

KSN News Release

Whitcomb's Book, *Searching For Ropens*, Asserts Pterodactyl Reported in Papua New Guinea

An investigator who explored Umboi Island, Papua New Guinea, declares that a large flying creature reported by an American WWII soldier, in 1944, is the same species of long-tailed featherless creature called "ropen."

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The original news release, dated August 14, 2006, was published by PRFree and by EWorld-Wire. This revised version is expanded and has updated contact information.

For Immediate Release

LONG BEACH, Calif/KSN/Sep 13, 2011 --- A study by an American cryptozoologist suggests that the "pterodactyl" described by the World War II veteran Duane Hodgkinson was a real creature, of a species living in coastal areas of Papua New Guinea. Jonathan Whitcomb, of Long Beach, California, analyzed a videotaped testimony of Hodgkinson in 2005 and concluded that the veteran saw, near Finschhafen, New Guinea, in 1944, the same species of flying creature that natives of nearby Umboi Island call "*ropen*."

Whitcomb had previously interviewed Hodgkinson, by phone and email, in August of 2004, and concluded that what he had seen was probably related to what some islanders of Umboi are reported to still see on occasion. A few weeks after communicating with the veteran, Whitcomb (a forensic videographer at that time) visited Umboi Island and interviewed native eyewitnesses. He returned to the United States, in October of 2004, convinced that one large nocturnal long-tailed pterosaur lives on that island. After analyzing reports from another expedition that year, he concluded that the *ropen* of

Umboi is protecting its territory from smaller ones of its species that live on surrounding islands.

From 2005 to 2006, he wrote of his experiences, and of eyewitness accounts, in his nonfiction book *Searching for Ropens*, asserting that the nocturnal creature of Umboi Island is a *Rhamphorhynchoid* pterosaur, commonly called "pterodactyl." (The third edition of the book, to be published in 2012, will be retitled "Searching for Dragons.")

Whitcomb disputes the idea that sightings of giant "pterodactyls" are only misidentifications of Flying Fox fruit bats. A few years before his 2004 expedition, other Americans interviewed two Umboi Island natives who described how one *ropen* held itself upright on a tree trunk; fruit bats, on the other hand, hang upside down from branches. In addition, the *ropen* is said to eat fish and to have a long tail, unlike the Flying Fox.

According to standard models of biology, all pterosaurs had become extinct by about 65-million years ago. Although Whitcomb admits having no

Whitcomb's Book . . . Pterodactyl . . . CONTINUED

photograph to disprove textbook declarations that all pterosaurs are extinct, he disputes the idea that the *ropen* is a bat still undiscovered by science. His book examines an investigation by the explorers Garth Guessman, a Southern California firefighter; and David Woetzel, a New Hampshire businessman. Their 2004 expedition on Umboi Island, a few weeks after Whitcomb's expedition, uncovered a native tradition about the *ropen's* tail: It moves only near the tail's base. According to Guessman, that relates to pterosaur anatomy, based upon fossil evidence.

James Blume, a Baptist missionary in Wau, on the mainland of Papua New Guinea, has also investigated reports of the giant flying creatures. According to his interviews with natives, the tails of the nocturnal creatures have flanges that natives compare to eel tails. Around Manus Island the wingspan is said to be three to four feet but in other areas may reach ten to fifteen feet. Whitcomb's book mentions a few *ropens* that are even larger, including the one seen by Hodgkinson.

Whitcomb found no evidence of any hallucination or hoax related to the American veteran's account of the 1944 encounter. He also noted that the native eyewitnesses he interviewed in Papua New Guinea mentioned no supernatural elements (with only one exception: a native who was trying to get paid for his testimony). Also, natives who had a clear view of the *ropen* gave American cryptozoologists details similar to details given by Hodgkinson: a large size, a long tail, and no sign of feathers.

On September 13, 2011, Whitcomb invited Hodgkinson to be interviewed for a documentary film being produced by Christopher Maloney, to be released in some theaters in 2012.

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Duane Hodgkinson, World War II veteran and an eyewitness of a ropen "pterodactyl" in 1944, near Finschhafen, New Guinea



Entrance to Finschhafen Harbor



Gideon Koro and six other boys saw the giant ropen in daylight, around 1994, as it flew over Lake Pung on Umboi Is. (interview by Whitcomb)