

Presentation given in the City Hall of Gettysburg in 1999
WW II plane crashes in the Saarland and its neighboring areas
How historical research has led to friendship and reconciliation
by Klaus Zimmer, flugzeugabstuerze-saarland@arcor.de

PART ONE

First I want to tell you a few things about

The background of my research.

From my childhood on it has been my hobby to research old things, to occupy myself with the history of our region. This has resulted in me writing some 10 books on such topics so far. But it wasn't until four years ago that I discovered a unique chance to combine two of my main fields of interest: local history and the English-speaking world. Since then locating American and British fliers who downed in our area has proved to be a most fascinating occupation.

In the meantime I have located some 200 World War II plane crashes in our small region. My research consumes almost all my spare time and needs considerable financial means. However, it constitutes a unique gratifying experience. It has opened up completely new perspectives to many people, including myself and my family. It has built bridges across the Atlantic. One of these bridges led us to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where I gave this presentation in the city hall to a large group of American veterans from this area. It was a thrilling experience to be there with them. It is good to have friends in the United States. On this occasion the son of a flier who was murdered near Fürth in 1944 was also present. Actually, we came to Gettysburg after he had invited us to visit him and his wife for 10 days. The same presentation was also given in a church in Brenham, Texas, on the invitation of a retired pastor, who was a heavy bomber pilot in WW II and who parachuted into the village of Leitersweiler near St. Wendel in 1944.

In the following I will pick out some of the research projects I have been involved in order to illustrate what impact my and my friends' activities have had.

I will first tell you about some fliers who were

Once at war, and are now at peace.

All begins in the year 1995. Plenty of activities are organized all over the world to commemorate the end of the Second World War fifty years before. Also on the local level speeches are held, articles published, books written, exhibits opened ... An event that took place in April 1944, only a few miles from the village where I grew up in the Southwest of Germany, catches my attention. Photos show an American B-17 bomber, a Flying Fortress, which rests on a hill near Bubach im Ostertal, almost undamaged, after emergency landing there. What forced this plane down? Where did it come from?

Who were the ten crew members? These questions occupy my mind. Nobody can give me the answers. I must find a way to locate those who were in that huge plane. Crazy idea, I say to myself, impossible! However, this thought does not go out of my mind. I locate numerous eye-witnesses, find the exact crash site with their help, compile their accounts and manage to piece together the events as remembered by the German villagers. Still, no idea about where the Americans are. During my research I find friends dedicated to the same cause who help me. Then the incredible happens: one needle in the haystack is found, then two, then three, then all US veterans from this plane who are still alive today. A real "explosion" of information takes place.

To make it short: assisted by my new friend Ed McKenzie of New Hampshire, ball turret gunner of this B-17, I write a book about the event which sells 1,500 copies in our rural area in Germany of only 4,000 inhabitants. Interest is enormous. The idea of a commemoration on the crash site emerges. My newly found American veteran friends keep pushing me into tracing the German fighter pilot who shot them down after I have already given up all hope to be successful. And I really do find him! Ex-Lieutenant Hans Berger of Munich, like some of the American protagonists of 1944, spontaneously expresses his strong wish to meet his former foes. A most moving ceremony takes place on the crash site in May 1996. Local residents, Americans, Germans, even French guests, all are deeply touched. Some have tears in their eyes, as both nation's national anthems are played. Here reconciliation takes place, lives are affected for the better. Former foes clasp hands and hug each other and are good friends from now on. No more horrifying nightmares of bombers firing at him for Hans Berger since that friendship meeting on the hill outside the little farming village. All have been at peace since that ceremony. Ed McKenzie is encouraged to write an exhaustive book entitled *"Boys at War, Men at Peace"* which is published in New York.

In the next instance of my research

A preaching pilot

played a major role.

After the tremendous positive response to the friendship meeting I just cannot stop doing this kind of research. My friends characterize me as "indefatigable". And they must be right. When my book was presented to the public, a farmer from one of the little villages told me about some American airmen who had been held captive next to his farm in 1944. in Langenbach, Kreis Kusel. A lady from another tiny village told me about a terribly bleeding American parachuter in Selchenbach, Kreis Kusel, and some others who were well remembered by her. Wouldn't it be an idea if I found them too? The eye-witnesses all encourage me. This, however, is even a harder nut to crack. The various statements concerning the exact day when this took place differ widely. Then I happen to read in a book that on 29 January 1944 some Allied fliers parachuted into our area. One lady insists that the parachuters landed near her village on a cold Saturday. And the 29 January 1944 really was a Saturday! I now more or less force my disagreeing

informants to agree on this date. And suddenly one tells me: Yes, of course, on 29 January, it was on my uncle's birthday!

