

6 The Murder of Allied Airmen

When a bomber or fighter plane is shot down over hostile territory or forced to perform an emergency landing, surviving crew will become prisoners of war.

The Geneva Convention (1929) was an international treaty which Germany as well as the United States and the United Kingdom had signed.

Part I Article 2 of the Geneva Convention read:

Prisoners of war are in the power of the hostile Government, but not of the individuals or formation which captured them.

They shall at all times be humanely treated and protected, particularly against acts of violence, from insults and from public curiosity.

Measures of reprisal against them are forbidden.

As early as 1940, Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess had demanded that enemy parachutists should be "arrested or rendered harmless". The Prosecution at the Nuremberg Trial translated his German words into English as "to be arrested or liquidated", and it must be admitted that this, although not translated verbally, was in all probability what he had in mind. When Hess said this, Allied bomb raids had not yet reached their later devastating impact.

Three years later, on 10 August, 1943, Heinrich Himmler sent out a circular to all Higher SS and Police Leaders:

"It is not the task of the police to meddle with skirmishes between German nationals and parachuted English or American terror fliers".

With this circular, he denied the parachuted men the "protection against acts of violence" to which they were entitled under the Convention. However the SS seem to have known that they were on dangerous ground: Himmler's staff ordered, in transmitting Himmler's circular, that the subordinates should be informed verbally only.

In the last days of May, 1944, Minister of Propaganda Dr. Joseph Goebbels wrote in the VÖLKISCHER BEOBACHTER, the main Nazi paper:

"It is only with the assistance of the armed forces that it would be possible to preserve the lives of shot down enemy pilots after such (sc. air) raids, because otherwise they would be beaten to death by the afflicted populace. Who is within his rights here: The murderers who after having committed their cowardly misdeeds still expect humane treatment on the part of their victims, or the victims who want to strike back following the doctrine of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth"? These questions are not hard to answer. It does not seem possible nor bearable any more to use German police or army against the German people when they treat murderers of children like they deserve".

Goebbels also made similar speeches on the national radio broadcast.

One of them (Nuremberg, 4 June 1944) contained the following sentences:

"It so happened that in a few villages or towns the population took the law into their own hands against the terrorist fighter pilots. They battered them to death (cheering, applause) or cut their throats, or similar. We're not shedding crocodile tears over that, and those who did this will not be led to the scaffold for it; we're not as stupid as that".


From trial documents we know that this speech became widely known among the people (see e.g. below the case of the murder of Lt. Reuss at Preist).

Field Marshal Keitel wrote down that Hitler decided, end of May 1944, that the army should shoot to death downed Allied airmen in certain cases without even so much as a drumhead court-martial, to wit, if they had fired at German airmen while they came down with a parachute, or at crash-landed German planes while there were still crew members on board, or at public transport railway trains, or, in low altitude raids,

at civilian individuals.

Hitler's party secretary Martin Bormann sent out a secret circular on 30 May, 1944 which should be transmitted verbally only to the local Nazi party leaders.

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Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
Partei-Kanzlei

Der Leiter der Partei-Kanzlei Führungshauptquartier, den 30.5.1944

Geheim

Kanzlei Rosenberg
Elek. Nr. - 2. JUNI 1944
Rundschreiben 125/44 g.

(nicht zur Veröffentlichung)

Betrifft: Volksjustiz gegen anglo- amerikanische Mörder.

Englische und nordamerikanische Flieger haben in den letzten Wochen wiederholt im Tiefflug auf Plätzen spielende Kinder, Frauen und Kinder bei der Feldarbeit, pflügende Bauern, Fuhrwerke auf der Landstraße, Eisenbahnzüge usw. aus geringer Höhe mit Bordwaffen beschossen und dabei auf gemeinste Weise wehrlose Zivilisten - insbesondere Frauen und Kinder - hingemordet.

Mehrfach ist es vorgekommen, daß abgesprungene oder notgelandete Besatzungsmitglieder solcher Flugzeuge unmittelbar nach der Festnahme durch die auf das Äußerste empörte Bevölkerung an Ort und Stelle gelyncht wurden.

Von polizeilicher und strafgerichtlicher Verfolgung der dabei beteiligten Volksgenossen wurde abgesehen.

gez. M. B o r m a n n .

Verteiler: Reichsleiter,
Gauleiter,
Verbandsführer,
Kreisleiter.

zur Kenntnisnahme an:

Zurück an Kanzlei.

F.d.R.:

Bormann's circular (swastika in the letterhead removed by the authors)

He wrote that during the past weeks low altitude fliers had repeatedly attacked non-military targets such as playing children, ploughing farmers etc., that in several cases the pilots of such planes who had to crash land or bail out were lynched on the spot by the enraged populace, and that (hint, hint) it had been decided not to prosecute the German nationals involved.

This was of course not just a report of things which had happened but a blatant instigation to kill. Other Nazi officials issued similar circulars in their departments, and the spiteful term of “terror fliers” which appeared in the press and radio over and over again, together with the horrible experiences of the civilian in the street (or rather in the air raid shelter) added to the general climate of hate.

On 4 July, 1944, the police received secret orders which amounted practically to the order to kill all allied airmen, without regard for the circumstances of the case.

The total number of cases is still under dispute. The latest publication on the subject, Kevin T. Hall's dissertation “Terror Flyers” (2021) states that it is likely that there were at least one thousand cases of Lynch justice committed against Allied Airmen within Germany's postwar borders', and that it would be a conservative assessment to estimate “three thousand cases of mistreatment” throughout Germany and its occupied territory.

Most of them were Gestapo, SD, SS, SA, police or army members. If civilians, they were Nazi party functionaries in almost all cases.

The cases of murdered Allied airmen were among the first to be tried by Allied Military Courts. At Dachau alone, US courts tried about 200 cases of which 82 ended in execution by hanging.

The base in international law was, of course, violation of the Geneva Convention, committed in pursuit of a common design. The defence of Superior Orders was frequently, almost regularly, brought forward, and it was of course a fact that such orders did exist. The courts never accepted this defence with regard to the question of guilt, only sometimes as a reason for mitigation of punishment. As a justification for their refusal they might even have quoted Goebbels. In the editorial quoted above he had written something aimed at Allied airmen which in all fairness he would have had to accept as a rule against himself:

There is no provision in the Laws of War that a soldier becomes exempt from punishment for an ignominious crime if he invokes Superior Orders, particularly if these orders are blatantly opposed to every human morale and Usage of Warfare.

The first charge against a German for having killed a prisoner of war did not, however, concern an airman. Hauptmann (CPT) Curt Bruns, commander of the 2nd Battalion, 293rd Regiment, 18th Volksgrenadier-division, was tried and sentenced to death by a US Military Commission for having ordered two GIs to be killed. After being taken prisoner, they were shot upon Bruns' order on 20th December, 1944 near Bleialf, Germany, because they were Jewish. They were T/5 Murray Zappler and S/Sgt Kurt R. Jacobs, members of the IPW (Interrogation of Prisoners of War) team #154, attached to the US 106th Infantry Division. Some days earlier, German soldiers of Bruns' unit had been taken prisoner and been interrogated by Zappler and Jacobs. But meanwhile the 423rd US Infantry Regiment had surrendered to Bruns' unit; 300 GIs with Zappler and Jacobs among them walked into captivity. The German former POWs came back with them and reported to Bruns that they had been interrogated by “Jews from Berlin”. Zappler and Jacobs were indeed Jews of German extraction. Because of their language skills and their undoubted loyalty to the Allied cause – they had been persecuted by the Nazis, after all – they had been transferred to a highly secret Military Intelligence training camp at Ft. Ritchie, Maryland. The graduates of Ft. Ritchie were afterwards distributed to IPW and other Military Intelligence teams. Zappler and Jacobs were just two out of 1,985 German-born “Ritchie Boys” who served in World War II. Bruns' trial took place at Düren, on 7 April, 1945, before the War was even ended. His execution by firing squad on 14th June, 1945 in a gravel quarry at Denstorf (today part of Vechelde, Peine county, near Braunschweig/ Brunswick) was the first of a German war criminal that we know of.



Captain Curt Bruns being blindfolded before his execution

In internet sources, the date of Bruns' execution is sometimes given as 9th June, and sometimes as 14th. This photo of his headstone on Neuer Friedhof (New Cemetery) in Norden settles the question. According to his death registration entry at Brunswick (No. 2508/1945), he was born on 12 March 1915 on the island of Juist and was executed by shooting on 14 June 1945. The entry gives his first name as "Kurt".

But already two weeks after Bruns' death, the first execution for the murder of an airman took place.

It was the case of

The Bad Penny that did not come back.

The navigator, 21-year-old 2nd Lieutenant Lester E. Reuss, had done a good job on board the B-17 Flying Fortress "Bad Penny", tail number 42-31183. He had found the assigned target, and together with the 38 other crews of the 303rd Bomb Group (Heavy) they had dropped their payload on an airfield near Wiesbaden. Now they were on their way back to their base at Molesworth, Cambridgeshire, England.



Photo: Courtesy of www.grabsteine-ostfriesland.de (Gerhard Fischer).

It was 11.48 a.m. when the formation, flying in a lower, higher and lead group, was attacked by 20 to 25 German Focke-Wulf FW-190 fighter planes. Nine out of 13 of the lower group planes were shot down. One of them was "Bad Penny", flying immediately behind and to the left of the leading aircraft. All nine crew members were able to bale out, radio operator Sgt Patsy Rocco (28) seemingly staying in the radio room to the last.

Down on the ground it was wheat harvest time, 15 August, 1944. Few men were left in the village of Preist to do the work: the old, the boys, the cripples and mentally unstable, some forced labour workers from Belgium and Poland, and those who were deemed to be indispensable: the Nazi party officials.

74-year-old Nikolaus Nospes saw the parachute descending. He interrupted his work of cutting wheat and went to the place where the flyer came down. The parachute caught on a tree. Old Nospes was the first to arrive on the scene, together with his niece Appolonia Binz and her three children, then came two soldiers who were on furlough. They helped the airman disentangle himself from the parachute. Almost simultaneously Matthias Krein arrived, a member of the Landwacht whose duty it was, among other things, to guard enemy grounded flyers. He had his rifle with him but no ammunition. He demanded the airman from the soldiers but they refused, saying "No, he is in our custody". At that point a motorcycle arrived. The driver, 37-year-old Peter Back, put it against a tree and limped up to the scene. From a very early age he had suffered from infantile paralysis in both feet. He was a tailor by profession, a Nazi party member since 1937 and currently Block Leader. Right now he was brandishing a 30 cal. Browning automatic pistol and shouted "Shoot him down, beat him down". When within two or three yards of the flyer, he shot and hit him about the head. The flyer fell, but stood up again and Back fired a second shot, hitting him. More and more people assembled. Krein busied himself with warding off the curious but did nothing to protect the airman. One of the crowd, Peter Kohn, a former soldier who had lost his left arm on the Russian front, wielded a stick a yard long and two or three inches thick and hit the flyer about the head several times, another man, Matthias Gierens, had a hammer and beat the airman, too. When Gierens finished, Reuss was dead.

