The Flying Fortress of the Hahnenwald

Documentation of the crash of an American bomber between Huettersdorf and Primsweiler, Germany, August 3, 1944, and the fate of its crew

by
Roland Geiger

Since its landing at Normandy beach on the morning of June 6, 1944, the allied ground forces were advancing constantly through France toward Western Germany. The supporting air forces concentrated their attacks on important military targets of Central and Eastern France and in the Southwestern German border area. Thousands of raids had been flown by American bombers against airfields, supply dumps, bridges and railroad tracks in that area during the previous weeks.

The Eighth Air Force planned another big offensive raid for August 3, 1944: 37 targets had been selected for 1,068 four-engined heavies taking-off from their bases in England on that day. Three hundred forty-five of these aircraft were Flying Fortresses - 273 would attack the ANTAR refinery at Merkwiller, France, the Toul-Croix-de-Metz airfield, plus the marshalling yards of Mulhouse and Straßburg-Hausbergen. The remaining 72 were to attack the marshalling yards of Saarbrücken. This target had been classified "very important" because of its capacity to process 6,000 railcars daily and its big repair shops for locomotives and other rolling vehicles.

At 2:06 p.m. the air raid station at Ottweiler was informed that more than 300 bombers had passed Maastricht, Belgium, flying southeast. About 4 minutes later, it was reported that the planes were approaching Saarbruecken area. The first air warning for Saarbrücken sounded at 2:12 p.m.. Incoming reports from Ottweiler said the closely flying formations were headed southeast. But suddenly at 2:54 p.m., one of the bomb groups flying between Landstuhl and Kaiserslautern changed course. Eleven minutes later that formation was "approaching Saarbrücken" and at 3:13 p.m., anti-aircraft fire was reported over the town. Further reports continued: 3:15 p.m. "nothing has changed - bombers over Saarbrücken"; 3:16 p.m. "bombs falling at the town"; again at 3:17 p.m.. Three minutes later came the report, "Airplanes circling Saarbrücken area - bombs are dropped on the Burbach steel mill and the marshalling yard". This reports fit with the battle report of 1st US Bomb Division which states that between 3:15 and 3:20 p.m., 423 500-pound bombs and 207 1,000-poundbombs--a total weigt of 190 metric tons--had been dropped on Saarbrücken by 70 B-17s. [Roland: for consistency, either use time in the 12-hour clock or 24-hour clock, but not both.]

One Fortress, known as SLOWBALL, was hit by flak and crashed two miles northwest of Lebach at 3:21 p.m.."[where is the start of this quote? It's hanging by itself.]

(source: Werner Eckel, "Saarbrücken im Luftkrieg" (Air War over Saarbrücken), pages 135-136)

In summer 1996, I received a photocopy of the SLOWBALL missing aircrew report #7705 from Werner Eckel of Limbach. The report was provided to him as a microfiche copy from the National Archives, Washington, DC.

This report contained the mission date of the plane and its unit plus data about the crew and their home adresses during Word War II. After the crash and theirsubsequent capture,the

crew were examined by German authorities.Every document, letter, passport, photo, written paper, as well as anymoney were taken from them. These items were delivered to the Interrogation Center at Oberursel where the crew were later interrogated by English-speaking German soldiers. The documents were filed and numbered using a specific system. If the crew belonged to a US bomber, the file was numbered “KU“ (for Kampflugzeuge USA) follwed by a series number. Fighter pilot documents were given a "J" for "Jäger" followed by a series number. After the occupation of Germany, the documents and files were taken the United States where they are kept at the National Archives. If you want a copy, order it and you will receive one.

The SLOWBALL file was given the number KU 2615.

Upon receiving the file, I checked the names and adresses from the missing-air-crew-report (MACR) to search for living crew members. Of the original nine crew members, five were located and agreed to participate in this project. Three others were deceased. The copilot died in the last week of June, 1998 (I contacted him during the end of May). The top turret gunner either wasn’t locatable, or not interested in participating. All the remaining five men were very much interested in talking about their memories.

Bombardier George O. Cobb started his narration with the words:

"Dear Roland,
this day I have received your most interesting letter. To say the very least it brought back some very old memories, and has caused me to relive some incidents that were buried deep in my mind. I am going to try and relate to you some of the things that I can reach back and relive to the best of my ability. But first I should explain something of my background and how my memory and my life ha caused me to seldom think of these days and almost never talk about them.

I am nearing 82 years old, very active playing golf, softball, bowling and doing volunteer work at a veterans hospital. I have been married fifty two years to the same wonderful wife, have 2 sons and that is the reason I`ve had little time to think about the past. My grandmother was from Germany, Wilhelmina Becker, and due to this I took German language classes in high school, and so I could speak a little of your language. In my memories I can recall incidents and happenings but will not remember names of town and dates. I have read the account of Billy Hardesty, and want to say he has done a fine job and info given is correct."

After translating the letters from English to German, they were compared to German eye witness accounts. Differences resulted from the distance in time of 54 years plus the way the witnesses experienced what happened. On one side the US flyers were happy to have succesfully bailed out and survived the jump despite not knowing what to expect on the ground. On the other side, German civilians, some of them children at that time, saw their whole world turned upside-down.

The Plane

The Boeing B-17 (B like bomber) was a four-engined heavy bomber weighing 29.7 metric tons and could reach a speed of 486 kilometers per hour at an altitude of 28,000 feet. The

plane was 70 feet long and usually had a crew of ten men: the bombardier and navigator sitting in the nose of the plane; pilot and co-pilot in the cockpit; behind them the top turret gunner who also served as the engineer. Then there was the big bomb bay with its maximum load of 1.8 tons of bombs. Next were the radio room and the waist. Here three men "worked" - two waist gunners and the ball turret gunner whose turret was hanging under the belly of the plane. Last but not least was the tail gunner defending the plane against German fighters coming from the rear. In August 1944, the danger of German fighters had decreased so there was only one waist gunner covering both sides. Each crew member –except the pilots had a 50 caliber single or double machine gun. This heavy defensive firepower gave the ship its nickname the "Flying Fortress".

The B-17 which crashed at Hüttersdorf was a G-model and the most modern version at the time. Typically this model was equipped with an additional chin turret with two machine guns to fire against head-on attacking fighters.

The SLOWBALL was delivered by its producer, the Boeing Company, to the Army on December 2, 1943.. On December 31, it was flown to Europe and given to the 351st Bomb Group, 511th Bomb Squadron, stationed at Polebrook, Northamptonshire. The 351st Group's symbol was a big black "J" in a white triangle. The triangle was painted on the tail section of the plane, plus its serial number 297492 and the letter "B".

The target of 351st Bomb Group on that early afternoon of August 3, 1944, was the Saarbrücken marshalling yard. Bombing was scheduled for 3:15 p.m.

The Flight

Slowball's crew consisted of nine men:

Position	Name	Rank	Serial-number
Pilot	Ralph S. Brackens	2Lt	O-815063
Co-Pilot	William M. Beals	2Lt	O-460767
Navigator	Daniel W. Mosley	2Lt	O-707306
Bombardier	George O. Cobb	2Lt	O-701445
Top Turret Gunner	William F. Williamson	SSgt	37503239
Radio Operator	Billy M. Hardesty	SSgt	37514205
Waist Gunner	George A. McCrary	Sgt	14149527
Ball Turret Gunner	Robert F. Mattice	Sgt	32745939
Tail Gunner	James O. Atkins	SSgt	7084788

All crew members were on their 13th mission except tail gunner James O. Atkins - a spare for the sick tail gunner of the crew. Atkins was something like a veterans with 31 missions flown. Four more and he could go home. It was his second trip with Brackens' crew; a couple of weeks prior he had accompanied them to Peenemünde.

