Mystery wreck may be Lt. Bishop's lost P-40 that was shot down December 7th, 1941

By Dave Trojan, Aviation Historian, davidtrojan@earthlink.net Dec 2014

Lt. **Samuel Bishop at Hickam Field in a Curtiss P-40B, circa December 1942, photo courtesy US-Aircraft.com**

There are many mysteries surrounding the loss of aircraft from the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The records are incomplete and perplexing about what really happened on that Sunday morning so long ago. The 44th Pursuit Squadron with twelve P-40 Warhawks was at Bellows Field on the north shore of Oahu for gunnery practice on the morning of December 7th, 1941. They did not escape the attention of the Japanese during the attack. Newly discovered information about undocumented aircraft wrecks raise questions concerning their identity and the possibility that one may be the site of Lt. Samuel Bishop's aircraft final resting place.

Pre-attack on Bellows Field

Beginning November 7th, 1941, twelve P-40s and personnel of the 44th Pursuit Squadron (Interceptor), 18th Pursuit Group at Wheeler Field began deploying to Bellows for a month's aerial gunnery training. They flew a practice mission on Saturday, December 6th, but did not immediately refuel their aircraft afterward. They also removed

the guns from a number of aircraft to perform a more thorough job of cleaning them. Also after completing the week-long exercise, 50% of the personnel were allowed passes. Most of the officers returned to their home base at Wheeler Field to enjoy the remainder of the weekend with their families. Consequently, on the morning of December 7th, 1941, Bellows Field was undermanned, the P-40 Warhawks were parked wing-to-wing, low on fuel, and some had their guns removed.

Tent city at Bellows Field August 1941, note P-40s parked nearby, USAF photo

Aerial view of Bellows Field, 27 October 1941, P-40, O-47 and P-26 aircraft are visible, USAF photo

The attack on Bellows Field December 7th, 1941

At approximately 0830, a lone Japanese fighter flew in from the east and made a single pass firing its machine guns at the tent area, slightly wounding PFC James A. Brown of the medical detachment in his leg. The initial attack alerted the men and personnel went over to the armament building and drew Browning automatic rifles, Springfield rifles, and machine guns. Everyone then dispersed, jumping into ditches, behind buildings, or whatever shelter they could find.

Sometime between the solo attack and the main attack, a crippled B-17C arrived at Bellows. This was one of the twelve Flying Fortresses coming in from Hamilton Field; and its pilot, 1st Lt. Robert H. Richards of the 38th Reconnaissance Squadron, had been the last in line to land at Hickam. He never made it there because Japanese Zeros had riddled his aircraft from nose to tail, shot away the ailerons, and severely wounded three crew members. Trying to lose his attackers, he sped away at full throttle along the southern coast of Oahu, and roared in over Waimanalo Bay toward Bellows' short fighter strip. As he approached, crew chief Earl Sutton was taxiing a P-40 to a dispersal area and crossed directly in his way, forcing him to pull up and go around again.

Sergeant Covelesky recalled the event: “No one was aware of the flight of bombers arriving from the states, and to see that approaching monster trailing smoke from its right engines was mind boggling. Our asphalt landing strip at Bellows was hardly long enough to accommodate our P-40s, much less a B-17; and when he made an approach from the ocean downwind, we knew we were in for a breathtaking crash landing. Even though his wheels were down, he flared out and touched down halfway on the strip, knowing he wouldn't be able to stop, retracted the wheels and slid off the runway over a ditch and into a cane field bordering the air strip.” The B-17 bomber was repeatedly machine gunned during the second attack. Afterwards they counted at least 73 bullet holes and the bomber was “a complete washout”.

Wrecked B-17 at Bellows Field shortly after the attack, USAF Photo

At approximately 0900 the main attack began. Nine Japanese A6M Zero fighters flying in a V formation of three planes each began attacking Bellows. The raid started with a diving attack by all nine planes, after which the three-plane formations peeled off and began shooting from various directions. A few men with rifles managed to return fire, but the return fire was minimal from the ground.

One soldier at Bellows recounted his actions that morning. Private Ray F. McBriarty “ran from church down to the section” when “whistles blew around the camp.” PFC Raymond F. McBriarty and Pvt William L. Burt of the 86th Observation Squadron grabbed a puny 30 caliber machine gun and ammunition from the armament shack, mounted the gun in the rear cockpit of their squadron commander's parked O-47 observation aircraft. They were proceeding to put ammunition in the gun when the main attack started. McBriarty "hit the dust" when the first strafing attack passed him by, then “crawled into the cockpit and expended 450 rounds on them”. McBriarty remembers one Japanese plane “was coming down, just right down the runway, didn’t seem to have any objective at all, just fired on the ramp.” McBriarty later received the Silver Star for gallantry in action.

