



# Will Missing Malaysian Airlines Jet Remains Ever Be Found?

*By Erik Ortiz*

Retrieving wreckage of the missing Malaysian jet and its black boxes has been met with dead ends and misplaced hope, leaving families to wonder whether the remains of their loved ones — or at least personal effects — can ever be found.

While that likelihood fades with each passing day, it is still not out of the realm of possibility, experts tell NBC News. In 2011, passenger remains were located about two years after [Air France Flight 447 crashed off the coast of Brazil](#) and into the Atlantic Ocean.

But all of the unknowns, coupled with the vast search area roughly the size of Los Angeles, has made finding anything linked to Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 an uneasy prospect, said David Learmont, operations and safety editor at Flight International magazine.

“MH370 is a different ball game,” Learmont said. “We know nothing.”

The Air France tragedy shares some eerie similarities with the missing Malaysia Airlines jet — neither plane sent a distress signal — but the French plane’s recovery benefited from its altitude and low speed when it hit the water, Learmont said.

“It’s the reason why there was floating wreckage as well as some big bits on the seabed when, after two years of search, they found the wreckage,” he added.

So far, officials can’t provide the circumstances for why Flight 370, which was supposed to arrive March 8 in Beijing from Kuala Lumpur, deliberately flew thousands of miles off course over the southern Indian Ocean. The rate at which it struck the water is also unclear.

“Oceanographers have said that the sea floor in this area is very silty, so anything heavy — engine parts, wing spars — may sink in, in which case ... we may not be able to ‘see’ anything,” Learmont said.

An [unmanned U.S.-made submarine has been using sonar](#) to scour the ocean floor some 15,000 feet down. Air France, which carried 228 people on board, was discovered 12,795 feet below the surface.

While it makes finding Flight 370 more difficult the further down it may have sunk, that could actually benefit the search for remains.

“I thought to myself, she found her grave in the sea, and it was OK for me. Now it disturbs us again.”

That’s because there are fewer animals to disturb the wreckage site at that depth, said Robert Jensen, CEO of Kenyon International Emergency Services, a private firm that has helped airlines in the recovery process after a crash.

Fragments of human remains could be located, and investigators would be able to use DNA and forensics to determine whom they belong to.

That was the case with Air France, in which one of the skeletal remains dredged up in 2011 was discovered strapped into a seat.

Jensen said the Indian Ocean's depth would require an unmanned vehicle to haul the wreckage to the surface — a painstaking process that could also be controversial, opening up wounds among family members, some of whom might rather their loved ones be left entombed in the ocean.

Others, however, may want the remains recovered, even if there's a risk the machinery could damage them.

Air France families who thought they lost their loved ones for good in 2009 experienced emotional turmoil when new remains were found during a renewed search in 2011.

Winifried Schmidt, who lost his 27-year-old daughter in the accident, had mixed emotions, he [told USA Today](#).

"I thought I had put it to peace already," he said at the time, adding, "I thought to myself, she found her grave in the sea, and it was OK for me. Now it disturbs us again."

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