's lost ship.

393

00:23:19,000 --> 00:23:22,000

We discovered two previously uncharted wrecks.

394

00:23:22,000 --> 00:23:25,000

The steam barge Bruno and the schooner Louisa.

395

00:23:25,000 --> 00:23:27,000

New discovery, Josh.

396

00:23:27,000 --> 00:23:28,000

Really cool.

397

00:23:28,000 --> 00:23:29,000

Awesome.

398

00:23:29,000 --> 00:23:33,000

In the process, Valerie proved to be one of the most tenacious investigators

399

00:23:33,000 --> 00:23:35,000

I've ever worked with.

400

00:23:35,000 --> 00:23:38,000

She's one of the most knowledgeable people around when it comes to wrecks

401

00:23:38,000 --> 00:23:42,000

in the Great Lakes, and she's determined to find the final resting place

402

00:23:42,000 --> 00:23:45,000

of Northwest 2501.

403

00:23:46,000 --> 00:23:50,000

It's a six-hour drive around one Great Lake to the shores of another.

404

00:23:51,000 --> 00:23:53,000

But when I get to South Haven, Michigan,

405

00:23:53,000 --> 00:23:56,000

it feels more like I've driven back in time.

406

00:23:58,000 --> 00:24:00,000

Oh, come on.

407

00:24:00,000 --> 00:24:01,000

How adorable is this?

408

00:24:01,000 --> 00:24:03,000

Somebody cue the small town music.

409

00:24:06,000 --> 00:24:08,000

I go sightseeing.

410

00:24:08,000 --> 00:24:10,000

It takes 45 seconds.

411

00:24:11,000 --> 00:24:13,000

Once I've seen everything in town, twice,

412

00:24:13,000 --> 00:24:17,000

I go to find Valerie who's asked to meet me on the banks of Lake Michigan.

413

00:24:20,000 --> 00:24:21,000

How are you?

414

00:24:21,000 --> 00:24:22,000

Great to see you again.

415

00:24:22,000 --> 00:24:23,000

Great to see you too. How have you been?

416

00:24:23,000 --> 00:24:24,000

Great to see you too. How have you been?

417

00:24:24,000 --> 00:24:25,000

Great to see you too. How have you been?

418

00:24:25,000 --> 00:24:26,000

When did you first hear about this story?

419

00:24:26,000 --> 00:24:29,000

You know, I first heard about it in 2003.

420

00:24:29,000 --> 00:24:33,000

We have been looking for shipwrecks, and we knew about this.

421

00:24:33,000 --> 00:24:38,000

We did some research, and we thought we might find it in the course of looking for shipwrecks.

422

00:24:40,000 --> 00:24:43,000

Valerie, her husband Jack, and their partner Craig Rich

423

00:24:43,000 --> 00:24:48,000

lead a team of investigators and divers at the Michigan Shipwreck Research Association.

424

00:24:49,000 --> 00:24:54,000

Together, they've discovered 20 previously undocumented wrecks at the bottom of the lake.

425

00:24:54,000 --> 00:24:57,000

But the more Valerie read about the missing plane,

426

00:24:57,000 --> 00:25:00,000

the more she became fixated on finding it.

427

00:25:00,000 --> 00:25:04,000

58 people went missing in modern history,

428

00:25:04,000 --> 00:25:08,000

and families of these victims have never gotten closer.

429

00:25:08,000 --> 00:25:12,000

Right. Imagine losing one parent, both parents maybe in some cases.

430

00:25:12,000 --> 00:25:13,000

Exactly.

431

00:25:13,000 --> 00:25:15,000

And never knowing what happened to them.

432

00:25:15,000 --> 00:25:16,000

Right.

433

00:25:16,000 --> 00:25:20,000

I really captured my interest in trying to solve this mystery.

434

00:25:22,000 --> 00:25:27,000

This 15-year passion project quickly became a subject of obsession.

435

00:25:27,000 --> 00:25:31,000

She conducted over 100 interviews with family members of the victims,

436

00:25:31,000 --> 00:25:35,000

eyewitnesses on the ground, and former Northwest officials.

437

00:25:35,000 --> 00:25:39,000

Then, poured over thousands of documents to write Fatal Crossing,

438

00:25:39,000 --> 00:25:42,000

the definitive record of the lost Northwest flight.

439

00:25:42,000 --> 00:25:45,000

Let's talk about what happens immediately after the plane disappears.

440

00:25:45,000 --> 00:25:50,000

At 5.30 a.m., Northwest Airlines realized the plane would have run out of fuel.

441

00:25:50,000 --> 00:25:51,000

Right.

442

00:25:51,000 --> 00:25:54,000

And they alerted the authorities to begin a search over by Milwaukee,

443

00:25:54,000 --> 00:25:55,000

across the lake from here.

444

00:25:55,000 --> 00:25:56,000

Far from here?

445

00:25:56,000 --> 00:25:59,000

Yes, 60 to 80 miles from here.

446

00:26:00,000 --> 00:26:03,000

The search of Lake Michigan near Milwaukee proves fruitless.

447

00:26:03,000 --> 00:26:06,000

But back on the eastern side, near South Haven,

448

00:26:06,000 --> 00:26:10,000

a fisherman pulls up a macabre catch, a dress shirt,

449

00:26:10,000 --> 00:26:13,000

belonging to a passenger on the plane.

450

00:26:13,000 --> 00:26:16,000

Soon, his nets are bringing up loads of debris.

451

00:26:16,000 --> 00:26:22,000

After notifying the Coast Guard, search efforts are quickly relocated to South Haven.

452

00:26:22,000 --> 00:26:25,000

And what about on shore? Does anything wash up here?

453

00:26:25,000 --> 00:26:27,000

There was all manner of debris that washed ashore.

454

00:26:27,000 --> 00:26:31,000

These were suitcases, personal effects.

455

00:26:31,000 --> 00:26:34,000

There were a foam from the seat cushions.

456

00:26:34,000 --> 00:26:38,000

There was a little baby doll that a passenger child must have carried.

457

00:26:38,000 --> 00:26:41,000

And littered among all that were human remains.

458

00:26:41,000 --> 00:26:43,000

And these were not identifiable.

459

00:26:43,000 --> 00:26:45,000

This was so gruesome.

460

00:26:45,000 --> 00:26:48,000

The mayor of South Haven had to close the beaches.

461

00:26:48,000 --> 00:26:52,000

The plane crash became a national fascination, dominating headlines

462

00:26:52,000 --> 00:26:55,000

as the search for victims got underway.

463

00:26:55,000 --> 00:27:00,000

Rescue craft in Plains searched the waters of Lake Michigan near South Haven, Michigan,

464

00:27:00,000 --> 00:27:04,000

for clues to the worst airline disaster in U.S. history.

465

00:27:04,000 --> 00:27:08,000

The cause of the catastrophe unknown.

466

00:27:11,000 --> 00:27:16,000

Unfortunately, Northwest 2501 was pushed off the front pages the next day

467

00:27:16,000 --> 00:27:20,000

by another story, the beginning of the Korean War.

468

00:27:20,000 --> 00:27:22,000

And it wasn't just the newspapers.

469

00:27:22,000 --> 00:27:27,000

The whole country reverted to war footing, and the crash was the first casualty.

470

00:27:27,000 --> 00:27:31,000

Families of victims were never notified of their relatives' fate.

471

00:27:31,000 --> 00:27:35,000

There were no burial ceremonies for the few remains that were recovered.

472

00:27:35,000 --> 00:27:39,000

And far, far too quickly, 2501 was forgotten.

473

00:27:39,000 --> 00:27:42,000

It's something that Valerie is desperate to rectify.

474

00:27:42,000 --> 00:27:47,000

So, okay, how do you go about figuring out where the plane is?

475

00:27:47,000 --> 00:27:49,000

Well, come with me and I'll show you.

476

00:27:49,000 --> 00:27:51,000

Okay, come on.

477

00:27:52,000 --> 00:27:57,000

Valerie brings me down the road to a marine warehouse turned headquarters.

478

00:27:57,000 --> 00:28:03,000

South Haven is where Valerie and her team at the MSRA coordinated the efforts to find wrecks,

479

00:28:03,000 --> 00:28:07,000

like the SS Michigan, missing since 1885.

480

00:28:07,000 --> 00:28:13,000

And the Hennepin, gone since 1927, both discovered by her team.

481

00:28:13,000 --> 00:28:18,000

Manning the fore here is Valerie's husband and partner, Jack Van Heest.

482

00:28:18,000 --> 00:28:19,000

Jack, great to meet you.

483

00:28:19,000 --> 00:28:20,000

How you doing, Josh?

484

00:28:20,000 --> 00:28:22,000

Pleasure. You guys have a regular war room going here.

485

00:28:22,000 --> 00:28:26,000

Well, for so many years, South Haven has been our base of operation.

486

00:28:26,000 --> 00:28:28,000

Yeah, so let's talk about this operation.

487

00:28:28,000 --> 00:28:30,000

This chart shows the flight, yeah?

488

00:28:30,000 --> 00:28:31,000

Yes.

489

00:28:31,000 --> 00:28:33,000

Okay, can I borrow your model here?

490

00:28:33,000 --> 00:28:34,000

Yeah, of course.

491

00:28:34,000 --> 00:28:35,000

So this is Flight 2501.

492

00:28:35,000 --> 00:28:40,000

So it moves out over the lake, crashes somewhere, never to be seen again.

493

00:28:40,000 --> 00:28:41,000

Exactly.

494

00:28:41,000 --> 00:28:43,000

Okay, so that's a lot of water.

495

00:28:43,000 --> 00:28:48,000

So the first thing we did is get our hands on the Civil Aeronautics Board reports, the CAB report.