The heavies of 351st Bomb Group took off from their base near Polebrook and assembled in the air -- three planes to a box with the middle plane taking the lead and its right wingman flying a little behind but higher and the left wingman also a little behind but lower.
Three boxes created a Squadron, one taking lead, one right above, one left below. Three squadrons became a group and three groups a combat wing.

SLOWBALL was the right wingman of High Box, High Squadron, High Group of 94th Combat Wing.

What a group looked like

Figure 1 - top-down view

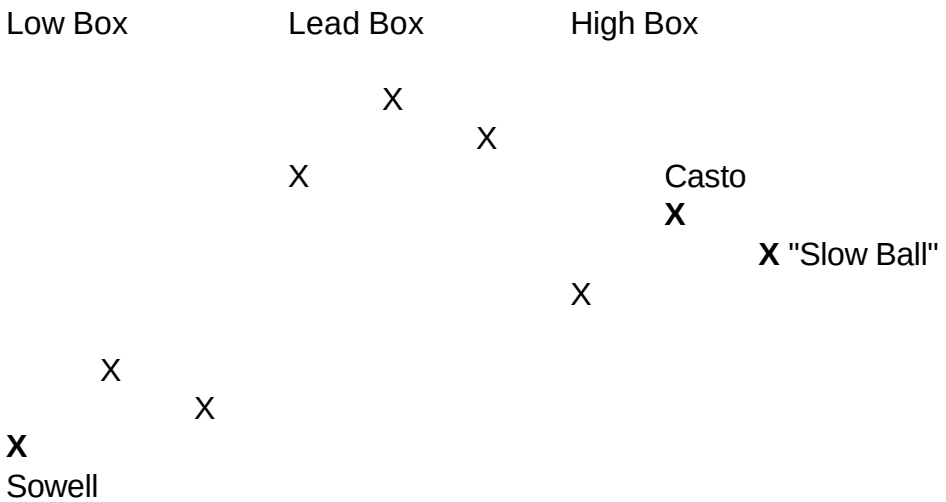
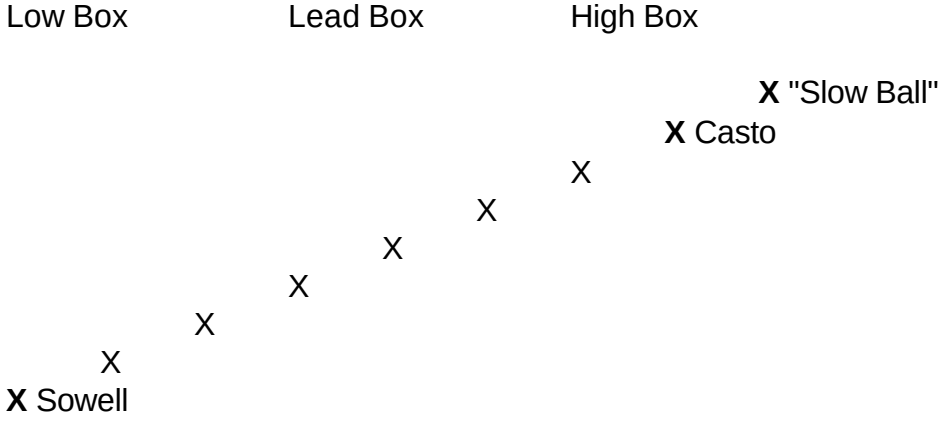


Figure 2 - from the rear



The flight headed over Belgium and Luxembourg to north of Saarbrücken at an altitude of 27,000 feet. Twenty-five miles further the formation made a 180 degreeturn NW and continued flying toward the target. They reached the IP (Initial Point) and suddenly the heavy fire of the anti-aircraft batteries around Saarbrücken hit them. Immediately after dropping its payload, SLOWBALL was hit.

Hit and Bail out

This shot-down report of a Saarbrücken flak battery is part of the MACR:

"Heavy Flak Bn 631 *4 August 1944*

Subject: Shooting down of a Fortress II near Lebach on 8.3.44, 1521 hrs

to: Dulag West, Information Center, Oberursel

At the air raid on Saarbruecken on 8/3/44, the Heavy Flak Bn 631 (e) shot down an enemy plane of the Fortress type (II) at 1521 hrs. According to reports of witnesses, the planes exploded with a big flame and disassembled entirely in the air. 8 pilots were able to save themselves by parachute. The following members of the crew were captured:

McCrary	*George*
Cobb III	*George C.*
Williamson	*William*
Hardesty	*Billy M.*
Atkins	*James O.*
Beals	*William M.*
Mattice	*Robert F.*
Brackens	*Ralph F.*

The prisoners have fractures of legs and ankles. All prisoners refused any statements about the raids of their plane. In spite of repeated requests, the police authority of Lebach has not shipped the personal property taken from them. This authority had taken the prisoners into custody.

Illegible sign."

KU

Nur für den Dienstgebrauch! KV - 2615

Angaben über Erbeutung eines Feindflugzeuges.

Dulag-Luft, Wetzlar
Eingang 6 AUG 1944
Zentralkart. u. Meldest.

Dienststelle: Schwere Flak-Abt. 631

Ort: Saarbrücken

Zeit: 4.8. 1944

Abschußzeit (Tag u.Uhrzeit): 3.8.1944, 15,21 Uhr

Aufschlagsort (mit Bezugsort): 3 km nordwl.Lebach, Jagdhaus Hahnwald bei Saarbrücken

Art der Erbeutung (Flak, Jäger, Nachtjäger, Notlandung: Abschuß durch schwere Flak

Flugzeugmuster: Fortress II

Flugzeugkennzeichen: (Buchstaben vor und hinter dem Hoheitszeichen) nicht feststellbar.

Zulassungsnummer (vor dem Leitwerk): US.-Army 17 G - 15 - VG Airforce Serie Nr.42/97 492 Crew 1200 LRS

Bildgerät: nicht vorgefunden

F.T.-Frequenzen: nicht festgestellt

Zustand des Flugzeuges: Vollständiger Bruch.

Verteiler: Dulag west, Oberursel 1x
LGK.VII über Flakgruppe Saar-Lothr. 1x
Flakgruppe Saar-Lothringen 1x
Flughafenbereich Metz 1x
Entwurf.

After completing their mission by late afternoon and flying safely back to England, the tailgunners of two other planes reported the shooting down of SLOWBALL.

SSgt Thomas R. Sowell:

"I, Thomas R. Sowell, 18039676, was flying as Tail Gunner on Aircraft No. 43-37862 which was in No. 3 Position, High Squadron, Low Box on a mission to Saarbrucken, Germany on 3 August 1944. On the bombing run our formation was attacked by flak and I saw Lt. Brackens' plane, flying in High Squadron above me, get hit and start to smoke. No. 3 engine was set on fire. He fellout of formation and began to descend. During his descent I saw one (1) parachute come out of the plane. The plane went on down and eventually went out of sight. It seemed me though he was in too steep a dive to be under control. I heard nothing over VHF."

SSgt Leon W. Casto:

"I, Leon F. Casto, 15170552 was flying as Tail Gunner on Aircraft No. 43-57571 which was in Lead position, High Squadron, High Box on a mission to Saarbrucken, Germany on 3 August 1944. Just after bombs away I saw that Lt. Brackens, flying on my right, had been hit by flak. I looked and could see flames coming from behind No. 3 engine. He fell to the rear of the formation and began to lose altitude. Just before the plane began to descend I saw one (1) parachute come from it. The pilot then apparently tried to pull the plane back up in formation, but didn't make it. He kept on descending and then the plane exploded in mid-air just before it went into a cloud bank. I definitely saw burning pieces spread all over the sky after it exploded. I heard nothing over VHF."

