

# Mohawk Chief



## TAIL TURRET RESEARCH

B-24 sn 42-51415 738th sqd 454th BG

**Freddy Furlan**

## RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH FOR IDENTIFICATION OF THE AIRCRAFT TO WHICH BELONGS THE TAIL TURRET DISPLAYED AT CAORLE IN THE MUSEUM OF THE “SAILORS OF ITALY ASSOCIATION”.

### Introduction:

In the summer of 2009, during a research aimed to discover the identity, hitherto unknown, of an American bomber, a Consolidated B-24 whose wreckage lies on the sea bottom at a distance of about 8 nautical miles both from Grado and Lignano, I came across, on a website, a photo of a tail turret of B-24 complete with its two machine guns. The photo, taken by Daniele Cinganotto who lives in Caorle, had a caption in which was indicated the storage location of the part, the courtyard of the Association of Sailors of Italy, at Caorle.



In the hope that the serial number of the machine guns could coincide with one of those listed in the MACR (Missing Air Crew Report) of one of the two aircraft, that, according to some evidences I had collected in past, could meet the search criteria for a possible identification of the B-24 sunk off Lignano-Grado, I then decided to go personally to Caorle and to take some photos, if possible, of the serial number of the two Browning machine guns cal. .50 still mounted in the turret.

If those numbers they had found a match in the MACR of one of the two planes, then it would be enough to get information on where the turret had been fished to finally identify the wreck of Lignano-Grado.

Before going to Caorle, however I made some phone calls to get permission for taking photos of the details of weapons and, in general, of the equipment of the turret. From the Coastal Guard I only had a confirmation of the location of the piece; I had better luck talking with an employee of the Culture Department of the City of Caorle from whom I came to know the name and address of the finder, that was the family Dalla Bella and, in particular, the current manager of the fishing company, Mr. Vittorio Emanuele Dalla Bella. From the President of ANMI I obtained the permission to take pictures and then, in early September 2009, I went to Caorle.

Firstly I met Mr. Vittorio Emanuele Dalla Bella that, in addition to being the owner of the company is also a writer and author of two interesting books on history of the Italian Navy, the first, "Sommergibile Da Vinci, Missione finale" in 2008 and, more recently, in 2011 "Il porta sigarette d'argento", the story of the Submarine Calvi of the Royal Italian Navy, also sunk during the Second World War. From him

I had known the story of the recovery of the turret in 1982 or 1983. Unfortunately it was not able to tell me the exact point at which they had collected the piece of plane in their network because they had noticed it only when they pulled the net on board and so, after several miles of trawling. The only indication, fairly rough, was that they were fishing at the limits of the Croatian territorial waters and in an area east of Grado.

Having taken the photos I came home and the first thing I checked was the serial number of the sole weapon I succeeded in photographing, the right one. The other, in fact, had the part of the barrel with the serial number, covered by the toothed wheel of the vertical lifting device.

From first check had emerged, without a doubt, that the serial was not included among those listed in the two MACR possibly related to the plane of Lignano-Grado and that, therefore, that turret had to belong to another plane. I had, however, already suspected this when I was told the approximate area of the discovery.

Even more intrigued, I then decided to start a new search that would allow me, in a short time (or so I hoped at the time) to give a name to this new plane and discover its fate and story. The examination of the various sources and a first reconstruction of that history, would, however, require much more time and effort than expected, as we shall see in the following pages.

## **REPORT ON THE OUTCOMES OF THE FIRST PHASE OF RESEARCH ON THE STORY OF THE B-24 "MOHAWK CHIEF" OF THE 454TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP.**

Note: This first part reports what I had been able to find out about the story of the Mohawk Chief, between September 2009 and May 2010. The text of this first and provisional report had been sent, for right information, to the family Dalla Bella of Caorle, who had recovered the turret, to the City Hall of Caorle, to the Commander of the local station of the Coastal Guard and to the Italian Sailors Association, Section of Caorle.

The results of early research, and I mean the autumn of last year, had been very discouraging.

I had decided to send to Mr. Archie Difante, a civilian Italian-American who works at A.F.H.R.A., the Air Force Historical Research Agency of Maxwell AFB, Alabama, a request for information on the Browning M/2 machine gun of which we had the serial number.

I got the name and address of the A.F.H.R.A., from a researcher, my friend Mar. Gianni Criscuoli, a technician servicing in the National Acrobatic Team "Frecce Tricolori"..

He, in the past, had asked Mr. Difante for some other queries relating to serials of other weapons found near wreckages of aircraft crashed or shot down, during the war, in the Friuli area. Various attempts to get in touch with Mr. Difante, however, were negative and I had received no reply to my emails.

I decided, then, to ask for help in some US Forum whose members are usually very well informed or, otherwise, almost always provide some addresses to be contacted in case of particularly difficult researches.

Within a few days, I had the first discouraging evidences. It seemed that the serial number was not present in any of the microfilms stored at Maxwell. This is not unusual because at that times were recorded, but not always, only the serials of weapons mounted on American planes and not those of aircraft assigned to the Royal Air Force or the South African Air Force, etc. So there was the possibility that the turret had not been part of an American B-24, but instead on an English one or a South African, etc.

In this case there would be no possibility of identifying the plane as the Air Forces of the Commonwealth did not record the numbers of weapons mounted on their planes, or if perhaps they did, those documents are not available.

Around Christmas 2009, however, I received a personal message from David Ungemach, an American researcher who works on aviation history of the U.S. Navy.

David said to have a copy of the microfilm in which there would have been that particular set of numbers but there was a gap of ten in the recorded series. Our serial was one of those ten missing but Dave sent me a copy of the page anyway. This copy, almost unreadable as it was the copy of a frame of a document microfilmed about 60 years ago, contains a set of data quite poor but sufficient to understand on which aircraft a weapon had been installed.

The problem is that the Browning .50 machine gun was mounted on almost all U.S. planes, bombers, fighters, reconnaissance and so on, and in the list sent by Dave there were several types of aircraft

and, moreover, employed on all war fronts from Europe to the Pacific and there was no particular order or subdivision.



