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January 3, 2009

Mr. Tom Moore
69647 Camino De Las Brisas
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Dear Mr. Moore:

As promised, please find enclosed a copy of my report on the CNAC plane crash on Basalt Island in 1948. Both Mr. Tobias Wong and Mr. How Man Wong mentioned that your Association might like to receive a copy. I hope you find it interesting.

Sincerely,



David Pickerell

Basalt Island Crash Site Investigation

Introduction

On the afternoon of Tuesday, December 21, 1948, a regularly scheduled CNAC flight from Shanghai to Hong Kong went missing in bad weather. A search for the lost plane found that it had crashed on uninhabited Basalt Island, about 40 km from Hong Kong's Kai Tak Airport, leaving all 28 passengers and 7 crew members dead. One of those killed in this accident was Quentin Roosevelt, vice president of CNAC and grandson of US President Theodore Roosevelt. This plane crash—which occurred at a time of great turmoil in China, with many families fleeing to avoid the advancing Communist forces—also claimed the life of Paul Yung, scion of a prominent Shanghai business clan, whose younger brother Rong Yiren (榮毅仁) went on to become the founder of CITIC, the richest man in modern China, and Vice President of the People's Republic of China. Yet this Hong Kong plane crash—which claimed the lives of the grandson of a US president and the brother of a future Chinese vice president—is largely unknown today.

This modern archeological project began early this year when a family friend, Tobias Brown, mentioned that he had come across a list of air accidents in Hong Kong and that one had caught his attention, the 1948 crash on Basalt Island of a DC-4. Given that this is a remote and seldom visited island on the eastern edge of Hong Kong waters, we wondered whether evidence of the crash might still be on the island.

Given a strong interest in history and in exploring remote corners of Hong Kong, I thought this sounded like a fun potential project and so volunteered to do some research on the crash. While at first it was difficult to find much useful information about this long-forgotten event, in the end we managed to piece together far more information about this crash than anticipated, discovered that a number of famous people died in the incident, and—after two trips to the hard-to-access island—finally managed to identify the crash site and found parts of the plane and items which were on board. Perhaps most rewarding of all, we managed to locate several relatives of those killed in the crash and to provide them with previously unknown-to-them details of the incident. The purpose of this report is to summarize what we discovered during this project and to share it with anyone who has interest in this topic.

The Flight

CNAC plane XT-104 took off from Lughwa Airport in Shanghai and was scheduled to fly at an altitude of 8,000 feet over Wenchow (today Wenzhou), Foochow (Fuzhou), Amoy (Xiamen), and Swatow (Shantou) to Hong Kong. The plane took off at 9:32 am and had an estimated arrival time of 2:02 pm, although the flight plan showed an

anticipated flight time of four hours. In-flight messages were received from the plane at Wenchow, Foochow, and Amoy at 10:46 am, 11:42 am, and 12:17 pm. respectively. All three messages indicated that the plane was at 8,000 feet, and none of the messages gave any suggestion of a problem.

At 1:30 pm, the aircraft contacted the Hong Kong airport and reported that the plane was flying at 8,000 feet and was 80 – 100 miles northeast of Hong Kong, approximately half an hour away. The control tower gave the pilot permission to descend to 4,500 feet. This was the lowest acceptable height allowed for Hong Kong and was apparently advised because of poor weather conditions in the territory. The Duty Approach Control Officer at the airport said that at the same time he provided information on the local weather to the aircraft.

It would appear that the weather was very bad indeed, and poor visibility resulting from this lousy weather seems to be the likely cause of the crash. Another CNAC plane—XT-103—was due to land before XT-104, and at 1:00 pm the crew reported that they were still flying on instruments at an elevation of 300 feet and had decided to abort their approach and climb to a safer height. After reaching an elevation of 4,500 feet, XT-103 was instructed to divert to Canton (Guangzhou). Similarly, a Pan American Airways flight was diverted to Manila just 10 minutes later by the same Approach Control Officer. Thus two flights coming into Hong Kong in the hour prior to the accident were diverted to Canton due to poor weather.

That weather was an issue is also evidenced by the conversation between XT-104 and another CNAC flight (XT-106) flying approximately 13 minutes behind it. At about 1:55 pm the ill-fated XT-104 reported, “We have found a gap here and are going to have a look.” “Let me know how you make out,” requested XT-106. XT-104’s somewhat ominous response: “If I can let you know then I guess it will be alright.” It is unclear from the records whether this is the voice of Captain Charles Sundby or Flight Operator P.H. Kao; either way, it seems to have been the last message ever received from XT-104.

The Search

It turns out that XT-103, the earlier flight that had been diverted to Canton, found that the weather to the northwest of Hong Kong was much better and so decided to reattempt to land in Hong Kong, doing so successfully at 2:01 pm. At 2:05 pm, some three minutes after the estimated time of arrival, the control tower radioed XT-104 “in order to pass the information regarding the improved weather conditions to the North West and also to check that the aircraft was at 4,500 feet.” The Approach Controller could not establish contact and “suspected that the pilot of this aircraft had descended on his own initiative, below the level of the high hills that surround Hong Kong, therefore making it difficult for the radio to maintain contact.” He therefore contacted XT-106 (the flight approximately 13 minutes behind the missing XT-104) and asked them to make contact, but they too were unable to do so. The Amoy and Canton Air Traffic Centres were also contacted to see if they had any information on the flight, but they too had no information

on the missing plane. At this point, the Senior Air Traffic Control Officer at the Hong Kong Airport was notified that the plane was missing, although there is no record of how long it took for this report to be made.

According to the official accident report, "it was agreed that the weather was deteriorating too rapidly for successful search by flying boats." The Royal Air Force was asked to keep crews standing by in case the weather showed any improvement. At the same time, the Water Police and Chinese Maritime Customs were asked to contact their patrol boats located in eastern Hong Kong to request them to look for the missing plane. Other patrol boats were also asked to assist in the search.

It seems that CNAC pilots were more willing to brave the poor weather than those of the RAF, and a CNAC C-47 aircraft was given permission to take off at 4 pm to search the east side of Hong Kong for the missing plane. After 1¼ hours the search plane was forced to return to Kai Tak due to the rapidly deteriorating weather, but on return the pilot reported that he had seen what he suspected were the remains of the missing aircraft burning on a ridge near the entrance to Mirs Bay. This information was relayed to the Water Police who at 7:47 am the following morning reported that the downed aircraft had been located on Basalt Island and was still burning, 18 hours after the crash.

The Crash Site

The police finally landed on the north end of Basalt Island by small boat at 9:50 am on 22 December. After climbing to the top of the ridge and examining the wreckage on both sides of the ridge, it was soon apparent that the plane had been destroyed, with parts of the plane scattered over a wide area, and that there were no survivors.

According to newspaper reports at the time and the official accident report, the plane was heading from north to south and crashed into the north slope of Wan Tam Shan (穩盭山), the main peak on Basalt Island, at an elevation of about 350 feet, as evidenced by a large indentation. This indentation was just below the eastern ridge of the hill, and the official investigation concluded that the propellers were still turning when they hit the hillside and that the plane was climbing when it hit the hill. (The assumption is that the pilot suddenly saw the island looming before him and attempted to pull the plane up to clear the hill.) Upon impact the nose and a portion of the fuselage broke off and the cockpit crew and some passengers were thrown from the plane. At the same time, the right wing of the plane hit the hillside, as evidenced by a second indentation to the right of the first one and by the location of a nine-foot section of the right wing tip.