The minutes between getting hit, bailing out and landing on the ground experienced by each crew member from his point of view:

Tail gunner James O. Atkins

"As we approached the target area we begin to get into rather heavy flack. We had encountered no fighter opposition on the entire mission. The last words I heard on the intercom were "Bombs away", then all hell broke loose. We had three directs from 88s, 1-2-3 within 5 to 8 seconds, the plane slid off to the left, then went into a steep dive spin. No. 3 engine was on fire and flames were shooting back past the tail section. I looked forward the waist and saw other crew members bailing out. I clawed my way toward the waist door and bailed out. I think I was the last man to jump, I jumped through the flames from the burning engine. I felt the concussion when the plane blew up. I pulled my rip cord and the chute opened. It seemed so quiet I could hear nothing. I did not realize I had been hit by flak in four places and was bleeding badly until I was on the way down.“

Radio Operator Billy Hardesty

"There were no unusual happenings on take off or crossing the channel. We were always trying to keep up with the formation. "SLOWBALL" was not just a trick name, it was a very slow B17G. When we reached the IP for the bomb run, we got some flak but no hits. It was my job to see "Bombs Away" and follow them to the target visually. After Bombs Away and before they hit the gound, we took a direct hit in the inside starboard engine. I must have hit the prop governor because we had a run-away prop and a big fire. the co-pilot came on the

intercom screaming, "We got to get out of this S.O.B. "Almost immediately, he said "disregard".

Within a few seconds there was a hit in the Bomb Bay and another in the radio room. I did not have my chute on. I was wearing the harness. When I turned to get my chest pack chute it was on fire. The radio room and bomb bay were blue like a tin can after you set off a large firecracker under it. I beat the fire out on the bungee cords of my chute and put the chute on. We were going down out of control. I helped drag a crew member with "deployed chute" to the back exit door and shove him out. He lived. We were burning badly. The flight engineer was at the front of the bomb bay. We waved to each other; he bailed out the bomb bay and I bailed out the rear door through a wall of fire. I did not catch on fire. The plane exploded as the engineer and I cleared the fire. There were at least 4 crew members still on board when she blew. All of them survived."

Bombardier Cobb

"The day of our mission to the marshalling yards of SAARBRÜCKEN was on August 3, the birthday of my oldest son. We were flying B/17 SLOWBALL. I had dropped our bombs and the flak hit us heavily on the way out of the bomb run. We were hit in no. 3 (inboard engine) which was on fire. The pilot Ralph Brackens tried the extinguisher which failed, and diving the ship was not working either. I was in the nose with my back to the plexiglas dome when the bail out order came. I did not have my chest pack chute on as I could not get over the bombsite properly. In this desperate few seconds Doc Mosely handed me my chute and that could have saved my life. I hooked my chutes snap hook to my right side riser cord ring. At that point the explosion threw me backwards with such tremendous force I smashed into the plexiglass dome with my back and upper body and lost conciousness. When I came to, I was floating down in the air, and felt my chest for my chute and nothing. At this point I could not remember and thought I had forgotten it. So many things went through my mind but mainly howbad my family would feel at my death. Then I felt something above me and my riser cords had come loose and the chute was trwisting above my head. Naturally I was happy to pull it down, hook up the other side and pull the ripcord. As I looked up I could see the ship in a tight spin and no parachute was visible near it. Then the wings came off and the spin stopped and Brackens was able to get out. As I came down I could hear the whine of the bullets passing near me, so I began to swing myself from side to side and luckily none hit me (There was no shooting on the crew; it was floating debris and exploding ammunition; this was stated by the German eye-witnesses)*."*

Co-Pilot Beals

When the plane got hit, Beals paniced and jumped down to the nose hatch but then calmed down and went back to the flight deck. A little later Brackens told him to bail out. So he went down to the nose and saw that the plexiglas dome was blown out. He bailed out through the hole. At that time the plane was already was at low altitude, so he pulled the ripcord at one. The chute opened and he reached the ground within seconds. He didn't hurt himself because he kept the prescribed bearing.

Navigator Mosely

Navigator Daniel W. "Doc" Mosely summarized on the telephone what happened during the last minutes of flight:

"The first hit knocked out engine No 3 and set it on fire. A piece of the flak shell broke through the fuselage wall and came down in front of my feet. I just wanted to bow down to take it up for souvenir when some inner voice told me "let it be". So I stood up again, and the same moment the "soil" under my feet was lifting. I stood on my flak vest which got lifted by the second hit. If I had bowed down, I would have gotten it right into my chest." The bombs just had been dropped so the bomb bay doors were wide open. The rear end of the bomb bay was hit by shell number three. Shrapnel went through the ball turret and injured the hand of ball turret gunner Mattice. At once he turned his ball upside down and went out into the fuselage. He turned around and saw waist gunner McCrary lying on his back. He was half unconscious because of lack of oxygen. The last hit had bumped the plane very hard and banged him against the inner wall of the fuselage. His oxygen pipe was torn from the frame - he was choking from lack of oxygen. He thought he was outside the plane and falling and pulled the ripcord of his chute. The chute opened but inside the plane. Mattice took the chute and crumpled it in front of his chest. Then he took McCrary in his arms, threw him and the chute out of the waist window and jumped behind.

The chute re-opened at once. It must have been that chute which had been seen by the tail gunners of the other planes. Mattice first fell a while before pulling the rip cord.

Mosely continues: *"Radio Operator Billy Hardesty glanced out of his radio room and realized that Mattice and McCrary were in trouble. He looked through the bomb bay toward the front of the plane, waved good-bye to the top turret gunner and bailed out through the waist window-right behind the other two. The top turret gunner bailed out through the burning bomb bay. "*

Shell number 4 hit the tail of the plane where tail gunner Atkins was kneeling and smashed his position but didn't hurt him. He turned around and wanted to bail through the escape hatch but couldn't open it. So he went to the waist door and jumped out there.

Before hit number 4 the plane started descending while pilot and copilot tried to perform a controlled crash to give the crew a chance to bail out. Doc Mosely in the nose looked toward the bombardier who was facing him and looking for his parachute. Doc handed it to him and hooked one hook in. The rest Cobb could do himself. Now Doc had to take care for himself. While trying to get into his chute, the plane lurched and he fell on his back. Then the plane exploded and he and Cobb were blown out thru the nose window.

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Classification [illegible]
to RESTRICTED
by E. A. BRADUNAS, Lt. Col., AC
by F. M. MUENCH, Capt., AC
Date MAR 1 5 1946

WAR DEPARTMENT
HEADQUARTERS [illegible]
WASHINGTON

7734

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT

IMPORTANT: This report will be compiled in triplicate by each Army Air Forces organization within 48 hours of the time an aircraft is officially reported missing.