The Japanese strafing attack plastered the field with machine gun bullets. The ensuing bedlam was further compounded by a 2000 gallon 100 octane gasoline truck that was quickly set ablaze and was spewing jets of fire and billowed angry rolling black smoke to darken the sky overhead.

Burned out fuel truck at Bellows Field after the attack, USAF photo

Amidst the many heroic actions rendered by airmen that infamous Sunday morning, three Army Air Corps pilots of the 18th Pursuit Group, 44th Pursuit Squadron attempted to get airborne at Bellows Field. Their first sight of the enemy attack force was of planes coming in low and fast around the point from the direction of Kaneohe Naval Air Station.

As the attack began, personnel of the 44th Pursuit Squadron rushed to disperse, fuel, and arm their twelve P-40 Warhawk aircraft, which were lined up on the edge of the runway. Only four of the squadron's officers were at Bellows Field that morning, and three were pilots. They wanted to get into the air as soon as possible to challenge the superior attacking enemy force. The three pilots made the attempt to take-off into the heat of the attack against overwhelming odds.

2nd Lt. Hans C. Christiansen was the first to reach his plane. As he started to get into the cockpit of his plane, enemy fire struck him in the back and he fell at the feet of his mechanic, Cpl Elmer L. Rund. Blood gushed out from a large hole in the life jacket of the fatally wounded pilot. Rund and his crew chief, Joe Ray, then had to quickly duck under the aircraft for protection from the strafing attack which seemed to come at them from all directions.

Up next was 2nd Lt. George A. Whiteman. Lt. Whiteman found the P-40s being readied for takeoff while Japanese fighters commenced strafing attacks. He ran up to a P-40 which was still being loaded with ammunition and told the men to get off the wing because he would fly the plane as it was. He started the engine and taxied out onto the runway, leaving so quickly that the armorers did not have time to install the gun cowlings back on the wings. Whiteman began his takeoff run and was immediately attacked by Japanese A6M Zero fighters which swooped down on him.

The base commander, Colonel Weddington, looked on with horror as he watched Lt. Whiteman try and take off. He later recounted, “I personally watched, wondering what would happen if the pilot was hit while taxiing, whether the airplane would just go on off, over the island, or whether he would die there, or whether he would ground-loop, or what would happen…six different airplanes made passes at him and seemingly never hit him, but when he got on the runway and started to take off, they got square behind him, and just as he got off, shot him down in flames; and he was turning, trying to give them a bad target, and crashed into the beach and burned there.”

Whiteman managed to get his plane airborne approximately 50 feet up in the air. He then tried to turn inside and to the left of the two Zeros on his tail. He took heavy fire which hit his wings, cockpit, and engine of his aircraft, which burst into flames. His plane crashed to the ground with its left wing hitting the sand on the beach about 200 yards off the end of the runway. A tremendous ball of fire erupted upon impact. SSgt. Cosmos Manning carried a large fire extinguisher down to the wreckage, and others followed in a hopeless rescue effort, but 2nd Lt. Whiteman was killed in the crash. The intense fire from the fuel tanks consumed the aircraft and pilot. There was not much left except a few scattered pieces of metal surrounded by an ugly patch of blacken sand. Fourteen years later, Sedalia AFB in Missouri was renamed Whiteman AFB in honor of Lieutenant Whiteman.

The third pilot at Bellows Field was 1st Lt. Samuel W. Bishop. He attempted to take off to engage the enemy while under heavy fire directly behind Whiteman. He watched helplessly as he saw Whiteman's plane crash down on the beach before him. He was easy prey for the Japanese fighters, which came in on his tail and clung persistently to their prey. The Japanese fighters badly shot up his plane and rendered his hydraulic system inoperative. Bishop was unable to retract his landing gear in a vain attempt to try and gain speed and altitude that would take him away from the immediate area of Bellows. He also received damage to his engine and a vital hit that led to the loss of engine coolant and loss of power. According to several reports, he was forced to ditch the aircraft about a ½ mile off shore. After successfully exiting the stricken aircraft in the ocean, he swam ashore all the while surviving a strafing as enemy pilots took aim at

him. Lt. Bishop suffered a bullet wound to the calf of his leg, but he managed to survive the horrible ordeal.

All three pilots were shot down before they had a chance to fight back. The men were caught by surprise, but they most certainly did not give up. Though the attack lasted only about 15 shocking minutes, the names of Christiansen, Whiteman and Bishop are now forever honored in the rolls of Air Force history.

