The Search for Flight 419

The Accident

A group of F51s left Wold-Chaimberlain Field in St. Paul on June 27,1954 at 1345 hours for a training mission consisting of general formation flying, operating between Stillwater and Forest Lake, MN. Early in the training flight, one of the planes developed a problem with coolant and returned back to base, which left two F51s – Flight 419 (piloted by Major Louis Walton) and Flight 2135 (piloted by Major Jack Chandler). The pair went through several airborne maneuvers without any incident, operating between 8,000 and 10,000 feet. At some point, Flight 419 made an unexpected evasive maneuver, causing a significant loss in altitude. Flight 419 was now at an altitude of only about 4000 feet and, again the plane executed the same violent evasive maneuver. At that point, Chandler called to Walton on the radio, warning him of the danger of his action. Chandler believed that Flight 419 was still under Major Walton's control, but he then he lost direct line of sight of Flight 419. It then later appeared that Major Walton that Walton lost control of his F51 and struck the water in Lake 3 (southern most) lake in Forest Lake) off the eastern shore.

Chandler did not see a parachute deploy from Major Walton's plane. He circled the location of the crash and radioed the control tower to report the incident.

As part of the investigation, several eyewitness reports from residents in the area were taken.

F-51

The Military Investigation

Immediately after the crash, the military conducted a full investigation, primarily to locate the plane and to determine the cause of the crash. After an extensive search, a few small pieces of wreckage were found along with partial human remains attributed to Major Walton. No major pieces of wreckage were ever discovered.

Trident Sciences has a copy of the military's report which outlines their search, including eyewitness reports, and that also summarizes their findings.

Major Walton's remains are interred at Fort Snelling National Cemetery.

Trident Sciences Initial Research

Trident Sciences got involved with this project after hearing anecdotal stories of a military plane crash in Forest Lake from the "diving community". Although many had heard the story and many recreational divers had attempted to find the wreck, nothing of note had ever been found.

During our research, a newspaper article had been sourced from the local Forest Lake newspaper.

FL man puts facts to story

Warren Parsons spent 2 years researching 1954 crash of P-51 Mustang in Forest Lake

CLIFF BUCHAN
NEWS EDITOR

Warren Parsons heard the stories from the day he moved to Forest Lake in 1968. There were stories and tales of the airplane in the lake and the pilot's body which had never been recovered.

Three decades later — after years of hearing the stories — Parsons has put fact and fiction to rest with a two-year study of what happened over Forest Lake on Sunday, June 27, 1954.

For years, Parsons, now 49, knew one thing. A U.S. Air Force Reserve pilot on a training mission had been killed when his P-51 Mustang had crashed in Third Lake. Nearly 50 years later Parsons has pieced together many of the pieces of the story, but like military officials who investigated the accident, can not explain what caused the crash of Major Louis M. Walton's plane.

The calm waters of the northeast shore of Third Lake today provide no trace of the events that took place near Shadyland Point 48 years ago today.

FACTS FROM 1954

Major Walton was 31 on that fateful day in 1954, just three days shy of his 32nd birthday. He was a World War II veteran who flew B-17 bombing missions over Germany from bases in England.

He had joined the Air Force Reserves while living in Minnesota. The Walton family, which included three children ranging in age from 8 to 4, lived in St. Anthony Park. He had married his high school sweetheart from White Bear Lake prior to the start of World War II.

It was a routine training weekend mission for Walton's squadron which left Wold Chamberlain Airport at 1 p.m. that Sunday afternoon. In less than two hours, Walton's plane would vanish in the murky waters of Third Lake on the Forest Lake chain.

CRAWFORD AUTEY PARSONS

Accident information documents found by Parsons give a glimpse to Walton's final hours of life.

But the differing accounts in 1954, coupled with the change of time and recollection of individuals, have likely contributed to the mystery that would follow the crash.

By 1968 when Parsons moved here as a 15-year-old, the stories captured his attention.

The testimony of Walton's wingmate on June 27, 1954 provides one account. According to 1st Lt. Albert J. Greffenius the two P-51 Mustangs were flying high altitude "in-trail" maneuvers when something happened to Walton's plane.

Lt. Greffenius said in accident reports Walton's plane suddenly went into a steep dive and hit the lake water at a high rate of speed with a "faint cloud of smoke" the only sign from the air. After going into the dive, Greffenius said he believed Walton's plane was "out of control" and "flounder-

PLANE—SEE PAGE 12

FL council, ma[…] grants pay hik[…]

JESSICA FOSTER
STAFF WRITER

The Forest Lake City Council Monday night gave themselves a raise.

The raise, which has been in discussion for several meetings, had to be set prior to the election due to statute. The raise will go into effect January 1, 2003.

