



Jonathan Bird's Blue World

Episode 13 • The Airplane Graveyard • Study Guide

During World War Two, a fierce battle between American and Japanese forces on Kwajalein atoll left a trail of debris on the deep lagoon floor. This lagoon now has one of the largest collections of well-preserved aircraft in the world. As part of the first ever film crew allowed onto this secret military base, Jonathan explores a B-25, F4-U Corsair and Dauntless dive bomber still sitting on the bottom of the ocean, as if ready to take off. These amazing time capsules are exactly as they were left, 60 years ago.

Objectives

1. Provides an introduction to the study of history through underwater exploration.
2. Introduces the history and historical significance of several WWII-era U.S. military aircraft.
3. Demonstrates the exploration of sunken aircraft.

Questions for before watching the program

1. What usually happens to discarded and damaged aircraft at the end of their useful lifetime?
2. What exactly is a “dive bomber?”
3. Can you find Kwajalein Atoll on a map? Why would the U.S. want a base there during WWII?
4. What can archaeologists learn about the past by working underwater with wrecks?

Discussion for after watching the program

1. Many of the wrecks seemed to have sections of their wings or rudders missing, yet the frame was still present. Why?
2. The Dauntless dive bomber had holes on the trailing edge of its wings. Why?
3. The aircraft in the Airplane Graveyard are not there by accident. How did they get there?
4. Do some on-line research to determine the likely year that the planes were dumped into the graveyard. How long have they been there? Based on their condition, how long do you expect them to last before they are completely deteriorated?
5. Do some on-line research to find out how many Corsairs are still flying. How rare are these planes today?