

Buchenberg History Booklets

No. 1

July 18, 1944

**Air Battle over
Buchenberg**

**Local History Association of
Buchenberg, a registered association**

July 18, 1944
Air Battle over Buchenberg

by
Willi Heuberger

Documentation

Publisher:

Local History Association of Buchenberg, a registered association

Compilation: Erhard Ott
Technical assistance: Tobias Würzner

Cover illustration: Anni Käser, contemporary witness

Publication: July 2004

Available at:

Local History Association of Buchenberg, a registered association
of the Local History Museum on Eschacher St.

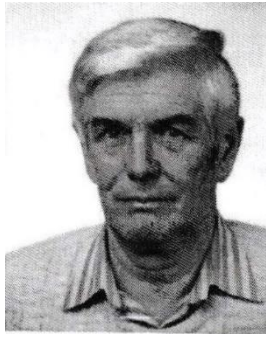
Open on Sunday from 2 – 4 o'clock,
and the Bär drugstore

DIN 5 collectors' file cases available in specialty shops

2nd edition (unchanged), 2006

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Printing: Allgäuprokura, 86807 Buchloe



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Born 1924 in Kempten.

Apprenticeship as an aircraft engine mechanic
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Munich.

Flight Training Regiment 71
in Fels am Wagram.

Frontline duty with the
Field Maintenance Unit III./40 in the
southern sector of the East Front.

Technical and military
course for non-commissioned officers in Munich.

As an engine mechanic non-commissioned officer with
Group II of Night Fighter Wing (*Nachtjagdgeschwader*) 5
and Group III of Night Fighter Wing 6.

After the end of the war until his
retirement in the year 1986,

a locomotive engineer with the
German Federal Railway.

Lives in Kempten.

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Introduction

The “History Booklets” are meant to initiate examinations into our Buchenberg history. It is the intention of the publisher to issue these papers at irregular intervals and on temporally different topics with the goal of someday being able to hold our rich Buchenberg past in our hands in the form of a chronicle.

That “July 18, 1944 – Air Battle over Buchenberg” is being put together as the first booklet just now is solely due to the fact that this year is the 60th anniversary of this event. In 1998, when the Local History Association of Buchenberg had a memorial plaque installed on our war memorial in the cemetery to commemorate this event and especially the victims of this event, the thought of publishing an account of all the connections that ultimately led to that air battle had not yet been born.

Three years later, the local museum association of Ehrwald in Tirol likewise erected a monument. In the public park of this village, it has since commemorated a similar air battle that played out so terribly there two weeks later, on August 3, 1944. At the same time, the association published the brochure “August 3, 1944,” in which the events of this air battle were reviewed. For us, this brochure was the trigger for the present work. Our member, Mr. Willi Heuberger, took advantage of the opportunity to bring the results of his years of research to the public in the present form. For that, he deserves the gratitude of us all.

Foreword

In this brochure, an account is given of probably the greatest air battle over German soil in the final phase of the Second World War. The author researched in German and American archives, questioned both German as well as American eyewitnesses or combatants. Despite that, no claim to completeness nor to accuracy can be made. For example, when comparing materials from German and American archives, differences can be detected throughout. As a rule, personal reports are likewise subjective by nature, and the long time span between this event and the present may contribute to the fact that the final inconsistencies could not be resolved. This, however, does no harm to the work in total. With this documentation, the reader will find himself at the end stage of the Second World War.

Even though, for the most part, only the events over the fields of Buchenberg are dealt with in the present booklet, it will certainly be clear to everyone that this air battle had far-reaching significance: it was one further step into the final phase of the war, and there weren't only American soldiers among those killed in action – even if this was the case in the limited area of Buchenberg. May this booklet be dedicated first and foremost to all the soldiers killed in this air battle and their survivors.

Published on the 60th anniversary of the
"Air Battle over Buchenberg."
Buchenberg, July 18, 2004

Erhard Ott

How it all began...

Triggering moment for the research on this historical event was undoubtedly the following report in the Allgäu Newspaper (*Allgäuer Zeitung*):

“Allgäu Newspaper,” Friday, June 16, 1978
Kempten and Environs, page 30



The bomber propeller alone, which was discovered in the bog near Schwarzerd together with the almost complete nine-cylinder engine, is extremely heavy.



Found in the Schwarzerd peat works

A Battered Bomber Engine Awakens Bad Memories of War

Wreckage comes from a “Flying Fortress” that crashed in 1944

BUCHENBERG/SCHWARZERD len – The battered engine of a heavy American bomber, which workers found in a peat bank in Schwarzerd on Wednesday, has awakened bad memories of war days: Exactly 34 years ago, in June of 1944, a group of four-engine American bombers were attacked by German fighter planes over the western part of the old district of Kempten. At least three of the heavy machines crashed. 24 U.S. airmen were later buried in Buchenberg. On Monday, specialists from the U.S. Air Force in Frankfurt want to inspect the bomber engine which was preserved in the bog. In addition, the grounds of the Schwarzerd peat works are to be searched for possible explosive devices or additional wreckage.

Already in the summer of last year, little pieces of wreckage had been found again and again on the grounds of Patzer Brothers Ltd. in Schwarzerd while cutting peat. Now, on Wednesday, the excavator uncovered the almost complete bomber engine along with a propellor. The peat, in which the extremely heavy monster was buried three meters deep, had preserved the remnant of war for 34 years. With no trace of rust, even little screws can be loosened without the slightest effort; rubber seals are as pliable as they were decades ago. And even the adhesive labels of the Hamilton propeller manufacturing firm in Ohio are almost undamaged.

Based on the first examinations, the engine most likely comes from a B-17 bomber, known as the “Flying Fortress.” The large formation of bombers that appeared over the old district of Kempten in June of 1944 probably consisted primarily of these heavy machines. Josef Adler, former mayor of Buchenberg, was an eyewitness when the bombers were attacked by German fighter planes. Adler: “One of the bombers exploded while still in the air, two others crashed in flames. And then we saw several parachutes in the sky.”

According to Josef Adler’s information, two bombers were smashed to pieces on the ground in Steckenried and in Schwarzerd. Parts of the third machine set a farmstead in Einöde on fire. Adler: “In the following days, we buried 24 Americans near the cemetery wall. They were reinterred in a war cemetery in 1945.”

The time before July 18, 1944

The air observation post on the Buchenberg

For the sake of completeness and a better understanding of the situation at that time, may its own place be devoted to the air observation post on the Buchenberg.

As early as April of 1935, Pastor Max Frommknecht approved building a listening pit and dugout on the Buchenberg, which was church property. (See p. 9.) The Buchenberg thereby became part of a team of 22 other air observation posts on the various hilltops between the Lech and Lake Constance. (See p. 13.) Enemy flight movements were to be recognized as early as possible and the information passed on to the nearest military airfield so that fighters were able to take off from there – in our case, Memmingen – to take defensive action. This is what also happened on July 18, 1944.

The Buchenberg observation post was subsequently changed. While it was originally a covered pit, fortified by an embankment and thereby simultaneously camouflaged,



Buchenberg, den 29, April 1935.

B e t r e f f : Genehmigung zur Errichtung einer Horchgrube
und eines Unterstandes auf dem Buchenberge.

Der Unterzeichnete erklärt hiemit sein Einverständnis dahin, dass auf den auf dem Buchenberge gelegenen Grundstücken der hiesigen Pfarrpfünde, die für die hiesige Flugwache benötigten Anlagen - Horchgrube und Unterstand - errichtet werden.

Die Sicherung gegen Unfälle nach § 836, 837 B. G. B. übernimmt die hiesige Flugwache, bezw. deren vorgesetzte Behörde.

M. Frommknacht, Pastor

Buchenberg, April 29, 1935.

Subject: Approval for building a listening pit and dugout on the Buchenberg.

The undersigned hereby declares his consent to the necessary facilities - listening pit and dugout - being built for the local air observation post on lands of the local pastor's benefice situated on the Buchenberg.

The responsibility for safeguarding against accidents, pursuant to paragraphs 836-837 of the Civil Code, is assumed by the local air observation post or its higher authority.

M. Frommknacht, pastor.

it then developed into a relatively simple hut, already with a tower,



and finally, around 1942, into a solid structure with electricity and telephone connection.



The air observation post was occupied around the clock by Buchenberg men who performed their military duty here and thus had the good fortune not to be called to the front. There were also young women who, as air observation post helpers, had to do their service there. Since they were not locals, they lived with Liebherr, later the “Sonne” inn (burned down in 1967, current village park).



After the war, on July 3, 1945, the air observation post burned down. The Moroccans (French occupying force) are said to have been those responsible for this fire.

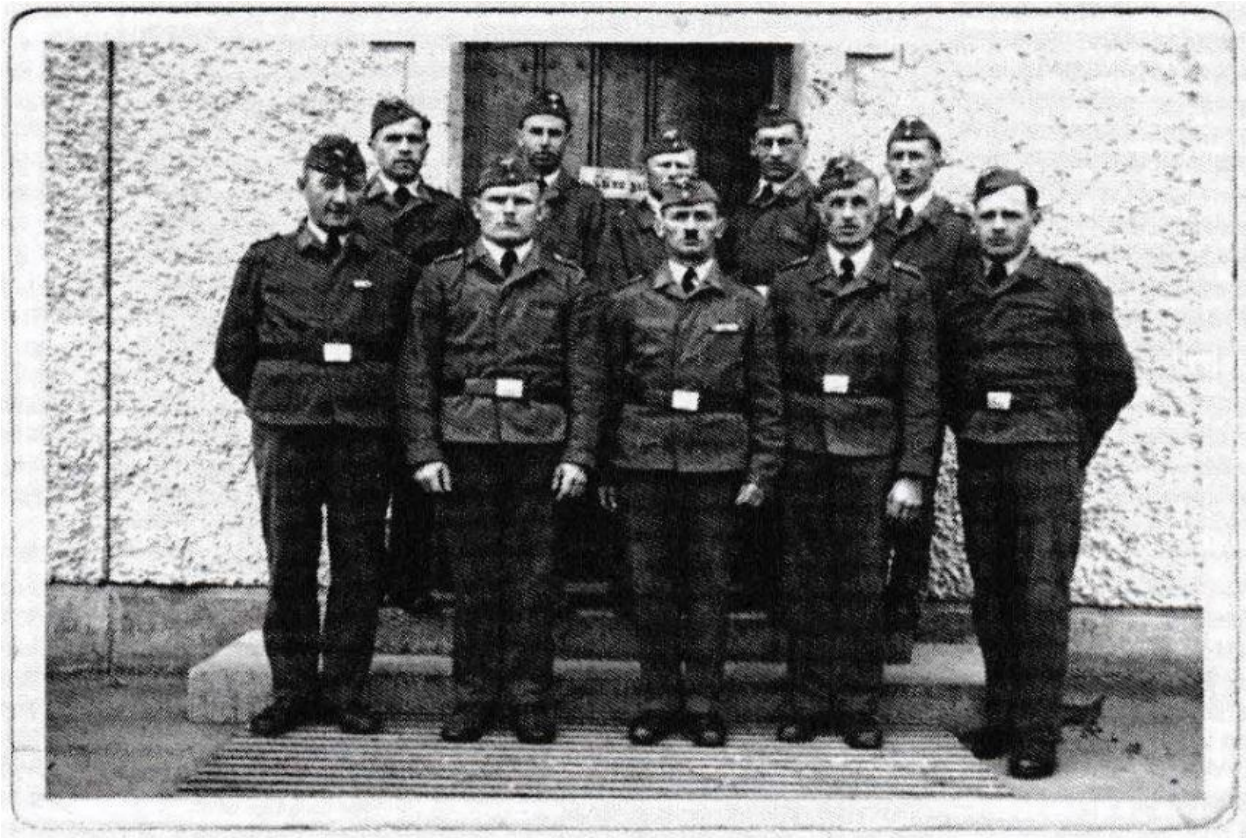
The site of this air observation post was located between the ski lift exit and the Folk Costume Association’s cross.

Buchenberg air observation post personnel, 1939, on the occasion of a training course:

Front row, from left: Eduard Haslach, Josef Grimm, Johann Seif, Ludwig Holzer, Xaver Hagg,

Back row, from left: Andreas Rieser, Wilhelm Glötter, Wilhelm Geist Weinharz, Wilhelm Diet,
Felix Vogler,

Sergeant Ludwig Schön is missing.



Luftwachen im Bereich des Flugm. Res. Komp. 11/7 Kempten

1	Hauptmannsgreuth
2	Roßhaupten
3	Hopferau
4	Nesselwang
5	Nebelhorn
6	Oberjoch
7	Knottenried
8	Buchenberg
9	Grünten
10	Wiederhofen
11	Spullersee
12	Bartholomäberg
13	Muttersberg
14	Thüringerberg
15	Viktorsberg
16	Dornbirn
17	Pfänder
18	Oberreitnau
19	Scheidegg
20	Simmerberg
21	Wiesbadener Hütte
22	Straßburger Hütte
23	Warth (Lech)

Schädler

Air observation posts in the area of the Aircraft Reporting Reserve Company (*Flugmelde-Reserve-Kompanie*) 11/7 Kempten.

Kempten	1	Hauptmannsgreuth
“	2	Roßhaupten
“	3	Hopferau
“	4	Nesselwang
“	5	Nebelhorn
“	6	Oberjoch
“	7	Knottenried
“	8	Buchenberg
“	9	Grünten
“	10	Wiederhofen
“	11	Spullersee
“	12	Bartholomäberg
“	13	Muttersberg
“	14	Thüringerberg
“	15	Viktorsberg
“	16	Dornbirn
“	17	Pfänder
“	18	Oberreitnau
“	19	Scheidegg
“	20	Simmerberg
“	21	Wiesbadener Hütte
“	22	Straßburger Hütte
“	23	Warth (Lech)

Schädler

Germany finds itself in the 5th year of war.

On June 6, 1944, the Allies land in Normandy. One day earlier, American troops conquer Rome. Indian, New Zealand, French and Polish armed forces occupy Monte Cassino on May 18, 1944.

Air supremacy was long lost. The 8th U.S. Air Force, stationed in England, was tied down in Normandy and further north in France. Thus, the 15th U.S. Air Force, located in Italy, had to carry out attacks on targets in Southern Germany. This 15th U.S. Air Force was already firmly established in Southern Italy since the end of October of 1943. Since the beginning of December of 1943, this 15th U.S. Air Force had established itself in Foggia. No German attacks hindered this. The Führer's order was to only attack harbors and shipping targets. There were no longer any suitable planes available, as far as quantity was concerned. Also, for this very reason, the airspace over German territory was only weakly secured.

According to air reconnaissance of the Americans:

The activity at the Memmingen airfield has increased. One recognizes 50 to 70 Bf 110s and Me 410s, which stood not very far apart, with modern camouflage painting. These [facilities] were being used for repairs and for assembling airplanes. Thus, this discovery made the airfield one of the most important targets of the opposing air force.

The intention to eliminate the assault group (*Sturmgruppe*) on the ground with a bombing raid had been announced a few days earlier over the Armed Forces' radio station "Calais." However, it is by no means certain that the relocation of the assault group from Illesheim to Memmingen, which had occurred in the meantime,

was already known on the Allied side, but rather it can more likely be assumed that the attack was directed at the Me 210s and Me 410s detected on the field by American air reconnaissance, which already had been known to the operational forces of the 15th U.S. Air Force for a long time.