That evening between 7 and 8 o'clock, farmer Johann Jacob drove the dead body to the cemetery at Preist. The next morning at about 7.30, he helped old Nospes to bury him. There was neither coffin nor priest – the Nazi party forbade it.

Three miles to the west, Sgt Patsy Rocco had landed safely in the vicinity of a place called Idesheim. He surrendered to a boy of sixteen, of all persons, and accompanied him to a Prisoner of War Camp which was located in that very village. While walking, he asked his captor about the chances of escape, and how far it was to Luxembourg. Later Rocco was taken to another village two miles away which curiously went by the very similar name of Idenheim. There he was confined, apparently overnight.

It was decided that Rocco should be brought to Bitburg, twelve miles to the north. So he was given into the custody of Friedrich Scheilz, a policeman in his fifties, who shackled his prisoner's hands behind the back, armed himself with pistol, carbine, and bayonet, and set out to walk Rocco to Bitburg along the Trier-Bitburg highway (today: highway B 51).

During that walk something happened which gave Scheilz the impression that Rocco was about to run. He grabbed him and warned him not to try this again or he would be shot. About three miles further along the road, Rocco accelerated his steps, Scheilz pursued him, took the carbine from his shoulder, slipped a bit but regained his step and fired at a distance of about ten yards – as he would later claim: after having shouted twice "Halt!" and with the intention of giving a warning shot over Rocco's head. In fact Rocco was hit in the back of his neck and died on the spot. The body was taken to Bitburg, examined, and buried.

Less than nine months later, Nazi Germany was surrendered, and the Allies were investigating war crimes. Killing a parachuted airman certainly was one.

On 1 June, 1945, in an administrative building at Ahrweiler, a US Military Commission consisting of six colonels, one lieutenant colonel and one major heard the case of Peter Kohn, Matthias Gierens, and Matthias Krein. They were charged with violation of the laws and usages of the war, "in that they ... not being lawful belligerents ... did feloniously assault, and with one Peter Back did wilfully kill an American airman".

The commission did not judge rashly; they heard 18 witnesses for the prosecution and three for the defense. The next day, they pronounced sentence: All three were to be hanged by the neck – Krein, too, although he did not fire a shot nor strike a blow. The German civilian defense lawyer had brought up the question of criminal responsibility: Two siblings of Gierens had died in insane asylums, and he himself had been denied a marital credit because the family was hereditary defective. The court followed up on this lead, however a neuropsychiatric examination declared Gierens sane.

Of course the man who was most badly wanted was Peter Back. He was found shortly after the trial of the three others, and stood trial on 16 June. His unsworn statement was a curious mixture of justification and remorse: "...he heard Dr. Goebbels' speech: 'The population should take steps in this matter and should judge for itself'. He did not think of this speech when firing; he was thinking of a woman in Preist and his own wife who were nearly killed by a low-flying airplane. He does not know why he fired; cannot explain why he fired; no intention to kill airman; although commended by the District leader, he realized that he had become a murderer and decided never to do it again; his conscience worried him, his wife and he grieved a lot over it..." From the evidence of other villagers it seemed that Back was of limited mental capacity, sometimes got very ecstatic, was not able to judge things clearly and had a tendency to act without thinking. While this gave a probably accurate picture of the man, it was of course no excuse. "Death by hanging" was the sentence.

A fortnight later, the sentences had completed their review process. Matthias Krein, the Landwacht man with the empty rifle, was not to be hanged but to serve a life sentence; the other death sentences were confirmed, and Lt. Colonel J.V. Roddy, a Californian from San Francisco, was ordered to see them executed.

This was the first time after Germany's surrender that a death sentence for war crimes was executed by hanging. In the prison yard at Rheinbach, Master Sergeant John C. Woods and Staff Sergeant Thomas F. Robinson supervised the erection of the gallows, and on 29 June, 1945, they hanged the murderous trio: Peter Kohn at 5 a.m., Matthias Gierens at 5.45 a.m., and Peter Back at 7 a.m. LIFE ran a 5 page report on the trials and executions with 30 photos. In the caption referring to Back's execution, LIFE claimed "After this hanging, as after the other ones, the hangman wept" – a statement which no one will find credible who ever looked into Woods' career and character for a single minute.

One of the pictures shows Back's body, still hanging from the rope, being slipped into a white mattress cover. Maybe this is how he was buried, just like the US servicemen executed at Shepton Mallet, unless he was returned to his family and given a coffin. These authors were unsuccessful in locating his grave.

And what about Sergeant Rocco?

One more year passed until on 7-9 August 1946 his death was the topic of a trial at Dachau. Friedrich Scheilz stood accused of "wilfully, deliberately and wrongfully (killing) a member of the United States Army, believed to be Patsy ROCCO, who was then a surrendered and unarmed prisoner of war".

There were two witnesses for the prosecution of whom one had actually seen the shooting from a distance, and three for the defence, of whom one was the prisoner himself. The eyewitness was not what the prosecution would have wanted; he varied his description of what happened and even said the accused had a bicycle with him which Scheilz denied.

The court found Scheilz guilty and sentenced him to life imprisonment.

At that time most Germans felt that Allied justice was little better than vengeance in legal disguise (and, sad to say, there are still some who do).

This case however shows otherwise.

There seems to have been a disagreement among the members of the court whether Rocco's death had been indeed a "wilful", "deliberate" or "wrongful" killing. Since Scheilz was not sentenced to hang, it seems that there was a sufficient majority to find him guilty but not sufficient to sentence him to death. One member of the court, Infantry Colonel Edward B. Jackson, was so dissatisfied with the outcome that he filed a Petition for Clemency. And then there was, of course, the Review. On 9 August, 1947, attorney

Oliver C. Hardy of the Post Trial Branch wrote his recommendation: That the findings and sentence be disapproved because the evidence did not warrant the guilty verdict. On 14 October, 1947, Lieutenant Colonel C. E. Straight, Deputy Judge Advocate for War Crimes, concurred. On 22 October, the Board of Review recommended that the findings and sentence be disapproved and the accused ordered released.

It seems that this is indeed what happened. Friedrich Scheilz may have spent about two years in prison for his fateful shot until he was set free without being sentenced.

The bodies of the two American airmen were not allowed to remain in hostile territory. The US Army moved them to the American Cemetery in Luxembourg, where Reuss now lies in Plot A, Row 6, Grave 8, and Rocco in Plot B, Row 9, Grave 9. Their seven crew comrades of the "Bad Penny" survived the War in German POW camps.

There were more trials and more executions to follow. The case of LT Reuss was one of the comparatively few where the trial and the execution were not held at Dachau or Landsberg, respectively, but it was not the only one. In November 1945, US hangman John C. Woods went to work in the Bruchsal prison yard. The crime he was ordered to avenge became known as:

The Rüsselsheim Massacre.

Rüsselsheim on the river Main was then and is today known as the city of a large Opel plant. The firm, since the 1920's owned by General Motors, used to build cars (as it does again today) but took up the building of aircraft parts including those for the Junkers JU 88 bomber, Arado 96 (fighter/trainer) and Messerschmitt ME 262 (the World's first jet fighter). Which made the firm a legitimate target for bombing, of course.

British and US aircraft flew attacks on the Rüsselsheim Opel factory

--- on 8/9 September, 1942. The RAF attacked Rüsselsheim along with targets in Frankfurt/Main and Mainz. One hit in the Opel factory's POW camp sending 21 huts into flames, killed 18 French POW and severely wounded 18 more.

--- on 20/7/1944. Units of the 8th US Air Force flew a daylight attack at 11.13 a.m., consisting of 102 planes in 6 waves, dropping 400 high-yield explosives plus incendiaries. 112 dead.

--- on 13/8/1944. RAF dropped 964 tons of explosives.

--- on 26 August, 1944. Starting at 0.52 a.m., 412 RAF aircraft dropped 674 bombs with a total weight of 1,451 tons on Rüsselsheim (plus 556 tons on Darmstadt). Of the 674 bombs dropped, 21 hit the factory. The rest destroyed large parts of the residential area of the city (to the east of the factory) and parts of the vicinity. In the camp of the slave labour workers, 31 huts were destroyed. A direct hit on the dug-outs for Russian women killed many of them. Of the 198 dead of that day, all but twelve were slave labourers.

The US bombing survey later said that in July and August 1944, 315 Opel workers were killed and 277 severely injured. Of the 9,000 worn but usable machines in the factory, 2,500 were disabled.

When the day dawned, worn and angry Rüsselsheim citizens looked at the ruins that used to be their homes, heaved a sigh, and then fetched shovels, brooms and wheelbarrows to clear up the mess. And while they were working, between 9 and 10 a.m. on that Saturday, a small troop of men in foreign flight suits came lopping along, accompanied by two German soldiers as guards. Suddenly a shrill female voice was heard: "Beat them to pieces, beat them to death. They are the ones who were here last night. Kill the dogs. We cannot have pity on them."

But the six men under guard had nothing to do with the Rüsselsheim raid of the previous night. They were Americans.

Two days earlier, on 24 August 1944, a large bomber fleet had taken off in England in order to attack 16 targets in the area north of Hanover: 485 B-24s and 834 B-17s, accompanied by 739 fighter planes. 72 of

them were to raid Hanover-Langenhagen airfield. One of the 72 was a four-engine B-24J Liberator, serial 42-110107, aircraft N of the 854th Bombardment Squadron, belonging to the 491st Bomber Group (Heavy) in the 8th US Air Force, based at North Pickenham, Norfolk, England.

The crew consisted of 2LT Norman J. Rogers Jr. from Rochester, New York, pilot, 24 years old; 2LT John N. Sekul from the Bronx, New York (22), co-pilot; Flight Officer Haigus Tufenkjian from Detroit, Michigan (23), navigator and bombardier; S/Sgt Forrest W. Brininstool from Munith, Michigan (28), flight engineer; S/Sgt Thomas D. Williams Jr. from Hazleton, Pennsylvania (19), radio operator; Sgt William A. Adams from Klingerstown, Pennsylvania (19), nose gunner; Sgt Elmore L. Austin from Edinburg Falls, Vermont (19), left waist gunner; Sgt Sidney Eugene Brown from Gainesville, Florida (19), tail gunner; and Sgt William A. Dumont from Berlin, New Hampshire (20), belly gunner.

Just after they had dropped their bombs, with the bomb bay still open, an anti-aircraft shell exploded below the aircraft. Shrapnel disabled the hydraulic system and one engine while damaging two others, and injured Brininstool and Adams. The pilots managed to keep the crippled aircraft under control, but with only one good engine and a continuous loss of altitude returning to base was out of the question. Finally Rogers gave the order to abandon ship, and all nine men made it out alive.

