

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 14, 2017

Mr. Kelly McKeague
Director, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Mr. McKeague:

We write to express our concern regarding the search for the *San Antonio Rose*, a World War II B-17 Flying Fortress (No. 41-24458) shot down by the Japanese on January 5, 1943. As the new Director of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), we wish to bring this issue to your attention and request reinvigorated efforts to locate this plane by ensuring that all measures are being taken to locate and bring home the eleven brave crew members of the *San Antonio Rose*. Through this process, we encourage you to improve communication with their families, as no American family should ever be left to wonder whether our government is doing everything possible to find their missing loved ones. Unfortunately, as we approach the 75th anniversary of the downing of this plane, the families of the crew of the *San Antonio Rose* continue to face this painful uncertainty today.

On January 5, 1943, the *San Antonio Rose* was involved in an anti-shipping strike near Rabaul targeting Japanese shipping in Blanche Bay, Simpson Harbor, Keravia Bay, and Vunapope, all on the island of New Britain, in what is now Papua New Guinea. After taking significant anti-aircraft fire from the Japanese, the *San Antonio Rose* turned south disappearing into the clouds heading east of Vunakanau, also on New Britain Island. Despite previous conclusions by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command that the *San Antonio Rose* was lost at sea, the families of the missing crew worked with experts in the field to conduct extensive, independent research that provided evidence to DPAA in June 2016 indicating that the aircraft likely crashed inland – providing a new plausible search location.


While efforts continue to recover the *San Antonio Rose*, we are concerned that your agency must do more to effectively bring this search to a successful conclusion. In April, DPAA partnered with the Australian Unrecovered War Casualties Office to conduct a limited four-day, three-member ground exploration. This effort was an appendage to a previously scheduled search to Tol Plantation to canvass coastal settlements for World War II aircraft crash sites in the area of Papua New Guinea where the *San Antonio Rose* was last seen. It resulted in multiple sites identified by local nationals, including one with similar characteristics to the *San Antonio Rose*. In August, a Papua New Guinea team that included a DPAA Liaison Officer conducted a mission in the area of Kalip and Tol Plantation based on the information identified from the April operation. However, this mission was unsuccessful following a failure of sufficient and reliable resources to direct the team to the crash site. These search efforts remain insufficient so long as recovery of the *San Antonio Rose* remains an afterthought to other missions and priorities. As such, we request your commitment to establish a devoted search and recovery mission to locate and return the remains of the crew of the *San Antonio Rose*.

Thank you for your dedication to locating, recovering, and bringing home all of our lost military personnel. As members who represent the families of the eleven heroes who perished nearly 75 years ago, we are committed to ensuring these families, many of whom are now senior citizens with precious little time, do not wait any longer to bring their loved ones home to rest. We appreciate your attention and look forward to continuing to work with DPAA on this important matter.

Sincerely,


RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate


MARTIN HEINRICH
United States Senate


STEVE DAINES
United States Senate