

Crash site
US B-17 Flying Fortress „Dottie“
97th Bomb Group, 414th Squadron
February 27, 1945
Trimbach / Switzerland



B-17 Flying Fortress "Dottie" call sign Mickey 4

This B-17 (No 48248, plane name "Dottie") belonged to the 15th Air Force, 97th Bombardment Group (Heavy), 414th Squadron and had its base on Amendola Air Base, Foggia / Italy. On February 27, 1945 this Bomber was involved in a bombing raid on Augsburg/Germany. This kind of B-17 had a radome in place of the ball turret, which identifies the plane as a Pathfinder Force (PFF) aircraft and has H2X radar. This H2X radar was code named "Mickey", and all PFF planes were commonly referred to by the name "Mickey" and therefore call sign of "Dottie" was "Mickey 4".





Tail markings of the 15th Air Force, 97th Bomber Group, 414th Squadron as well as the arm patch of the 15th US Air Force and the patch of the 414th Bomb Squadron, 97th Bomb Group, where "Dottie» belonged.

Major Albin was new to the 340th Squadron and the crew who was flying "Dottie", a 414th Squadron ship for the Augsburg Raid. I understand it was common practice to use aircraft from other Squadrons, depending on availability, mechanical status, etc. Major George Albin may have been the 340th C.O., and apparently piloting the lead crew with PFF. Additionally, this may have been Albin's first and only flight with this crew.

The "Dottie" crew for the Augsburg Raid was the following:

Pilot:	Maj. George, L. Albin
Copilot:	Maj. John B. Campbell
Navigator:	Cpt. Billy F. Bolton
Navigator:	1st Lt. Alvin F. Smith
Bombardier:	1st Lt. Robert M. Martin
Engineer:	S/Sgt. Paul E. Culley
Radio:	S/Sgt. Harold C. Isaacson
Waist Gunner:	S/Sgt. William B. Beavers, Jr.
Waist Gunner:	S/Sgt. Roy Zermeno
Tail Gunner:	S/Sgt. Richard L. Adkins

"Dottie" was severely hit by German Flak during the attack of the railroad yards in Augsburg and other Bomber crews saw, that "Dottie" lost height rapidly. However, this crew, excepting Major Albin, had experienced similar situations before. They felt they could make it to Switzerland and be interned, instead being captured by the Wehrmacht. On several other missions they had been hit and/or lost engines, but had always been able to crash-land and survive. At around 13.25 p.m. the skipper Major Albin gave the order to bail out. I got the information that the crew actually yelled by radio at the pilot to stay the course, which was borderline insubordination and a court martial offense. No problem, the skipper did not hear the insubordination of his crew, he had already put "Dottie" on auto pilot and bailed out together with his co-pilot! It is strongly assumed, that Major Albin gave order to the entire crew to abandon the plane, but the word never got back to where other crew members were. It was only when the remaining crew members started protesting Albin's decision to jump that they found out he had already left the plane. So after that, the rest of the crew also jumped while still over hostile Germany. The Dottie crew became German P.O.W's - one group including Campbell, Isaacson, Tail gunner Adkins and one of the navigators were caught near the town of Fuessen by local German policemen while the rest of the crew was picked up by the Wehrmacht near Kaufbeuren. All remained in different German prison camps until liberated by the Russians or Americans.

This is a paraphrased quote from a crew member:
"We knew we were losing altitude, but we had been in this situation before. We knew we were only a few miles from Switzerland, so someone yelled to the skipper to stay the course and not go down over Germany. The skipper, being new and inexperienced, had already put the plane on auto pilot, and bailed out!"

Former Waist Gunner Bill Beavers remembers:



Bill Beavers one of "Dottie's" Waist Gunners today

For a 'break-in' flight we flew to Foggia, Italy, where we joined Squadron 340, 97th Bomb Group, 15th Air Force, tasked with, "Destroy Germany's ability to wage war."

"Our first combat mission was quite a learning experience, we were attacked by five German fighter planes." Bill's crew soon progressed to "Lead Crew", making them first plane over targets.