So July 17, 1944 came, and in the headquarters of the 5th U.S. Bombardment Wing in Foggia, the following – 628th – Operations Order was issued (see pp. 16-17):
(The publisher has a copy of the original in English)



This page is not classified

S E C R E T

Headquarters of the 5th Bombardment Wing (U.S.)
APO 520
July 17, 1944

Operations Order) (The Operations Order No. 626, dated July 15, 1944
No. 628) is hereby revoked)

1. a. See intelligence service report.
- b. (1) Bombers: The 47th Bombardment Wing attacks Friedrichshafen Airdrome at 11:00B.
The 49th Bombardment Wing attacks the Dornier plant in Manzell at 10:50B.
The 55th Bombardment Wing attacks the fuel plant in Raderach at 10:40B.
The 304th Bombardment Wing attacks the Maybach Motor Works at 11:00B.
This Air Force Formation is led by the 5th Bombardment Wing, second the 55th
Bombardment Wing, third the 49th Bombardment Wing, fourth the 304th
Bombardment Wing, and fifth the 47th Bombardment Wing.
- (2) Escorts: Seven (7) fighter groups will furnish penetration,
shield the formation over the target, and safeguard the return flight of the
bombers.
2. Twenty-eight (28) B-17s of the 463rd, 99th, 2nd, 97th, 483rd, and 301st Bombardment
Groups will bomb the airfield at Memmingen, Germany, and its installations
on July 18, 1944. That is Plan A.
Secondary targets: Main switchyards of any city in Germany.
Bomber rendezvous: 463rd and 99th Bombardment Group, FOGGIA, 5000 ft. at 07:29B
2nd and 97th Bombardment Group, AMENDOLA, 6000 ft. at 07:30B
483rd and 301st Bombardment Group, S. SEVERO, 7000 ft. at 07:41B.
Wing rendezvous: CAPRARA ISLAND
463rd and 99th Bombardment Groups, 7000 ft. at 07:47B.
2nd and 97th Bombardment Groups, 8000 ft. at 07:50B.
483rd and 301st Bombardment Groups, 9000 ft. at 07:53B.
Wing formation: Column of Combat Wings.
Flight route: Rendezvous at the key point by Leermoos (42/24 N. and
10/54 E.), to the first waypoint, to the target.
Key point: 44/00 N. 14/00 E. 17,000 ft. at 08:39B.
First waypoint: KEMPTEN (47/43 N. 10/20 E.)
Direction of attack: 345 degrees.
Time over the target: 10:30B.
Drop altitude: 463rd Bomb. Group – 22,500 ft. 97th Bomb. Group – 22,000 ft.
99th Bomb. Group – 24,000 ft. 483rd Bomb. Group – 23,500 ft.
2nd Bomb. Group – 25,500 ft. 301st Bomb. Group – 25,000 ft.
Altitude of the target: 1978 ft.
Rally: right bank
Return flight route: Rally in the direction of Brixen (46/43N. 11/40E.)
to the key point of the base.
3. x.(1) Bomb load of the 2nd, 97th, 483rd, and 97th Bomb. Groups consist of 500 lbs.
(+ General Purpose = high explosive) with a nose fuse and secondly with a tail fuse.

S E C R E T

[?] “Nickels” ? will be loaded and dropped according to Group Intelligence Service orders.

[No?] change

Standard signaling procedure is to be observed

Command transmitter 6440 KCS, VHF channel

Bomber call sign: Greenherd

463rd – 11 99th – 12

2nd – 13 97th – 14

483rd – 15 301st – 16

Call sign of the escort: Pixie

Counter call sign: Shampoo

Carpet ? will be used by all units that are so equipped.

No windows (chaff material) will be loaded.

[By?] order of Brigadier General Lawrence

[Attachment?]:

[Attachment?] I Intelligence Service

[Distribution?]: Y

Signature

Stephen W. Henry

Lieutenant Colonel, Air Corps

Asst A-3

Note: The first two letters are cut off a few words on the left-hand margin:

ine = Keine?

f = Auf?

hang = Anhang?

rteilung = Verteilung?

July 18, 1944 and the time thereafter

The American Air Force (USAAF)

The squadron is comparable to the German *Staffel* and had about seven machines.

Four squadrons formed a group. The 483rd Bomb Group was on active service over Buchenberg, with the 815th, 816th, 817th and the 840th Squadrons.

The 5th Bombardment Wing, to be compared with the German *Geschwader*, comprised six groups: the 2nd Bomb Group, the 97th BG, the 99th BG, the 301st BG, the 463rd BG and the 483rd BG, which was operating over Buchenberg. All six groups flew B-17s, the so-called "Flying Fortresses."

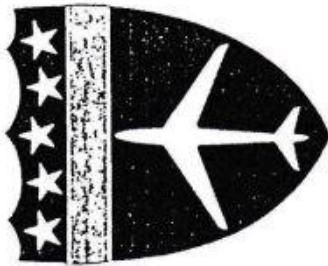
Since December of 1943, these six Bomb Groups, with about 27-30 B-17s each, had made themselves at home on the airfields of Amendola, Tortorella, Lucera, Celone and Sterparone by Foggia in Central Italy.

For the protection of the bombers, the Operations Order reads:

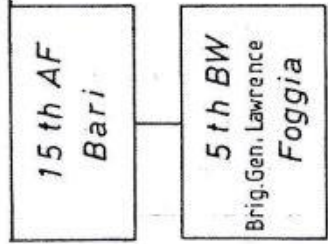
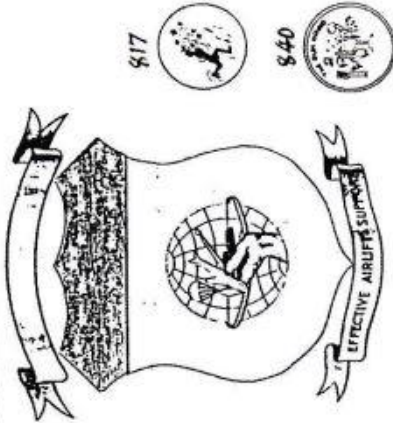
Seven fighter groups will furnish penetration, shield the formation over the target, and safeguard the return flight of the bombers.

These fighter groups were the 52nd, the 332nd, the 31st, and the 325th Fighter Groups with P-51s (Mustangs), as well as the 1st, the 14th, and the 2nd Fighter Groups with P-38s (Lightnings), so that about 200 machines had gathered around Foggia for their operations.

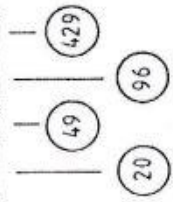
5th BOMBARDMENT WING



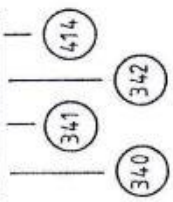
483d BOMBARDMENT GROUP



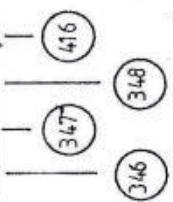
2nd BG B-17
Col. Wangh
Amendola



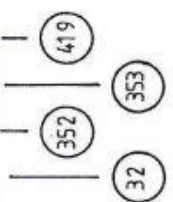
97th BG B-17
Col. Ohman
Amendola



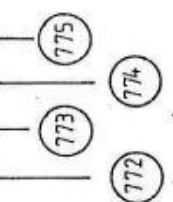
99th BG B-17
Lt. Col. Schwanbeck
Tortorella



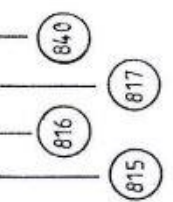
301st BG B-17
Col. Holmers
Lucera



463rd BG B-17
Col. Mc. Gregor
Celone



483rd BG B-17
Col. Barton
Sterparone



— Squadron —

The aircraft used

Boeing B-17 G “Flying Fortress”



Engines:

four Wright GR Cyclone double radial engines

Wingspan: 31.64 m

Top speed: 480 km/h

Service ceiling: 11,400 m

Range: about 2,960 km

Flight weight: 25 t

Armament: 13 - 12.7mm machine guns

Maximum bomb load: 7.85 t

North American P-51 D Mustang



Engine:

Rolls-Royce/Packard-Merlin with 1490 hp

Wingspan: 11.28 m

Top speed: 698 km/h

Service ceiling: 12,500 m

Range: about 3,325 km

Flight weight: 5.26 t

Armament:

four or six 12.7mm machine guns

The German Air Force (*Luftwaffe*)

The smallest unit of the German Air Force was the squadron (*Staffel*), comparable to a company of infantry. The squadron was led by the Squadron Commander (*Staffelkapitän*), as a rule a first lieutenant (*Oberleutnant*) or captain (*Hauptmann*). A squadron had between nine and twelve machines.

Three to four squadrons formed a group (*Gruppe*), comparable to a regiment. In addition, there were several machines of the command staff. The Group Commander was a captain or a major.

The group was mostly an independently operating unit. The wing (*Geschwader*) was comprised of three to four groups with the wing staff and was led by the Wing Commodore (*Geschwaderkommodore*).

On the German side, those involved in the air battles of July 18, 1944 were:

Group II/Fighter Wing (*Jagdgeschwader*) 27, with Bf 109 G6s, based at Fels am Wagram, situated between Krems and Vienna,

Group II/Fighter Wing 300, with FW 190 A8s, in Holzkirchen,

Group IV/Fighter Wing 3 "Udet," with FW 190s, in Memmingen,

Group I/Fighter Wing 300, with Bf 109 G6s, in Bad Wörishofen.

Bf 108s and Bf 109s come from Bavarian Aircraft Works in Augsburg. The designation Bf is retained even after the aircraft works became the Messerschmitt Works. Only the new airplanes receive the designation "Me."

On the history of Storm Squadron (*Sturmstaffel*) 1, Storm Group IV/Fighter Wing 3 “Udet,” the following can be reported:

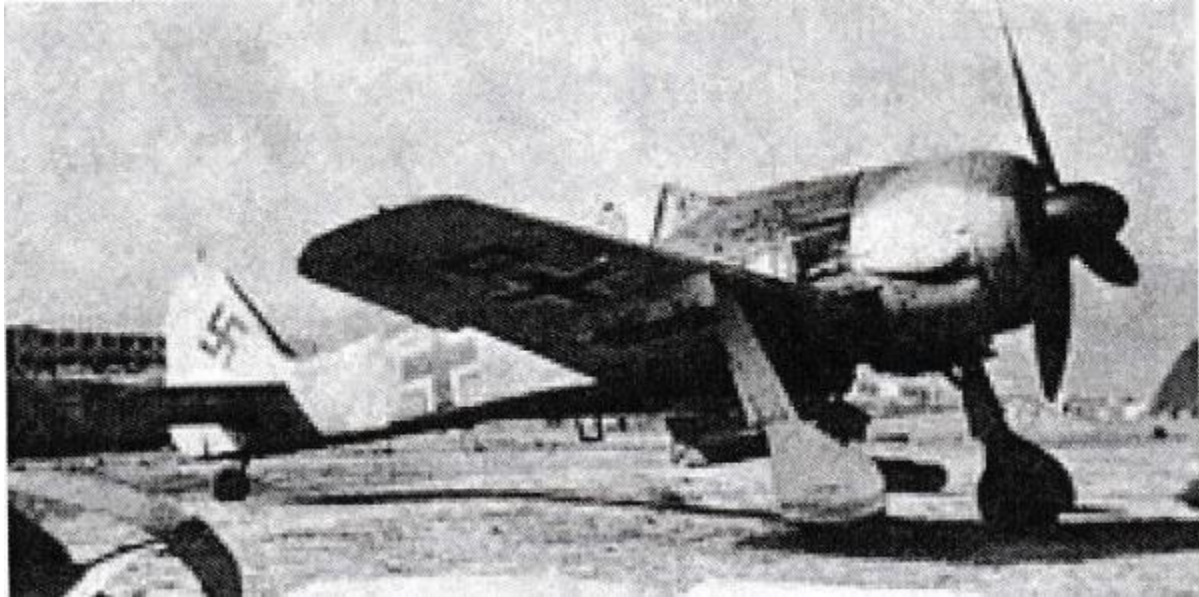
The formation of Storm Squadron 1 began in November of 1943 at the Achmer airfield. Its path led through the military airfields of Dortmund, Hannover/Langenhagen, and Salzwedel, to becoming the 11th Squadron of Storm Group IV/Fighter Wing 3 “Udet” on May 4, 1944.

With the incorporation of Storm Squadron 1 into Group III/Fighter Wing 3 “Udet” as the 11th Squadron, Group III/Fighter Wing 3 “Udet” received the designation Storm Group III/Fighter Wing 3 “Udet.”

Storm Squadron 1 was an experimental unit, which was to test a new method of attack against the (four-engine) bomber formations of the Allies. This squadron, formed at the instigation of Major von Kornatzki and comprised of volunteers, was to attack the four-engine planes from behind in close-range combat and at the same time get as close to the bombers as possible while matching their speed in order to ensure their being shot down. The goal was to shoot down the bombers, whatever the cost might be. At the same time, ramming should be used as a last resort.

The aircraft used

Focke Wulf Fw 190 A-8



Engine:

BMW 801 D-2 14-cylinder double radial with 1400 hp

Wingspan: 10.52 m

Top speed: 715 km/h

Service ceiling: 11,400 m

Range: about 800 km

Flight weight: 4.4 t

Armament:

2 - MK 108, 2 - MG 151/20 cannons

Two 13mm machine guns located over the engine, two 20mm cannons in the wing roots. In each of the outer wings, an MK 108 with 30mm rate of fire 600/min.

Supply of 55 to 60 rounds of hexogen munitions, highly explosive, in armor-clad munitions box.

Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-10



Engine: DB 605 with 1475 hp

Wingspan: 9.97 m

Top speed: 684 km/h

Service ceiling: 12,500 m

Range: about 856 km

Flight weight: 3.5 t

Armament: 1 - Mk 108, 2 - MG 151/20

Tag	Darstellung der Ereignisse (Dabei wichtig: Beurteilung der Lage [Feind- und eigene], Eingangs- und Abgangszeiten von Meldungen und Befehlen)
Uhrzeit	
Ort und Art der Unterkunft	
<i>Fort. 11. J. 1944</i>	<i>2 ldl. Bomber bei Kollmehofen</i>
	<i>1 " " " Schwayerd</i>
	<i>1 " " " Escharb-Freipachs</i>
	<i>1 " " " Escharried</i>
	<i>1 " " " Kromach (Soldatthal)</i>
	<i>1 " Jäger " Räumlinge (Alteisried)</i>
	<i>1 " " " Kpt. Spittelhof</i>
	<i>1: F. W 190 " Trichmannsried (Göllmühle)</i>
	<i>1 deutscher Jäger " Rimbach</i>
	<i>1 " " " Nippenbach</i>
	<i>1 " " " Schratzenbach notgelandet. -</i>

July 18, '44

...Ravensburg area and in a northerly direction into the Augsburg area.-

In the Kempten area (14 N/FA 53 and EA 34), intense air battles developed, in the course of which 9 enemy machines crashed. 4 of our own fighters were reported as having crashed or made an emergency landing.

11:16 report of leaflet drop in Bregenz.

10:47 bombs dropped near Roßhaupten (200 m away from the train station in the direction of Lechbruck.) Further bombs dropped on the military airfield at Memmingen, reported at 10:45, 11:14 and 11:45.-

Air observation post Kempten 16 reports: Fortress with red painted end plates.-

From 11:19 – 11:44, departure of the enemy machines remaining in the Kempten area and those that returned from neighboring areas over Füssen – Lermoos in an easterly direction and west to Lake Constance and into Switzerland.-

11:43 air observation district of Kempten free of enemies.-

MYO [= “Enemy Aircraft Approaching” alert] from Munich for all areas from 08:45 – 12:50

2 scouts out from 10:20 – 12:30

Alarm station Kempten 201 occupied from 10:40 – 12:07.

Dornbirn transmitter shut down from 10:50 – 12:05

Air raid alarm in Kempten from 10:27 – 12:07. Provisional all-clear 11:56.-

All-clear signal: Memmingen 10:35, Schongau 10:53, Kaufbeuren ./.

