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Crashed Aircraft Site Report

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Wreckage: Yes

Model & Serial: C-47DL #41-18556 a.k.a. CNAC #60

Date Visited: 29 Sept 2011 and two additional trips later in 2011.

GPS Coordinates: N 25-38-58.7 E 100-05-30.2

Datum: WGS 84

Country: China

Province / State: Yunnan

Nearest Town / Village: Dali

Distance / Directions: 4-day trek E of Yangbi Jiang.

Map: Google Earth or other satellite imagery.

Elevation: 13,400 ft.

Aspect: SE

Topography: Mountains. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

Terrain Notes: Steep, open slope just below summit ridge and steep, rocky drainage channel. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

Vegetation: High-altitude grasses on slope below summit ridge, high-altitude bamboo and shrubs alongside drainage channel. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

Aircraft ID Method: Aluminum wreckage with aircraft construction number 4681 found at site. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

Engines / Propellers: No engines or propellers seen at site. Metal detector indicated many large metallic objects buried under rocks in drainage channel. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

Wreckage / Artifacts / ID Tags: Wreckage found on steep slope at base of high cliff and extending .5 mi down drainage channel below cliff. Estimated point of impact is steep slope or face of high cliff directly above steep slope. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

Human Remains: None seen by investigator. See attached Expedition Notes.

Removed: I removed nothing from site. Not known if others removed anything from site.

Water: Nearest water was intermittent runoff and occasional standing pools in drainage channel at site. Drainage channel normally dry unless precipitation occurs on summit ridge. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

Site Disturbance: Significant disturbance caused by hydraulic erosion and landslides. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

Photos: See website for photos. Additional photos on CD and video on DVD available upon request.

Misc. Notes: See attached Expedition Notes.

C-47DL #41-18556 a.k.a. CNAC #60 Expedition Notes

China National Airlines Corporation (CNAC) #60 was enroute from Kunming, China to Dinjan, India on 17 Nov 1942, when it mysteriously disappeared somewhere on the Hump. Piloted by John J. Dean, CNAC #60 was reportedly loaded with tin ingots / billets, and was flying the northern-most (Able) air route to Dinjan. CNAC #60 was only the second known aircraft loss on the Hump and was the first CNAC loss on the Hump. It was also one of the very few CNAC aircraft losses that had never been found.

My quest to find this aircraft started with Robert L. Willett of Merritt Island, FL telling me this aircraft was co-piloted by his cousin and childhood playmate, James S. Browne. Bob's story was so compelling, and his desire to achieve some closure was so evident, that I decided to take on the search for this long-missing aircraft.

Bob supplied me with what few details were known about the last flight of #60. It seems that #60 was only about I hr. out from Kunming and still slightly SE of Lijiang (formerly Likiang), China, when it was already accumulating a dangerous amount of ice. In a radio conversation with eastbound CNAC pilot Robbie Robertson, #60 pilot John Dean said his plane was icing badly, and asked Robertson how it was down south. Kunming-bound Robertson had just crossed the Hump on the more southerly Charlie course. Robertson responded to Dean that it was not bad and he saw no Japs. According to Bob, this was the last known radio transmission received from #60. CNAC #60 was never seen nor heard from again.

At the geographic location where I calculated #60 was when Dean reported bad icing to Robertson, #60 had not yet crossed over any mountains higher than 12,200 ft. Dean surely had to know that with his heavy payload of tin and the icing already on his plane, he would never make it over the much higher Hengduan Shan on Able course beginning just west of Lijiang. I was not aware of any radio transmissions from #60 or sightings from other pilots to confirm any route change Dean may have made, but my instinct told me #60 made an abrupt turn to the SW shortly after talking with Robertson. In my view, that would have been his natural reaction in a desperate attempt to reach Charlie course just S of Dali (formerly Tali), and hopefully the more mild weather that Robertson had just encountered on his crossing of the Hump. I plotted the Able and Charlie courses on my map and also plotted the route correction that I believed #60 had taken to join Charlie course. My calculations showed #60 passing almost directly over the highest summit of Cang Shan (formerly Tali Mtn) at almost 13,700 ft. I knew that if #60 was already in serious trouble after crossing over mountains no higher

than 12,200 ft. (and possibly no higher than 11,000 ft, depending on exactly where he turned SW), then it was very probable that Cang Shan had brought him down. I decided that Cang Shan or somewhere just W of Cang Shan was the most logical place to start my search for #60.