"On about our 30th bombing mission - Ploesti, Rumania on August 18, 1944 - (the unit was awarded a Distinguished Unit Citations for that mission) we had an engine shot out, a second engine failed, then the third lost power. We flew hundreds of miles on one engine before crash-landing." "We were praying to make it over the Adriatic Sea to safer haven in Italy before ditching."

Bill was wounded in the crash and awarded a Purple Heart. Later, the Air Medal with two Oak Leaf Clusters was added to his military decorations, along with five bronze battle stars.

"The most dangerous place to be in WWII was in a bomber over Germany," according to BOMBERS OF WWII, by Jeffrey L. Ethell.

With a new pilot and different B-17, Bill and several of his original crewmen soon returned to action. They would complete 30 Sorties and 57 Combat Missions. The 57th Mission wasn't completed exactly as planned.

Let's go back to the night before Mission #57. "A strange guy none of us knew, came into our barracks talking about a time when his parachute failed to open." "He showed us how to unsnap the parachute, allowing it to open, should the ripcord happen to fail."

Bill now insists, "That strange guy could have been an Angel of the Lord!"



Bill's decorations

The next day, while bombing railroad yards in Augsburg, Germany, anti-aircraft flak took out their #2 engine and wounded the Bombardier. "We'll have to bail out," ordered the new pilot, not feeling they could gain sufficient altitude to cross back over the Alps.

Bill and his experienced buddies suggested they try for safe harbor in Switzerland, which was only six minutes away.

"The cockpit was quiet until someone yelled the pilot and co-pilot had already jumped!" "We were all scared to death to jump, but our Tail Gunner was a big guy from Texas, he had always insisted we not worry, he would personally kick our butts out, one by one."

"When his time came, the Texan froze and we had to boot his butt out," jokes Bill.

Airmen are well-trained on 'bailing out', Bill followed all the instructions, but his parachute failed to open. Then he remembered the 'strange guy' from the night before and followed his instructions. Whether by coincidence or providence, he landed safely.

The bad news, Bill was welcomed to Fussen, Germany by the Nazi Wehrmacht (in fact local German policemen). Via boxcar and foot, he was taken to a POW Camp at Nuremberg. Each day on their journey Allied Forces bombed or strafed the POW convoy. "We figured to be killed, we just didn't know by whom!"



SSGT Bill Beavers in Italy in 1944

From Nuremburg, Aviation POWs were marched to Frankfurt's Dulag Luft, a Luftwaffe Interrogation Camp. Finally, after a ten-day march, the POWs found themselves in Moosburg's Stalag 7. "The German guards didn't have much to eat themselves, so we had less. We pilfered and lifted what we could along the roadside and villages---I can tell you, raw radishes will set your mouth afire!"

