



NAVY POW/MIA PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
NAVY PERSONNEL COMMAND  
MILLINGTON, TN  
(901) 874-2438



## Patrol Squadron (VP) 91\*

### Robert Louis Cyr Jr.

Birthplace: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Date: June 14, 1924

Hometown: New Haven, Connecticut

Enlisted: New Haven, Connecticut

Date: Aug. 26, 1941

Rating: Aviation Radioman 2nd Class  
(ARM2c)

Description: Operated radio transmitting and receiving equipment of Navy aircraft. Maintained and cared for radio batteries. Enciphered and deciphered Navy code messages as well as adjusted direction finders.

#### Promotions:

Aviation Radioman 2nd Class: 02/01/1943

Aviation Radioman 3rd Class: 08/01/1942

Seaman 1st Class: 06/01/1942

Seaman 2nd Class: 12/26/1941

Apprentice Seaman upon enlistment

Loss Date: Jan. 22, 1944

#### Duty Stations:

Patrol Squadron (VP) 91: 05/07/1943

Headquarters Squadron, Fleet Air Wing (FAW) 14: 11/01/1942

Patrol Wing 1: 08/07/1942

Patrol Wing 2: 03/23/1942

Group School, Naval Training Station San Diego, CA: 10/28/1941

Naval Training Station Newport, RI: 08/26/1931

#### Awards and Decorations\*

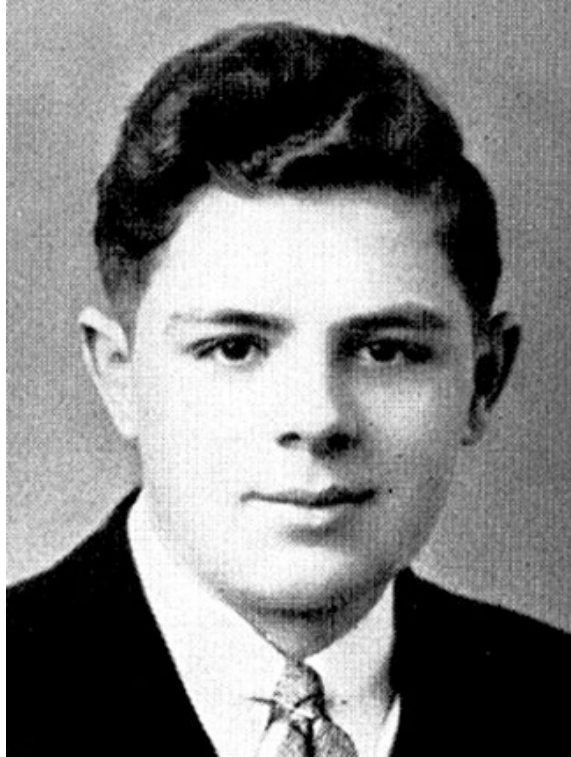
Navy Unit Commendation

American Defense Service Medal (with Fleet Clasp)

Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal (with Bronze Star)

World War II Victory Medal

American Campaign Medal



\*This biography reflects only information present in the service member's Official Military Personnel File and NAVPERS 1650, Transmittal of and/or Entitlement to Awards.



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A flight of Navy PBY 5s. (U.S. Navy photo)

## Cyr's Final Mission

On Jan. 22, 1944, at approximately 1:30 p.m., Patrol Squadron (VP) 91, stationed at Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu, (formerly New Hebrides), received a dispatch reporting an enemy submarine contact. A PBY 5 Catalina, with its aircrew of nine Navy airmen were dispatched to look for the enemy vessel.

The crew consisted of:

Lieutenant Junior Grade Alfred Magas, first pilot;  
Aviation Pilot First Class (AP1c) George L. J. Spearing, second pilot;  
Lt. John Richey, plane commander;  
Aviation Ordnanceman Third Class (AOM3c) Elmer D. Smith, gunner;  
AOM3c Gerald A. Rogier, bombardier;  
Aviation Radioman Third Class (ARM3c) Herbert F. Rush,  
Aviation Machinist's Mate 2nd Class (AMM2c) Earl Lightfoot, first mechanic;  
AMM2c William Grayard, second mechanic;  
ARM2c Cyr, first radioman; and  
ARM3c Herbert Rush, second radioman.

The crew boarded its PBY-5 Catalina, built for seaborne takeoff and landing, and long-distance flights, but also fitted to carry anti-submarine ordnance. These aircraft proved an invaluable weapon for the squadron's naval warfare missions. For the assigned mission, squadron personnel equipped the aircraft with three Mark-17, 325-pound anti-submarine depth bombs (two on the port wing and one on the starboard wing), and a then-classified experimental "torpedo-like device" also on the starboard wing.



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Magas and Spearing initiated take-off procedures, attempting a downwind takeoff from Segond Seaplane Base and proceeding down Segond Channel, which separates the islands of Espiritu Santo and Aore.

Half a mile from the seaplane base, Magas and Spearing turned the aircraft to clear the ships in the channel. Shortly after this, about two thirds of the way through the take-off run, the Catalina bounced off of the water four times, the last bounce taking it 20-to-40 feet into the air. It crashed nose-down into the water and buckled, then suffered one or two explosions. These were believed to be the depth bombs.

The experimental “torpedo-like device” evidently launched, its wake last seen heading back towards the direction from which the aircraft came. At some point, the aircraft broke into two pieces; the forward section and wings sinking almost immediately, while the rear section remained afloat long enough for a passing boat to respond. The boat rescued survivors Smith, Rogier and Rush. All other crew members, including Cyr, were killed in the crash.

