

Recovery of sunken WWII plane ready to go

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SOUTH COUNTY — More than a year after two bass fishermen found a [World War II](#) Navy bomber resting at the bottom of Lower Otay Reservoir, the salvage company and naval museum that want to raise and restore the aircraft are ready to start the process.

All state and [San Diego](#) permits are in place for possible recovery of the SB2C-4 Helldiver that crashed into the reservoir May 28, 1945, said Nelson Manville, the city's assistant lakes manager in charge of ranger-divers. The plane's Navy pilot and Army gunner survived the emergency landing and swam to shore.

The salvage operation could take place within the next few weeks. It would include officials from A&T Recovery in [Chicago](#) and the Florida-based National Naval Aviation Museum.

"We're just waiting for the recovery team and museum to give us a date," Manville said. "This is drinking water, so a lot is going into this because we're going to have to shut the lake down from the system."

Divers also would need to take precautions to avoid an oil or fuel spill from the plane.

On Friday, it will be exactly 65 years since the Helldiver, on a practice run from Coronado, was ditched in the lake by pilot E.D. Frazar of [Texas](#). Frazar and gunner Joseph Metz of [Ohio](#) told Navy officials that the plane's engine failed.

After the initial dive in July, A&T Recovery officials determined that another dive would be needed to determine whether the aircraft is damaged below the silt line. Divers will have to dredge silt from around the plane to see if it's recoverable.

The National Naval Aviation Museum doesn't have an SB2C-4 Helldiver in its collection. Leaders of the institution said they're checking on whether the Navy will join in the salvage process.

"We definitely want the SB2C and feel this is our best opportunity to get one," said Capt. Bob Rasmussen, director of the museum.

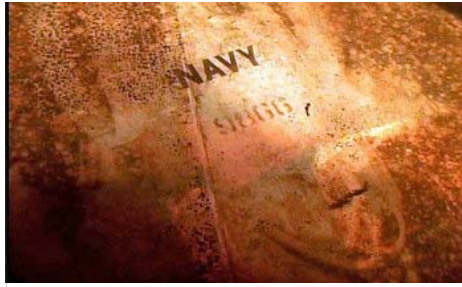
It would cost about \$125,000 to pull up the plane, which is much less than the usual expense of recovering aircraft from deeper waters in the ocean or [Great Lakes](#). Restoration will cost more, though a specific price tag hasn't been given.

Frazar and Metz have since died, but their relatives hope the Helldiver will one day be displayed for the public's appreciation.

"As a retired Marine, I have a deep understanding of the significance of these things to veterans and patriots of all generations," said Richard Ansel Frazar of Texas, the pilot's eldest child. "Wouldn't it be amazing to watch it being pulled up, or to actually have it restored to flying condition, and I could sit in my father's pilot seat and take the plane up?"

Metz's daughter, Debra Boerio of Ohio, said her mother, Hilda Metz, now 88, probably can't make it to the recovery site. But her uncle would like to be in San Diego when they raise the plane.

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/ 2009 FILE PHOTO / A&T RECOVERY

The Navy logo on the tail of the Helldiver bomber at the bottom of Lower Otay Reservoir is among the still images taken last summer when divers assessed the aircraft's chances of being recovered.



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