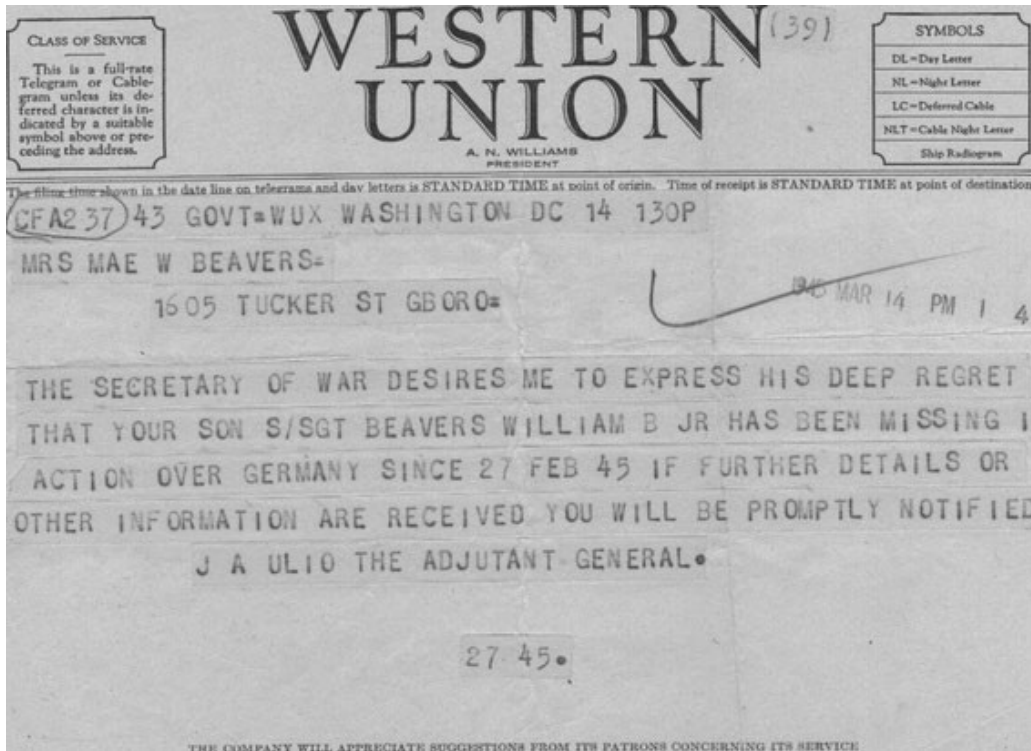


Stalag VII A at Moosburg

Stalag 7 A, about twenty miles northeast of Munich, was built in 1939 to house 10,000 prisoners. When liberated in April, 1945, one report said it housed 7948 officers and 6944 enlisted POWs, from every Allied country. Up north a ways, Adolph Hitler committed suicide on April 30.

"I will never forget those tanks rolling in, the guards rolling out, and a spiffy U.S. General with pearl-handled revolvers riding atop the lead tank - it was thrilling." General Patton spent May 1 visiting with the liberated POWs.

Staff Sergeant Beavers, who had lost fifty pounds, was flown to Camp Lucky Strike, near La Havre, France, for medical attention, then by Liberty Ship to New York. He volunteered for KP Duty aboard ship and was made Mess Sergeant, "That way, I could eat all day, I was perpetually hungry!"



Bill Beaver's Western Union Telegram that he got MIA

Bill isn't a name-dropper, but you should know this. General Jimmy Doolittle was the first Commanding Officer of his 15th Air Force, and the Enola Gay's Paul Tibbetts once commanded Bill's Squadron 340. Today Mary and Bill live in Guilford County / North Carolina / USA.

Bill Beavers original crew



Bill Beavers crew

Back row left to right: Bill Beavers, left waist gunner; George Dustin, tail gunner from Houston, Tx; Ben StClair, radio operator from Memphis, Tn;

Front row left to right: Bob Butler, ball turret gunner from Greensburg Pa.; Bill C. Welden, right waist gunner from Ada, OK.; and John King, engineer gunner top turret from Wymore, Nebraska. This is my original crew. The Operations Officer put Beavers with the other crew the day they bailed out.

