

**Meldung über den Abschluß eines
US-amerikanischen Flugzeuges**

Abschluß-Nr. **ME 2490**

Abschlußtag und Zeit: **2.12.44. 15.00.**

Abschlußort: **Führungsgrund**

Flugzeugtyp: **Liberator**

Meldende Dienststelle: **Fl. H. Kdr. Gleiwitz**

Besatzung:

Name und Vornamen: Geburtsdag und -ort:		Dienst- grad	Erk.- Marke:	gef.: verw.: tot:	Verbleib: welches Lager Art d. Verwundung Grablage
ROKERSLEY	John Dean	1/Lt.	0-1795875	gef.	Dulag-Luft West
GOODSON	Ray Martin	2/Lt.	0-716535	gef.	dito
ORKIN 7.2.25.	David N.Y.C.	T/Sgt.	32883780	gef.	dito
GADOL	Morris Sabota	S/Sgt.	32709492	gef.	dito
BILANYCH 11.11.25.	George Kent., Ohio.	S/Sgt.	35927231	gef.	dito
SHAPIRO	Sherman Bud	S/Sgt.	39417114	gef.	dito

Bemerkungen: **MAER - 10034**

SULAG-LUFT, des **21.12.44. 7.5.**

Dear Mr. Serwatka,

First I want to apologize for being so negligent and taking so long to answer your letters. I cannot plead that I haven't had the time but this is one of those things that I guess I have mostly put out of my mind ever since that day because of the unpleasant memories. That is no excuse, however, so I will now try to give you as accurate an account as possible after some 50 years.

I don't know if you have a full list of my crew so in case you do not I will list them.

Michael Butinsky, 2nd Lt., Co-Pilot; Paul Dillon, Warrant Officer, Navigator; Ray Goodson, 2nd Lt., Bombardier; David Orkin, Sgt., Radio Operator/Engineer; Sherman Shapiro, Cpl., Nose Gunner; George Bilanych, Cpl., Belly Gunner; Edward Pultz, Cpl., Tail Gunner; and, Waist Gunners Cpls. Maurice Gadol and Floyd Sprinkle. The Radio Operator/Engineer was also responsible for operating the top turret gun. I know that Bilanych and Shapiro have passed away in recent years. I have lost touch with other crew members so cannot say how many of them are still living.

Our crew was assembled in June, 1944 at Westover Field, Massachusetts. The original crew included Alfred Ladonnisi, Cpl. but on our first mission he became ill and was hospitalized with meningitis. He had not yet rejoined the crew before the Dec. 2 mission to Blechhammer. He was Radio Operator/Engineer and was replaced by Orkin. Lt. Ray Goodson also joined our crew after we arrived in Italy since the man originally assigned to the crew, as Bombardier, received orders for another duty assignment before we left the U.S.

We picked up a new B-24 at Mitchell Field, Long Island, NY to ferry across and deliver in Italy. We left Mitchell Field on or about 12 Oct. 1944 and flew to Gioia del Colle via Grenier Field, Manchester, NH; Gander, Newfoundland, Azores Islands, Marrakech, North Africa, and Tunis, North Africa before arriving at Gioia del Colle. To the best of my recollection we arrived at Gioia del Colle about 12 days after leaving Mitchell Field due to being weathered in at two stops.

I hope you will excuse my memory in recollecting some of the events but I am reciting them as closely as I can recall. I do recall that our first mission was in northern Italy and I believe it may have been the Brenner Pass where some German troops were concentrated. We also participated in missions at Linz, Austria and at Munich, Germany before the mission to Blechhammer.

The Blechhammer target, as I recall, was one of the dreaded missions due to heavy anti-aircraft fire. Although the anti-aircraft fire that day was reported, I believe, lighter than usual there was still a lot of flak.

I don't recall the time of departure from our base at Castellucci, Italy but it took about four hours to reach the target area. We were flying, I believe, at 23,000 feet and had reached the IP and were on the bombing run when our plane was struck by what I think was a direct hit from anti-aircraft. We had observed no sign of any German fighter activity on the way to the target area. When the plane was hit it seemed to be in the nose section and was strong enough to force the plane into a position that I could not see the lead plane on which we were flying left wing. I motioned for Lt. Butinsky, Co-Pilot, to take over the controls thinking he might be able to see from the right hand seat. Just after taking them over he let me know that all our controls were gone, apparently a result of the hit.