MYO [= “Enemy Aircraft Approaching”] alert reported to all air observation posts.-

Enemy reconnaissance activity over Bavaria until 14:00.-

In the air observation district of Kempten, the following airplane crashes were reported in today’s raid:

- 1 enemy bomber near Reicholzried.
- 2 enemy bombers near Waltenhofen
- 1 enemy bomber near Schwarzerd
- 1 enemy bomber near Eschach-Freitags
- 1 enemy bomber near Eschachried
- 1 enemy bomber near Kürnach (Goldachtal)
- 1 enemy fighter near Bräunlings (Altusried)
- 1 enemy fighter near Kempten-Spitalhof
- 1 FW 190 near Dietmannsried (Gfällmühle)
- 1 German fighter near Reinharts
- 1 German fighter at Wiggensbach
- 1 German fighter made an emergency landing near Schrattenbach.-

In addition, the contemporary witness **Anni Käser remembers**:
(The publisher has a complete copy of the original.)

Wir sahen die vielen Fallschirme am Himmel
die wie weiße Wolken aussahen.

Bis dann ganz in unserer Nähe bei der Georgskapelle
ein Soldat mit ungeöffnetem Fallschirm, vor unseren
Augen zur Erde stürzte.

Es war furchtbar, wie der Körper durch den Aufschlag
eine Mulde geschlagen hat, trotzdem der Boden
doch recht trocken war. Es war wie wenn man
sich mit ausgebreiteten Armen in einem weichen
Schnee legt.

Er hat uns wirklich sehr leid getan. Aber was ich...

We saw the many parachutes in the sky, which looked like white clouds. By then, very close to us by St. George's Chapel (*Georgskapelle*), a soldier with an unopened parachute crashed to earth before our eyes. It was horrible how the body had created a depression upon impact, although the ground was really quite dry. It was like how one lays down in a soft snow with outstretched arms. We really felt sorry for him, but he had probably already suffocated to death during the fall.

Little by little, the full extent of the event became known. ... I can still clearly see a machine before me, which lay on the meadow between the Oberhofers' place and the dairy farm. It was a terrible sight with the torn-up bodies that lay scattered about.

Mrs. **Maria Kratzer** remembers:

On that day, I was helping with the hay harvest on my parents' property in Eschachried (now: Schuster). From the elevation of the Eschachried moor, located between Eschachried and the Pflaumenmühle, an American soldier approached our house with my father. Since he appeared to be wounded, we indicated to him that he should lie down on our sofa, and we gave him milk to drink. As far as we could understand, he came from a shoe store in New York and had a little daughter—just like I did. However, the German military quickly came along and called us “goddamned farmers” (*Saubauern*), because we had looked after this “enemy.” So, this “enemy” was taken prisoner, and we never heard anything more of him. He left behind a cloth map of Europe, a prayer book and a compass for us, together with his parachute, which we were able to roll up and hide shortly before the arrival of the German military. From it, many beautiful blouses were sewn in the post-war era – all things that still remind me of that day.

Mr. **Xaver Walk**, who has since passed away and who, at that time, was dragged into this event as a 16-year-old, will be discussed in more detail at a later point in time. His memory also allows us to get a feeling of this July 18th.

Re: Air battles in the district of Kempten during the air raid alarm of July 18, '44, 10:30 – 12:15 o'clock.

received by: clerk Brack

- I. During the air raid alarm, the following reports were received:
 - 1.) Krugzell: Mayer, owner of the electric power station, reports that dozens of parachutes are in the sky.
 - 2.) Kimratshofen: The mayor reports that 4-5 airplanes have crashed in an air battle (10:45 o'clock).
 - 3.) Altusried: The military police station reports that 4-5 crashing airplanes were observed during an air battle; paratroopers jumped. 1 airman taken into custody. In Bräunlings, the roofs of 4 houses were taken off.
 - 4.) Dietmannsried: The mayor reports that a German airplane crashed near Zellenmühle.
 - 5.) Wengen: The mayor reports: During the air battles, 2 paratroopers jumped. In addition, incendiary bombs fell.
 - 6.) Martinszell: Report 11:45 o'clock: 1 enemy airplane crashed, a delayed-action bomb with timer was dropped.
 - 7.) Wiggensbach: The mayor reports: Several airplanes crashed, paratroopers came down. A forest fire broke out in Kürnach, caused by a crashing airplane. Bombs dropped!
 - 8.) Krugzell: (2nd report) In Schwarzenbach, municipality of Krugzell, 1 airplane crashed. 1 man taken into custody.
 - 9.) Altusried: (2nd report) Market community of Altusried: air battles over our village 10:45 o'clock. Crashed airplanes in the direction of Kimratshofen and Wiggensbach were observed here (5). Jumping paratroopers in the direction of Kimratshofen. Pursuit undertaken.
- II. The Air Raid Protection Warning Command (*Luftschutz-Warnkommando*) and the Armed Forces Garrison Readiness Director (*Wehrmachtstandortsbereitschaftsführer*) and the Military Police District Director (*Gendarmerie-Kreisführer*) were informed. Later, the Armed Forces Garrison Readiness Director (3211) was called again, since Waltenhofen and Altusried had requested reinforcements.

- III. After the all-clear signal, the District President of Augsburg (Air Defense Desk) was called and informed of the reports listed under I.
- IV. After forwarding the report to the government, the following additional reports came in:
- 1.) Buchenberg: Several airplanes crashed, 10-12 paratroopers jumped. Around 4-5 crashed machines are thought to be involved. In Eschach, a house is burning fiercely.
 - 2.) Wengen: 1 crashed paratrooper taken into custody. Several are still hanging on the trees in the forests.
Later report: (12:50 o'clock)
4 paratroopers taken into custody.
The Rural Auxiliary Police Party Readiness (*Landwacht Parteibereitschaft*), the Armed Forces Spare Parts Depot (*Wehrmachersatzteillager*) are looking for further paratroopers.
 - 3.) Kreuzthal: Three airplanes crash, 5 men taken into custody.
 - 4.) Weitnau: The Military Police District Director of Kempten reports:
In Eisenbolz, municipality of Weitnau, 1 bomb with a time fuse went down 20 m away from a residence. The property was cleared.
3 paratroopers were taken into custody.

IV: Copy to
Inspector Schwarz for further action.

Kempten, July 18, '44
The District Administrator:

Reg. No. Lu 65
The District Administrator

Kempton, July 20, '44

To the Military Police Station

Re: Report concerning the events of the air battles on July 18, '44 and of the air attack and the air battles on July 19, '44 in the district of Kempton.

A written report concerning the events of the air battles on July 18, '44 and of the air attack and the air battles on July 19, '44 is to be made to me. The reports already made by telephone are to be repeated in writing.

Kempton, July 20, '44
The District Administrator: Sonntag

.....
Lu No. 65

Military Police Station Buchenberg Buchenberg, July 21, 194[4]
District of Kempton
Administrative Region of Swabia

Military Police Station:

To the District Administrator
in Kempton

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR'S [?] Received: July 24, 1944 [?]
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Report
concerning the events

a) on July 18, 1944 (air battles):

On July 19, 1944, a written report was already made from here concerning the air battles that took place on the 18th.

There were 3 four-engine U.S. bombers that crashed in this service area on July 18, 1944. Two of them burned up completely on impact. A farmer's home in Hintereinöde also caught fire due to the crash. In and near the crashed bombers, the bodies of 22 U.S. airmen were found, which have now been buried near the local cemetery. 13 U.S. airmen were captured alive.

By a bomber lying near Hochberg, there are still two 250-kilo high-explosive bombs that did not explode. Warning signs have been put up, and military sentries are guarding the cordoned-off area. 2 officers from the military airfield at Kaufbeuren have arrived here and are arranging the removal of the bomber wreckage and are seeing to it that the two bombs are blown up.

Reißler, Master of the Military Police and Chief of Police.

Reg. No. Lu 65

The District Administrator

Kempton, [July 20], '44

To all mayors

Market Community of
Buchenberg
Received July [22?], 1944

Re: Report concerning the events of the air battles on July 18, '44 and of the air attack and the air battles on July 19, '44 in the district of Kempton.

A written report concerning the events of the air battles on July 18, '44 and of the air attack and the air battles on July 19, '44 is to be made to me. The reports already made by telephone are to be repeated in writing.

Kempton, July 20, '44

The District Administrator: Sonntag

.....
Lu No. 65

Community: Buchenberg

Buchenberg, July 24, '44

To the District Administrator
in Kempton

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR'S [?]
Received: July 25, 1944
[?]

Report
concerning the events

a) on July 18, 1944 (air battles):

On Tuesday morning, July 18, 1944, an air raid alarm was given by telephone from the post office in Kempton. At the same time, one heard the approach of enemy machines from the south. The first flights through were so high that they could not be seen with the naked eye. The following ones were somewhat lower, and it was observed that our fighters were coming from the north. One saw tracer fire flashing. The air battle began. The fighters raced through the group, turned at the end, and continued to attack the same from behind. It lasted less than two minutes, and two enemy airplanes spun to the ground. Over Schwarzerd, a four-engine bomber exploded in mid-air, and little fragments of wreckage and human body parts rained down on the surrounding area. The first airplane hit went down near Freitags. From the village of Buchenberg, one saw the long-lasting cloud of black smoke left behind. At the same time, it was observed that a large number of parachutes opened as the enemy crews jumped. A four-engine bomber crashed onto a meadow near the Pflaumenmühle. The bulk of an American fighter went down near the hamlet of Eschachried. Other individual pieces of flying sheet metal fluttered to the ground over an extensive area. The air battle stretched

Continuation:

from south to north in the western part of the municipality, over Schwarzerd, Hahnemoos, Eschach, Hintereinöde, and Wegscheidel. In the municipal district of Buchenberg, a total of 14 living American airmen were brought in by the local inhabitants. The same were handed over to the Armed Forces in Kempten. On the orders of the Recovery Officer (*Bergungsoffizier*) of the airfield at Kaufbeuren, the community had to carry out the burial of the killed airmen. 22 men were gathered and buried in a mass grave near the south wall of the cemetery. In addition, four dead were brought from the outlying district of Unterkürnach, in the state forest, so that 26 men were buried here. There were no German fatalities or injuries, however the farmhouse no. 119 in Hintereinöde, belonging to Albert Einsiedler, went up in flames. The fire was caused by a burning piece of wreckage crashing through the roof and setting the haymow on fire. The livestock and a small portion of the clothing and beds could be saved. Everything else was consumed by the flames. The farm stood on a mountain slope; the water supply was difficult to access, and the fire department could only tackle extinguishing the haymow. Two 250-kilogram undetonated bombs are lying near the airplane in Freitags.

b) on July 19, 1944 (air attack and air battles)

On Wednesday, July 19, 1944, the municipal district of Buchenberg was spared. Enemy aircraft was only observed flying through. One could hear the detonation of the bombs dropped in Kempten and see four mushroom clouds shooting up into the air. At the request of the District Administrator, the fire brigade was made available. It was able to return without being put into service.

Buchenberg, July 24, '44

The Mayor:
Schurr

Reports from neighboring towns

Two views from outside our municipal borders are presented here, so that the brutality of this brief wartime event can be felt in its full cruelty.

a) Memhölz

An entry in the record book (Volume III/40 from 1944) of the village of Memhölz, which lies in the southern part of the old district of Kempten, reads as follows:

<p>18.7.44 Mittwoch 10³⁰h</p>	<p>Luftkampf über Memhölz = Mitterpöthofen - Linsenberg, in dessen Verlauf ein Amerikarichter 4 unbr. Bomben ab- schleuderte von der Flugprange Memhölz = Mitterpöthofen, die explodierten und Bomben rissen einen großen Trichter auf. Die Schwingung benennung ist. 3 Mann, darunter der Flugzeugführer, ein</p>	<p>Linsenberg,</p>
	<p>Leutnant, blieben auf Memhölzer Flur liegen, in. wurden im Trichter gefasst, ohne Gebet, ohne christliches Gebet. Auf die Bitte des Pfarrers, die Toten im Friedhof beizusetzen, die folgte die Bitte gar nicht, sondern der Linsberger: Die lassen wir, was sie sind, das sind keine Toten, das sind Luftkämpfer!</p>	
<p>Kein Katholischer fluchenden keine christliches Gebet! Der Nationalsozialismus hat unser Volk vergiftet. Der Feind hat einen Abgrund aufgedeckt, der der Hölle nahe ist. Mitterpöthofen auch in Memhölz!</p> <p>Nachschreib: Nach dem Zusammenstoß der Amerikarichter, bez. der Franzosen wurden auf der Ankündigung des Amerikarichters eine Bombe beim Mitterpöthofen abgesetzt. Im Laufe des Geschehens wurden die Toten auf einem neuen, geländereichen bei Klein gebracht.</p>		

July 18, '44,

10:30 o'clock in the morning

Air battle over Memhölz – Niedersonthofen – Buchenberg, in the course of which an American 4-engine bomber crashed on the field border of Memhölz – Waltenhofen; the exploding bombs opened up a big crater. The airplane crew dead. 3 men, including the pilot, a lieutenant, remained lying on the Memhölz field and were buried in the crater without prayer, without Christian symbols. At the pastor's request to bury the bodies in the cemetery, since there was enough room there, the mayor answered: We'll leave them where they are. Those are no soldiers; those are air gangsters!

No Catholic sensibility, no Christian feeling! National Socialism has poisoned our people. The day has uncovered an abyss that is close to Hell. Satan's helpers even in Memhölz!

Postscript: After the arrival of the Americans and French, respectively, a cross was placed by the Americans' grave on the mayor's orders. In the course of autumn, the bodies were exhumed and taken to an American military cemetery near Ulm.

b) Memmingen

Tuesday, July 18, 1944 – 91st air raid alarm

2nd large-scale attack on the military airfield of Memmingen (1st attack on March 18th)

Weather: sunny, nice with some clouds

The enemy came out of the south. At 10:36, the alarm was sounded. Bomb drops on the airfield followed at 10:48 and 10:53. They were reported to our command post by Stemmer and Wiedemann, the two runners at St. Martin's church tower. Intense air battles were waged over the city, in the Swabian Uplands and opposite Lake Starnberg. At 11:15 and 11:39, the airfield was attacked once again. At 12:07, the all-clear signal could be given.

We immediately hurried to the airfield, which had sustained heavy damages, but only 1 fire raged in an eastern hangar. The fire department could not save anything here; on the other hand, there was heavy damage done by the high-explosive bombs, which resulted in tragic fatalities as well. As it turned out, the number of victims exceeded 150, some of whom could not be recovered for a long time. Of course, there are still victims of March 18th who have not yet been recovered. The runway was not hit. Thus, the airfield itself is still completely operational.

The tragic consequences of this attack became apparent toward evening, as our mortuary became extremely overcrowded. On this evening, the military airfield's car brought numerous victims again, but destroyed the south entrance gate near the mortuary chapel in doing so. This catastrophe created conditions that, at the time, demanded my personal intervention in the mortuary and, in the following days, in the cemetery as well, so that the morgue attendant and cemetery attendant did not collapse. In addition, due to the hot and humid weather, signs of decomposition appeared immediately, so that chloride of lime had to be used. Most of the victims at the military airfield had been identified, but even in various cases where this was not successful, their burial had to be completed by American prisoners of war by 10 o'clock in the evening on Saturday, July 22nd, after this task had been begun on Friday afternoon by directive of the State Health Department (*Staatliches Gesundheitsamt*).