Former Waist Gunner Roy Zermeno

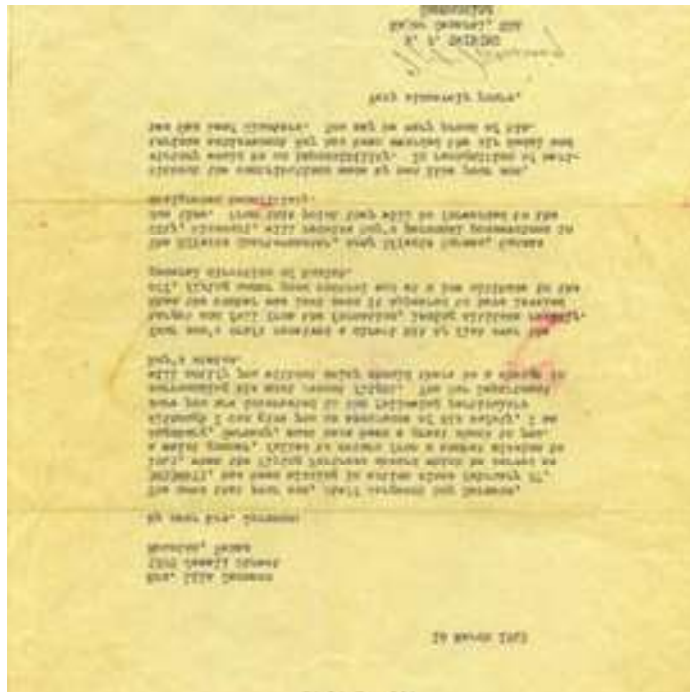


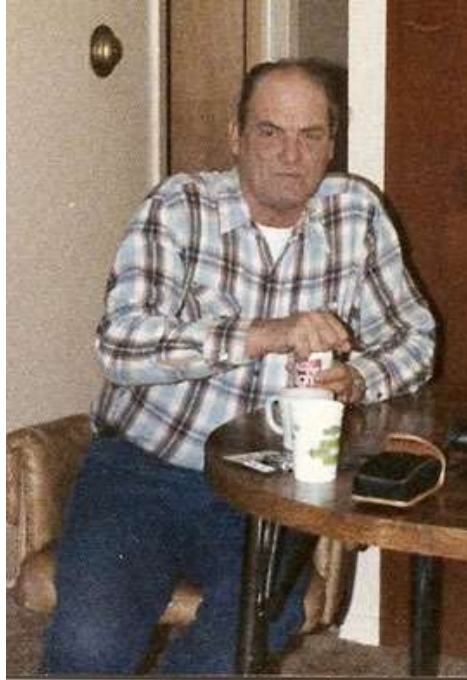
Waist Gunner Roy Zermeno (courtesy Zermeno Family)

Roy Zermeno was on the ETO Battlefield since August 1944 and has been in the service for 18 months. The Augsburg Raid was already his 47th mission. Roy Zermeno holds the Air Medal with two clusters. His other three brothers have been in the service as well.



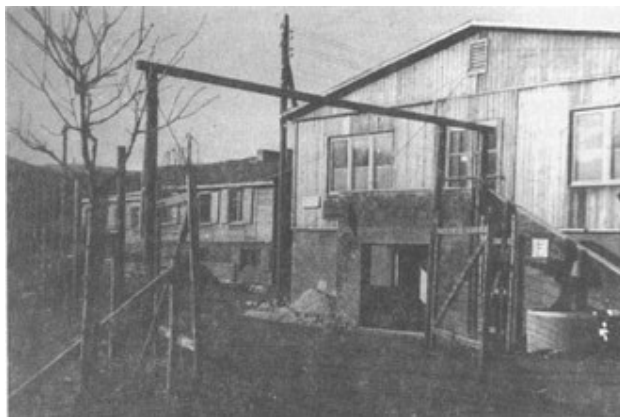
Former Tail Gunner Richard L. Adkins





Richard L. Adkins (past away in February 1996)

Richard L. Adkins was born in 1926, being only 19 when he was part of the „Dottie“ Crew and on the way to bomb the rail yards in Augsburg/Germany on February 27, 1945. After his granddaughter he was a very tall guy, though...6'3". Being a tail gunner in a B-17 was rough for him at that height. I was told that to give himself more room, Adkins would wear lower profile boots, but tie his regular boots to an item of clothing he was wearing, in the event he had to bail out. After his pilot and co-pilot already abandoned the ship, he had to crawl out of the tail gunner position in order to bail out with his remaining crew members. As mentioned earlier, he and the others have been caught by the Germans and he as well as the other went first to Dulag-Luft-West.



Entry gate of Dulag-Luft-West (taken From the book "The Interrogator" by Raymond F. Toliver)

This was a transit camp of the Luftwaffe and was located at Oberursel (13 km north-west of Frankfurt-am-Main) and was recognized as the greatest interrogation center in all of Europe. Nearly all captured Allied airmen were sent there to be interrogated

before being assigned to a permanent prison camp. After that he was sent to a different German prison camp where he remained until the Germans were fleeing due to the Russians approach. So he was able to leave this camp on his own. Adkins as many others were very thin at that time because in the camp they ate once a day if that, and it was watered down potato soup and a piece of bread primarily made of saw dust. However, Richard Adkins made it back to the US and lived on until he died of cancer in February 1996.

