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## Crashed Aircraft Site Report

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**Wreckage:** Yes

**Model & Serial:** C-47B #43-48308

**Date Visited:** 05 Nov 2009

**GPS Coordinates:** N 24-01-50.6 E 091-45-31.0

**Datum:** WGS 84

**Country:** India

**Province / State:** Tripura

**Nearest Town / Village:** Birmani Kami

**Distance / Directions:** 1-day trek W of Birmani Kami. See attached Expedition Notes.

**Map:** Google Earth or other satellite imagery.

**Elevation:** 1,350 ft.

**Aspect:** E

**Topography:** Hills. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

**Terrain Notes:** Steep hillside and rocky streambed. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

**Vegetation:** Jungle. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

**Aircraft ID Method:** Aluminum panel with aircraft construction number 14124 / 25569 found at site. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

**Engines / Propellers:** 2 engines and 2 propellers found at site. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

**Wreckage / Artifacts / ID Tags:** Wreckage on hillside and extending .5 mi down streambed from estimated point of impact. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

**Human Remains:** None seen by investigator. Oral history of local villagers tells of them seeing many human remains at site soon after crash occurred, and burying all collected remains in fenced plot near village. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

**Removed:** I removed nothing from site.

**Water:** Nearest water was small stream at site. See photos and attached Expedition Notes.

**Site Disturbance:** Significant disturbance caused by hydraulic erosion and salvaging. 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-47B #43-48308 Expedition Notes

Preliminary information about this reported aircraft wreckage site was relayed from a local Tripura man to my trekking guide based in Itanagar. I decided to travel to Tripura state and investigate.

I tried to access the intended search area near Manu from two different approach routes, but local police commanders turned me away each time after explaining the area was not safe for foreigners because of armed insurgency activity by a local separatist organization. Upon the advice of the local police commanders, I returned to the state capitol in Agartala to meet with the commandant of Tripura state police. The state police commandant warmly received me and speedily granted his approval for my proposed search effort. He said his approval was conditional on me accepting an armed escort which he would provide at no cost. Upon returning to Manu, I was joined by a 32-man heavily-armed paramilitary police escort. The police escort was armed with assault rifles, light machine guns and grenade launchers. We drove W in caravan formation to the end of the dirt road, then shouldered our gear and trekked to the small village of Birmani Kami. The village is approx. 5 miles W of Manu, and very close to the border with Bangladesh. After arranging for local guides in Birmani Kami, we trekked an additional 2 miles W to the crashsite.

It was evident the ill-fated aircraft had approached from the E or SE, and had impacted the upper area of a rock face on the E aspect of Long Thrai Mtn. Aircraft wreckage slid down the rock face and into a rocky drainage directly below the mountain. This drainage flows W to E, and is known locally as *The River of the Airplane*.

The villagers in Birmani Kami related their oral history regarding this plane crash: Sometime in the mid-late 1940's, villagers had witnessed the plane crashing into Long Thrai Mtn. and had gone there soon afterwards. They described the poor weather that morning, and also how the aircraft wreckage was still burning when they arrived on site. The villagers recounted seeing many bodies scattered about. The villagers collected all the human remains they could find and brought those remains down to their village. The remains were then buried in an impromptu cemetery on the edge of the village. A large metal cross fashioned from the aircraft wreckage was erected within the cemetery plot. The villagers said the large metal cross stood in the cemetery for many years, and disappeared about 5-10 years ago after an especially heavy rainstorm. They think an earthen embankment collapsed and allowed the cross to fall into the nearby creek where it probably washed downstream.



The indigenous Tripura tribe had been mostly converted to Christianity many decades ago. The people of Birmani Kami described how local Christians have been conducting an annual memorial service at the cemetery for the dead airmen every year since the 1940's, and continue doing so to this day. The memorial service is said to occur in early January. The cemetery was neatly fenced with woven bamboo, and is currently planted with ginger.

Aircraft ID was determined through the construction number 14124 / 25569 painted on a piece of aluminum wreckage found at the site.

# C-47B #43-48308 Accident Analysis

The archival accident report on this aircraft loss lists 2 serious errors that might have been contributing factors:

1. Pilot failed to get a weather and route briefing prior to departing Mingaladon.
2. Pilot failed to file the proper flight clearance.

However, in all fairness, flying in these extreme weather conditions could easily have doomed any pilot, irregardless of how diligently he followed the established flight rules and regulations.