The “Memmingen Mission,” transition to the American reports

For the Americans, the Memmingen Mission represented a catastrophe. Superficially, the Americans achieved their goal and inflicted the already described disaster on this city (see preceding report). Of the 167 aircraft of the B-17 type that took off in the morning from the Italian base, the 483rd Bombardment Group was one of a total of six Groups that constituted this formation. As a result of weather conditions and radio misunderstandings, this formation was broken up over the Adriatic. However, the 483rd Bomb Group, which consisted of 26 B-17 bombers called Flying Fortresses, decided to attack the target of Memmingen and continued its flight alone and without fighter escorts over Northern Italy and Austria into the target area. Of these 26 bombers, 14 did not return to their starting point. They were shot down by German fighters in the greater Allgäu region even before their attack on Memmingen. 4 of them went down in the Buchenberg area (see map(s)). Of the 142 crew members, 87 were able to save themselves by parachuting and were taken as prisoners of war, 55 died in this action. There were 29 on the fields of Buchenberg alone. These, or the parts of them that could still be found, were buried by the south wall of the cemetery.

In the official **“The Story of the Memmingen Mission”** (original copy available to the author), an understandably glorified account of this operation is given. However, historical inaccuracies can easily be spotted, especially as concerns the strength of the German fighters. The stated number of fighter planes no longer existed on the German side.

The History of the Memmingen Mission

As part of the strategic struggle of the Fifteenth (U.S.) Air Force against industrial targets and targets of the enemy air force (*Luftwaffe*) in southwest Germany, a force of 167 B-17 aircraft of the Fifth (Bombardment) Wing took off on July 18, 1944, to attack and destroy the Memmingen airfield and military installations in Memmingen (Germany). The significance of this target is emphasized by its description in an attachment of the intelligence service to the marching orders: “The activity at the Memmingen airfield has increased. One recognizes 50 to 70 Me 110s and 410s, which stood not very far apart, with modern camouflage painting. These facilities were being used for repairs and for assembling airplanes. This makes the airfield one of the most important targets of the enemy air force.”

The 483rd Bombardment Group (Heavy) was in the fifth position in the formation consisting of six groups and was led by Captain Louis T. Seith, Commanding Officer of the 840th Squadron. While they were flying over the Adriatic through dense cumulus clouds, the individual groups of the tactical wing formation became separated from each other. Since they could not traverse the adverse weather conditions along their route, two groups with a total of 44 B-17s returned to their base, while 27 B-17s of another group attacked a different target. The timetables, which had been muddled up by the extremely bad weather, made it impossible for the escort of the bombers to arrange a rendezvous or to put them in a position to accompany the bombardment groups as planned. In addition, the formation was irritated by reports which were broadcast by enemy stations and contained instructions that it might be advisable to attack some secondary target, since the actual primary target could not be attacked now. Since the required official confirmation signal of the Air Force was lacking, the 483rd Bombardment Group decided to attack the primary target as ordered and continued its flight alone and without escort over the northern part of Italy and over Austria into the target zone in Southwest Germany.

At the specified starting point for the attack, approximately 75 single-engine fighter planes, half Me 109s and half Fw 190s, were observed to the right of the formation, maneuvering into position for an attack from behind. When this formation of enemy fighters flew in a wide arc to attack the formation from behind, an

even larger group of fighter planes appeared behind the first formation. In view of this unexpected and overwhelming superiority of strength in numbers, the 483rd Bombardment Group decided with the utmost heroism and bravery to continue the bombardment as ordered. The entire attack, which was carried out by approximately 200 enemy fighter planes, was a well-planned maneuver that was intended—and also aggressively carried out—to destroy a single group in the shortest possible time. The fighter planes carried out waves of attacks on five or six machines at a time, which formed an acute triangle and flew at the same altitude as the rearmost of the B-17s. The concentrated firepower of the guns and missiles was overwhelming. The rear guard, which consisted of seven aircraft of the 816th Squadron, was completely destroyed during the first attack, but only after having put up a courageous and brave fight. Three machines were shot into pieces while they held their position within the formation, and a fourth apparently crashed out of control and broke up as the plane began to spin.

The three remaining B-17s apparently lost control as well and fell out of the formation. Two of them were burning, but their guns were still shooting. The enemy fighters climbed upward and carried out the same concentrated attack on the seven aircraft of the 817th Bombardment Squadron, which were flying in position number three (within the formation). They applied exactly the same methods of attack. Five aircraft were destroyed in a relatively short time, several dropped out of the formation in flames, whereby their metal alloy broke away, but here, too, the gunners fired to the end. During the entire attack, there was no escort of fighter planes there, and it appeared that the entire group would be completely destroyed without the additional help of fighter planes. Yet, in the sure knowledge of possible destruction, unfrightened by the spectacle of the exploding and burning Flying Fortresses on every side, forced to watch how their comrades jumped from the planes, some with burning parachutes, the crews of the bombers bravely and with the greatest fearlessness continued their attack on the intended target. The enemy fighters then climbed up to position number two, and two additional B-17s crashed, whereby one of them broke apart in mid-air due to the destructive force of the concentrated firepower. The other was in flames, but eyewitnesses confirmed that the tail guns were still

firing, which proves that the brave gunner fulfilled his duty to the end. It was obvious that the crews were more occupied with operating their guns, repulsing the enemy, flying to the planned target and dropping their bombs than with the thought of their personal safety.

The methods used by the enemy fighter planes allowed the formation's gunners to aim only a very small number of guns at them at the same time. The Germans came very close, throttled back their machines and maintained almost the same speed as the formation. At the same time, the group reached the planned target, and the twelve remaining airplanes dropped their bombs, whereby they destroyed it. When they turned away from the target, twelve P-38 fighter planes of the first group appeared and attacked the German machines. With this additional help from our own fighters and because the German aircraft were possibly running low on ammunition, the enemy's firepower was reduced to such an extent that it allowed the gunners of the formation of Flying Fortresses to resist another attack.

In the course of this fierce air battle, the gunners of this formation of the 483rd Bombardment Group notched up 53 destroyed enemy aircraft, eight that were probably destroyed, and five that were damaged.

The results of the bombardment were devastating according to a summary drawn up by the intelligence service concerning its activity for the headquarters of the Mediterranean Allied Strategic Air Force, dated July 19, 1944: "Photos of the bombing raid show 118 enemy aircraft (40 single-engine, 77 two-engine and one multi-engine). 17 were certainly destroyed, 4 were probably destroyed and 14 were damaged. A heavy concentration of strikes stretches over the entire surface of the military installations north of the airfield. Two, or perhaps three, of the very large hangars were struck exceedingly hard and were totally destroyed. Four other hangars on the northern edge were hit directly and were damaged by shock waves. A very large hangar on the western edge suffered direct hits and few misses. Two storehouses and adjacent armories in the southern part suffered direct hits, which were followed by fires and explosions. Several small workshops in the southeastern corner suffered direct hits and were

destroyed. Widespread damage to workshops, barracks and administration buildings on the western edge of the complex is likewise visible.”

Although 143 officers and men paid with their lives and 14 of 26 airplanes did not return from the attack on this eminently important target, the damage proved to be morally and physically irreparable for the enemy—they lost 101 fighter planes that were destroyed or damaged, a considerable portion of its already decimated *Luftwaffe*—and would prove to be of advantage to our Air Force in future bombing raids. Rarely, if at all, in this war was an air attack carried out against such a stark superiority in numbers—it is estimated at 17 to 1—with more determination, extraordinary heroism or bravery. Individual gunners shot down 4 or 5 enemy aircraft; the pilots continued their flight in a desperate attempt to drop their bombs on the selected target—without regard to the fact that they could be shot to pieces and were often in mortal danger. The first squadron even slowed down its flight after it had carried out the order “drop bombs,” in order to do everything in their power to give their comrades covering fire and allow them to catch up, although that almost would have brought about their own destruction. During the entire operation, morale, team spirit and the heroism of individuals could not reach a higher level. Through this devoted fulfillment of duty, the outstanding proof of heroism in the face of unequal chances and the extraordinarily brave manner in which this attack was carried out, the members of the 483rd Bombardment Group earned great merit for themselves and the entire Air Force.

July 18, 1944 from an American perspective.

On the following day, the Headquarters of the Bombardment Group gives the following memorandum to its operational forces:

HEADQUARTERS
FOUR HUNDRED EIGHTY THIRD
BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)
APO 520

19 July 1944

MEMORANDUM:

TO: All Personnel, 483rd Bombardment Group (H)

Yesterday this Group became engaged in an air battle with the German Air Force and suffered very heavy casualties. Normally in battles of this kind we are supported by several other bombardment and fighter groups. This time we stood alone! By ourselves, we shot down at a conservative estimate, many times our own number of German Fighters and still went in and destroyed our assigned target. We took our losses, severe as they were, but we fought and decisively defeated a large portion, possible a third, of the cream of German Fighter Forces in Europe.

This battle is a gallant chapter in the history of the 483rd Bombardment Group (H) and of the United States Air Forces. I am proud of you all and you have every right to be proud of yourselves.

Yesterday we established a fighting tradition which we must continue to uphold. Failure to do so would constitute a betrayal to the memories of those brave and gallant men who did not come back. I know you will not fail, but will continue to carry out more and more successful attacks against the German enemy until the war is victoriously ended.

PAUL L. BARTON
Colonel, Air Corps
Commanding

The translation thereof reads:

[German translation of the original English memorandum illustrated on the previous page.]

The sole survivor of the Jackson crew, Charles W. Erickson—he will be discussed later—submits his report on his mission 40 years later.
(The publisher has a complete copy of the original.)

Letter from Charles W. Erickson to Arthur “Ace” Jordan 9 April 1984.

“I was the upper turret gunner on Lt. Jackson’s crew. When we were being shot up, I was driven from my position by fire from the hydraulic fluid and oxygen. As I backed out of the turret and turned around it appeared that pilot and co-pilot had been hit. One was slumped forward and the other was slumped sideways. At about that time the plane went into a spin and I fell through the trap door. When I reached navigator compartment the plexiglass nose had been blown off. I found out later that Lt. Rother and Lt. Higgins had fallen out without parachutes. The Germans asked someone to identify them. Based on what I saw in the plane and only hearing about Lt. Rother & Higgins I have always believed that everyone else was wounded or dead and went down with the plane”

483 BOMB GROUP (H)
ASSOCIATION
WWII ARCHIVES

[German translation of the foregoing report.]

Here is a photo with his flyer comrades from the time before his mission



Front row, from left:

Franc Lonc, Eugene Jackson, Walter Higgins, Theodore Rother

Back row, from left: Walter Ulitsch, Charles Erickson, Lewis Milks, William Bermandie, Ralph Murphy, Nicholas Cook

The following entries concerning July 18, 1944, can be found in the War Archives of the USA:
 (Excerpt from a copy of the original)

483 BOMB GROUP (H)
 ASSOCIATION
 WW II ARCHIVES

FORTRESSES AND MEN LOST IN COMBAT AND MISSION RELATED ACCIDENTS
483rd BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)

Kampfverluste an Festungen (877) und Männern und einsatzbezogene Verluste

DATE	TARGET	PILOT/CO-PILOT	SR	8-17 NUMBER	KIA	POW	MIA	OTHER*
15 April 44	Nis <i>Nis</i>	Preston-H.L. Johnston	815	42-5786	10			<i>andere</i>
16 April 44	Nis	Wahlsten-Bannette	815	42-2979	5	10	5	<i>S. Uniten</i>
23 April 44	Wiener-Neustadt	Hucia-Deicamp	840	42-5777		8	2	
30 April 44	Milan	Landholt Daniels	815	42-5418	6	4		
7 May 44	Belgrade	Lanford-McCabe	817	42-102406	2	8		
10 May 44	Wiener-Neustadt	Scranton-Ewing	815	42-29858	2	4		
24 May 44	Avisto	McSparran-Millet	817	42-107065	2	8		
14 June 44	Budapest	Owens-Kolb	840	42-31631	4	3	5	8
22 June 44	Fornova DiTaro	Schild-Friberger	815	42-102388	4	3	3	5
22 June 44	Fornova DiTaro	R.F. Johnston-Ericson	816	42-102472	2	2	8	10
9 July 44	Ploesti	Berger-Spencer	815	42-107168	2	6	8	10
14 July 44	Budapest	Swanson-Berndt	840	42-32109	2	2	8	10
14 July 44	Budapest	Goessling-Abbott	816	42-32111	8	2	10	10
15 July 44	Ploesti	Kipathick-Brooks	840	42-97653	10	8	10	10
15 July 44	Ploesti	Vlahovick-Beltonio	840	42-102429	4	8	10	10
18 July 44	Memmingen	Vanderhiles-Wanstrom	815	42-102927	4	8	10	10
18 July 44	Memmingen	Ward-Higgins	815	44-6177	8	2	10	10
18 July 44	Memmingen	Combs-Blake	816	42-107172	8	2	10	10
18 July 44	Memmingen	Gunn-Fuehr	818	42-102422	9	1	10	10
18 July 44	Memmingen	Gusterson-C.A. Griffith	816	42-97871	10	1	10	10
18 July 44	Memmingen	Hildreth-Worcester	816	42-107008	10	10	10	10
18 July 44	Memmingen	Hommel-Ball	816	42-97584	10	10	10	10
18 July 44	Memmingen	Jackson-Lond	818	44-8174	9	1	10	10
18 July 44	Memmingen	Smithers-W.D. Johnson	816	42-107179	1	8	10	10
18 July 44	Memmingen	Clark-Boggs	817	44-6287	1	8	10	10
18 July 44	Memmingen	Haley-Moewe	817	42-107170	1	8	10	10
18 July 44	Memmingen	MacIver-Monson	817	42-102862	5	5	10	10
18 July 44	Memmingen	Rickey-Hoss	817	42-102923	5	5	10	10
18 July 44	Memmingen	M.J. Smith-Myers	817	42-102382	1	9	10	10
30 July 44	Budapest	Nivens-Flanagan	817	44-6201	5	5	10	10
30 July 44	Budapest	Weston-Lizak	840	42-32010	5	5	10	10
3 Aug 44	Friedrichshafen	Mullins-Bradshaw	816	42-32007	1	10	10	10
10 Aug 44	Ploesti	T. Brown-Kempion	815	42-32007	1	10	10	10
15 Aug 44	Beach 261 D-Day	Tenslav-Netheritus	815	42-32007	1	10	10	10

im Kampf gefallen
zurückgebracht
Kriegsgefangene
zurückgebracht

0144418 44-6287

German operations

The losses of German fighter pilots, on the other hand, kept within limits, but that was because only about 45 fighter planes of the 12th Squadron/Fighter Wing 3 “Udet” had taken off from Memmingerberg, about 40 machines of Group II/Fighter Wing 300 from Holzkirchen, of Group I/Fighter Wing 300 from Bad Wörishofen, and of the 6th Squadron/Fighter Wing 27 from Fels am Wagram. The last-mentioned Squadron, however, was already assigned to Fighter Wing 3 “Udet.” Each of these fighter planes was occupied by only one man. In view of that, the 16 fatally crashed fighter pilots – 6 from Memmingerberg, the other ten from the aforementioned military airfields – carried a lot of weight. Although none of the German fighter pilots nor any civilians died in the Buchenberg area, they should be commemorated here:

**6 pilots of Group IV/Storm Fighter Wing 3 from Memmingen,
5 pilots of Group II/Fighter Wing 300 from Holzkirchen,
2 pilots of Group I/Fighter Wing 300 from Bad Wörishofen,
2 pilots of Group II/Fighter Wing 27 from Fels am Wagram,
1 pilot of Group II/Fighter Wing 51 “Mölders”**

5 pilots were **wounded**:

Hans **Bergermann**, Otto **Erhardt**, Otto **Pritzl**, Willi **Unger**, Hans **Weik**.

The names of the German fighter pilots who had to pay with their lives:
(The official documents are available.)