This settled, I have all Missing Aircrew Reports for this day sent by the US National Archives. But what a mess! In many cases no exact crash location is given. In all other cases none refers to our region. I get the idea to summarize my eye-witness accounts and to try to contact all those veterans mentioned in the first category of reports. A bomb group association, friends, a CD ROM with all US telephone directory entries and the Department of Veterans Affairs in St. Louis, Missouri, help me. Only after two weeks, I get a phone call from South Carolina. Dave Helsabeck, ex-bombardier, confirms: "*I was your parachuter who landed in the apple tree near Langenbach!*" Now I have my crew consisting of 10 Americans. Walter Garber of Louisiana is the one who was apprehended by a shepherd and his dog near Langenbach. Art Siciliano of Massachusetts is the man who was bleeding badly and who was escorted into Selchenbach. And I manage to clarify the fate of all the other crew members as well. However, I still do not know where the pilot, Claude Farris, landed. One thing he remembers is a sign "*Saarbrücken, 38 km*".

I decide to publish his reminiscences in the newspapers. On the same day when the first of these papers appears, two eye-witnesses call. They were in the capturing party who found Claude in a forest near Leitersweiler. Their account agrees in detail with Claude's. I manage to identify the exact landing sites of all ten crew members, near Langenbach, Selchenbach, Herchweiler im Ostertal and Hirstein (Krs. St. Wendel). Another puzzle game has been completed.

In August 1996, Claude, now a retired Baptist minister, and four others of his crew and their wives come to Germany. Assisted by my friend Roland Geiger of St. Wendel, we tour our area, meet eye-witnesses, see the landing sites, become very good friends. The highlight is a commemorative church service in a parish church of Herschweiler-Pettersheim near the villages where Claude and his men landed. It is packed with local people, many of whom never attend church on other occasions. Claude, once a pilot who threw bombs on German soil, now preaches to the German people. His message is: "*Just as we trusted our parachutes when we were falling down, so I ask you to put your trust in the Lord.*" It leaves a deep impression on all listeners.

The biggest radio station in our area, the Saarländischer Runfunk, broadcasts two extensive half-hour programs on these activities. There are reports in several local papers. In the USA the TV program "Eyes of Texas" covers this friendship meeting as well.

And a couple of months later I had the honor of speaking in Claude's church in Texas. I'm grateful for all this because it shows me too that what I'm doing has not remained a

mere hobby but has had some deeper impact.

Very tragic events

were involved in my third major project.

In a local history book I find a clue about another plane crash, on 13 September 1944. This is the plane in which Stephen Andrews was doing his duty as a radio operator whose son invited us to visit him in Gettysburg. This crash is also mentioned in files discovered in the Kusel county archives. I contact some local people from the villages surrounding this crash site near Fürth (Krs. Neunkirchen). They show great interest. The curator of the village museum at Dörrenbach spontaneously suggests that an exhibit on this crash and the crew's fate should be set up and a friendship meeting should be organized. Others support this idea and they ask me to continue my research on this event.

I interview some fifty eye-witnesses, study archive material from the United States. Soon I find out that some terrible things are connected with this crash, which really make me feel sad: two of the nine fliers were shot by the German military after safely landing on the ground. I manage to get files from the War Crimes Records in the US National Archives which reveal the whole tragedy. But I am relieved to learn that the local population had no share in the crimes, that existing rumors indicating just that are totally unfounded. On the contrary: the villagers were thoroughly shocked at what had happened on their doorstep. They have been full of consternation up to this very day. They even buried the murdered men in their own cemeteries although the military had expressly ordered them not to do so. Two further tragedies emerge. Another flier from this crew, tail gunner Charlie Fowlkes, was severed from his chute by a falling plane part, thus being killed. A fourth man is still Missing in Action. The press report about these research results. I get some angry phone calls from German veterans would not believe that the German military shot Prisoners of War. But I must insist on that because I have clear evidence. This calms them a bit down. Of course I have also evidence that these were exceptions, that the German military normally behaved quite differently, that they usually protected POWs against angry crowds.