1. ORGANIZATION: Location AAF Station 110 ; Command or Air Force Eighth
Group 351st Bomb ; Squadron 511th Bomb ; Detachment
2. SPECIFY: Point of Departure AAF Station 110 ; Course Southeast
Intended Destination Saarbrucken, Germany ; Type of Mission Heavy Bombardment
3. WEATHER CONDITIONS [illegible] LAST REPORTED: 4 to 5/10 small cumulus top 5,000 ft. with 5/10 thin cirrus above 30,000 ft. Visibility: Unlimited
4. GIVE: (a) Date 3Aug44 ; Time 1519 ; and Location Saarbrucken, Germany of last known whereabouts of missing aircraft.
(b) Specify whether (X) Last sighted; ( ) Last contacted by Radio; ( ) Forces Down; ( ) Seen to Crash; or ( ) Information not Available.
5. AIRCRAFT WAS LOST, OR IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN LOST, AS A RESULT OF: (Check only one ( ) Enemy Aircraft; (X) Enemy Anti-Aircraft; ( ) Other Circumstances as follows
6. AIRCRAFT: Type, Model and Series B-17-G ; A.A.F. Serial Number 42-97492
7. ENGINES: Type, Model and Series R-1820-97 ; A.A.F. Serial Number (a) SW-005613
(b) 43-59264 ; (c) SW-005686 ; (d) SW-890
8. INSTALLED WEAPONS (Furnish below Make, Type and Serial Number) see attached sheet
(a) ; (b) ; (c) ; (d)
(e) ; (f) ; (g) ; (h)
9. THE PERSONS LISTED BELOW WERE REPORTED AS: (a) Battle Casualty X
or (b) Non-Battle Casualty
10. NUMBER OF PERSONS ABOARD AIRCRAFT: Crew 9 ; Passengers 0 ; Total 9
(Starting with pilot, furnish the following particulars: If more than 10 persons were aboard aircraft, list similar particulars on separate sheet and attach original to this form).

	Crew Position	Name in Full (Last Name First)	Rank	Serial Number	
1.	Pilot	Brackens, Ralph S.	2nd Lt	0-815063	RTD
2.	Co-Pilot	Beals, William M.	2nd Lt	0-460267	RTD
3.	Navigator	Moseley, Daniel W.	2nd Lt	0-707306	RTD
4.	Bombardier	Cobb, George O.	2nd Lt	0-701445	RTD
5.	Top Turret	Williamson, William F.	S/Sgt	37503239	RTD
6.	Radio	Hardesty, Billy M.	S/Sgt	37514205	RTD
7.	Waist	McCrary, George A.	Sgt	14149527	RTD
8.	Ball Turret	Mattice, Robert F.	Sgt	32745939	RTD
9.	Tail	Atkins, James O.	S/Sgt	7084788	RTD
10.					

11. IDENTIFY HELOW THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE LAST KNOWLEDGE OF AIRCRAFT, AND CHECK APPROPRIATE COLUMN TO INDICATE BASIS FOR SAME:

	Name in Full (Last Name First)	Rank	Serial Number	Contacted By Radio	Last Sighted	Check Only One Column: Saw Crash	Saw Forced Landing
1.	Sowell, Thomas R.,	S/Sgt.	18039676		X		
2.	Casto, Leon W.,	S/Sgt.	15170552		X		
3.							

12. IF PERSONNEL ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE SURVIVED, ANSWER YES TO ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS: (a) Parachutes were used yes ; (b) Persons were seen walking away from scene of crash ; or (c) Any other reason (Specify)
13. ATTACH AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH, MAP, CHART, OR SKETCH, SHOWING APPROXIMATE LOCATION WHERE AIRCRAFT WAS LAST SEEN.
14. ATTACH EYEWITNESS DESCRIPTION OF CRASH, FORCED LANDING, OR OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES PERTAINING TO MISSING AIRCRAFT.
15. ATTACH A DESCRIPTION OF THE REPORT OF SEARCH, IF ANY, AND GIVE [illegible] AND SERIAL NUMBER OF OFFICER IN CHARGE HERE

RECEIVED

Date of Report 5 August 1944

Patrick W. Flournoy Jr.
(Signature of Preparing Officer)
PATRICK W. FLOURNOY, JR., 1st Lt, Air Corps.

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Aug 81

MACR for Slowball

Eye witnesses

From the ground the last minutes of the plane were also observed.

Robert Paulus from Hüttersdorf saw the plane approaching from Saarwellingen. Then it turned toward Lebach. Then it turned to one side and started falling. A short time later it exploded. All the crew members appeared to have bailed out before, but after the explosion another man followed.

The airplane was torn in pieces by the explosion. Pilot Brackens succeeded in escaping from the cockpit part at the very last second. A large front section of the plan landed on a potato field beneath the hunting cottage "Horrido". The field was called "Hahnenfeld" as it belonged to "Hahn", a suburb of Lebach. Thus the farmers Nikolaus Schäfer, Josef and Johann Sauer from Hahn had to guard the debris.

Another eye-witness from Hüttersdorf --eight years old--saw the plane exploding over the forest - "you could see only sparks". Then he saw a parachutee descending. His mother jumped on her bycicle with him on the backseat. Three men landed in the forest near the plane, one high up in a tree. Both his legs? were broken. One came down near Primsweiler. All POWs were taken first to Primsweiler as there was a path going there from the crash site.

The boy came back a couple of days later with some friends to check the wreck but there was big paddle of blood inside with lots of bees flying around. When they arrived the bees attacked them so they ran away.

Benno Altmeyer from Bettingen was at home when he saw the plane approaching within the formation and suddenly fell out of formation and began to burn. The crew bailed out under their chutes. A short tme later the plane exploded. A P-51 Mustang escort passed the wreck several times.

Richard Dickmann from Hüttersdorf was 11 years old. Together with his mother and three younger brothers he was in a bunker in the outskirts of Hüttersdorf. His younger brothers distracted his mother so he could escape from the bunker. He ran home, took his bicycle and rode toward the Hahnenwald. In his partly fictious narration "Bridge over the Ocean", published in 1965, he honored the efforts of Huttersdorf policeman Peter Lehnert who prevented a mob from lynching one of the flyers.

The explosion was so strong that parts of the plane were spread over a wide area. The waist door landed in the garden of the Schmitt Family at Hüttersdorf, Fischerstraße, about a mile away from the main crash site.

Landings

Despite careful research in the United States as well as in Germany, I wasn't succeessful in locating the exact landing site of all crew members.
A big help was the JAG War Crime File which chronicles the proceedings against three citizens from Hüttersdorf and Bettingen for mistreating a US flyer. The original is kept at National Archives, College Park, MD, in 12-1726-VOL-1. The file contains 15 eyewitness statements plus those of the defendants. I got my copy courtesy of Bob Breyer from Raleigh, NC, in September 1998.

Co-Pilot Beals

He landed in a potato field. The fields were plowed in long strips, one with potato, the next with barley. 300 yards away from him the front part of the plane came down which he had left shortly before. This part was burning and ammunition was exploding so loudly that he first thought we (the Germans) were firing at him. Above him another chute came down with the pilot hanging under it. He swung left and right and cut off a young fir tree and broke his leg. Beals ran to him to give him some morphine for his pain, but he had lost his survival pack during the descent and the pilot told him to leave. Realizing he couldn't help him, Beals obeyed his orders and left the site. He moved southward on a trail through the woods. But he didn't make it very far as a group of 10 youngsters--most probably Hitlerjugend--met and captured him. They took him to Primsweiler.

Here he met the pilot again. Brackens had been mistreated; there was a stab wound in his back. They were taken to the Lebach hospital by truck and given first aid and surgery. Beals had some minor wounds but the pilot's leg needed surgery. It was fixed with metal clamps. Ball turret gunner Robert F. Mattice had also broken a leg and was taken to Lebach hospital. The three prisoners stayed one night in the hospital, guarded by a soldier whose insignia had death's-head signs. The next morning they were taken to a jail in Saarbrücken by truck where they stayed another night. The following morning they were taken by train to Cologne (most probably it was Frankfurt); Beals remembers the roof of the big station had been blown away by bombs. The next stop was Wetzlar (Dulag Luft), where Beals was placed in solitary confinement at Oberursel for 4 nights and 3 days. Around August 12th, Beals went to Sagan - Stalag Luft 3 - together with Cobb.

Explanatory note by the translator:
Usually POWs were taken to Frankfurt by train and then to Oberursel by street car. Oberursel was the main interrogation center for all POWs from the West. Here they were kept in solitary confinment and interrogated, then taken to Wetzlar until the decision was made where they would stay for the rest of the war.