*Browning serial number*

Having deciphered, at best, what was more or less readable I decided to start a type of research that looked almost impossible to perform, in order to understand, as I supposed but without certainty, if it was possible that lots of weapons with consequential serial numbers could have been installed on aircraft of the same production line, and this in one of the 5 or 6 assembly lines of the B-24.

We have also to remember that although M2 and M3 machine guns were of Browning design, in fact these guns were produced under license by many companies in the United States and England and, although I was able to detect that one of Caorle had been produced by General Motors, this indication seemed to be useless as this company did not have the list (or, at least, so it seemed) of those factories to which, during the war, they had supplied the weapons. So even on this front the search had stalled.

I then decided to play the last card, i.e. to check, one by one, all the MACRs, the reports about the loss of aircraft and crew, of all B-24s produced in the same period, and this means hundreds of aircraft (about 400 ), one of whom could be the one on which the gun had been installed.

I said "could" because, apart from the aforementioned case of a possible assignment to a RAF unit, there was also a significant possibility that surplus weapons had been switched to other production lines and therefore not directly documented. So, during Christmas period I started looking for that phantom plane.

The control of each single MACR takes between 5 minutes to half of an hour depending on traffic on the Internet and I must say that during Christmas the traffic was very heavy and often the connection was slow or broke off. At last the luck decided to come on my side and after at least 160 reports checked, one night, at about two a.m. I finally succeeded in finding out that damned serial number.

It did not seem real, and then, instead of going to bed and resume the next day I continued the search up to three a.m. looking, in various sites for further information on that plane because, unfortunately, the MACR was composed of only four pages while, usually, for a bomber there were from a minimum of 10/12 to even 60 or more. A few details but then also, apparently useless.

From what written in the MACR it resulted that the turret had been the tail one and the plane on which was mounted was the **Consolidated B-24J-10-DT Liberator, serial number 42-51415** produced by Douglas, Tulsa (Oklahoma), in August 1944. It was one of the last B-24 produced in this factory and, in fact, the last of the series was the 42-51430, nicknamed "Tulsamerican", shot down on December 12, 1944 off the island of Hvar in Yugoslavia.

The 42-51415 was delivered in early September 1944 and transferred the next few days in Topeka, Kansas for the calibration of instruments. In mid-September had been flown from Topeka to Italy, at the base of San Giovanni, southwest of Cerignola (Foggia) with a journey lasting about 10 days with stops in Grenier, New Hampshire, in Gander, New Newfoundland, from Gander, across the Atlantic to Lagens, and then to Azores, Marrakech and then in Tunis in North Africa, and finally in San Giovanni, Italy.

The plane was assigned to the unit, the 738th Bomber Squadron of the 454th Bomber Group, and precisely to the crew of 2nd Lt. William R. White of Hickory (Missouri). The crew, as usual, gave a nickname to their plane and called him "Mohawk Chief (Chief of the Mohawk Indians).

The Mohawk Chief was lost returning from a bombing mission on the oil refinery of Moosierbaum, near Atzenbrugg in western Austria on 9 December 1944, of the ten crew on board, nine died and only one managed to survive.

This was the composition of the crew:

<i>Pilot:</i>	<i>2nd Lt. William R. White</i>	<i>S/n O-824725</i>	<i>Hickory (Missouri)</i>
<i>Co-pilot:</i>	<i>2nd Lt Rex W McFarland</i>	<i>S/n O-775081</i>	<i>Norfolk (Nebraska)</i>
<i>Navigator:</i>	<i>2nd Lt Edwin R. Houck</i>	<i>S/n O-2060293</i>	<i>Columbus (Ohio)</i>
<i>Bombardier:</i>	<i>2nd Lt Thomas Webster Borden</i>	<i>S/n O-2056770</i>	<i>Mobile (Alabama)</i>
<i>Radio operator:</i>	<i>Sgt Raymond L Cole</i>	<i>S/n 36754377</i>	<i>Chicago (Illinois)</i>
<i>Engineer:</i>	<i>Staff Sgt Karl Smith</i>	<i>S/n 33722216</i>	<i>Eckhart (Maryland)</i>
<i>Waist gunner:</i>	<i>Sgt Wifford C Goodwin</i>	<i>S/n 38522992</i>	<i>Springhill (Louisiana)</i>
<i>Nose gunner:</i>	<i>Sgt Garvin Carper</i>	<i>S/n 33657125</i>	<i>Winchester (Virginia)</i>
<i>Ball gunner:</i>	<i>Sgt Anthony R Natto</i>	<i>S/n 33109385</i>	<i>Erie (Pennsylvania)</i>
<i>Tail gunner:</i>	<i>Sgt Hubert Mallette</i>	<i>S/n 34165844</i>	<i>Dozier (Alabama)</i>



The sole survivor, although seriously wounded and half frozen to death, was Lieutenant Thomas Borden who died after the war, on March 2, 1990 and was buried in the Arlington National Cemetery (Virginia).

White, McFarland, Cole, and Mallette are now buried in a common grave in the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery of St. Louis (Missouri).

Natto is buried in the Andersonville National Cemetery at Andersonville, Macon County, (Georgia).

Smith is buried in the Florence American Cemetery.

Goodwin is buried in the Mount Hebron Cemetery, Winchester City - Virginia.

Carper was KIA, killed in action, as results in the site of the National WWII Memorial and then, most likely his body had been recovered but I was unable to discover where. Carper is buried in the Old Town Cemetery at Haynesville, Claiborne Parish, Louisiana.

Houck, finally, appears on the list of missing in the Florence American Cemetery and then it seems that his body had never been found.

So far nothing strange or mysterious, they were events that were common in those days, but the problem which I wanted to resolve before drafting this report to inform Dalla Bella, the fisherman, and all other people of Caorle who helped me in this research, was about the point where the plane had really crashed, or better, was ditched.

According to the MACR and also to where the sole survivor had been rescued (by a British rescue boat), the plane would have been crashed into the sea some miles off the coast of Ancona.