Technical Sergeant (*Feldwebel*) Hubert Borowski,
September 16, 1919, Drengfurt, Fw 190, 12th Squadron/Fighter Wing 3

Technical Sergeant (*Feldwebel*) Helmut Starke,
April 24, 1918, Niederlangen, Fw 190, 12th Squadron/Fighter Wing 3

Technical Sergeant (*Feldwebel*) Otfried Baisch,
September 3, 1922, Stuttgart, Fw 190, 12th Squadron/Fighter Wing 3

Airman First Class (*Obergefreiter*) Alfred Schwarz,
February 19, 1921, Nuremberg, Fw 190, 12th Squadron/Fighter Wing 3

Airman First Class (*Obergefreiter*) Eric Erck,
October 2, 1924, Meiningen, Fw 190, 11th Squadron/Fighter Wing 3

Airman First Class (*Obergefreiter*) Hans Scheu,
January 12, 1922, Villmar, Fw 190, 11th Squadron/Fighter Wing 3

Captain (*Hauptmann*) Rudolf Scharfenberg,
January 31, 1915, Fallersleben, Fw 190, 5th Squadron/Fighter Wing 300

Second Lieutenant (*Leutnant*) Franz Müller,
June 7, 1922, Steyr, Fw 190, 4th Squadron/Fighter Wing 300

Sergeant (*Unteroffizier*) Heinz Brischke,
March 10, 1921, Rehdorf, Fw 190, 4th Squadron/Fighter Wing 300

Airman (Gefreiter) Reinhard Metzner,
February 29, 1925, Berlin, Fw 190, 6th Squadron/Fighter Wing 300

Airman (Gefreiter) Gerhard Schneider,
July 6, 1924, Auerbach, Fw 190, 4th Squadron/Fighter Wing 300

Technical Sergeant (Feldwebel) Herbert Jaeschke,
August 25, 1920, Dessau, Bf 109, 1st Squadron/Fighter Wing 300

Senior Flight Officer (Oberfähnrich) Otto Henicke,
January 5, 1925, Halberstadt, Bf 109, 1st Squadron/Fighter Wing 300

Sergeant (Unteroffizier) Rolf Ingenhoff,
6th Squadron/Fighter Wing 27

Sergeant (Unteroffizier) Wilhelm Krejci,
6th Squadron/Fighter Wing 27

Technical Sergeant (Feldwebel) Herbert Michaels,
February 28, 1918, Hamburg, Fw 190, 2nd Squadron/Staffel Fighter Wing 51 "Mölders"

The Airmen (*Gefreiten*) Reinhard **Metzner**, Gerhard **Schneider**, as well as the Airman First Class (*Obergefreiter*) Alfred **Schwarz** rest in the military cemetery in Kempten.

Mission reports from the German fighter pilots:

Wilhelm **Moritz**, captain,
Group Commander of Storm Group IV/Fighter Wing 3 “Udet”

I took off with 45 Fw 190s (4 Squadrons + staff) of Storm Group IV/Fighter Wing 3 “Udet” on reports of incoming enemy planes from the south. Ascend to 9,000 m and observe the enemy over Lake Starnberg, a stream of bombers approaching over Innsbruck. I decided on a group that, flying somewhat lower, turned off to the northwest, attacked it from behind and shot down 49 bombers (Fortresses) in four minutes at the most. Three B-17s attempted to escape to the southwest/Switzerland, but were also shot down. In this area, there were no other formations involved other than Group IV/Fighter Wing 3. I myself landed in Memmingen between bomb craters and, while getting out, was greeted by a bomb about 30 m away. There were no other formations at that place. Never found out, which bomber formation we destroyed; it was undoubtedly planned for Memmingen as well. The Armed Forces’ radio station “Süd” had announced the destruction of my unit on the ground.

Oscar **Boesch**, Technical Sergeant (*Feldwebel*),
Pilot, Storm Group IV/Fighter Wing 3 “Udet”

I still remember July 18, '44 well, because it was a day of good success, 49 bombers shot down. I myself had shot down a B-17 and scored one shoot-out (*Herausschuss*).* Afterwards, I flew at low altitude straight through Switzerland, searching for an airfield. After I saw Swiss crosses everywhere, I knew where I was and then landed in Freiburg. There, I learned of the bombing raid on our Memmingen, where I later saw the heavy damages after landing there. The additional fragmentation bombs also took a heavy toll on our ground personnel; I lost one of my guards.

*Note: *Herausschuss* or “shoot-out” = to damage a bomber sufficiently to separate it from its formation.

Hans **Reinartz**, sergeant (*Unteroffizier*),
Pilot, Group II/Fighter Wing 300

On July 18th, at 9:32 in Holzkirchen, we took off with our formation, about 30 to 40 airplanes, and rendezvoused over Lake Ammer, at an altitude of about 2,000 m, with Group IV/Fighter Wing 3 (Moritz Group). I myself was assigned as No. 5 to the lead swarm (*Führerschwarm*). Sometime toward 10:15, we made contact with the enemy on the edge of the Alps. The Moritz Group (Group IV) was flying about 2,000 m in front of us and made contact with the formation. The latter was completely destroyed by the Moritz Group in a very short time. Before we came into contact with the bombers, we were attacked by Mustangs. At that time, I took a hit in the left wing. The Mustang that had shot me passed me on the right and then turned off, down to the right. I didn't follow it, but rather stayed with my swarm (*Schwarm*). A short time thereafter, we then made contact with a formation of B-17 bombers. On this occasion, I shot down a B-17. After the mission, I landed in Neu-Ulm at 10:51.

Hans **Weik**, First Lieutenant,
Squadron Commander, 10th (Storm) Squadron/Fighter Wing 3 "Udet"

I was shot down on July 18, 1944, in the Memmingen area. Right arm gunshot fracture with loss of blood. The machine (engine) burned and lost altitude. When approaching the military airfield of Memmingen, the airfield was bombarded. I was able to turn off at the last second, flew farther west, and landed on a forest meadow with much luck. The machine burned. I was unconscious and was brought to the military hospital in Waldsee, where they patched me up.

(Hans Weik died in 2001)

One of the German fighter pilots – he was able to save himself with a parachute and was only slightly injured – should be introduced on behalf of all the other soldiers who participated in the air battle over Buchenberg. He will also be discussed again at a later point.

Willi Unger, *27.03.20
Leutnant, Warstein.

Er begann erst 1942 mit der Fliegerausbildung, nachdem er zwei Jahre Flugzeug Techniker war. Im Januar 1944 kam er zur IV./JG3 "Udet" und wurde dort in kurzer Zeit zu einem der erfolgreichsten Sturmjäger der Reichsverteidigung. Bei Kriegsende im JG7.

Insgesamt 22 Luftsiege, davon 19 Viermots, 3 im Osten. Diese Erfolge konnte er bei einer erstaunlich geringen Feindflugzahl erzielen. Nur 34 seiner Einsätze führten zu Feindberührung, dreimal wurde er selber abgeschossen.

Teilnehmer an der Luftschlacht über Buchenberg. Abschluß einer B-17, FSA beim Landeanflug auf den Fliegerhorst Memmingen.

RK am 23.10.1944 als Fahnenjunker-Feldwebel nach 19 Luftsiegen.-



Willi Unger, born March 27, '20
Second Lieutenant, Warstein.

He did not begin pilot training until 1942, after he was an aircraft technician for two years. In January of 1944, he entered Group IV/Fighter Wing "Udet" and there, in a short, became one of the most successful Storm Fighters (*Sturmjäger*) in the Defense of the Reich. In Fighter Wing 7 by the end of the war.

A total of 22 air victories, including 19 four-engine planes, 3 in the east. He was able to achieve these successes with an astonishingly low number of enemy flights. Only 34 of his missions led to enemy contact; three times, he was shot down himself.

Participant in the air battle over Buchenberg. Downing of a B-17, parachute jump while approaching the military airfield of Memmingen for landing.

Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross (*Ritterkreuz*) on October 23, 1944, as a cadet sergeant (*Fahnenjunker-Feldwebel*) after 19 aerial victories. –

Unger, Sergeant
12th Storm Squadron/Fighter Wing “Udet”

Battle Report.

On July 18, 1944, at 9:30, I took off as swarm leader (*Schwarmführer*) in the group's battle formation. Sighting of the enemy occurred at 10:45. The 12th Squadron withdrew shortly before the attack and, with 2 swarms, attacked the group of about 20 Boeing Fortresses flying at the right rear. The attack occurred at 10:50 from behind and below, whereby I came into shooting position with a Boeing flying approximately in the middle of the group. I opened fire from 400 m and scored hits in the fuselage, and due to the jamming of an MK 108, the burst of fire drifted into the left wing as well as both left engines. There was an intense flash in the wing-to-fuselage joint; afterwards, both left engines burned. Individual parts came off. The Boeing Fortress immediately broke formation and went down to the left. I saw the enemy machine go down in flames in a left spiral. After the first burst of fire, the rear gunner shot no more. I wasn't able to observe the impact on account of subsequent jamming in the loading mechanism and contact with the enemy fighter cover. I was shot down myself and was able to save myself by bailing out with a parachute.

signed Unger

Copy

12th Storm Squadron/Fighter Wing "Udet"
(unit)

E.O., July 19, 1944
(place, date)

12th Downing

Report of Downing, Report of Destruction

1. Time (day, hour, minute) and area of the crash: July 18, 1944, 10:50 o'clock
about 30 km southeast of Memmingen
Altitude: 7,500 m
2. By whom was the crash/destruction effected? Sgt. Unger, 12th Storm Squadron/Fighter
Wing "Udet"
3. Type of aircraft of the downed plane: Boeing Fortress II
4. Nationality of the enemy: U.S.A.
Factory numbers or marking: American cockade
5. Manner of destruction: crash due to armaments' fire
 - a) Flames with a dark plume, flames with a light plume
 - b) Individual parts flew off, came off (explain type of parts), burst into pieces: from the
left wing
 - c) Forced to land (on this side or on the other side of the front, smoothly or in a crash)
 - d) Caught fire when shot on the ground on the other side of the front
6. Type of impact (only if this could be observed)

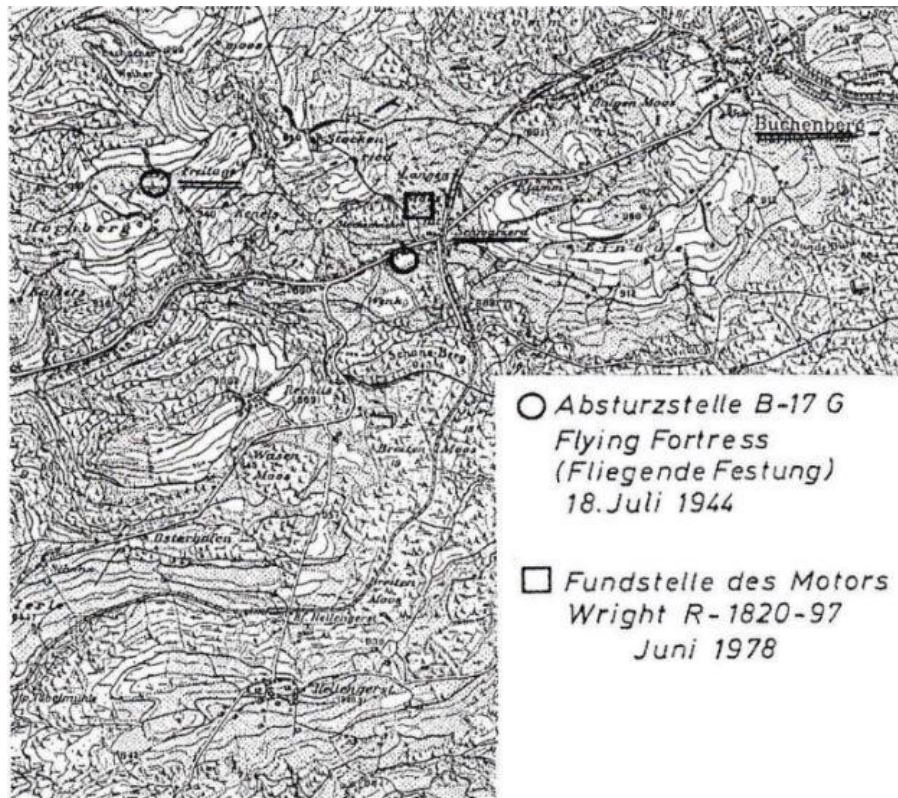
- a) On this side or on the other side of the front
- b) Vertical, at a shallow angle, fire on impact, cloud of dust
- c) Not observed, why not? Air battle with the enemy fighter cover
- 7. Fate of the passengers (dead, parachuted, not observed)
- 8. Battle report of the gunner is attached
- 9. Witnesses:
 - a) Air Lieut. Room, 12th Storm Squadron/Fighter Wing "Udet"
 - b) Ground
- 10. Number of attacks made on the enemy airplane: one
- 11. Direction from which the individual attacks were made: from behind and below
- 12. Distance from which the plane was shot down: 150 m
- 13. Tactical position from which the downing was initiated: swarm leader
- 14. Was one of the enemy gunners put out of action? yes, the rear gunner
- 15. Type of munitions used: high-explosive incendiary ammunition, high-explosive armor-piercing ammunition, and mine shells
- 16. Munitions consumed: 40 rounds 3 cm, 70 rounds 2 cm
- 17. Type and number of weapons used in shooting down the plane: 2 MK 108s, 2 MG 151/20s
- 18. Type of own machine (e.g. Me 109 6 with 2 cannons and 2 M6s.) Fw 190 A8 with 2 MK 108s and 2 MG 151/20s
- 19. Further factual or technical details worth noting: --
- 20. Hits in own machine: hits to the engine, fuselage, and wing and cabin, parachute jump
- 21. Participation of further units (also flak) --

signed Room
 (signature)
 Lieut. and acting Squadron Leader (*Staffelführer*)

For numbers 5-7, the relevant information is to be underlined.

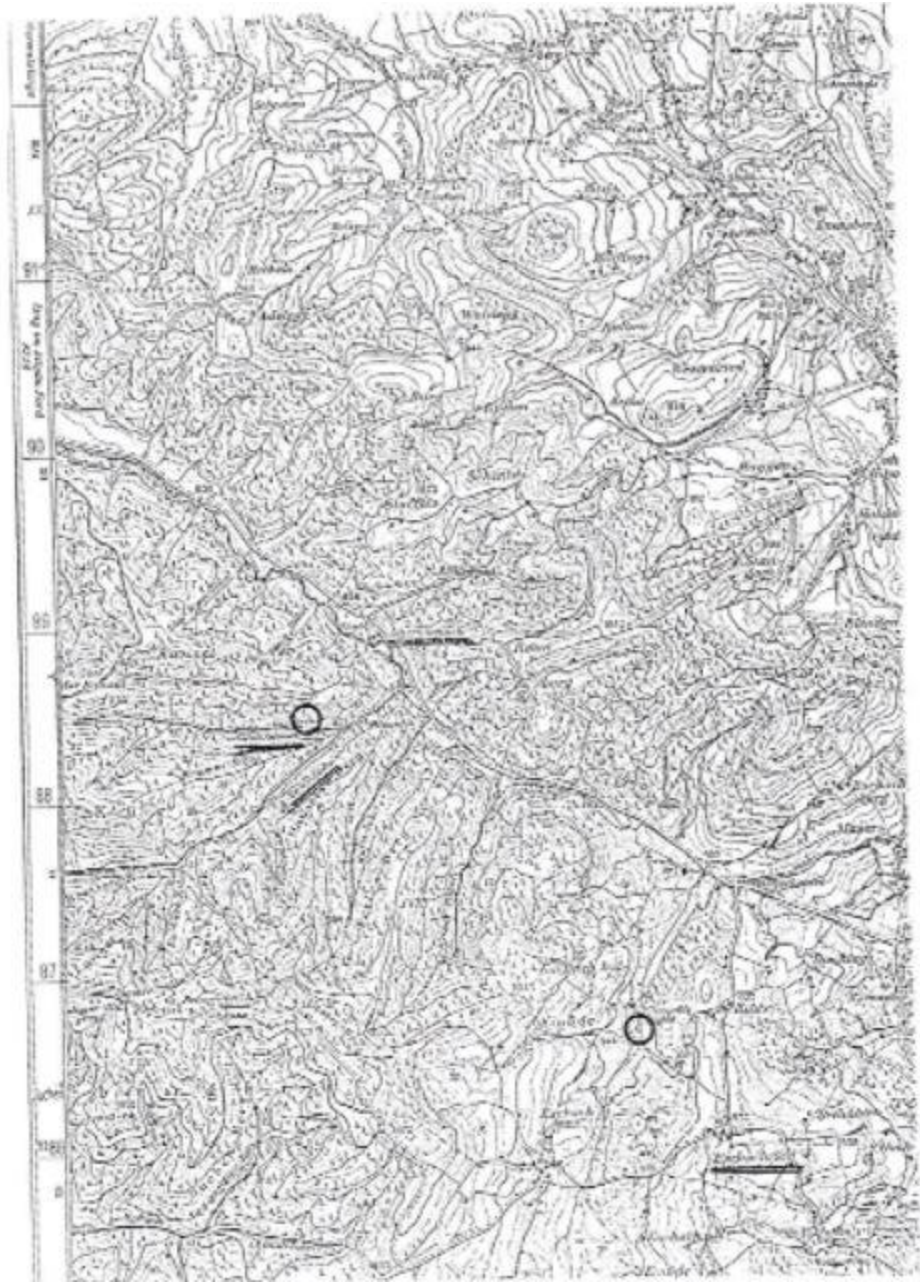
Buchenberg theater of war

It is certain that Gunn's bomber exploded over Schwarzerd. The other three machines crashed near Freitags/Hochberg, near the Pflaumenmühle and on the Kleine Goldach river near the Blockhäusle (see maps). Which of the machines crashed where, however, has still not been clarified. It also has not yet been clarified how Charles Thompson of the Smithers crew came to his death on Buchenberg soil, although his machine did not crash here.