The council, on a 3-2 vote, approve a $1000 yearly increase for the city council and a $1500 yearly increase for the mayor. This is the first pay increase in four years.

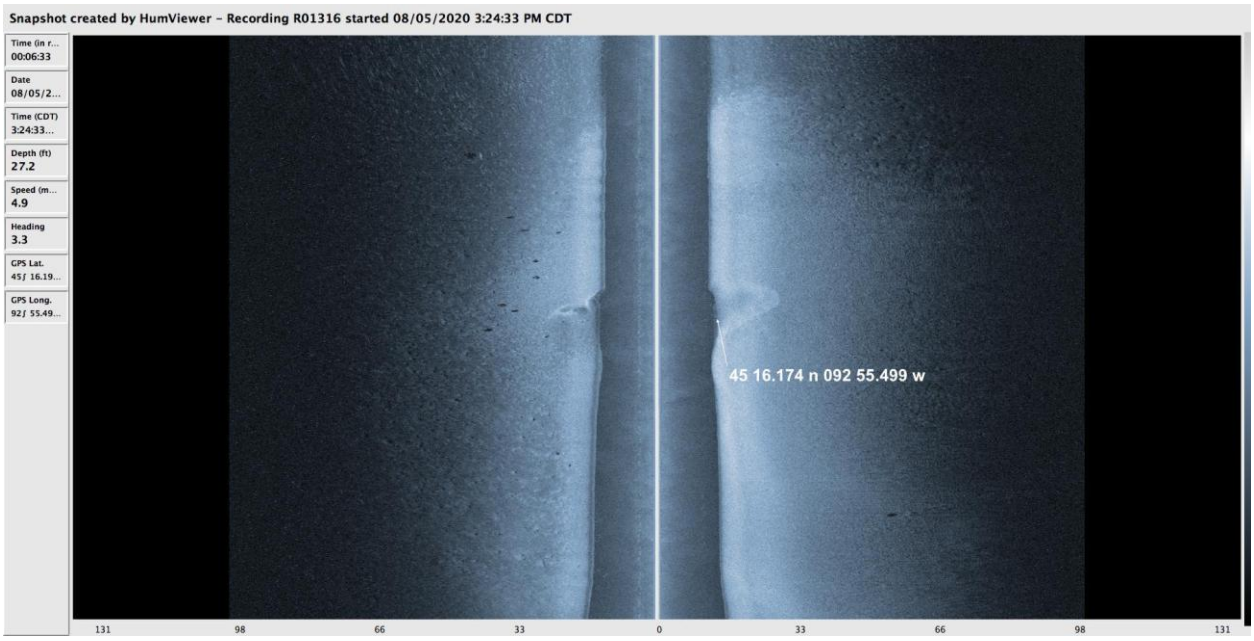
The council discussed other possibilities for compensation including a stipend for meetings above and beyond regular city council meetings.

Councilman Bruce Carlson suggested $70 per meeting would be appropriate while Councilman Tom Lynch thought $55 was a better number though he did prefer straight salary.

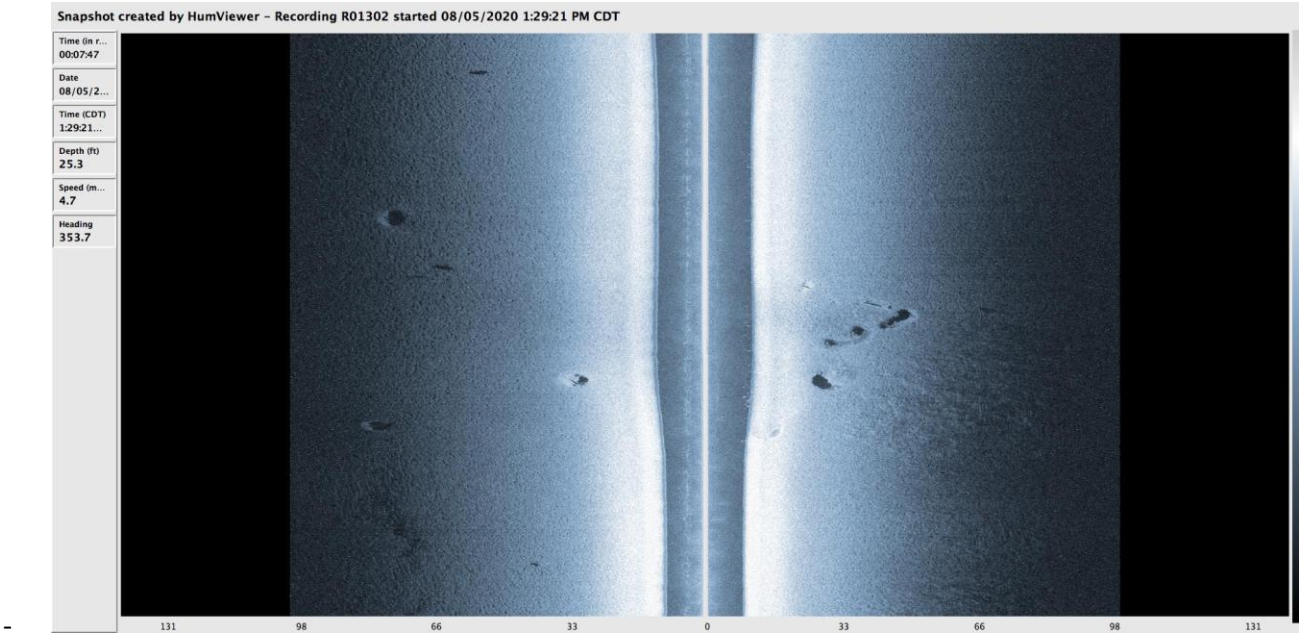
"In all fairness we should have stipends for any thing over regular council meetings," Carlson said.