To trace what happened to the man Missing in Action I contact my friends from the Search Group for the Missing. They come with a squad of volunteers equipped with spades and start digging at the crash site. We find all kinds of wreckage, but what is most important: two dogtags inscribed "Robert N. Lincoln 37622618", several human bone fragments, a bracelet inscribed "R. N. L.", parts of a flier's uniform, remains of a parachute, coins and so on. A friend of mine notifies the US Army European Mortuary Department. They come with a search group and complete the excavation. Everything

is documented, the bones and dogtags are sent to a US government office for further processing. Lincoln was from St. Louis, Missouri, but I cannot find his relatives there. However, in the year 2000 I learn from the pilot of the plane, Bob Funk, that Lincoln's remains that were dug out by us were buried with military honor on the St. Louis National Cemetery in the presence of his sister who had been located by the American authorities.

For some time I am unable to locate any relatives of the two shot fliers, Stephen J. Andrews of New Jersey and Frank Hedeem of California. However, I am more successful in Charlie J. Fowlkes' case, the man who fell down without his chute. His brother Guy lives in North Carolina. I soon find out that Charlie now lies buried there but nobody of his family knows what really happened to him. I am glad I can finally tell them something they have always wanted to know. Guy has been troubled by the question of what happened to his only brother all his life. Now it is hard for him to bear the news. But it really helps him to find his inner peace.

In May 1997 the third friendship meeting takes place. Apart from Guy and Donna Fowlkes, pilot Bob Funk of Illinois comes with his wife. And we are able to welcome Dr. Max Adenauer, son of Germany's first post-war chief of Government. He was a 1st Lieutenant in 1944 and apprehended pilot Bob Funk after his landing on German soil. This happened only one mile from the village where Bob's comrade Stephen Andrews was shot. Bob was so lucky as to land in a place where he was treated decently. The friendship meeting is an outstanding success. A commemorative church service is conducted by German pastors from three different denominations. The Protestant chaplain of nearby Ramstein US Air Force Base holds the sermon in which he clearly expounds the Gospel. The exhibit is visited by school classes from the surrounding area. We drive to nearby France to the largest American Military Cemetery in Europe. Deeply moved Bob places flowers on the graves of his two comrades shot in our area, his co-pilot Frank Hedeem and his radio operator Stephen Andrews, and presents a last military salute to them.

I have written another book, on this crash and the fate of the crew members. For this book I get the Second Prize in a competition on local history in our state. I am second of 70 other competitors. The jury, which consists of eminent professors, emphasizes that my work is an important contribution to foster friendship between our two nations, the USA and Germany. A friend of mine is awarded the Order of Merit of the neighboring state of Rheinland-Pfalz where he lives. He is also given the highest award of the city of Kaiserslautern, where he resides. This all encourages me quite a bit to continue my time-consuming hobby. I finally manage to track down the son of radio operator Stephen Andrews in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania: Len Andrews, who has become a good friend of ours. After locating Len, I find out that he was stationed at Ramstein Air Force Base in the seventies, only 20 miles from where his father found his tragic end, without knowing

this. Len and his wife Sharon were now so kind as to host my family and me in Gettysburg. Without their invitation I wouldn't have been there.

In a further case

A machine gun serial number led the way.

Another outstanding success is the excavation of an American Mustang fighter plane by the Search Group for the Missing at Oberalben, Kreis Kusel. A machine gun bears a serial number with whose help the pilot is found: Richard McDonald of Scituate, Massachusetts. Of course, he is surprised when he receives my first letter with a summary of eye-witness accounts. In 1997 I was able to visit him along with my family in his home on the Atlantic. I had with me a plaque of the town of Kusel where he was jailed for two nights and a video cassette showing the excavation of his plane. The local press in Massachusetts reported about our visit and both Dick and I received friendly responses from the readers.

A very gratifying experience for me was the fact that I was able to bring

Comfort for a troubled mother.

Another hard nut turns up and I try to crack it too. A B-17 bomber fell into the woods near the town of Kusel on 9 August 1944. The cemetery register has the entry "Three unknown Allied fliers" and the serial number of one of them. A friend of mine drives to Lorraine American Military Cemetery at St. Avold in France, gives the personnel this number and asks them to identify the flier's name. Although they have a computer which can do this within seconds, he is strictly denied any assistance. So, rather discouraged, he walks around among 12,000 graves for hours on end, reading the tombstone inscriptions and recording them on tape. And when he listens to the recordings later he finds a serial number not identical but similar to the one in the cemetery register. I order the Missing Aircrew Report for this man and his crew. However, I get no response from the US National Archives this time. American friends get the Report for me and send it to me. And really: this is our plane! I managed to get in touch with all surviving members and, in most cases, with relatives of those Killed In Action or who have passed away in the meantime.