DETAIL OF WORK CARRIED OUT								
By No. 272 (Beaufighter) Squadron, R.A.F. <b>SECRET</b>								
FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER, 1944.								
DATE	AIRCRAFT TYPE & NUMBER	CREW	DUTY	TIME		DETAILS OF SORTIE OR FLIGHT	REFERENCES	
				UP	DOWN			
7.	G. Beau. X. NV. 120.	W/C. R.N. Lambert. D.F.C.		1100	1510	6 Beaus on armed recce made rendezvous with 4 Spits of No. 237 Squadron posn. 4543N. 1245E. attacked 1 laden barge. R.P. hits and cannon strikes seen. Tanker broke in half and sunk. Light flak. At San Giorgio di Livy sighted six stationary barges in canal running through centre of town. Attacked with R.P. and cannon. two barges sunk, one left smoking and others damaged.		
	N. " NV. 269.	F/O. A.E. Masterbee. S/L. R.K.H. Johnson. D.F.C.		"	1510	Another barge attacked by two aircraft and claimed as sunk. 20 N.W. A.A. from area. At 1300 hrs. message received from aircraft "B" reporting oil leak?		
	B. " NV. 201.	F/O. H. Roe. - Armed F/O. J.R. Rutland. Recce.		"	"	At 1322 posn. 4537N. 1247E. Aircraft "B" was seen to belly land in a field. Crew were seen sitting on Port wing and waving. All others returned to Base. F/O. Rutland, pilot and F/S. Potts, Navigator, missing. Weather fair. 7/10 St. Cl. at 2000 feet vis. 5 miles. Some haze.		
	M. " NV. 568.	F/S. E.M. Potts. F/O. K.W.D. Goulding.		"	1510			
	Y. " NT. 971.	F/S. R.E. Buss. W.O. F.C. Manning. (A.421023)		"	"			
	G. " NV. 120.	F/O. S.G. Philpott. (A423317) F/O. J.H. Atkinson. (J.27547) F/O. R.J. Clark.		"	"			
8.	Nil operations.							
9.	J. Beau. X. NV. 510.	S/L. A.J. Mottram. D.F.C.		0845	1320	6 Beaus on armed recce made rendezvous with 6 Spits of No. 237 Squadron. At 1045 two Beaus saw Aircraft "Y" with starboard engine on fire; attempt to force land in a field. Aircraft "Y" blew up on hitting the ground. Intense accurate medium and light A.A. from area. Aircraft "Y" was flying at 150-ft when hit. At 1049 position 4548N. 1325E. Aircraft "M" attacked a barge on river with cannon - strikes seen. At 1059, two miles North of SAN GIORGIO, barge and dredger attacked with R.P. - dredger blew up. Aircraft "B" and "E" went to investigate ditching reported on V.H.F. Posn. 4535N. 1323E. found dinghy with two people hanging on to it. S.O.S. to Base. Aircraft "B" S/O Base. Other three aircraft continued patrol. Posn. 4538N. 1251E. Aircraft "M" attacked four pairs of barges with R.P. and cannon. 2 Barges sank. Other aircraft orbited dinghy previously reported. No other incidents. All other aircraft returned to Base except aircraft "G" which developed engine trouble and landed at Falconara on one engine. Weather good. 8/10 St. Cl. at 6000 feet vis. 10 miles. Aircraft "W" F/O. J.G. Horlock (Pilot) and W.O. F.H. Rapley (Navigator) missing.		
	M. " NV. 568.	F/L. J. Miller. - Armed F/L. J. Dobson. Recce.		"	1310			
	F. " NV. 499.	W.O. W. Adams. F/S. A.L. Stevenson.		"	1345			
	E. " NV. 586.	W.O. C.M. Sim. F/S. S.J. Jeffries.		"	"			
	V. " NT. 971.	F/O. J.G. Horlock. W.O. R.H. Rapley.		0845	--			
	G. " NV. 495.	F/S. J.P. Furness. (W.421504) F/O. W.H. Forbes. (W.421101)		"	1205			

272th Sqn RAF (Beaufighters) report

This seems contrary to what I was told by Dalla Bella, namely that the turret had been netted by the fishing boat Santa Rita, in June 1982 or 1983 between Caorle and Grado, and instead, would agree with some references given me by the current President of ANMI about a presumed finding of the turret near Ancona.

At the time of my visit in Caorle, in September of 2009, I spoke with the President of ANMI only few minutes and after having heard from Dalla Bella a detailed account of the stages of recovery so then I had not paid much credit to his words, i.e. that the piece was brought to Caorle by a previous President who was just a native of Ancona.

Obviously it seemed unlikely that one had bothered to spend a lot of money carrying a piece of metal scrap and even very heavy, from Ancona to Caorle and then just to put it on display in the garden of the Sailor's Association.

It seemed also very strange that a fishing boat from Caorle had pushed south so much for fishing, considering the impossibility to bring home any fish in a so brief time, and this without considering the need for supplies of fuel to go back home and even then the risk of taking a very big penalty for having fished outside the allotted area.

It was however clear that the sole survivor had been found off the coast of Ancona and that certainly he could not, in about ten hours between the crash and his rescue, having traveled about 130 miles i.e. over than 200 km, wounded, half frozen to death and in a dinghy without a motor.

This seemed to give credence to the statements of the U.S. and then to what declared by the ANMI President. In addition to this, in mid-January I was contacted by Giuseppe Versolato, a researcher living in Vicenza, for clarification on another B-24 found at sea 9 miles off Lignano. On that occasion I knew that he, two or three years ago, had come to Caorle to take note of the serial number of the gun but then, for the reasons stated above, had failed to discover the identity of the plane. He confirmed that someone in Caorle had told him that the turret came from the area of Ancona.

At this point I didn't know how I should behave, whether to write to Dalla Bella and report these information or pretend to forget the case. To tell what, apparently, seemed the truth would be like giving him a liar but I couldn't still give me a reason why he should have told me a lie and invented even all the details of the recovery, like to have exchanged the scrap for a wheelbarrow as the machine guns seemed just the handles of a wheelbarrow, or to have thrown into the sea, exactly at the point where his boat is always anchored, hundreds of machine gun rounds for fear of having trouble with the authorities. Those rounds had to be still there and should be easy recoverable if one wants to have a definite proof.

