

Date: 14 April 1947

Inv. Div. No. 2257

Report by: Philip F. Cheles

Title: CHANGED  
UNKNOWN SUBJECT  
Sunken U.S. navy Scout Bomber Curtiss (SB-2-C-4), Serial No. 26-2088-60, near Hirai-mura, Oshima-gun, Yamaguchi-ken.

Synopsis of facts:

On or about 19 March 1945, a U.S. navy Scout Bomber Curtiss (SB-2-C-4), #26-2088-60, was hit by anti-aircraft and crashed into the sea near Hira-mura, Oshima-gun, Yamaguchi-ken. Two survivors picked up by Japanese tug-boat. Captain of boat located and interrogated. Positive identification and final disposition of fliers unknown. Plane salvaged from the sea and serial number obtained. Com-Nav-Jap to secure identities thru Washington Bureau.

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At Yamaguchi:

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Upon investigation at Hirai-mura it was learned from the villagers that on or about 19 March 1945, an Allied plane had crashed into the sea near there and it is possible, they said, that the weapons had belonged to its occupants. Further inquiries revealed that the two survivors had been rescued from their rubber boat by a Japanese tug-boat which no one seemed to be able to identify. These villagers, brought in by the police, claimed that they had not seen the crash or the rescue but had heard rumors.

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The title of this case has been changed to reflect a more complete description of the plane and a more exact location of where it crashed into the sea.

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Two Japanese divers were furnished upon demand and descended into approximately 60 feet of water in the vicinity of the reported crash. They reported that they had found a two-seater, single engine U.S. Navy plane. Recovered by the divers in this initial dive were:

- a) 1 Machine-gun sight with the following identifying marks:  
"U.S. Navy BU. OFORD  
ILLUMINATED SIGHT  
Mark 8 Mod. 7  
INSPECTOR H.T.N. No. 32672  
KOLLMORGEN OPTICAL CORP.  
BKLYN, N.Y."
- b) 1 Head-rest cushion (about 5" square)
- c) 1 small section of cloth-covering off tail section. Faded and unidentifiable.

No bodies or evidence of any remains were found.

The above items as well as the recovered pistols are at the Yamaguchi Branch.

At Yamaguchi.

On 7 March, 1947, In reply to a demand placed on the chief of police, Kuka-machi, for the complete facts concerning the crash and the witnesses thereof, it was learned only that sometime around 19 March 1945, a Japanese war fleet was maneuvering [sic] a distance from UKISHIMA and during the day gunfire was heard. A great many Allied planes had been flying over that area and late in the day one of them (type unidentified) was seen to crash into the sea. It was rumored that three witnesses saw two survivors of the crash being picked up from their rubber-raft by someone in a Japanese type crash boat. These witnesses are:

Tokaichi OKAMOTO    Add:    OSHIMA-gun, Okajima-mura, Aza  
Nishikuma #332.  
Uichi TAMURA        Add:    Oshima-gun, Okajima-inura, #276.  
Gonichi ISHIZAKI    Add:    Oshima-gun, Hirai-mura.  
(Former air-raid warden).

These witnesses were sent for and will be interrogated.

The police reported that to date they have been unable to learn which units of the Japanese fleet were in this vicinity about 19 March 1946, but that they are making further inquiries at Kure, Honshu, and will report their findings to this office.

A commercial wire was dispatched by this agent to the Fukuoka Branch to determine if U.S. Salvage equipment and personnel are available in Fukuoka or vicinity in order to raise the sunken plane for identifying purposes.

Captain Joseph SARTIANO advised that he had contacted a Lt. McGUIRE of Graves registration, Fukuoka, and was advised that such equipment and personnel are not available. Lt. McGuire farther advised this writer to procure same from Japanese sources and that a Graves Registration Team will be on hand to inspect the wreckage.

On 10 March 1947, the Yamaguchi Liaison Section was ordered to provide suitable equipment and personnel for salvage of submerged vessels in order to raise the plane at the earliest possible date and to inform this agent of their progress so that he may be on hand to direct the operations.

The Yamaguchi Liaison Section was also ordered to discover which units of the Japanese war fleet were in that area around 19 March, 1945; who the commanding officer was; the identity of the survivors and who captured them; and their final disposition.