I kept the #60 search project on the back burner for a few more years until funds could be raised to cover most of my anticipated expedition costs in China. Meanwhile, while attending CNAC reunions, I learned from former CNAC pilot Pete Goutiere that he had spotted aircraft wreckage several times on Cang Shan. Then, in Feb 2008, I received communications from a former WW II L-5 pilot named Arthur Clark. Arthur had read a news article about my MIA recovery project in the former China-Burma-India theater, and he wanted to tell me about an aircraft wreck he spotted from the air one day in the mid-1940's. Arthur said he had seen an aircraft wreck very high on the W flank of Cang Shan, just below the summit ridge and above the treeline, and at a latitude approx. the same or slightly S of old town Dali. His described location for the aircraft wreckage was exactly where I plotted on my map that #60 had crossed over Cang Shan in Nov 1942. In a follow-up phone call to Arthur, he said the wreckage appeared to be that of a C-47 aircraft. Arthur had even tried to climb to the wreck with a friend in the month of January soon after spotting the wreckage from his L-5 airplane, but they were turned back by bitter winter weather and deep snow. As far as Arthur knew, the wreck was never reported to the USAAF. I then reviewed the air crashes listed in the Hump reference book titled *The Aluminum Trail*, but couldn't find any known crashes to be in that area on Cang Shan. A similar review of archival reports from Aviation Archaeology Investigation & Research also showed no known US aircraft crashes in that area.

In Spring 2011, expedition funding was largely put in place by a generous donation from the CNAC Association and generous donations from several of the CNAC Association's individual members and from the Robert Willett family. I committed to going to China in Sept 2011 to search for CNAC #60.

My first step was to find an English-speaking trekking guide operating in the Dali area who would do some initial investigative work for me before I arrived in-country. An Internet search connected me to an enthusiastic operator of a climbing service based in old town Dali. At my request, he ventured to several small villages on the W flank of Cang Shan, and asked local villagers if they knew about an airplane crash high on the mountain. He quickly learned that several villagers were aware of an airplane crash high on the mountain.

Upon arriving in China, I conducted independent interviews with 7 local people in 4 different villages on the W flank of Cang Shan. All 7 villagers knew about an airplane that crashed high on the mountain in late 1942, and they all described the same location for the crashsite. Their description of the crashsite location closely matched that described by Arthur Clark.

The first two villagers I interviewed seemed to be quite knowledgeable of the crashsite location, but after several days of interviewing them, both men ultimately refused to guide me to the crashsite. They said the route was just too difficult and too dangerous. Repeated and steadily increasing offers of monetary compensation for their guiding services on the mountain were all declined. It seemed that nothing would change their mind about helping me. Of course, I was very disappointed by this unexpected turn of events.

I then interviewed two other men from another small village. One of them said his father was hunting high on the mountain in late 1942, when he saw an airplane spiral-in at a very steep angle and crash just below the summit ridge. His father said the plane appeared to be either breaking-up or dropping cargo as it plunged towards the mountain. Without me even mentioning that #60 was transporting a load of tin on its final flight, these men told me that while on a hunting trip in 1977, they found a solid tin billet laying in the streambed slightly downstream from the crashsite. I was amazed when they said the billet was made of tin, and when they described it as being approx. 14" in diameter and 24" long, silver in color, and weighing 100-150 lbs. They said they tried to salvage the tin billet, but it was too heavy and bulky for them to carry very far, so they left it by the side of the stream. During later hunting trips into the area, they noticed the tin billet was gone. It could have been salvaged by other hunters or possibly washed downstream during the heavy spring runoff and covered under debris. They agreed to lead me to the crashsite, and a couple days later we headed up the mountain. After some days of intense jungle trekking and numerous very hazardous river crossings, we arrived at a junction of several mountain streams. They pointed to the distant summit ridge of the mountain to indicate the approximate location of the airplane wreckage, then abruptly stated it was too dangerous to continue further up the mountain and insisted on terminating the expedition. I was stunned by their sudden and surprising refusal to proceed higher. I returned to old town Dali to recoup and reorganize.

Next, I interviewed a 59-year old man and his younger brother from yet another small village on the W flank of Cang Shan. They told me their father was gathering medicinal herbs on the family's ancestral hunting grounds high on the mountain sometime in late 1942 or early 1943, when he discovered the airplane wreckage. Their father told them he heard a lot of birds squawking on a steep slope just below the base of a high cliff. When he approached the birds, they flew away, and that's when he saw the birds had been scavenging human remains laying on the slope. He noted the remains of 2 or 3 people, and that the bones (or most of the bones) were noticeably larger than those of Chinese people. He also saw an airplane wing and much metal wreckage scattered on the slope. Over the following years, the man took his sons (now my mountain guides) to the crashsite several times while on hunting trips. The sons agreed to guide me to the crashsite, so a few days later I headed up the mountain for the second time. We mostly followed the same route I had covered with my previous mountain guide, and we eventually arrived at the base of a steep, rocky

drainage coming down from the distant summit ridge. Early the next morning, we started up the steep drainage, climbing over massive boulders and precariously-balanced fields of rocky debris. The younger brother was still recovering from a serious hand injury and opted to return to camp when the climbing became more difficult, leaving his older brother to be my only guide up to the summit ridge. The weather progressively worsened as a storm front moved in, frequently hiding the summit ridge in clouds and starting to rain. Just as we reached the base of the high cliff on the summit ridge which was reportedly the area of the crashsite, the storm intensified into a wild fury. My sole remaining guide started down the mountain towards our last camp, while I remained at the summit with his 20-year old nephew, in an attempt to start documenting the crashsite. The nephew grew increasingly uncomfortable with the rapidly deteriorating weather and was insisting we also head down for our safety. After another half hour of unsuccessfully trying to document the site in the driving rain, we also started down. The steep, rocky drainage was now a flowing waterfall, making for probably the most dangerous downclimb in my entire mountaineering career. By the time we reached camp, I think all of us were borderline hypothermic. About noon the next day, and completely out of dry firewood and almost out of food, we broke camp in a drenching rain and started the long trek back to the village. Upon reaching the village, I tried to get my guide to commit to returning to the mountain with me as soon as the weather improved. He was still so shaken by the events of the expedition, that he steadfastly refused to go back up there anytime in the near future. He finally suggested that I return in November for possibly another attempt on the mountain. I was stunned, again.