It was very improbable and absurd and so I decided to investigate further but at that time I was very busy with the planned visit to Grado of two historians of the Department of Defense. In fact I had been contacted by their office, who deals with the search and repatriation of MIA, the Missing in Action. Only in the Second World War and only for the Adriatic they have more than 7,500 missing. In their periodic checks on various discussion forums on the wartime crashed aircraft, they had found a post of mine referring to a B-24 crashed on the island of Morgo, between Grado and Porto Buso, on January 30, 1944. This wreck, which probably contains the remains of seven missing crew members, is still on the island, covered by about 4 / 5 feet of mud. They got in touch with me and



asked if I could accompany two officials of their team on that island in order to evaluate the possibility of an excavation for the recovery of the remains.

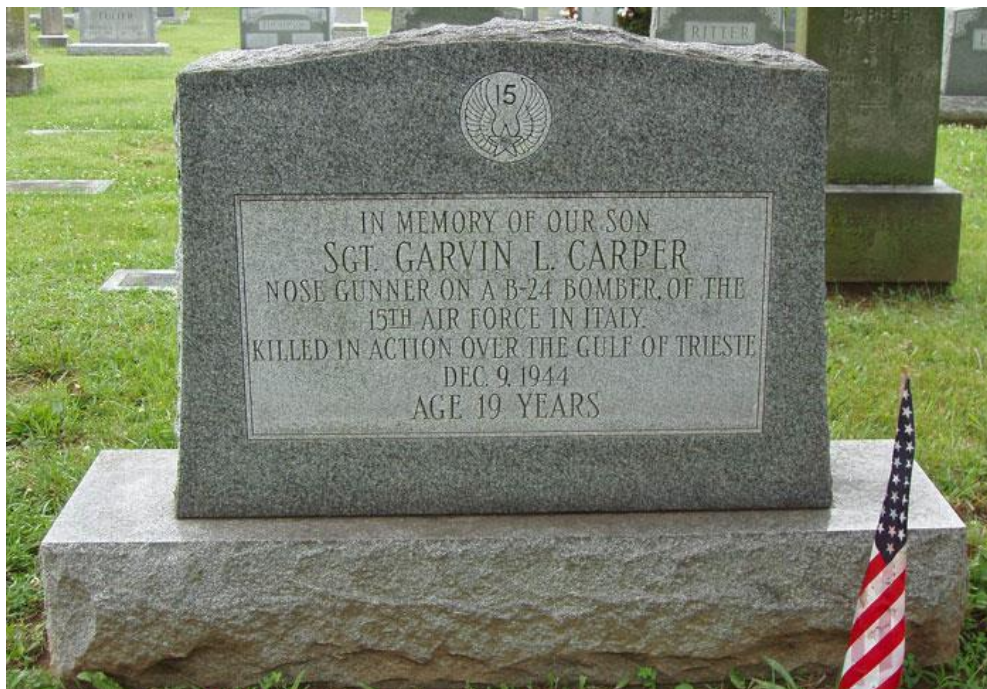
Despite a big amount of difficulties caused by the reluctance of the owner of the island to grant permission for the visit, by the weather, because of the snow falls in Washington that had blocked the airport for a week and then here in Italy where we had continuous rain until early March and finally by the hitches in to find, in the Grado City Hall, at least one of the administrators who could give a worthy welcome to the guests and also by many other hardships, finally the visit to the island took place and therefore it was possible to detect the real existence of the wreckage in site.

Given the success of the visit to the isle of Morgo, I had the opportunity to ask the two officials if they, when again in the United States, could send me some more documentation on the crew of the "Mohawk Chief".

I had been promised that they would certainly have tried to give me, if any, additional information. After about a month I received a message from the DPMO in which they said to have found nothing more than what already known by me but I was also asked to keep them informed in case of finding any new information that could be useful for a further investigation. Curiously enough, only a few days later, searching for something other not related to the turret of Caorle, I happened to find, on the Internet, a photo of the tombstone of one of the crew members, Sgt. Marvin L. Carper, the nose gunner.

The plaque, placed by the parents (both deceased), contains this statement:

*"In memory of our son, Sgt Marvin L. Carper, bow gunner on a B-24 bomber of the 15th Air Force in Italy, killed in action over the Gulf of Trieste, December 9, 1944, at age 19. "*



**Then, not Ancona but, clearly, the Gulf of Trieste.** Marvin Carper seemed to have been found in the Gulf of Trieste and then in the north edge of the Adriatic Sea.

With these new data in my hands I had requested to DPMO if it was possible to have the Carper's IDPF, even if I knew that these documents are strictly confidential, to check whether in it there could be a reference to the exact point of discovery and temporary burial of his body.

What had jumped in my head was, in fact, a new and seemingly absurd assumption, i.e. that the plane in trouble for being hit in Austria, had followed a route different from the rest of the formation trying to return to base on a shorter way, flying over Trieste and the Istrian-Dalmatian coast with the hope of reaching an area of Italy yet in Allied hands where to crash land or even to bail out safely.

The island of Vis (Lissa) in Dalmatia was halfway between the enemy territories and the US bases in southern Italy and was, at those times, in British hands. It had a makeshift runway often used by aircraft damaged in action and returning from missions in Europe.

It is possible that the Mohawk Chief, when reached the coast, was flying at a low level and could have been hit again by flak. This could have caused a partial detachment of the tail turret.

It was also possible that the crew was trying to repair the damage and so some men, including the nose gunner have moved forward, in the rear of the aircraft, for this operation but, at some point, the structure could have collapsed so the aircraft could have lost in flight the tail turret, managing somehow to continue flying.

The fall of the part may have dragged with it some of the crew including Marvin Carper. It was also possible that the plane had continued to fly up to the area of Ancona where undoubtedly (or at least so it seems) was ditched as evidenced by the finding in the area of the sole survivor.

Unfortunately, today, I had no answers from U.S. about those requested documents but I still believe that, at least in part, they will give me at least a summary of the contents. In this event, my hypothesis, as absurd and improbable it may be, should be confirmed or not. Only then we could say to have solved the mystery, and so put an end to the case of "Mohawk Chief", and could be certain that the turret was really found in the area indicated by Dalla Bella or, otherwise, it will be necessary to start a new and more accurate investigation.

I sent this information first to Mr. Dalla Bella, to apologize for the delay in reporting the search results, but also to make him known about my personal opinion on the veracity of his story.

PS: Thanks to the precious and detailed memories of Mr. Dalla Bella I was even able to resolve another case, who was unresolved, that one of two B-17 bombers crashed due to a mid air collision near the village of Brussa.