In one case I find in North Carolina the 97-year-old mother of one of the fliers from this plane. He was killed by falling plane parts after bailing out. She never knew what exactly happened to her boy or where it happened. I am able to tell her. The pain of losing him was so great that the family never talked a word about the crash. I receive a letter from her granddaughter, Jan Loftis, who writes me: *"She told me she often wondered why*

she had been allowed to live so long, and this must have been why: to finally learn what happened to her son. We were both comforted to see the photo of the cemetery. Your compassion has brought us peace, and we feel that you must have a generous and loving heart." I am deeply moved by this response. She also told her niece that she was at last going to die in peace. And really, only a short time later she did die.

These were just a few examples of my and my friends' research results and their ensuing human encounters. Apart from that, more meetings with unforgettable experiences have taken place and many more lasting friendships have started in the meantime. My family and I have been to the USA five times as a result of this research, visiting veterans and their relatives. To me all these activities and the fact that we can be with you today are an example of how God has made something good out of something bad.

PART TWO

My story is entitled

The "Bombo's" final flight

and it starts with some

Background information.

It happened on 13 September 1944, in the late morning. More than 1000 heavy US bombers along with some 600 fighter planes were heading for industrial targets in Germany. Among them was the IG Farben chemical factory in the southwest of Germany, near the city of Ludwigshafen. 74 bombers of the 3rd Bomb Division had set course for this place. One of the ships was a plane nicknamed "Bombo". It belonged to 490th Bomb Group stationed in Eye, England, and was piloted by 1st Lt. Robert W. Funk of Tinley Park, Illinois. Apart from him, the following airmen were on board:

2nd Lt. Frank R. Hedeem, co-pilot, of Wasco, California;

2nd Lt. Allen R. Quinn, navigator, of Chicago, Illinois;

2nd Lt. Rae A. Stokes, bombardier, of Eau Claire, Wisconsin;

S/Sgt. Stephen J. Andrews, radio operator, of South River, New Jersey;

S/Sgt. Thomas Dobson, flight engineer, of Fall River, Massachusetts;

Sgt. Charlie J. Fowlkes, tail gunner, of Danville, Virginia;

Sgt. Robert N. Lincoln, top turret gunner, of St. Louis, Missouri;

Sgt. Robert G. Lawrence, ball turret gunner, of Lawton, Oklahoma.

Funk's crew had flown its first 7 missions in B-24s but then the Group was converted to B-17s and this was their third sortie in this type of plane. When these men were approaching the target of Ludwigshafen on 13 September 1944, they, like all the others in the formation, hoped they wouldn't be hit by the flak fire that had started. However, this was going to be a fateful day for them. Immediately after releasing their bombs, they received a direct hit in the right side of their plane, between the nose and the engines. At the same time, the lead plane was also hit and fell down with them some 5000 feet. The right fuel tanks of the "Bombo" were now on fire. Pilot Funk decided to try and escape into friendly territory in France, and they took the direct route to this destination. A lonely straggler, they would have been an ideal target for German fighters. Fortunately for them, they didn't come that day. So there was a fairly good chance of making it back home.

However, after flying alone for 20 minutes, their heavily smoking bomber became unstable and finally utterly uncontrollable. Pilot Funk had no alternative but to give his crew the order to bail out, hoping that they had already reached an Allied-controlled area. What they didn't know at that point of time: they had not made it and would have needed some further 20 minutes. So tough times were waiting for all of them. For some their last hours had begun, for some even their last minutes.

Back in the city of Ludwigshafen, the chemical plant had to suffer from the effects of its most serious bomb attack up to that time. Nine people had been killed, 34 injured and 1000 become homeless as a result of the air raid that day.

In the following I want to give you a summary of what happened to each individual crew member.

Bombardier Stokes and navigator Quinn

In the hectic moments after the bail-out order, the nine men were in a rather stressful situation. And each of them responded to it in a different way. Down in the nose, navigator Quinn, who was nearest to the nose escape hatch, was like in a dream. Bombardier Stokes yelled at him to pull the cable to release the door's hinges, but Quinn didn't move. So Stokes reached over his shoulders and did it himself. To crown it all, Quinn was even unable to kick the door out and Stokes had to do this as well. After that, Quinn simply sat there petrified, with his legs dangling out the hatch, and made no attempt to leave the crippled ship. They were in a critical situation, so Stokes kept yelling at him to get out. Quinn mumbled something but, because of the noise of the plane, Stokes couldn't understand what his comrade was saying. Stokes made a last attempt, using all his persuasion, and finally Quinn let himself fall out. After that, Stokes also jumped out of the burning aircraft. Later, on the ground, Quinn told him what his answer had been: "*Push me out,*" he had said to the bombardier in a soft voice.