The crash of the plane was recorded at 12.15 p.m. near Greven, about 75 miles west of their target. One after the other the crew was found and taken prisoner. Rogers and Dumont had injured their ankles on landing. Brininstool, who had suffered a shrapnel wound to his belly, received emergency treatment by a doctor and was then removed to a hospital in Münster. The next day, the remaining eight were given into the custody of three Luftwaffe soldiers who took them on a train heading south, to Dulag Luft aircrew interrogation center at Oberursel near Frankfurt. The train ride lasted the whole day, but they had to abandon it before midnight because the Allied were bombing the cities in the vicinity. Together with the other passengers and the locals, they sat in an air raid shelter and experienced what it meant to be on the receiving end. At 3 a.m. the All Clear was sounded, and they could board their train again and continue their ride. Three hours later, the train stopped outside a city: Rüsselsheim. It was announced that the tracks were bombed out, and that whoever wanted to continue their journey was to leave the train, walk around the damaged spot and catch a train on the other side. The Americans were led into town and left there waiting under only one guard while the two others went away to get directions. Almost two hours later, only one guard returned. The most senior of the guards, a fat man in his forties with a stripe on his sleeve, never came back. The two remaining guards, two very junior soldiers with no rank insignia at all, decided to march their charges across town, following the other passengers who seemed to know where to go. But the guards did not know the town. Instead of turning right at Marktstraße which would have been the shortest way to the railway station, they went straight ahead following Frankfurterstraße. A mob of townspeople began to gather and follow them, jeering and shouting.



Rüsselsheim Town Map, with route taken

A man with the green arm band of an air raid warden, armed with a 6.35 mm pistol, stopped the Luftwaffe guards and talked to them, demanding that they take the airmen eastward out of town. They refused, saying that they needed to get a train. While the dispute was still going on, a female shout came from the rear: "Beat them....!" It was Käthe Reinhardt who, together with her sister Margarete Witzler, ran a tobacco shop on Frankfurterstraße. She picked up a brick from the rubble in the street, and hurled it towards the airmen. The brick hit Rogers on the left side of his head and cracked his skull. The air raid warden, forty-year-old Josef Hartgen, drew his pistol and fired a shot in the air to regain everybody's attention, but to no

avail. Margarete Witzler who was also among the crowd, heard her sister's screams and followed suit: She, too, picked up a brick and threw it at the prisoners.

This was the moment when hell broke loose. A mob of perhaps twenty, perhaps 200 people (the estimates differ) descended on the airmen, threw bricks, stones and pieces of slate, and picked up sticks to beat them. People came running out of their houses along the way, wielding shovels, brooms, hammers... It would be too long and too depressing to describe here the whole ordeal in excruciating detail. Suffice it to describe the end: Six of the airmen were dead and two were severely injured, alive and conscious but pretending to be dead. Between 11 and 12 a.m., the bodies were placed on a farmer's carriage brought for the purpose, and drawn by Hitler Youth to the cemetery. Someone with a club climbed on the cart and beat those who gave signs of life on the head. Then an air raid alarm sounded, and the man sought shelter.

Two of the eight were still alive, Brown and Adams. After dark, they crept from under the dead bodies of their comrades, and fled. Four days later, they were captured again, brought to a POW camp, and survived.

Russian prisoners of war buried the six victims on 28 August in a common grave.

On 25 March, 1945, soldiers of the 3rd US Army took Rüsselsheim. Slave labourers and prisoners of war told American officers about eight British soldiers (so they thought) who were buried on the Waldfriedhof.

On 28 June, exhumation started. The party, looking for eight bodies, only found six. Four of their number could be identified because they wore their dog-tags: Sekul, Williams, Dumont, and Austin. All except one had their skull fractured. The man without skull fracture had two bullet holes in his head. Two others had bullet injuries to their skulls as well. There were no other fractures.



Bodies of the Rüsselsheim victims after exhumation

Austin, Dumont and Sekul were brought to their home towns in the USA. The bodies of the others were buried in the Lorraine American Cemetery at Saint-Avold, France: Rogers in Plot D, Row 3, Grave 14; Tufenkjian in Plot E, Row 48, Grave 16; and Williams in Plot E, Row 44, Grave 17.

In June 1945, the US Army set up a department for the investigation and prosecution of war crimes.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has a video giving insights into the collecting of evidence and the trial: [here](#).

Lieutenant Colonel Leon Jaworski (later known as Watergate Special Prosecutor) prosecuted in the Rüsselsheim case. Eleven German civilians stood trial from 25 July to 2 August 1945 at Darmstadt,

defended by defence counsel from the ranks of the US military but also by German civilian attorneys; one of them was Heinrich von Brentano, later to become Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany. The trial ended with seven death sentences (among them Käthe Reinhardt and Margarete Witzel), one sentence of 25 years at hard labour, two of 15 years at hard labour, and one acquittal.

On 23 August, 1945, Colonel C. Robert Bard, Staff Judge Advocate, wrote his recommendations for the review by the Commanding General of the Seventh Army. In Bard's opinion, all the sentences should be upheld, because:

...”while American sympathy may be aroused at the prospect of hanging women and old men, it must always be remembered that half-way measures will never impress upon the people of Germany and that their actions have been unlawful and degenerate. The deterrent effect of punishment must be great enough to prevent forever crimes that are an abomination in the eyes of man and blasphemy in the sight of God”.

The general however reduced the sentences of the two women to 30 years. The remaining five death sentences had to be reviewed in a second stage by the Commanding General of the European Theatre who confirmed them.

On 10 November 1945, on a gallows erected in the yard of Bruchsal prison, the death sentences were executed by M/Sgt John C. Woods, assisted by S/Sgt Fred Guidry. The condemned were executed singly. They were:

Josef Hartgen, 41, married with three children aged 2 to 7, foreman in the Opel plant, leader of the local Nazi party group, SA man, air raid warden, propaganda chief for Rüsselsheim, who had beat the airmen like a madman using something like a hoe handle, and finally fired pistol shots to the head of at least three men.



Josef Hartgen being led to his execution

Johannes Seipel, 67, kicked an airman who was sitting on the ground, wounded, against the neck and chin.

Philipp Gütlich, 49, married with four children of which the youngest was eight months old, had beaten the airmen several times with a club three feet long and two inches thick, using both hands.

Friedrich Wüst, 40, beat with a piece of wood with great force, later beat an airman on the head with a hammer.

Johannes Opper, 62, beat the airmen twice with a broom and joined in the incitement to violence.

The persons sentenced to serve prison terms were released in 1953 and 1954 and returned to Rüsselsheim.

After this trial, the prosecution did not consider the case closed. They clearly had not succeeded to round up all persons involved, and probably never would. But they tried nevertheless. Two more persons were found and tried for their part in the Rüsselsheim massacre: The man who climbed on the cart near the cemetery and tried to finish off the still living victims with his club ("the size of a table leg"), and one of the several soldiers who had been mentioned in evidence during the trial as having joined in the beating.



*Johannes Opper being prepared for hanging
(in the background, behind the rope, S/Sgt Fred Guidry, assistant hangman)*

The man with the club was found to be Otto Hermann Stolz, 34, a carpenter and SA member. He was tried on 15/16 May, 1947 before a General Military Government Court at Dachau, was found guilty and hanged on 14 November 1947 at Landsberg, at 11.12 a.m.

One of the soldiers was identified as Corporal Franz Umstatter, 36, a wine gardener in his civil profession, and described by the investigator as “the worst looking criminal of them all and ... built like a gorilla”. He was tried on 26/27 August, 1946 before a General Military Government Court at Dachau, was found guilty and sentenced to death. The War Crimes Group of the European Command however overturned the verdict. It seems that the reason was a technicality: The charge against Umstatter did not specify where the crime had been committed. On 1st March, 1948 at 2 p.m., Umstatter was set free. The five words “at or near Rüsselsheim, Germany” by their absence saved his neck.

In August 2001, survivor Sidney Brown, accompanied by his wife and Tufenkjian's brother with the latter's wife, came to Rüsselsheim upon an invitation of the town mayor to take part in a service of remembrance and to receive a formal apology.



On the sixtieth anniversary of the crime, 26 August 2004, a memorial was unveiled on the spot where the airmen suffered most, near the railway station in Grabenstraße.

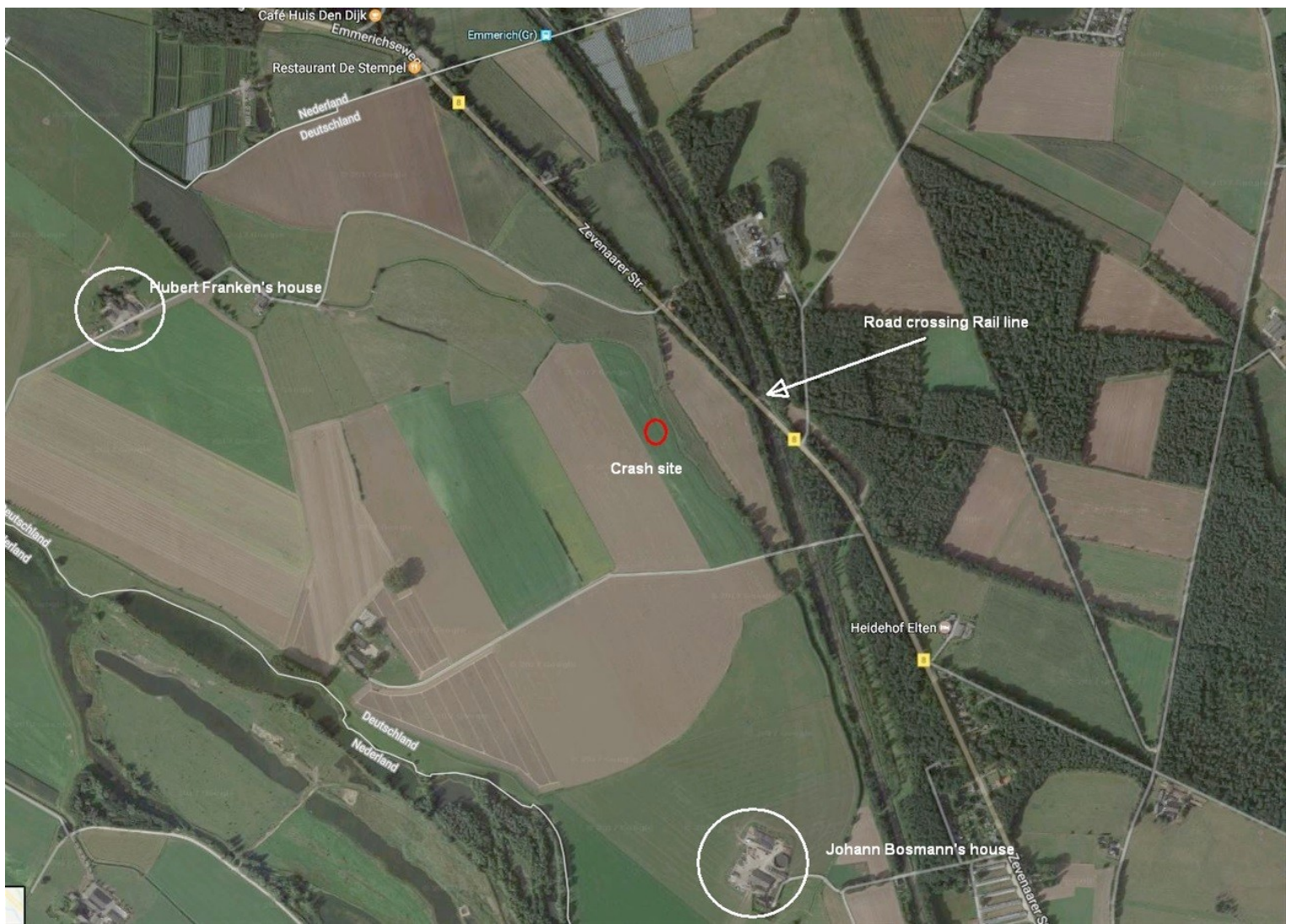
The Elten Case: The murder of P/O William E. Maloney, RAAF

On 16 September, 1944 the mission of No 80 (Fighter) Squadron was to attack “Big Ben” sites i.e. launching pads of V2 missiles, and military transports. “We were strafing a train in Holland, near the German frontier”, S/L Bob Spurdle wrote two days later, “when ‘Spike’ had to crash-land his machine with a dead engine.” After receiving a flak hit in the vicinity of Arnhem, glycol had been seen streaming from his engine. The squadron comrades were anxious to find out what had happened to Pilot Officer William ‘Spike’ Maloney and circled the crash site for 15 minutes. “I flew low over his aircraft several times and he appeared to be unharmed”, the squadron leader wrote. Receiving this letter, Maloney's parents in Toowoomba (Queensland, Australia), would have thought that the worst that could have happened to their son was being taken prisoner of war. They were wrong.