These two planes, according to official documentation, should have crashed in the area of Grado, and then in past years had been searched for them only in that area, of course unsuccessfully. These two aircraft of the 97th Bomber Group collided due to bad weather. There were 17 deaths and only three survivors. Although this story should be told because it is full of sides still unclear and some very questionable human implications. But this is another story.

May 2010

Freddy Furlan

## **Final remarks:**

The searches at sea carried out in the spring of 2014, to tell the truth sporadic and superficial, did not give any result, except that the discovery of an unexploded mine of the First World War.

However, information derived by the message of Borden's grandson in the forum of the Army Air Forces, and I mean what had been told by Thomas Borden to his family, about the fact that he continued to float for hours clinging to the outside of the raft while holding even Edwin Houck, suggests a different course of events.

From what can be deduced by reading the Borden's statement in Houck's IDPF, he later officially declared to have been successful, at some point, to get on the raft but he doesn't say after how much time from the accident.

Of course, given the time of year and the water temperature, this must have happened in the space of half an hour, one hour maximum, otherwise Borden would have lost consciousness, also considering that his injuries had to be severe enough if he had needed to stay in a hospital for three months.

If, therefore, the sighting of the dingy by the British fighter-bombers had taken place in this period of time (let's not forget that several minutes could have been passed from when the request for assistance sent by the formation of the 454th Group had been received, up to the moment when a message had been sent to British aircraft in order to start the search of possible survivors), it is possible that the raft, in the meantime, had already traveled a good distance driven by currents (typically with trend from north-east to south-west, but sometimes also from northwest to southeast and with varying intensity depending on the tides and other factors) or by the wind and, consequently, the wreck of the Mohawk Chief should be searched in an area much wider and practically impossible to explore.

If we consider that trawl fishing is usually carried out at a short distance from the border of the Croatian territorial waters (waters known to be much more fish-rich than Italian ones) then we could surely assume that the tail turret of Caorle had been caught in a position shifted from one to three miles to the north-east or north-west.

The last point to consider is related to the discovery, in 1947, of part of the fuselage in the vicinity of Grado. Unfortunately, we do not know whether that part had been moved by currents or if it was removed from one of those Wreck Recovery Companies that had operated in the northern Adriatic after the war. Sometimes it could happen that, if it was noticed the presence of human remains on board, the rescue operations were suspended and the wrecks abandoned at a short distance from the coast to avoid hassles and delays related to the necessary involvement of Allied and Italian authorities in order to recover the bodies of the dead.

In summary, the probability of finding out the wreckage of the Mohawk Chief, unless some new element comes out in the future, is quite remote and the certainty that there could be no other human remain to look for, excludes a research mission to be made in future by the Department of Defense of the United States.

## **Copies of the messages, posted in the forum of Army Air Forces, related to the case of the Mohawk Chief and final results of the research.**

\* Note.

The first six posts in the forum of Army Air Forces, date back to a period from 1 August to mid-September 2010.

Only later I had been informed by Dave Ungemach of the existence of this thread and then I decided to intervene in the discussion in the hope to provide some clarification, especially to Nancy McSweeney Hardyns.

My first post was followed by an extensive private correspondence with her, and the acquisition of new information about the uncle and some pictures of the crew.

In the following messages, copies of those that can be found in the Forum of the Army Air Forces, appear several names of the participants in the discussion.

The first, who opened the discussion to request information on the State of Service of her father, is Pamela Thompson Penz, aka "Thompsonkid." The second intervention on the case of the "Mohawk Chief", has been made by Nancy McSweeney Hardyns, the grandson of Sgt. Raymond L. Cole, the radio operator of the "Chief".

The pseudonym "DaveTW1", is that of David Ungemach, an employee of the Department of Defense of the United States. Dave is also a book writer and a researcher of aeronautical history of the Second World War, in particular with regard to the history of the 455th BG and to Aviation of the U.S. Navy. For several years I'm collaborating with him and from him I have often received very important information, especially with regard to the serial of weapons and to the serial numbers of the aircraft on which they were mounted in origin.

The nickname "Mohawk Chief" belongs, however, to Carolyn Strohecker, the daughter of Sgt. Edward L. Strohecker. Sgt. Strohecker was not part of the original crew of the "Mohawk Chief" but, probably, had flown a few times with its crew as a temporary replacement. He was part of the crew of another B-24, the "Queen of Hearts", also the 454th BG. From Carolyn I received a very valuable and, as far as I know, unpublished photo of the "nose art" Mohawk Chief. (Between the copies of the posts that follow, the messages from Carolyn have been omitted because their content is not relevant to the case of Mohawk Chief but only to the story of the "Queen of Hearts") The subsequent posts, starting from the end of February 2011 until May 2013, are inherent in the story of the "Queen of Hearts" and therefore not relevant to this research.

The last message, dated May 21, 2013, was posted by David Lee Phillips, whose grandfather Thomas Webster Borden was the only survivor of the "Mohawk Chief". Thanks to the information provided by David I had the opportunity to know the history of the vicissitudes of Borden after his rescue until his premature death in 1990.

### ***Information on 738th squadron... my father was a navigator.***

*(Thread started Aug. 01, 2010)*

#### ***Thompsonskid***

*Dear Folks,*

*My father was a navigator in the 738th squadron at the end of the war (Oct 1944-45). Not much out there on these guys. I have all the letters he wrote home to his family from his start in officer training school in 1943 thru his discharge after the war.*

*I am looking for a publisher for these letters, but need much more information on battles flown and photos if available. He of course could not talk in the letters about his missions but he has some fun stuff about the down time "hanging out" in Italy.*

*My father was Capt Harry W. Thompson, Jr. and passed away July of this year. He did not talk much about the war when he got home...any help would be greatly appreciated.*

*Any information on the 738th at the end of the war would be greatly appreciated.*

*Sincerely,*

*His daughter, Thompsonskid*

#### ***Nancy McSweeney Hardyns***

*Hello, I am new to this forum. My uncle Raymond L Cole was a radioman in the 454th SQ 738, 15th AAF, his aircraft the Mohawk Chief, went down over the Adriatic sea 12-09-1944. There was only one survivor 2nd Lt Thomas W Borden. I have a picture of the crew and information from his MACR14627. I can't help but think that these men knew each other, they were in the same groups and squadrons, flew the same kind of aircraft, and were pretty much the same ages. Young. My uncle was 19. I have some letters, he arrived in Italy 10-30-1944 and he died on 12-09-1944 with all his buddies, pilot, co-pilot, and navigator. That's not a lot of information, I wish I had more. Thanks*