The rest of the plane essentially bounced off the impact point on the northern slope, carried on airborne over the ridge and landed again on the southern slope approximately 130 feet from the point of initial impact. The plane continued to slide down the southern slope before coming to a rest approximately 450 feet from the point of initial impact.

It would appear that the right fuel tanks burst into flames upon impact, with the result that the remainder of the main section of the aircraft was completely destroyed by fire and the south and east slopes of the hill suffered from extensive burns. Parts of the plane, including some engines and propellers, were found some distance from the wreck, again suggesting that the plane hit the hill with considerable speed. As reported by the South China Morning Post on December 23, 1948, "Bodies of the passengers and wreckage of the aircraft were strewn over an area of about half a square mile amongst the luggage, freight and mail, and the only things moving in the entire area were the carrion in the air and a wrist watch still going found on an arm at 1.20 pm." The paper also reported that 24 bodies were thrown clear of the fuselage and could be identified, with the remaining bodies presumably lying in the burned carcass of the aircraft. Quentin Roosevelt's body was not one of those identified.

The Passengers

There were 35 people on board XT-104, 28 passengers and 7 crew. All perished in the crash.

Of those on board the flight, the most famous was undoubtedly Quentin Roosevelt, grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt and Vice President of China National Airline Corporation, based in Shanghai. It is unclear whether Mr. Roosevelt's body was ever recovered. The China Mail reported on December 28, 1948 that 32 bodies had been brought from the island and were being kept in the Kowloon Mortuary and that one other body had been recovered, but that Mr. Roosevelt's body had not been found. The official accident report, however, lists Mr. Roosevelt as having been cremated at the Government Crematorium in Kowloon, although it is not clear whether this is accurate or not. Meanwhile, recent correspondence with Mr. Roosevelt's family reveals that they are not aware of his remains having been returned to the United States. It is also possible that his ashes were returned to Basalt Island and buried at the site of the memorial, but that is just speculation. It seems that the final resting spot of Mr. Roosevelt is unknown.

The other westerner on the flight was Mr. Charles Marinus Sundby, pilot of the plane. According to a website devoted to CNAC history, Sundby was from Copenhagen, Denmark and worked for CNAC from 1942 until the time of the crash in December, 1948. He had apparently flown an estimated 600 flights "over the hump" during World War II.

At the time of the incident, newspaper reports focused on Roosevelt and several well-known Chinese passengers:

Mr. Peng Hsueh-pei. Former Minister of Information.

Mr. Feng Yu-chen. Manager, Shanghai Bureau, Central News Agency and
Publisher, Shanghai Central Daily News.

Mr. P. L. Fang. Noted Chinese movie director.

It is believed that many of those on board were wealthy Chinese fleeing to Hong Kong. Shanghai in December, 1948 was in a period of considerable turmoil as the Communists continued to advance during the Chinese Revolution. Indeed, the China Mail on December 28, 1948 featured a photo of mounted police in Shanghai using their horses to disperse crowds of people who had stampeded banks in Shanghai several days earlier, with seven people killed in the melee. Meanwhile, the following day's paper reported that a total of 890 CNAC staff had been evacuated from Shanghai to Hong Kong, with many of them sleeping in temporary tents on open grounds in Kowloon.

Interestingly, a front page story in the China Mail on December 26, 1948 carried the headline "Large Amount of Jewellery Aboard CNAC Skymaster." The story claimed that a relative of one woman killed in the crash had revealed that the woman had been carrying three boxes full of jewelry which she was bringing to Hong Kong for safekeeping. The story went on to report that "Chinese Press reports said that a number of valuable diamonds were recovered from the hillside by the police after the crash." Similarly, in a statement released by Mr. A.J.R. Moss, Director of Civil Aviation, responding to criticism from newspapermen about "suppressing the liberty of the Press," Moss justified his reluctance to allow journalists free run of the crash site by the need to protect evidence. He also added, "In the case in point, it was known additionally that the plane had carried a quantity of valuable jewellery."

A complete list of passengers, extracted from the official accident report, is shown in Appendix I. It is interesting to note that no mention is made of Paul Yung, even though he was a well-known businessman and even though his wife was awaiting him at the airport. Background information on Quentin Roosevelt, Paul Yung, and Captain Sundby is given in Appendices II, III, and IV respectively.

Basalt Island

Basalt Island is an uninhabited island located in the central portion of eastern Hong Kong. It is found just to the east of Bluff Island, northwest of the Ninepin Group of islands, and south of Town Island and the High Island Reservoir. To the west is open sea.

Basalt is an oblong island, running from north to south, and is 1.6 km. (1 mile) long and 750 meters (just under one half mile) wide at the centre of the island. Basalt features a 554-foot tall peak—Wan Tam Shan (穩砵山)—near the centre of the island, with steep slopes running down the peak on all sides to the sea.

There is no sign of there having ever been any permanent dwellings on the island, although there is evidence that Basalt Island has been used occasionally in recent times by illegal immigrants in transit from China as a place to camp before moving on to Hong Kong proper. There is no pier on the island nor regular or irregular ferry service. No trails feature in any hiking guides to Hong Kong. It generally would appear to have been an uninhabited island for its entire existence, although leisure boats do occasionally park off the island on weekends and the surrounding waters are occasionally frequented by

divers attracted by the sea life. The shore of the island is generally very rocky, and one can only land on a small handful of beaches, which are generally covered with rocks rather than sand. Sai Kung, site of the nearest major public pier, is 14 km. (9 miles) away.

The Chinese name of Basalt Island is “火石洲”, which means “flint stone,” which can be found on the island.

The Aircraft

The ill-fated plane was a Douglas C54B-DC, manufactured in Santa Monica, California. The C-54 was the military version of a DC-4, nicknamed “Skymaster.”

The aircraft had been used by the United States Army Air Force during World War II and then sold as war surplus to the China National Aviation Corporation after the war. CNAC in turn hired Glen L. Martin Company of Baltimore, Maryland to overhaul the plane and to convert it to passenger use. Following modification, the 44-seat plane received a US Civil Aeronautics’ Certificate of Airworthiness and was delivered in China on February 12, 1946. CNAC placed the plane in service on regular domestic and international routes, and CNAC’s records showed that the plane had been regularly maintained and that no major problems had been reported.

It is not clear how old the plane was at the time of the crash. According to the official crash report, the airframe had seen 2,600.10 hours of flying time prior to conversion and a further 2,961.05 hours since conversion. Thus while we do not know how old the plane was, it does not seem to have experienced excessive flying time nor does it seem to have had any known major problems in the past. In any event, the first DC-4 was certified in 1939 and the military use C-54s only began production in 1942, so the plane could not have been that old.

The plane was powered by four Pratt and Whitney “Twin Wasp Type R.2000-11” engines. All four engines had been fitted to the craft within the three-month period prior to the crash. Two of the engines had seen less than 2,000 hours of service while the “oldest,” with 4,155.30 hours in service, had been overhauled just 311.35 service hours prior to the accident. Thus there is nothing in the records to indicate that the aircraft or its engines were extremely old, troubled, or poorly maintained.

What Caused the Crash?

As we have already seen, there is no indication that the plane had been suffering from mechanical problems, either prior to the flight or during this flight.

Fuel shortage can be ruled out. The flight plan shows that the plane took off with 1,708 American gallons of fuel, enough for a flight of approximately 8½ hours. The flight plan estimated that only 900 gallons would be needed for the flight, and the fierce

fire which occurred on impact suggests that there was plenty of fuel still on board. Meanwhile, the pilot (Sundby) was a very experienced one, being CNAC's senior DC-4 pilot and having had much experience landing in Hong Kong.

