On Sunday January 7, 1945 at approximately 0710 local time a flight of four U.S. Army Air Corps P-38 aircraft were conducting a fighter sweep of the northern part of Negros Island in the central Philippines. Their mission was to search for and engage any airborne Japanese aircraft they might encounter. After circling one Japanese airfield at Fabrica they headed for a second airfield at Carolina. Approximately three miles from the Carolina Airfield they suddenly observed a lone Japanese single engine fighter aircraft flying below them and heading directly towards them. As the Japanese aircraft passed directly underneath the flight leader an intense aerial engagement broke out. In less than two minutes two of the P-38 fighters lay burning on the ground, their pilots killed. The two remaining P-38's continued to fight the lone enemy fighter but eventually sought the safety of the overcast clouds and headed back to their base on Leyte. The lone Japanese fighter apparently got away undamaged.

The news of this dogfight devastated the morale of the American fighter pilots prosecuting the war against the Japanese. The top Army brass immediately slapped a “Top Secret” classification on any talk of this incident. For two decades after the war any details of this incident was kept from the public. Finally in the late 1960’s the Freedom of Information Act finally opened up the military's records on this incident and allowed military historians to finally learn the truth about what happened that day over Negros Island.

Why was this incident so sensitive to the U.S. military? Because on that day America lost one of the greatest fighter pilots in its history. Major Thomas B. McGuire, Jr. aged 24 from Ridgewood, New Jersey. Major McGuire was the top ace of the 475th Fighter Group of the Fifth Fighter Command with 38 confirmed aerial victories. He ranked second only to Major Richard I. Bong who had been credited with 40 victories. At the time of his death Major McGuire was the highest scoring American
ace still involved in air combat against the enemy. At war’s end Major McGuire’s total of 38 victories would place him as the second leading American ace of World War II. Major McGuire was also one of the highest decorated pilots during WW II and was posthumously awarded the nation’s highest award, the Congressional Medal of Honor. Today McGuire Air Force Base located near his home town in New Jersey stands as a daily reminder of his sacrifice.

What sparked my interest in this incident was just how could such a superb fighter pilot as Major McGuire meet such an unlikely fate during a seemingly routine combat patrol? And just who was that Japanese fighter pilot that took on four P-38’s, caused two of them to crash, chased the other two away, and apparently got away without a scratch? I also wondered exactly where Major McGuire went down and if there were any parts of his aircraft left at the crash site. I really wanted some answers to these questions. Unfortunately there were no easy answers to be found in the history books. In fact searching the internet and the history books I found about five different versions of what happened to Major McGuire that day. I couldn’t help but wonder which version was really the truth. So in 2000 I decided to undertake my own investigation into this tragic incident.

As a former USAF fighter pilot and mishap investigator I felt my military training and experiences might come in very handy in this investigation. It was also very helpful that I live in the Philippines, speak a little Filipino, am familiar with Negros Occidental, and that I’m an airline pilot with the ability to travel for free anywhere in the world that this investigation might presumably take me.

Background Research

My first step was to gather as much information about this incident as possible. I first contacted Mr. Charles Martin who authored the book The Last Great Ace which is a biography on the life of Major McGuire. I traveled to his home in Jacksonville, Florida to meet with him. He very graciously opened up some of his files to me and referred me to some other key people that had helped him in writing his book. Most notably he introduced me to Mr. Doug Thropp. On January 7th, 1945 2nd Lieutenant Doug Thropp was flying as Major McGuire’s number four wingman on that fateful day and witnessed his fatal crash. I traveled to Mr. Thropp’s home in Richmond, Virginia and interviewed him extensively. We went over every detail of the mission and for the first time drew out detailed diagrams of the engagement that took place. The information that Mr. Thropp provided to me was invaluable in this investigation.

Mr. Thropp in turn referred me to Master Sergeant Gary Boyd of McGuire AFB and to Lee Northrop the Director of the 475th Fighter Group Museum located at March AFB, California. I traveled to McGuire AFB to meet with Sergeant Boyd and received from him some extremely relevant documents pertaining to this incident that had been released under the Freedom of Information Act. He also referred me to Mr. Michael Terry, an aviation historian, who also provided me with some important documents along with a recording of Major McGuire’s CBS radio interview conducted shortly before his death. For the first time I was able to put a voice to the many pictures I had collected of Major McGuire.

I then traveled to March AFB, California to meet with Mr. Lee Northrop. Lee very graciously opened up the 475th Fighter Group Museum’s archives to me and allowed me to search through their unit history logbooks, maintenance records, and aircraft logbooks as well as viewing never before published photographs and documents that detailed the day to day operations of the 431st Fighter Squadron and the 475th Fighter Group. What I was able to learn in doing so helped me determine the history and the condition of Major McGuire’s mishap aircraft and understand why Major McGuire was not flying his personal “PUDGY V” aircraft that day. This information would later prove invaluable. Lee also referred me to Mr. Craig Anderson who is the son of Carroll “Andy” Anderson.