NMH

### **Thompsonskid**

*Thank you so much...my father mentioned that mission in one of his letters to his mother...his crew were planning on ditching as they had to abort their mission due to bad weather...they had a load of bombs they needed to dump into the sea and they were being shot at the whole time...they were losing altitude fast due to engine failure due to vapor lock...at the last minute the engines kicked in and they skimmed over the water and dumped their load...the bombs kept bouncing back up at them and exploding...other crews went down...my dad said it was the second worse mission of his tour...the worst was one of his last...he never talked about it in the letters as it had not been made public yet and so he could not talk about it. Keep me posted on more stories.*

*Thompsonskid*

### **Nancy McSweeney Hardyns**

*Hello, Thank you for responding. I'm sorry for your loss, I just loss my uncle Andy last march, he parachuted in on D-Day over Anzio. I have some letters from my uncle, only four, from Oct thru Dec 1944, several of them have a lot of info in them that I would be glad to share.*

*My uncle was with 15th Gp454 SQ 738, his last departure was out of San Giovanni field. The pilot was 2nd Lt William White 0-825725, buried at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis Mo. section 82 site 46A. He was from Vernon county MO.... Co-Pilot 2 LT Rex W. McFarland 0-775081, buried at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery St. Louis MO., section 82 site 46A, he was from Madison County, NE... Navigator Edwin R. Houck 0-2060293, buried at Florence American Cemetery in Via Cassia Italy, from Columbus OH. Someone cared about this man, he is on the wall of the Mia or buried at sea and the WWII Honoree wall... My uncle Sgt. Raymond L Cole 36754377 radioman, Buried at Jefferson Barracks Cemetery section 82 site 46A, he was from Chicago IL...SSG Karl E Smith 33722216 armament, is also buried at Florence American Cemetery, Via Cassia Italy, plot G row 11 grave 33, he was from Maryland ... SGT Wifford C Goodwin 38522992 waist gunner from Clairborne Parish LA, I could not find out where he is buried but he was KIA the same day as the rest of the crew... SGT Garvin L Carper 33657125, nose gunner from Fredrick County VA, I could not find him either, KIA same day as rest.... SGT Anthony R Natto 33109385 bail gunner, buried at Andersonville National Historic site, at section A site 189, he was from Erie County PA....SGT Hubert A Mallette 34165844, tail gunner, buried at Jefferson Barracks Cemetery St. Louis Mo. The next man is Thomas W Borden 0-2056770, bombardier, he was the only survivor.*

*He was picked up by a British craft, he was injured, they brought him to the Ancona hospital in Italy. He was excused from service very shortly after his hospital stay. I looked for him the same way I did the rest of the men but I found nothing at all.*

*Several months after my uncle's death my grandparents got a letter from the commanding office telling them their son's aircraft was sabotaged by a Master Sergeant and that this man had done the same to 10 other aircraft. My grandfather tore the letter up but the story has been told that way in my family for as long as I can remember.*

*I also have a picture of the crew taken before they went to Italy. They obviously stayed together because the MACR report had all the same names from the picture. Also the classification of the document I have is "Restricted" by E.A. Bradunas Lt. Col. AC and F.M. Murach, Capt., AC.*

*I have the numbers of the engines and the serial numbers for the weapons if you or anyone needs them. I am also going to register all the men, except the two who already registered, at The WWII registry of Remembrances in Washington D.C.*

*I would like to find Thomas Borden since he was the only survivor so he can tell me what happened that day. I hope this helps you. Hope to hear from you soon*

NMH

**DaveTWI** (This is my friend David Ungemach, a historian of the US Navy that often helped me in identifying the serial numbers of weapons)

*If you haven't seen it yet, there was a thread about the tail turret of MOHAWK CHIEF, B-24J S/N 42-51415:*

*<http://forum.armyairforces.com/fb.ashx?m=181747>*

*It was recovered from the Adriatic about 20+ years ago, and is on display at Caorle, Italy near Venice. One of the forum members (Freddy) did some fantastic detective work last year and identified the turret from a gun serial number (unfortunately, the gun serial numbers weren't recorded in the master list, so Freddy had to manually search through a ton of MACRs to find it). You might want to contact him to see if he has any additional information.*

### ***Nancy McSweeney Hardyns***

*Thank you Dave TW1, I have more information on the Mohawk Chief, my uncle Raymond L Cole 36754377, was the radioman. I have all the serial numbers of the installed weapons. LN-1261803..... RN-1261778.....LN1261693.....RN-1261840.....LB1261782.....WB-1262030.....LW-1261580.....RW-1261828.....LP-1261894.....NT-1261960...The AAF serial number is 42-51415. The engines, were type model and series R-1830-43A. AAF serial numbers CP-315596.....CP-315630.....CP-315651.....CP-315549. Do you need the name of the crew?*

*It was Freddy's forum that got me starting to look because the MACR 14627 was the same MACR I have from my uncle's report. And someone else mentioned a weapon with serial NT-126960 that was also in the report.*

*Freddy was right about a mystery, I have located all the crewmen and where they are buried but I can't find Thomas W Borden 0-2056770. The MACR report says he was Excused of Service. If you have information about him I would like to know what happened to my uncle. I have a picture of the crew that was taken before they went to Italy. Has Freddy already found all this information? If I can be of help I would be happy to do so.*

*Thank you.*

*NMH*

### ***DaveTW1***

*Hi Nancy, I haven't heard from Freddy for some time. I'm not sure if he had any luck finding Mr. Borden. The gun in question was S/N 1261960 (the two letters in front of the S/N indicated position - in this case, I think it was a typo, and it was supposed to be "RT" for "right tail"). The only thing I could ever find in the 454th Group records was that the plane was lost on Mission #164. The target is listed as the Linz Industrial Complex, and not the Moosbierbaum refinery. Not sure what is up with that. Anyway, the report stated that one aircraft developed supercharger problems, and had to jettison its bombs in the Adriatic to keep up with the formation. It later left the formation, and the flight thought that it had returned to base.*