Crash site Investigation and historical significance

Fast forward to today. Where is the crash site location of Bishop's P-40? Was the wreckage salvaged? Are there any artifacts remaining from his plane? What is known about Bishop's P-40? These questions have remained unanswered and undocumented for more than 70 years. They are now part of the mystery surrounding the attack on Pearl Harbor. It is now time to try and answer these questions.

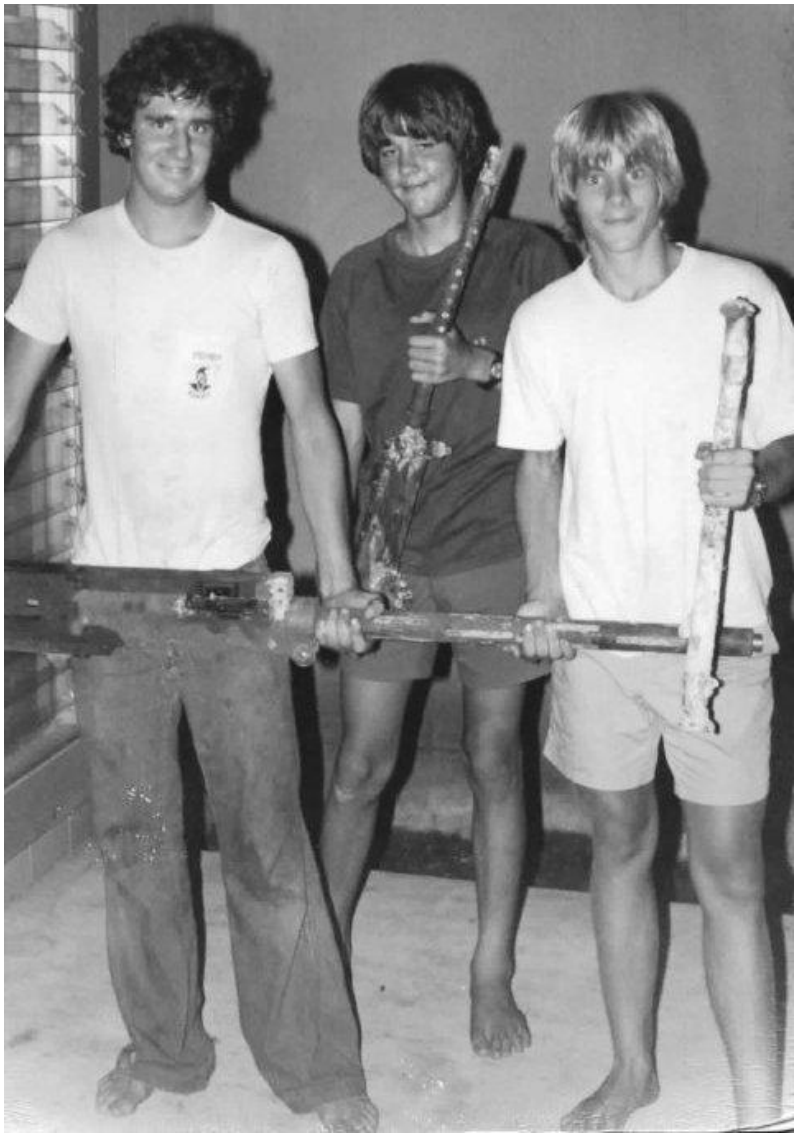
Recently, the locations of two aircraft wrecks near Bellows Field have been revealed. One of the two wrecks is believed to be 1st Lt. Bishop's P-40 aircraft that crashed after being shot down December 7th, 1941. Artifacts were recovered from one of the wreck sites. If the artifacts are in fact from Lt. Bishops P-40, they would be historically significant because this was one of the first American aircraft shot down during the historic Pearl Harbor battle that launched the United States into World War II.

Kailua aircraft wreck

A plane wreck was reported located off of Kailua Beach about three miles NW of Bellows Field and about 500 yards offshore. The wreck is believed to be a rare P-40B or C Warhawk model. The rarity of a P-40B or C model wreck site makes it historically important and warranted further efforts to survey the site to positively identify the wreck. Artifacts were recovered from the wreck back in 1977 by scavengers who did not understand the history and significance of the artifacts.

