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Crashed Aircraft Site Report

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Wreckage: Yes

Model & Serial: C-87 #41-23696

Date Visited: 19 Oct 2003

GPS Coordinates: N 27-43-03.3 E 096-55-19.1

Datum: WGS 84

Country: India

Province / State: Arunachal Pradesh

Nearest Town / Village: Latti

Distance / Directions: 4-day trek NE of Latti.

Map: Google Earth or other satellite imagery.

Elevation: 13,223 ft.

Aspect: W

Topography: Mountains. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

Terrain Notes: Open, moderate slope. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

Vegetation: Grass. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

Aircraft ID Method: Aircraft data plate with model number C-87 and serial number 41-23696 found at site. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

Engines / Propellers: 4 engines and 4 propellers found at site. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

Wreckage / Artifacts / ID Tags: Wreckage concentrated at estimated point of impact, and much of that driven up to 3 ft into ground. Additional wreckage extending approx. 200 yds down slope from estimated point of impact. Clothing remnants (boots, gloves and jackets) seen at site. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

Human Remains: Yes. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

Removed: I removed the aircraft data plate, several small pieces of metallic wreckage and all the human remains and clothing remnants that I found. The aircraft data plate, human remains and clothing remnants were delivered to JPAC. I subsequently sent the small pieces of metallic wreckage to families of crewmembers. Not known if others removed anything from site. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

Water: Nearest water was approx. 1 mi distant and consisted of a small stream.

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

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

Misc. Notes: Latti is Mishmi village on Latti River. Latti River joins Lohit River from the S, approx. 10 mi W (downstream) from Minzong / Samdul. At headwaters of Latti River, cross over mountain pass and drop into Tapum valley. Approach route through Tapum valley is forested with pine trees. Crashsite is on grassy, moderate slope above E bank of Tapum River. Tapum River flows N and joins Klong / Ghallum River NW of crashsite. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

C-87 #41-23696 Expedition Notes

My MIA recovery project started for me in 2002 while I was exploring in Burma. My guide asked me if I would be interested in seeing an old airplane wreck he had *heard* about high in the mountains of far northern Burma. Not knowing whose airplane it was or how or why it came to crash on a mountain in far northern Burma, I instantly answered yes, just out of curiosity. We then made a 2-week side trip to reach the rumored crashsite. After flying up to the old British colonial police outpost of Ft. Hertz, we trekked 7 days to the NW into the rugged mountains on the Burma-India border. Sure enough, crashed at over 12,000 ft. on a remote mountain on the Indian border was a C-47 airplane. I documented the crashsite as well as I could, but I didn't have a GPS receiver with me, so I vowed to return the following year to get its GPS coordinates.

When I got down to Rangoon, I went to the US Embassy and met with the Assistant Defense Attache, an Air Force major named James McAndrew. James was quite knowledgeable of WW II history, and he told me I had probably discovered one of the hundreds of US aircraft which had disappeared on the Hump route while flying war supplies from US bases in northeast India to bases in China. At that time, I had never heard of the Hump, so James gave me a brief tutorial on the Hump airlift.

Back home in the US, I started reading everything I could find about the Hump airlift, and I further educated myself on this subject by attending pilot reunions and interviewing the elderly aviators about their experiences flying that dangerous air route. The net result was, I was absolutely astounded by the huge number of US losses on the Hump, and the fact that nobody bothered to seriously search for them since the war ended. In fact, most of the Hump losses were officially deemed unrecoverable and were quickly written-off in an early version of *Mission Impossible*. This unacceptable situation really grabbed my attention because I was sure some of those men's families were still waiting for closure, and I also saw this as a personal challenge to myself because the US government had essentially said it was impossible to find and recover these men. Thus began my personal MIA recovery project in south Asia, specializing in the former China-Burma-India theater and its notorious Hump air route.

I returned to Burma in 2003, and rehired Pairem, the same Kachin hunter I had employed in 2002 to guide me to the C-47 wreck on the Indian border. Pairem told me he knew of another airplane crashsite across the border in a remote mountainous area of northeastern India. He suggested we first cross into India and reach that crashsite, then revisit the C-47 site from 2002 upon our return into Burma. I accepted his suggested itinerary, so we hired a large team of porters, bought ample supplies of rice and beans and set off into the jungles and mountains towards the India border.