The most likely cause for the crash was simply the bad weather in Hong Kong, which, as we saw earlier, resulted in a number of other planes being diverted to nearby airports. The problem was clearly exacerbated by the fact that the wrong information was provided to Sundby and the flight crew about the bad weather in Hong Kong. The Flight Forecast Folder recovered from the aircraft indicated the flight forecast was filed 13½ hours before the plane was due to depart and therefore contained an out-of-date weather forecast. According to the official accident report, "This forecast does not include any of the information contained in the QFZ's ["Landing Forecasts Hong Kong"] originated at Hong Kong. The flight forecast appears to be extremely favorable and it is considered that the forecast conditions were very inaccurate, when ample time was available for the flight forecast to be amended." The implication is that the airport authorities in Shanghai were delinquent in not providing Sundby with the latest weather forecast from Hong Kong, which the Hong Kong authorities insist were sent to Shanghai (and acknowledged) 13 hours, 50 minutes and again 3 hours, 18 minutes before XT-104 took off.

The official report also notes that the Hong Kong airport made meteorological broadcasts every half hour during times of bad weather, but that they had no idea whether XT-104 had received any of these reports. (These weather reports originated from a lighthouse keeper on Waglan Island, who used a radio phone to pass them to Kai Tak's control tower, after which they were broadcast every hour in good weather and every half hour in bad weather.) As there were no other weather ground observers around Hong Kong, the control tower also relied on observations from planes in the vicinity and passed these on to other aircraft. The Approach Controller at the Hong Kong airport says that he notified aircraft in the area of the poor weather based on the report he had received from XT-103 but that he was unable to pass this information to XT-104 because "contact having been lost with XT-104." This does seem to be an excuse from the control tower given that XT-103 had been diverted nearly an hour before contact was lost with XT-104. Indeed, as we have already seen, the control tower attempted to contact XT-104 at 2:05 pm to inform them that XT-103 had successfully landed in Hong Kong and that the weather had improved to the northeast. This message was never received, presumably because XT-104 was flying low and the signal was blocked by Hong Kong's hills or because the plane had already crashed by the time the information was broadcast. Either way, it would appear that the crew of XT-104 never received a clear appraisal of just how bad the weather was in Hong Kong.

Our Experience

Having heard about this crash from Mr. Brown, I began my search in the usual place—the internet. Perhaps unsurprisingly for an event which occurred so long before the internet was invented, the usual search engines threw up few references to this air accident, although the fact that the crash had occurred was confirmed. But this internet

search did turn up one reference which was very significant and which motivated me to keep digging: President Theodore Roosevelt's grandson, Quentin Roosevelt, was on board the ill-fated plane and died in the crash. The most useful reference was a New York Times article from December 22, 1948 on Roosevelt's death, a clipping of which was posted on a CNAC veterans' site. The same website also identified the pilot as Charles Sundby, a Danish national, while another website suggested that the crash site had been marked with a cairn.

Armed with this limited information plus a metal detector, various implements for cutting back brush and probing in the dirt, and plenty of drinking water, Mr. Brown and I set out to visit Basalt Island on June 2, 2008 with Mr. Charlie Smith, on whose sailboat ("Rapid Transit") we traveled to reach the island. We were also accompanied by various family members. After surveying the island, which is one mile long and which has a shoreline which is almost entirely rocky cliff, we identified a small, rocky beach at the north end of the island where we could land. This seemed a good location as the doomed plane had been flying from north to south and so presumably crashed into the north face of the island's sole peak.

We landed on the beach and worked our way up the hill to a large bluff which sits about halfway between our landing spot and the peak. On this bluff we discovered a monument, about 4 - 5 feet tall, with Roosevelt's name on it. As nearly 60 years have passed since the monument was erected and as it bears the full force of the elements on this exposed bluff, the wording was not at all easy to read, but after much effort we determined that the west side of the monument read:

QUENTIN ROOSEVELT
1919 - 1948
AMERICAN
WISE GOOD AND BRAVE
THUS GLADLY FREE
THE BEST OF LIFE TO LIVE
AND MOST OF IT TO SEE

The eastern side of the monument also has an inscription, in Chinese, which consists primarily of his name and his years of birth and death. About 70 meters to the east of the Roosevelt monument was another monument, a tall, round, pole-shaped stone memorial with Chinese characters carved into the face which were nearly indistinguishable, in part due to the heavy sun overhead. (The inscription became more readable later in the day when the sun hit it from another angle.) After much effort we determined that the inscription on the pole commemorated someone named Rong Yixin (榮一心). The pole-like monument had a small cement elephant placed before it. Reckoning that these two monuments marked the location of the crash, we went to work looking for evidence of the plane. We theorized that the plane must have hit the north or northwest face of the hill and looked for any obvious major indentations or large pieces of metal. At one point we looked up at the hillside and saw what looked like a large piece of metal reflecting the sunlight. Sure that we had found a major piece of the plane, we worked our way through

the thick brush to the location where we thought we had seen the reflection only to discover the sun had been reflecting off of a large shiny tarpaulin which had been used to create a tent for some illegal immigrants who had apparently been camping there. We found bedding and some food cans which suggested that they had probably been there recently. But there was no sign of any plane. Returning to the area around the two monuments, we surveyed a large swath of land with the metal detector. We did find a number of small pieces of metal which we believe came from the plane, but they were quite small and caused us to feel that we were somehow in the wrong place. The island was clearly uninhabited, except perhaps for the occasional illegal immigrant passing through on his way from China to the main parts of Hong Kong, and it was hard to believe that a messy plane crash nearly 60 years earlier had been so thoroughly cleaned up. With limited success and with thirst and hunger beginning to set in on this particularly hot day, we prepared to return to the boat.

Just before doing so, however, we on the spur of the moment decided that we should trim the grass growing all around the pole-like monument, which we thought was probably a Chinese grave. We knew that Chinese place great importance on “grave sweeping,” and this particular grave clearly had not been looked after for a very long time. In trimming the grass, we discovered that there was a large stone tablet under the grass, placed in the ground. This led to further tidying, and we discovered that the stone was inscribed with many Chinese characters. Unfortunately, they were not legible, partly due to age and partly due to the hot sun overhead making it impossible to make out the characters. My sister then had the bright idea of scattering dirt all over the tablet then dusting the dirt off the flat surface, with the hope that the dirt which fell in the cracks would be visible and enable us to read the inscription. It was a good idea but it did not really work until we added water to make the dirt in the cracks turn to a darker, muddy color, at which point the characters suddenly became quite legible. And as we read the characters we discovered that this monument recorded the death of another passenger on the same flight, a Mr. Rong Yiren (榮伊仁), from Wuxi, who was a representative of the Shanghai textile industry on a business trip to Hong Kong at the time of the accident. The inscription also recorded that Mr. Rong had been 37 years old at the time of the crash and that he was the third son of someone named Rong Desheng (榮德生). Further exploration revealed a shorter/smaller inscription in English on a small section of the tablet located to the east side of the pole.