The Artifacts

The story of how artifacts were found begins back in the summer of 1977. Three friends came across a V-12 engine in about 10-12 feet of water approx. 500 yards off shore of Kailua Bay. At first they thought it may have been from a speed boat. They had heard that the V-12 was a popular engine to use in boats after the war. After further checking the site, they discovered .30 caliber ammunition and a machine gun. They then understood the engine must be from a plane crash. They had no boat and no scuba tanks, just mask, fins and snorkels. They were just kids on an exciting adventure of discovery and they wanted a few souvenirs from the site. They had no concept that they were desecrating a historical site. The boys spent three successive days of investigating the site and recovering parts. It took the boys over three hours to drag one of the heavy .50 caliber machine guns along the bottom to shore. The gun was later given to a friend in 1978 when one of them moved to Nevada. They were able to finally identify the aircraft type when they found one of the stainless steel ammo boxes from one of the .30 cal machine guns. Tack welded on top was a chrome plated brass tag that read: AMMO BOX FOR: BROWNING .30 CAL R.H. INBOARD. AIRPLANE: P-40B.



Three proud young boys showing off their treasure

Artifacts recovered by the trio included: carburetor temperature gauge, control stick, eight day clock, part of the artificial horizon indicator, radio equipment, machine guns and some ammunition. An inventory of some of the items and their identity marks was later made by one of the boy's father.

Radio equipment:

Signal Corps U.S. Army

Radio Receiver BC-AL 429

Serial no. 220 order # 200-NY-41 Date 7-26-40

Made by Gray Bar Electric Co New York N.Y.

Signal Corps U.S. Army

Coil Unit C-270

Low range 201 to 398 kc

High range 4150 to 7700 kc

Used with any radio receiver BC-A1-429

Oder no. 200-41-NY Serial no. 220

Armament:

U.S. no. 12372 G.V.T. insp C.S.R.P

Browning Machine Gun Cal 50 M2

Manufactured by Colts Patent Fire Arms Mfg. Co.

Hartford Conn. USA

Patent no.s: 1293021 - 1548708 – 1628226 – RE 9159 – 1919242 – 1936254

Other patents pending

U.S. no. 14340 G.V.T. Insp. C.S.R.

Browning Machine Gun Cal. 30 M2

Manufactured by

Colts Patent Fire Arms Mfg Co.

Hartford Conn. USA

Patent no.s: 1293021 – 1803349 – 1803350 – 1803351 – 1803352 – 1803353

Ammunition Box:

Airplane P-40-B

Gun R. H. In ‘B. ‘D.

Caliber 30

Part no. 81-69-254-R

Capacity 500 Rounds

Ammunition:

30 Caliber

Ball marked F.A. 37

Tracer marked F.A. 40

50 Caliber

Ball marked F.A. 37

All these years later, these artifacts have remained hidden away as treasured keepsakes from the adventure so long ago. Over time, one of the boys realized that maybe in some small way he could help bring some closure to a family or just solve another of the many mysteries of military plane crashes from that era. He contacted me in an effort to try and determine which plane these artifacts came from. He was willing to have the items go to a surviving family member or a museum. He wants the artifacts to find a home, where ever that may be, better than a box in his closet. The question is which plane did they come from? Could they have come from Bishops' lost P-40?

Surviving Artifacts

Group of artifacts recovered from the wreck

30 cal. Linked Ammunition

Shell cases are stamped F.A. 37 and F.A. 40

Eight Day Clock

The clock reads approximately 1030-1045. The three planes at Bellows Field attempted to takeoff at about 0900 and were shot down shortly afterwards. This is well before the reading on the clock. The clock may have kept running after the plane crashed or the clock may not have been set to the correct time before the plane took off.

Carburetor Temperature Gauge


Control stick


grip close up

Part number on the control stick is 275973.

The Kailua Bay Wreck Site

A search was conducted during the fall of 2014 of the Kailua Bay area in an effort to relocate the wreck site identified back in 1977. The search area was based on information provided by one of the original boys involved in the recovery back in 1977. Although the memories were more than 37 years old, he was able to narrow down the search area significantly. After several dives in the area, the site was located only about 500 yards from the estimated location. The site is located about 3 miles northwest of Bellows Field in only 10-12 feet of water and about 500 feet from shore in Kailua Bay. The wreck site was surveyed by Blade Shepherd-Jones and documented using both photography and video. Link to video survey is located at: http://vimeo.com/104280581.