The news article gave us some background information and gave us a starting place for conducting a search.

Working with Maritime Heritage Minnesota, an underwater side scan survey of Forest Lake, including crash site, was conducted. Several interesting anomalies were located and cataloged for further investigation.



The most promising anomaly is shown on the sonar image below. It gave the appearance of an aircraft fuselage as well as some debris that might have been associated with the crash.



Trident Sciences ROV investigations

Using the information from the sonar study, Trident Sciences conducted two separate cruises on 8/22/20 and 9/11/20. We used our ROV to search the most promising anomaly sites to see if we could record video/photo evidence of the crash site.

The first cruise did not yield any interesting findings.

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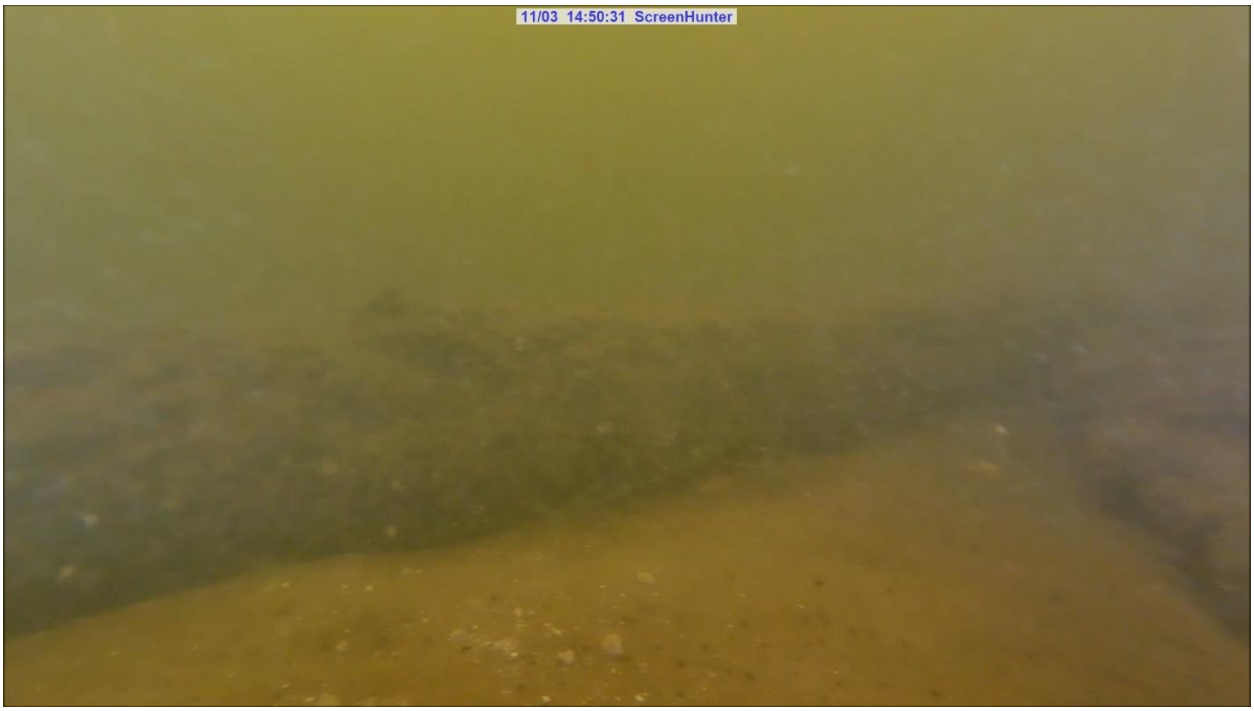
On our second cruise, we were able to capture interesting images of Anomaly 42a. These images showed unidentified structure / objects that did not appear to be “natural” in origin.