This created considerable excitement, for Rong Yiren (same spelling in English, but with the second character being different in Chinese) was the name of the founder of CITIC and was believed to have been the richest man in China. He had also been Vice President of China in the 1990s under President Jiang Zemin. While this was clearly not that Rong Yiren—his death had received global attention two years earlier and he had been buried in his native Wuxi—it was immediately obvious that this was probably a relative. It was simply too coincidental that both were surnamed Rong, both were named Yiren, both were from Wuxi, and both were in the textile trade. Awhile later, once on the boat again, my father called a friend of his who had worked at CITIC and determined that Rong Desheng (the victim’s father) was the father of the famous Rong Yiren and that this

monument therefore presumably honored the brother of the man who became Vice President of China.

This unexpected discovery made the entire outing worth the effort, but for the next few days we could not help but feel that we had been looking in the wrong place. This seemed odd, for the southbound plane must have crashed on the north face of the mountain, and the two monuments would logically have been located at the crash site. And so we set out to research the crash in more detail.

The next stop was the Central Library in Causeway Bay, where I looked through microfilms of old newspapers for the days and weeks following the crash. This proved to be quite useful, with several news stories appearing in the South China Morning Post and China Mail in late 1948 and early 1949. A couple of the articles had photographs of the crash site, which of course could prove very valuable in trying to locate the site. Unfortunately, a photocopy of a microfilm of an old newspaper inevitably ends up being much lower quality than the original photograph, and most of these photocopies showed nothing more than black and white patches, the black apparently being the hillside (or islands) and the white being either the ocean or the sky. Several attempts to reconcile the intersection of the black/white patches (presumably the shoreline) with the shape of the island (using Google Earth) failed as there was not even a slight match. But as best I could tell the plane crash seemed to be on the same bluff we had been searching some days earlier.

I asked the library whether they had any original copies of these old newspapers. Unfortunately, they only had the microfilm copies. I then went to the Public Records Office in Kwun Tong to search the government archives for any records of the crash. Unfortunately, the government records turned out to be quite difficult to search and all enquiries of the archivists regarding the plane crash led to confusing negative answers. In the process, however, I discovered that the Public Records Office had original copies of old newspapers from the time of the crash, and so I paged copies of both English and Chinese newspapers from around that time. While I was not allowed to make any photocopies of these newspapers, the photos were clearer than the microfilm and I was able to gain a clearer feeling for what the area of the crash site looked like.

Separately, Mr. Brown approached the Hong Kong government and requested that the official report of the government investigation of the crash be declassified as the event had occurred nearly 60 years ago. The government agreed to do so, and before long we had a copy of the official report.

We then sat down to carefully read both the report and the various newspaper stories. In the process, we discovered that we had indeed been looking in the wrong place. We were right that the plane had hit the north side of the peak, but it had done so near the top of the ridge and hence had bounced over the ridgeline and landed on the other side, coming to rest some 450 feet from the point of impact. Of course, we immediately resolved to go back out to Basalt Island to look in the correct place.

I then visited the government's Survey and Mapping Office in North Point and discovered that the Hong Kong government had regularly organized for aerial surveys of Hong Kong to be done. Unfortunately there had been a survey done not long before the crash, but that of course would not have been any use. But a low-flying, high-quality survey was done in December, 1956, and aided by a couple of very helpful clerks I managed to find a clear photo of Basalt Island taken by the flying cameraman. (A copy, labeled "Secret", is shown in Appendix V.) Even more helpfully, the Survey Office staff offered to arrange for the section of the photograph where we speculated the crash site to be to be blown up eight times in size. We waited with great anticipation for the blown up photo to be ready; unfortunately when I collected it there was no sign of any airplane wreck, although there was one stretch which had considerably less brush cover and therefore perhaps suffered in the post-crash fire.

And so, on August 25, Mr. Brown and I, accompanied again by family members, set out once again for Basalt Island. This time it proved much more difficult to get there. We went to the piers at the coastal town of Sai Kung and tried to rent a boat to take us to Basalt Island, but none of the boat rental people or fishermen were willing to go so far. After nearly an hour of speaking to people up and down the waterfront we finally found a couple willing to take us out to Basalt Island, a 1.5 hour journey by sampan. And so we returned to the island and disembarked again on the north shore. This time the hike was more arduous, for we needed to hike all the way to the ridge near the top of the peak, with much of the way being chest-high in brush. This time we had a much better idea of where to look, and after some searching we found a bluff on the south side of the peak which looked rather like the spot shown in the newspaper photographs. More importantly, we took out the black-and-white blotched photocopies of the newspaper photos and discovered that the shoreline implied by the blotches perfectly matched the shoreline below us, with the shapes of inlets, small islands, and large boulders matching the shading from the photocopies. It truly felt like a "Eureka" moment!

And so we set out with the metal detector to hunt for items. We searched over a wide area and found one zone which was particularly rich in remnants from the crash. After some light hunting in the dirt we found a considerable number of bits from the plane, mainly metal pieces of various shapes and metals. Even without the metal detector we began to find remnants of XT-104, including pieces of glass (presumably windshield or passenger windows), some of which had changed shape as a result of intense heat. We also found many fragments of fine Chinese porcelain. At first we thought they might be from the china service on the plane, but later we found that it was much too nice for this and that it was probably valuable porcelain which was being carried by a passenger wishing to get some assets out of Shanghai. In fact, after cleaning up the porcelain pieces, we discovered an inscription on the bottom of one which indicates that it was made during the reign of the Guangxu Emperor in the Qing (Ching) Dynasty.

But the most interesting find was a metal piece which, after cleaning, turned out to be the serial number plate from the magneto of one of the engines. We found this piece near the top of the mountain, not far from the initial point of impact. While somewhat damaged after the crash and after six decades of exposure to the elements, the plate was

in remarkably good shape and the words inscribed on it are still legible. The plate identified the magneto as having been made by the Scintilla Magneto Division of Bendix Aviation Corporation, and subsequent research showed that this plate came from exactly the type of magneto used in this type of DC-4. This confirmed beyond doubt that the debris which we found was from the missing aircraft.

Some examples of the fragments found in our search are shown in the photographs in Appendix VI of this report, while some of the photographs from our two site visits are shown in Appendix VII.

Conclusions

It would seem that this was a plane crash which never should have happened. The crew of XT104 were provided with an outdated weather forecast for Hong Kong by the airport in Shanghai, and this forecast was never amended even though more up-to-date forecasts had been sent to Shanghai. Similarly, two other planes had been diverted from landing at Kai Tak Airport in the hour prior to XT-104's estimated arrival time due to bad weather. One cannot help but wonder why the control tower did not similarly divert XT-104.

It is also surprising to find that a wreck of some historical significance could go uninvestigated in such a small, densely-populated place as Hong Kong for all of these years. The fact that Basalt Island is uninhabited and rarely visited certainly helps in this regard; the fact that the crash site is on the southern side of the ridge rather than the more logical northern side probably also helped to keep its location unknown for so long.

Despite being long forgotten, the crash of XT-104 on its way to Hong Kong six decades ago has left its small mark on history. It's hard to know whether the two most famous people on board the flight might have played a significant role in the world had they lived. With a little imagination, one can envision a situation where these two—one a patriotic American working hard to assist the KMT, the other with a younger brother who would become vice president of the PRC—might have found themselves working together or even against each other if they had lived. What is for sure is that the death of these two passengers—as well as of all of the others on the flight—changed the lives of many individuals who grew up missing a parent, spouse, child or sibling.

I have learned a great deal from this project, and I hope that those with an interest in Hong Kong history and family members of those who died in this accident will find the facts and conclusions in this report of at least a little bit of interest.