496

00:28:48,000 --> 00:28:51,000

Is that a huge investigative document?

497

00:28:51,000 --> 00:28:52,000

No, it's not.

498

00:28:52,000 --> 00:28:54,000

It's only four pages long.

499

00:28:54,000 --> 00:28:55,000

Four pages?

500

00:28:55,000 --> 00:28:56,000

Four pages.

501

00:28:56,000 --> 00:28:57,000

That's all there is.

502

00:28:57,000 --> 00:28:58,000

Six thousand words.

503

00:28:58,000 --> 00:28:59,000

Right.

504

00:28:59,000 --> 00:29:01,000

Okay, and do they have any analysis on where the plane crashed?

505

00:29:01,000 --> 00:29:02,000

It does at the top.

506

00:29:02,000 --> 00:29:04,000

It says location.

507

00:29:04,000 --> 00:29:09,000

So yeah, crashing to Lake Michigan approximately 18 miles north northwest of Benton Harbor.

508

00:29:09,000 --> 00:29:12,000

Okay, so dumb question.

509

00:29:12,000 --> 00:29:13,000

Yeah.

510

00:29:13,000 --> 00:29:14,000

Wouldn't this be the first place to look?

511

00:29:14,000 --> 00:29:15,000

Well, it was.

512

00:29:15,000 --> 00:29:16,000

Did you go there?

513

00:29:16,000 --> 00:29:18,000

We looked and there was nothing.

514

00:29:18,000 --> 00:29:19,000

Nothing there?

515

00:29:19,000 --> 00:29:20,000

No.

516

00:29:20,000 --> 00:29:21,000

It's not a scrap?

517

00:29:21,000 --> 00:29:22,000

Nothing.

518

00:29:22,000 --> 00:29:23,000

Okay, so where do you go from here?

519

00:29:23,000 --> 00:29:24,000

So we start digging deeper.

520

00:29:24,000 --> 00:29:25,000

We do some research.

521

00:29:25,000 --> 00:29:30,000

The local media picks that up, does a story, and then lo and behold, we get a phone call.

522

00:29:30,000 --> 00:29:34,000

From Clive Cussler, author and explorer.

523

00:29:34,000 --> 00:29:40,000

Clive Cussler is the author of more than 80 adventure books, but on the side, he's also

524

00:29:40,000 --> 00:29:45,000

become the patron saint of wreck hunters, helping to locate more than 60 sunken ships around

525

00:29:45,000 --> 00:29:46,000

the world.

526

00:29:46,000 --> 00:29:52,000

He was so intrigued by this case that he spent several seasons sponsoring Valerie's team.

527

00:29:52,000 --> 00:29:57,000

So he offers to send a search crew to South Haven to work with us to find this wreckage.

528

00:29:57,000 --> 00:29:58,000

We had this huge body of water.

529

00:29:58,000 --> 00:30:02,000

We knew we had to narrow down, and we knew that the Navy and the Coast Guard ships had

530

00:30:02,000 --> 00:30:05,000

been out there searching and finding debris and remains.

531

00:30:05,000 --> 00:30:09,000

So we found the Coast Guard and Navy logbooks in the National Archives.

532

00:30:09,000 --> 00:30:11,000

The actual logbooks from their search?

533

00:30:11,000 --> 00:30:12,000

Yeah, the actual logbooks.

534

00:30:12,000 --> 00:30:14,000

We got them right here.

535

00:30:14,000 --> 00:30:19,000

So what's important about these documents is they give us coordinates of where the Coast

536

00:30:19,000 --> 00:30:23,000

Guard was picking up debris every four hours during a week-long search.

537

00:30:23,000 --> 00:30:25,000

And exactly what they were doing.

538

00:30:25,000 --> 00:30:26,000

That's huge.

539

00:30:26,000 --> 00:30:27,000

Oh, yeah.

540

00:30:27,000 --> 00:30:32,000

The Coast Guard meticulously mapped every piece of debris that they recovered and logged

541

00:30:32,000 --> 00:30:35,000

it with a precise latitude and longitude.

542

00:30:35,000 --> 00:30:41,000

In total, they collected more than 7,000 pounds from the plane, only 10% of its weight.

543

00:30:41,000 --> 00:30:46,000

The logbooks provided Val and Jack with a real-time look at the rescue effort and gave

544

00:30:46,000 --> 00:30:49,000

them new places to look for the aircraft.

545

00:30:49,000 --> 00:30:53,000

So roughly where are they finding debris on here?

546

00:30:53,000 --> 00:30:55,000

They're finding debris right in this area here.

547

00:30:55,000 --> 00:30:58,000

Any clues in the debris itself?

548

00:30:58,000 --> 00:31:01,000

Well, we've got some of it if you'd like to take a look.

549

00:31:01,000 --> 00:31:04,000

You actually have items that were on board the plane?

550

00:31:04,000 --> 00:31:05,000

We do.

551

00:31:07,000 --> 00:31:12,000

Valerie retrieves a box containing some of the debris recovered in 1950, which she and

552

00:31:12,000 --> 00:31:17,000

her colleagues have collected as part of their exhaustive effort at preservation.

553

00:31:17,000 --> 00:31:20,000

The contents of this box are fairly emotional.

554

00:31:20,000 --> 00:31:23,000

These are actual things pulled from the water.

555

00:31:24,000 --> 00:31:30,000

It's my job to fight artifacts of the past, but what Valerie shows me here is absolutely

556

00:31:30,000 --> 00:31:31,000

overwhelming.

557

00:31:32,000 --> 00:31:33,000

What am I word?

558

00:31:44,000 --> 00:31:51,000

In the overnight hours of June 24, 1950, a DC-4 passenger plane carrying 58 people disappeared

559

00:31:51,000 --> 00:31:54,000

while flying through a storm over Lake Michigan.

560

00:31:54,000 --> 00:31:57,000

The crash site has never been found.

561

00:31:57,000 --> 00:32:03,000

Almost 70 years later, Valerie and Jack Van Heest believe they have the key to locating

562

00:32:03,000 --> 00:32:04,000

the wreckage.

563

00:32:04,000 --> 00:32:09,000

But right now, Valerie is about to show me the reason she spent thousands of hours on

564

00:32:09,000 --> 00:32:10,000

this search.

565

00:32:10,000 --> 00:32:13,000

The contents of this box are fairly emotional.

566

00:32:13,000 --> 00:32:17,000

These are the personal effects of a passenger Merle Barton.

567

00:32:18,000 --> 00:32:24,000

34-year-old Merle Barton owned a beauty salon in Minnesota.

568

00:32:24,000 --> 00:32:29,000

When 2501 went into Lake Michigan, he left behind a wife and a two-year-old daughter.

569

00:32:29,000 --> 00:32:34,000

We've got Merle Barton's checkbook register found floating in the water.

570

00:32:34,000 --> 00:32:36,000

Oh, my word.

571

00:32:36,000 --> 00:32:41,000

This is his actual checkbook, Austin State Bank of Austin, Minnesota.

572

00:32:41,000 --> 00:32:44,000

This is something that might have actually been on his person.

573

00:32:44,000 --> 00:32:45,000

Exactly.

574

00:32:45,000 --> 00:32:46,000

May I?

575

00:32:46,000 --> 00:32:47,000

Yes.

576

00:32:47,000 --> 00:32:54,000

You will find in here the registry for the ticket he purchased on this flight.

577

00:32:54,000 --> 00:32:56,000

Come on.

578

00:32:56,000 --> 00:33:01,000

The last entry, Northwest Airlines, \$94.30.

579

00:33:01,000 --> 00:33:02,000

It looks like.

580

00:33:02,000 --> 00:33:03,000

That's the plane ticket.

581

00:33:03,000 --> 00:33:05,000

Cost of a one-way ticket.

582

00:33:12,000 --> 00:33:13,000

That's kind of hard to look at even.

583

00:33:13,000 --> 00:33:14,000

It is.

584

00:33:15,000 --> 00:33:16,000

Pull.

585

00:33:19,000 --> 00:33:21,000

That's tough.

586

00:33:21,000 --> 00:33:22,000

Yeah.

587

00:33:24,000 --> 00:33:30,000

Now, what's harder to see is Merle Barton's jacket.

588

00:33:30,000 --> 00:33:37,000

And this was found floating on the lake and returned to his family.

589

00:33:37,000 --> 00:33:40,000

So this is his actual suit jacket that he's wearing on the flight.

590

00:33:40,000 --> 00:33:41,000

Yeah.

591

00:33:41,000 --> 00:33:42,000

Wow.

592

00:33:42,000 --> 00:33:48,000

And so now we really understand that this is a human tragedy.

593

00:33:52,000 --> 00:33:54,000

That's tough.

594

00:33:54,000 --> 00:33:56,000

It's very hard.

595

00:33:56,000 --> 00:34:02,000

Just, it just, when you see something so, when you just see something like this,

596

00:34:02,000 --> 00:34:04,000

I mean, it's the clothes off a man's back.

597

00:34:04,000 --> 00:34:05,000

It is.

598

00:34:05,000 --> 00:34:06,000

I mean, it's.

599

00:34:06,000 --> 00:34:17,000

And it's for his daughter and all the other children of victims that we want to find the final answer of what happened to this plane.

600

00:34:17,000 --> 00:34:19,000

The fate of these artifacts will be what?

601

00:34:19,000 --> 00:34:22,000

These are slated for a museum exhibit.

602

00:34:22,000 --> 00:34:23,000

That's good.

603

00:34:23,000 --> 00:34:24,000

That's good.

604

00:34:24,000 --> 00:34:25,000

Okay.