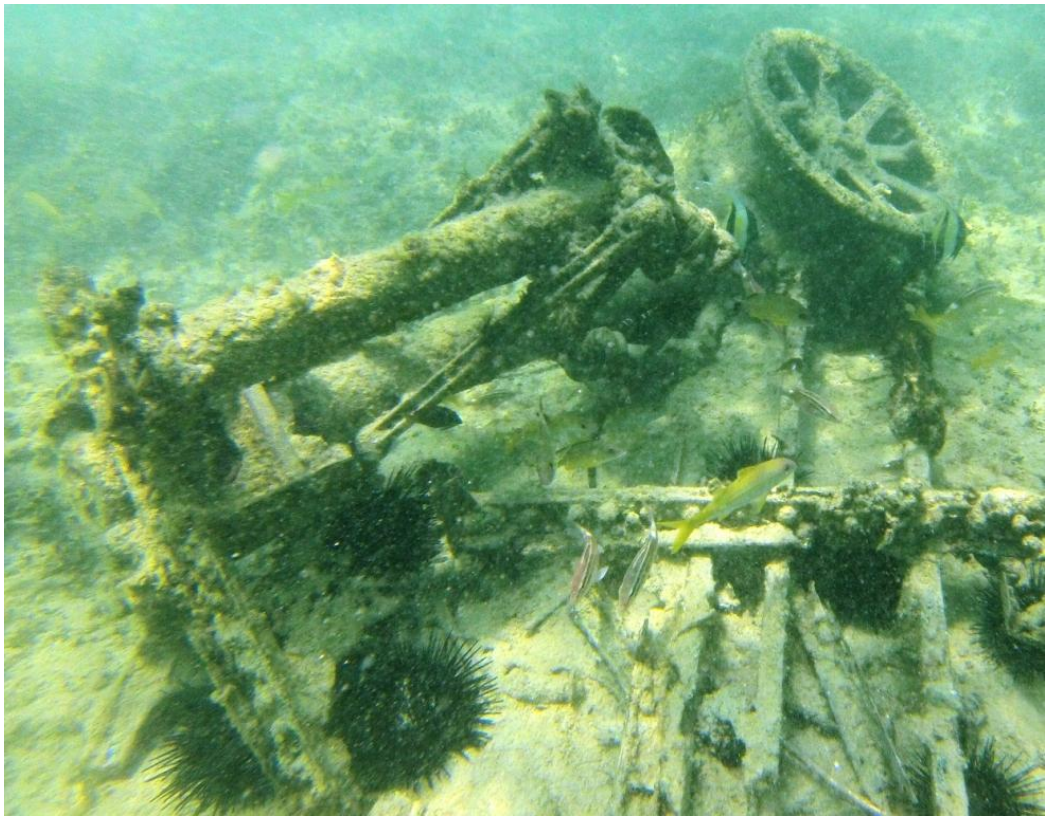


Photo of wreck site showing landing gear provided by Blade Shepherd-Jones

P-40 Landing gear diagram and photo used for comparison

Using the photos provided, the site was positively identified as belonging to a P-40 aircraft. This was based on the landing gear configuration and the inline engine.

Photos of wreck site provided by Blade Shepherd-Jones

Engine at the wreck site photo by Blade Shepherd-Jones

Engine Data Plate photographed underwater by Blade Shepherd-Jones

Engine data plate and information that can be derived from it

Allison V-1710-33 C-15, Air Cops or Bureau No, AC 41-35694, MFRS NO 1905, Accepted 3-3-41, contract# W535-AC16323, Engine Spec # 126-D

Allison Engineering Co. V-1710-33, liquid-cooled, supercharged, single overhead cam 60° V-12 engine, which produced 1,040 horsepower and turned a three-bladed Curtiss Electric constant-speed propeller. Allison built more than 70,000 V-1710's.

The Allison V-1710-33 engine is known as a 'C' version of the Allison V-1710s. The "C" series engines were developed for highly streamlined pursuit aircraft for the USAAC, and are easily identified by the long reduction gear case. The military models were V-1710-3, -5, -7, -11. -13, -15, -19, -21, -23, -33, producing between 750 and 1050 hp at 2600 rpm. These engines came in two groups, one group rated at full power at sea level, the other rated at full power at high altitude. The altitude rating difference was in the supercharger gear ratio, four of which were used: 6.23:1, 6.75:1, 8.0:1 and 8.77:1. These engines received heavier crankcases, a stronger crankshaft, SAE #50 propeller shaft, and Bendix pressure carburetors.

The Allison V-1710-33 was used on both the P-40B and C models. Later models used other dash models. Both the P-40D and P-40E used the V-1710-39 and the P-40K was equipped with the V-1710-81 engine.

The “41” from AC 41-35694 indicates the engine was purchased with FY 1941 funds and was the 35,694th aircraft engine purchased by the Army that year. Note that a similar scheme was used by the Army to identify their aircraft however there was no attempt to match the engine serial number to that of the aircraft.