Flying a low-level interceptor on a ground attack mission, Maloney was the perfect fit for the distorted image painted by German propaganda. Low level attacks, according to common belief, were targeted at

ploughing farmers, playing children and public transport railway trains full of civilians. A fighter pilot like Maloney was perhaps even more hated than a bomber pilot.

Maloney crashed at about 1100 hrs at Elten, a part of Emmerich, in a field near the spot where the railway crossed a road. The plane “turned over and I thought that no person could have survived ... it did a complete loop and landed in a cloud of dust”, eyewitness Johann Bosmann told Canadian investigators in July, 1945.



Crash site and surroundings as in 2017

Bosmann was a local farmer, and his house stood just a few hundred yards away. Being a member of the Landwacht (German equivalent of the Home Guard), he set out for the crash site, since it was one of his duties to take prisoner any downed enemy pilot. While still on his way, he saw a car arriving near the crash site. Three men in field grey and two in Nazi brown Sturmabteilung (SA) uniform exited the car. When Bosmann was still a few hundred yards distant, he saw them coming back to the plane wreck with an airman who had obviously been hiding somewhere, and starting a struggle. As Bosmann walked on, he recognized local policeman Hans Pelgrim from a distance of about hundred yards. Bosmann saw the airman being beaten with rifle butts, and saw Pelgrim wielding a rifle. "They came around the aircraft where I could see everything very clearly." Bosmann went on, "The airman was bleeding and his skull was smashed in... While he was bent over, and four men were beating him, one man came and kicked him in the face with his boot." Then another man – Bosmann recognized him as Hans Renoth, gamekeeper and police officer of the Gendarmerie Reserve – told the others to stand back and took aim with his carbine... Bosmann turned away. After a few steps, he heard a shot, and a cry. Some more steps, and he heard a second shot. And then there was silence.

There had been a second witness in addition to Johann Bosmann: fellow farmer Hubert Franken. The rumour of the incident spread through the village. When the Allied invasion reached the region, Bosmann and other witnesses came forward to inform the War Crimes Investigation teams.

The investigators found that the downed aircraft must have been Maloney's Tempest Mk. V, serial EJ662. The cemetery where the murdered airman most probably had been buried was the Nordfriedhof (North

Cemetery) at Düsseldorf. And indeed the cemetery attendant produced a record which said that the body of an unknown airman had been admitted 2400 hours, 16 September 1944, and had been buried the next day at 9 a.m. According to the casualty report of the German air base headquarters which went with the register entry, the plane had crashed on 16 September 1944, 1145 hours, on meadowland at Elten.

The investigators arranged for an exhumation and post-mortem in order to try and find out whether this body could be identified as Maloney, and which injuries could be ascertained.

On 23 July 1945, grave no. 544, Field 111c, was opened and the coffin trundled to the mortuary. Pathologist Major James Balfour, Royal Canadian Medical Corps, established three things which proved to be crucial:

--- There was no identity disk or other things to help in identification, but it was ascertained that while the upper jaw was intact, there were no upper teeth.

--- The right side of the skull was smashed; the body was in fact minus the right part of the forehead. The injury was consistent with strikes from a blunt instrument used with great force. Such injuries would have caused almost instant death.

--- Owing to the decomposed state of the body and the smashed condition of the skull it was not possible to say whether either had been hit by a gunshot.

Identification was rather easy. During the inspection of the crash site a fortnight earlier, together with witnesses Bosmann and Franken, Canadian War Crimes Investigator Wady Lehmann had found a dental plate for an upper jaw lying in the grass. Mr. Franken remembered that he had seen that plate lying beside the airman's corpse in September 1944. The dental records of the Air Force confirmed this state of Maloney's teeth.



This building, today housing a restaurant, used to be the Bahnhofshotel.

The hard thing was to establish what had happened and who had been involved with which degree of guilt. A British Military Court, sitting 8-10 January, 1946 at the Bahnhofshotel (railway hotel) at Elten, tried to do just that.

Four accused were before the court: Renoth and Pelgrim, the police officers, and Friedrich Wilhelm Grabowski and Paul Hermann Nieke, two customs officials. The latter two were the men seen in SA uniform – they had just returned from the funeral of an SA comrade, hence they were not in their customs uniform. Renoth said the fifth man seen by Bosmann in the car was a captain of the Wehrmacht, and that there was actually a sixth man in the car, another captain – however neither could be found. From Renoth's point of view, this was very unfortunate because he relied on their evidence for his defense. He said that he had fired at the airman upon the express order of one of the captains to give the pilot the coup de grâce since he was obviously suffering heavily and could only live for a few more moments anyway. To have proof that he had only followed orders, Renoth even had got himself a confirmation in writing, signed by the captain. This confirmation, Renoth said, he had passed on to his superior in the Gendarmerie. The confirmation was not produced in the trial, and Renoth could only vaguely remember the name of the captain – was it Kuehne, perhaps? In his pre-trial statement, Renoth had said that while the beating was going on, only the six persons already mentioned were at the scene, and he himself was talking to the captains – which left only Grabowski, Nieke, and Pelgrim to do the beating. Now in his trial evidence Renoth mentioned two more soldiers, one armed with a truncheon, and tried hard to distance his co-defendants from the actual beating.

Pelgrim, who according to Bosmann had himself wielded a rifle to beat the pilot, now said that the two mysterious unknown soldiers had twisted the rifle from the hands of the pilot (!) and beaten him over the head with the butt. Grabowski and Nieke told the same story. Thus, according to the defence, the beating had been done by strangers, and the lethal shot had been fired upon order.

There was a lot of contradiction between the trial evidence of the four accused, and between their trial evidence and their pre-trial statements. Especially the two soldiers not mentioned previously seemed to have taken the role of the Big Unknown on whom the blame should be put.

The Prosecutor made short work of that. Two unknown strangers? Nonsense. There was the evidence of the two farmers, Bosmann and Franken, which proved the beating was done by Pelgrim, Grabowski and Nieke. Further: Even assuming the killing had been done by those unknown strange soldiers: The silent, inactive presence of police, army and customs/SA officials would constitute sufficient moral encouragement to make them all guilty of “aiding and abetting”.

Renoth's plea of Not Guilty did not hold water for several reasons: Even assuming there was in fact an order by the army captain, it was evidently illegal and therefore obeying it was a crime just the same. And even assuming that Maloney was in the process of dying anyway from his heavy skull injuries: If Renoth's shot shortened his life, even if only by a matter of seconds, this was murder in English criminal law.

Renoth was sentenced to death by hanging, and Pelgrim, Grabowski and Nieke to 15, 10 and 10 years respectively. During the review process, all sentences were upheld although the staff of the Deputy Judge Advocate General (DJAG) were not unanimous in their evaluation. One member said that Renoth's sentence and the sentences of the others did not fairly reflect their relative guilt, and that on the whole he should have felt happier if Pelgrim, too, had been sentenced to death. They did not feel, however, that this should now result in a recommendation of leniency towards Renoth. The Court had been, after all, in a better position than any reviewing authority to gauge mitigating circumstances. In the end, the sentences were confirmed and put into effect.

Renoth was hanged on 8 March 1946 at 14.40 hours, at Hameln prison, by Albert Pierrepoint and RSM O'Neill. At 154 lbs. weight, he was given a drop of 7' 3". He belonged to the series of executions in which Dr. Buckland monitored the heartbeat. Renoth's heart still beat at a rate of 120 per minute ten minutes after the drop but seems to have stopped soon after since there is no further entry.

Pelgrim was released in 1953. He did not return to police duty but worked as an electrician and died of a heart attack in 1963. He always protested his innocence, maintaining that he had been too far away to do anything and had not even touched the pilot.

Grabowski was released on 26/02/1952 upon remission of sentence. He always maintained that he was subject to an injustice. He died in 1972.

Nieke was released on 17/04/1952 upon remission of sentence. He remained an official and died in 1975.

Pilot Officer Maloney was born on 25 July, 1921, in Clifton (Queensland, Australia) as the 8th child (2nd boy) of a schoolteacher.

He enlisted from Brisbane on 08 November, 1941, service no. AUS 414715.

He was first buried in Nordfriedhof Düsseldorf 111c grave 544, and later reburied on 19 October, 1946, at Reichswald Forest War Cemetery 7.F.18.



*P/O William Edward 'Spike'
Maloney, RAAF*

Sgt Cyril W. Sibley

The target was Worms. At 17.27 hrs. on 21 February, 1945, Halifax III bomber MZ351 MP-X of the no. 158 Squadron took off from RAF Lissett in Yorkshire together with hundreds of other bomber planes for another night raid. The crew consisted of F/Sgt Alan Charles Widdowson (pilot), Sgt Frederick J. Fox (flight engineer), P/O Terence Dillon (navigator), P/O John McFarlane Scott (air bomber), F/Sgt Michael Edward Jordan (wireless operator and air gunner, an Australian), Sgt Cyril William Sibley (air gunner), and Sgt Francis Leslie Charles Mewis (air gunner). They had not yet reached their target when night fighters attacked them. The pilot tried to evade them by a corkscrew manoeuvre but couldn't because of another Halifax in their path. That was the moment when one night fighter came up from underneath and hit them in the bomb bay. Most of the crew managed to bale out, landed in open fields, were captured and made prisoners of war. The pilot, Widdowson, had also tried to bale out but was found with his parachute entangled in one of the engines of the plane which had crashed in a vineyard.

Sergeant Sibley came down in the branches of a tree in the back yard of Maria Gassner at Friedhofstraße 18, Dirmstein, 11 kilometers south-west of Worms. Frau Gassner helped him to free himself, cared for his cuts and bruises, gave him two large glasses of wine spritzer and some cigarettes.