605

00:34:25,000 --> 00:34:28,000

So let's pack this stuff away.

606

00:34:29,000 --> 00:34:36,000

Valerie returns the personal effects to storage, leaving me with a new sense of how important this case truly is.

607

00:34:36,000 --> 00:34:39,000

But the debris has more than just sentimental value.

608

00:34:39,000 --> 00:34:42,000

It's helped Valerie look for 2501.

609

00:34:42,000 --> 00:34:44,000

The debris is, is floating up here.

610

00:34:44,000 --> 00:34:52,000

Now, some people might say, well, if there's debris on the surface, this must be where the plane is right here.

611

00:34:52,000 --> 00:34:53,000

Did you go there?

612

00:34:53,000 --> 00:34:54,000

We did.

613

00:34:54,000 --> 00:34:55,000

And?

614

00:34:55,000 --> 00:34:56,000

We found nothing.

615

00:34:56,000 --> 00:34:59,000

So that means maybe the debris has drifted into this position.

616

00:34:59,000 --> 00:35:00,000

Yeah.

617

00:35:00,000 --> 00:35:05,000

And so we hooked up with scientist David Schwab, who studies lake currents in Lake Michigan.

618

00:35:05,000 --> 00:35:12,000

In 2004, Schwab and the National Weather Service took the positions of where each piece of debris was recovered,

619

00:35:12,000 --> 00:35:16,000

then collected the weather data from the night of the crash.

620

00:35:16,000 --> 00:35:24,000

With all the available information, they projected the maximum distance the wreckage would have been able to drift before being picked up by the Coast Guard.

621

00:35:24,000 --> 00:35:28,000

This provided Valerie and Jack with a defined search zone.

622

00:35:28,000 --> 00:35:33,000

And your drift modeling guide determined that this stuff could have drifted how far before the Coast Guard got to it.

623

00:35:33,000 --> 00:35:42,000

He didn't feel based on weather records at the time that it couldn't have drifted any farther than 12.5 miles in any direction.

624

00:35:43,000 --> 00:35:53,000

Extending from the cluster of debris, the 12.5 mile radius gave Val and Jack a 25 mile diameter search zone,

625

00:35:53,000 --> 00:35:57,000

or about 500 square miles of Lake Michigan.

626

00:35:57,000 --> 00:36:02,000

For comparison, that's slightly bigger than the entire city of Los Angeles.

627

00:36:02,000 --> 00:36:06,000

So you've narrowed Lake Michigan down, but it's not exactly a slam dunk.

628

00:36:06,000 --> 00:36:07,000

Right.

629

00:36:07,000 --> 00:36:08,000

That's a lot of water.

630

00:36:08,000 --> 00:36:09,000

Yeah.

631

00:36:09,000 --> 00:36:10,000

Right?

632

00:36:10,000 --> 00:36:11,000

So now what?

633

00:36:11,000 --> 00:36:12,000

The search for us expanded.

634

00:36:12,000 --> 00:36:13,000

We worked outward.

635

00:36:13,000 --> 00:36:19,000

We tried to cover this entire circle, and we found shipwrecks, but not the airplane.

636

00:36:21,000 --> 00:36:28,000

Over 14 long years, Valerie's team has systematically divided the search zone into sectors for investigation.

637

00:36:28,000 --> 00:36:37,000

Year after year, they've been conducting high resolution sonar scans of the lake bed and diving to explore any anomalies that are found.

638

00:36:37,000 --> 00:36:47,000

But so far, they haven't found any sign of the wreck, yet they continue this remarkable labor of love in order to find the plane for the families.

639

00:36:47,000 --> 00:36:48,000

That's dedication.

640

00:36:48,000 --> 00:36:49,000

Yeah.

641

00:36:49,000 --> 00:36:50,000

Or madness.

642

00:36:50,000 --> 00:36:51,000

Or madness, you said it, not me.

643

00:36:51,000 --> 00:36:56,000

In the time that you've been searching, generally speaking, what have you covered?

644

00:36:56,000 --> 00:37:01,000

Well, the initial 500 square mile circle, we've done almost all of that.

645

00:37:01,000 --> 00:37:02,000

Almost all of it.

646

00:37:02,000 --> 00:37:10,000

And we've made sure that we overlap our coverage so that we're not leaving gaps, but there are some areas we have yet to cover.

647

00:37:10,000 --> 00:37:15,000

Though the circle is nearly searched, what's left is still a lot of water.

648

00:37:15,000 --> 00:37:22,000

Valerie's team has further narrowed down the remaining area, though, by tracking down information from some long hidden sources.

649

00:37:22,000 --> 00:37:26,000

And we just made a really amazing discovery just recently.

650

00:37:26,000 --> 00:37:27,000

Okay.

651

00:37:27,000 --> 00:37:31,000

A newspaper account of an eyewitness who saw the plane that night.

652

00:37:31,000 --> 00:37:32,000

Okay.

653

00:37:32,000 --> 00:37:34,000

And the article's from where?

654

00:37:34,000 --> 00:37:39,000

The article is from the South Haven Daily Tribune.

655

00:37:39,000 --> 00:37:40,000

How did this make its way to you?

656

00:37:40,000 --> 00:37:49,000

Well, actually, one of the little boys who saw the plane that night kept this all these years and just recently sent it to us.

657

00:37:49,000 --> 00:37:50,000

Out of the blue.

658

00:37:50,000 --> 00:37:51,000

Out of the blue.

659

00:37:51,000 --> 00:38:03,000

The article details the eyewitness account of a retired naval commander in South Haven named R.P. Helm, who described a plane flying over his home moments before seeing a flash out on the lake.

660

00:38:03,000 --> 00:38:05,000

Presumably, the plane crashing.

661

00:38:05,000 --> 00:38:10,000

But here's the amazing part that Valerie didn't know until this article was found.

662

00:38:10,000 --> 00:38:13,000

The plane was flying east.

663

00:38:13,000 --> 00:38:15,000

That's brand new information.

664

00:38:15,000 --> 00:38:22,000

So the idea is he came out on the airway and then actually turned around and started to come back, right?

665

00:38:22,000 --> 00:38:23,000

Right.

666

00:38:23,000 --> 00:38:29,000

And what this tells us is we've got a search within a small radius of Commander Helm's home.

667

00:38:29,000 --> 00:38:32,000

So this changes everything?

668

00:38:32,000 --> 00:38:33,000

Changes everything.

669

00:38:33,000 --> 00:38:38,000

Perhaps the pilot saw and encountered the storm and turned around.

670

00:38:38,000 --> 00:38:40,000

This is potentially a huge break in this case.

671

00:38:40,000 --> 00:38:45,000

The plane is possibly much closer to shore than we previously believed.

672

00:38:45,000 --> 00:38:55,000

Putting together the flight plan, the information from the transcripts, the eyewitness accounts and this newspaper, you've created a brand new place to look for this plane.

673

00:38:55,000 --> 00:38:59,000

Well, this is the most promising area based on all of the evidence.

674

00:38:59,000 --> 00:39:01,000

This is where we have to search.

675

00:39:01,000 --> 00:39:03,000

So 20 square miles.

676

00:39:03,000 --> 00:39:04,000

Yes.

677

00:39:04,000 --> 00:39:06,000

Got plans tomorrow?

678

00:39:06,000 --> 00:39:07,000

I do now.

679

00:39:10,000 --> 00:39:13,000

Early the next morning, and I do mean early.

680

00:39:13,000 --> 00:39:18,000

I meet Valerie and Jack at the South Haven Marina to go fishing for a plane.

681

00:39:18,000 --> 00:39:22,000

You know, when I signed up for this, I did not realize we'd be leaving at four in the morning.

682

00:39:22,000 --> 00:39:24,000

Well, the weather is good now.

683

00:39:29,000 --> 00:39:35,000

Jack starts up the boat and we motor out to the new spot where the MSRA hasn't yet searched.

684

00:39:35,000 --> 00:39:42,000

This is the place where Helm says he saw Flight 2501 turn around and head back toward shore.

685

00:39:48,000 --> 00:39:50,000

This is it. This is the place.

686

00:39:50,000 --> 00:39:52,000

Okay, we're here.

687

00:39:52,000 --> 00:39:55,000

We need to get the sonar in the water and find this thing.

688

00:39:55,000 --> 00:39:57,000

Let's do it.

689

00:39:57,000 --> 00:40:04,000

The MSRA's boat has been turned into a high-tech research vessel equipped with a state-of-the-art sonar array.

690

00:40:04,000 --> 00:40:09,000

The towfish will be pulled with a custom-built winch system across our new search zone,

691

00:40:09,000 --> 00:40:14,000

sending real-time data about the lake bed to the computer on board.

692

00:40:14,000 --> 00:40:19,000

What we have is we've got a bunch of lanes mapped out on here, paths that we want to take.

693

00:40:19,000 --> 00:40:25,000

So we want to do what we call mowing the lawn where we go down one path, turn, come back on another path,

694

00:40:25,000 --> 00:40:28,000

and cover that way we're covering the whole area.

695

00:40:29,000 --> 00:40:34,000

Sonar uses high-frequency radio waves to generate an image of the lake bed.

696

00:40:34,000 --> 00:40:40,000

The array pings the bottom and a receiver takes the reflection, mapping it in perfect detail.

697

00:40:40,000 --> 00:40:45,000

I mean, right now it looks like the surface of the moon down there. It just looks featureless.

698

00:40:45,000 --> 00:40:50,000

We've looked at a lot of lake bottom and there's a lot of featureless sand out there.

699

00:40:50,000 --> 00:40:52,000

Looks like a desert down there right now.