*Unfortunately, it did not specifically identify the aircraft or pilot, so it is only an assumption that it was 42-51415 that turned back and was later lost. Too bad that the letter about sabotage was destroyed. There are lots of stories about these things happening, but they are always anecdotal, with no hard evidence.*

*Have you obtained a copy of the IPDF for your cousin? You may also want to also order the pilot's IPDF, as it often has more information about the circumstances of the crash and the recovery of the remains. Good luck with your research!*

*Dave*

*(There are two slips in Dave's post, the first about Raymond Cole who was not the cousin of Nancy but instead his uncle and then writes IPDF instead of IDPF which is actually the acronym for Individual Deceased Personnel File)*

**Note: At this point, Dave had informed me of the discussion and, without waiting for a specific request from Nancy, I decided to step in to do some clarity on the situation and to provide to Nancy the information I had.**

## **Freddy**

*Dear Nancy,*

*Just yesterday I was informed by Dave about this thread and just a few days ago, to the beginning of September, I got, from Mark Russell of DPMO (Defense Prisoners of War/Missing Office), some few IDPF (Individual Deceased Personnel file) pages related to a couple of crew members of "Mohawk Chief."*

*With these documents, finally, I succeeded in resolving, in part, some unclear points about the story of that plane.*

*I must say that I'm an Italian researcher, so it is possible, indeed almost certain, that my English could be not very good so I apologize for any errors in this text.*

*I dealt with the "Mohawk Chief" last year because the tail turret of this aircraft was recovered in the Gulf of Trieste in 1984 and is now exhibited in a small open-air museum in Caorle, a small seaside resort on the Adriatic Sea between Grado and Venice.*

*No one knew of which plane the turret had been part, and so I decided, through the serial number of machine guns, to try to find out its identity. As Dave already told you, however, identification was difficult enough but at the end we had the certainty that it was precisely the "Mohawk Chief."*

*At this point, however, there were some aspects that were not very clear and in fact, as you have certainly already seen, according to the MACR the plane appeared to have crashed into the sea off the coast of Ancona and then about 130 miles south of where a fisherman of Caorle said to have found, entangled in his nets, that turret.*

*In the MACR, that unfortunately has only a few pages and then very little information, it is said that the only survivor, Webster Thomas Borden, was recovered, by an English motor launch, off the coast of Ancona on the day following the disaster. So, where was really ditched the Mohawk Chief?*

*If it happened in the Gulf of Trieste, then it was absolutely impossible that Borden, seriously injured and in a dinghy without a motor, could travel 130 miles in a few hours and this, even considering the possibility of strong winds and very fast sea currents*

*If, instead, it happened off Ancona, then it could be very difficult to understand why the turret had been recovered off Grado. You have also to know that the fisherman's boat is small enough and is not equipped to navigate beyond 10 or 15 miles from Caorle.*

*The only remaining explanation that could be considered was that the plane, after having been hit by flak, had lost its tail turret while flying over the Gulf of Trieste.*

*This hypothesis was quite strange and even incredible because, to my knowledge, no other similar cases have ever occurred, and really I do not know if a B-24 without its tail turret, because detached during the flight, could then continue flying for another 130 miles.*

*A couple of months ago, however, I was lucky enough to find, on the Internet, another clue. It was the photo of the tombstone of the nose gunner, Garvin L Carper and on it is readable:*

*"In memory of our son Garvin L. Carper, nose gunner on a B-24 bomber of the 15th Air Force in Italy, killed in action over the Gulf of Trieste, Dec. 9, 1944, age 19 years."*

*At this point it was clear that Carper's body had been found in the Gulf of Trieste and this would also have meant that, in addition to the turret, had fallen from the plane even some crew members but could also mean that perhaps the plane could have been ditched just in this area and not off Ancona as written in the MACR.*

*A definite answer could be found only in the IDPFs of the crew members and, in fact, from the examination of these documents came the resolution of the case.*

*In summary this is the probable history of Mohawk Chief:*

*1) The plane was hit by flak in the area of Linz in Austria, and was able to reach the Adriatic sea, perhaps hoping to land on the island of Vis where there was a landing strip already in Allied hands.*

*2) Probably failed to maintain the altitude and had to ditch in the Gulf of Trieste about 10 miles northeast of Grado. It is possible that during the maneuver, something has gone wrong but I do not know the details because the wreck has not yet been located, but we know that almost all the crew members had died on impact. At the time of the crash only three men managed to survive, Thomas Borden, Edwin R Houck, both quite seriously injured, and finally Garvin Carper who had inflated*

*his Mae West before having released his the parachute harness. He fought for twenty minutes to get free but unsuccessfully and then was submerged by seawater. Borden was able to get on the dinghy but was injured and was unable to pull on board even Houck who was also wounded and delirious, finally also Houck lost consciousness and was sunk. Today he is still missing and all searches carried out after the war to find his remains have not, unfortunately, been successful.*

*3) Borden had gone adrift, but fortunately the raft had been found by a British launch who was probably in that area for some rescue operation. It is possible that the British boat was actually bound for Ancona and so its crew had brought the survivor to the hospital of that town. I know that because of injuries, his stay in hospital lasted about three months after which he was repatriated. Webster Thomas Borden died Feb. 3, 1990 and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery, section 67, grave 996.*

*4) The error on the point of finding the survivor, as is shown in the MACR, probably occurred due to a misinterpretation of the report of the British boat crew, made by the compiler of the document, "Statement pertaining to missing aircraft # 415" .  
The communication about the rescue was in fact given by phone and perhaps had been misunderstood or not clearly reported the details about the exact point of recovery.*

*5) Regarding the case of your uncle, Raymond L Cole, unfortunately I do not know anything definite but maybe his body was among those three that were found, on 8 August 1947, in a piece of fuselage found nearby the beach of Grado. You must know that after the war there were many shipping companies which were dedicated to the recovery of shipwrecks in this area of the Adriatic. The wreckage was recovered and the metal was bound to the foundries. There had been agreements between these companies and the Allied Forces in the case of discovery of human remains inside the wreckage. These remains had to be handed over to authorities for identification and then brought into the American military cemetery of Mirandola.*

