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Crashed Aircraft Recovery Report

Date of Recovery: 04 Nov 2019 to 30 Dec 2019.

Model & Serial Number: B-25D #41-30362.

GPS Coordinates: N 27-22-45.8 E 096-54-14.2.

Datum: WGS 84.

Country: India.

State/Province/District: Arunachal Pradesh.

Nearest Town/Village: Gandhigram.

Distance/Direction: 3-day trek NE of Gandhigram.

Altitude: 9,007 ft.

Topography: Mountains.

Aspect: NW.

Terrain Notes: Narrow, steep, rocky ravine with estimated 30 deg to 60 deg slope. Several near-vertical rock steps/headwalls spanning width of ravine.

Vegetation: Forest.

Nearest Water: Small mud seep/bog at campsite.

Site Disturbance: Significant disturbance caused by hydraulic erosion.

Wreckage Trail: Wreckage is contained almost entirely within ravine and extends approx. 300 yds. down ravine from estimated point of impact. Some wreckage on steep, forested slopes on either side of ravine was probably ejected there by force of crash impact.

Human Remains Recovered: Yes. Pending analysis.

Personnel Artifacts Recovered: Yes.

Wreckage Artifacts Recovered: Yes

Photos: See website for photos. Additional photos and video on file.

Personnel on Recovery Team: 20.

Team Leader: Clayton Kuhles.

Summary: MIA Recoveries, Inc was asked by the family group associated with this aircraft to lead an expedition back to the crash site for the purpose of recovering remains and personal artifacts of the 5 personnel who died aboard the aircraft when it crashed on 10 Dec 1943. It was requested that the recovery expedition occur during Fall 2019, as soon as possible after the monsoon season.

I knew that the monsoon season in that area typically ends in late Oct, but it can take a couple additional weeks for the rivers to go down to a level that's safe for wading across and for any seasonal bridges to be rebuilt after sustaining damage from floating debris during the flood stage. The recovery expedition was therefore scheduled to begin in early Nov 2019. I estimated it would require a 20-person team and approx. 60 days to complete the recovery mission, including travel time to and from the crash site. The crash site would probably be receiving snowfall by late Dec and would likely be covered in snow by early Jan. Consequently, the expedition launch date was set for 04 Nov 2019 and the goal was to finish site work and start demobilizing by the end of Dec 2019.

Given the altitude of the crash site, there would only be a narrow weather window of Nov and Dec to complete the recovery work. It was essential that the entire team meet-up in Dibrugarh on 05 Nov and be prepared to mobilize immediately to the crash site. Not a single day could be wasted if we were to complete the recovery work before the snows arrived. Team members were selected for their ability to do the required work and their willingness to comply with the expedition itinerary. It was also necessary for all team members to be exceptionally fit and have the tenacity to live and work in a remote, challenging and unpleasant jungle environment for weeks until the recovery mission could be completed.

My team members and I met-up at the Dibrugarh airport on 05 Nov. Using hired vehicles, we drove to Pasighat, where we purchased tools, equipment, bulk foodstuffs and other supplies needed for the recovery mission. Continuing by hired vehicles, the team drove to Miao, where we hired porters, then continued to the roadhead at Namdapha. The vehicles were offloaded at Namdapha, loads sorted and assigned to porters, and then an arduous trek of 82 miles was commenced to the crash site. The trekking route followed the Dihing River upstream towards Chaukan Pass on the Burma border. The route involved numerous river and stream crossings, some over crude bamboo bridges, but mostly by wading across. When the team wasn't negotiating river crossings, it was slogging through deep mud and jungle and clambering over slippery river rocks. We passed through several small Lisu tribal villages before arriving in Gandhigram after 6 days of rough trekking. Gandhigram was the closest village to the crash site, so we met with the village headman and arranged for daily scheduled radio calls between our high camp near the crash site and the headman. We also arranged with the village headman to send porters up to our high camp on a scheduled basis to resupply us with bulk food items such as rice and vegetables. It was another 3 days of rough trekking up into the nearby Patkai Range to cross over a 10,000 ft. altitude ridge and drop down to our final campsite location at 9,222 ft. altitude. This was the same high camp that I utilized during my discovery expedition in Nov 2011. It was the closest useable location to the crash site, but it was far from ideal with its cramped area for tents and lack of nearby flowing water. Our only water source was a small mud seep/bog located almost in the center of our campsite. We excavated a sump in the middle of the mud seep and water quickly percolated into the sump. We then clarified and boiled the water before using it. We also collected rain water from the tarpaulins covering the mess tent and porter's tent by attaching bamboo "spigots" to the tarp edges and corners, causing the rain water to drip into containers below. The crash site was located to the west of our campsite and required a 20-minute downclimb every day to the estimated point of impact at 9,007 ft. altitude.

Because of the steepness and narrowness of the ravine and its very confining characteristics, we decided to excavate the crash site starting at the bottom of the debris trail and systematically move upgradient to the estimated point of impact. We excavated the entire crash site, including under and around the few pieces of wreckage found outside the ravine. There was a deep accumulation of soil at the base of each of the rock steps/headwalls spanning the width of the ravine, and these areas were sometimes excavated to a depth of 3 ft. Remains were found approx. 50 ft. downgradient from the estimated point of impact. The team also recovered some personal artifacts, as well as some smaller pieces of wreckage that could potentially be displayed in an exhibit. The overhead hatch through which Lt. Spain escaped just moments before the crash and the release handle for that hatch were found amongst the wreckage.

We completed our recovery work on 30 Dec 2019 amid light snow flurries. Demobilization started immediately before the weather became more wintery.

Historical Note: The Lisu people migrated from Burma into the Dihing River Valley in 1947, settling first in the Vijaynagar area and then establishing Gandhigram in the early 1960's. This means there were none of the current villages, inhabitants or trails in the area when Lt. Spain trekked out to safety after his narrow escape from the crashing aircraft in Dec 1943. My Lisu guides think Lt. Spain probably followed rivers downstream until he eventually reached the coalmining town of Ledo. Ledo is also the starting point of the famous Ledo/Stillwell/Burma Road. His trek to safety was an epic survival story in itself.

Date of Report: 11 Jan 2020.

Prepared By: Clayton Kuhles.