700

00:40:53,000 --> 00:40:58,000

This new unexplored area is at the southern end of Valerie's original search zone.

701

00:40:58,000 --> 00:41:06,000

While Jack, captains, she and I take turns watching a seemingly endless expanse of lake bottom scroll across the screen.

702

00:41:08,000 --> 00:41:12,000

Let's talk about what we're looking for here. We're not looking for the perfect outline of a plane.

703

00:41:12,000 --> 00:41:20,000

No, we're looking for debris field. We know that this thing broke up either on impact or with an explosion in the air.

704

00:41:20,000 --> 00:41:26,000

The engines we expect to be intact and then the structural spars in each wing, those are about 40 feet long.

705

00:41:26,000 --> 00:41:30,000

We should see those. Maybe we'll see a tail section.

706

00:41:33,000 --> 00:41:44,000

For the next three, four, five hours, we continue mowing the lawn until finally.

707

00:41:45,000 --> 00:41:49,000

Josh, there's something over here, Jack.

708

00:41:49,000 --> 00:41:50,000

What do you got?

709

00:41:50,000 --> 00:41:52,000

Oh, something down there. That's a shadow. Look at that.

710

00:41:52,000 --> 00:41:55,000

Yeah, wow. What is that?

711

00:41:57,000 --> 00:42:02,000

There's some height to it. There's some mass. It's about 15 feet wide.

712

00:42:02,000 --> 00:42:03,000

That could be the plan.

713

00:42:03,000 --> 00:42:04,000

Yeah.

714

00:42:04,000 --> 00:42:09,000

What we've got is something bigger than a tractor trailer lying in 130 feet of water.

715

00:42:09,000 --> 00:42:11,000

Let's get down there. Come on. Okay. I'm going to pull the sonar. Yes.

716

00:42:11,000 --> 00:42:13,000

All right. Yeah, let's pull the sonar.

717

00:42:15,000 --> 00:42:22,000

We drop an anchor line and prepare for the frigid waters of Lake Michigan.

718

00:42:22,000 --> 00:42:27,000

Once we're ready to dive, we step off and take the plunge.

719

00:42:33,000 --> 00:42:35,000

Holy s***, it's freezing.

720

00:42:37,000 --> 00:42:40,000

Okay, here we go. We are headed down the stern line.

721

00:42:41,000 --> 00:42:45,000

Inch by inch, we pull ourselves down to the target.

722

00:42:50,000 --> 00:42:54,000

We are passing 50 feet and headed down.

723

00:42:57,000 --> 00:43:02,000

Visibility is decreasing. Stay close to the line.

724

00:43:03,000 --> 00:43:06,000

Watch it out. I'm not going far.

725

00:43:06,000 --> 00:43:11,000

At its deepest point, Lake Michigan is almost a thousand feet straight down,

726

00:43:11,000 --> 00:43:13,000

enough to swallow the Eiffel Tower.

727

00:43:13,000 --> 00:43:17,000

Even here near the shore, it drops to well over 100 feet,

728

00:43:17,000 --> 00:43:21,000

meaning we'll be operating near the edge of our limits for scuba gear.

729

00:43:21,000 --> 00:43:26,000

Okay, we're passing 90 feet. Keep your eyes peeled.

730

00:43:29,000 --> 00:43:34,000

Arm is coming into view. I can see nothing dark down there.

731

00:43:36,000 --> 00:43:38,000

I don't know what that is.

732

00:43:40,000 --> 00:43:42,000

What is that?

733

00:43:55,000 --> 00:44:02,000

On June 24th, 1950, Northwest Flight 2501 flew into a storm over Lake Michigan

734

00:44:02,000 --> 00:44:05,000

and vanished with 58 people aboard.

735

00:44:05,000 --> 00:44:10,000

At the time, it was the largest aviation disaster in U.S. history,

736

00:44:10,000 --> 00:44:14,000

and it remains the only large U.S. airliner to never be found.

737

00:44:16,000 --> 00:44:20,000

A forgotten eyewitness report led investigator Valerie Van Heest and me

738

00:44:20,000 --> 00:44:26,000

to a new search area where Sonar revealed something large enough to be wreckage from the plane.

739

00:44:26,000 --> 00:44:28,000

That could be the plane.

740

00:44:28,000 --> 00:44:32,000

Now, we're descending into the depths of the lake to see what's down there.

741

00:44:35,000 --> 00:44:40,000

Arm is coming into view. I can see nothing dark down there.

742

00:44:43,000 --> 00:44:45,000

I don't know what that is.

743

00:44:48,000 --> 00:44:50,000

Wait, what is that?

744

00:44:52,000 --> 00:44:57,000

Resting on the lake bottom is what appears to be a huge metal framework.

745

00:44:57,000 --> 00:45:00,000

But the question is, from what?

746

00:45:02,000 --> 00:45:04,000

Looks more like a hit-brick.

747

00:45:06,000 --> 00:45:09,000

Yeah, it doesn't look like this is a plane.

748

00:45:10,000 --> 00:45:17,000

That is a hole. Definitely a ship. Looks like a barge.

749

00:45:17,000 --> 00:45:20,000

But we're down here a long time, that's for sure.

750

00:45:21,000 --> 00:45:25,000

Up close, the wreck reveals decades of encrustation.

751

00:45:25,000 --> 00:45:27,000

Any clueless to what happened to her?

752

00:45:27,000 --> 00:45:34,000

No idea. We're going to hand her luck to Gordon and use the research.

753

00:45:34,000 --> 00:45:36,000

Incredible. Another mystery.

754

00:45:37,000 --> 00:45:40,000

Okay, now I'm turning into a popsicle. Let's have a look.

755

00:45:50,000 --> 00:45:54,000

Okay, we got a wreck, but not a plane.

756

00:45:54,000 --> 00:45:56,000

It's not what we were looking for.

757

00:45:56,000 --> 00:45:58,000

No, a barge of some kind.

758

00:45:58,000 --> 00:46:00,000

It sure looks like it.

759

00:46:00,000 --> 00:46:04,000

Yeah, so disappointing, but another wreck with its own story to tell.

760

00:46:04,000 --> 00:46:08,000

We're going to have to work to identify it and tell it's story.

761

00:46:08,000 --> 00:46:11,000

And we've got to keep looking for the plane.

762

00:46:11,000 --> 00:46:13,000

How many wrecks that make for you?

763

00:46:13,000 --> 00:46:15,000

21.

764

00:46:15,000 --> 00:46:19,000

Not that one you're looking for, but 21 is still a pretty good number.

765

00:46:19,000 --> 00:46:21,000

Great job, though.

766

00:46:21,000 --> 00:46:24,000

A wreck is a wreck. Okay, let's get back on the boat.

767

00:46:25,000 --> 00:46:29,000

We climb back aboard for the trip home to South Haven.

768

00:46:29,000 --> 00:46:34,000

We've been able to fill in more of the search zone and found an incredible new wreck,

769

00:46:34,000 --> 00:46:36,000

but the plane is still out there.

770

00:46:36,000 --> 00:46:40,000

Valerie and Jack, though, have some tricks left up their sleeve.

771

00:46:40,000 --> 00:46:44,000

Once we make it to dry land, they send me down to Grand Rapids

772

00:46:44,000 --> 00:46:48,000

for a meeting that might help us get closer to the missing aircraft.

773

00:46:48,000 --> 00:46:52,000

But first, Valerie wants me to understand the urgency of her mission

774

00:46:52,000 --> 00:46:55,000

by stopping in for lunch at a South Haven diner.

775

00:46:55,000 --> 00:46:56,000

Hi, nice to meet you.

776

00:46:56,000 --> 00:47:02,000

With me is Ken Scogh IV, Ken Scogh Jr. and Ken Scogh III.

777

00:47:02,000 --> 00:47:09,000

Three generations, all named after one of Flight 2501's victims, Ken Scogh Sr.

778

00:47:09,000 --> 00:47:15,000

This is a story that a lot of people, especially younger people, may have never heard of.

779

00:47:15,000 --> 00:47:17,000

Tell me a little bit about that night.

780

00:47:17,000 --> 00:47:20,000

I was 18 years old. He was 51.

781

00:47:20,000 --> 00:47:25,000

51. And who was at the airport to meet him? Was it you?

782

00:47:25,000 --> 00:47:29,000

I had Margaret, his second wife, and he was flying in.

783

00:47:29,000 --> 00:47:34,000

He took a night plane instead of a day plane. I guess he wanted to do some more work.

784

00:47:34,000 --> 00:47:38,000

How long was it before you had a sense that maybe something was wrong?

785

00:47:38,000 --> 00:47:43,000

They knew at the time the plane was missing, but they didn't convey that information to me.

786

00:47:43,000 --> 00:47:49,000

They didn't know exactly where it was, but they must have had a pretty good idea that something was wrong.

787

00:47:50,000 --> 00:47:55,000

And they never did inform us. I was called the next day by a minister at the church,

788

00:47:55,000 --> 00:47:59,000

and the minister said, your dad's plane is missing.

789

00:47:59,000 --> 00:48:04,000

And as the search unfolded, what was that experience like?

790

00:48:04,000 --> 00:48:09,000

Well, you know, I knew my father was dead very soon.

791

00:48:09,000 --> 00:48:14,000

A briefcase emerged, and my father's briefcase. It was found early.

792

00:48:14,000 --> 00:48:15,000

Yeah.

793

00:48:15,000 --> 00:48:20,000

Just 18 when the plane crashed, Ken Jr. has kept his father's memory alive,

794

00:48:20,000 --> 00:48:25,000

sharing treasured pictures and stories with his children and grandchildren.