At Yamaguchi:

On 12 March 1947, in answer to a demand placed on the Liaison Section, the three Japanese who witnessed the plane crash and the survivors' capture were interrogated at this Branch. No statements were taken as they were unable to identify the boat that picked up the fliers. Their stories are as follows:

- 1) Uichi TAMURA, farmer and fisherman, age 38; address Yamaguchi-ken, Oshima-gun, Hirai-mura, Oaza Ukishima #276. About March 20, 1945, at about 1900, I was out at sea fishing in my motorboat but due to engine trouble I was heading back to the Dai Steel Works at Hirai-mura for repairs. I heard shell-fire and looking back into the sky I saw many anti-aircraft shells bursting and the sky was literally covered with smoke. I knew immediately that an air-raid was in progress therefore I tried to check the engine. The weather was clear with NE wind. The tide was average. At about this time I saw a plane from the southern direction about 1,000 meters from Ukishima make a forced landing on the sea and about a minute later, with its motor pointing north, she disappeared into the sea. I did not see any parachute descending but just as soon as the plane landed in the sea I saw two men in a boat that looked something like a rubber boat. I do not know if the plane came down because of motor trouble or because of being shot down. In the village we had heard that a Japanese fleet was somewhere around but we were not permitted to discuss it. I continued on to Hirai-mura to have my boat engine repaired so I did not see the rescue of the fliers but according to the villagers a small black boat came from the direction of Kure and picked up the two survivors, heading back towards Kure. No one seemed to

know if the black boat belonged to the Navy, Army, or to a private concern, and no one knew where the captured men had been taken.”

- 2) Geroichi KUBO, farmer and fisherman; age 49; address: Yamaguchi-ken, Oshima-gun, Hirai-mura, Oaza Ukishima Eno Ura #270. “On or about 19 March 1945 at about 1000, on my way home from fishing I saw a small black boat pick up two men from a small rubber raft and head toward Kure. The boat resembled a tug for tugging vessels carrying cranes, timbers, etc. As the boat approached I thought that they must have come to buy “tori-kai” (shell fish) that we had fished. One of the men in the boat gesticulated as if to say, “We have two big men in our boat.” On looking we saw two foreigners standing on the starboard. I do not remember the costume of the men, etc. The boat went away in the direction of Hashirajima. Presumably they went to Kure. At the time of the incident two cruisers and about five destroyers had been in the Inland Sea with the Yamato as center.”
- 3) Toraichi OKAMOTO, farmer, age 50; married, with one married daughter in Los Angeles; address; Yamaguchi-ken, Oshima-gun, Hirai-mura, #332.

(This man favorably impressed the writer since it was proven that he had suffered many indignities from the Jap police and Kempei-Tai because he had spent over twenty years in America and because his daughter was left there. He also advised the writer not to trust the Japanese police, or believe them in this case or any other case. He also gave information concerning local fish blackmarketing.) His story follows: “On or about 19 March 1945, at about 0900 or 1000 some 50 to 100 American fighter planes (some people thought they were Grumman but the identity was not positive) were flying out over the Inland Sea from the interior of Japan and from the direction of Kure towards Shikoka. It was common rumor that their target had been Iwakuni for it was later learned that Iwakuni had been bombed and strafed.

I saw that two planes were not in the main formation but were lagging behind. One continued on its flight in the same direction as the formation while the remaining one, flying much lower, turned back towards the shore. As it turned, black smoke was coming from the engine. It flew lower and lower and finally disappeared behind the Island of Kokima. I did not see it rise again or pass the island, and assumed that it had landed or crashed into the sea.

During the time the American planes went flying over Oshima and Ukishima antiaircraft shells were firing at them from three directions. Two from out at sea, presumably from a fleet, and one from Shiraki where there was a single land based antiaircraft battery. The air was filled with bursting shells, smoke and fire, and the shrapnel wounded a few on the island.

About 1 ½ to 2 hours after the plane disappeared I heard that two survivors of the plane crash were seen to be picked up by a boat similar to a tug-boat. I heard that these two had been floating in a rubber boat when they were captured. The boat did not come ashore but proceeded around Ukishima towards Kure. We never heard if the

survivors were injured or mistreated or what their final disposition was.

