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The fiercest air battle over the Allgäu

Four Americans follow in the footsteps of their father and grandfather in Legau

Kempton · Memmingen · Luftwaffe

27 Oct 2017 by Daniel Halder

LEGAU – Four men stand against a wall of the Legau town hall. They are wounded; they seem frightened. The picture of the four captured crew members of a US bomber was taken on July 18, 1944. On the same day, their B-17 bomber had been shot down along with at least 13 other American planes in the airspace between Kempton and Memmingen. It was the day of the largest US bomber attack on the Memmingen airfield, which was an important base for the German *Luftwaffe* at that time.

More than 73 years after the war's end, four men stand against the same wall in Legau. They are the three sons and the grandson of the man with the distinctive walrus mustache in the picture. At the invitation of the local archivist of Aichstetten, Gerhard Schmaus, the Americans from Akron (Ohio) and Chicago (Illinois) follow in the footsteps of their father and grandfather, Daniel Elias LaHurd, who was taken prisoner of war here. Schmaus is working on a book about the last major air battle in the Second World War in the Allgäu. By chance, he came across the descendants of the American bombardier. A trainee at the Memmingen airport had seen Daniel LaHurd on the cover of a book on the Internet. In "A Story of One," Christopher LaHurd tells the story of his grandfather.

Schmaus got in touch via e-mail. "When Gerhard wrote to me, I could hardly believe it," said Christopher LaHurd during his visit in Legau. The 35-year-old works in Vienna and initially only wanted to go in search of clues with his wife. However, when he told his relatives in the USA about it, his father Daniel (62) and the latter's brothers Dennis (66) and Ryan (71) wanted to come along with their families. "It is a very emotional day for us," says LaHurd in Legau. "Being in these places now, where my grandpa feared for his life, moves us all deeply. He was facing the enemy then. Today, 73 years later, I am sitting in a room with German friends. For that, we must be thankful," says LaHurd. Christopher LaHurd

Puzzle pieces come together

His book and Schmaus' research put many pieces of the puzzle together. Besides Daniel LaHurd, nine other American soldiers were on board the B-17 bomber. Nine were able to save themselves by parachuting; one did not survive the attack. The plane crashed into a field near Aichstetten. LaHurd landed with his parachute near Bettrichs (between Altusried and Legau). There he was apprehended and brought to Legau for interrogation.

The local resident, Erna Fend, wrote in a letter to her boyfriend at that time: "Four of the dangerous fellows went down on the fields of Legau, and we never would have dreamed that we would have the enemy in the town hall four times in such a significant way, for one was brought there after the

other. One of them was really to be feared, tall, bushy black hair with a mustache, simply looked frightening.” Christopher LaHurd grinned when Schmaus read these lines aloud. “My grandfather was a charismatic, good guy.” After the interrogation in Legau in 1944, he was first sent to a transit camp in Wetzlar before he was held prisoner on the Baltic Sea. After the liberation of Nazi Germany on May 8, 1945, he returned to his hometown

| “My grandfather was a charismatic, good guy.”

of Akron, where he opened a restaurant and grocery store. In the 1990s, he moved to Florida. Daniel LaHurd died in 2005.

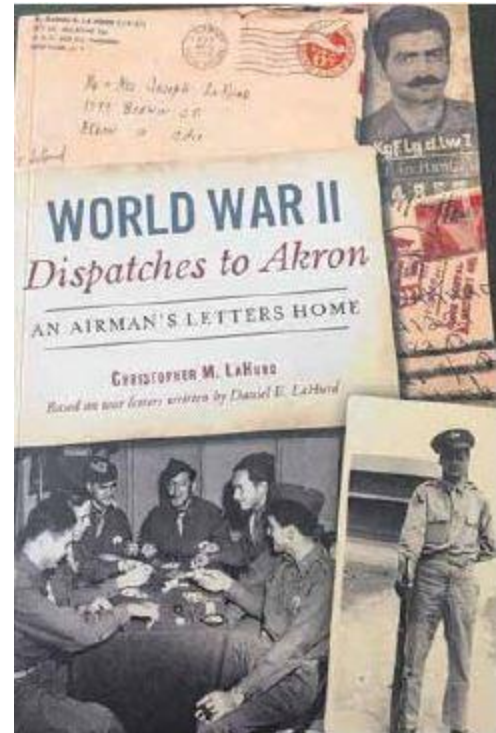
In the meantime, much has been learned about most of the other soldiers in the photo as well. The pilot Matthew Smith can be seen on the left; it is most probably the co-pilot Harvey Myers standing on the right, next to LaHurd. The sisters, Cilly Schröck (91) and Monika Hörberg (89), who were present during the Americans’ visit, remembered him. “We picked him up in a grainfield after the crash and brought him to our parents’ farm near Felben. One of our sisters bandaged his bloody arm while another hastily cut cloth from his parachute in the cellar. We later got blouses from that,” they said. Myers also returned to the USA after the Second World War.



On July 18, 1944, the American soldier Daniel LaHurd (second from left on the old photo) was taken into German captivity in Legau. More than 73 years later, his grandson Christopher (second from left) and his sons Daniel, Dennis [and Ryan] travel...



The American soldier Daniel LaHurd crashed with a B-17 bomber in 1944.



An acquaintance of the local archivist of Aichstetten recognized Daniel LaHurd on a book cover.