The aircraft serial number is not shown on the engine data plate. Allison assigned their serial numbers irrespective of engine type or model. Thus their manufacturer’s number sequence includes the X-4520, V-1710, V-3420, J31 and J33 engines. For example A-074138 is a V-1710-145(G6L) and A-074337 is a J33-10 jet engine.

Engine Spec # 126-D was documented assigned P-40B, unknown if assigned to P-40C

Contract number W535-AC16323. Until about 1944 all engines, and almost everything else aviation related purchased by the Army Air Corps/Air Forces, were identified by the prefix W535-ac-, followed by the contract sequence number, which reached into the five digits.

Also of note, it has been documented that at least in one case, an engine operated and overhauled twice by the USAAC during the war was never re-designated as a later V-1710-51, the corresponding Air Corps model, nor was the serial changed on the data plate. This leaves open the possibility that the earlier model engine was installed on a later model aircraft.

Curtiss P-40 aircraft information

The Curtiss-Wright model H81 was manufactured for the US Army Air Corps between March and May 1941. It cost the US Government $40,148.00. The P-40B and P-40C were basically similar except for armament and internal variations. Its official name was “Warhawk”.

P-40B, manufacture model designation Hawk 81A-2, 130 manufactured, deliveries starting from March 1941. P-40Bs serials numbers were 41-5205/5304 and 41-13297/13327.

Note the engine accepted date of 3-3-41 would indicate the aircraft was a P-40B if the engines and airframe were delivered close to each other.

P-40C, manufacture model designation Hawk 81A-3, 193 manufactured, deliveries starting in April 1941. P-40Cs serial numbers were 41-13328/13520. P-40C was powered by the Allison V-1710-33 which incorporated an improved fuel system and internally sealed fuel tanks.

Note according to one source, P-40Cs in the Curtiss construction block of 16104-16296 used the Allison engine order for a V-1710-33 which originally would have been in the 41.35### range as seen on other P40Cs in the same block. This would indicate that the engine was installed on a P-40C.

The artifacts do indicate they are from either a P-40B or P-40C model Curtiss aircraft. This is based on ammo box found at the site that had a P-40B tag on it. The other artifacts are also consistent with belonging to an early model P-40 aircraft. The book "East Wind Rain" states there were 87, P-40Bs and 12, P-40Cs on strength with the Hawaiian Air Force on December 7th, 1941. The 44th PS had a cross section of P-40s: P-40B serial numbers 41-5206-5209, 41-13319- 13323 and P-40C serial numbers 41-13328, 41-13331, 41-13332, 41-13337, 41-13340, 41-13344, 41-13367

Engine serial number research

A time consuming effort was undertaken to try and match the engine serial number to an aircraft serial number. This research was conducted thanks to the help of Craig Fuller of Aviation Archaeological Investigation and Research, (AAIR). As stated above, no effort was made during the manufacturing process to match the engine serial numbers to the aircraft serial numbers. However, some aircraft history card records also listed the engine serial number. It was hoped that by using a list of P-40 aircraft shipped to Hawaii, it could narrow down the possibilities. Unfortunately, all the early P-40 aircraft history cards did not contain engine serial number information.

A complete review of all P-40 accident reports, Army Air Corps Form 14, from the Oahu Hawaii area was also conducted by Craig Fuller of AAIR in an attempt to identify one that occurred in the area where the wreck is located. At least 54, P-40B and P-40C aircraft had major accidents and were written off in Hawaii during the war. Furthermore, there are an unknown number accidents for which there are no official accident reports

because of wartime conditions in Hawaii and the disorder after the attack on December 7th, 1941. Most accident reports gave approximant location information, but many had to be individually read for clues to their crash location. The accident report list did reveal that P-40B and P-40C aircraft actively operated from Bellows Field both before and after December 7th, 1941. It was discovered that there are no documented P-40 wrecks listed in the general area three miles northwest from Bellows Field off Kailua beach. This line of research did reveal several possibilities. The accident location could be wrong on the accident report, the accident was not documented, the accident report was lost or the wreck was not a result of an accident, but was a result of enemy action.

Next, another survey of accident reports was conducted by Craig Fuller of AAIR looking for engine serial numbers. This was done because of the possibility of the wrong location listed on an accident report. Many accident reports did contain engine serial numbers and it was hoped that by re-checking the records a match could be found or a block of most likely candidates could be determined to at least bracket the wreck engine serial number 41-35694. The relation of aircraft serial number to engine serial number does not appear to be linier, but it did give an idea about where to look up more P-40 accident reports that may narrow down the list. Further checks were then done on each individual candidate to see if any matched the serial number. The closest match made was P-40C aircraft serial number 41-13342, engine serial number 41-335671. This was only four engine serial numbers away from our wreck engine serial number of 41-35694. However, by looking all the other P-40s in the same serial number group, none had an engine serial number that matched or no records were available for the particular P-40 candidate.

