



Flightline



Newsletter of the 780th Bombardment Squadron of WWII

March 2016

First combat casualty for 780th

Jackpine Joe crashes into Swiss Castle

Editor's note: The 780th bombardment squadron began combat operations on May 5, 1944. The squadron had a perfect record of no personnel or equipment losses until its 47th mission, on July 19, 1944, to the Allach aircraft factory near Munich, Germany. On that mission Jackpine Joe, piloted by Archie Davis, sustained heavy damage. The crew limped to Switzerland before bailing out and being interned, while the aircraft crashed into a castle. This is the story of that crash as written by a Swiss historian. The Flightline thanks Josh Golden, son of bombardier Nathan Golden, a member of the Davis crew, for sharing this article, which was published in the Swiss newspaper Andelfinger Zeitung on July 20, 2004.

*by Mathias Weichelt, Swiss National Library
contributed by Josh Golden
edited by Kathy Le Comte*

On several occasions during World War II bombs hit Swiss soil. While almost 200 aircraft managed to land safely in Switzerland, some badly damaged planes crashed or were shot down by Swiss fighter pilots, known as the DCA. The crash of a 780th Bombardment Squadron aircraft on the castle Wyden, near Ossingen, is fortunately the only case in which a large building was partly destroyed by a fallen airplane.

On July 19, 1944 Munich and other targets in southern Germany were the focus of a large coordinated air raid. From the mass of the 1,200 four-engined bombers with appropriate escort by American long-distance fighters, the German air defense should be somewhat crushed. B-24 Liberator bombers from the 465th Bombardment Group came from the south via Tirol, taking off from the south Italian airfield known as Pantanella. One of these bombers was a Liberator nicknamed *Jackpine Joe*. piloted by Lt. Archie C. Davis of the 780th. He was an experienced pilot from 21 missions, but over the target an engine was shot and caught fire. The



Wyden Castle today. Note the tower.

still inexperienced navigator, Jackson C. Johnson, panicked and saved himself with a bold parachute jump - directly into German hands as a POW.

In the north German POW camp "Stalag Luft 1" for Allied officers, located 23 km northwest from Stralsund, Johnson spent the last ten months of the war. The summer was still to

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Your News & Letters

I have very little news to share this issue. Bill Edwards has called and checked in a few times. He informed me that Harold Worman passed away in February. I couldn't find an obituary for Harold but if anyone does, please send it to me. This leaves two members of the Joe Theena crew: Bill, and George Kuchenbecker. On the back cover there is an aircraft photo sent in by Joshua Hummel. If you have any info, please contact him. I hope to have more news for you in June but I need your help. Please send me a note or an email. I love hearing from you, and so does everyone else! - *Kathy*

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some extent bearable, but the severe winter at the Baltic Sea without sufficient fuel supply consumed all body reserves. The rations for the prisoners - at 1,200 calories per day already at the lowest margin - could be supplemented only occasionally with Red Cross parcels. When these failed to arrive towards the end of war in March 1945 because of catastrophic transportation conditions, many POWs were weakened so much that they could not rise anymore from their sleep places. Finally, in April, a Red Cross transport came through which permitted the prisoners to survive until their release by the Russians in May. Johnson finally could return home.

When Johnson made his premature jump, he didn't consider that all the maps and navigation aids followed him through the hatch into the open air. Nevertheless, Davis guided his damaged aircraft with the rest of the crew toward safe Switzerland.

When Davis recognized Lake Constance from 4,000 meters, he instructed the crew to prepare to jump. In this instant they flew over Friedrichshafen, which was defended by heavy flak, resulting in further hits. With a burning engine the heavily damaged plane couldn't be held in the air any more. The remaining crew

abandoned ship. The parachute of co-pilot Michael W. Ballbach failed to open, with deadly consequences. Three other crew members were slightly hurt and given first aid in the hospital at Muensterlingen. After detailed questioning by the Swiss military intelligence service,

which wanted to know more about the whereabouts of the missing tenth crewmember, all men were brought to the internment camp at Adelboden.

Still operating on autopilot the leaderless bomber flew west over Kreuzlingen another 30 km without losing altitude. Eventually the autopilot failed, the plane lost altitude, tilted, and at 11:45 a.m. fell right into the tower of castle Wyden. A wing was separated in the impact and remained hanging in the branches of a nearby beech tree. The remaining fuel and engine oil fed a de-



Wreckage of *Jackpine Joe*

veloping fire.

The old castle burned out completely. The heat was so intense that a collection of gold coins kept in a safe deposit melted together. The courageous, if sometimes careless, rescue actions of the Ossingen fire brigades managed to save some of the valuable paintings and antique furniture. The ground floor of the newer part of the castle was saved from the flames, but was damaged considerably by water. The library with many old books, located in the castle tower, was lost.

Ironically, the castle's owner was professor Dr. Max Huber, the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross. One of the major tasks of the ICRC is to help victims of war without being absorbed by the conflict itself. On this particular day, a Wednesday, Professor Huber was at the head office of the IKRK in Geneva. His married daughter, who was at the castle, was with her four-and-a-half-year-old son on the second floor of the new building. When she heard engine noises rapidly approaching she stepped to the window. In this instant the whole building shook strongly, as if a bomb went off. Miraculously she and her son were unhurt and made it to the ground floor and from there through a window to the outside. Five other children, who played at the place in front of the castle, also escaped the frightening scene unharmed. However a housemaid, now a Mrs. Lotti Wepf-Fehr, was in the cellar when the plane crashed through the tower down to the basement, and suffered heavy burns on her arms. She was treated at the cantonal hospital at Winterthur.

The weekly newspaper, *Marking Time*, which

was edited in Switzerland by interned Allied citizens, reported the event in detail two days later, right next to an article about the Czech minister of foreign affairs' comments about the gas chambers and the Holocaust in Eastern Europe that was only half the length of the crash article.

Hardly three weeks later, all American pilots were instructed that when seeking refuge in Switzerland to not give up their damaged aircraft over an inhabited area but to let them crash in one of the numerous Swiss lakes or into the mountains. An hour before the Liberator hit castle Wyden, a B-17 that also was given up by its crew adhered to the aforementioned instruction, even though it had not yet been published. The B-17 crashed into a mountain slope above Obersaxen in the canton Graubünden.

The U.S. government had an office for those seeking damages from American air activity in neutral countries. The

sum for repairing castle Wyden and replacing the furniture came to 769,040.60 Swiss Francs, which was paid after the war (ed: about \$179,000 in 1949 dollars).



Jackpine Joe, above, and her crew

- Archie C. Davis, pilot**
- Michael W. Ballbach, co-pilot (KIA)**
- Jackson C. Johnson, navigator**
- Nathan Bloom, bombardier**
- Theodore L. Weber, gunner**
- Alva H. Moss, gunner**
- Robert P. Guertin, gunner**
- Robert H. Desmond, gunner**
- Billie D. Palmer, gunner**
- Robert A. Wiley, gunner**

TAPS

Harold LeRoy Worman, 94, of Maxwell, California, passed away on February 2, 2016. Harold was born in South Dakota and moved to California where he enlisted in 1943. He was preceded by his wife, Alice, in 2006. He also has a son.

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Do you know this aircraft?

Joshua Hummel writes: "This photo was with a bunch of other old photos my mom and grandmother found in my grandfather's footlocker. We are working on developing the other ones. It was published by my grandmother, Loreen Davenport. Wondering if anyone has any information on it. Thanks a lot!" Does anyone remember *Blunderbuss*? If you have any information, please email Joshua at maddog472@aol.com, or mail *The Flightline* at the address above or email at johnkath5@comcast.net.