Then Adolf Wolfert appeared. He was the local Nazi party leader, and with him was Georg Hartleb, battalion commander of the Volkssturm (territorial army, home guard). They took Sibley away to the local police station. There a third man joined them, Volkssturm adjutant Heinrich Kreß, a teacher in civil life. Later they took him away, allegedly to a collecting point at Grünstadt.

15 year old Arthur Maurer, together with some friends, followed them from a distance. Just after passing the disused station building of the local railway, the men turned suddenly, and disappeared behind the building. A few moments later, the boys heard shots. Others heard them, too. Three shots.

This is what Wolfert himself said in a trial statement:

We took the airman behind the railway station. He did not say anything and we did not speak to him. Hartleb took him with his left hand, turned him around and held his revolver close to his face. I then took my revolver and shot the airman from a distance of about two meters, once in the head and once in the chest. The airman fell down, and Hartleb fired one more shot after he had fallen down.

The next morning, Frau Gassner saw the bodies of two airmen on a handcart, and recognized one as Sibley. The other was Widdowson, presumably, who had been removed from the crash site.

In the afternoon of the 22nd, Widdowson and Sibley were buried in a mass grave together with six airmen from another bomber crash near Dirmstein.

On 6 August 1945, 18 year old Erwin Folz together with a number of other men was given the task of unearthing the bodies. An American commission of inquiry had come to look into the matter. Erwin Folz remembered in 2014 that Sibley's body was lying on top, without coffin, and that even he could clearly see an entry or exit wound when the American medical officer handled the skull.

From 13th to 17th May, 1946 a British Military Court sat at Bad Lippspringe – curiously without a Judge Advocate or Legal Member – to try the case. Wolfert, Hartleb, Kreß and a fourth man who was later acquitted were charged with “committing a war crime in that they at Dirmstein, Germany, during the night of 21/22 February 1945 in violation of the laws and usages of war were concerned in the killing of Sgt Cyril W. Sibley, Royal Air Force, a British prisoner of war.”

Wolfert claimed superior orders: The Nazi county leader, his superior, had ordered (he said) that crashed or parachuted enemy airmen should not be taken prisoners. Hartleb denied to know of such an order but admitted to have known Wolfert's intention to kill. Kreß said that due to his being hard of hearing he had not known what was afoot until the killing, in which he did not have any part, was committed.

The trial ended on 17th May with death sentences for Wolfert and Hartleb and a sentence of 10 years imprisonment for Kreß. The death sentences were confirmed by higher authority on 22 July 1946 while the prison sentence was not.

On 11 October 1946, Albert Pierrepoint, assisted by RSM O'Neill and Alexander Hurry, hanged twelve men at Hameln, among them Wolfert and Hartleb. Wolfert, at 10.31 a.m., shared the place on the trap doors with Dr. Rohde (see the case of Sgt Habgood and the SOE women, below), while Hartleb's turn came 28 minutes later, together with one Friedrich Fischer who had murdered an Allied airman at Bochum.

In 1948, Cyril W. Sibley was reburied on Rheinberg War Cemetery (within the city limits of Kamp-Lintfort, Germany) in grave 20.B.20. He was born on 10 October 1923 in Merthyr Tydvil (Wales), son of Cyril V. W. Sibley and Rhoda B. Sibley née Jenkins. In 1943 he had married Florence Rogers.



Sibley's headstone at Rheinberg War Cemetery



"Stumbling Stone" for Sibley in Dermstein

Some in Dirmstein tried to forget. Others didn't. In 1985 and 2004, regional writers wrote about the murder. In 2001, there was a radio broadcast of which the typescript is still available on the internet. When in 2005 the chronicle of the village was printed, the names of the murderers were however shortened to initials. In March 2009, Dirmstein honoured the memory of nine Jewish fellow citizens, who had been deported and

murdered, by setting Stolpersteine (stumbling stones) in front of the house where most of them had lived. A Stolperstein is a cobblestone-size concrete cube bearing a brass plate inscribed with the name and life dates of victims of Nazi extermination or persecution. The stolperstein art project was initiated by the German artist Gunter Demnig in 1992, and is still ongoing. As of 31 January 2017, over 56,000 Stolpersteine have been laid in 20 European countries, making the Stolperstein project the world's largest decentralized memorial.

Next to these nine Stolpersteine, a tenth was set for Cyril W. Sibley, making him the only murdered airman so far to receive this kind of memorial on German soil. The spot where he had been murdered could not be used because it had been covered with a new road.

Ferdinand Flach and Lee Huffman

34 year old Hermann Noack was born at Duisburg on 4 June, 1912 and was married with three children. He had been an athletic instructor before the War. By 1940 he was a first lieutenant in the paratroopers. During September 1944 he was operating a Hitler Youth Camp near Harbach in Rhineland-Palatine.

His co-defendant was Karl Georg Böss (given as Boess in the trial records), a 42 year old butcher and inn keeper at Grünberg, Oberhessen. Böss was a member of the Grünberg Fire Brigade. He thus wore a uniform and was permitted to carry a pistol. He too was married and had a daughter.

Liberator bomber B-24H Nr. 41-28922 "Texas Rose" of 445 Bomber Group, 701 Bombardment Squadron, piloted by 2LT Palmer M. Bruland, was shot down on 27 September, 1944 near the village of Hattenrod in Germany. Among the crew were Staff Sergeants Ferdinand E. Flach (army serial no. 37540396) and Lee R. J. Huffman (army serial no. 34203002). Flach was the nose gunner and Huffman the right mid-ships gunner. Both men were able to parachute out and both were captured and taken to the Bürgermeister's office (mayor's office). Noack and Böss took each man in turn out to Noack's car and together with two other men with spades, drove off to a nearby shooting range where each man was shot and then ordered to be buried by the men with the spades. Noack is reported to have said "Revenge for the first sergeant." It is not clear what he might have meant by this remark.

The commanding officer of the Harbach Airfield had issued an order that all captured Allied airmen were to be shot on the spot.

Noack was arrested and released but then re-arrested and sent to an internment camp at Karlsruhe, where he remained until 18 July, 1946.

Noack and Böss were tried before a US Military Court at Dachau on 29-31 July and 2-5 August, 1946 in case no. 12-472. At the time of the trial, the victim's names were unknown. Both men were found guilty of their parts in the murders. Noack was condemned to death and Böss sentenced to eight years in prison.

At Landsberg, Noack fasted and lost sufficient weight to enable him to squeeze through the bars of his cell and escape in the nude. He was caught by Russian soldiers and shot in the leg. They returned him to Landsberg where he had the injured leg amputated. Noack was hanged at Landsberg on 21 March, 1947, probably the only one legged man to be executed here. A surviving photograph of the preparations for the execution indicates that he may have been strapped to a collapse board.

LT Joseph H. Williams who had been posted to Landsberg to improve security there, recorded in his book that Noack tried to stun himself prior to the execution and took ten minutes to die after the drop, death being confirmed at 9.36 a.m.

Ferdinand E. Flach is buried in the American Cemetery at Margraten in the Netherlands, Plot A Row 15 Grave 14, and Lee R. J. Huffman is buried in the same cemetery in Plot H Row 3 Grave 8.



Hermann Noack being carried to the gallows at Landsberg. The collapse board may be the light object visible behind Noack's right ear. Also his chest seems to be strapped to something with a leather strap.

P/O Gerald Hood and Bote van der Wal

42 year old Georg Otto Sandrock and 37 year old Ludwig Schweinberger were tried before a British Military Court sitting at Almelo in eastern Holland on 24-26 November, 1945. With them were Franz Joseph Hegemann and Helmut Wiegner.

Sandrock and Schweinberger were accused of the murder of P/O Gerald Hood, a British prisoner of war, on 21 March, 1945 and of Dutch civilian, Bote van der Wal on 24 March, 1945. Hegemann was tried for his involvement in the murder of Hood, and Wiegner for his part in the murder of Bote van der Wal.

All four men were convicted. Sandrock and Schweinberger were sentenced to "suffer death by being hanged", Hegemann and Wiegner were sentenced to 15 years in prison. The sentences were confirmed by the Commander-in-Chief, British Army of the Rhine, on 12 December, 1945. Sandrock and Schweinberger were hanged at Hameln by Albert Pierrepoint at 15.49 hrs on the afternoon of 13 December, 1945, following on from the executions of the Belsen defendants.

23 year old Gerald Hood, from London, was the navigator in Lancaster Mk. III bomber LM658 HW-W of No. 100 Squadron. On the night of Saturday 12 August, 1944 it had taken off at 21.45 hrs. from RAF Waltham near Grimsby, Lincolnshire, for a night bombing raid on Brunswick/Braunschweig.

There were problems with the plane's navigational equipment and also with high winds. They encountered a great deal of anti-aircraft flak, which resulted in a fuel tank being punctured and the Lancaster going down in flames near Almelo, between the villages of Hardenberg and Bergentheim at approximately 0110 hrs. local time, on the Sunday morning.

Hood sustained burns to his legs but managed to parachute to safety. He was found by Jan Piksen, a local resistance leader and taken to a “safe house”. Hood was moved several times until he was at the home of Mrs. Ebeltje van der Wal in the village of Nyverdal. Mrs. van der Wal had a son, Bote and a daughter, Grietje. Bote had refused to sign up for the Nazis and work for them. So on the night of 13 March 1945, following a tip off, the local Nazi police surrounded the house to arrest him. Fearing for the safety of Mrs. van der Wal and her daughter the men gave themselves up. On searching Hood, the police found his identity tags. Both were taken to Almelo prison.

Hood was interrogated by Oberfeldwebel (M/Sgt) Georg Otto Sandrock, who spoke good English. Hood told Sandrock that he had been shot down but could not remember where he had hidden his parachute and uniform.

On the morning of March 21, 1945, Untersturmführer (SS 2LT) Paul Hardegen arrived at Sandrock's office and told him that Hood had been sentenced to death as a spy.

Sandrock was unhappy about this as no trial had taken place and he did not feel that Hood was a spy. However orders were orders, so he had Hood brought to his office from Almelo prison. At around 10 p.m. he was loaded into a car with Sandrock, Ludwig Schweinberger and Franz Josef Hegemann who was the driver. He was taken to woods near the village of Zenderen where Sandrock told him that he was to be executed as a spy. Schweinberger fired a single round from a 9 mm Luger pistol into the back of Hood's neck. Two days later Bote van der Wal was executed in the same way and at the same place.

The Tilburg Lynching Case

Three Allied airmen were shot execution style at a “safe house” during a raid by German Gestapo officers on the morning of 9 July, 1944 at Tilburg in the southern province of Noord-Brabant in the Netherlands. They were 21 year old F/L Ronald Arthur Walker (RAF), 26 year old Australian F/O Jack Stewart Nott (RAAF) and Canadian born, 23 year old F/O Roy Edward Carter (RCAF).