At Frankfurt Central Station trains typically enter and depart through the same gate, i.e. entering forward and departing backward. Cologne Station is as big as Frankfurt Central Station but trains enter on one side and depart on the other.

When I called Beals in July 1998 at home in Arizona, I learned from his daughter that he died the weekend before.

Pilot Brackens near the hunting cottage "Horrido"

"Brackens jumped out. He was the last man to leave the plane --dismantled by the explosion– before it crashed in the forest near the hunting cottage "Horrido". His parachute opened and slowed his fall a little. But with high speed he broke through tree branches, decapitated a young fir tree and broke both legs. Then he crashed to the ground semi-conscious. German civilians approached and helped him out of his parachute. Suddenly another man approached, knocked him down and stabbed his back with a knife. A third man forced the attacker to stop. They put Brackens on a stretcher, loaded it into a car and drove him to Lebach to the hospital." That's what Brackens reported.

This report was the basis for a trial against the three men who participated in Brackens' mistreatment.

According to various statements and the final pleadings of indictment and defense this is about what happened:

"The plane exploded in mid-air with parachutees coming from it. The last man jumped from a big falling piece of debris. As it happened to be Brackens, this must have been the cockpit section. Explosion and crash were observed by people from the surrounding area. Lots of people, also M, L and D and most of the witnesses went toward the crash site. D, a merchant from Schmelz, Germany, found it a good opportunity to fill up the gas tank of his car to support his short gas ration of 10 liters (about 3 gallon per month). Therefore he took his car and rode to the forest. It lasted a little while till he reached the forest because the engine quit some times because of lack of gas. 400 yards away from the crash site he met the Ortsgruppenleiter M and took him along in his car.

Peter Lehnert, chief of the Hüttersdorf police, arrived riding his bike with a carpenter from Hüttersdorf named L. sitting on the back seat. They stopped at the forest's edge. Lehnert estimated the crash site in a wrong direction so L. reached the site earlier than he. At this time Brackens had been helped out of his chute and received first-aid by Red-Cross helper Horst Bellmann. His broken legs had been splinted with wooden sticks. They placed him on the ground lwith his back eaning against a tree not sure what to do with him. M. arrived at the scene, went to the American and talked to him in very bad English. He asked whether he was a US soldier. Brackens didn't understand the question and to indicate he shook his head. M. became very angry and cried loudly that the enemy hadn't send soldiers but paid mercenaries to fly his planes and bomb Germany. He added that this man had no right to be treated like a POW. He didn't mention exactly what he meant but it was obvious to everyone what he

intended to do. But L. was the only one who acted. He became furious, jumped to the prisoner and mistreated him with his feet and fists. He did that for about a minute without being stopped by anyone around. L. was a big man and everyone feared him. Then Lehnert arrived. He jumped toward L. and pushed him away from the prisoner. "That man is my prisoner and is under my personal protection!" The surrounding mob didn't like that. But Lehnert pulled his rifle to make sure everyone understood him. He didn't aim the rifle at anyone in particular. But M. grabbed him at his shoulders and pushed him away. He pointed his finger at him and cried "*You dare to aim your gun to other Germans - you, a German official?"* Lehnert didn't respond but took the initiative . He went to D. who stood beside his car and asked him to provide his car to carry away the wounded man. D. realized that his car was not equipped to carry a stretcher but was too furious to think, so he shouted: "*Such animals will not ride in my car. Go away for five minutes, and our problem will be solved*."

The American on the stretcher was put into the car of Heinz Peter and carried via Primsweiler to Lebach hospital.

M., L. and D. were captured in May 1945 by the US Military Police and held for some weeks.. In August 1945 they were imprisoned again and kept at Saarbrücken-Lerchesflur prison, then at Landsberg-Lech Prison until brought to trial in March 1947. The main indictment was the attack on Pilot Brackens and the wound by a knife but indictment could not prove that. Finally the court concluded that Brackens was wounded when dropping down through the fir trees and so was not stabbed by L.

D. was acquitted immediately while M. and L. were sentenced to jail for a couple of years.

Ball Turret Gunner Mattice

Johanna Harfinger from Primsweiler told me that her family was at home when they heard the explosion. They left the house and saw the chutes descend. Her father, Franz Groß, born in 1895, was mayor of Primsweiler. He took his hunting rifle and went into the woods to look for the parachutists.

At the edge of Primsweiler three air –raid shelters had been built before the war. Red-cross-helper Helene Frischbier (today Helene Wirth) was on duty in one of the shelters. Suddenly someone called that a parachutist had landed. She took her first –aid bag and left the shelter to meet Franz Groß who called: "Well, we have to run again!" And that's what they did.

In the forest they met another group of people cursing and kicking a POW lying on the ground. It must have been ball-turret-gunner Robert Mattice who landed in a fir tree. He had cut himself down and hit the ground so hard that he broke a leg. Together with Helene and Franz, the leader of the Hüttersdorf fire brigade, Jakob Sinnwell, arrived and prevented the people from further mistreating the POW.

The American sat with his back against an old trunk. Helene at once provided first aid. Some people helped her bandage the knee and splint the broken leg. Finally she hung a note around his neck stating "Given first-aid by Helene Frischbier". Thankfully, he gave her a chocolate bar. Finally they put him on a hand cart to carry him away.

Short before they left, another prisoner approached led by some men from Hüttersdorf. His knee was badly hurt and he could barely walk. It was the bombardier George Cobb.

Georg Cobb repots: *"I came down into dense woods and the chute caught on a tree limb maybe 15 ft. above ground. I managed to get loose from the chute and dropped to the ground on my left leg, causing a bad knee injury. As I landed on the ground I could hear sounds of men coming thru the wood and then voices. I laid down in a dry creek bed and covered myself with dry leaves. After a while when the sounds abated I crawled out and sat myself down leaning against a tree. One leg of my flight suit had torn off at the knee and my map, compass and escape rations were gone. As I racked my brain a rifle barrel looked down at me from behind. A tall elderly man and a young boy caused me to raise my hands and surrender. The boy had studied some English in school, and we could sort of understand a little bit of what each of us said. "*

We don't know who the older man was but the younger most probably was Josef Becker from Hüttersdorf, later organist of the local parish. They took Cobb under his arms and walked him toward the crash site. Franz Groß saw them approach and told Helene to move on with the first group and the man in the hand cart.

Gross led the second group which was much slower because the American could barely walk.

Johanna Harfinger, daughter of Franz Groß, had followed her father, accompanied by other people from the village. There was a tree nursery called "Boeschen" about 15 minutes away from Primsweiler where they met Franz Groß, the prisoner Cobb and other people from Hüttersweiler. They had stopped for a rest; the American sat on the ground.

A man from Hüttersdorf named Paul Eckerts who also had a rifle tried to push Groß aside and said: "Step aside, Franz, I will slay him!" But Franz didn't step aside and said: "Paul, beat it, this man goes with me." Franz had been a soldier in World War I (known in Germany as „the Great War“) and a POW for some years. He knew about the emotions of the American. He took his arm and went on toward Primsweiler. The people from Primsweiler and most of the people from Hüttersdorf followed him, except Paul Eckerts. The chute meanwhile disappeared.

The Gross Family about 1940

They took Cobb to Franz Gross‘ house in Primsweiler. Cobb sat down in the living room which was quickly crowded by curious people. He didn't want anything to eat, thank you, but something to drink.