I decided to try to climb to the crashsite one last time later in the season, ideally finding a weather window after the rains ended and before the winter snows started. I knew from experience that weather windows at high-altitude can be very brief and unpredictable, and even nonexistent during some years. I eventually located a younger hunter from yet another tiny village who agreed to guide me to the crashsite. He claimed to have been at the crashsite 3 times during the last 10 years while on hunting trips high on the mountain. He helped me recruit 6 young men from his village who would work as my porters and also assist with excavating the site. Carrying a professional-grade metal detector and hand digging tools purchased in Kunming, we headed up Cang Shan, making it my third climb of the mountain in less than 90 days. This latest mountain guide used an entirely different approach route to the summit ridge, requiring an additional day of trekking in each direction, but avoiding many of the hazardous river crossings which I encountered on my 2 previous climbs of the mountain. His approach route brought us out safely onto the summit ridge, and we actually had to slightly downclimb to reach the crashsite area. Highcamp was established about 100 yds distant from the excavation site. Although the aircraft wing and other large pieces of metal wreckage were no longer seen on the steep slope, we easily found many smaller pieces of wreckage lodged amongst the rocks on the slope just beneath the high cliff and continuing far down the rocky

drainage. My metal detector indicated many large pieces of wreckage buried under the boulders and rocky debris of the drainage channel, and wreckage was either found or electronically indicated as far as a .5 mile below the estimated point of impact at the base of the high cliff on the summit ridge.

The crashsite was shown by my GPS receiver to be almost literally at the very highest point on Cang Shan, and directly on the penciled line I had drawn on my map almost 6 years earlier after talking with Bob Willett about the disappearance of #60. Cang Shan is approx. 40 miles long, extending from NNW to SSE, and curving slightly to the SW at the southern end of the mountain. The crashsite was found on the SE aspect of the southern end of the mountain where the spine of the mountain curves to the SW, and at a latitude just slightly S of old town Dali. This is the exact location described to me by Arthur Clark as being where he spotted a C-47 wreckage from the air in the mid-1940's.

The aircraft was positively identified as being CNAC #60 by the discovery of its construction number stamped into a piece of aluminum wreckage. Aircraft ID was further corroborated by the large amount of strong circumstantial evidence gathered in the 7 independent interviews I conducted with villagers in the area:

1. All 7 interviewees said the airplane crashed in 1942, and all described the same crashsite location as where WW II pilot Arthur Clark told me he spotted what appeared to be a C-47 wreckage in the mid-1940's.

2. A thorough review of archival records found no reported US airplane crashes in that area.

3. The only person known to have actually witnessed the airplane crashing into the mountain, told his son the airplane appeared to be either breaking-up or dropping its cargo as it plunged downwards. This hunter most likely saw the tin billets dropping from the plane. This would also explain the tin billet found downstream from the crashsite in 1977 by this man's son.

4. The first person known to have reached the crashsite (probably in Spring 1943) told his sons that he saw the remains of 2 or 3 people at the site, and that the bones (or most of the bones) were noticeably larger than those of Chinese people. This would indicate Caucasians.

5. The crashsite location is directly on the flight path which I calculated #60 took in an attempt to reach Charlie course shortly after talking with Robbie Robertson.

6. Due to the remoteness of the crashsite and the difficulty and serious hazards involved in reaching it, it's highly unlikely the wreckage was salvaged for metal by local villagers over the past decades. While there is evidence of fire and some limited melting of the aluminum wreckage, the majority of the wreckage is probably still there, but buried under many tons of boulders and rocky debris in

the drainage channel directly below the steep slope and estimated location of impact. It's known that a major earthquake occurred in this area in 1950, and that would probably explain the boulders and rocky debris now clogging the drainage channel. The steepness of the terrain and the water runoff in the channel surely caused much of the wreckage to migrate significantly downhill prior to the earthquake in 1950, thus explaining the electronic detection of wreckage buried under the rocks up to a .5 mile below the crashsite. The roundness of the rocks found in the drainage channel attest to the high-volume and frequency of those water flows, and thus their ability to transport aircraft wreckage and human remains downhill away from the location of impact. The net effect of the 1950 earthquake was probably to cover much of the wreckage and possibly the human remains under a thick layer of rocks, essentially entombing it there.

It must be noted that none of the hunters whom I interviewed nor any of the men who accompanied me on my 3 separate climbs of Cang Shan recalled personally seeing any human remains during their previous visits to the crashsite, nor did I find any human remains during my visit to the site.