In September 1944 various German army units were billeting in our area, among them some SS troops, which were, as is generally known, sometimes ruthless and trigger-happy. And Stokes and Quinn fell into the hands of such a unit. Two young military policemen arrived in front of the mayor's home in the village of Boersborn, Kreis Kusel, where the two Americans had been captured in order to pick them up. One of the two Germans jumped off their car with the words: "*Let's see where we can shoot these two guys.*" Then they rushed into the mayor's living room where the two POWs had been waiting. One of the Germans at once rushed up to Stokes and knocked him to the ground whereas Quinn was not touched. The mayor and his daughter, who witnessed this scene, were shocked at the uncivilized behavior of the German soldiers.

The two Americans were then driven to the SS unit's headquarters where a civilian woman who had lived in the States for some time interpreted. As they refused to answer the questions, the interrogating German officer suddenly pulled his pistol and was about to shoot them. However, the interpreter, with great presence of mind, intervened and jumped between the officer and the prisoners and thus probably saved their lives. The German calmed down again after that. Stokes and Quinn finally landed up in Stalag Luft I in Barth on the Baltic.

Co-pilot Hedeem

Co-pilot Frank Hedeem appeared cool, calm and collected after the bail-out order had been given. He even smiled. He was the third out of the plane and also left it through the front escape hatch. Hedeem also landed near a village, the village of Altenkirchen, Kreis Kusel, and lit a cigarette after reaching the soil in a meadow. He was first apprehended by angry villagers. One of them had been a POW in the first World War and received some rude treatment then. He now "revenged" himself by kicking Hedeem in the butt. Another man hit him with his walking stick, a third gave him a slap in the face. That, of course, was no nice welcome. But after that, these civilians cooled down again and, under normal circumstances, the worst would have been over for the co-pilot. Unfortunately, the worst was still to come in this case.

This can be attributed to two facts. First, in this village a unit of the infamous SS-Division "Das Reich" was stationed. For some of the officers in this division a man's life didn't count much and after the war it was classified as a criminal organization. The second reason was Hedeem's unwise behavior in a situation which was unfavorable for him anyway. I interpret what he did as signs of a delayed shock condition, something that is true for many other men too who parachuted into enemy territory. In the SS headquarters the commanding officer, Hans Rauscher, tried to conduct an interrogation. Hedeem, didn't answer all the questions to the interrogator's satisfaction, which was a normal thing as he was only allowed to give name, rank and serial number. But what's more, the American energetically put his two legs on the officer's desk. The German was

infuriated about this behavior and told him that you didn't do such a thing in Germany and that he should take his feet off again. However, Hedeem insisted and said that he didn't care about German habits and that he was going to have it his way. And, subsequently, he joined in a heated debate with the officer in whose course he hurled the words into the German's face: *"People like you will be court-martialed by us after we have won the war!"* This was more than the German could bear. And it was like signing his own death penalty.

One hour after noon the local residents observed how several SS men, among them Hans Rauscher, led Hedeem out of their headquarters, put him in a jeep and drove away. The villagers all assumed that they were taking him to a nearby military training area near Baumholder or St. Wendel, which would have been the normal procedure. One hour later, the Germans returned again, without the American. The local mayor didn't trust the SS people and suspected something illegal might have happened. That's why he sent his clerk to the SS headquarters to inquire about Hedeem's fate. Rauscher said to the clerk: *"Tell the mayor he was shot while trying to escape."* However, one of the soldiers who had driven away with the American was boasting in the village he had *"bumped off that guy"*. The truth could no longer be concealed. Later that afternoon, the mayor was given one of Hedeem's dog tags, told where he could find his corpse and ordered to bury him, but not in the local cemetery.

The villagers were utterly shocked. Although they, of course, were full of anger about the constant air raids, they by no means agreed with what the military had done. They found Hedeem lying in a shallow hole, which he most probably had had to dig himself. The body was covered with fir twigs, the head and chest covered with blood. That evening they took him away from that place and interred him, contrary to the military's orders, among their own dead in the village cemetery. To this very day, the people in this village have been full of consternation at what happened at their doorsteps.