Another possibility that cannot be ruled out is that the engine may have been changed after the plane was manufactured and before it crashed. In summary, no match was found and no P-40 was identified using available records.

Additional investigation of the wreck site

Addition dives to the wreck site were conducted by Blade Shepherd-Jones in November 2014 to try and find additional data plates or other identifying information. The P-40 aircraft had serial numbers or construction numbers on a number of places including the oil tank, fuselage longerons, back armor, and other panels. Data plates were located in the cockpit, on the tail and landing gear. Panels and components could also have marks that could help identify the wreck. Unfortunately, no other numbers or data plates were found due to the corroded condition of the wreck. The only other possibility would be to recover much of the remaining wreckage, clean and conserve it and then check for any identify marking.

Official loss records for Lt. Bishop's P-40

There is no individual official record for the loss of Lt. Bishop's P-40. The crash was documented in a number of After Action Reports from December 7th, 1941, but no model type or serial number is listed in any of them. According to the official After Action Report from Bellows Field, "Lt. Bishop took off and attained an altitude of about 800 feet." "He was forced to land in the water off Lanikai." The location Lanikai is not too far

from the Kailua wreck site and the 800 foot altitude attained would imply that the plane made it further out from Bellows than many others reported.

According to the 44th Pursuit Squadron, 18th Pursuit Group unit history from the Air Force Historical Agency (AFHRA), they list two aircraft lost on December 7th 1941. They are P-40Bs, serial numbers 41-5208 and 41-5209 listed as destroyed that day. However there is no way of knowing which one was Bishop's aircraft. Furthermore, usaafdata.com claims Bishop's aircraft was P-40B, serial number 41-5209. However, no other reference for this is given from this source and no other references could be located. A check of the aircraft history cards for both 41-5208 and 41-5209 confirm they were both assigned to Bellows Field during that time and both were reported condemned as of December 28th 1941. This was standard practice for aircraft destroyed on December 7th because it took some time for the paperwork to catch up to the reports.

Eyewitness and book accounts of Lt Bishop's plane wreck

Several eyewitnesses gave accounts of where the plane crashed and a survey of books also listed several locations. Complicating the research is the fact that the accounts differ making the exact location hard to determine.

Some accounts say Lt. Bishop swam ashore and others say waded ashore after being shot down. This would imply that the crash site was not far from shore and in relative shallow water.

The location according to book, "The Pineapple Air Force", page 18, "shot him down in the ocean about half a mile offshore." The location according to Bishop's official Silver Star Award, "forced to make a crash landing in the waters nearby." The location according to book, "At Dawn We Slept", page 532, "crashed off Bellows Field .75 miles." The location according to book "7 Dec 1941: The Air Force Story, page 78, "Bishop managed to get his P-40 into the air; but before he could gain altitude, several Zeros attacked him, and he crashed into the ocean."

Three eyewitnesses gave good documented accounts of Bishops' aircraft loss.

The base commander, Colonel Weddington gave this account of Lt. Bishop's shoot down. "I did not see him take off, because there were some of them making passes at the position I was in at the time, and ducked. I had seen him taxiing down, however. They shot him down in the same manner (as Lt. Whiteman), except that he was not so badly shot up, landed in the water about three quarters of a mile to a mile down the beach, and swam ashore."

Forest E. Decker recalled the events of December 7, 1941 at Bellows Field: "One P-40 did get off but was shot down, just as he cleared the runway, and it crashed about 1000 yards out into the ocean."

Edward Covelsky recalled the events of December 7, 1941 at Bellows Field: "At this time Lt Bishop had time to start his engine and taxi to the takeoff end of the runway and while under fire was able to become airborne, but the machine gun fire he received had done its job, his hydraulic system was rendered inoperative and he was able unable to

retract his landing gear and build up an airspeed that would take him away from the immediate area of Bellows. He certainly had received a vital hit in the engine and with the loss of engine coolant and loss of power he was forced to ditch the aircraft about a ½ mile off shore. He successfully landed that stricken aircraft in the ocean and swam to shore all the while surviving a strafing as enemy pilots took aim at him. Lt. Bishop suffered a bullet wound to the calf of his leg."