David A. Pickerell
19 November 2007

Appendix I: List of Passengers on Lost Plane

The following list of passengers on the ill-fated flight is extracted from the official government accident report:

Disposal of Remains of Victims of the C.N.A.C. (Basalt Island) Disaster.			
1.	Frank Chang	M 32	Buried at No.7 Cemetery
2.	Chen Pei Chiao	M 22	Buried Tsun Wan Permanent Cem.
3.	Jack Au	M 24	Buried Chinese Christn - Pokfulam.
4.	Chu May	F 14	To be buried Chinese Christn - Pokfulam.
5.	Chu Ping	F 18	To be buried Chinese Christn. - Pokfulam.
6.	Yang Hai Lin	M 53	Deposited Tung Wah mortuary
7.	Wong Shun Kwei	M 37	- do -
8.	Lo Ta min	M 2	- do -
9.	Loh Tao Wei shen	F 26	- do -
10.	Loh Chang Nien	M 31	- do -
11.	Chen Yi	M 45	- do -
12.	Chang Sho	M 42	- do -
13.	Leo Teh Chuen	M 40	- do -
14.	Hsu Cheng Yu	M Adult	- do -
15.	Chiu Kwok Wah	M 35	- do -
16.	Chen Tung Soh Fun	F 36	- do -
17.	Shing Dah Yu	M 37	- do -
18.	Fang Pei Ling	M 41	- do -
19.	Feng Yu Tsan	M 43	Cremated. Govt. Crem. (K.)
20.	Wong Hu Ching Nan	F 26	- do -
21.	Wong Kang shik	M 3	- do -
22.	Unknown	F Adult	- do -
23.	Unknown	? ?	- do -
24.	Unknown	F ?	- do -
25.	Quentin Roosevelt	M 29	- do -
26.	Feng Hsueh Pei	M 51	- do -
27.	Wu Chu Hung Yun	F 34	- do -
28.	Wu Chu Tsai Yun	F 35	- do -
29.	Unknown	? ?	Cremated. Govt. Crem. (K.L.W.)
30.	Woo chiu Ngan	M 52	Cremated. Hindu Crematorium
31.	Lo Lieng Kien	M 72	Cremated. Hindu Crematorium
32.	Capt. C.M. Sunby	M 40	- do -
33.	Lo Lieng Kien	F 63	- do -
34.	Han Ming Yee	F 50	- do -
35.	Wang Moh Ching	M 33	Buried at No.7 Cemetery.

Appendix II: Quentin Roosevelt

Quentin Roosevelt was born on November 4, 1918 at the Roosevelt family home in Oyster Bay, the youngest of four children.

His father was Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. (“Ted”), son of the former US President, “Rough Rider” Theodore Roosevelt. Ted had no less an illustrious career than his father, serving in World War I, becoming one of the founders of the American Legion, running for the governorship of New York, and becoming Governor of Puerto Rico and Governor General of the Philippines. Rejoining the army following the outbreak of World War II, Ted became a Brigadier General and was the only general to participate in the first amphibious assault of Normandy in 1944, his leadership on that occasion winning him the prestigious Congressional Medal of Honor. Ted died of heart attack on the battlefield in Normandy just five weeks after D-Day.

Quentin was named after his uncle, Ted’s brother Quentin, who was killed in action in 1918 during World War I. With a father, grandfather and uncle all known for their bravery and service to country, it was almost inevitable that young Quentin would lead an exciting life.

Like his father, Quentin was a graduate of Harvard, graduating in 1941. In 1939 he visited Lijiang in China and formed a collection of over 1,000 Nazi manuscripts, which featured a rare type of writing used by a remote tribal group in China. These manuscripts were the subject of his undergraduate thesis, and upon graduation he donated the manuscripts to the Library of Congress, where they still today form the backbone of the Library’s Nazi manuscript collection.

On graduation, Roosevelt followed in the family footsteps by joining the US Army. He served in North Africa, where in 1943 he was wounded, and he participated with his father in the Normandy invasion on June 6, 1944, making them the only father-son pair to land at Normandy on D-Day.

Just two months earlier, on April 12, 1944, he married Francis Webb of Kansas City, an American Red Cross worker. The wedding occurred at the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Blandford, England, with his father serving as best man and with hundreds of his fellow officers and local townspeople in attendance. For his bravery in action, he was awarded several medals.

Following the end of the war and his discharge from the Army, Roosevelt joined Pan American Airways in 1946. He was posted to Shanghai where he became a Vice President and Director of China National Aviation Corporation, China’s largest airline, which was owned jointly by Pan American Airways and the Chinese Government. CNAC crews had been famous for flying supplies “over the Hump” to landlocked Nationalist troops in China, and during Roosevelt’s period with CNAC the airline was very much still assisting the Nationalists. As a result, it is assumed that Quentin

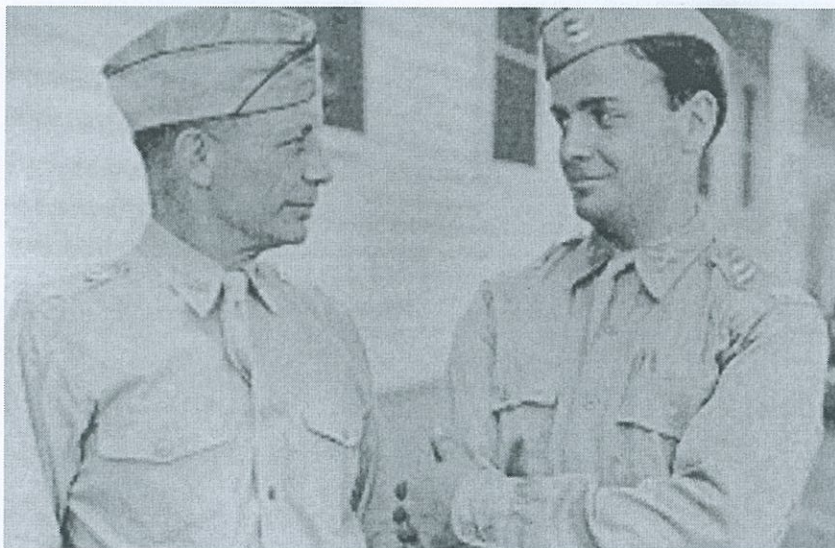
Roosevelt was probably working for the CIA. His brother Cornelius, who was based in Hong Kong at the same time, had served in the Office of Naval Research (which later became part of the CIA) during World War II, and he subsequently spent a long career with the Agency, retiring in 1973.

The China Mail on December 24, 1948 ran a front page photograph which they said was believed to be the last photo taken of Roosevelt. It showed him aboard a CNAC plane watching the loading of wounded Nationalist soldiers at Hsuehchow shortly before the city fell to the Communists in early December.

An article in the South China Morning Post on December 23, 1948, with a Shanghai byline, proclaims Roosevelt to be “modest, unassuming and co-operative, he was easily the most popular air executive in China, particularly with the Press.” The article also says that he “was no armchair air executive” and that “he flew every type of mission the CNAC airline, of which he was Vice-President and Director, was required to fly.” The article also notes that Quentin’s brother, Cornelius, was living at the time in Hong Kong where he was head of the William Hunt Company’s Hong Kong office. He promptly flew to Shanghai to look after Quentin’s family.

At the time of his death, Quentin Roosevelt was father to three young daughters. One daughter, Susan, became a professor at Harvard specializing in ancient Chinese civilization and law and served as First Lady of Massachusetts from 1991 – 1997. (Continuing the family tradition, she has a son named Quentin.) Another daughter, Anna, also followed an academic career, becoming a professor of archeology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Like her father and grandfather, she has shown a tendency towards excitement and exploration, becoming a preeminent expert in Amazonian archeology and discover of cave paintings over 10,000 years old. It is not known what happened to the third daughter.

