

Dear members and friends of the 450th bombardment group association



"They gave their live to save our village" says the inscription on that simple stone standing alone under a small tree just outside the town of Wuerenlingen, Switzerland.

That's where the B-24G "Maiden America" (42-78356) of the 723rd Squadron crashed on December 25, 1944. After a raid against a supply depot in Innsbruck, Austria, "Maiden America" was on its way back, severely damaged after being hit by flak over the target. With two engines on fire pilot 1st Lt Vincent F. Fagan tried to reach the airport in Basel, Switzerland. Due to fog the crew headed for the airfield in Duebendorf, a town near Zurich. In the Wuerenlingen area Swiss flak – for unknown reasons - opened fire against the crippled bomber. The crew was unable to lower the landing gear and was afraid of shooting flares because gasoline was leaking out of the damaged tanks. After the B-24 got a direct hit, pilot Fagan ordered the crew to bail out. Then he increased the power of the two remaining engines. Doing so, he avoided that the aircraft crashed right into the village.

After leaving the bomber, navigator 2nd Lt Martin A. Homistek's chute got caught by one of the horizontal stabilizers. Left waist gunner Sgt Ralph L. Coulson didn't leave his position. Both crew members were killed when the aircraft hit the ground. Co-pilot 2nd Lt Nicholas Mac Koul came down on the nearby "Aare" river and drowned in the ice cold water. The rest of the crew landed safe.

Today, only this small memorial reminds of this war tragedy from 64 years ago. On the internet I've noticed that the 450th BG celebrates its 65th anniversary and its reunion. That's why I visited the memorial recently, placed a small American flag and took a few pictures for you.



Though I don't know if 1st Lt Fagan and his fellow crew members of "Maiden America" are still alive today, I'd like to give them or their families an impression of how the site (built in 1965) looks today. But above all I'd like to express my deep respect for the brave crew. Trying desperately to find a safe place to land, they were shot down by flak in neutral Switzerland! I really wonder what made those Swiss soldiers shoot at a heavily damaged US-bomber...

Unfortunately only few people know about that site and the sad story behind it. In these days, the U.S. government is criticized often around here, especially due to the military engagement in Iraq and elsewhere. No matter which opinion people have about this issue, they should never forget one thing: Whether in the skies over Europe or on the beaches of Normandy, there were hundreds of thousands of brave young Americans like 1st Lt Fagan and his crew fighting to liberate Europe. And memorial sites like the one in peaceful Wuerenlingen should remind further generations like mine that so many of those young guys gave their lives in those days – for the peace that we're living in to this day and for our freedom.

This, dear members of the 450th BG association, is my small and very personal part of saying thank you. May god bless you.

Seon/Switzerland, August 12, 2008.

Bernhard Graser



The former crash site, looking from north to south



A view over the landscape around the former crash site.
Notice the Black Forest mountains (Germany)
at the horizon.

The crash site on December 25, 1944,



Bernhard Graser (37), state police Sgt., living in Seon, Switzerland
(15 miles away from the crash site of "Maiden America").
Interested in the history of World War II, especially in the air war of
the 8th and 15th USAAF against Nazi Germany.
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