Walker was the pilot and only survivor from Lancaster bomber ND551 OL-V ‘Victor’ of No 83 (Pathfinder) Squadron, which took off from RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire at 23.18 hrs on the night of June 21, 1944 to bomb Wesseling. It was intercepted by a German night fighter, some 9 km south of Eindhoven in Holland at 01.25 hrs on 22 June, 1944. The aircraft exploded in mid-air with the loss of the other six crewmen. They were F/L Norman Cornell (navigator), F/L John Wells (bomb aimer), F/Sgt Harold Houldsworth (flight engineer), F/Sgt Bailey (wireless operator), F/Sgt David Kelly (rear gunner) and F/Sgt Charles Taylor (mid gunner). The six dead were buried in the cemetery at Woensel, Eindhoven.

Jack Stewart Nott was the bomb aimer serving in Halifax bomber MZ698 KN-J of No. 77 Squadron. It took off from RAF Full Sutton on the night of June 16, 1944, with a crew of eight to bomb Sterkrade in Germany. It was shot down over St-Oedenrode, a small town north of Eindhoven in Holland. Five of the crew were killed in the crash and Flight Sergeants J. W. Needham and J. M. Bulmer were taken prisoner.

Roy Carter was serving with No. 431 Squadron RCAF operating from Croft in Yorkshire. He was shot down on the night of 16/17 June, 1944 in Halifax NA514 SE-B near Nistelrode in Holland. All of the crew, except the pilot, F/O Blachford, who died in the crash, were able to bale out. F/O Lough and F/Sgt Gould sadly did not survive the parachute jump. F/Sgt Hattey and F/Sgt Kennedy were captured almost immediately. F/Sgt Thomas Masdin and F/O Roy Carter managed to evade capture. Masdin was later apprehended and taken prisoner.

Ronald Walker had no memory of exiting the plane but landed safely with just bruises. Once he recovered himself he started walking until he spotted a farmer's wife. She called for assistance to Bas van de Aaist who was working in a nearby field and who was a Dutch Resistance member. He took Walker to a cornfield and told him to stay there until night fall, which he did. He was then taken by another Resistance member, Walter de Vries, to his home. The Dutch Resistance had formed a chain to get Allied airmen out of Holland

and into Belgium. Jack Nott had a similar rescue and met Walker on another farm where they spent a week together. On 29 June, 1944, both men were moved yet again, to the house of Frans van Dijk, who was hiding two Canadian airmen.

On the evening of 8 July 1944, the four airmen were given fake Dutch identity cards and Nott and Walker were driven to Tilburg in a "police car". The driver did not know the way and was accompanied by Miss Leoni van Harsell, a Resistance leader. The men were to be taken to the house of 60 year old Miss Jacoba Pulskens, known as "Aunt Coba" at 49 Diepenstraat in Tilburg. Aunt Coba was already hiding Roy Carter in her house.

The other two Canadian airmen that Frans van Dijk was sheltering were arrested that night as they were being transported in the fake police car. Under severe questioning the driver, Jantje, revealed that there were three more airmen whom he had taken to a house at Diepenstraat in Tilburg. The following morning, around 11 a.m. the Gestapo raided the house. There was a loud banging on the front door which the unarmed airmen immediately realised meant trouble. They moved towards the back door where Michael Rotschopf was waiting with a machine pistol. He forced them to line up along the wall and shot all three of them. The shootings were witnessed by Mr. Nico Pulskens and his wife, who lived opposite Aunt Coba, would later testify that Rotschopf was the shooter.

A man named Hardegen was in charge of the arrest squad. One of the German officers, Hans Harders, ordered Aunt Coba to cover the bodies with a sheet. As an act of defiance she used the Dutch flag, instead. The Tilburg police were to be informed to come and collect the bodies. Examination of the corpses revealed that they had been shot around 100 times. They were later cremated, possibly at Vught Concentration Camp near s'Hertogenbosch.

Aunt Coba was arrested and sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp where she was gassed in February 1945.

The "Trial of Franz Schonfeld and Nine Others" (a.k.a. The Tilburg Lynching Trial) was held before a British Military Court sitting at the Jugendheim (youth centre) on Fürststraße in Essen-Steele, from June 11-26, 1946. The ten defendants were charged with committing a war crime in that they

"at Tilburg on the 9th of July 1944, in violation of the laws and usages of war, were concerned in the killing of a member of the Royal Air Force, a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force and a member of the Royal Australian Air Force".

All ten pleaded not guilty.

Miss Leoni van Harsell, a member of the Dutch Resistance, testified as to the events of 9 July, the court being permitted to hear evidence from a secondary witness as the primary one (Aunt Coba) was dead.

There was discussion of the Doctrine of Common Purpose as it applied to this case. The Judge Advocate concluded that in the case of the four condemned, it did apply.

Of the ten, four were convicted and sentenced to death, six were acquitted due to lack of evidence and released. The verdicts and sentences were as follows:

Karl Paul Schwanz: Death sentence. Hanged at 10.08 a.m., age 49.

Albert Rösener: Death sentence. Hanged at 10.41 a.m., age 35.

Karl Cremer: Death sentence. Hanged at 10.41 a.m., age 37.

Michael Rotschopf: Death sentence. Hanged at 11.36 a.m., age 26.

Karl Otto Klingbeil: Acquitted & Released

Franz Schonfeld: Acquitted & Released

Hans Harders: Acquitted & Released

Werner Koeny: Acquitted & Released

Eugen Rafflenbeul: Acquitted & Released

Karl Brendle: Acquitted & Released.

The four sentenced to death were hanged at Hameln on Friday 5 September, 1947 by Albert Pierrepoint, assisted by RSM Richard O'Neill and Edwin Roper.

All three of the airmen are commemorated at the Air Forces Memorial at Runnymede in Surrey. Jack Nott is on Panel 257, Ronald Walker on Panel 203 and Roy Carter on Panel 245.

Jacoba Maria Pulskens was posthumously awarded the Medal of Freedom in 1947. On 27 June, 1984, a memorial rock to Mrs. Pulskens and the three airmen was unveiled in Tilburg.

The Borkum Island Massacre

Borkum Island is the largest of the seven East Frisian islands, with an area of almost 31 square kilometres. It is approximately 30 kilometres from the mainland, and is Germany's most north-westerly point. During World War II it was an important German military and naval base and had a population of 4,500 to 5,000.

On Friday August 4, 1944, Boeing B-17G-75-BO Flying Fortress S/No. 43-37 909 of the 486th Heavy Bombardment Group had taken off from its base at Sudbury in Suffolk, England. The nine member crew comprised 2LT Harvey M. Walthall (the pilot), 2LT William J. Myers (the co-pilot), Sgt Kazmer Rachak (flight engineer), 2LT Howard S. Graham (bombardier), 2LT Quentin F. Ingerson (navigator), T/Sgt Kenneth Faber (radio operator), S/Sgt James W. Danno (turret gunner), S/Sgt William F. Dold (waist gunner) and S/Sgt William W. Lambertus (tail gunner).

At 12.51 on that Friday the plane was over the German coastline, north west of Bremen. Here it was involved in a mid-air collision with another plane from the Group, 43-38 145, piloted by 2LT Haper. Two crew members, Rachak and Ingerson baled out and parachuted down on mainland Germany where they were taken prisoner and survived the rest of the War.

William J. Myers managed to regain control of 43-37909, but realised that he would not be able to nurse the damaged plane back to England and decided to make an emergency landing on Borkum Island. The plane came under anti-aircraft fire as it made its final approach. Only one crew member was injured and all surrendered to German soldiers who took them to the Eastland Battery, commanded by Oberleutnant (1LT) Jacob Seiler. Present at the Battery was Fregattenkapitän (Commander) Kurt Goebell of the German Navy, who was the highest ranking officer on the island. Oberleutnant (1LT) Erich Wentzel was called in to act as interpreter as he had a good command of the English language. The prisoners were to be transported to a naval base on the south of the island from where they were to be transported to the mainland and interned as prisoners of war. Oberfeldwebel (M/Sgt) Josef Johann Schmitz together with seven armed soldiers was detailed to march the US airmen to the naval base. Seiler briefed Schmitz that the prisoners were not to be protected from the local people, were to be marched with their hands up and were to take the longest of the three possible routes, some seven miles. Schmitz was not familiar with some of the streets mentioned, so Erich Wentzel offered to accompany the group, becoming the only officer on the march, but not in charge of it.

The police chief, Heinrich Rommel, and the acting mayor of Borkum, Jan Akkermann, were informed by phone of what was about to happen and reminded that they were not to interfere "since this was a purely military matter" according to an edict issued by Joseph Goebbels. Jan Akkermann phoned Heinrich Rommel to ensure that he would comply with this edict. He also informed Meyer-Gerhards, the acting chief of the Air Raid Police that he hoped its officers would show "what kind of men they were." He took two of his men to a point where he knew the prisoners would pass. He also made a public speech encouraging an attack on them.

The first assault took place before the men reached the town. The men were marched along the beach to

an intersection with the road into town, where Wentzel met August Haesiker, the commander of an RAD unit (obligatory Reich Work Service unit), who ordered him to continue on the Promenade to Strandstraße. On the Promenade the airmen were forced to march between two lines of men who were ordered to hit them with their spades. They continued into Borkum, where Akkermann made a speech urging locals to “beat the dogs, the murderers.” The locals did just that. Oberfeldwebel (M/Sgt) Schmitz took part in this, hitting the prisoners with his rifle butt.

In the town hall area Howard Graham's trousers fell down and he was not allowed to pull them up, because Seiler had ordered that the men must keep their hands up at all times. Graham was assaulted by Air Raid Policeman Gustav Mammenga and left lying on the ground, where he was shot by Gefreiter (Pfc) Langer, whose wife and child had been killed in an air-raid in Hamburg. Langer was not a member of the escort but happened upon the prisoners as he returned from guard duty. Graham was taken to the Naval Hospital where he died soon afterwards.

The rest of the group continued their march to the naval base and had very nearly reached it when a further six were shot. Langer boasted that he had shot all of them, but it is likely that Schmitz and another sergeant also shot some of the prisoners.

Those who died that day were: Harvey Walthall, William Myers, Howard Graham, Kenneth Faber, James Danno, William Dold and William Lambertus. All were initially buried in the Lutheran Cemetery on Borkum.

Harvey Walthall and James W. Danno were most probably re-interred in the USA. The other five were all reburied at Ardennes American Cemetery in Neupré, Belgium.

William Myers: Plot B, Row 31, Grave 49.

Howard Graham: Plot A, Row 24, Grave 5.

Kenneth Faber: Plot B, Row 11, Grave 2.

William Dold: Plot C, Row 1, Grave 2.

William Lambertus: Plot D, Row 15, Grave 2.

Borkum Island would fall to the British and a French POW told them that he had witnessed the seven murders. An intelligence report was forwarded to the US Naval Liaison Officer who made a preliminary investigation of the incident. This was followed up the US Army Intelligence Corps and charges were brought against 23 defendants, although only 15 could be located and put on trial at Ludwigsburg between 6 February, 1946 and 22 March, 1946. The trial was entitled “Kurt Goebell et al.” There were two charges both relating to Violation of the Laws of War. Count 1 related to the murder of the airmen, while Count 2 related to the non-lethal assaults on them. All 15 defendants pleaded not guilty. Gefreiter (Pfc) Langer had died in action just before the end of the War and thus could not be brought to trial.