[Map of the area west and south of Buchenberg]

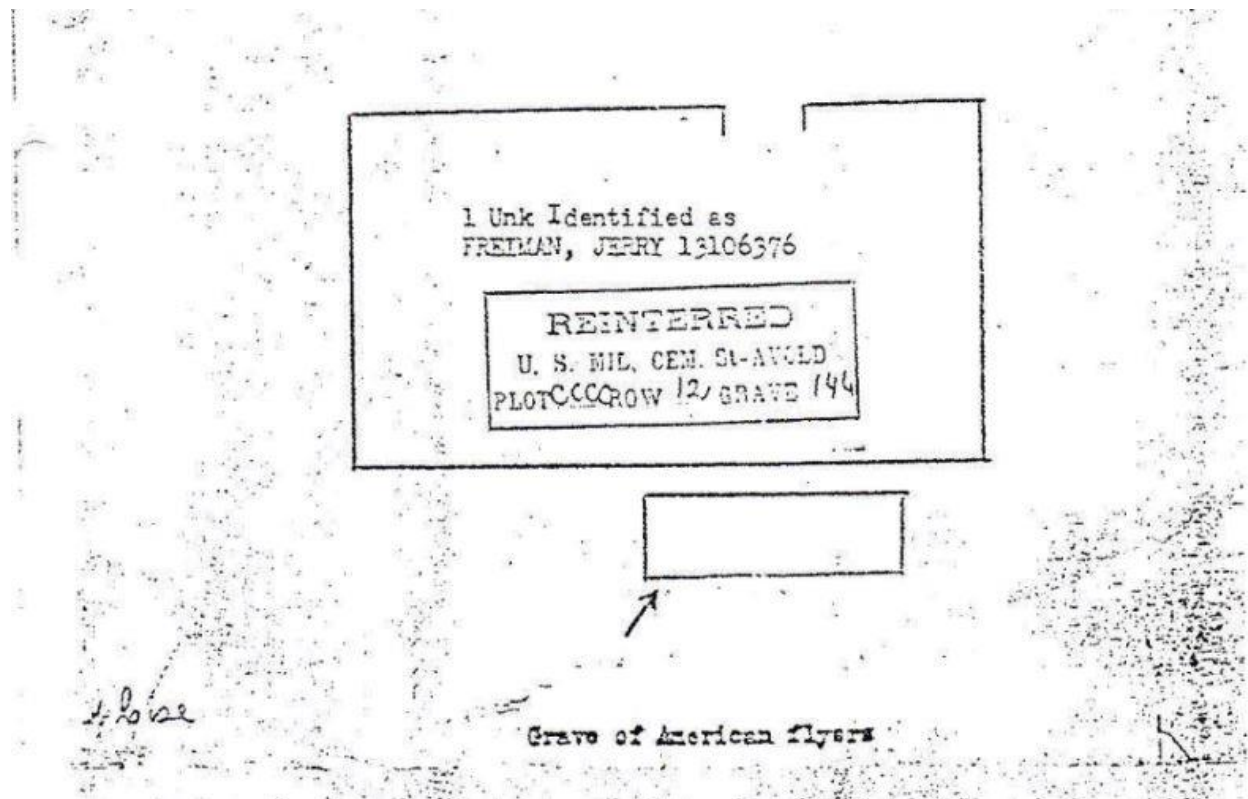
- crash site of a B-17 G Flying Fortress, July 18, 1944
- location where the Wright R-1820-97 engine was found, June 1978



Burial of the Americans who lost their lives

Mr. **Alois Klöpf**, then just ten years old, still remembers this event well. He knows: The Americans who lost their lives were brought by farmers on carts to Buchenberg in the following days. The master mason Anselm Rusch, who had to perform the duties of the mortuary attendant at that time, had already had the mass grave outside of the cemetery's south wall dug by French prisoners of war and by Polish farm workers. Now the mortal remains were lowered into it and covered with a lot of lime, since those were very hot days, and the dead, on account of the shock alone, could not be buried on July 18th, but rather – as already mentioned – only in the following days.

A sketch prepared in the course of the exhumation – on May 17, 1946 – says that another unknown soldier was identified as Jerry Freiman and was ultimately buried in the American military cemetery in St. Avoild (France).



**Catholic Parish Office of
Buchenberg
Mail via Kempten, Allgäu**

Buchenberg, May 17, 1946.

Re: graves of members
of the American Army.

Bishop's Ordinariate of Augsburg 04598 May 20, '46
--

Respectfully and most humbly reported:

Here in Buchenberg, below the cemetery, there is a grave of American soldiers (27 dead), who fatally crashed during the air battle over our area on July 18, 1944.

Respectfully and most humbly

M. Frommknecht, pastor.

Supplement: Just now, on today's date, the aforementioned bodies are being exhumed and taken away by an American delegation.

Official investigations of July 18, 1944

(The original copy dated Sept. 20, 1950)

ID + 402
AGRC Case + 12635 (closed)
Germany L-48/2942

Report on the investigation in Buchenberg, district of Kempten, Germany (L-48 / X-80)

I. Research results:

In accordance with the relevant regulation ID + 402 , AGRC [=American Graves Registration Command] case + 12633 of August 16, 1950, the investigations at the crash sites of the U.S. bombers were reopened in order to try one last time to find further remains of the downed crew members.

II. Facts and attendant circumstances:

Since no DULAG* record for the bomber A/C 44-6174 was available and since the names of the crew members of this bomber are listed in the DULAG record of the bomber A/C 42-102422 (crashed near Schwarzerd), including the name of Staff Sgt. Stephan Jaski, who was a crew member of Lt. Gunn's airplane A/C 42-102422, it became clear while reviewing these facts that two airplanes had crashed near Schwarzerd. Namely, A/C 42-102422 and A/C 44-6174.

Thus, special attention was paid to this crash site. In order to find out additional details, the following individuals were questioned:

Adler, Josef, mayor of Buchenberg and witness to the airplane crashes in Schwarzerd.

Oberhofer, Therese, an employee in the inn at the Schwarzerd train station and owner of a nearby meadow, onto which the aircraft wreckage primarily fell.

Reissler, formerly military police in Buchenberg, now Oberdorf near Martinszell.

Oberhofer, farmer in Schwarzerd.

Sandholzer, now lives in Schwarzerd.

Wiedemann, Heinrich, farmer in Schwarzerd.

Kaufmann, Johann, farmer in Schwarzerd.

Rasch, owner of the cheese factory in Schwarzerd.

- 2 -

*DULAG = transit camp for members of the Air Force.

According to the written and oral statements of these people, it appears that one U.S. bomber exploded in the air and, in a cloud of black smoke, burst into countless little pieces, which then fell down like rain over a wide area around Schwarzerd.

At the same time, another U.S. bomber was observed as it crashed on the meadow of Therese Oberhofer behind the cheese factory of Schwarzerd. Its engines and wings were already torn off, but the fuselage was undamaged and did not burn, although there were many inflammable objects on board. This may serve as proof that this fuselage was not a part of the bomber that exploded in mid-air.

There were three complete bodies; a fourth corpse lay about 100 m away from the crash site – without a parachute. A fifth body with severe back injuries was found at the edge of the forest called Schieneberg. Finally, the sixth body lay beneath the fuselage. He was not discovered until the wreckage was removed.

In addition, several body parts lay scattered over a broad meadowland in tall grass. They were gathered soon after the crash and stored in a large box. In this box, there was already a burned and mutilated corpse from a crash near Freitags-Hochberg. The remains discovered in Schwarzerd are probably related to four crew members.

Near St. George's Chapel (*Georgskapelle*) near Buchenberg, another dead airman was found, whose parachute had not opened. He was possibly a crew member of one of the two aircraft that crashed in Schwarzerd.

A total of about 13 U.S. airmen – four of whom were wounded – were held prisoner in Therese Oberhofer's inn. The wounded were taken to a hospital in Kempten. The remaining airmen remained in the custody of the German military.

The pieces of large and small wreckage that could be recovered near Schwarzerd were so immensely numerous that they filled three large trucks, loaded by German soldiers at the railway station there.

These facts led to the opinion that two airplanes were involved in the crash area of Schwarzerd. See exhibits A, B, C.

All of the corpses and body parts from Schwarzerd were buried in a mass grave in Buchenberg, together with deceased from other crash sites.

For months after this air battle, farmers and farm workers continued to find human remains and pieces of wreckage while mowing. The pieces of wreckage were collected in order to protect the farm machinery from damage. The body parts were possibly buried in the ground. One can also assume that the many foxes in this area ate or carried off the remainder.

III. Establishment of facts.

- a) Schwarzerd: The light fuselage created only a small depression in the meadow. Several excavations have been made at this site, but only pure soil was found. The entire area has been searched for further wreckage with great precision. Part of the meadow is marshy. The attached sketch shows where excavations were made and where more deeply buried wreckage was discovered. Two machine guns that had been tied together have been discovered at one site. Their numbers are: 89995 and 972424. Further numbers point to M.A.C.R. [=Missing Air Crew Report] A/C 42 – 102422, Lt. Gunn's airplane. Nowhere were human remains found.
- b) Freitags-Hochberg: Additional excavation efforts to find further human remains yielded no results.
- c) Eschachried – Pflaumenmühle: The final site was still clearly discernible. It was excavated until they hit pure soil. No human remains have been found.

Through this research, it has been determined with certainty that A/C 42-102422, whose pilot was Lt. GUNN, crashed on July 18, 1944, in Schwarzerd after it exploded in mid-air. It can be assumed that most of the crew members, including Lt. GUNN, were torn to pieces by the explosion. This and the few airplane parts were all that remained on the ground. Most has apparently been lost in the tall grass of the meadows and/or was destroyed by foxes. German military personnel possibly discovered a torn-off part of A/C 42-102422, or the identity was determined in another way. For that reason, this A/C number is registered in the DULAG [=transit camp] records.

Possibly, it was assumed that all of the bodies found in this area were crew members of the same airplane. For that reason, their names are in the DULAG records for A/C 42-102422. And that, although they were actually crew members of A/C 44-6174, which crashed at the same time and in the same area. However, it is unlikely that this can help with the identification of the airplanes, including the two partial number plates (?)

Exhibit "D" shows the number of complete corpses and body parts, as they were found at each crash site. In the unanimous opinion of all the witnesses involved, a total of 22 complete corpses and the remains of 5 (five) other soldiers were found. The numbers correspond exactly to the burial of the bodies in the mass grave, as was noted and outlined in the report of July 17, 1955. It all agrees with the relevant section of the mayor's records as well.

2 (two) additional corpses were found by an AGRC [=American Graves Registration Command] excavation (exhumation) group at the crash site near Oberkürnach. That results in a total of 29 corpses, which corresponds exactly to the total number of victims of the 5 aircraft.

One can assume that a numerical difference could have resulted from a significant number of body parts being collected in large wooden boxes.

IV. Recommendations:

It is not possible for the excavation groups to determine which of the victims were found in Schwarzerd and which were later disinterred from the mass grave in Buchenberg, because the MACR [=Missing Air Crew Report] does not show the status of the individual crew members.

Even we do not have the excavation notes. As has already been shown in previous cases, the corpses and body parts were buried in the same order that they were found. That means a partial wall was used to separate the groups. If the excavation notes were written correctly, one can compare them with Exhibit "D," and that will undoubtedly show that 2 (two) airplanes crashed in Schwarzerd.

The discovery of machine gun No. 972424 in Schwarzerd proves that GUNN's airplane was one of these.

It is therefore recommended to acknowledge that the remains were already discovered, as well as all that can possibly be found of the airplanes concerned.

/s/ JAMES L. McCULLER
Capt. TC
AGRC S&R* Team No. 5

**Note: AGRC S&R = American Graves Registration Command Search & Rescue*

Buchenberg, September 21, 1950

REPORT CONCERNING THE AIR BATTLE ON JULY 18, 1944

I, the undersigned, was an eyewitness to an air battle that took place on July 18, 1944. I saw that an airplane, shortly after the beginning of the air battle, exploded in mid-air.

On account of the clouds of black smoke that came from the explosion, I did not see any large pieces fall down. I only saw a shower of small parts.

I worked on this day. I am a forester in the forestry office of Kürnach. At that time, I was in the forest, over which the air battle took place. I was subsequently appointed by the police to work as an assistant under these special circumstances.

I was ordered to cross the forest for the purpose of erecting a barrier around the crash site. There, I was able to determine that a wide area of ground near Schwarzerd was strewn with little parts that, in my opinion, all came from the airplane. The fuselage, which impacted the ground in Schwarzerd and had neither wings nor engines, in my opinion cannot be from the machine, the wreckage of which was strewn about here.

There were also no traces of burning to be seen on this fuselage, while most of the small parts from the explosion were burned.

While I erected the barrier around the crash site, I also looked at the inside of the fuselage from time to time and searched the machine. I saw three (3) dead crew members lying there, who were completely uninjured externally.

One man lay about 100m away, without a parachute; another lay at a great distance on the edge of the Schöenberg Forest, with a parachute strapped on. The dead man had a large wound in his back.

After the removal of the fuselage, another soldier was found, who was under the wreck. A total of six (6) dead were found. The mortal remains were gathered together and buried in the cemetery of Buchenberg. In my opinion, that concerned the mortal remains of four (4) men in the end.

In addition, one man was found near St. George's Chapel (*Georgskapelle*) in Buchenberg. His parachute had not opened. I cannot say from which airplane he came.