After a week of very rugged trekking and many hazardous river crossings, we neared the area where Pairem remembered the airplane wreckage being. Along the way, he had stopped and hesitated many times, as if he was unsure of the wreckage location or the best route to reach it. Eventually, we reached a location where Pairem said we should establish our highcamp, as this was the last water source before reaching the wreckage another 1-hour trek further up the mountain.

The following morning, we trekked further up the mountain in search of the aircraft wreckage. Again, Pairem seemed somewhat unsure and hesitant. We searched all day and didn't find the reported wreckage. Whenever I asked Pairem questions about the wreckage location or what he remembers the surroundings looked like, I just received a blank stare from him in response. I was beginning to get rather annoyed with him and concerned that just maybe I had been led on a wild goose chase. We decided to call it a day, and headed back down the mountain to our highcamp. The next morning, we trekked back up the mountain and resumed our search for the elusive airplane wreckage. Still, nothing could be found of it. In the late afternoon, I finally vented my concerns to Pairem. I asked him if he really knew where the airplane wreckage was, or was he just leading me around after a nonexistent airplane so he could charge me wages for his guiding services. Upon me asking him this, he immediately reacted by grabbing his shotgun, and while holding it at the ready with both hands, he said: *Well, I have the only gun here, so what are you going to do about it?!* Without skipping a beat, I retorted: *I'll tell you what I'm going to do about it. Nobody's leaving here, and nobody's going to get paid until we find that airplane!* After that verbal exchange, I announced I would go down to highcamp and brew some tea (hopefully allowing some time for our tempers to cool). Pairem said he would continue searching until dark.

I had barely finished brewing my tea, when a porter came running down the mountain yelling: *Mr. Clay! Mr. Clay! We find airplane! We find airplane!* I abandoned my tea and hurriedly followed the porter back up the mountain in the rapidly approaching dusk. There was the wreckage! It was on an open, grassy slope and just a little farther north than where we had been searching earlier that day. It appeared that most of the wreckage was concentrated in a very small area, perhaps only a .25 acre. The team had already started digging around in the wreckage. It soon became apparent that much of the wreckage had been driven at least 3 ft. into the rocky ground. That and the very small footprint of the main wreckage area, told me the aircraft had probably spun-in at a near-vertical angle. This might indicate the aircraft had stalled (possibly caused by severe icing) and then nosedived towards the ground.

We returned to the wreckage site the next morning. The first thing I did was ask Pairem and all the porters not to remove anything from the site, but to leave everything in place so I could properly document things. We readily found many human bones and clothing remnants laying in plain view on the ground surface.

Pieces of leather boots, gloves and flight jackets were amazingly well-preserved after having laid in the open for all these past decades. We searched and examined the wreckage all day, but by dusk we still couldn't find anything that would enable me to positively ID the airplane by its all-important serial number. From examining the wreckage, I knew it was a 4-engine aircraft, but that was about all I knew for sure. So after expending all this time, effort and personal money, I was now coming away with no positive ID for the airplane and its crewmembers. I was devastated! I loaded a few small pieces of metallic wreckage into my backpack, and placed all the recovered human remains in a nylon stuffsack which I normally used for my sleeping bag and placed all the clothing remnants in another nylon stuffsack that I had been using for my sleeping pad. With darkness approaching, we gave up the search for an aircraft ID and trekked down to highcamp.