Photograph of Quentin Roosevelt from New York Times, December 22, 1948. The photo is a file photo from 1943.



Theodore "Ted" Roosevelt, Jr. with his son Quentin Roosevelt.
(Source: Matinecock Masonic Historical Society website)

Appendix III: Paul E. Z. Yung

Paul Yung (pronounced “Rong”) was the third son of famed industrialist Rong Desheng. Rong Desheng and his older brother, Rong Zongjing, founded a flourishing flour- and cotton-milling empire during the early decades of the 20th century and were known in China as the “cotton tycoons and flour kings.” The family had its roots in Wuxi but based themselves in Shanghai, China’s commercial hub.

Paul Yung was born in 1912 in Wuxi, the third of seven sons. Because of the family textile interests, Paul was sent to the Lowell Textile Institute in Lowell, Massachusetts (now amalgamated into the University of Massachusetts Lowell). He then returned to China where he joined the Shenxin (or Sung-Sing) Cotton Mills in Wuxi.

Yung’s body was never recovered from the crash. The English inscription on the memorial on Basalt Island closes with the words, “though his body is in ashes his spirit remains forever.” From a Chinese-language biography of Yung’s brother, we know that Paul Yung was also known as “Yixin” (“one heart”), and this explained why the characters on the pole-like memorial on Basalt Island were inscribed “榮一心先生罹難紀念” (“Rong Yixin Memorial”).

According to an essay at www.dorothyung.com, Yung’s wife, who was awaiting him at the airport in Hong Kong, was pregnant with her second son at the time of the crash. In 1952 Mrs. Yung and her family moved to Sao Paulo, Brazil. Daughter Dorothy eventually settled in the United States, where she is today a successful painter. It is not known what has happened to the first son; the second son, Wellington, is a businessman in Brazil.

One can only imagine what might have happened to Paul Yung had he not taken that fateful flight. His younger brother, Rong Yiren, ended up running the family’s 24 mills by the end of the 1940s. Following the Chinese Revolution, Rong decided to stay in China rather than flee like so many other industrialists, and he was appointed Vice Mayor of Shanghai in 1957 and Vice Minister of Textile Industry in 1959. During the Cultural Revolution he was denounced and beaten because of his bourgeois background, but when Deng Xiaoping came to power, he knew Rong’s industrial knowledge and management abilities were needed by China, and Rong was rehabilitated. In 1979 Rong set up CITIC, China’s first state-owned entrepreneurial enterprise. Nicknamed “The Red Capitalist”, Rong was reckoned to be the richest man in China at the time of his death. In 1993, he was appointed Vice President of China under President Jiang Zemin, largely a ceremonial post. His son, Larry Yung, is Chairman of CITIC Pacific and is a prominent Hong Kong-based businessman.

Paul Yung’s eldest brother, Rong Weiren, died before him, and his sixth brother, Rong Jiren, died of illness at age 26, also in 1948.

Appendix IV: Charles M. Sundby, Pilot

Charles Marinus Sundby—known as Charlie—was the pilot of the ill-fated CNAC flight which crashed on Basalt Island.

Born on November 15, 1908 in Denmark, Sundby began life as a seaman with the merchant marine before attending Copenhagen's Navigation School, at which he passed his "officer examination" in October, 1933 and his "ship's leader examination" in April, 1934. Sundby then joined the Danish navy and was trained as a pilot, earning his pilot's certificate in December, 1935. While in the Navy Air Service, Sundby spent the summers of 1936 and 1937 as a pilot of planes which were conducting aerial surveys of Greenland for Denmark's Geodesic Institute. Then in 1938 he was one of two Danish pilots in an expedition to determine whether Pearyland in northern Greenland was an island or a peninsula and whether there were islands to the northeast of Greenland.

On the night of April 16, 1940, just a week after the German invasion of Norway, Sundby and his fellow officer Kaj Birksted fled by boat from Denmark to Sweden to join the Norwegian forces fighting against the Germans. The Norwegians put the pair in touch with the British, who engaged them as liaison officers on the HMS Wolverine. Evacuated from Norway with the British, Sundby and Birksted applied to join the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve but were turned down. With their visas running out, the pair then signed up to work on a British ship, the M/S Tasmania, with Sundby serving as a third officer. Sundby and Birksted left London on June 10, 1940 on the M/S Tasmania, bound for Burma via Cape Town, South Africa. In Cape Town they volunteered to join the South African Air Force, but they were given an inconclusive response. Then, en route to Calcutta, they received a telegram on August 7, 1940 informing them that they had been accepted provisionally into the South African Air Force. On return to Cape Town, another telegram was awaiting them, this one informing them that they had been accepted to join the Royal Norwegian Air Force. They sailed with M/S Tasmania to Cuba, where they signed off the ship on October 16, 1940. After transiting Miami, they arrived in Toronto, where the Royal Norwegian Air Force was setting up a training camp known as "Little Norway."

For reasons which are not clear, Sundby ended up joining the Royal Canadian Air Force rather than the Norwegian squad, first as a flight instructor and later, in 1941 and early 1942, as a pilot ferrying bombers from the United States to Britain. (Birksted, by the way, remained with the Norwegian unit and ended up the best known, most successful and highest ranking Danish pilot in the RAF in World War II. The highly decorated pilot ended up as a Wing Commander in the RAF and played an important role in the formation of the Royal Danish Air Force after the war. He passed away in 1996.)

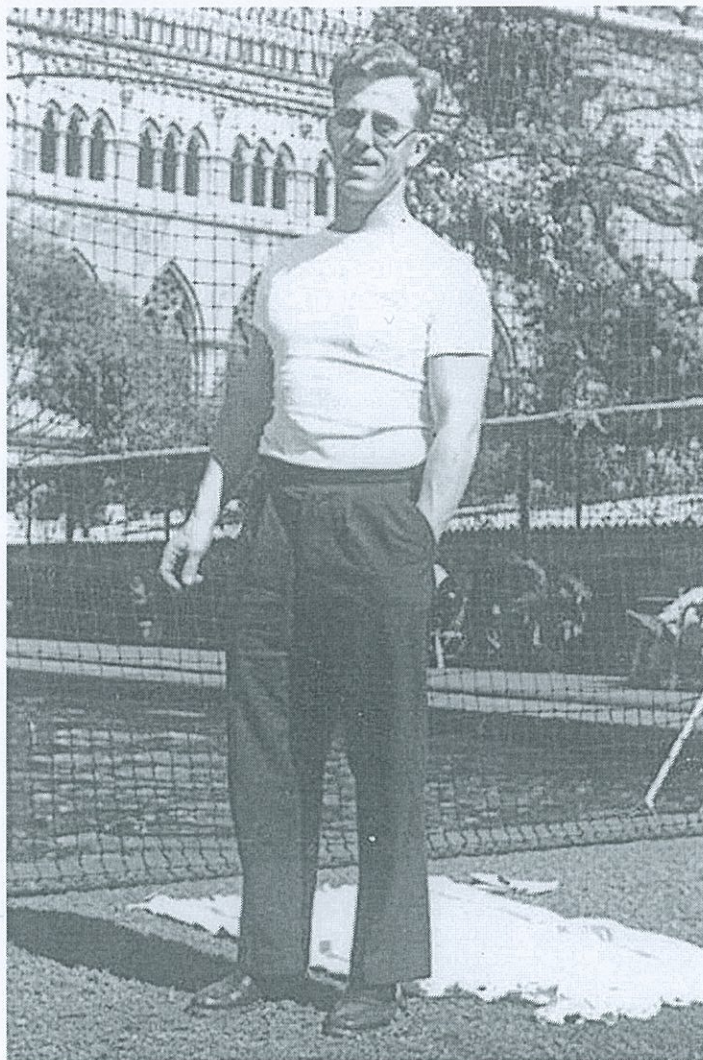
Sundby finished flying for the Ferry Command on October 23, 1942, after which he signed up soon thereafter (on November 4, 1942) to join the China National Aviation Corporation as a captain. By December 3 he was in Calcutta, and on December 11, 1942 he rode his first flight "over the hump." After 6 training flights as a co-pilot, Sundby was