Former Engineer Paul E. Culley's story (courtesy Carol Denzinger daughter of Paul)



Paul E. Cully in 1943 (courtesy Carol Denzinger daughter of Paul)

After being shot down over Yugoslavia during his first mission, Paul E. Culley returned to complete 6-7 more bombing missions before his final flight on February 27, 1945. This was Paul's first time flying with this crew and on this plane, "Dottie". He recalls that while bombing Augsburg on that final day, the B-17 was badly damaged, but the crew believed they could make it to Switzerland. The plane was still carrying bombs and would not be allowed to land in Switzerland with these on board, so Paul moved into the bomb bay to manually release the remaining warheads. They were somewhere in the foothills of the Alps and still over Austria, when the pilot and co-pilot went back to the bomb bay and told Paul they had given the order to bail out. Paul was the first to exit the plane and believes that the pilot and co-pilot were close behind. He does not recall being captured, but found himself in Augsburg with a fractured leg. He

remembers that one day, after being in Augsburg only a short while, they heard the bomb sirens go off. While everyone else ran for cover, Paul was left behind, unable to run for cover because of his injured leg. He remembers bombs exploding all around, but his next recollection is riding on a train to Frankfurt where he would be interrogated. After remaining in solitary confinement in Frankfurt for a period of time, he was transferred to Stalag 3 where he remained until rescued near the end of the war in Europe.



Paul E. Cully in December 2010 (courtesy Carol Denzinger daughter of Paul)

Paul was inducted into the air force on July 3, 1943 at age 19. He attended boot camp in Biloxi, Mississippi which Walter Winchell, a prominent newsman at that time, described as the "hellhole of the nation." Paul was trained on B-25 and B-26 fighters, but flew all his missions in the B-17. He never once flew with the crew to which he was originally assigned. He was shot down on his first mission, on Oct. 20, 1944, a little over 4 months prior to this final flight. At that point, he was lucky enough to land in the Yugoslavian country-side where he was rescued by patriots and funneled back to his home base in Italy via the underground. Paul is still alive today and well.





"Dottie" on the way to Switzerland



K+W D-3801 Morane J-198 of the Swiss Air Force

Roughly around 2 p.m., the abandoned "Dottie" crossed the Swiss border and was intercepted by Swiss fighter planes, which tried to guide it to the Duebendorf airfield. However, all signs given by the Swiss to surrender and follow them were not acknowledged and "Dottie" flew on. Finally, it became clear that the crew bailed out and the ship was abandoned.

JEAN VICTOR STOCKER
SWISS FIGHTER PILOT, FLIEGER-KOMPANIE 3
13.05.1923 – 21.07.1948 (PLANE CRASH 1948, NEAR BRIG)

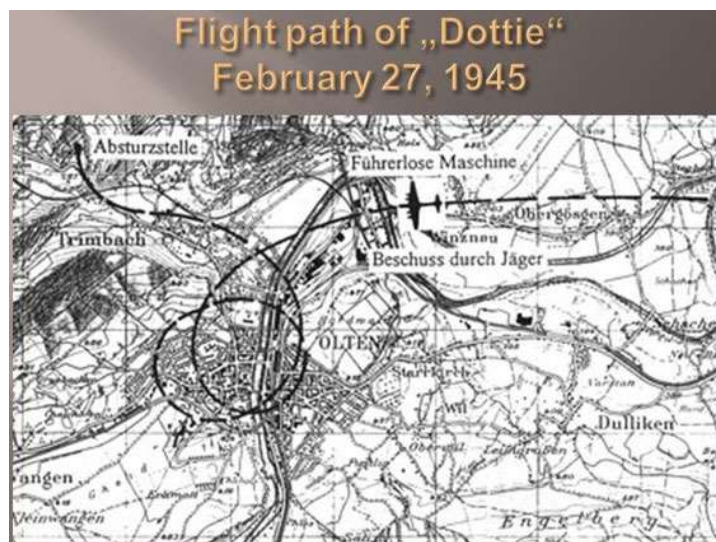


Patch of Flieger-Kompanie 3

Jean Stocker was one of the Morane Fighter Pilots who shot down the US B-17 "Dottie" on Feb. 27, 1945 in Trimbach / SO, Switzerland.