We were almost at the drop point when this happened but could not see the other planes when they dropped their bombs. Since we had no control of the plane we could not turn with the formation and continued on in a straight path. Although I could not detect any engines out, we started losing altitude quite rapidly and shortly thereafter I gave the crew the order to bail out.

The Bombardier and Nose Gunner thought WO Dillon was struck by shrapnel and appeared to be fatally wounded, however, they got him out of the exit and pulled his ripcord. His body was later found and has been returned to the U.S. for burial.

Lt. Butinsky, Co-Pilot was OK when I gave the order to bail out, as far as I could tell, and preceded me out of the plane. He was using a back type parachute and I have always assumed that it possibly failed to open and he fell to his death. I was in touch with his family after the war and my return to the U.S. but don't know if they ever received word that he was found. If they did they did not pass on this information to me. It would seem to me that if this scenario were true his remains would have been found and he should have been listed as killed in action. I have noted, however, that according to the history of the

Fightin' 451st, published by Turner Publishing Co., his name is listed but no designation of MIA or KIA was made.

As for the rest of the crew, they all made it safely to the ground and were taken prisoner by the Germans. Lt. Goodson and myself ended up at Stalag Luft I where we were liberated by the Russians in May 1945. I cannot tell you where the rest of the crew were imprisoned.

I myself, received a slight cut on the left side of my face just missing my left eye. It was superficial and was caused by some flying glass. I got out of the plane at somewhere around 14000 or 15000 feet and landed close to a farmhouse where some German civilians were watching. When I landed I injured my foot and had to be furnished with some crutches in order to be able to walk by that evening. I was offered no medical attention. Shortly thereafter my reaching the ground some German military personnel showed up and took me into custody.

I was taken to a small post in a nearby village and later that evening was taken to a train station for the trip to the Interrogation Center at Oberussel near Frankfurt. I recall spending most of that night in a train station in Dresden and I could hear bombs exploding somewhere in the vicinity. I don't recall how long it took for us to get to Oberussel but I think we spent at least one night on the train. It was on this trip that I was reunited with some members of my crew and learned of WO Dillon's fate. While at Oberussel I could hear either bombs or artillery explosions. I guess at that time the Allies were getting close enough that it could have been artillery.

We were held at the Interrogation Center for several days and then put on a train to be taken to Stalag Luft I at Barth, Germany. We were on the train for at least two nights as I recall. While being held at the Interrogation Center we were treated quite civilly but were confined in solitary confinement which, I suppose, was to try to add to our anxiety as to what was to happen. We were told that we were considered as spies unless we told the Germans more than our name, rank and serial number. Our food while there consisted of a bowl of very poor soup three times a day.

I don't know how much detail you might be interested in as to the prison camp. If you would like any more information on this please let me know and I will try to oblige. We were, of course, under guard 24 hours a day and were called out for roll call twice a day regardless of weather. While there we received Red Cross food parcels until about the end of January but from then on subsisted entirely on German rations consisting of black bread and mostly rutabaga stew. Needless to say we all lost a great deal of weight before we were liberated.

You mentioned that you had located the approximate position where our plane actually crashed. I would be interested in knowing where this was, however, I don't believe that I would care to receive any part from the plane.

This is probably the most I have talked about our experience to anyone since that day. I guess I have just shoved it back into my subconscious as though in denial that it really happened. I am very lucky to be alive today, at about 83 years of age, and think often of how much of life Mike Butinsky and Paul Dillon missed. They were both fine young men as were so many others who gave their lives.

Since it has take me so long to get this done I am sending it to you by E-Mail, however, I am printing out a copy and will send it by mail to your Warsaw address just in case this doesn't come through properly.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance to your project.

Sincerely yours,

J. Dean Eckersley

P.S. If and when a book is published I
would like to purchase a copy.
I wish you well.