elevated to first pilot and fully qualified by CNAC on December 27, 1942. At one point Sundby estimated that he had flown approximately 600 flights over the Himalayas to deliver Chinese soldiers to Kunming. When the war ended, Sundby stayed on with CNAC. He returned on leave to Denmark in December 1945 and January, 1946 to pick up his wife, after which the couple took up residence in Shanghai.

In a letter to his brother in mid-December, 1948, Sundby said that the political situation in Shanghai was such that the company had advised employees to evacuate their families. Sundby's wife was packing and preparing to leave on a flight to San Francisco which Sundby would pilot. Before going on that trip, however, he had one more assignment: to pilot the ill-fated CNAC flight to Hong Kong on December 21, 1948.

According to the official incident report, Sundby was given periodic route, instrument, aircraft, emergency, and procedure checks. He was the senior foreign captain on DC-4 aircraft for CNAC and had flown regularly in and out of Hong Kong since 1945. Up until the time of his death, he had completed 7,931.09 hours of flying time, 5,931.09 of which were for CNAC. Of his CNAC flying hours, 3,120.09 hours were on DC-3 aircraft, 1,251.00 hours were on C-46 aircraft, and 1,560.00 hours were on DC-4 aircraft. He held Chinese Civil Aeronautics Administration license number 10035.

At the time of his death, Charles Sundby was 39 years old. A photo of Sundby at the Royal Calcutta Swimming Club appears on the CNAC website; a copy is shown below.



Charlie Sundby at the Royal Calcutta Swimming Club.
Undated. Downloaded from CNAC.org website. Photo supplied by Jim Dalby.

Appendix V: 1956 Photo of Basalt Island

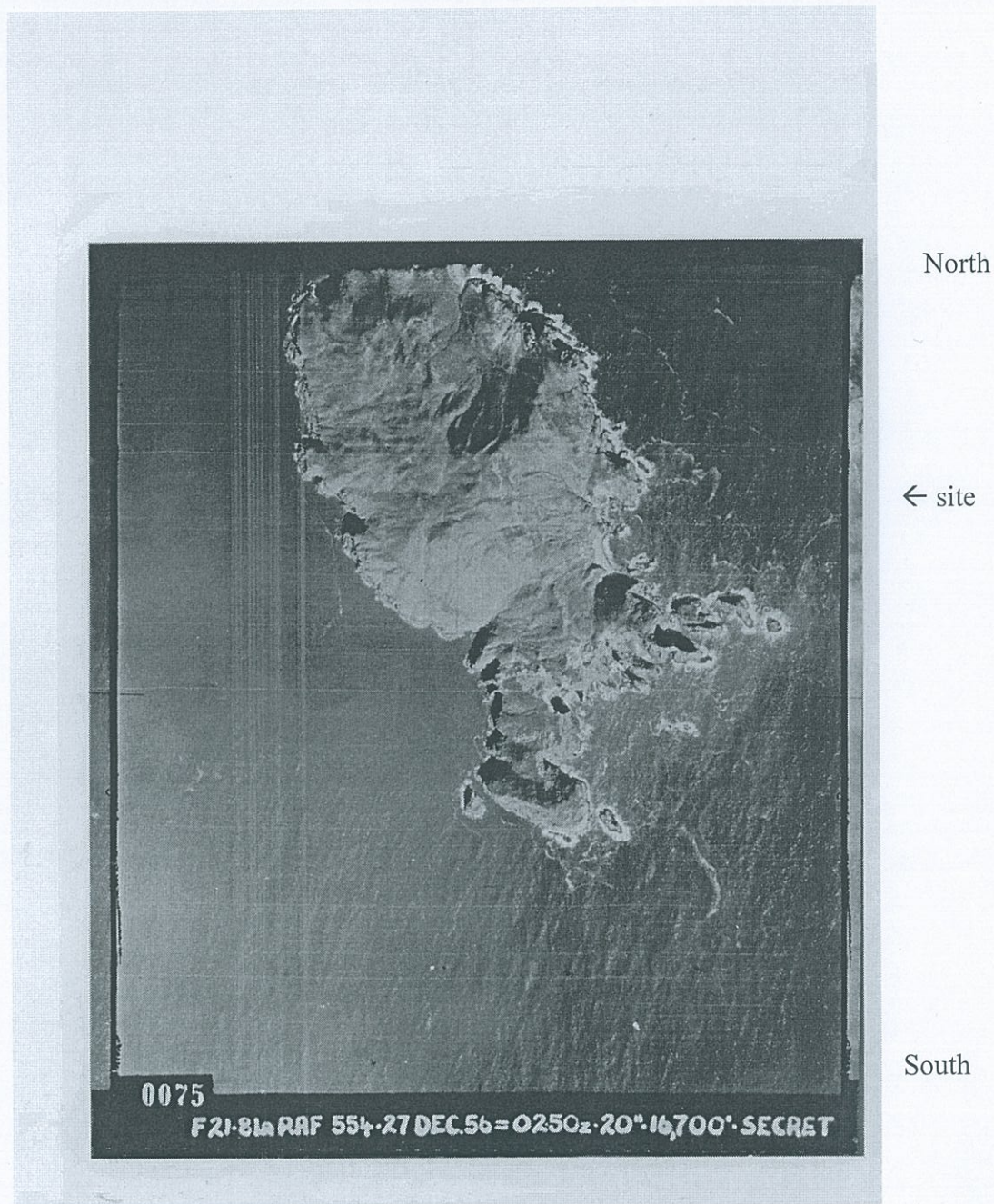


Photo of Basalt Island taken by RAF aerial survey in December, 1956. (Reduced in size.) Obtained from Hong Kong's Survey and Mapping Office. A 10" x 10" blowup (8 times) of the area where the plane was believed to have crashed failed to show any indication of the accident. In any event, it turned out to be the right spot and is at the intersection of the two "arrows" on the right and bottom edges.

Appendix VI: Items Recovered from Crash Site



Some of the remnants from the plane found at the site of the crash.





Bendix magneto tag from one of the engines.
Found near the western end of the ridge

Appendix VII: Photographs From Our Outings to Basalt Island



View of Basalt Island from the southwest. June 2, 2007. The left side of the photo is the northern end of the island; the right side of the photo is the southern end.



Beach at north end of Basalt Island, where we landed.



View of north side of the hill. Plane initially hit near the top of the ridge and then bounced over to the other side. The two monuments are located on the bluff in the middle of this photo, which is where we did our initial search.



Surveying with metal detector on the north side of the hill, near the monuments, on the first visit.