795

00:48:25,000 --> 00:48:28,000

And this letter? This is a letter from Eisenhower.

796

00:48:28,000 --> 00:48:32,000

I learned that your father had been a passenger on the plane lost over Lake Michigan.

797

00:48:32,000 --> 00:48:37,000

My sincerest sympathy, sincerely, to write to you, Eisenhower.

798

00:48:37,000 --> 00:48:39,000

So that's really, really something that he sent that.

799

00:48:39,000 --> 00:48:41,000

Yes, I admired him.

800

00:48:41,000 --> 00:48:46,000

And what about you, Ken, when you were a kid growing up, was this story of the flight

801

00:48:46,000 --> 00:48:50,000

kind of part of the narrative of your family or something that wasn't talked about?

802

00:48:50,000 --> 00:48:55,000

Well, we didn't talk about it a whole lot. I just knew as a kid that I was missing a set of grandparents.

803

00:48:55,000 --> 00:49:00,000

Over time, I became more curious and wanted to know what had happened.

804

00:49:00,000 --> 00:49:03,000

What would it mean to you if the plane was found?

805

00:49:03,000 --> 00:49:10,000

It would be an important point for me to know the spot or something I could say, that's where he's buried.

806

00:49:10,000 --> 00:49:14,000

There was no grave, there was no nothing. He just, he died, he was gone somewhere in Lake Michigan.

807

00:49:14,000 --> 00:49:18,000

For me, that would be nice to know where it happened.

808

00:49:18,000 --> 00:49:26,000

I think it would mean a lot to tell their stories, and I think finding the wreckage of the plane would make those stories so much more potent.

809

00:49:26,000 --> 00:49:32,000

You know, you think about this accident and all of the people whose lives were cut short,

810

00:49:32,000 --> 00:49:37,000

the world is a very different place because of that airplane crash.

811

00:49:37,000 --> 00:49:42,000

Well, listen, I just want to say thanks for taking the time to chat with me. I really appreciate it.

812

00:49:42,000 --> 00:49:44,000

It was really an honor to hear about your father.

813

00:49:44,000 --> 00:49:45,000

Thank you.

814

00:49:45,000 --> 00:49:50,000

The Scoges are just one of the many families waiting for a phone call from Valerie,

815

00:49:50,000 --> 00:49:54,000

and the news that Northwest 2501 has finally been found.

816

00:49:54,000 --> 00:50:00,000

Now, we may be closer to that day with new information that might just change the search.

817

00:50:01,000 --> 00:50:08,000

I'm headed to Grand Rapids, Michigan to meet with the oceanographer who worked with Valerie early on to help establish her initial search area.

818

00:50:08,000 --> 00:50:14,000

Now, there's word that he's been able to use new technology to make a major break in the case.

819

00:50:28,000 --> 00:50:29,000

Dave? Hey.

820

00:50:29,000 --> 00:50:30,000

Dave's here.

821

00:50:30,000 --> 00:50:31,000

Nice to meet you. How are you?

822

00:50:31,000 --> 00:50:32,000

Hi, Dan.

823

00:50:32,000 --> 00:50:34,000

Dan, pleasure. This is an impressive setup.

824

00:50:34,000 --> 00:50:35,000

Thank you.

825

00:50:35,000 --> 00:50:36,000

You ever do Monday Night Football in here?

826

00:50:40,000 --> 00:50:42,000

No, we're all business.

827

00:50:42,000 --> 00:50:45,000

All business? Okay, that's good. You're the weather service. You're supposed to be all business.

828

00:50:45,000 --> 00:50:48,000

So, okay, and you focus on another aspect of weather, right?

829

00:50:48,000 --> 00:50:51,000

My specialty is oceanography of the Great Lakes.

830

00:50:51,000 --> 00:50:53,000

So we've got above the water and in the water.

831

00:50:53,000 --> 00:50:54,000

Exactly.

832

00:50:54,000 --> 00:50:58,000

And weather really is at the heart of this story that we're tackling.

833

00:50:58,000 --> 00:51:02,000

Let's go back in time to 1950. Facilities like this are not here.

834

00:51:02,000 --> 00:51:03,000

Don't exist yet.

835

00:51:03,000 --> 00:51:06,000

Right. Do we have records from that time?

836

00:51:06,000 --> 00:51:07,000

Yes, we do.

837

00:51:07,000 --> 00:51:12,000

Weather observers at the airports that existed at that time, and they're taking observations on an hourly basis.

838

00:51:12,000 --> 00:51:14,000

And when we say collecting data, what are they doing?

839

00:51:14,000 --> 00:51:21,000

So they're collecting the recording, the sky condition, visibility, temperature, dew point, humidity, wind direction and speed.

840

00:51:21,000 --> 00:51:22,000

And then just writing it down?

841

00:51:22,000 --> 00:51:24,000

Writing it down. Handwritten records.

842

00:51:24,000 --> 00:51:27,000

And can anything insightful be gleaned from that data?

843

00:51:27,000 --> 00:51:34,000

Yeah, NOAA has recently created a reanalysis data set that can be used to make a modern day forecast.

844

00:51:34,000 --> 00:51:37,000

So we can use modern forecasting to look at an event from 1950?

845

00:51:37,000 --> 00:51:38,000

That's right.

846

00:51:38,000 --> 00:51:39,000

Okay, can we see it?

847

00:51:39,000 --> 00:51:40,000

Sure.

848

00:51:40,000 --> 00:51:42,000

We're all familiar with weather forecasting.

849

00:51:42,000 --> 00:51:47,000

Where meteorologists use observations and computer modeling to predict the weather.

850

00:51:47,000 --> 00:51:51,000

Now, Dan is employing a cutting-edge technology called hindcasting.

851

00:51:51,000 --> 00:51:59,000

Using known data from the past and mathematical models of how storms behave created an historic weather map.

852

00:51:59,000 --> 00:52:05,000

He's about to give me a glimpse into the past and the future at the very same time.

853

00:52:05,000 --> 00:52:10,000

Whoa!

854

00:52:35,000 --> 00:52:44,000

Dave Schwab and meteorologist Dan Cobb are using cutting-edge technology to try to pinpoint the location of the missing plane.

855

00:52:44,000 --> 00:52:48,000

This is the evening of June 23rd, 1950, and this is our squall right here.

856

00:52:48,000 --> 00:52:50,000

This is the formation of the squall line.

857

00:52:50,000 --> 00:52:55,000

It develops and then accelerates southward across southern end of Lake Michigan.

858

00:52:55,000 --> 00:52:58,000

We're talking about something that's stretching across a couple of states here almost.

859

00:52:58,000 --> 00:53:00,000

This is hundreds of miles across, right?

860

00:53:00,000 --> 00:53:01,000

Right.

861

00:53:01,000 --> 00:53:03,000

It's not just weather, but I know that red is bad.

862

00:53:03,000 --> 00:53:05,000

Tell me what's happening in all these red cells as it comes down.

863

00:53:05,000 --> 00:53:11,000

Those cells are areas where there's just extreme turbulence, winds at speeds of 100 miles per hour,

864

00:53:11,000 --> 00:53:15,000

large hail, torrential rain, a lot of lightning in those areas too.

865

00:53:15,000 --> 00:53:17,000

Definitely a place you don't want to be.

866

00:53:17,000 --> 00:53:18,000

Right, a nasty place.

867

00:53:18,000 --> 00:53:19,000

Right.

868

00:53:19,000 --> 00:53:23,000

So even today, this is something that a modern jetliner would not want to fly into.

869

00:53:23,000 --> 00:53:26,000

Right, they absolutely do everything they can to avoid those areas.

870

00:53:26,000 --> 00:53:32,000

This really visually speaks volumes about how dangerous a storm system they were flying into.

871

00:53:32,000 --> 00:53:38,000

So I know that you worked, Dave, with Valerie, when she started her search,

872

00:53:38,000 --> 00:53:42,000

to help define this outer perimeter of the search area.

873

00:53:42,000 --> 00:53:50,000

From the wind records, we were able to create a path that a piece of debris might have followed

874

00:53:50,000 --> 00:53:52,000

if it was only being pushed by the wind.

875

00:53:52,000 --> 00:53:56,000

And that gave her a pretty massive diameter of about 500 square miles.

876

00:53:56,000 --> 00:54:01,000

So what's changed now? How are you able to refine that?

877

00:54:01,000 --> 00:54:09,000

We can combine the wind and the currents to give a much more precise estimate of where that debris might have come from.

878

00:54:09,000 --> 00:54:16,000

Generally speaking, what percentage of the debris's movement is owed to current and what percentage is owed to the wind?

879

00:54:16,000 --> 00:54:19,000

Well, it depends on how much is sticking above the water.

880

00:54:19,000 --> 00:54:20,000

Yeah.

881

00:54:20,000 --> 00:54:24,000

We use 3% of the wind and 100% of the current.

882

00:54:24,000 --> 00:54:27,000

You have to use both those things in concert to be accurate.

883

00:54:27,000 --> 00:54:28,000

Yes.

884

00:54:28,000 --> 00:54:30,000

So we're talking about some pretty advanced computer modeling here.

885

00:54:30,000 --> 00:54:33,000

I like to think of it as forensic oceanography.

886

00:54:33,000 --> 00:54:34,000

I love that.

887

00:54:35,000 --> 00:54:42,000

As Valerie told me earlier, the Coast Guard recovered nearly 7,000 pounds of debris from 2501.

888

00:54:42,000 --> 00:54:48,000

Pieces of aluminum, bits of seat cushions, paneling, and hundreds of personal effects.

889

00:54:48,000 --> 00:54:53,000

I read their meticulous logs, noting the location and time of each discovery.