I do not think that this boat was part of any fleet but it may have been a Navy auxiliary boat. Such a boat, with derricks and other equipment, had often patrolled these waters locating and marking buoys.”

At Kuka-machi:

On 14 March, 1947, two Japanese engineers from the Moji Salvage Company arrived at the buoy-marked crash scene to estimate how much and what type of equipment would be necessary to raise the plane.

Three days later a tug-boat, dredge, salvage equipment and personnel arrived and recovery work began while this agent stood by to witness the operations.

On 19 March, exactly two years from the day ~~the plane~~ it crashed, the ~~body~~ plane, intact except for the engine, was raised from approximately sixty feet of water. It was towed to shore to be cleaned and identified. The diver stated that the engine was buried in mud that it could be raised. On 20 March the engine minus the propeller was brought to the surface and towed to shore. A twenty-four hour guard was posted to prevent damage or theft of identification marks and plates.

The cause of the crash could not be determined as the body and engine showed no signs of a hit by shell fire. In the rear cockpit there was an open parachute still in good condition despite being under water for two years. Also found were four incendiary bombs intact in their rack. On the tail section was a number #26, believed to be a squadron or group number. On the right outside of the front cockpit were stenciled two lieutenant names but these were not altogether readable as parts of the letters were washed away. The top name had the rank (Lt.) identifiable but the first initial or initials were missing. The surname had five or six letters in it, parts of which were missing. The closest the writer could come to a recognizable name was “DERBY”. The second line had the rank (Lt.) and first initials intact but the surname, consisting of six letters, also had parts of the letters missing. The surname was thought to be “WORDEN”. Following is how the names appeared on the side of the plane:

LT. \_ \_ \_ (DERBY?)  
LT. D.D. WOPDEN (WORDEN)

Under the right under side of the motor cowling was found the serial number of the plane. The plate was marked thus:

Airplane Model: SB2C-4 (TN. Scout Bomber 2 Curtiss)  
SER. NO. 26-2088-60 Del. Date (TN. Blank)  
DWG OR PART NO. 84-23-200  
CONTRACT No. NOAS - 1609

Photographs, showing four views of the plane, were taken and are hereby enclosed with this report. The identifying plate is also enclosed.

A map showing the site of the plane crash is hereto attached to original report.

On 25 March three men who were directly responsible for the capture and initial disposition of the two survivors were interrogated at the Tanaguchi Branch.

First to be interrogated was the captain of the tug-boat Juichi TAHIAKA of Kure-shi, Kaigan Dori, Nicho Me #57. At the present he is employed as a clerk for the Hari Shipbuilding Company, but during the war, and during March 1945 when the crash occurred, he was a captain aboard a tugboat working for the Kure Naval Engineering Company. Their duties were to lay undersea netting as a preventative from torpedoes.

TANINAKA stated that on 19 March, 1945, at about 1100 while in his boat in the waters around Ukishima he saw an American plane flying low and burning. It crashed into the sea about 1000 meters off shore Ukishima. It was his impression that it had been shot down by anti-aircraft from the Japanese fleet which was in that area. There were about five Japanese war ships, including the battleship Yamato, which were being bombed and strafed by about 200 American Gruman [sic] planes.

He stated that his boat was about three miles from where the plane crashed and without orders from anyone he decided to rescue the survivors. There were no parachutes that he saw but as he approached them he could see two men in a rubber "float" rowing towards his boat. The captain's crewmen pulled the Americans and their rubber boat into the tug-boat, and he put them in a warm place near the engine as it was cold that day. He turned the boat toward Hashira Shima where there was a naval garrison. On the way he and some of his crew attempted to make each other understood with sign language. Cigarettes and water were given them. They were not mistreated in any way, he claimed. Their rank could not be determined as this was the first time any of them had seen any American fliers and they did not know where to look for rank insignia. When asked if they had bars on their shirt lapels or on their shoulder he replied that he could not remember. He described them as follows:

- 1) About 19 yrs of age; 5'2", weighing about 120 lbs; slender with slight build; round face, blue, deep set eyes and red hair. He was dressed in a flying suit and had a khaki shirt on. He does not remember seeing any ornaments or bars but he did see that he had dog-tags. (Interpreter Pvt. Sakai showed TANIKA his own dog-tags and the captain stated that the fliers had been wearing something similar to those).
- 2) About 22 yrs of age; 6', weighing about 200 lbs; slender build. Long face, reddish hair; (uncertain if eyes were blue or brown). Dressed in flying suit, khaki shirt.