View of Basalt Island from the northern end. The high point is the hilltop.



View of the Yung monument from the Roosevelt monument, both on the northern bluff.



Roosevelt monument as seen from the west.



Close up.



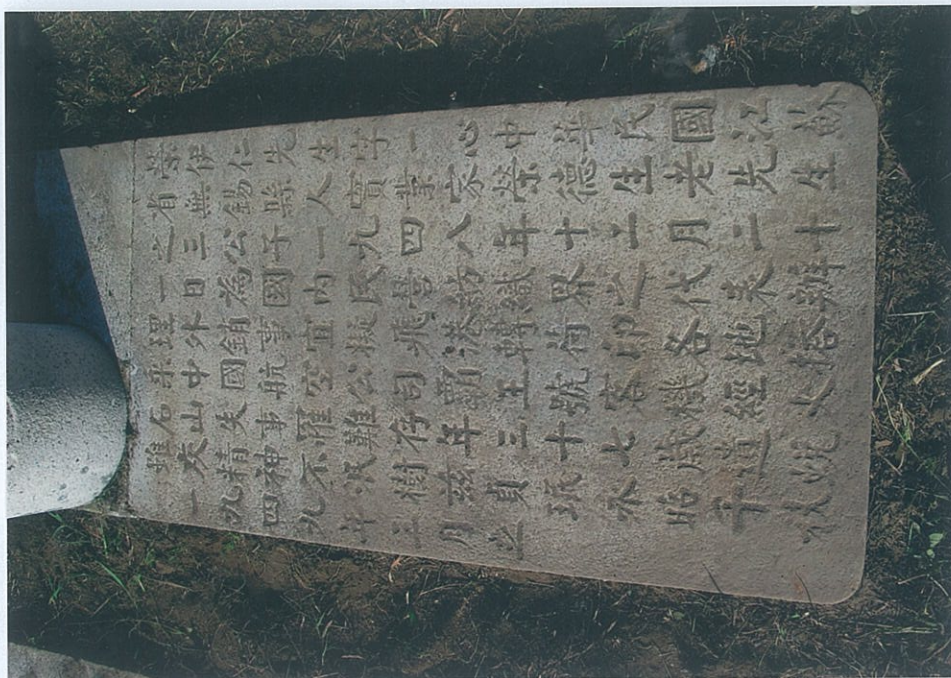
Other (eastern) side of Roosevelt monument.



Roosevelt monument as seen from the Yung monument.



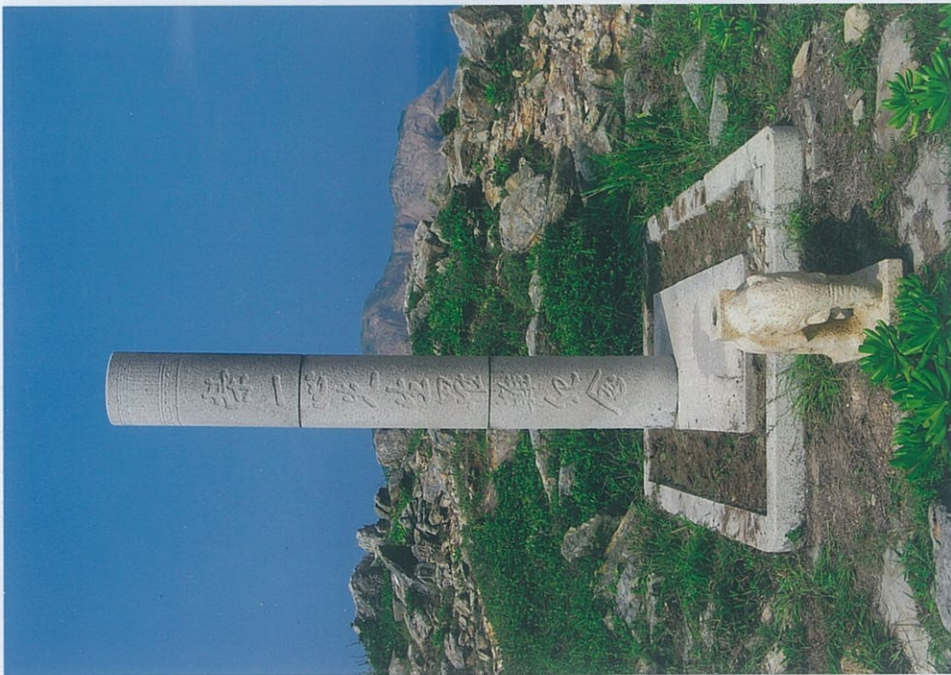
Author at Paul Yung monument.



Inscription found below grass in Paul Yung monument. (Dirt and water added to make characters legible.)



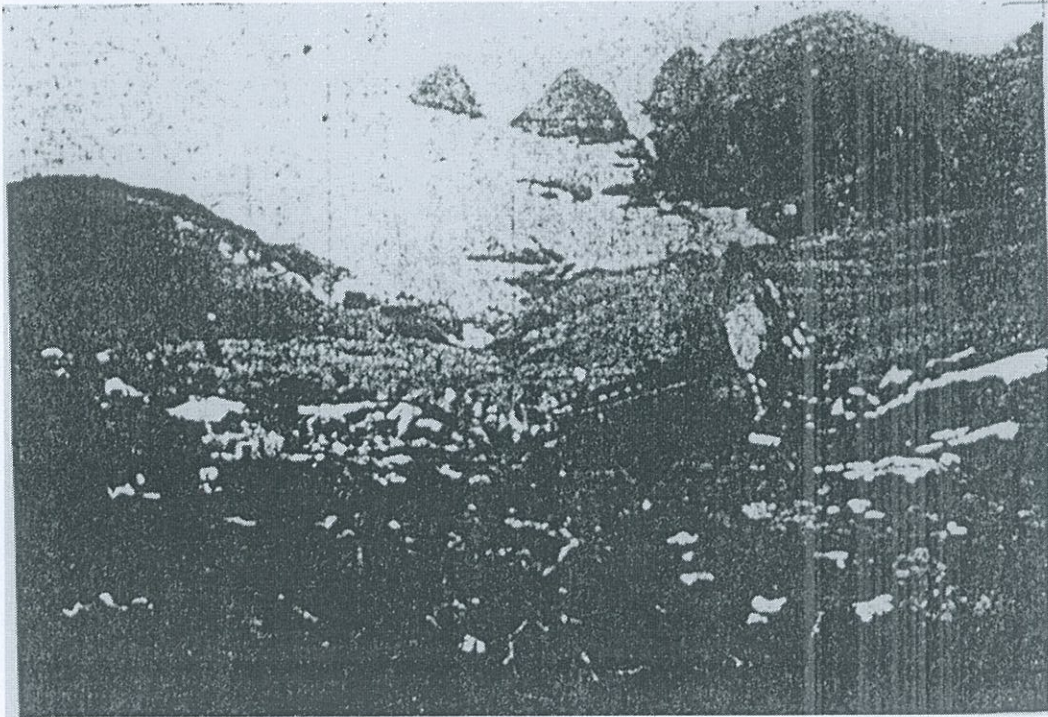
English-language inscription found at backside of pole.



Paul Yung memorial with elephant in front.



Eureka! When we saw this view, we knew we were in the right place. Compare the shoreline with the outline in the photocopy from the 1948 newspaper below. The tail of the plane can be seen in the right-center of the newspaper photo.





The main area where plane remnants were found is on this slope.



The sampan we took out to the island on our second visit.