



**The search for lost heroes of WWII is still on.  
A special day in Edenkoben, Germany, In memory of Robert Butler Jr.  
Marking the closure of a sister's 67 years mourning.**

**Joyce Allen** and her husband John were going to be in Europe on a business trip to Europe. So why not, after all these years, travel to the site in Germany where, 67 years ago, Joyce's brother Bobby's B-24 "Liberator" crashed as a result of a mid-air collision with another American bomber which literally cut his plane in two with its propellers ?

Plans were made by Joyce and her local travel agent through a **US based Tour Operator (DMITOURS.com)**. **Elfie Majoie**, co-owner of this company, contacted the **Edenkoben** Homeland Society, located in the Palatinate region of Germany neighboring Eastern France. After 3 weeks of research implemented by DMI began a journey that not only brought Joyce to the site of her brother's death, but also brought two nations - once bitter enemies - and their citizens together.

**The trip of a lifetime.**

Backing up on the original event: On October 19, 1944, exactly 67 years ago, several B-24 "Liberator" bombers took off from near London. They belonged to the 847th bomber squadron of the 489th bomber division. Their objective was to approach from Kaiserslautern industrial targets in Mainz, close to occupied Eastern France.

At 1:15 p.m. — as the aircrafts were flying at an altitude of 7,300 meters [c. 24,000 feet]—two bombers collided between Schänzel **and the forester's house Heldenstein, to the west of Edenkoben.** Both aircraft plunged to the ground and were almost totally destroyed.

In one of the two bombers under the command of Lieutenant Lee B. Lithander was the 19-year-old Sergeant Robert Butler, Jr. (reported in *Die Rheinpfalz* on April 12, 2002). In addition to Butler, ten other soldiers died. Four Americans who were able to escape using parachutes were captured by the Germans, interrogated, and then sent to a POW camp in Germany.



**Finding the exact location of the crash in the forest**

Based on a tip from a mushroom picker, **Uwe Benkel**, member of a work team based in Heltersberg which purpose is to investigate persons missing in action during WWII, had located the site of the crash in 2002. He alerted the office responsible for these kinds of matters located close to the battle area, and finally salvaged and documented fragments of the aircraft and equipment/armaments. *"Yes, I am extremely interested in giving certainty to family members, in working through their grief with them, help them find closure and comfort. That is the best reward for decades of work in seeking and researching persons missing in action"* was Uwe's statement about this

The remains of **Robert Butler** and his comrades were buried in Edenkoben local civilian cemetery after the crash, thanks to a local priest who, against Nazi rules, insisted in having them to rest within sacred grounds as Christians. In Edenkoben's death registry no entries related to this incident were to be found. "Enemy" dead were apparently not registered in times of war. However, proof was found in the diary of the sexton of the cemetery at the time, Georg Braun, in the following entry: October 24 (1944) 11 Englanders (crossed out) Americans, 7/18/ (1945) picked up by Americans and moved. The deceased, among them Sergeant Butler, had been buried at the north edge of the Edenkoben cemetery and, after the end of the war, on July 18, 1945, were exhumed and transferred to the U.S. military cemetery in St. Avold in Lorraine [Eastern France].

**THE REMEMBRANCE TRIP WAS SET TO  
OCTOBER 5TH 2011.**

Joyce Allen was nine years old when news of her big brother's death arrived home. Her mother suffered from depression for years afterward. Joyce, however, swore that she would one day follow the trail of her fallen brother to give him a last tribute on behalf of her whole family. **Now the time had come.** A half an hour later, the small group had climbed the trail originating at the

Schänzel Napoleonic war memorial and Uwe Benkel led the group to the site of the accident. The craters at the point of impact were clearly noticeable but overgrown with trees. Obviously moved, Joyce Allen placed a bouquet of flowers at the site and remained for some time paying tribute in silence to her brother. Then, once Uwe had kindly assisted her with some kind words in bringing a closure to her affliction, she filled a pouch with soil from the Palatinate forest in order to be able to bring it back home not only for herself but also for all of her other family members. This way they could too have something tangible from the site of the tragic incident. In the meantime, Uwe Benkel had located some additional fragments from the destroyed aircraft with his metal detector. He presented to the Allen couple **these and a larger piece of the wing that he had salvaged in 2002, and he gave Joyce a piece of the plane in memory**. Then, during a lunch break in a former forestry house converted into a local restaurant, they all looked at some period documents like old friends, all the parties present, both Americans and Germans, agreeing on further clarifying the 1944 events. Subsequently, they visited the Edenkoblen cemetery where the deceased American soldiers were buried temporarily for approximately nine months before being transferred to Saint Avold American military cemetery in France.

**The descendants of the one-time “enemies” took leave of one another as friends.**

**Please watch video of this unique event clicking on this link:**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNGwQBt-3nE&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNGwQBt-3nE&feature=youtube_gdata_player)

**What can be done to help other American families to find places where their beloved lost their life in France or Germany?**

#### **OUR TEAM:**

**- DMI Tours:**

**We are Tour operator specialized in selling Europe.**

- we specialize in custom made tours , providing historical searches, looking for witnesses, in Germany, France, making contacts with American cemeteries in France etc. We work in close cooperation with **Uwe Benkel** and 2 other local German historians giving their time as volunteers to bring closure to KIA American soldiers relatives.

- We organize the travel to Germany and France, providing custom-made guiding, transportation and personalized accommodations

**- Uwe Benkel – Our researcher**  
[www.flugzeugabstuerze-saarland.de](http://www.flugzeugabstuerze-saarland.de) -

**If you have at your disposal for your lost beloved one: US Army identity number, plane name and number, presumed date of crash and around which place in Germany the event took place, Uwe can help you find the exact spot and sometimes remains of clothes, planes, other effects.**

The bodies of some of the thousands of allied airmen shot down in Germany during the Second World War have been recovered thanks to the extraordinary work of Uwe Benkel and his team. This volunteer worker is reuniting families with the remains of their lost husbands, fathers, uncles and cousins. He has received letters of support from Bill Clinton and is even an honorary member of the British Bomber Command Association. Second World War historians refer to him as "The Big B". Fifteen years spending most weekends crawling around in the mud of crashed plane sites would be enough for most people to think of calling it a day. But for Mr. "Big B" it is a race against time. **He wants to find the estimated 1,200 pilots and crew still missing under Germany's soil.** His collection of plane wreckage and the photographs of his crash site digs are used for exhibitions relating to the Second World War in schools and communities throughout Germany. "For the kids it gives our past a tangible meaning that they simply can't get from school history books," he says. "Some of the youngsters are so taken by the subject that they come along and help along during excavations."

He would be also very interested to do conferences in United States.

#### **INFORMATION CONTACT FOR:**

**- Articles and interviews of Uwe Benkel**

**- Searches of crash sites, remains for American families**

**- Organization of trips to Germany /France, personalized exclusive tours of Normandy invasion beaches escorted by bilingual expert certified guides,**

**- Conferences with Uwe Benkel in USA (Universities, associations)**

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