Carroll Anderson was a fellow pilot in the 475th Fighter Group and frequently flew with Major McGuire on combat missions over New Guinea. In the early 1970’s, on his own initiative, Carroll Anderson launched the first and only investigation into Major McGuire’s fatal mission. At the end of his investigation he wrote a superb article describing what happened and titled it “McGuire’s Last Mission”. This article was eventually published in the January 1975 issue of Air Force Magazine.
I then traveled to Craig Anderson's home in Linden, California where he allowed me to view all of his dad's old files. While casually reviewing these old files dating back to the 1970's I came across a hand drawn map written in Japanese. Looking a little deeper I discovered that this map had apparently been drawn by the Japanese fighter pilot that had engaged Major McGuire's flight that day.

Japanese Side of the Story

In his investigation in the 1970's, Carroll Anderson had discovered that there was not just one Japanese plane involved in the dogfight but TWO planes. He was also able to learn the identity of the two Japanese pilots' and had contacted one of them to get their side of the story. The surviving Japanese pilot eventually provided Mr. Anderson with a description of what had happened along with a hand drawn map of northern Negros where the dogfight had occurred. On this map the Japanese pilot clearly identified where Major McGuire had crashed. This map, hidden away for 25 years, became the lynch pin that led me to successfully locate Major McGuire's crash site and eventually recover artifacts from his aircraft.

Even more remarkably I discovered that the Japanese pilot was still alive and residing in Kagoshima, Japan. His name is Mr. Mizunori Fukuda and I was able to contact him and receive permission to interview him. The information provided by Mr. Fukuda proved to be invaluable in this investigation. Not only about the location of Major McGuire's crash site but also about his and the other Japanese pilot, Warrant Officer Akira Sugimoto's, background and detailed information about what happened during the dogfight and how Major McGuire may have been killed.

As it turns out both Warrant Officer Sugimoto and Sergeant Fukuda were highly experienced air combat instructor pilots with many thousands of hours in single engine fighters. They also had extensive combat experience dating back to 1941 and recent combat experience against P-38's and P-51's over Leyte. They were also flying two of the highest performance aircraft in JAAF service, the Ki-43-III and the Ki-84A. It was no surprise that they handled themselves so competently against the four P-38's in Major McGuire's flight that day.

Visit to Negros Island

After almost a year of research I finally decided I had enough information to warrant a field trip to Negros, Occidental. On January 5th, 2001 I traveled to Bocolod City the capitol of Negros Occidental and assembled my search team. Assisting me would be Edwin Kho, an archeology student from Bocolod City University, along with his driver and an armed university security guard. The area that we would be working in was not totally secured from MLF and NPA terrorist activity so we wisely took these precautions. Edwin was also familiar with the area we would be searching in and had already recovered numerous WW II artifacts. Equipped with detailed maps, metal detectors, cameras, GPS receivers, digging tools, communication equipment, and plenty of funding we proceeded north to the area where the dogfight had occurred.

We immediately located the abandoned at Carolina Airfield where Mr. Fukuda had been based. There we observed the concrete remains of the command post bunker that Mr. Fukuda had told us formed the center reference point of his hand drawn map. We then proceeded to locate and interview elderly local Filipinos that had been living in this area during the occupation. We located one individual, Mr. Orinco Remagio, who had been conscripted by the Japanese in 1942 and who was forced to work as a laborer at the Carolina Airfield until February 1945. He was very helpful in providing us with detailed information regarding runway orientation, aircraft parking areas, and day-to-day operations at this airfield. He also directed us to an area where he said numerous Japanese aircraft were junked after the war. Using a metal detector we were able to recover numerous Japanese 20mm shell casings and an HO-5 20mm cannon. The Ho-5 is the same type of weapon used by Mr. Fukuda's Ki-84A Hayate fighter aircraft. Unfortunately we did not locate any significant aircraft parts.

The following day Mr. Remagio led us to a field south and west of the Carolina Airfield where an American aircraft had crashed during the war. He and some other workers were led there on a work
detail in early 1945 to load parts from that aircraft and bring them to the Carolina Airfield. He advised us that the Japanese officers showed a lot of interest in examining the wreckage. Unfortunately he could not offer any description of that aircraft or what may have happened to the pilot. We searched the area with metal detectors but did not locate anything significant. In a follow up interview with Mr. Fukuda he advised me that this was the P-38 aircraft that he had shot down and that his fellow officers were trying to confirm the aerial victory for him. Although I have not yet been able to positively confirm this fact it is probable that this was the P-38 aircraft of Major Jack Rittmayer, who was flying as Major McGuire’s number three wingman.

After completing our inspection of the Carolina Airfield complex we followed Mr. Fukuda’s map and proceeded to an area approximately three miles to the east. In this area we proceeded to a plantation identified as Hacienda Progresso. This plantation was identified in a U.S. Army Search and Recovery report as the location where Major McGuire’s remains were recovered in 1947.