890

00:54:53,000 --> 00:55:01,000

Using those data points as a reference and weather service models of wind and current after the crash, Dave ran a simulation.

891

00:55:01,000 --> 00:55:05,000

Actually, he ran 2,600 simulations.

892

00:55:05,000 --> 00:55:09,000

Each one, a virtual plane crash in a different part of Lake Michigan.

893

00:55:09,000 --> 00:55:11,000

So let me make sure I understand this.

894

00:55:11,000 --> 00:55:15,000

Each one of these hypothetical crashes generates a debris path.

895

00:55:15,000 --> 00:55:18,000

These black triangles are where the Coast Guard ships were finding debris.

896

00:55:18,000 --> 00:55:19,000

Is that right?

897

00:55:19,000 --> 00:55:20,000

Exactly.

898

00:55:20,000 --> 00:55:25,000

So I can't help but notice that in the middle of all this is this big cluster of red dots.

899

00:55:25,000 --> 00:55:33,000

After we ran the simulation, we looked at each of those tracks from the 2,600 potential crash sites.

900

00:55:33,000 --> 00:55:34,000

Right.

901

00:55:34,000 --> 00:55:41,000

And each of those tracks, we assigned a number to it based on how close it came to places where real debris was found.

902

00:55:41,000 --> 00:55:50,000

Dave explains that the red dots are the virtual crash sites where simulated debris best matched the location of real debris found by the Coast Guard.

903

00:55:50,000 --> 00:55:56,000

So put another way, there's probably an airplane wreck somewhere in there.

904

00:55:56,000 --> 00:55:59,000

That's where my money would be.

905

00:55:59,000 --> 00:56:06,000

The new target is safely within the unsearched area of Dave's original 500-mile zone.

906

00:56:06,000 --> 00:56:09,000

It means we've got a new place to scan.

907

00:56:09,000 --> 00:56:11,000

This is amazing detective work.

908

00:56:11,000 --> 00:56:12,000

I really, really appreciate this.

909

00:56:12,000 --> 00:56:13,000

Valerie's going to flip out.

910

00:56:13,000 --> 00:56:15,000

I can't wait to show her this data.

911

00:56:15,000 --> 00:56:16,000

One final question.

912

00:56:16,000 --> 00:56:18,000

Am I going to need an umbrella tomorrow, Dan?

913

00:56:18,000 --> 00:56:19,000

No, I think you're going to be good.

914

00:56:19,000 --> 00:56:20,000

I'm good?

915

00:56:20,000 --> 00:56:21,000

Yep.

916

00:56:21,000 --> 00:56:22,000

Okay.

917

00:56:22,000 --> 00:56:23,000

It's not going to rain tomorrow.

918

00:56:23,000 --> 00:56:24,000

You heard it here.

919

00:56:24,000 --> 00:56:32,000

The Weather Service scientists have been able to take 70-year-old data and tell us with eerie precision what occurred on June 24, 1950.

920

00:56:32,000 --> 00:56:44,000

Now armed with a truly refined search zone, I speed back to Valerie and Jack at the South Haven Marina, where for this crucial search, she's called in some much-needed help.

921

00:56:44,000 --> 00:56:48,000

Josh, this is Sergeant Peros from the Michigan State Police.

922

00:56:48,000 --> 00:56:49,000

Pleasure meeting you.

923

00:56:49,000 --> 00:56:51,000

I feel underdressed suddenly.

924

00:56:51,000 --> 00:56:53,000

Or about to be arrested.

925

00:56:53,000 --> 00:56:54,000

So what's going on?

926

00:56:54,000 --> 00:56:55,000

Valerie reached out.

927

00:56:55,000 --> 00:56:57,000

I believe we've got a narrowed down search area.

928

00:56:57,000 --> 00:56:59,000

This modeling now has it narrowed way down.

929

00:56:59,000 --> 00:57:01,000

Yes, and we'd like to give a hand.

930

00:57:01,000 --> 00:57:03,000

We've got some state-of-the-art tech on board.

931

00:57:03,000 --> 00:57:04,000

Okay.

932

00:57:04,000 --> 00:57:08,000

And we hope that it can be of assistance and that it'll get the job done.

933

00:57:08,000 --> 00:57:09,000

That sounds great.

934

00:57:09,000 --> 00:57:10,000

Let's do it.

935

00:57:10,000 --> 00:57:12,000

Come on aboard.

936

00:57:12,000 --> 00:57:17,000

We exit the harbor in the Sergeant's patrol boat.

937

00:57:17,000 --> 00:57:23,000

Having been in the backseat of a cruiser before, long story, I know the cops have some souped up gear.

938

00:57:23,000 --> 00:57:25,000

Officer, how fast does this go?

939

00:57:25,000 --> 00:57:27,000

Let's find out.

940

00:57:27,000 --> 00:57:28,000

Coming up.

941

00:57:28,000 --> 00:57:30,000

Coming up.

942

00:57:30,000 --> 00:57:32,000

Woo-hoo!

943

00:57:32,000 --> 00:57:34,000

Woo-hoo-hoo!

944

00:57:34,000 --> 00:57:39,000

This is awesome!

945

00:57:39,000 --> 00:57:41,000

Oh, yeah!

946

00:57:41,000 --> 00:57:45,000

If there's a speed limit out here, I'm pretty sure we're breaking it.

947

00:57:45,000 --> 00:57:50,000

After the fastest mile I've ever traveled on water, we get to the new search area.

948

00:57:50,000 --> 00:57:52,000

They were coming up on the area.

949

00:57:52,000 --> 00:57:53,000

This is it?

950

00:57:53,000 --> 00:57:54,000

This is it.

951

00:57:54,000 --> 00:57:56,000

Okay, we're in the zone.

952

00:57:57,000 --> 00:58:02,000

And Sergeant Peros brings out the gear he hopes will find 2501.

953

00:58:02,000 --> 00:58:04,000

So, Josh, this is our secret weapon.

954

00:58:04,000 --> 00:58:05,000

Look at this.

955

00:58:05,000 --> 00:58:08,000

So, this is an AUV, is that right?

956

00:58:08,000 --> 00:58:09,000

That's correct.

957

00:58:09,000 --> 00:58:11,000

These things are insane.

958

00:58:11,000 --> 00:58:13,000

It's literally like a mini-submarine.

959

00:58:13,000 --> 00:58:21,000

AUVs, or Autonomous Underwater Vehicles, have been a 21st century game changer in search and recovery operations.

960

00:58:21,000 --> 00:58:25,000

We program the course for it, and we feed that course into the vehicle.

961

00:58:25,000 --> 00:58:30,000

So, this goes off on its own, does the scanning, and then hypothetically returns to you?

962

00:58:30,000 --> 00:58:31,000

Correct.

963

00:58:31,000 --> 00:58:35,000

The AUV is equipped with the latest sonar technology to map the lake bottom.

964

00:58:35,000 --> 00:58:40,000

It's like a lawnmower that mows by itself, only much more expensive.

965

00:58:40,000 --> 00:58:43,000

I'm just going to drop her in the water and let it do its business.

966

00:58:43,000 --> 00:58:44,000

Okay.

967

00:58:44,000 --> 00:58:48,000

We carefully lower the AUV over the side.

968

00:58:48,000 --> 00:58:50,000

All right, she's in the water.

969

00:58:51,000 --> 00:58:55,000

Sergeant Parros programs in the waypoints, and we're ready to launch.

970

00:58:55,000 --> 00:58:58,000

So, all you got to do is push the green button, and it'll be on its way.

971

00:58:58,000 --> 00:59:00,000

Now that honor goes to you.

972

00:59:00,000 --> 00:59:01,000

Here's hoping.

973

00:59:02,000 --> 00:59:03,000

She's off?

974

00:59:14,000 --> 00:59:19,000

I'm with investigator Valerie Van Heest and Michigan State Police Sergeant Randall Parros.

975

00:59:19,000 --> 00:59:27,000

Searching for the wreck of Northwest Flight 2501, an airliner lost in a storm off Lake Michigan in 1950.

976

00:59:28,000 --> 00:59:35,000

Now, we're using a sonar equipped autonomous underwater vehicle to scan for debris from the lost plane.

977

00:59:35,000 --> 00:59:38,000

So, all you got to do is push the green button, and it'll be on its way.

978

00:59:38,000 --> 00:59:40,000

Now that honor goes to you.

979

00:59:40,000 --> 00:59:41,000

Here's hoping.

980

00:59:42,000 --> 00:59:49,000

The torpedo springs to life and sails off to map the lake, leaving me with much less to do than usual.

981

00:59:49,000 --> 00:59:50,000

All right.

982

00:59:50,000 --> 00:59:51,000

Now we...

983

00:59:51,000 --> 00:59:52,000

Wait.

984

00:59:52,000 --> 00:59:53,000

Wait.

985

00:59:53,000 --> 00:59:56,000

Okay, let's go wait.

986

00:59:56,000 --> 00:59:57,000

Okay.

987

00:59:59,000 --> 01:00:03,000

RoboCops is going to be out on patrol for the next three hours.

988

01:00:03,000 --> 01:00:07,000

So, I do some light reading while Valerie catches a few Zs.

989

01:00:11,000 --> 01:00:16,000

Okay, two hours and 52 minutes left.

990

01:00:20,000 --> 01:00:23,000

And exactly two hours and 52 minutes later.

991

01:00:23,000 --> 01:00:25,000

Hey, the AUV's up.

992

01:00:25,000 --> 01:00:26,000

We got it.

993

01:00:28,000 --> 01:00:31,000

Well, let's hope there's something on there.

994

01:00:32,000 --> 01:00:40,000

We retrieve the AUV, load the data onto a laptop, and start combing through the results of the day's subject.