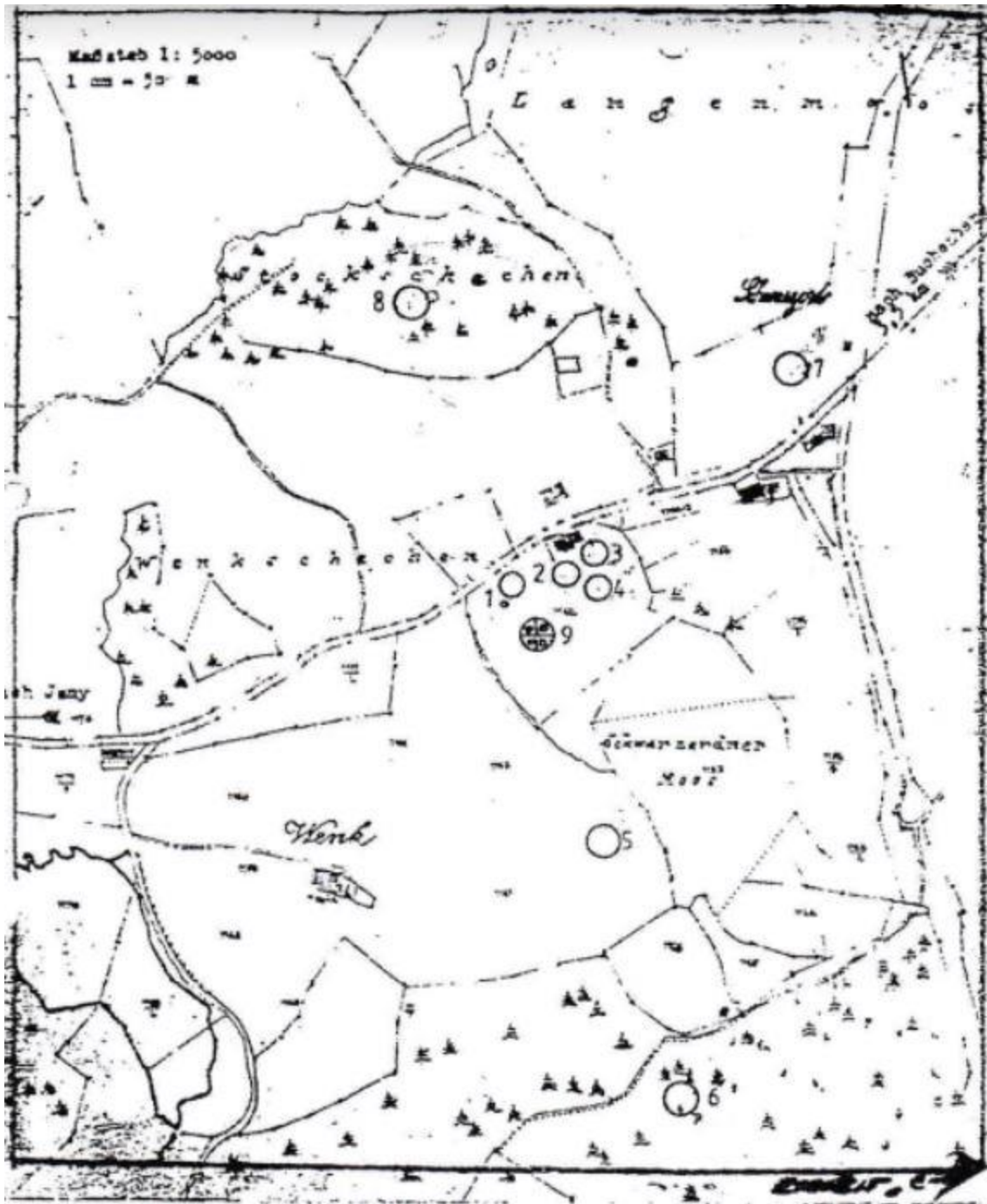
I cannot provide further information concerning details of other crash sites. As I had already mentioned, I was deployed in Schwarzerd.

seal/stamp

translated by:
Raymond Hubert

The mayor
signed: illegible
probably Adler

I confirm that I have translated accurately and to the best of my knowledge and conscience.



(See accompanying legend, p. 71)

Legend for the sketch of excavations in the area of Schwarzerd
(See p. 66)

Legend to sketch Exhibit "C", area "SCHWARZERD".

- 1
0 Part of cylinder found deeply embedded in ground
- 2
0 Part of a cylinder found deeply embedded in ground
- 3
0 Machine Guns 89995 and 972424 and generator found deeply embedded in ground
- 4
0 Chin Turret found deeply embedded in ground (Number plate inclosed)
- 5
0 Part of landing gear (Wheel)
- 6
0 Three-bladed propeller
- 7
0 Very heavy part of a bomber deeply embedded in ground
- 8
0 Hole still visible where one motor was probably removed.
- 9
0 Crash point of fuselage, where four (4) complete bodies were found

Small red circles indicate where two (2) additional complete bodies were previously located.

Partial remains were scattered over entire area.

Opposing forgetting

What reminds one of July 18, 1944, today.

The question may be allowed: What would have happened if, one day in July of 1978, that B-17 engine had not been found? If the author had not made this find his purpose in life, had not started his research in German and American archives, if he had not been out and about, asking – curiously asking! – questions everywhere. It was simply not yet common to talk about such things. Even I – and that as a teacher! – heard about this event of July of '44 for the first time when I had already been in Buchenberg for more than twenty years. If you would forgive my saying so, there would be fewer and fewer of those who experienced this air battle. And a pivotal chapter of our community's history would have actually and with certainty been forgotten.

Putting up a commemorative plaque on the local war memorial in the cemetery was a logical idea that followed. With the backing of our military associations, with the unanimous “Yes” of Buchenberg's town council, and with the help of many donations from near and far, the Local History Association could then, in July of 1998, unveil that plaque, which has opposed forgetting ever since. And in the meantime, this event belongs to the body of must-have historical knowledge for every resident of Buchenberg.

Be we will let the press get a word in for this most recent time period:

U.S. Veteran on Search for Evidence Concerning the Air Battle 53 Years Ago

Shot down over the Allgäu in 1944 – A resident of Kempten researches

Kempten (se). Charles Erickson was taken prisoner by an approximately 14-year-old boy on July 18, 1944. The on-board technician was then the only survivor of the crew of a B-17, which was shot down by German fighters in one of the heaviest air battles over the Allgäu. Today, the 73-year-old lives in Oklahoma. Contact with the veteran was established by Wilhelm Heuberger of Kempten, who, along with the American, is searching for eyewitnesses to and documents concerning the air battle.

An archivist of the 483rd Bombardment Group, to which Erickson belonged, supported Heuberger's research. Through him, the retired aircraft engine builder obtained the address of the former on-board technician of the "Flying Fortress." Since then, the men have corresponded by mail. The most interesting thing for both of them would be to find the man who took Erickson prisoner in those days.

Erickson remembers the downing rather precisely. According to his own account, he landed with his parachute northwest of a village in the old district of Kempten. He suffered shrapnel wounds on his leg and burns to his face at that time. He then ran into the armed youth near a bridge. Erickson was led into the village with raised hands. He was locked up in the fire station.

Later, the airman was led to the main street and was taken away by a military truck. On the truck, Erickson met several comrades from his Bombardment Group again. The driver probably brought the soldiers to a barracks in Kempten. From there, they went via Frankfurt to a prisoner of war camp on the Baltic Sea. He arrived there on his 21st birthday. He was not freed until May 6, 1945, thus two days before the end of the war.

The American would like to exchange experiences with the now perhaps 67 or 68-year-old who took Erickson prisoner at that time. The veteran can no longer remember the name of the place though. He assumes, of course, that the "heroic deed" of the young fellow created quite a sensation at the time. Whoever has information about the incident can contact Wilhelm Heuberger, Lindauer Straße 53V, telephone (08 31) 2 89 17.

Memorial plaque planned

For years, Heuberger has collected information surrounding the air battle over the Allgäu. On his initiative, with the support of the Local History Association of Buchenberg, a memorial plaque for the crashed airmen is now to be created. The bronze casting could find its place at the Buchenberg cemetery. 29 fallen Americans rested there after July 18, 1944, until their exhumation in May of 1946.



The on-board technician Charles Erickson in younger years. In 1944, the American soldier was shot down over the Allgäu.
Photo: private

Allgäu Newspaper (*Allgäuer Zeitung*) July 18, 1997

Search for Evidence 53 Years After the Crash

As a 16-year-old, Xaver Walk of Buchenberg had arrested a downed airman

Buchenberg/Kempton (li).

53 years ago today, on July 18, 1944, one of the heaviest air battles raged over all of the Allgäu. 14 U.S. machines were shot down by German fighter planes. 55 crew members died, 87 were taken away as prisoners of war. Among them was Charles Erickson, who landed with his parachute in the hamlet of Freitags near Buchenberg. Xaver Walk had taken him away and now went with the amateur researchers Wilhelm Heuberger and Michael Schneider on a search for evidence.

Two weeks ago in the *Allgäu Newspaper*, Heuberger had told about his correspondence with the 74-year-old American from Oklahoma. Up to today, Erickson does not know how he got out of the shot-up machine and now wanted to find out details about his landing. After the *Allgäu Zeitung* report, 29 callers reported in, among them Xaver Walk, who lived on his parent's farm in Freitags in 1944.

On that July 18th, Walk had heard how a B-17 bomber had buried itself into a meadow near his parental home. Several hundred meters farther away, Charly Erickson had landed with the parachute. At an altitude of 4,000 meters, he had been hurled out of a "Flying Fortress" and now sat on the ground with shrapnel wounds and burns.

The 16-year-old Walk thereupon helped himself to his father's pistol, arrested the airman, and went with him as far as Schwarzerd. German soldiers encamped there at the railway station's inn sent the wounded man to the military hospital in Kempton. Years later, during the search for evidence, Walk immediately recognized the American on the group picture, although he had only seen him briefly 53 years earlier. Wilhelm Heuberger now wanted to know what happened to the "Flying Fortress." "No one exactly knows," Walk said dismissively. A clearing detachment from the military airfield at Kaufbeuren probably removed the machine.

Heuberger wants to have a memorial plaque cast for the fallen members of five bomber crews who landed all around Buchenberg and have it installed in the cemetery. He has to collect around 7,000 marks for it. He already has 100 dollars – sent by Erickson from Oklahoma.



53 years after the downing of an American bomber, Wilhelm Heuberger (left) and Michael Schneider (right) view the crash site in Freitags near Buchenberg. Xaver Walk (center) had arrested a U.S. airman at that time, who had landed a few meters farther away with a parachute.

Photo: Ralf Lienert

Allgäu Newspaper (*Allgäuer Zeitung*) April 24, '98

Immortalizing 29 Fallen Americans on a Memorial Plaque

Local History Association of Buchenberg seeks patrons

Buchenberg (ett).

The Local History Association of Buchenberg is planning the erection of a memorial plaque on the war memorial in the Buchenberg cemetery. During years of research in European and American archives, member Wilhelm Heuberger has compiled names, birthdates and ranks of those American soldiers who died on July 18, 1944, in the Buchenberg area.

On that day, probably the largest air battle in the area of Southern Germany during the Second World War took place. While flying toward Memmingen, the 483rd Bombardment Group (H) of the American Air Force, coming from Italy, was intercepted. During the developing battle, 14 of the 26 "Flying Fortresses" crashed. 55 soldiers died, 87 fell into German captivity. Group III/Bombardment Wing 4 (Udet) and the attached 2nd Squadron/Bombardment Wing 51 (Mölders) lost seven pilots, five were wounded. During the fighting over the old district of Kempten, 13 machines (Fw 190s) were lost.

Center of the battle

The airspace over Buchenberg was the center of this battle. Even though no German soldiers and also no civilians killed here, 29 fallen Americans stayed behind. They were first buried by the outer wall of the cemetery, then exhumed in 1946. The Local History Association of Buchenberg holds the view "that the names of those, who gave their young lives here so that we can live in freedom today, should not be forgotten."

Dedication on July 19th

Therefore, their names are to be immortalized on a memorial plaque next to the plaques for the fallen of both World Wars from the community of Buchenberg. The dedication is planned for Sunday, July 19th, at the Buchenberg cemetery.

As the association reports, the financing of the plaque is not yet secured. There are costs amounting to around 8,000 marks, which, for the most part, are to be covered by donations. A donation has already been received from Charles Erickson from the U.S.A., with whom Heuberger is in contact by mail. As a flight mechanic of the U.S. Air Force, Erickson took part in this battle and was the only one to survive the crash of his bomber.

Donations can be transferred to Account No. 412074 (Bank routing number 73369902) at the Farmers' Co-operative Bank (Raiffeisenbank) of Buchenberg. Code word "July 18, 1944." The community of Buchenberg issues donation receipts.

On July 18, 1998, the following report appears in “Our Mountain Places” (*Unsere Bergstätten*):

Air Battle over Buchenberg Celebrates Anniversary – Memorial Plaque is Unveiled

Buchenberg – Tomorrow, on Saturday, it will be 54 years since the sky over Buchenberg trembled. The crashing and flashing over our fields only lasted a scant quarter hour, and then the horrific episode was over. 29 Americans did not survive this battle. The residents of Buchenberg, who were harvesting hay on this bright Tuesday morning, were confronted with the cruelty of a war that had now lasted for five years already.

A piece of contemporary history, which many of our citizens can still remember, should not fall into oblivion. That was also the cause for the Local History Association to take the initiative to put up a memorial plaque. Thanks to the meticulous research work of our member Wilhelm Heuberger, thanks to the spontaneous approval of our municipal council, and thanks to the numerous donations from near and far, this commemorative plaque can now be unveiled on our war memorial this coming Sunday.

What was the cause that led to that debacle on July 18, 1944?

167 airplanes of the B-17 type, belonging to the American Air Force, took off from airfields near Foggia/Southern Italy in order to attack and destroy the airfield and military installations in Memmingen. The 483rd Bombardment Group was one of six Groups that formed this formation. As a result of dense clouds and radio misunderstandings, this formation was broken up over the Adriatic; two Groups returned to their bases. The 483rd Bombardment Group, however, consisting of 26 B-17 airplanes, decided to attack the main target of Memmingen as ordered. Thus, it continued its flight alone and without an escort over the northern part of Italy and over Austria into the target zone. This comes from American documents.

The approach of the American airplanes did not remain unnoticed. Air observation posts – one of which was located on the Buchenberg – reported this to Memmingen, and German fighter planes flew from the airfield there toward the enemy Group. They met over the old district of Kempten. At that time, 14 of the 26 “Flying Fortresses,” as these American bombers were also called, were shot down. 55 Americans were killed in this action, 87 were able to save themselves with the parachute and fell into German captivity. In the Buchenberg area, 29 killed were counted from five different airplanes, all however belonging to the 483rd [Bombardment] Group, and after the conclusion of the military investigations, were buried by the southern outside wall of our cemetery.

The 12 bombers that escaped the air battle subsequently attacked the airfield of Memmingen with three additional Groups and caused great damage there and in the surrounding area. The number of victims, airfield personnel and civilians, exceeded 150. The German airmen of Storm Group IV/Fighter Wing 3 “Udet,” who had flown toward the Americans with 45 fighter planes, lost seven comrades; five were seriously injured.

The American and German airmen all carried out their instructions in accordance with their duty. War, wherever and whenever it takes place, is an evil. May the deeper sense of keeping the memory of past war events alive be seen in the unveiling ceremony this coming Sunday, so that such are never repeated again.