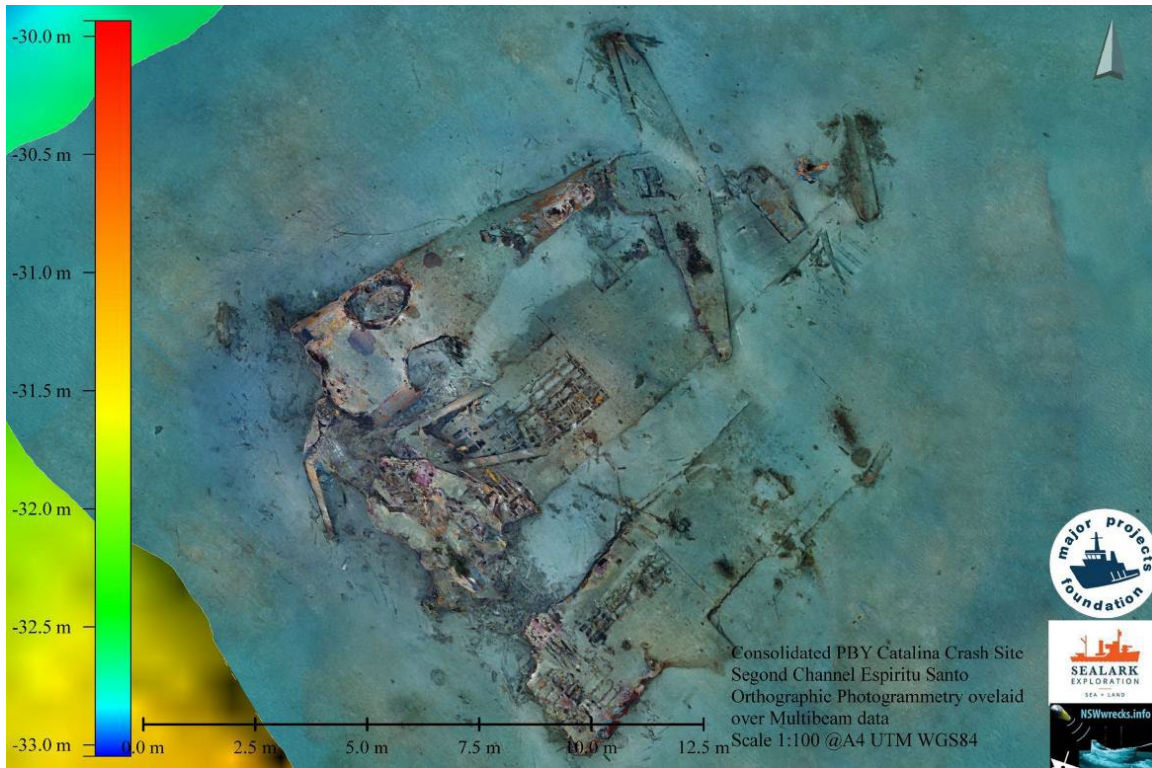
Personnel aboard USS Atascosa (AO-66), an oiler moored in the channel, witnessed the crash, stating that the crash occurred 400 yards off the port beam of their ship. One officer described the ship’s location relative to the navigation beacons lining the shore.

Search parties recovered Richey’s remains from Segond Channel the day after the crash; the bodies of Magas and Spearing were recovered on Jan. 24. The remains of Lightfoot were recovered two days later. No trace of Cyr or Grayard were ever recovered. According to survivors, the pair were last seen in the navigation and mechanic’s compartments, respectively.

Navy personnel marked the spot of the wreckage with a buoy, but due to the depth of the water, the heavy current, and the unknown status of any ordnance still on board the aircraft, officials decided against salvage operations. The Navy initially reported Cyr as missing in action to his parents on Jan. 24, 1944, and he was issued an official death certificate on Feb. 22.

Although the American Graves Registration Service investigated many cases of missing service members in the Espiritu Santo area, several days at anchor in Segond Channel in August of 1948, records do not indicate whether the search team made any specific attempt to locate the remains of Cyr and Grayard. On April 19, 1949, the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery issued a status of “non-recoverable” for Cyr.

With advancements being made in recovery and identification technologies, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) dispatched a partner investigation team in 2022 — comprising Sealark Exploration and the Major Projects Foundation — to a location likely associated with the PBY 5. From previously collected data, five targets of interest were selected for inspection and only one contained the wreckage of a PBY-5 Catalina, missing its forward section, which was consistent with reports that the aircraft broke in two, and it was located within the historical loss area.



**Site map for Site VU-10116. Excavations at this site in 2024 and 2025 yielded possible human remains, possible osseous material, and possible material evidence. (Photo courtesy of Sealark Exploration and Major Projects Foundation)**

The team located and documented the wreckage of a PBY 5, later designated Site VU-10116. Another DPAA partner, Cosmos Archaeology, excavated the site twice, first from May to June 2024 and again in May 2025. Both teams recovered possible human remains, possible bone tissue, and possible material evidence. All evidence was submitted to the DPAA Laboratory and consolidated as Central Identification Laboratory (CIL) 2024-207.

Based upon laboratory analysis and comparison with DNA sequence information obtained from family reference samples, ARM2c Robert Louis Cyr Jr was accounted for on Nov. 5, 2025.