

Pat Epps

The Aviator Finds his Glacier Girl

Only one man had the tenacity – some say insanity – to search for, dig up and eventually recover Glacier Girl, the celebrated P-38 that is part of the legendary Lost Squadron buried beneath 256 feet of Greenland ice cap. “I was stuck to the project like Brer Rabbit got stuck to Tar Baby,” says the 73-year-old adventurer, who lives in Athens, Georgia.

Digging up the grave of Glacier Girl “was thought daring, foolhardy,” says the founder of Epps Air Service of Dekalb-Peachtree Airport (PDK). His recovery team’s efforts – relentless, difficult, exhausting efforts – were an ordeal that battled dangerously unpredictable Arctic weather and endless lack of financial resources that year after year threatened to doom the project. But this was an expedition that fit Epps perfectly. “Lindbergh, Ernie Gann, Bob Hoover, Doolittle...it’s the guys ahead of us who paved the way that gave us confidence,” Epps says of the aviation greats he calls his heroes, men who inspired his quest. “Others have had success, so why shouldn’t we?”

In the 11th year, it happened: the expedition’s “Super Gopher” steam probe, plunged 250 below polar ice, made contact: a B-17. Though this craft proved to be too badly crushed to retrieve, further exploration located the soon to be celebrated P-38, all in one piece. This plane today after 10 years of painstaking restoration serves as arguably the most authentic – and flyable – P-38 in the world.

“It ain’t all luck,” says Epps of his success at one of aviation’s greatest search-and-recover missions. “A lot of it was, but mostly it was preparation.” His daughter, Elaine Persons, begs to differ. Her father is the living, flying embodiment of the words of Norman Vaughan, the explorer who accompanied Admiral Byrd to the South Pole. “‘You haven’t failed until you quit,’ is what Vaughan would say,” she says. Says her tenacious father: “My nature? Nothing unusual. I’m just curious. I always want to see what’s on the other side of the river.”

Get wind of Epps’ latest aviation exploits at eppsaviation.com