*I do not know if any other part of the fuselage of the Mohawk Chief had been recovered after 1947 and if, inside, there were the remains of other crew members still missing, but this is quite likely. An answer could only be found reading your uncle's IDPF but unfortunately this document is not among those available to me. I know that these documents can be requested but I do not know exactly to which office or even what could be the procedure for the request.*

*The few copies I have come directly from DPMO with whom I am collaborating on some other cases of Missing in Action but also they have to request the IDPFs to another office.*

*The crew members recovered on the beaches near Grado in the days following the disaster are: Karl E Smith and Garvin L Carper that were identified because they still had their identification tags. Anthony R Natto had been recognized for some other particular which I do not know. In the fuselage, recovered in August 1947, were found three other bodies but only Wifford C. Goodwin had been identified with certainty whereas it was not possible to ascertain the exact identity of the other two. Unfortunately I don't know anything about the circumstances of the subsequent discovery and the identity of the fourth man. (cited in the IDPF but without further details)*

*The exact circumstances of discovery of your uncle, Rex W McFarland, Hubert A. Mallette and William R White are still unknown to me, although we are sure, thanks to testimony of Borden, that White had not been inside the aircraft after the crash and so, probably, he had been found later on some Yugoslav or Italian beach.*

*This, in brief, what is to my knowledge about the case of the Mohawk Chief.*

**Note: After about a year during which no other messages were posted about the Mohawk Chief (apart from some photos, posted by Daniele Cinganotto of Caorle, that show of the machine gun and a big piece of the fuselage structure, probably part of the B-24 "Vivacious Lady" crashed at sea just off the coast of Caorle), on May 21, 2013 the discussion was taken up by David Lee Phillips, grandson of Thomas Webster Borden, the only survivor of the Mohawk Chief.**



## **dauidlephillips**

*I know this is an old topic. However I am just now doing some research into my grandfather, Thomas W. Borden, the sole survivor of the MOHAWK CHIEF. I didn't know my grandfather very well, as he passed in 1990 when I was only six. I vividly remember the 21 gun salutes, and some old friend of the family picking up a casing to give me that i still have to this day. I merely google'd his name and this post and one other came up immediately. One of the only stories I know of Grandpa Tom is the one of how he received his purple heart.*

*The story I always heard was he was a navigator on bomber plane, it went down, he and one other crewmate survived. He treaded water for days trying to stay afloat holding up the other guy (forgive me I never heard a name, no disrespect intended). Eventually the other guy died while in the water, and he continued to tread water until help arrived. He lost his thumb due to complications of this incident.*

*From what i know of my grandfather i have gathered myself over the years from stories from my mom, and grandma. Thomas was married 5 times before he passed, having two children with my grandmother (his 2nd wife) who now lives in mobile. He was an avid hunter/sportsman, and passed that on to his son who spent much of his life as a game warden. He was very fond of alcohol, much to be understood after reading some of these accounts. Thomas lived in Maryland at least the latter part of his life, and is now buried in the Arlington National Cemetery.*

*The main reason I posted here is in the hopes of getting a picture of the crew that included Thomas W. Borden, as I have only a photo of him in his old lounge chair in the mid 80s.*

*Thanks for your time.*

*David Lee Phillips*

## **Freddy**

*Hello David,*

*I am attaching the photo of the crew of the Mohawk Chief I received from Nancy McSweeney Hardyns, the niece of Sgt Raymond L Cole, a few years ago.*

*Unfortunately I haven't the list of names with their position in the photo but probably you will be able to recognize your grandfather among them.*

*I attach also the report, updated February 2013, about the research on the Mohawk Chief. It contains an account of the research and a copy of the correspondence with Nancy, David and others who have helped me to solve the case.*

*Freddy*

## **dauidlephillips**

*Freddy,*

*Thanks for all your Info, it has been quite informative for me and my family....*

***New Information added by me on February 2, 2013 at:***

***<http://forum.armyairforces.com/Mohawk-Chief-m229749.aspx#233241>***

***In reference to the previous threads:***

***<http://forum.armyairforces.com/Informaton-on-738th-squadronmy-father-was-a-navigator-m190404.aspx>***

***and***

***<http://forum.armyairforces.com/B24-tail-or-nose-turret-found-in-the-Adriatic-Sea-m181260.aspx>***

## **Freddy**

*Probably have been identified the coordinates of the real point of the Adriatic Sea in which, on December 9, 1944, was ditched the B-24 "Mohawk Chief" of the 738th BS.*

*In recent days I have received, from the British National Archives, the copy of some pages of the Operation record book of the R.A.F. 272 Squadron (Beaufighters Mk X).*

*I am currently inquiring about a 272 Sqn Beaufighter, also shot down on December 9, 1944 but crashed inland at about 7.2 miles from the coast.*

*The British report says that two aircraft of 272 Sqn had been sent to look for survivors of an unspecified aircraft that had ditched at coordinates 45° 35' N 13° 23' E.*

*The English crews, at about h. 11.00, reported: "**found dinghy with two people hanging on to it**".*

*As has already been said in one of the previous threads, we know that the sole survivor of the "Mohawk Chief", the bombardier 2nd Lt Thomas Webster Borden, although wounded, managed to get on the dinghy and then tried to pull on board also the navigator, 2nd Lt. Edwin R. Houck, who was also wounded and delirious. Unfortunately he couldn't do it because Houck lost consciousness, and was drowned. Houck is the only crew member still MIA.*

*If the British crews had been able to observe the two men in the water while trying to get on the raft, it means that the Mohawk Chief had sunk only a few minutes before the sighting and the coordinates specified should be those of the point where the B-24 was ditched.*

*Then, if any parts of the wreck still exist, they should be approximately in an area at 6.3 miles south of Grado and about 60/65 feet deep.*

*Note that on December 9, 1944, in this area of northern Italy only two planes were lost, the B-24 Mohawk Chief and the Beaufighter Mk. X NT971 of 272 Squadron RAF.*

*A research mission is planned to be carried out next spring using a boat equipped with Side Scan Sonar and Underwater R.O.V. in the hope that the remains of the aircraft are not already completely sunken in the mud of the seabed.*

*Freddy*