TANINAKA claims that the fliers did not have pistols and that their personal possessions were not taken from them.

The captain claimed that he took the prisoners to Hashira Shima instead of to the fleet because it was his base and he wanted to be advised on what to do with them. Arriving there he consulted with his superior Ichiji UEMATSU who took him to a petty officer by the name of Toraichi OBARA. The latter after telephoning to his superiors at Kure, ordered to proceed to KURE. He also told a civilian worker attached to his unit (name unknown) to accompany them to Kure. Arriving at Kure at about 1400 on the same day, 19 March, 1945, and accompanied by UEMATSU and four seamen from his boat TANIKA took the fliers to the Naval Garrison Headquarters where he turned them over to a Senior Lieutenant HAKARA (fnu). Following they returned to his boat and back to Hashira Shima. As to the final disposition of the prisoners TANINAKA claims he never heard any more about them. He claims that the fliers were not injured in their descent nor were they mistreated by him or anyone else while they were rescued and turned over to the Naval Garrison Headquarters.

Ichiji UEMATSU, age 51, address: Yamaguchi-ken, Hashira Shima. At the time of crash UEMATSU was superintendent [sic] in charge of operations of the tug-boat which picked up the survivors. He accompanied the fliers from Hashira Shima to Kure. His story follows:

"On the date of 19 March, 1945, I was resting at my home on Hashira Shima. I really can't clearly remember the actual time but it was in the morning when several airplanes passed over Hashira Shima, heading towards Kara. I believe it turned out to be a terrific battle and I personally took shelter in the pine woods.

"After the bombardment was over I began to worry about the twenty laborers who were working near the vicinity of Ukishima. I had planned to ride a small boat to try to find the workers but the men returned safely to Hashira Shima in the tug-boat. I heard from the captain, TANINAKA, about the rescuing of the airmen. Immediately after hearing this story I boarded the boat and said "It was good to rescue these men. Did they sustain any injuries? If so give them first aid."

In order to get the orders for the disposition of the airmen I climbed the hill to the Naval Chief petty officer's office for consultation. The Chief said they must be taken to Kure and asked if I would lend the boat for such a purpose. I granted the request. The petty officer wanted to inspect the airmen and asked me to bring them up the hill to his office. I flatly refused the request as it would be my responsibility in bringing them up the hill, however I told him that if he wanted to see them he could come down to the boat.

I think a First Class Petty Officer named TAKEUCHI (fnu) came down to the boat and he may have talked to the airmen. At about that time I was ashore and therefore did not hear the conversation.

In order to maintain order and protect the airmen I went to Kure aboard the same boat.

On our way to Kure I tried to speak with the airmen but due to language differences we were not able to communicate with each other.

Their suits were very wet so I dried them for the airmen. They made motions for cigarettes and I obliged for which they seemed very happy.

Sometime in the afternoon, I don't remember the time, the boat reached Kure and the airmen were transferred to the Naval Defense Harrison and accepted by the officer in charge. I do not remember the name of this officer, but I believe TANINAKA the captain of the tug-boat knows it. One of the sailors from Hashira Shima also accompanied us to Kure."

Toraichi OBARA, age 45, address: Wakayama-ken, Kishi Muro-gun, Tondamura, Oaza Sakae #9771, former petty officer at Hashira Shima who ordered the tug-boat with the survivors to Kure. His story: "From an angle of about 270 degrees off Hashira Shima and approximately 6000 meters a fighter plane crashed into the sea on or about 19 March, 1945. I do not know what happened thereafter because I was intrigued by the bombardment on the combat lookout tower. At about 1400 an engineer's boat docked at the Hashira Shima pier with two American airmen who had been captured after they had crashed into the sea somewhere near Ukishima. The captain of the tugboat accompanied by one man came to my office but the airmen were detained aboard the boat. Since I was busy on duty observer I immediately ordered First Class Petty Officer TAKEUCHI who was senior non-com, and a sailor to board the boat and accompany the tugboat captain to Kure where the prisoners were to be turned over to someone at the Naval Harrison Headquarters."