Pilot radioed control tower at Barrackpore at 6:10 AM to report he had passed over Akyab, Burma at 5:30 AM, and that he was flying on instruments (indicating poor visibility), and he expected to arrive at Barrackpore at 8 AM.

Note: The C-47 aircraft has a max. flying speed of 232 mph and a cruising speed of 175 mph. In reality, the pilots usually flew lightly slower, especially if encountering turbulence or icing. Barrackpore is approx. 348 straightline miles from Akyab. In ideal flying conditions and using an average flying speed of 200 mph, it would require approx. 1.74 hrs to fly this distance. At 140 mph, or by generally following the coastline, it would require approx. 2.5 hrs. to fly this distance. It would therefore be possible for him to reach Barrackpore by 8 AM in ideal flying conditions.

After-accident interview statements collected from Mingaladon personnel reveal the pilot was well known to dislike flying over water. Furthermore, the pilot stated he could not fly over water on this flight because he didn't have enough life jackets aboard his aircraft. The pilot reportedly stated he planned to follow the coastline to Calcutta, and he expected this longer route to take him approx. 5.5 hrs of flying time and more fuel. His aircraft had full fuel tanks when it departed Mingaladon. Pilot also told Mingaladon personnel that if he encountered a storm over Akyab, he would change course and fly N or NE around the storm.

Note: An early monsoon storm was developing over the Bay of Bengal that day. This would have caused strong winds out of the SSW, turbulence, poor visibility, lightening and possibly icing at higher altitudes. Lightening causes electrical interference with radio communications, airport radio beacons and aircraft radio compasses.

Pilot radioed Barrackpore at 6:15 AM for a weather update. This would indicate he was concerned about deteriorating weather conditions, since it would normally be daylight and with reasonably good visibility at this time of day in late May. Archival records show Barrackpore had to transmit its weather report twice due to heavy atmospheric interference (lightening).



Note: Flying at approx. 200 mph would mean the aircraft covered approx. 150 miles since passing over Akyab at 5:30 AM. If pilot had continued up the coast from Akyab (as he reportedly said he would do if he encountered a storm over Akyab), then he would be slightly south of Chittagong by 6:15 AM.

Pilot mistakenly responded to Barrackpore's call to another aircraft at 7:05 AM, and reported back *QRU* (nothing for you). This was the last radio contact with C-47B #43-48308.

Note: Flying up the coastline at approx. 200 mph would put the aircraft approx. 300 miles NW of Akyab at 7:05 AM, and approaching Birmani Kami and Long Thrai Mtn at this time. If the pilot had turned towards Barrackpore at Akyab, then he could potentially have been over the northern Sundarbans at 7:05 AM. As noted earlier, it's extremely unlikely the pilot had decided to fly the standard / direct route over the Bay of Bengal.

## Conclusion

There is no known record of the pilot's actual flight bearing after he passed over Akyab, Burma. Given the pilot's comments prior to departing Mingaladon, plus the very poor weather conditions in the area on that day, it's extremely unlikely the pilot flew the standard / direct route over the Bay of Bengal. It's much more probable that the pilot had turned N or slightly NE in the vicinity of Akyab, in an attempt to skirt the storm front (as he had told Mingaladon personnel he would do), and with the intention of turning W or SW somewhere N of Chittagong.

The strong SSW winds associated with an early monsoon storm over the Bay of Bengal would naturally have created significant sidewinds on the left side of his aircraft while he was crossing to the W, NW or SW. This sidewind effect could easily have pushed his aircraft significantly off-course towards the N or NE. If the pilot had turned NW at Akyab or turned W or SW somewhere slightly N of Chittagong (the most realistic scenario), then it's highly probable his aircraft was blown significantly off-course towards the N or NE.

The monsoon storm and its associated electrical activity had definitely interfered with radio communications that day. Atmospheric interference often caused ground radio beacons and aircraft radio compasses to be highly inaccurate or even non-functioning. This unfortunate set of circumstances would naturally have compounded the pilot's difficulty in determining his exact location, while he simultaneously battled strong sidewinds and turbulence. Under these extreme conditions, the pilot could easily have gotten off-course, become lost and ultimately flew into the mountain in poor visibility conditions. It's also possible the aircraft impacted the mountain while the pilot was attempting to get under the cloud cover to gain a visual fix on the ground to help determine his location.