Verdicts and sentences.

Name	Count 1	Count 2	Sentence
Akkermann, Jan J.	Guilty	Guilty	Death
Albrecht, Günther	Not guilty	Guilty	6 years
Geyer, Karl	Not guilty	Guilty	4 years
Goebell, Kurt	Guilty	Guilty	Death
Heinemann, Heinrich	Not guilty	Guilty	18 years (later reduced to 10 years)
Krolikovski, Walter	Guilty	Guilty	Life (later reduced to 14 years)

Name	Count 1	Count 2	Sentence
Mammenga, Gustav	Not guilty	Guilty	24 years
Meyer-Gerhards	Not guilty	Not guilty	Acquittal
Pointner, Johann	Not guilty	Guilty	5 years
Rommel, Heinrich	Not guilty	Guilty	2 years
Schmitz, Johann Josef	Guilty	Guilty	Death
Seiler, Jakob Valentin	Guilty	Guilty	Death
Weber, Karl	Not guilty	Guilty	25 years
Wentzel, Erich	Guilty	Guilty	Death
Witzke, Heinz	Not guilty	Guilty	11 years

The five death sentences were confirmed by the Governor, US General Lucius D. Clay, in 1947. However Goebell's and Seiler's death sentences were commuted to life in prison in 1948. Goebell was paroled in February 1956.

54 year old Jan Akkermann was hanged at Landsberg on 15 October, 1948. Josef Schmitz followed him on the same day. Erich Wentzel was hanged there on 3 December, 1948.

August Haesiker came to trial on 26 June, 1947 and was given a sentence of 10 years for ordering his men to beat the prisoners. He was paroled in December 1952.

On 4 August, 2003 a memorial to the seven airmen was unveiled at Hindenburgstraße in the town of Borkum.

The Essen-West Lynching Case

The Ruhr area, with its coal mines and steel works, was the “Armory of the German Reich”, as Hitler said. Essen in particular, the home town of the Krupp armament works, was therefore an important target for the Allied bomber planes during the First (March to July 1943) and Second Battle of the Ruhr (October to December 1944).

During the night 12/13 December, 1944, RAF Bomber Command flew their last heavy night raid on Essen with 540 aircraft: 349 Lancasters, 163 Halifaxes, and 28 Mosquitos. Between 7.30 p.m. and 8 p.m., 57 blockbuster bombs (the RAF's HC or High Capacity bombs) were dropped, plus 4,000 explosive bombs, 60,000 incendiaries and 5,000 white phosphorous bombs. About one third of the explosive bombs were equipped with a time delay device which set them off at 12 or 36 hours after dropping, thus endangering salvage workers in the morning after the raid, and again in the morning of the second day.

In addition to the damage to the factories, 696 homes were destroyed in Essen and 1,370 more damaged. 463 persons on the ground were killed, including 84 political prisoners who were killed when the prison was

hit, and many slave workers and prisoners of war. 196 were injured, and 40 were missing. Reich Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels had made a speech on the Krupp premises just one hour before the barrage started and escaped the attack.

Six Lancasters failed to return to base, but there were survivors.

On the morning of 13 December, civilians brought three parachuted Allied airmen, taken in the neighbourhood, to police station no. 13 in Essen-West. Police commander Hauptmann (CPT) Abel handed them over to army Hauptmann (CPT) Heyer, commanding officer of No. 6 Company of the Landesschützen Battalion No. 471 which was conveniently billeted next door, in the same disused school building on Mülheimer Straße. Abel expected the Allied flyers, as per traditional Geneva Convention procedure, to be brought under military escort to the nearest Luftwaffe unit for interrogation – in this case to Mülheim Airfield, about four miles distant. Heyer was somewhat irritated. Why should he be troubled with these men, he asked Abel – they would be shot anyway, he said. Or perhaps he said “should be shot” – the witness was not quite sure during Heyer's trial before a Military Court which took place one year later, 18-22 December, 1945, in the “Jugendheim” (youth centre) in Fürstinstraße, Essen-Steele.



Jugendheim Steele, location of several British Military trials in Essen (Photo: Sammlung Steeler Archiv)

Thanks to a trial transcript contained in the file WO 235/56 of the British National Archives at Kew, it is possible to follow the proceedings in considerable detail. The prosecution called 14 witnesses in all, and from their evidence it was established that in the end, Heyer agreed to take charge of the airmen. His interview with Abel was at 9 a.m. or perhaps 9.30, witnessed by a police officer. Heyer, within earshot of a waiting crowd, ordered an escort of one Unteroffizier (Sgt) by the name of Ferdinand Nelges plus one Private (the accused Koenen) to escort the airmen to Mülheim Airfield, adding that they were not to interfere if civilians should molest the prisoners. (Heyer, when examined, admitted to having given this order, but not within earshot of civilians.) The accused Koenen testified that this order of non-interference had already been read to his unit twice in the course of the preceding days.

Off they marched, followed by a number of civilians and, according to some evidence, for about 175 yards by Hauptmann Heyer and one Feldwebel (T/Sgt) Grosche or Groosse, too. One witness said that Heyer incited the crowd while walking, saying "Civilians, attack these airmen; they are not men but murderers." (Heyer denied this.) The Prosecutor said that about halfway between Kruppstraße and the Wickenburg bridge, near a brickyard, "...an unknown corporal in the German anti-aircraft wing actually fired a revolver at one of the airmen, who is identified as a sergeant, and wounded him in the head, and that the sergeant took out a bandage and put it round his head". The accused Koenen testified having seen this shooting but did not mention the bandage. The bandage however is mentioned by several witnesses and serves to identify the sergeant whenever he is mentioned as the story progresses.

Not quite half a mile into their march, they reached the bridge where the street crossed a narrow stream and a railway line. Hauptmann Heyer by this time had returned to the barracks.



The original Wickenburgbrücke was torn down and replaced by the present one in about 1996. This view shows the western parapet of the old bridge. The demolition is already under way. In the distance: The trees of Southwest Cemetery where all Allied victims of that day were initially buried. (Photo: Sammlung Robert Welzel Essen)

The crowd had increased until finally about 60 people – the numbers given by witnesses varied between 40 and 170 – milled around the prisoners, shouting abuse at them, throwing sticks and stones from the bed of the tramway track, and beating them with whatever was at hand (the accused Boddenberg, for instance, took off his belt for the purpose). The accused Braschoß was seen beating the airmen by several witnesses. They said he used the stick with which he used to walk, having been shot through his knees in World War I. (In the witness stand, he and his wife fiercely denied that he had his stick with him when on the bridge.) Most witnesses saw only five to seven people actually taking part in the violence; the majority

seem to have limited themselves to abuse. There were also voices heard of “Don't beat them, leave them alone”, and similar.

In the end, two of the airmen were thrown over the parapet on the western (downstream) side of the bridge, about forty feet deep, and one, who had attempted to escape, was thrown over the other side, allegedly by Braschoß and one Franz Kircher (not before the court in this trial). The Unteroffizier of the escort who was blind in one eye (one witness spoke of his glass eye) was seen to fire about two or three shots (other witnesses: ten, twelve or fifteen) from his rifle at the two airmen lying downstream in the water, killing them. Several people, among them Braschoß and Unteroffizier Nelges, were seen down by the stream, robbing the bodies, undressing them, and throwing them into the water. Some witnesses said the bodies were carried away by the current, and according to some evidence the water level in the stream was indeed above normal at the time.



The Borbecker Mühlenbach used to have this V-shaped profile, covered with flag stones, at the spot in question. This photo is from a different location where the old profile still exists.

(Photo: Wikimedia user Wiki05)

After five days of trial, the court acquitted two of the accused.

Hauptmann Erich Heyer was sentenced to death. Although he had not taken part in the killing, he had used “words that kill”, which “lit the fuse” leading to the later eruption of violence. The Court believed the witness who said he instigated the civilians to ill-treat and kill the airmen. This instigation was what made him “concerned in the killing”. That he admittedly had repeated to his subordinates the “Terrorflieger” order (i.e. not to protect baled-out airmen from the mob) would not have made him guilty of the present charge, although it might have been considered a War Crime under Art. 2 para. 2 of the Geneva Convention of 1929.

Johann Braschoß was sentenced to hang for his part in the beating and, as the court obviously believed, in throwing one airman off the bridge (although only one witness had claimed to have seen him do it).

Another civilian, Karl Käufer, was sentenced to imprisonment for life.

A third, Hugo Boddenberg, received ten years.

Peter Koenen was sentenced to five years imprisonment.

The prison terms were served at Werl Prison, where the British held German war criminals and Allied nationals.

At Hameln prison, Erich Heyer and Johann Braschoß were hanged together on 8 March, 1946 at 4.10 p.m. by Albert Pierrepoint and RSM O'Neill.

"A"

MILITARY GOVERNMENT - GERMANY
MILITARY COURT - WAR CRIMINALS
DEATH WARRANT

To: The Director or Officer in charge of ZUCHTHAUS HAMELN
Name and location of Prison

WHEREAS one JOHANN BRASCHOSS
Name of condemned

was on the twenty second day of December 1945
convicted by a Military Court at ESSEN WEST of a war crime and sentenced by such Court to the penalty of death by judicial hanging and

WHEREAS in accordance with Army Order No. 81 of 1945, such sentence has come before me for confirmation and after due consideration and in exercise of the powers conferred upon me, I have confirmed the sentence of death by judicial hanging so imposed.

NOW THEREFORE I hereby order you to execute such sentence within 24 hours of receipt of this warrant by judicial hanging and for so doing this shall be sufficient warrant.

Upon execution of said sentence the return below will be completed and forwarded to this Headquarters (A(PS4)).

Date 3. Feb. 1946.
HQ BAOR

Lt. General, Erich Koenen
Commander in Chief.
Confirming Authority.

RETURN OF WARRANT

The above sentence imposed on JOHANN BRASCHOSS
was put into execution at ZUCHTHAUS HAMELN (Location)

on 8th. March 1946.
(Date)

1610. (Hour)

Lt. Koenen Lt. (Signature and Appointment of Prison Official)

E. H. ... Capt. (Counter signature and rank identifying witness)

PSS 3143 A 12.45 500

"A"

MILITARY GOVERNMENT - GERMANY
MILITARY COURT - WAR CRIMINALS
DEATH WARRANT

To: The Director or Officer in charge of ZUCHTHAUS HAMELN
Name and location of Prison

WHEREAS one ERICH HEYER
Name of condemned

was on the twenty second day of December 1945
convicted by a Military Court at ESSEN WEST of a war crime and sentenced by such Court to the penalty of death by judicial hanging and

WHEREAS in accordance with Army Order No. 81 of 1945, such sentence has come before me for confirmation and after due consideration and in exercise of the powers conferred upon me, I have confirmed the sentence of death by judicial hanging so imposed.

NOW THEREFORE I hereby order you to execute such sentence within 24 hours of receipt of this warrant by judicial hanging and for so doing this shall be sufficient warrant.