Cobb continued:
"They walked me to a town and the grandfather was forced to show his rifle to keep some of the people from taking me from him (Cobb told me duing a telephone interviewthat someone had come with a car and had wanted to take him away, but his "host" prevented this) He turned me over to--I believe--a Volksturm officer who walked me through thewoods to another village. At one time I lit a cigarette which seemed to infuriate him, as he stucked a pistol barrel against my head and screamed at me in a mess of German words. After a few words I was so depressed to be alone in Germany, and helpless, that I laughed in his face, swore words he had never heard, and told him go ahead and shoot. Shortly after this he calmed down and explained, „Fire in the woods“, and I told him I understood. From then on there were no problems between us, and he turned me over to some soldiers who drove to another town. This town had a prison of some sort and they kept me overnight.“

Tail gunner Atkins

Also not far away from the landing site of the plane wreck tail gunner James Atkins landed:

"As I neared the ground I heard rifle fire, firing at me. Some shots hit my chute, but none hit me (these were not rifle shots but exploding ammunition). I was coming down in a heavily wooded area but I missed the trees and landed in the middle of a narrow dirt road. I crawled into some underbrush to hide. I could hear a lot of people yelling and hollering in the distance, they had formed a big circle and in about half an hour they located me. They began beating and kicking me, using sticks and rocks, spitting and scratching at my face. One man speaking English, who said he was Gestapo, asked me if I had my 45 so they could use it to kill me, but I was not carrying it that day.

After some time and a lot of beating a man in a green uniform drove into the woods in a small car. After a lot of yelling and arguing with the people, I estimated about 75 to 80, the soldier put me in the car and drove me to a small village, consisting only of one street and several houses, where one of my crew members was in a small goat cart with a broken leg (top turret gunner Robert Mattice). The cart was standing in the middle of the road. They made me pull him and the cart up and down the street to again be beaten and shouted at. Then the soldier put me in the car and took me to what I guessed to be Saarbrücken (it was Lebach) and locked me up with other crew members. A Luftwaffe Officer interrogated me. He asked me about my age and I told him

Flight engineer Williamson in Korprich?

William F. Williamson was the only one of the crew who wasn’t injured by the crash and bailing out. Unfortunately I was not able to talk to him. His former crew members informed me that he broke off contact with them years ago and didn't respond to any letter or call.

I presume he landed at Körprich but cannot confirm this.

Maria Klein from Bettstadt was 18 years old and sitting in the kitchen when there was an explosion. Her father ran into the garden and pointed to the sky. "There are three chutes." The parachutists went down near Körprich. Her father immediately ran there but ordered his children to stay at home. They obeyed.

Josef Paul from Körprich was born in 1926 and was 18 years old. He had served as flak helper with the air force. Like other young men of his age he waiting for the call to leave. Later he became a paratrooper and participated in the Battle of the Bulge. On March 9, 1945, he was captured in a small village a few miles in front of the Remagen Bridge by US troops and spent the following years as a POW in France.

Knorscheid has 2 mills: Knorscheid Mill and Quirin's Mill. On the day of the crash, Josef was at Knorscheid Mill to have some corn threshed. He saw the plane and heard the explosion. Two chutes came down--one over Primsweiler, another one on a field near the new road to Hüttersdorf at Korprich. The landing site in the field was about 300 yards away from Josef. He ran there immediately together with a French laborer, also a POW. The Frenchman arrived first. When Josef had arrived, the Frenchman already had taken the watch of the frightened flyer. Josef--who had learned English in school--try to calm down the American with the words 'For you the war is over!'

One of the next to approach was G., a member of the NSDAP of Korprich (NSDAP = Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter-Partei = t h e Nazi Party). He wore his unform and seemed breathless from running. "If I had arrived first, he would be dead now!" he shouted. Josef became angry: "You ... - have you ever heard a bullet's shot? How could you dare to menace such a thing? If you want to shoot, you certainly will not do here!" G., who didn't have to become a soldier and fight in the war as he was a member of the local Partei, nearly got mad from these words.

A motorbike with a sidecar approached from Nalbach. The driver was Policeman A., beside him in the sidecar was M., a barber from Nalbach, who as a small man with a big back. Seeing the American he took his rifle from the backseat, jumped to the prisoner and started beating him with the rifle. Before he could beat him a second time, Josef Paul prevented him by falling in his arm. Josef asked the policeman who did nothing to prevent the beating about his duties according to the Geneva Conventions.. G. and M. became more and more agitated. Now the mob's rage seethed more against Josef than the American. But he was helped by his sister who jumped between him and the mob. Now she also was in the line of fire. During this argument, Josef and his sisten gradually moved the mob toward the center of the village and away from the scene. Finally the American was taken into custody and carried away.

There was only one American coming from Korprich but there were one or two others landing not far away from the town.

Katharina Scholer from Körprich reported that an American hid in a so called "grain box" (grain is tied together and set up to dry) in the field of her parents. The people who looked for him overthrew those grain boxes until they found him. A man was there with his motorbike. They took away the American‘s boots to prevent him from running away and put him in the sidecar. Then they drove him down to the Hüttersdorf road where he was expected by some people from Korprich. He was completely intimidated and frightened. A woman from Korprich continued shouting "slay him, slay him".

Daniel "Doc" Mosely at Dillingen

Navigator Mosely had been thrown out of the plane together with bombardier Cobb. While Cobb pulled the ripcord very late, Mosely opened his chute directly. The wind blew him west toward the Saar River. He landed in a forest, hid his chute and took his bearings from his compass. He went west. Taking cover as well as possible so as not to get discovered by anyone, he reached the banks of the Saar River between Dillingen and Rehlingen two days later. There were two bridges crossing the river near Rehlingen. Both were guarded; he could see the walking patrols. He stopped and waited for a chance which never came. Frustrated, tired and hungry he gave up the idea of passing over one of the bridges and wandered southward along the shore to check out another possibility to cross. But the ferry-station he found was also guarded. So, he finally sat down at the shore and waited for capture.

On the morning of August 7, 1944, a Saturday, 60 year-old Jakob Trentz from Bildstock, who was visiting his brother Paul Trenz from Dillingen-Pachten, Wilhelmstraße 19, and together with his grandson, 5-years-old Dietmar Grandmontagne, were walking along the Saar River, not too far away from their home. From the distance they could see a man sitting there who wore a strange uniform. The American studied a map lying in front of him. "He surely thinks he reached France!" When he saw both Germans coming he stood up and waited for them. He was trembling but whether from fear or exhaustion was impossible to state. Trenz explained to him "with hands and feet" to accompany them. Without hesitation Mosely followed them home. They went up into the kitchen on first floor where he was given a cup of water and something to eat. Five minutes later police came and took him along.

These documents were part of the KU-file (the Burgomaster = Bürgermeister = mayor):