Jean Victor Stocker of Flieger-Kompanie 3 (photo courtesy J.C.Cailliez)

So the leader of the Morane fighters gave order to shoot the B-17 down. Around 19 minutes past 2 p.m., the Swiss fighter planes opened fire near the Swiss town of Olten and Dottie's right wing was shot in flames and lost altitude as it approached the town of Trimbach. One Swiss fighter plane continued to pursue "Dottie", firing all the way. Around 3 P.M, Dottie finally crashed in a field in Trimbach, Canton Solothurn.



Mickey 4 flight path

Crash site of "Dottie" call sign "Mickey 4", February 27, 1945



1956 map showing crash site of "Dottie"

The following entry was made in the Trimbach history book in 1975:

"February 27, 1945, around 14:19 hours, Olten's air raid warning sirens went off! Minutes after the sirens went off, a US-Bomber followed by Swiss fighter planes appeared over the town of Olten. The right wing of the plane was in flames and it was about to crash. First, it was feared that the plane was crashing over the hospital area, but the plane flew on, made another circle over Olten and flew on to Trimbach. Shortly before 3 P.M the US plane finally crashed in a farmstead of the Rintel. The plane was completely destroyed and there have been no signs of a crew! What a miracle that the plane was not crashing on the town".

After bombing raids over Germany there have been more US-Bomber crashes on the same day. In Celerina in the canton of "Graubunden" a B-25, and near the town of Adligendwil in the canton of Zurich a B-24.

Also on the same day there have been some emergency landings of a B-24 near Altenrhein in the canton of St. Gallen and a B-17 and 4 B-24 in the town of Duebendorf where a Swiss Air Force base was in action.

At the crash site February 27, 1945





Wichtig: In Deutschland,
Frankreich, Belgien,
Australien.

Datum: 1945.

Wichtig:

Wichtig.

Wichtig:

Wichtig.

Wichtig:

Nicht mehr fortsetzen.

Wichtig:

Von der Kommando führt jede Spur. Es wird erwartet,
dass diese bereits über Deutschland mit dem Palästinensischen
Kommando sei.

Wichtig:

- 1. Postkarte des Kommandos
- 2. Postkarte
- 3. Lokomotive mit Dokumenten
- 4. Palästinensische Nr. 400000 und 400000 (teilweise verloren)
- 5. Dokumente.

Die noch vorhandenen Dokumente werden dem Kommando übergeben.

An Hand der Dokumente konnte festgestellt werden, dass es sich um ein Postkarten-
Paar handelt.

Wichtig: Die Dokumente sind

Wichtig: Die Dokumente sind

1945

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- 1. Karte Nr. 10 0000.
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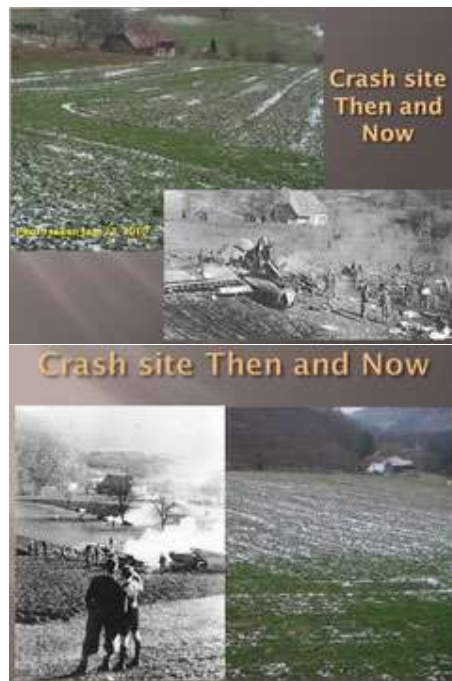
13 April 1945





"Dottie" in pieces Feb. 27, 1945

"Dottie's" Crash site Then and Now



Thanks to:

I would like to thank the following people who helped to do this story:

Mary and Bill Beavers / Harry Thetford / Patricia Law / Carol Denzinger / Roy and Stephen Zermeno and Family / Swiss Federal Archiv Berne

Source : <http://standwheretheyfought.jimdo.com/b-17-flying-fortress-crash-in-trimbach-switzerland-february-27-1945-then-and-now/>