After the war, in August 1945, Hedeem's corpse was disinterred and examined by American experts. Their report reads as follows:

"The remains were clothed in a dark green wool shirt and trousers of the U. S. Army, T-shirt with Air Corps insignia and socks, but no shoes. In the right shirt pocket was a metal pilot wings and chain, curved to form a bracelet with 'F. R. Hedeem 0768090 Air Corps, LOVE TONI' inscribed thereon. On the ring finger of the left hand was a gold ring with 'H 14 Kt' and the words 'I love you' inscribed inside. The U. S. Army identification tag on the chest of the body had 'FRANK R HEDEEM 0768090 T-43-44 OP' inscribed thereon. The cause of death was determined to have been multiple bullet holes and fractures through the skull."

The US authorities tried to get hold of the perpetrators, however, were unable to locate

any of them. This had to do with the further way of the German SS-unit, which was almost totally wiped out in the Battle of the Bulge (known as the Ardennen Offensive in Germany) in late 1944. Hedeem's father intended to offer a high sum of money to the villagers to make them assist him in finding the murderers and taking them to court. However, this attempt was intercepted by the U. S. War Crimes Branch, which held the view that *"the offer of a reward of the size contemplated would not be of any assistance in the apprehension of the war criminals in question but would, on the other hand, provide an incentive to numerous persons with questionable motives to denounce innocent individuals possessing similar names, with the hope that such action would result in the receipt of the reward."*

The mothers of the American fliers from the "Bombo" who were KIA or still MIA exchanged letters, a practice which continued after the war. In 1947 Hedeem's mother wrote to Charlie Fowlkes' mother, who had also lost her son, trying to comfort her:

"You mustn't grieve for your son too much, Mrs Fowlkes. I do not believe our sons want us to. I am sure they are in a land of happiness and peace and someday we will see them - don't you think so? Give him your best thoughts. That's what they want. Knowing this takes away the sadness in our parting."

I myself was deeply moved, standing at the graves of Frank Hedeem and his comrade Stephen Andrews on Lorraine American Military Cemetery in neighboring France while researching this case.

In Wasco, California, Hedeem's home town, there was still a sister-in-law living at the time of the research, but I have been unable to locate any other relatives. The "Wasco Tribune" published a long article about my research results. Levi Pagsuberon, the editor, emphasized in the introduction to his report: *"Perhaps this story will bring much pain to the surviving family members of one of Wasco's World War II heroes, Lt. Frank R. Hedeem. But this story has to be told if only to bring to the fore that not all Germans are cruel, hardened Nazis."*

Radio operator Andrews

Radio operator Stephen Andrews was already 36 years old and the oldest crew member. With his age he must have been one of the oldest soldiers of the 8th AF's flying staff. When the "Bombo" was hit by German flak over Ludwigshafen, Andrews yelled over the intercom that they had got him and he was bleeding. Co-pilot Hedeem and flight engineer Dobson immediately rushed into the radio room to come to his assistance. They found that he was slightly bleeding in the face and on the knee, but it was nothing serious. What was serious though, was the shock Andrews had received. When the bail-out order was given, he was, as a result of this shock condition, unable to follow the pilot's order. So his comrades helped him by attaching a chute to his harness along with a static cord and threw him out of the main escape hatch at the right side of the plane's

fuselage. They waited until they saw his chute open and then bailed out themselves.

When the chute opened, Andrews lost one of his flying boots and soon landed in a tree on the edge of a woods near Breitenbach, Kreis Kusel. He managed to free himself and climb down. When a teenage boy of about 13 years approached him, he willingly allowed this boy to take him by the hand and lead him away. Giving a rather helpless impression, Andrews didn't seem to fully comprehend what was going on around him. They reached a meadow in which some villagers, partly equipped with scythes and other farm tools, were already waiting for them.

In the neighboring village of Fuerth, the First Department of Mechanized Tank Artillery Regiment 102 was billeting at that time. Soon two soldiers from this unit, Paymaster Wilhelm Kamis and Captain Schmidt, arrived on the scene with a motorcycle. Kamis was ordered by Schmidt to take care of the prisoner and lead him away into the village while Schmidt returned with his motorcycle. On the way, Kamis and Andrews were met by a teenage boy, Dieter Volz of Dörrenbach, who approached them and asked Andrews with the little English he had learned at school: *"Are you American?"* To which the foreign man answered: *"No, I'm Canadian."* At once Volz was prohibited from any further conversation with the prisoner. We can only speculate why Andrews denied being American. Perhaps this answer can be attributed to his shock condition, or he hoped to get a better treatment by not being classified as an American "terror flier".