While at this location we made contact with the current owner of the land, Mr. Bert Capay, but he could not offer any information to us regarding this incident. He did however identify an elderly woman by the name of Lourdes Cosa who had worked as a maid for the plantation owner, Mr. Vladimir Terrogoff, during WW II and that she might provide us with some information on this incident. Eventually we located her in the nearby city of Cadiz and interviewed her. Although she did remember the plane crashing near the owner’s house she could not pin point the exact location of the crash site. She did however refer us to the plantation foreman Mr. Vincente Bedoria whom she said lived in the nearby city of Conception.

The following day January 7th, 2001 we located the residence of Mr. Bedoria and sat down to interview him. We told him that we were investigating the crash of a plane in this area towards the end of WW II and if he knew anything about it? He replied: “Oh yes, I certainly do!” To my surprise he accurately described the type of aircraft involved, the markings on that aircraft, the time of day, the presence of three other “double body” aircraft, the presence of a Japanese single engine aircraft, and provided us with a description of the personal equipment that the pilot had been wearing.

Of particular interest was his statement that the pilot was wearing an unusual gold ring with a black stone. He also described the condition of the pilot’s remains and how he and some other workers had placed the pilot’s remains in a wooden box and carried it to the owner’s house. There they buried it under a large tree and replaced the grass so it would not look like a freshly dug grave. He then described how he had made contact with U.S. Army troops in 1947 and led them to the grave site where they took custody of the body.

The information that Mr. Bedoria provided us with was cross referenced with the U.S. Army’s 1947 Search and Recovery Report, Major McGuire’s autopsy report, Major McGuire’s Missing Aircrew Report, and most vividly a photograph taken on January 5th, 1945. In this photo, taken two days before his death, Major McGuire is clearly seen wearing a black and gold ring on his left ring finger. Without reservation I determined that Mr. Bedoria had indeed witnessed Major McGuire’s crash and had assisted in recovering and securing his remains so they would not fall into the hands of the Japanese.

I then asked him to lead us to the crash site. After a 15-minute walk he led us to the western slope of a shallow ravine and standing midway up the slope stated that this is where the plane came to rest.

At the location that he directed us to look we began excavating the soil and over the next three days recovered more than 200 pieces of metal parts. One part we recovered was a 5-inch round geared pulley. This geared pulley was a precisely manufactured part recovered approximately 10 inches under ground in the middle of the crash site and showing extensive corrosion. Eventually this part was taken back to the U.S. and positively identified as a part of the window cranking assembly of the P-38 aircraft. This part is unique to the P-38 aircraft. We also recovered two .50 caliber brass shell casings with unfired primers, heavily corroded and showing extensive evidence of heat stress, and stamped with the number “4” on the casing base. We also recovered a single 20 mm HEI
Based on the testimony of Mr. Bedoria, the recovery of unmistakable P-38 aircraft parts at the location, the U.S. military documentary evidence, and the direct testimony from Mr. Fukuda and Mr. Doug Thropp I determined that this was in fact the crash site of Major McGuire’s aircraft.

The artifacts recovered at the crash site have been donated to the Clark Air Base Museum as part of a display honoring Major McGuire. It was in the sky over Clark Airfield on December 25th and 26th that Major McGuire distinguished himself and was subsequently awarded the coveted Medal of Honor. Today, a memorial marker with the following inscription has been placed at the crash site identifying the location of Major McGuire’s death.

During my investigation into Major McGuire’s unfortunate mishap I tried to rely on direct eyewitness testimony from individuals directly involved in the dogfight and on the evidence collected at the crash site. I also conferred with many P-38 pilots from the 475th Fighter Group who flew with Major McGuire and knew him personally. I feel the conclusions that I have drawn concerning the dogfight over Negros on January 7th, 1945 are the best idea we may ever have as to what really happened that day. I am currently writing a final report describing the details of the dogfight and analyzing exactly what happened. I hope to eventually establish a website on this incident and make my final report available on the internet.

I would like to thank the following individuals for their extremely valuable assistance in conducting this investigation:
Mr. Charles Martin
Mr. Doug Thropp
Mr. Mizunori Fukuda Mr. Craig Anderson
Mr. Lee Northrop
MSgt. Gary Boyd Mr. Michael Terry
Mr. Vincente Bedoria

Without their help this investigation would not have been possible.

David J. Mason
Website Reference: http://www.pacificwrecks.com/aircraft/p-38/44-24845/

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IL-2 Sturmovik Cliffs of Dover - COD/CLOD skins - No 3d model at this stage

IL2 Sturmovik Forgotten Battles (FB), Ace Expansion Pack (AEP), Pacific Fighters (PF),
1946 skins
IL2 game skin by 2S Ki-84 Hiko Dai 71th Sentai Mizunori Fukuda Philippines 1945
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