We brewed some tea and huddled around the blazing campfire trying to stay warm, while discussing plans to break camp the next morning and head back into Burma. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Pairem fishing around in his top-left shirt pocket, as if trying to extract a cigarette. Instead, Pairem extracted a small, crumpled piece of silver-colored metal. I exclaimed: *Pairem, I had asked everybody not to remove any wreckage from the crashsite. Here, let me see that!* I almost fell off the log I was sitting on when I examined the piece of folded metal. Pairem, who couldn't read English, and who was asked several times not to remove any wreckage, had found and pocketed the actual aircraft data plate!! This aluminum plate measuring approx. 1 inch tall and 4 inches wide, gave the aircraft model number, aircraft serial number and date of manufacture. What a miracle it was for this small piece of fragile aluminum to not only survive the intense inferno following the crash which melted or vaporized much of the aluminum wreckage at the site, but then to be found in the rocky soil amongst all the other debris, and then to be picked up and retained by Pairem, and finally for me to inadvertently see him remove it from his pocket! This compounded, incredible good fortune was truly providential. No other possible explanation would have been plausible. I gave Pairem a big hug and profusely thanked him for saving the expedition. However, I never learned what inspired him to pocket that one piece of wreckage. Did he somehow sense how critically important that piece of metal was, or did he just like the way it looked? The strange thing was, the aircraft data plate was so small and so folded and crumpled, that even I couldn't tell what it was until I pried it open and flattened it out.

The next morning with broke camp and started the trek back to Burma. Shortly after crossing into Burma, we made a minor diversion to reach the C-47 wreckage I first visited in 2002. After completing my documentation of the C-47 crashsite, we proceeded to trek down to Ft. Hertz.

As we approached Ft. Hertz, I gathered everybody into a group and explained to them that Burmese military intelligence (MI) agents might interrogate me and /

or them to learn where we had been and why we went there. I knew MI was well aware of my presence, and as the only American in the area, they were probably intensely curious about my recent activities. It was absolutely vital that none of us should mention we crossed the border into India, as that would surely lead to our collective arrests and jailing for making an illegal border crossing (two of them, actually). At the same time, I was concerned that MI might have already planted a paid informant among my porters, in which case, I was already headed for a Burmese jail.

I spent a couple days in Ft. Hertz waiting for the next flight south. My plan was to get down to Rangoon as quickly as possible, and then get over to the US Embassy and deliver the recovered crewmember remains and clothing remnants to the Defense Attache. I knew the next flight out of Ft. Hertz went only as far south as Myitkyina, where I'd have to spend the night and then continue south the following day. The Assistant US Defense Attache, James McAndrew, had previously told me he would be in Myitkyina about this time, and I should stop by and visit him if I'm passing through.

Upon entering the small airport building in Ft. Hertz to check-in for my flight to Myitkyina, I immediately noticed a large detachment of plainclothes MI agents eyeing me. Sure enough, they detained me while everybody else was processed and allowed to board the airplane. The airplane door was closed and the portable stairs were rolled away, and then it just sat there on the tarmac. Now the MI agents took me apart. My bags were completely emptied onto a large table, and then the interrogation started. The MI agents asked me numerous times where I had found the human remains, clothing remnants and the pieces of aircraft wreckage; and each time, I responded that the items were found just a few miles outside of town. Finally, the lead MI agent made a lengthy call on his mobile phone. After his phone conversation, he told me he had been ordered to release me, but they would retain all the remains and artifacts. He politely wrote me an itemized receipt for the retained items, which we both signed and dated, and then he gave me the original and kept a photocopy for himself. I was immensely relieved to finally be boarding the flight for Myitkyina, but what about the crewmember remains and artifacts?!

When I reached Myitkyina, I quickly located James McAndrew. He was laughing uproariously as I approached. As James explained it to me, he was already aware of the recent events up at Ft. Hertz because he had been standing next to the district MI commander while the commander took the phone call from his lead MI agent at the Ft. Hertz airport. Being fluent in Burmese, James just kept his ears open and his mouth shut. He laughingly assured me that had the MI commander ordered I be arrested, the US Embassy would have gone to work to get me released. It must be said though, the Burmese military intelligence agents were at all times very pleasant, polite, courteous and professional towards me.

About a month or so later, the Burmese government delivered the seized crewmember remains and artifacts to the US Embassy in Rangoon. The items were then delivered to the JPAC lab at Hickam AFB in HI.

In early 2004, I visited the JPAC facility in HI, and personally inspected the returned items. I verified that all the items which were seized from me at the Ft. Hertz airport were now present and accounted for. The JPAC staff allowed me to take the pieces of aircraft wreckage with me (except for the aircraft data plate). I subsequently sent the pieces of aircraft wreckage to the families of the men who were aboard this aircraft when it disappeared in April 1943.