995

01:00:40,000 --> 01:00:42,000

The results of the day's sonar scan.

996

01:00:43,000 --> 01:00:46,000

So, this looks a lot like what we were seeing on the boat the other day.

997

01:00:46,000 --> 01:00:47,000

Exactly.

998

01:00:47,000 --> 01:00:49,000

This pretty featureless bottom, right?

999

01:00:49,000 --> 01:00:54,000

I really think we're looking for a scattered debris field, maybe a couple of hard hits for the engines.

1000

01:00:54,000 --> 01:00:55,000

Right.

1001

01:00:55,000 --> 01:01:00,000

Miles of lake bottom scroll by, and all we see is nothing.

1002

01:01:00,000 --> 01:01:02,000

But then...

1003

01:01:02,000 --> 01:01:04,000

Oh, gee.

1004

01:01:04,000 --> 01:01:08,000

That looks like that could be debris.

1005

01:01:08,000 --> 01:01:09,000

Here?

1006

01:01:09,000 --> 01:01:10,000

Yeah.

1007

01:01:10,000 --> 01:01:13,000

Can you zoom in on that, Randy?

1008

01:01:13,000 --> 01:01:14,000

Yes.

1009

01:01:15,000 --> 01:01:17,000

That looks like debris.

1010

01:01:17,000 --> 01:01:19,000

Oh my goodness.

1011

01:01:20,000 --> 01:01:22,000

Look at this.

1012

01:01:22,000 --> 01:01:24,000

Oh my goodness.

1013

01:01:24,000 --> 01:01:25,000

Disagree.

1014

01:01:25,000 --> 01:01:29,000

I mean, that looks like it could be an engine and that could be body, right?

1015

01:01:29,000 --> 01:01:30,000

Yep.

1016

01:01:31,000 --> 01:01:32,000

Oh, my word.

1017

01:01:32,000 --> 01:01:36,000

This is what it means to look for something for 15 years.

1018

01:01:36,000 --> 01:01:41,000

Valerie is overwhelmed at the possibility of finally locating the plane.

1019

01:01:41,000 --> 01:01:43,000

This could be it.

1020

01:01:43,000 --> 01:01:45,000

We're close, yet so far.

1021

01:01:45,000 --> 01:01:47,000

How deep down is that target?

1022

01:01:47,000 --> 01:01:48,000

About 270.

1023

01:01:48,000 --> 01:01:49,000

Can your dive guys get down to 270?

1024

01:01:49,000 --> 01:01:50,000

Yeah.

1025

01:01:52,000 --> 01:01:56,000

Diving to those depths requires special training and special equipment,

1026

01:01:56,000 --> 01:02:00,000

which means I'm not the one who's going to be able to fetch whatever's down there.

1027

01:02:00,000 --> 01:02:03,000

Valerie has a team, though, that can reach the bottom.

1028

01:02:03,000 --> 01:02:04,000

Let's go.

1029

01:02:04,000 --> 01:02:05,000

Let's go.

1030

01:02:05,000 --> 01:02:08,000

Yeah, let's get down there and see what this is.

1031

01:02:08,000 --> 01:02:12,000

Valerie radios her colleagues back at the MSRA headquarters,

1032

01:02:12,000 --> 01:02:16,000

and 20 minutes later, we rendezvous with Todd White and Jeff Voss,

1033

01:02:16,000 --> 01:02:20,000

divers able to venture down to our sonar target.

1034

01:02:20,000 --> 01:02:22,000

How you doing guys?

1035

01:02:22,000 --> 01:02:23,000

Good, how are you?

1036

01:02:23,000 --> 01:02:24,000

Well, we got a target.

1037

01:02:24,000 --> 01:02:25,000

All right.

1038

01:02:25,000 --> 01:02:26,000

Yeah, this could be it.

1039

01:02:26,000 --> 01:02:27,000

Yeah, cool.

1040

01:02:27,000 --> 01:02:28,000

Let's check it out.

1041

01:02:28,000 --> 01:02:30,000

Okay, here we go.

1042

01:02:30,000 --> 01:02:36,000

Diving at 300 feet requires a specialized mixture of oxygen, helium, and nitrogen.

1043

01:02:36,000 --> 01:02:40,000

Because at those depths, compressed air is actually toxic.

1044

01:02:40,000 --> 01:02:42,000

And due to the frigid cold of Lake Michigan,

1045

01:02:42,000 --> 01:02:47,000

the dive team dons thick dry suits to combat the risk of hypothermia.

1046

01:02:48,000 --> 01:02:50,000

The target's at 270 feet.

1047

01:02:50,000 --> 01:02:52,000

So what's your bottom time at 270?

1048

01:02:52,000 --> 01:02:53,000

We can do about 20 minutes.

1049

01:02:53,000 --> 01:02:54,000

20 minutes.

1050

01:02:54,000 --> 01:02:55,000

Okay, so that's all we got.

1051

01:02:55,000 --> 01:02:56,000

Okay.

1052

01:02:56,000 --> 01:02:58,000

Because of the pressure in deep water,

1053

01:02:58,000 --> 01:03:01,000

the diver's time at the bottom is extremely limited.

1054

01:03:01,000 --> 01:03:04,000

Whatever's down there, they need to find it fast.

1055

01:03:04,000 --> 01:03:06,000

What kind of target were you going after?

1056

01:03:06,000 --> 01:03:08,000

I mean, it looked like a scatter.

1057

01:03:08,000 --> 01:03:11,000

Yeah, big debris field was really broken up,

1058

01:03:11,000 --> 01:03:15,000

but there looked like a couple of big hits that might be engines down there.

1059

01:03:15,000 --> 01:03:16,000

Okay.

1060

01:03:16,000 --> 01:03:18,000

So, we'll stay in touch from up here.

1061

01:03:18,000 --> 01:03:19,000

Good luck.

1062

01:03:19,000 --> 01:03:20,000

All right, well do.

1063

01:03:20,000 --> 01:03:22,000

Yeah, okay, let's do it guys.

1064

01:03:22,000 --> 01:03:26,000

Jeff and Todd climb into the water and prepare to dive.

1065

01:03:27,000 --> 01:03:29,000

All right, got speed.

1066

01:03:37,000 --> 01:03:39,000

Okay, we're dropping down.

1067

01:03:40,000 --> 01:03:45,000

The dive team slowly, carefully descends down the guide rope toward the target.

1068

01:03:47,000 --> 01:03:49,000

What are the conditions like?

1069

01:03:50,000 --> 01:03:53,000

We're about 50 feet down.

1070

01:03:53,000 --> 01:03:56,000

Water is definitely getting colder.

1071

01:03:59,000 --> 01:04:01,000

Okay guys, let us know when you hit the bottom.

1072

01:04:01,000 --> 01:04:03,000

Okay, we'll do.

1073

01:04:05,000 --> 01:04:07,000

Finally, after several tense minutes,

1074

01:04:07,000 --> 01:04:09,000

the team reaches the end of the rope,

1075

01:04:09,000 --> 01:04:11,000

and our clock starts.

1076

01:04:12,000 --> 01:04:14,000

We're at the bottom.

1077

01:04:17,000 --> 01:04:18,000

Anything?

1078

01:04:20,000 --> 01:04:21,000

Nothing yet.

1079

01:04:21,000 --> 01:04:24,000

We may have tripped it off the target.

1080

01:04:25,000 --> 01:04:26,000

Have a swim around.

1081

01:04:26,000 --> 01:04:28,000

It's a pretty big debris field on the sonar,

1082

01:04:28,000 --> 01:04:30,000

so you should bump into it sooner than later.

1083

01:04:31,000 --> 01:04:33,000

Visibility is good.

1084

01:04:33,000 --> 01:04:35,000

Not seeing any wreckage.

1085

01:04:36,000 --> 01:04:39,000

We definitely saw some pieces that were sticking up,

1086

01:04:39,000 --> 01:04:41,000

so they've got to be visible.

1087

01:04:41,000 --> 01:04:42,000

Got it.

1088

01:04:42,000 --> 01:04:46,000

We're still looking, turning through bottom time fast.

1089

01:04:46,000 --> 01:04:49,000

The clock ticks, and we only have five minutes left

1090

01:04:49,000 --> 01:04:52,000

before the divers have to begin to surface.

1091

01:04:52,000 --> 01:04:54,000

Despite the clarity of our sonar image,

1092

01:04:54,000 --> 01:04:57,000

they haven't yet found anything.

1093

01:04:57,000 --> 01:05:00,000

But just as our time is about to run out...

1094

01:05:00,000 --> 01:05:03,000

Josh, I think I've got something.

1095

01:05:03,000 --> 01:05:05,000

You got debris?

1096

01:05:05,000 --> 01:05:07,000

Looks like metal.

1097

01:05:07,000 --> 01:05:09,000

Cut each pearl of flame.

1098

01:05:17,000 --> 01:05:21,000

My expedition may have led me to the icy waters of Lake Michigan,

1099

01:05:21,000 --> 01:05:24,000

but along the way, I made time to take in what may be

1100

01:05:24,000 --> 01:05:27,000

the greatest gathering in the Mitten State,

1101

01:05:27,000 --> 01:05:30,000

the antique flywheelers tractor show.

1102

01:05:33,000 --> 01:05:37,000

This thing, 1920s John Deere tractor that was modified

1103

01:05:37,000 --> 01:05:41,000

by a local genius named Norm Bunk.

1104

01:05:41,000 --> 01:05:43,000

It has about three horses,

1105

01:05:43,000 --> 01:05:46,000

but all of that boolia, she's got all the bells and whistles.