July 18, 1944
 483rd Bomb Group Storm Group IV/
 Bomb Group Fighter Wing 3 "Udet"

In Memory of all American and German Airmen killed in Aerial Combat.
 They lost their lives at Buchenberg:

	B-17 42-102422 Gunn Crew 483rd Bomb Group (H) 816 Sq
1 st Lt	Gunn, Timothy A. P * 08.10.21 Lakewood Ohio
1 st Lt	Fuehrer, Carl M. CP * 09.07.21 Rochester New York
2 nd Lt	Howland, Ralph E. B * 15.02.24 Sioux Falls South Dakota
2 nd Lt	Cashman, Kay V. N * 29.06.18 Sacramento California
S/Sgt	Fischetti, Alfred B. E * 10.03.23 Bayside L.I. New York
T/SGT	Nicholas, Hubert AE * 07.10.23 Quinton Kentucky
T/SGT	Freiman, Jerry RO * 21.10.21 Brooklyn New York
S/SGT	Odiome, Dolph Jr. ARO * 01.09.23 Center Michigan
S/SGT	Niezgocki, Vernon G. AAG * 14.10.23 St. Paul Minnesota

	B-17 44-6174 Jackson Crew 483rd Bomb Group (H) 816 Sq
2 nd Lt	Jackson, Eugene A. P * 13.09.18 Wethersfield Connecticut
2 nd Lt	Lonc, Frank A. CP * 30.08.18 Rochester New York
2 nd Lt	Higgins, Walter F. N * 20.03.22 Philadelphia Pennsylvania
2 nd Lt	Rother, Theodore H. B * 17.09.24 Brooklyn New York
S/Sgt	Ulitch, Walter G. AE * 03.12.23 Bronx New York
T/Sgt	Bermandie, William J. RO * 09.07.07 Norwich Connecticut
S/Sgt	Cook, Nicholas J. ARO * 15.01.12 South Holland Illinois
S/Sgt	Milks, Lewis E. AG * 22.10.24 Sioux City Iowa
S/Sgt	Murphy, Ralph B. AAG * 25.11.23 Phoenix Arizona

	B-17 42-102923 Rickey Crew 483rd Bomb Group (H) 817 Sq
T/Sgt	Mazzacone, Angelo R. E * 27.03.23 New York New York
S/Sgt	Short, Douglas J. AE * 10.03.21 Detroit Michigan
S/Sgt	Ramsdell, Raymond G. ARO * 15.01.22 Middletown New York
S/Sgt	Wertenberger Jr., Alton A * 27.10.23 Mishawaka Indiana
S/Sgt	Huntley, John H. AA * 1923 /24 Detroit Michigan

	B-17 42-102862 Maclin Crew 483rd Bomb Group (H) 817 Sq
1 st Lt	Maclin, Don R. P * 15.11.20 Placerville California
2 nd Lt	Monson, Donald D. CP * 07.08.22 Anoka Nebraska
T/Sgt	Ricciardo, Joseph A. RO * 19.08.24 Newark Ohio
S/Sgt	Bamey, Alton S. ARO * 21.08.23 Detroit Michigan
S/Sgt	Pate, James I. AA * 10.04.24 Jacksonville Illinois

	B-17 42-107179 Smithers Crew 483rd Bomb Group (H) 817 Sq
S/Sgt	Thompson, Charles R. AE * 05.01.22 Tulsa Oklahoma

Exhumed the 17th of May 1946
 May this Commemorative Plaque further the Preservation of Peace.
 Buchenberg, the 19th of July 1998

Former Adversaries Have Become Friends

Buchenberg: Association unveils memorial plaque for 29 American airmen

Buchenberg (is).

At the war memorial in Buchenberg, a memorial plaque for 29 American soldiers has been unveiled, who lost their lives 54 years ago during an air battle in the Buchenberg area. The dead were first buried on the south outside wall of the cemetery but were exhumed two years later and were transported in part to an American military cemetery near Saarbrücken, in part to their homeland.

On July 18, 1944, 167 bombers of the U.S. Air Force took off in Southern Italy in order to attack the airfield and military installations in Memmingen. From there, German fighter planes of Storm Group IV/Fighter Wing 3 "Udet" flew toward them. During the air battle over Buchenberg, there were 29 killed from five American airplanes.

Wilhelm Heuberger of Kempten, once a non-commissioned officer of the Air Force (*Luftwaffe*), has now ascertained their names. The Local History Association of Buchenberg had them immortalized on a memorial plaque in the cemetery, next to the names of the German victims from both World Wars. The first to donate was Charles Erickson, who was the only one from his bomber to survive July 18, 1944. Xaver Walk from Kenels, then 16, had arrested and turned him in. As a contemporary witness, the now 70-year-old took part in the memorial celebration.

Admonition to vigilance

"Former adversaries have long since become friends," chairman Erhard Ott determined. The plaque was unveiled in the presence of numerous people by two former pilots, Hans Weik and Willi Unger, who were wounded during the air battle. War is always an evil, Ott stressed. The wish "Never again war" must be preceded by the wish "Never again dictatorship." For dictatorship is the preliminary stage of war, "and it is up to all of us to never let it go that far again." The memorial plaque should always remind one anew to be vigilant.

Like Mayor Ernst Windmüller, who reminded us of the 29 young airmen – one was not even 20 years old: “We must never forget such a thing.” That the soldiers on both sides were doing their duty was emphasized by Gerhard Baeker of the traditional unit “Fighter Wing 3 Udet.” After the end of the war, they had quickly found each other and became friends.

The ecumenical blessing of the memorial was performed by the Protestant deacon Hans Gerhard Maser and – in place of the ailing local clergyman – Pastor Heinrich Ant as a vacation guest from the Diocese of Trier. Apart from the market community of Buchenberg, the three military associations of this area offered bundles of flowers: the Warriors’ and Soldiers’ Association (*Krieger- und Soldatenkameradschaft*) and the Reservists’ Association (*Reservistenkameradschaft*) of Buchenberg, as well as the Warriors’ and Reservists’ Association (*Krieger- und Reservistenverein*) of Kreuzthal, which had dispatched their flag delegations.

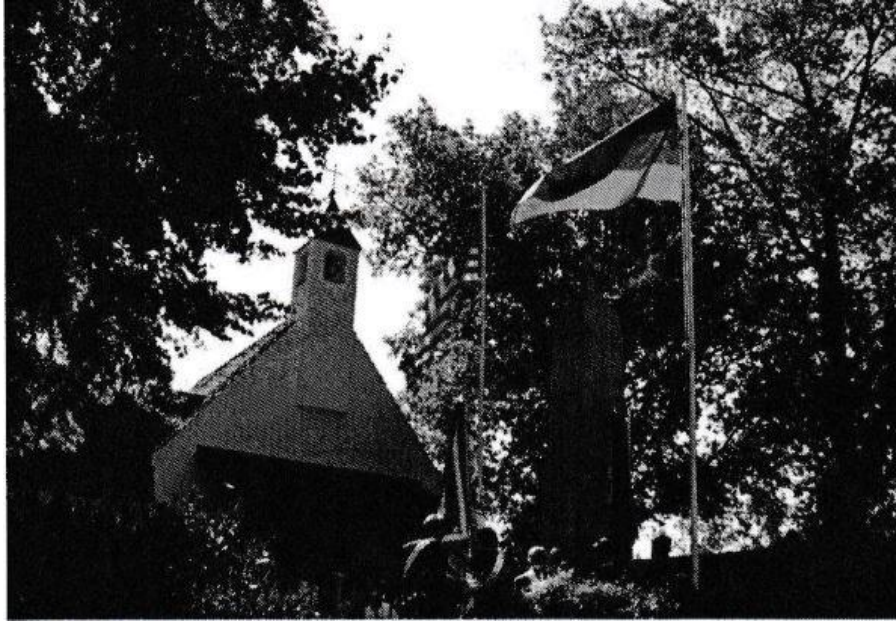
The flags of the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States fluttered at the war memorial. Especially moving was the contribution of the soprano Karen Eldred from New York, who honored her dead countrymen at the celebration with the “Largo” by G. F. Händel. The Buchenberg band played ceremonial tunes and also played the song “I Had a Comrade” (*Ich hatt’ einen Kameraden*). Ute Hoffmann, chairwoman of the German-Israeli Society, showed her reverence to a Jewish soldier among the downed airmen.



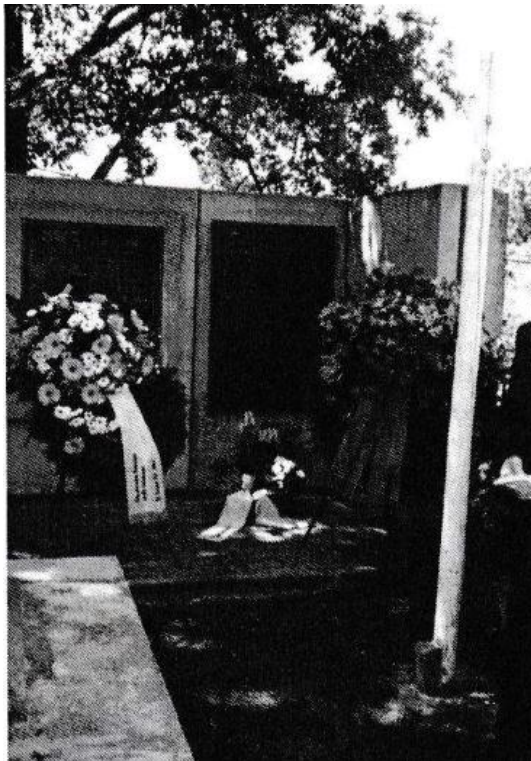
At the memorial (from left): Erhard Ott, chairman of the Local History Association, Wilhelm Heuberger, who compiled the data concerning the dead, and Herbert Kutscha, former commander of Group II of the Fighter Wing “Udet.” Photos: Ralf Lienert



Fighter pilots who took part in the air battle and were wounded thereby. Hans Weik, left, and Willi Unger at the dedication ceremony in 1998. Hans Weik died in 2001.



A worthy memorial site at the monument to those killed in action in the Buchenberg cemetery. The flags of the two former enemy states show that peaceful cooperation came long ago.



When Enemies of Long Ago Fall into Each Other's Arms American Airman in Buchenberg in Search of Evidence

By Rita Winter
Buchenberg

55 years ago, the American Charles Erickson had to cover the distance from Freitags to Schwarzerd with raised hands. Directly behind him: the farmer's son Xaver Walk, who held the enemy soldier in check with a pistol. Last week, the two met again – and embraced each other as friends.

The story could come from a novel. It begins on July 18, 1944. On this day, a heavy air battle raged over Buchenberg. 14 U.S. bombers are shot down by German fighter planes, including the machine with on-board technician Charles Erickson. At 4,000 meters, the 20-year-old is hurled out of the bomber and lands with his parachute in the hamlet of Freitags near Buchenberg.

From his parents' farm, the 16-year-old Xaver Walk observes the soldier's landing, takes his father's pistol and arrests Erickson. He goes a good half hour with him to Schwarzerd and hands him over to German soldiers there.

Jumping ahead into the 90s: His research on the air battle over Buchenberg brings the amateur researcher from Kempten, Wilhelm Heuberger, into contact with Erickson. He, in turn, has been searching for years for the young man who had picked him up at that time. With the help of the Allgäu Newspaper (*Allgäuer Zeitung*), Xaver Walk is found (we reported). An exchange of letters follows, and finally Charles Erickson and his wife Jean say that they are coming for a visit. They are accompanied by Joe Higgins, whose brother sat in Erickson's plane and died in the crash.



On-board technician Charles Erickson in his younger years. In 1944, the American soldier was shot down over Buchenberg. Now he came back as a welcome guest. Photo: private

Tears of emotion

They meet in front of Buchenberg's town hall. The enemies of long ago do not even try to fight the tears of emotion, as they stand before each other after more than half a century. Many words are not needed in this moment; the memory of a shared experience overcomes all three.

In a friendly group in the mayor's office, they can then put their feelings into words once again. "I never thought that I would ever return to the place where I survived the war," admits Erickson. It has been his fondest wish to see the man again, who had found him in open country. "His face never left my mind." Walk thinks "Charly" had hardly changed in the 55



After 55 years, Charles Erickson (in front) visited Buchenberg, where he was shot down as an airman in 1944. Upon being received in the town hall, the veteran entered his name into the guestbook – flanked by Xaver Walk (right), who arrested Erickson, and Joe Higgins (left), whose brother died during the air battle. In the middle: Mayor Ernst Windmüller. Photo: Diemand

years. Whether the pistol, with which he held the enemy in check at that time, was even loaded? “That I do not know,” the senior grins. “I probably had more fear than he did.”

Joe Higgins is near tears when he says thank you for the memorial plaque in the local cemetery. It is comforting that his brother and 28 other American airmen who died over Buchenberg were not forgotten. As reported, the bronze casting was put up on the cemetery wall in 1998 on Heuberger’s initiative with the financial support of the Local History Association and American veterans.

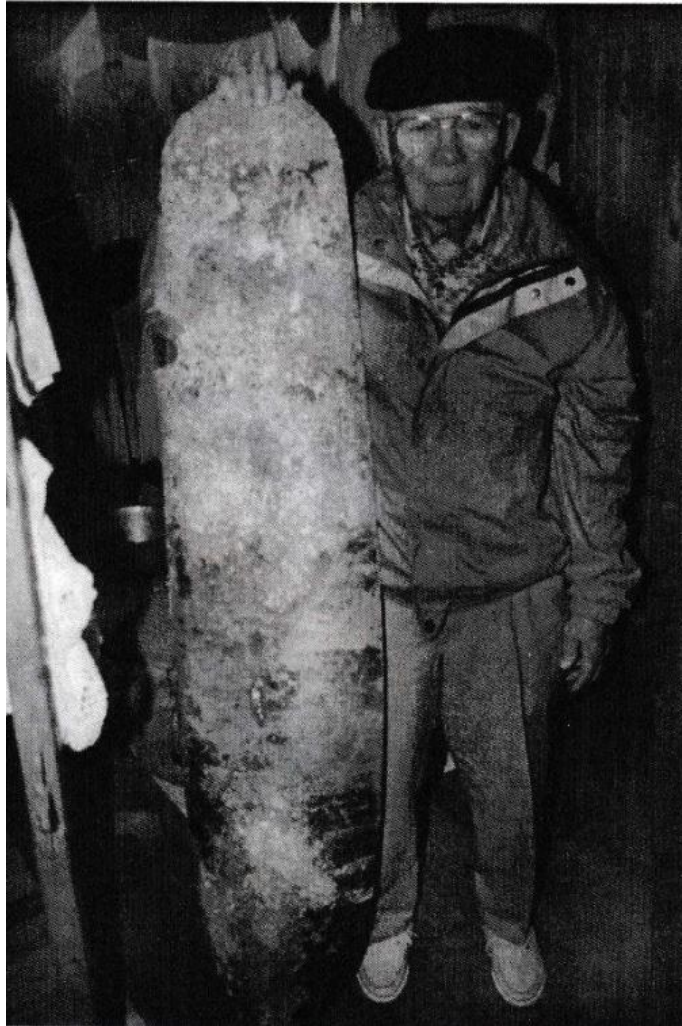
The visit there was on the American guests’ agenda, as was the crash site in Freitags. A moving past comes alive, but the Americans also experience new impressions: like in the Brotzeitstüble, when the landlady plays the zither and the daughter performs “Il silenzio” on the trumpet.

Erickson and Higgins experience a special surprise in the house of Erhard Ott, the chairman of the Local History Association: There, Xaver Walk’s sister shows them her silk wedding dress – it was made a good 50 years ago from Erickson’s parachute. Three Walk daughters wore the noble piece to the altar. “And I thought I had hidden the parachute really well,” Erickson said with surprise.

The veterans and their wives are overcome by the hospitality and affectionate care provided by their newly made friends. “We thought we would be greeted, led to the memorial plaque, and then left to ourselves,” said Erickson and Higgins.

They have duly underestimated the people of the Upper Allgäu. The guests not only enjoyed the “excellent cake” in the Ott home, but also the contacts, the tour to the military airfield at Memmingerberg, the early summer days in a splendid landscape. They wouldn’t have noticed the continuous rain before – “the people here were so friendly.”

1999: What might be going through Charles W. Erickson's head?



Charlie stands in our local museum 55 years later, next to the blade of a B-17 propeller. Does this find, which served for years as a bridge over a ditch, come from his bomber?