When they arrived at the unit's headquarters, quite a number of villagers and soldiers were already waiting for them, among them the commanding officer, 1st Lt Jacques. Jacques received them with the words: *"Kamis, where have you been so long? Go right away and make out the settlement of the billeting accounts. We are marching off."* Jacques was under pressure of time because he had been ordered to move out of our area. He tried an interrogation in English but Andrews only smiled and didn't say a word.

Another tragic figure on that day was Pfc Otto Peschke. He had just returned from an unsuccessful search for other parachuters and happened to carry a submachine gun, which most probably contributed to what was to happen now. Jacques first ordered him to search Andrews for weapons, but he couldn't find any on him. Then Jacques asked those surrounding him: *"What shall we do with this man now?"* And the soldiers gave him the answer he must be taken to division headquarters and from there to a POW camp. *"Nonsense! We have no gasoline. Get going, Peschke! Shoot this man immediately. Go with him 100 meters behind the first houses!"*, the officer retorted. Some other soldiers, equipped with spades, were ordered to accompany Peschke, in order to bury the American at once.

The small group marched off, up a hill, through the village, observed by the villagers and numerous schoolchildren, who were all watching at a distance what was now happening.

Even today the eye-witnesses can describe Andrews' appearance: *"Medium build, blonde hair, blue eyes, yellow-brown trousers, on one foot a flight boot, on the other some sort of damaged shoe, wearing a sweater with yellow-brown zipped collar, no headgear, carrying a lined leather jacket on his right arm."* Just outside the village Peschke pointed his weapon from behind at the man's heart and fired a round. Andrews, still walking, fell to the right. After a few moments, Peschke fired another round, this time in the head. The others buried the killed flier immediately in a shallow hole under a cherry tree, about 10 meters from where he had been shot. Back in the village, Peschke reported to Jacques that his order had been carried out. *"Well done,"* Jacques commented. When the other officers billeting in that village learned what had happened, they went up to Jacques to protest. The latter only stated: *"There is nothing to be sorry for. I assume full responsibility."*

Like in Altenkirchen, the people of Fuerth have been shocked at what happened to this very day. They also thought it an unworthy thing that a man was buried in a field outside their town. Three days after the events, early in the morning, they came under cover of darkness, disinterred Andrews, took him to their own cemetery and buried him there in the same grave as tail gunner Charlie Fowlkes.

When Peschke returned to his quarters in the home of one of the villagers after the execution, his thoughts and feelings were in a complete turmoil and he was in a kind of shock condition himself. The killing of the man was *"very depressing"* for him, Peschke said in a statement after the war. *"At that moment I didn't know what I should do or where I was."* He claimed that he never completely recovered from this traumatic experience. *"What should I have done?"*, he defended himself in a US war crimes court. *"If I had refused to obey orders and deserted, they would have caught and shot me right away or court-martialed me. Even today I don't see how I could have prevented the execution."* Peschke was sentenced to lifelong imprisonment but pardoned 20 years later. It can be assumed that he was, like many other war criminals, released in the early fifties. 1st Lt Jacques could not be called to account because he was KIA in the Battle of the Bulge.

Stephen Andrews now lies buried in the same military cemetery in France as his comrade Frank Hedeem.

Tail gunner Fowlkes

Tail gunner Charlie Fowlkes bailed out next after Andrews, and the others saw how his chute opened. But this was the last they ever saw of him. After the war the survivors from the "Bombo" crew had to fill in questionnaires on the fate of those KIA or MIA. However, none of them could explain what had happened to Charlie Fowlkes.

The Fowlkes family were notified by the US military authorities that he had been KIA, and in 1950 they decided to have him buried in the Baptist cemetery in their home town. His mother was still full of grief. When I located Charlie's brother Guy in 1996 in Providence, North Carolina, the family still didn't know what exactly had happened to him. There were even rumors the military might have sent an empty casket or one filled with stones, only in order to calm Charlie's mother. I was finally able to solve a mystery which had troubled them ever since Charlie was reported MIA. The news was really hard for Guy to bear, even after such a long time. After a press report about my efforts Guy got many phone calls from people trying to comfort him. He now has closed this sorrowful chapter in the family history and found his inner peace. My family met him and his wife in their home on one of our trips, too.