1106

01:05:46,000 --> 01:05:49,000

Literally. All the bells, all the whistles.

1107

01:05:58,000 --> 01:06:00,000

Oh, my God.

1108

01:06:01,000 --> 01:06:03,000

I'm never getting out of this.

1109

01:06:03,000 --> 01:06:05,000

This is the happiest I've ever been in my life.

1110

01:06:05,000 --> 01:06:08,000

I'm from Boston. Pretty much all we want to do is honk at people.

1111

01:06:08,000 --> 01:06:12,000

I'm from Boston. Pretty much all we want to do is honk at people.

1112

01:06:13,000 --> 01:06:16,000

I'm from Boston. Pretty much all we want to do is honk at people.

1113

01:06:43,000 --> 01:06:45,000

The feet below the surface of Lake Michigan,

1114

01:06:45,000 --> 01:06:48,000

our deep diving team may have just hit paydirt.

1115

01:06:52,000 --> 01:06:54,000

You got debris.

1116

01:07:00,000 --> 01:07:04,000

Anything aviation related is going to have a serial number stamped on it.

1117

01:07:09,000 --> 01:07:12,000

Anything else that you're seeing down there that you can describe?

1118

01:07:13,000 --> 01:07:15,000

Not so frustrating. You're not going to be able to see it.

1119

01:07:15,000 --> 01:07:17,000

There's more debris nearby.

1120

01:07:17,000 --> 01:07:20,000

Twisted metal. Really damaged.

1121

01:07:20,000 --> 01:07:22,000

Here's how water is.

1122

01:07:22,000 --> 01:07:25,000

If there's nothing else, we should take a look at the piece you have.

1123

01:07:25,000 --> 01:07:27,000

Just bring it up.

1124

01:07:27,000 --> 01:07:29,000

We need to know if this is flight 2501.

1125

01:07:29,000 --> 01:07:32,000

Got it. We're headed out now.

1126

01:07:32,000 --> 01:07:35,000

But our deep divers can't just pop back up.

1127

01:07:35,000 --> 01:07:39,000

If they surface too quickly, they'll fall victim to the bends.

1128

01:07:39,000 --> 01:07:44,000

A potentially deadly condition where gas bubbles form in the bloodstream.

1129

01:07:44,000 --> 01:07:47,000

So they'll have to surface in stages.

1130

01:07:47,000 --> 01:07:53,000

Jeff, if you want to hang on the line, I'll come get it for you during your decompression stop and I can bring it up.

1131

01:07:53,000 --> 01:07:55,000

Copy that.

1132

01:07:55,000 --> 01:07:56,000

I'm going to go grab it.

1133

01:07:56,000 --> 01:07:57,000

All right.

1134

01:07:57,000 --> 01:08:02,000

While Jeff and Todd pause to decompress, I gear up and dive in.

1135

01:08:10,000 --> 01:08:14,000

I meet them at 100 feet to retrieve the evidence.

1136

01:08:14,000 --> 01:08:17,000

Here you go, Josh. That's your pitch.

1137

01:08:17,000 --> 01:08:21,000

Whoa. Okay, you guys, finish your safety stop now.

1138

01:08:21,000 --> 01:08:25,000

I'm going to clean this off best I can and come to the surface.

1139

01:08:33,000 --> 01:08:34,000

Hey.

1140

01:08:34,000 --> 01:08:35,000

What do you got?

1141

01:08:35,000 --> 01:08:36,000

I got a present for you.

1142

01:08:36,000 --> 01:08:38,000

Oh boy.

1143

01:08:39,000 --> 01:08:40,000

It's from a plane, right?

1144

01:08:40,000 --> 01:08:41,000

Yeah.

1145

01:08:41,000 --> 01:08:42,000

Look, that's safety wire.

1146

01:08:42,000 --> 01:08:43,000

That's aviation.

1147

01:08:43,000 --> 01:08:44,000

That's aviation, for sure.

1148

01:08:44,000 --> 01:08:48,000

Safety wire is used to secure bolts that could loosen due to vibration.

1149

01:08:48,000 --> 01:08:52,000

It's a strong indicator that this came from an airplane.

1150

01:08:52,000 --> 01:08:53,000

Look at the serial stamp on it.

1151

01:08:53,000 --> 01:08:54,000

Yeah, right.

1152

01:08:54,000 --> 01:08:55,000

Does it look modern to you?

1153

01:08:55,000 --> 01:08:56,000

Yeah.

1154

01:08:59,000 --> 01:09:00,000

Probably not 2501.

1155

01:09:00,000 --> 01:09:01,000

No.

1156

01:09:02,000 --> 01:09:06,000

We'll be able to look up the serial number and every plane is marked.

1157

01:09:06,000 --> 01:09:07,000

But hold on. I don't get this.

1158

01:09:07,000 --> 01:09:09,000

That's a plane part, no question.

1159

01:09:09,000 --> 01:09:11,000

What the hell is it from?

1160

01:09:11,000 --> 01:09:15,000

There are no other planes that have gone down big commercial planes.

1161

01:09:15,000 --> 01:09:17,000

We've got another mystery on our hands.

1162

01:09:17,000 --> 01:09:18,000

Yeah.

1163

01:09:20,000 --> 01:09:22,000

I thought you had it.

1164

01:09:22,000 --> 01:09:23,000

I really did.

1165

01:09:23,000 --> 01:09:25,000

I thought we did too.

1166

01:09:25,000 --> 01:09:26,000

This is how it goes.

1167

01:09:26,000 --> 01:09:27,000

Yeah. Welcome to our world.

1168

01:09:27,000 --> 01:09:28,000

Yeah.

1169

01:09:28,000 --> 01:09:29,000

Well, I'm happy to be here.

1170

01:09:29,000 --> 01:09:30,000

Yeah.

1171

01:09:30,000 --> 01:09:31,000

Frustrated, but happy to be here.

1172

01:09:31,000 --> 01:09:32,000

Yeah.

1173

01:09:33,000 --> 01:09:40,000

Valerie's search for the lost Northwest plane now 15 years old is not yet finished.

1174

01:09:40,000 --> 01:09:42,000

So the hunt goes on.

1175

01:09:43,000 --> 01:09:50,000

She and her team have crossed off another sector of their search zone and they won't stop until the plane is found.

1176

01:09:50,000 --> 01:09:54,000

And the families of those on board get some small measure of peace.

1177

01:09:54,000 --> 01:09:59,000

As for my journey, there's one more place I want to visit before I return home.

1178

01:09:59,000 --> 01:10:02,000

The Lakeview Cemetery in South Haven.

1179

01:10:06,000 --> 01:10:19,000

In 2008, Valerie's detective work led her to discover that the remains of victims recovered by investigators back in 1950 were actually buried in an unmarked grave in the nearby city of St. Joseph.

1180

01:10:19,000 --> 01:10:23,000

In 2015, another mass grave was discovered here in South Haven.

1181

01:10:23,000 --> 01:10:30,000

Stunningly, in both cases, the families of the victims were never notified and there were no markers to commemorate the accident.

1182

01:10:30,000 --> 01:10:32,000

Well, that's changed.

1183

01:10:32,000 --> 01:10:37,000

Thanks to some generous donations, Valerie and her team have organized the placement of two headstones.

1184

01:10:37,000 --> 01:10:41,000

They've since held memorial services in both locations.

1185

01:10:41,000 --> 01:10:49,000

And now, finally, the passengers and crew of Northwest Airlines Flight 2501 have a place to be remembered.

1186

01:10:50,000 --> 01:10:58,000

These markers are the only tangible monuments to the tragic events of the night of June 23, 1950.

1187

01:10:58,000 --> 01:11:01,000

The only remembrance of those lost in the crash.

1188

01:11:01,000 --> 01:11:09,000

But as more people become aware of Northwest 2501's story, the families need no longer mourn alone.

1189

01:11:09,000 --> 01:11:15,000

The airplane part we found at the bottom of Lake Michigan was identified by using its serial

number.

1190

01:11:15,000 --> 01:11:23,000

It is a clamp from a 747 engine that fell from the sky in 2004.

1191

01:11:23,000 --> 01:11:28,000

This expedition has reminded me of a terrible truth.

1192

01:11:28,000 --> 01:11:34,000

That advancement in aviation safety is, in large part, the result of crashes.

1193

01:11:34,000 --> 01:11:36,000

We learn from failure.

1194

01:11:36,000 --> 01:11:41,000

And sadly, we're not through learning.

1195

01:11:42,000 --> 01:11:46,000

The world was shocked when Malaysia Air Flight 370 vanished,

1196

01:11:46,000 --> 01:11:54,000

because even 70 years after Northwest 2501, planes were still not being tracked in real-time over water,

1197

01:11:54,000 --> 01:11:57,000

where radar cannot reach them.

1198

01:11:57,000 --> 01:12:01,000

But now, finally, that's changing.

1199

01:12:02,000 --> 01:12:08,000

In the past year, a company known as Aeron is using a network of 66 satellites

1200

01:12:08,000 --> 01:12:12,000

to implement a global aviation tracking system.

1201

01:12:12,000 --> 01:12:14,000

And here it is.

1202

01:12:14,000 --> 01:12:20,000

This is a snapshot of the more than 10,000 planes circling the globe at this very moment,

1203

01:12:20,000 --> 01:12:23,000

carrying more than one million people.

1204

01:12:23,000 --> 01:12:27,000

Mothers, fathers, children.

1205

01:12:27,000 --> 01:12:35,000

This is the legacy of Northwest 2501, that we remember that their loss is a charge to do better.

1206

01:12:35,000 --> 01:12:42,000

To connect the world and to strive for a day when no passenger is ever lost again.