

## Search for aircraft brings memories, closure

Contributed by: Marv Maul on 10/4/2007

The day began a lot like any other summer morning for an 11-year-old boy growing up on a ranch northeast of Colorado Springs.

The cows had been milked, we'd had the usual fried eggs and bacon breakfast, and my parents, brothers and I had set out upon our usual tasks for the day.  
It was Aug. 9, 1944.

This was haying season, and the big meadow had been freshly mowed. It was time now to harness the teams of horses and get ready for a day of raking hay on the bumpy seats of the 12-foot dump rakes.

Things progressed pretty much as normal through our lunch hour, with the usual harness repair, visit from the Raleigh man (they sold great vanilla) and other routine developments in the afternoon. Things were normal, that is, until about 5:25 p.m.

At that moment, we were wrapping up the haying operations for the day, with one team having been unhitched, watered, unharnessed and fed, and the other team closing down as well.

Our attention was abruptly diverted, however, by the agonizing roar of an airplane engine out of control. About two miles south of us, we saw a large bomber with an apparent engine fire, trailing smoke! Within a few terrifying seconds, we saw a wing come off, and the giant bird began spiraling into the ground.

Upon impact, the plane exploded with an ensuing column of dense, black smoke.  
We drove to the crash site as rapidly as possible, but upon arrival it was obvious there would be no survivors. The only recognizable feature of the plane were the left wing with its attached engines, and the twin vertical tail stabilizers characteristic of the B-24 Liberator bomber.

Air Force records indicated that the B-24 had been part of a flight of six B-24s based at the Pueblo Army Air Base and were on a camera bombing mission at an indicated altitude of 20,000 feet.

According to a written account of the crash, one of the accompanying pilots in the flight noted that the number four engine on the ill-fated plane was on fire. He radioed a warning to the pilot of the craft, who responded that the propeller on the engine was running away. The pilot immediately descended to a level of about 3,000 feet with the engine and nacelle enshrouded in flames. Shortly thereafter, the wing with the number four engine separated from the plane resulting in a tight clockwise spiral downward.

Local folks had begun to gather around the raging fire consuming the wreckage, but we were pitifully unable to help, with the nearest fire extinguishing equipment at least nine miles away. Instead, we were able to recover only two of the bodies of the 10 men who perished that day. A horrible thing for anyone, particularly a child, to witness, and it is seared forever into my memory.

Fast forward now, 63 years later.

On Aug. 8, we received a telephone call from Larry Carpenter, an aviation researcher who wanted to bring some visitors to the site of the wreckage for historic and personal reasons. Apparently the site of the crash had never been accurately pinpointed for the official historical record of the sad event.

My brother, Walt Maul and I, along with Bryce Gresham, an Elbert County rancher who had also witnessed the crash, readily agreed to help in the search for the exact site.

What followed is a remarkable series of events characterized as solid research combined with a good measure of astounding luck.

Carpenter had been contacted by Chuck Marvel and his son, Bill. The Marvels, as it turned out, had more than a passing interest in the ill-fated B-24, and this triggered the ensuing events.

During World War II, at the Pueblo base, Chuck Marvel, a battle-hardened veteran from earlier South Pacific campaigns, met up with Harold Humphrey, a vet from European battles, and they formed a fast friendship.

Humphrey, who was known as "Humpy" to his friends, actually introduced Chuck to his future wife, Val. As the senior radio operator at the Pueblo base, Chuck Marvel was responsible for assigning radio operator trainees to the different flights from

the base.

And so it was on Aug. 9, 1944, that Chuck Marvel, unknowing of the fatal outcome, assigned his close friend Harold Marvel to the mission.

This year, on Aug. 9, 13 of us gathered in the vicinity of the site. We fanned out, manned with metal detectors and pairs of eyes focused on the ground. We had little reason to expect to find very much, because the site was farmland that had probably been plowed a number of times during the years. After about half an hour of fruitless searching, my wife, Nancy, and I, along with the others, were getting a little discouraged after having found only bits of barbed wire and other non-crash related artifacts.

However, at almost exactly the same instant, Nancy came across a sizable piece of aluminum angle-iron, while Carpenter found other unmistakable pieces of the plane. We knew we had located it!

After assembling several dozen pieces, we all gathered around to absorb what we had accomplished. We'd become a tight group of people who, 24 hours earlier, had not known each other.

But, the most heart-rending moment happened as Chuck Marvel, now 85, kneeled next to the small stack of B-24 parts and lovingly placed several pieces of the plane into a special pouch he had brought along. After 63 years, Chuck Marvel had found some closure to the special relationship he shared with Harold "Humpy" Humphrey.

Following this, we observed several moments of silence in respect for the 10 airmen who perished that day.

In commemoration of the event, we plan to place a monument adjacent to the crash site, and to schedule a date for dedication of this monument.

We hope, during the dedication ceremony, to arrange for a "missing man" aircraft formation flyover, or possibly schedule a flyover of the only remaining airworthy B-24 in the country.

A fund has been established for purchase of this memorial. For those caring to make a donation to this fund, the address is: Bank of Choice (Kiowa branch), P.O. Box 69, Kiowa, CO 80117. Please make checks payable to: "Kiowa B-24 memorial Fund."



Pieces that the men collected, including parts from a magneto, the plane's skin, snaps from parachutes, molten aluminum and other less identifiable pieces.

Provided by: Marv Maul



Marv Maul, of Colorado Springs; Bryce Gresham, of Elbert; Walt Maul, of Kiowa; and Chuck Marvel, of Olathe, Kan.  
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