Let me, just in brief, explain what happened to the tail gunner. After his chute had opened, the bomber went into a spin. During that process part of the right wing tip was hurled away by an explosion in the fuel tanks. And something very improbable happened, something that was very tragic for Charlie Fowlkes. The wing tip flew directly into the direction where he was slowly floating down. He didn't have the slightest chance to escape the plane part by drawing on his chute lines, thus changing his course. Within a second, the wing tip severely hit him in the stomach area and severed him from his chute. The unlucky man fell down without his chute, most probably already smashed to death by the impact with the wing tip, which hit the ground only a short distance from where he was found. His empty chute and the attached harness, both covered with blood, slowly descended in the neighboring village of Werschweiler. Charlie Fowlkes was taken to the Fuerth village cemetery and buried there, in the same grave as Stephen Andrews.

Top turret gunner Lincoln

Top turret gunner Robert N. Lincoln of St. Louis, Missouri, was listed as MIA until we dug out his remains on the crash site.. After starting my research on this case, I notified my friends from the Search Group for the Missing. On the crash site we found all kinds of wreckage, remains of a parachute and chute harness, human bone fragments, a bracelet inscribed "R. N. L." and, last but not least, Lincoln's two dogtags. The material was being processed by a US Army department in Hawaii to change Lincoln's status from MIA into KIA. And, as already mentioned, he was buried in 2000 in St. Louis.

I have some letters exchanged by the mothers of the fliers from the "Bombo". In May 1945 Mrs Ethel Lincoln, Robert Lincoln's mother, wrote to Charlie Fowlkes' mother: "*We can only hope and pray for our boys' safety and leave everything up to God. All we can do is to keep our faith and trust in God. I think that is what is wrong with the world today, too many people forget to trust in God.*" And five years later, in 1950, she was still hoping for her boy's return: "*I have never heard anything about my son,*" she writes. "*In*

fact I didn't know they were still searching for the Missing. I have never quite given up hope that maybe somewhere in that cruel world over there Bob might still be alive."

It is now clear why Lincoln didn't bail out but stayed in the plane. Pilot Funk waited till the last moment and then wanted to leave the unstable bomber as well. When he got up from his pilot's seat and turned around, he saw Lincoln standing behind him. Lincoln was taking off his chute again. Funk yelled at him to put it back on again and bail out. But Lincoln was in deep shock and didn't notice what was going on around him. He stood there petrified and clasped his hands tightly on some instrument device. Funk tried to pull him down into the nose section with him, but didn't succeed. There was no way he could save him and he left the plane at the very last second before it lost too much altitude and before it started spinning. If Funk had waited a brief moment longer, he would have suffered the same fate as Lincoln. The latter went in with the plane, which was destroyed in a mighty explosion on the ground.

Ball turret gunner Lawrence, flight engineer Dobson and pilot Funk

Ball turret gunner Lawrence, flight engineer Dobson and pilot Funk all landed near the village of Doerrenbach, only one mile from Fuerth, where Stephen Andrews was shot. The way they were treated stood in sharp contrast to the experience Hedeem and Andrews had to undergo. Funk and Dobson were first approached by a soldier belonging to the SS unit in Fuerth who had drawn his pistol and was waving it around wildly. All this was observed by several farmers who had been working in their fields. One of them shouted to the German soldier: *"Put that pistol away! If you want to shoot with it, go to the front. These two guys won't harm you."*

In Doerrenbach another Army unit was stationed at that time. One of the officers was First Lieutenant Dr. Max Adenauer. He had studied in the US before the war and had befriended an American girl then. He had wanted to stay longer there, possibly to marry her, but his residence permit had run out and so he had had to return to Germany. When the war began shortly after that, he lost contact with his girl-friend. As a result of his positive experience in the US, he had become a great friend of the Americans. When he and Lt Schulz arrived on the scene, the first thing they did was offering the Americans cigarettes. The prisoners were handed over to them and led away to their jeep.

The farmers' further reaction is another good example to illustrate the attitude of the rural population in our area towards downed fliers. Of course, they were infuriated about the constant bomber attacks. But they would never have agreed to the killing of a helpless POW. One of the farmers shouted to Dr. Adenauer and Lt Schulz: *"Don't you dare to bump off these two guys or I will give you a decent whipping!"* However, there was no reason to suspect these soldiers would do a thing like that. The Americans were taken into the village center where soon a large crowd gathered to admire the two men

from so far away. Still today the women of the village, then in their teens or twenties, are enthused about *"these two big and extremely handsome men."*

Conclusion

What I have just told you only covers the main facts of the "Bombo" story. Our time has not permitted me to go into further detail although many more facts are available. I hope it was interesting for you and thank you very much for your attention.