In reply to questioning OBARA claimed that there were over forty units of Naval Harrison at Kure and he does not know which of these received the prisoner. He was interrogated at great length but maintained that he never heard who the prisoners were turned over to, nor did he know what final disposition was made of them. The main headquarters was the Kure 39th Naval Defense Garrison with a Lieutenant Commander (name unknown) in charge. He claimed that a Senior Lt. HARADA (fnu) usually took charge of prisoners but that since there were no prison camps in Kure the fliers were probably taken elsewhere.

The Yamaguchi Liaison Section was ordered to furnish a complete and accurate list of all the Naval units stationed at Kure on 19 March, 1945, and the names and addresses of the commanding officers with particular emphasis on Senior Lieutenant HARADA (fnu) who allegedly received the prisoners, and the Lieutenant Commander in charge of the Kure 39th Naval Defense Garrison.

Results of this demand will be added in a subsequent report.

At Tokyo:

The records at the AG Casualty section were searched to determine if any names similar to the ones found on the side of the front cockpit of the salvaged plane, and who were shot down on 19 March, 1945, in the area investigated, were on record. There a name very similar to one stenciled on the side of the cockpit was found. It is Lt. (s.g.) Donald Doris WORDEN. The one on the plane, as far as could be made out, was Lt. WOPDEN. WORDEN was shot down "over Kure" on 19 March, 1945, in a plane identified in the report as a VP-82, and was from the carrier U.S.S. BENNINGTON. On 21 August, 1945, he was transferred to a Tokyo POW camp but was

recovered from the Ofuna POW camp on 29 August, 1945. He was returned to the U.S.A. aboard the U.S.S. BENEVOLENCE. His addresses are 1860 S.W. 10th Street, Miami, 35, Florida; and Stewartsville, Missouri.

No name similar to Lt. DERBY, also on the cockpit, could be found, however, there was found another man that had been on the carrier, BENNINGTON, shot down over Kure in a plane identified in the records as a VB-82 (similar to WORDEN's), on 19 March, 1945. He is ARM/3C Clifford Amos BROWN, Serial Number 826-27-71. He was recovered from the Ofuna POW camp on 1 September, 1945, and returned to the U.S.A. His home address is 44 Mercer Street, Hamilton Square, New Jersey.

There is a strong possibility that these are the two men that were in the plane which crashed into the sea near Ukishima and who were taken to Kure. A letter to the Zone of Interior has been dispatched, through Administration section, together with pictures of the salvaged plane, to Lt. D.D. WORDEN for all available information concerning the date, approximate location, if known, companion or companions in his plane crash previous to and including his capture and subsequent delivery to Kure.

A search of the CRD files reveals that both WORDEN and BROWN have made statements concerning their treatment at the Ofuna POW camp. These statements are in file TO-45. The statements did not, however, reveal the circumstances of their crash, captors and delivery to Kure, or who was the companion of each.

Their statements are not added to this report since it is not certain that these two are the ones that are involved in this case.

AI COM NAV JAP the plane identification plate as well as the pictures were shown to Lt. L.M. CROCKETT of that section. He is certain that, with the aid of the plane serial number, the identity of the fliers who crashed in it can be ascertained by contacting their Washington bureau. He has volunteered to dispatch a request for identification through channels to the zone of Interior and will report the results of this request to the Legal Section, Investigation Division. It is his opinion that the results will not be forthcoming for two or three months.

At Yamaguchi:

Investigation at Kure is being continued for additional information concerning the identity and possible mistreatment of the two survivors.

#### UNDEVELOPED LEADS

The Tokyo Office - At Tokyo - Will report the results of the letter sent to Lt. D.D. Worden in Zone of Interior for particulars of his plane crash "over Kure".

Will, when COM NAV JAP receives positive identification of SB-2-C-4 and its crew members, add results to this case.

P E N D I N G