Second wreck site off Bellows Beach

To complicate this investigation, a second possible wreck site was identified underwater near Bellows Field. Another un-named person claims to have discovered the remains of an aircraft wreck just off the end of Bellows Field runway underwater. There is not much left of this aircraft wreck, but the location description closely matches most of the eyewitness accounts of Lt. Bishops P-40 crash site. The debris is generally located ½ mile straight out from the old Bellows Field landing strip.

The person claims that parts of the landing gear and wheel remain in the water. Furthermore, he claims that a coral incrusted wheel can be identified as belonging to a P-40 type aircraft. According to the account, the debris field starts from the wheel and spreads out in various areas. Over the years, storms have broken up and dispersed the little remaining wreckage. He claims the wheel is hard to relocate because the coral heads all look the same underwater and it is partially imbedded in one.

As part of the evidence of the wreckage found off Bellows are two photos that appear to show some kind of coral encrusted manmade objects. Unfortunately, no photo was provided of the wheel, because the discoverer claimed it is the hardest to relocate and he did not have a camera at the time of the other pictures. No artifacts were recovered from this site and it is very difficult to tell what is located underwater using the pictures.

Other relevant information

According to photo printed in the book, "East Wind Rain", "A P-40, shot down on take-off on Dec.7, is retrieved from the water nearly two years later in September 1943." The photo shows a P-40 aircraft apparently recovered from the ocean upside down with its landing gear in the retracted position. No other P-40 except Bishop's matches the photo

description. However, the eyewitness account by Edward Covelsky when he recalled the events of December 7, 1941 at Bellows Field, stated Bishop's landing gear was disabled by fire from the Japanese aircraft and did not retract, so this is most likely not his plane. There is no official record or other information that the wreck recovered in 1943 was in fact Bishop's P-40. It is most likely a completely different wreck from a later date. The wreck looks to be in too good a condition to have been underwater for nearly two years, but it is hard to tell.

Recommendations

Only a through modern survey of the wreck sites may reveal the true identity of the wrecks. The wreck site off Kailua Beach most likely contains parts that may still have identity marks that could be traced if recovered. The wreck site located ½ mile off Bellows Field also needs a much more through survey to relocate the wheel and any other debris in the area to compare it to a P-40 aircraft. A review of local records and newspaper reports may contain additional information about the wreck that was salvaged in 1943. A review of National Archives material may provide more information about the identity and location of Lt. Bishop's P-40 plane wreck.

The artifacts recovered in 1977 from the Kailua wreck site are very rare and should be treated appropriately and conserved by professionals. The artifacts could be used to ***represent*** all the P-40 Warhawks that operated from Bellows Field.

The artifacts are planned to be put on public display at the new MCBH Kaneohe Air Terminal Interpretive Center.

Conclusions

The aircraft wreck located off Kailua Beach and where artifacts were recovered from back in 1977 is a most likely a rare P-40B or C model. The preponderance of evidence leads me to believe that this wreck is most likely ***not*** Bishop's P-40. This conclusion is based on the official reports and eyewitness accounts that agree that Bishop crashed his plane about 1000-2000 yards and straight out, off shore of Bellows Field. The Kailua wreck site location is over 3 miles from Bellows Field, making it too far away to be Bishop's P-40. The Kailua wreck is most likely an undocumented P-40 accident that occurred around the time of the Pearl Harbor attack. The accident report was most likely lost due to the chaos after the attack. The wreck is however still historically important.

The wreck site/debris field located ½ mile from the end of Bellows runway is more likely Bishops P-40 wreck site because most accounts state Bishop's P-40 crashed his plane closer to the field. The most detailed and compelling eyewitness account by Edward Covelsky, stated that Bishop's P-40 was so badly shot up while taking off that the landing gear was unable to retract and the plane ditched ½ mile offshore. If the plane was so badly damaged, it would not have gotten very far from the end of the runway. I believe that the wreck was most likely retrieved from the water shortly after it crashed and salvaged for parts. The extended landing gear could have easily broken off during recovery if it was dragged ashore, the most likely recovery method. It is not surprising that no records were found concerning the wreck and salvage of Bishop's P-40 because there was a war on at the time and they had better things to do besides write reports. It is hoped that this report sheds light on a little know chapter of the attack on Pearl Harbor. It is also hoped that the P-40 wreck in Kailua bay is someday positively identified. I want to especially thank Blade Shepherd-Jones and Craig Fuller for helping with this investigation.

ALOHA, Dave Trojan

P-40Bs of the 44th Pursuit Squadron, 18th Pursuit Group patrol the skies above Hawaii on August 1st, 1941, USAF photo