MHM / Trident Sciences Diving Investigations

As part of an overall survey of Forest Lake, MHM/Trident Sciences conducted diving operations over 3 days to investigate several “anomalies” that were identified during the side scan sonar work.

Several wrecks were identified, including Anomaly 16, which turned out to be a wooden boat wreck.

The focus on finding the plane centered around a couple of the anomalies that were identified during the side scan sonar work as well as the subsequent work done by Trident Sciences during the ROV cruises. These anomalies were slightly outside the area searched at the time of the crash – the theory being that if the plane was not found during the Air Force's search, that the plane may have crashed elsewhere.

First attempt on 10/6/20

Two dives were made on this cruise.

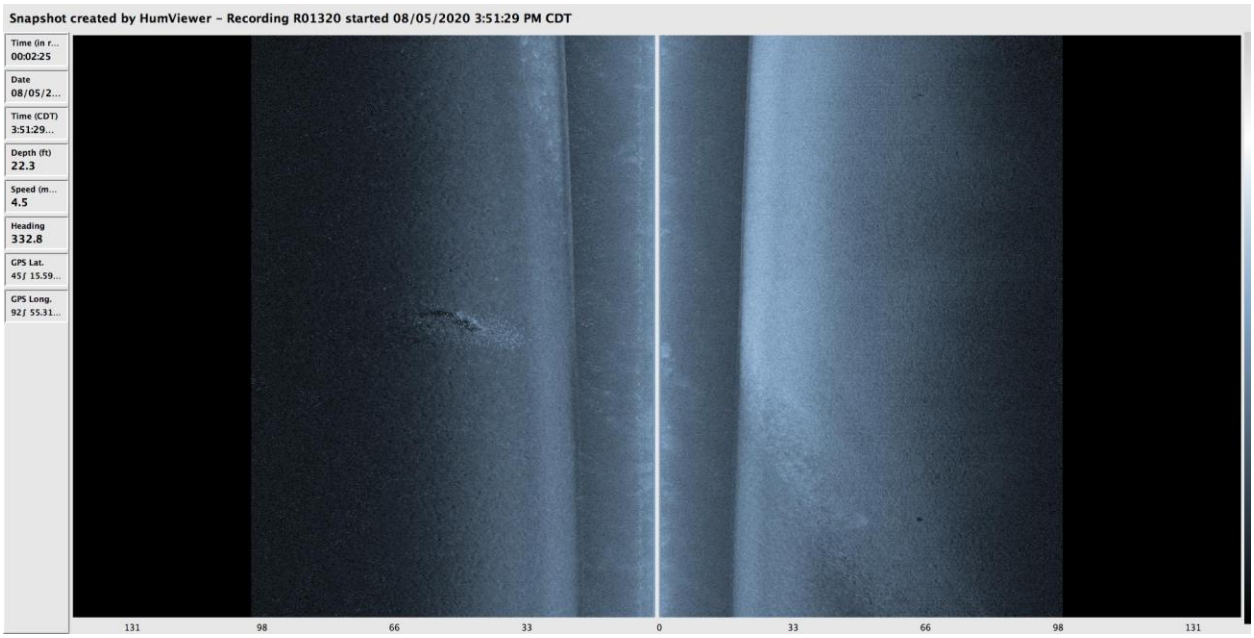
- Dove on Anomaly 42a – determined to be sunken trees and clay formations
- Dove on Anomaly 42d – determined to be an aluminum boarding ladder from a boat

Second attempt by MHM – 10/13/20

Two mores dives were made on this cruise.

- Dove on Anomaly 44 – nothing found
- Dove on Anomaly A16 – inconclusive – nothing found

One additional anomaly (A20) was not investigated during the diving portion of the investigation, but MHM did capture an interesting sonar image that suggests some additional work should probably be done on this site.



Summary / Conclusion

So where is Flight 419?

It is highly likely that the plane wreckage may be located outside the designated “crash area”. Airplanes that crash into water can glide underwater for quite a distance beyond the point of entry.

We also noted the high level of inconsistency in the eyewitness reports in the military crash summary. Instead of helping to pinpoint a specific crash site, the reports raise the possibility that the wreckage may be well outside the area being investigated.

The prevailing theory (and the one put forth by the military researchers) is that the plane buried itself into the silty bottom when it crashed. If this is the case, finding the wreckage may be difficult using sonar and diving operations. An investigation should be conducted scanning the projected crash site using a magnetometer, which would be able to detect large ferrous metal objects (such as the plane’s engine) that are buried beneath the silty bottom.

Additional side scan sonar work may also yield other possibilities.