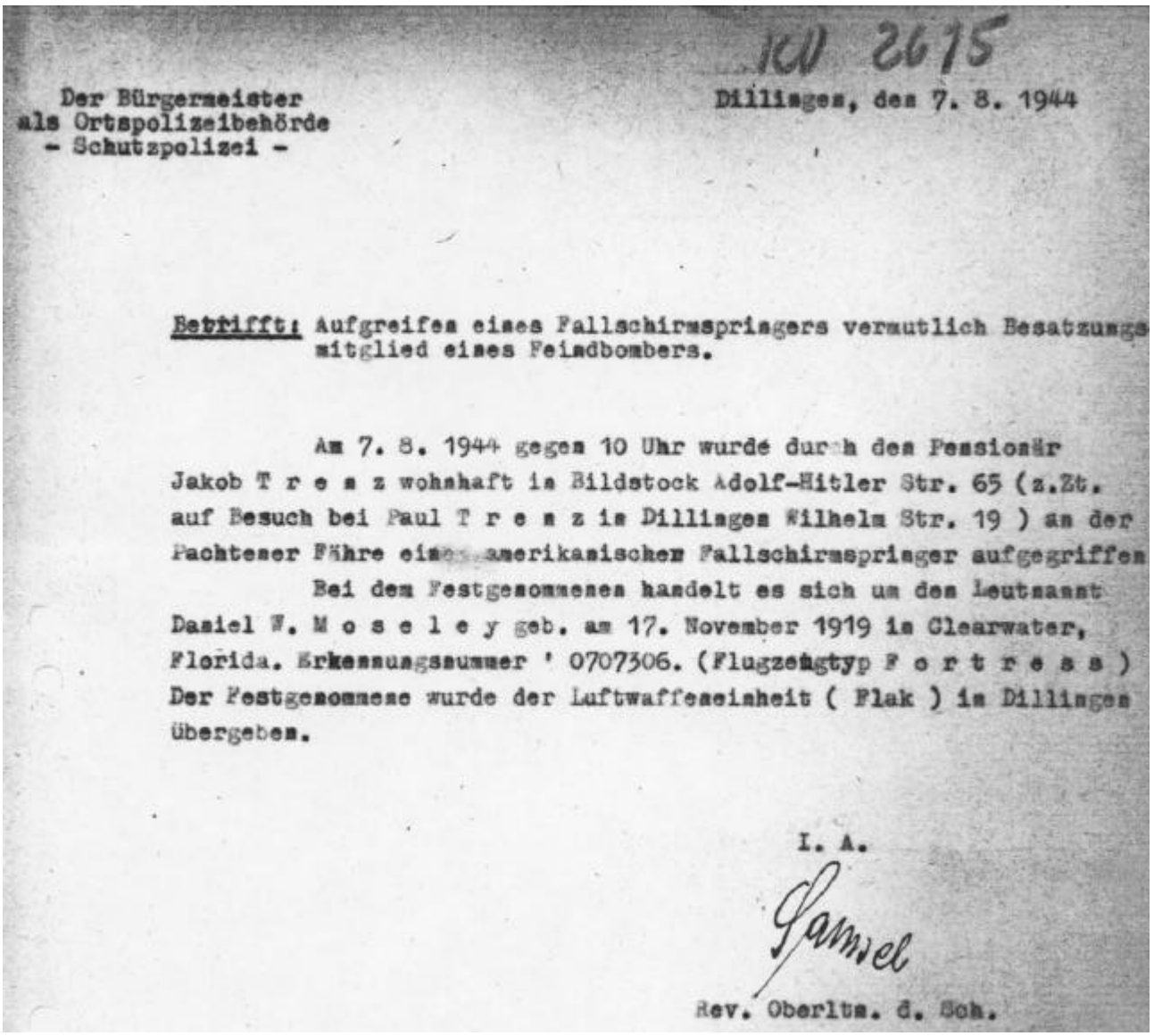
"The Burgomaster *Dillingen, 8/7/1944*
Local Police Authority
Protective Police

Subject: Capture of Parachutists, presumably crew member of enemy aircraft

On 8/7/1944, about 1000 hrs, an American parachutist was captured by the retired Jakob Trenz, resident of Bildstock, Adolf-Hitler-Straße 65 (at present on a visit to Paul Trenz at Dillingen, Wilhelm-Straße 19) at the Pachten ferry station.

The prisoner was identified as Lt. Daniel W. Mosely, born 17 Nov. 1919 at Clearwater, Fla., Ser.No. 0707306.
Type of plane: Fortress. The prisoner was turned over to the flak unit stationed at Dillingen.

By: Samsel
1st Lt., reserve
Protective Police"



IV 2615

Der Bürgermeister
als Ortspolizeibehörde
- Schutzpolizei -

Dillingen, den 7. 8. 1944

Betrifft: Aufgreifen eines Fallschirmspringers vermutlich Besatzungsmitglied eines Feindbombers.

Am 7. 8. 1944 gegen 10 Uhr wurde durch den Pensionär Jakob T r e s z wohnhaft in Bildstock Adolf-Hitler Str. 65 (z.Zt. auf Besuch bei Paul T r e s z in Dillingen Wilhelm Str. 19) an der Pachtener Fähre einen amerikanischen Fallschirmspringer aufgegriffen.
Bei dem Festgenommenen handelt es sich um den Leutnannt Daniel W. M o s e l e y geb. am 17. November 1919 in Clearwater, Florida. Erkennungsnummer ' 0707306. (Flugzeugtyp F o r t r e s s)
Der Festgenommene wurde der Luftwaffeneinheit (Flak) in Dillingen übergeben.

I. A.
Samuel
Rev. Oberltn. d. Sch.

"Air Force Station Dillingen 8/7/1944

On the American prisoner who was taken over by the police today no information could be obtained as to what damage he belongs to. He claims to have been thrown out of the plane. He is unable to state the exact day of action. He probably is a member of the crew of the Fortress shot down 8/3/44, Thursday, in the area of Schmelz which exploded in the air. He is unable to make any statements about parachute and combination.

Sign. illegible
Lt., Bty Cdr."

Luftwaffendienststelle Dillingen 7.8.1944

Bei dem heute von der Polizei übernommenen amerikanischen Gefangenen war nicht festzustellen, zu welchem Bruch er gehört. Er sei aus der Maschine geschleudert worden. Den genauen Einsatztag kann er nicht angeben. Vermutlich handelt es sich um ein Besatzungsmitglied der am Donnerstag, dem 3.8.44, in der Gegend Schmelz durch Flak zum Abschuß gebrachten Fortress, die in der Luft explodierte. Über den Verbleib des Fallschirms u.der Kombination kann er keine Angaben machen.

Leutnant u. Battr.-Chef

Between landing and prison - the American flyers at Lebach

Next report is radio operator Billy Hardesty's. I didn't succeed in finding out where he landed with his chute. The village where they brought him and where he met his comrades again could have been Lebach.

Hardesty: *"As I neared the ground, I deployed my chute. I was on course to land on the roof of one of those houses with steep roofs. I didn't know if it would work or not, but I spilled some air out on one side of my chute. It pulled me away from alsmost sure death, by landing on, and falling off that high, steep roof.*

The down side of the landing was that due to spilling air from my chute it increased my downward speed. I landed more on my right leg than the left, hurting my right hip. It still hurts. Within a minute or less I was surrounded by civilians, young and old. The younger ones started beating on me. As soon as they knocked me down, I would jump back up. It took me a while to decide to stay down. That got me a few kicks, until some people came with a rope. I didn't speak German, but since they were shoving me in the direction of some trees, I figured out that they planned to hang me. Happy ending for me, two German soldiers with machine guns came running up and took me from them. The soldiers took me to a village where others had the engineer in custody. About that time, soldiers arrived with the pilot (who had a broken leg) and had been stabbed with a knife. A short time later one of the gunners was brought up. He had been beaten so badly that his head and face were so swollen that you could not see his eyes and his head was swo llen out to the end of his nose. The soldiers made me and the engineer carry the fat pilot but I would fall down when I tried to pick up my share. The soldiers took me and the engineer to a street car and then to jail. I never saw the pilot or gunner again. I figure I owe my life to those two soldiers."

After capture

The wounded men were taken to the Lebach hospital to receive first aid and next day they were taken--in a car or on a truck--to Saarbrücken prison. There they stayed another day. Then they were taken by train to Frankfurt and by trolley to Oberursel in the Taunus Mountains to be interrogated in the Interrogation Center and kept in solitary confinement. The group was later divided and taken to different permanent camps of the Luftwaffe in East Germany.

