

Bermuda Triangle just a myth, U.S. says

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By Ken Kaye, Sun Sentinel

Now it's official: The Bermuda Triangle is a bunch of bunk.

For decades, rumors persisted that hundreds of ships and planes mysteriously vanished in the area between Miami, Puerto Rico and Bermuda because it was cursed or patrolled by extraterrestrials. Most of us already suspected that was a myth. Yet, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration just posted a story declaring the Devil's Triangle, as it's also known, is no different than any other open ocean region — and that foul weather and poor navigation are likely to blame for any mishaps.

"There is no evidence that mysterious disappearances occur with any greater frequency in the Bermuda Triangle than in any other large, well-traveled area of the ocean," the agency stated this month on noaa.gov. Ben Sherman, spokesman for NOAA's National Ocean Service, said the agency wrote the story as part of an educational program where it responds to readers' questions. The story was based on information from the U.S. Navy and U.S. Guard, which make no bones about saying the mythological area is so much balderdash.

"The Coast Guard does not recognize the existence of the so-called Bermuda Triangle as a geographic area of specific hazard to ships or planes," the military branch said. "In a review of many aircraft and vessel losses in the area over the years, there has been nothing discovered that would indicate that casualties were the result of anything other than physical causes."

Not everyone is in full agreement, including Minerva Bloom. She's a volunteer docent at the Naval Air Station Fort Lauderdale Museum, which pays homage to Flight 19, perhaps the highest-profile incident involving the Bermuda Triangle. The five U.S. Navy torpedo bombers took off from Fort Lauderdale on a routine training exercise in December 1945, never to return.

"I don't think there are aliens or anything like that, but I do think

there's something going on there," Bloom said. One reason for that: In the early 1990s, she and her family flew in a seaplane operated by the now defunct Chalk's International Airlines from the Bahamas to Fort Lauderdale.

"The pilot said, 'We're going over the Bermuda Triangle,' and all of the sudden, a screw fell from his panel," she recalled. "He said, 'that's happened before, don't worry about it.' But it was just spooky."

Otherwise, more scientific study should be done to determine if the Bermuda Triangle is inhabited by "some form of energy that hasn't been explained yet," Bloom said. "The Earth is full of pockets of energy, and there might be some sort of scientific explanation."

Since the early 1950s, some outrageous theories have surrounded the Bermuda Triangle. Among them: Space aliens hunt for human study subjects there; the lost continent of Atlantis exerts an evil influence there; or black-hole vortices pull objects into other dimensions from there. There also are more reasonable explanations, such as methane gas, erupting from ocean sediments, have overwhelmed vessels or that strong magnetic forces can confuse sailors and pilots. NOAA contends that hurricanes and tropical storms, which frequently churn through the triangle, and other bad weather are more likely explanations for ships or planes getting into trouble.

Additionally, the Gulf Stream, a fast-moving current that runs parallel to the U.S. East Coast, can cause "rapid, sometimes violent, changes in weather" — and that numerous shallow water areas near Caribbean islands can be treacherous to ship navigation, the agency said. "The ocean has always been a mysterious place to humans, and when foul weather or poor navigation is involved, it can be a very deadly place," NOAA said. "This is true all over the world."

NOAA noted the U.S. Board of Geographic Names does not recognize the Bermuda Triangle as an official name. Further, the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard have no official maps to delineate the boundaries of the Bermuda Triangle. "Their experience suggests that the combined forces of nature and human fallibility outdo even the most incredulous science fiction," NOAA said.