Bombardier Cobb

*"The next morning I was taken away and sent to an interrogation facility (*Oberursel*). On the way a lady watching from the street, ran up behind me and kicked me in the butt. The guards had a good laugh and that was thankfully all the abuse I received. I was interrogated for several days and kept in a tiny room with no window., no lights, no water. One guard attempted to force my airforce ring (gift from my Mom) from my finger. We slammed back and force across the room and the noise attracted one more guard who broke it up. Nobody was hurt and I kept my ring. I would only give name, rank, serial number to the men who questioned me but he assured me he knew more about me and my hometown and he was right. He explained he was from Chicago (worked in the Ford plant in Hegewish and had come home to Germany to visit his family) when the war broke out. Shortly after this I was taken to a train station in Frankfurt where I joined some of my crew men so I knew that they had lived. We were stuck into a small alcove in the wall and the people would stop, curse us, spit at us, and one tried to kick Brackens' broken leg, but when I stepped in front of Ralph they moved on. We went a along way by train and we were broken up, and only Bill Beals and I stayed together at Sagan, Stalag Luft 3.*

I did not see any of them again till the war was over. Bill and I were put in the British Compound, in the same room until we took the long miserable cold (minus 35 degrees Celsius) march without warm clothes and no food except Red Cross parcels we carried ourselves, until we became so weak we had to discard them. The shoes I was given were so ill-fitting that both heels on my feet had half dollar size bleeding blisters, and the soles [or sores?] which would freeze when we stopped, would cause the blisters to bleed more as they thawed out.

This was the worst period of my life and for awhile I thought I would not make it. We had to stop the column to let some Polish refugees go through, and those of us in the back half were sent several kilos down the wrong road. I was in pitch dark, deep frozen ruts, and every so often I'd step on a rut, fall down, and I hurt a lot. For a while I was ready to give up, lay down, maybe die, but I got really really angry and I walked, cursed everybody, fell and cursed some more and suddenly I was at the head of the column. Then I realized I had toughened up immensely and I would be tougher and stronger the rest of my life. I took a beating but I grew up. My opinions of your Stalags - that's something different.

Stalag Luft 3 (Sagan near Breslau)

12 men to a room, bunk beds, straw pallasses [pallets?], bad and wormy soups, when we got any, dark bread partially sawdust, about 4 slices, sometimes. I went down on Aug. 3 and was there over Christmas. We made ice cream from snow, Klim, and pineapple jam from Red Cross Parcels. We did not get near enough showers, had body lice, no medicine for colds or other sickness, my knee swelled to twice its normal size making walking very painful. No medical attention. Stoves would not keep us warm. But we were just toughening up for # 7A.

Stalag Luft 7A (Nürnberg)

This was the bottom of the barrel. Filthy barracks (formerly held Italians) flea infested, no fuel for the stoves. So we made saws and stripped boards from the washhouses and sawed down interior fences posts and burned them. No interior toilets or water, and you could not leave barracks at night. But many of us would make a run for the latrines as soon as the

guard and dog were at the other end of the compound. There was a fence between us, and he and the dogs, so if you got a good running start going and coming you had it made. That was better than drawing cards to see who would dump the huge kettle that was the night latrine. Conditions were miserable and in no way lived up to the Geneva Convention Rules. But I could not say there was any brutality that I ever hear about. The Appels here were usually by an Officer I think was named as I remember Ladowitz, as close as I can get. We nicknamed him Smiling Jack after a comic book hero. The Appels at #3 were also okay by an Officer sounding like Glimlitz or Glemlitz or something, also a decent man and soldier.

Stalag Luft 17 (Moosburg an der Isar)

It was getting near Austria. By this time most of us were so tired, filthy and miserable we did seem like the worst had to be over. It couldn`t get much worse, and we felt the war was about over, and we would go home. The few days we were here in a former garbage dump, and under tents the ground there was live fire. You could put in a cooking utensil which we had made from the tin cans, and carried along with us, put in food, water, whatever you had in a hole in the ground, and it would boil in minutes. And one day day along came Patton and let us out. We went up to Landshut, had to wait an extra day for a weather delayed plane, then to France and then to HOME.

In closing I had many miserable days as a Kriegie but I came home as a stronger man, even after losing 28 pounds."

Tailgunner Atkins

"Later the next day we were taken by a wood burning flat bed truck several miles to a railroad station then by train to Frankfurt and by street car to Oberursel prison for interrogation. After three days we were transferred by train to Wetzlar, a camp where we received food and clothing, about a week later by boxcar to Stalag Luft 4 at Kiefheide in East Pomerania.

On Feb. 6, 1945 we began a forced march until April 28th when our guards marched us into the American lines and gave us up at Bitterfeld. I am 6'3" tall, normal weight at 190 lbs, but from maltreatment and lack of food, my weight was 120 lbs. When liberated, after being hospitalized at Halle for two weeks, I was shipped home arriving back in the U.S. in mid June 1945.

I never saw any of the crew members after we left Wetzlar in August. One member, the Navigator, who lives in San Bernadino, CA, has telephoned me a few times over the past five years, his name is Daniel "Doc" Mosley.

After the war I went into the field of Radio Broadcasting an some TV for 35 years. Then into advertising and was elected in 1983 to the Jacksonville City Council for 4 years. Then as Advertising Director for the "Jacksonville Suns" Baseball team, retiring in late 1991. I had a stroke in December 1992, but am doing fine now..

I will be 74 years young on May 16, 1998. My wife and I celebrated our 55th wedding anniversary on April 5th of this year. We have three children, one boy and two girls and five grandchildren. I write country music and own a small Independent Record label and Publishing company (Alrington Records & Sanam Music BMI)."

Radio Operator Hardesty

"I was moved from jail to a Gestapo prison. I got no beatings at the Gestapo prison (Interrogation Center), but I got kicked a lot. At the Gestapo Prison they knew all about me. They tried to get information from me. They didn't believe me but I really didn't know anything they wanted to find out from me. I guess they figured that out because they only kept me a day or two then put me on a POW train bound for Stalag Luft 3.

Prison was quite boring. I was a Staff Sgt. so I did not have to work. The worst thing about prison was very, very little food and very poor quality food. However the guards (who were mostly old men) didn't fare much better.

One guard was a giant of a man. He did not speak English. Some of the guards were as dumb as a stump and we teased them a lot. We called them "goons". When a guard was coming in for inspection, the first POW that saw him shouted "Goons Up". When the giant of a man came to enter, he would smile and shout "Goontsz up". I didn't think he was really "mean" but heard rumors that he was captured by the Russians and beheaded. I think it was on January 29 that we took all our belongings and started a march. This was referred to by many as a death march. We slept in snow or hog barns. A lot of POWs did not make it through this ordeal. Older men and unhealthy men were the most victims. The Germans marched away from the closest enemy. The allied forces and Russians were same distance away. We always marched away from the Russians. I was liberated May 2, 1945. All crew members lived to make it back to the States and Home."

After the war

I wrote about the fate of M., D. and L. from Hüttersdorf.

G. was captured after the war when the French took over the area from American troops in July 1945. French police arrived at Körprich and asked for Johann Paul but he was a Prisoner of War somewhere. From a neighbor they heard the story as it had happened. Then they found G. and beat him up.

Unfortunately there was not the happy end for Peter Lehnert like Richard Dickmann wrote in his narration. He was denounced, imprisoned for three months in a camp for political prisoners (like members of the SA) at Theley, Germany, and then at Neunkirchen-Bildstock. A year later he recovered in a hospital from his prison sufferings. After the war he was a policeman again until his sudden death from heart attack in 1956. His saviour from America (from Dickmann's story) never came.

Eye-witnesses:

USA
Billy M. Hardesty, Kansas City, Montana
Daniel M. Mosely, San Bernadino, California
James Atkins, Jacksonville, Florida
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