Upon execution of said sentence the return below will be completed and forwarded to this Headquarters (A(PS4)).

Date 3. Feb. 1946.
HQ BAOR

Lt. General, Erich Koenen
Commander in Chief.
Confirming Authority.

RETURN OF WARRANT

The above sentence imposed on ERICH HEYER
was put into execution at ZUCHTHAUS HAMELN (Location)

on 8th. March 1946.
(Date)

1610. (Hour)

Lt. Koenen Lt. (Signature and Appointment of Prison Official)

E. H. ... Capt. (Counter signature and rank identifying witness)

PSS 3143 A 12.45 500

Death Warrants of Braschoß (left) and Heyer, execution date and time entered manually on the "Return of Warrant" part.

From 1st to 3rd April, 1946, a British Military Court sat to try the case of Franz Kircher – he was one of those mentioned on the charge sheet and in the evidence of the aforementioned case but could not be found at the time. He was alleged to have thrown or helped to throw one of the airmen off the bridge, and to have taken the boots of one of the dead. The accused denied having been on the bridge and said he had helped pull one of the bodies from the stream to prevent it sinking. He admitted to have bought the boots off one of the escort for a few cigarettes. His defence, in addition to pointing out discrepancies in the witness evidence, submitted that Kircher, as a devout Catholic, had been opposed to the Nazi regime which made him a very unlikely suspect for such a crime. (Indeed one of the prosecution witnesses was investigated for perjury in 1950.)

The court however found him guilty and sentenced him to death by hanging. The sentence was executed

at Hameln by Pierrepoint and O'Neill on 15 May, 1946 at 5.30 p.m.

On 25 July 1949, the sentence of Karl Käufer was scrutinized by the Deputy Judge Advocate General of the British Army of the Rhine, Lord Russell of Liverpool. He found that the evidence against Käufer was flimsy to begin with, and that the sentence should never have been confirmed. His advice was that the appeal should be allowed and the conviction quashed. Four days later, General Sir Brian H. Robertson, the Military Governor and Commander-in-Chief, did as suggested.

In due course the sentences of Koenen and Boddenberg, too, were sent to Lord Russell for an opinion. These sentences he found correct in law, and, while not making any recommendation with regard to Boddenberg, on 4 August 1949 he wrote that, in the case of Koenen, the Commander-in-Chief "may feel that he has received sufficient punishment" after three years of imprisonment. Indeed the balance of Koenen's sentence was remitted on 10 August 1949. One day later he was released from Werl Prison.

Since 1979, there has been no statute of limitations for murder in Germany. So in 1990 German prosecutors decided to reopen the case with a view to finding out whether the persons mentioned in the charge but not brought before one of the two Military Courts could and should be prosecuted for murder: i.e. Unteroffizier Ferdinand Nelges, Peter Tewes, and Hans Braschoß, Johannes' son. The investigators found that Nelges and Tewes were dead, and that there was no evidence linking Braschoß jun. with the killing.

One question remains: Who were those airmen? Throughout the trial papers, they are called "unidentified".

Of the six Lancaster bombers who did not return from this particular mission, one crashed in the North East of Düsseldorf, one at Jüchen, and four were lost over or in the vicinity of Essen. These four belonged to the No. 150, No. 460, No. 582, and No. 635 Squadrons, respectively. All except the plane from No. 582 (Pathfinder) Squadron, which carried a crew of eight, were manned by seven airmen. The names of these 29 men are known from the Operations Record Books of their squadrons. 26 of these same names appear in the online database of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (www.cwgc.org) as being buried today in the Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, near Kleve, Germany, after an initial burial on Essen Südwestfriedhof (South West Cemetery).

Thus, all crew members of these four ill-fated Lancasters are accounted for with the exception of three who are commemorated at Runnymede Air Forces Memorial because they "do not have a known grave". They are F/O Michael Gisby, F/Sgt William Horlor, and F/O Leon Milner.

It is tempting to assume that these three were the victims of the Lynching Crime, and presumptions to this effect have been around for quite some time, e.g. in military forums on the internet.

However a book published recently by Sean Feast and Marc Hall ("Missing - Presumed Murdered"), based on extensive research, makes it highly probable that only two airmen remained without a known grave, F/O Gisby and F/O Milner, and that they were indeed victims of this murder.

The third victim has been identified with a certainty "beyond reasonable doubt", as the authors put it, to be Sgt Harry Mawson, flight engineer on board Gisby's plane. Mawson's body rests in Reichswald Forest War Cemetery, Germany. The authors also argue that the third "missing" airman, Sgt Horlor, may actually lie in the same cemetery with his comrades. From a set of 1944 filing cards discovered in Essen, it is clear that the cemetery attendant claimed to have put two – probably very mutilated – bodies into one coffin which was buried in Plot 3, Row 1, Grave 14 in the Essen South West Cemetery. In this grave however, the exhumation party after the war found just one body, the body of Sgt Stephen H. Ward, flight engineer on board Horlor's plane. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, when confronted with the documentary evidence, remained unmoved: "...based on the exhumation officer's clear statement, we have no reason to believe that 13.G.1. in Reichswald contains anyone in addition to Sgt. S.H. Ward."

Feast and Hall however believe that Horlor's body "was still in the coffin and is still in Stephen's war grave. We believe that sadly there wasn't that much of Bill left to identify him."

The last case in this chapter on murdered Allied airmen at the same time provides a transition to the crimes

committed in the concentration camps. It is the case of Sergeant Habgood who was killed at the same spot and by the same men who were responsible for thousands of other deaths, including the murder of four women of the Special Operations Executive.

Sgt Frederic H. Habgood, RAF, And The Four SOE Women

Between 9 p.m. and 10 p.m. on 28 July, 1944, 494 Avro Lancaster bombers of the Royal Air Force took off from different bases in Yorkshire, England, accompanied by 400 fighter planes. Among them was a plane which bore the number NE164 and had taken off at 9.36 p.m. from North Killingholme air base near Grimsby. It belonged to the No. 550 Squadron and was piloted by F/O Harry Jones. His crew, as in all main force Lancasters, consisted of a flight engineer (Sgt James Drury), a navigator (F/O William Dinney, a Canadian), a wireless operator (Sgt Donald Hunter), two gunners (Sergeants Roy Cumberlidge and Idwal Williams) and a bomber. The latter was 160253 Sergeant Frederic Harold Habgood (21), son of Harold Herbert and Gwynne Elizabeth Habgood from Wandsworth, London.

Their target was Stuttgart. The city was to be raided for the third time in that very week: The Bosch works should be damaged or destroyed. The route took the planes over Rouen, Orleans, St. Dizier, Strasbourg and Karlsruhe. Altitude was 19,700 ft, temperature – 95° F, cruise speed 185 mph.

When they were over Orleans, still far away from their target, they were already picked up by German fighters. 300 of them were on their track. The fighters and the anti aircraft guns caused the loss of 53 RAF planes of which 17 went down in France. The NE164 was intercepted near Strasbourg and shot down at 1.32 a.m. by Oberleutnant (1LT) Gottfried Hanneck of the Nachtgeschwader 1 (Night Fighter Wing No. 1), flying a Me 110. With the right wing of the Lancaster on fire, F/O Jones steered his plane towards Mount Ste. Odile (in Alsace, west of Strasbourg), passed overhead the small town of Obernai and crashed at about 1.50 a.m. in the forest near Mount Ste. Odile. Six crew were able to bale out, but pilot Jones died in the crash, and Williams didn't survive his parachute jump. Sergeants Drury, Hunter, and Cumberlidge were taken prisoner and survived the war in a camp in Poland. Dinney, the Canadian, hid in a nunnery and was handed over to the Résistance who helped him to escape back to England. Sgt Habgood hid in the neighbourhood till early on Sunday 30th July, he was discovered in a wood near Lutzelhouse by a woman who tried to keep him in her house with offers of Schnapps until she could get help to take him to the local Gestapo Headquarters. Sgt Habgood however realised what was afoot and managed to escape. Unfortunately the Gestapo were warned and he was recaptured on the evening of the same day (Sunday) in a barn where he had been hiding under the hay, and taken to Chateau Schiedeck at Lutzelhouse which was the Gestapo Headquarters. Later that night or early on the Monday morning he was removed to the SS security camp at Schirmeck and placed in Cell 24. Schirmeck was more or less an outpost of the concentration camp Natzweiler-Struthof, 6.5 miles distant. On Monday evening, he was driven by car from Schirmeck to Natzweiler, was taken straight to the crematorium, stripped, and hanged from a hook in the ceiling right in front of the furnace, in a manner which must have amounted to slow strangulation.



Ceiling hooks in front of the crematorium furnace at Natzweiler-Struthof Concentration Camp, Alsace, France

SS Hauptscharführer (M/Sgt) Peter Straub, the NCO responsible for the crematorium, kicked away the support below Habgood's feet after his stoker, an inmate by the name of Franz Berg, had fixed the noose. The driver of the car smoked a cigarette meanwhile outside and later testified that after ten minutes, Habgood had not been dead yet.

It is assumed that Habgood's body was cremated in that furnace. Behind the crematorium building is a large field where the ashes of the cremated camp inmates used to be scattered. That Habgood's ashes, too, must have been among them was the only assumption which could so far be made about his place of burial.

Until August 21, 2018, that is. On this day, a second-year sports student by the name of Anna Bernard was working on a summer job at the European Center for the Deported Resistance Fighters (CERD) situated on the site of the former concentration camp Natzweiler-Struthof. While watering the flowers, something glittering between the plants caught her attention. It turned out to be a silver bracelet, showing on one side the RAF wings, Habgood's name and service number, and on the reverse side, the name of his cousin "Jean".

Paul Habgood, son of Frederic's brother Ronald, and his sister Marilyn, resorted to Struthof in October 2018 to receive it. They had known that their uncle had possessed such a bracelet. He had trained in Canada throughout 1943. He had relatives in the country; for his graduation they had given him this gift, and Freddie had written about it in a letter home.



Natzweiler crematorium furnace

Now it had resurfaced, showing traces of being partially molten. Almost certainly it had accompanied Habgood's body into the furnace. Where the bracelet had ended up, Habgood's ashes cannot have been far away.

Not quite two years after Habgood's death, a British Military Court sat in the main building of the Zoological Garden at Wuppertal – one of the few buildings left in this town with a room large enough for such a purpose. The proceedings on 4 and 5 June, 1946 came under the heading of "Trial of MUTH and five others". The subject was the murder of Frederic Habgood. The prosecution withdrew charges against one of the accused, so the court proceeded against the remaining five only. It found the facts as described above, and pronounced one prison term and four death sentences. Two of the men sentenced to death were handed over to the French to face another trial in France on additional, different charges, and in the end were not executed. The remaining two were Peter Straub and Franz Berg. Their sentences were confirmed on 7 August, 1946, and they were hanged simultaneously on 11 October, 1946, at 9.54 a.m., at Hameln. 58 year old Straub was given a drop of 7 ft 7 in for his 145.5 lbs



Peter Straub talking to his counsel during the trial

weight, and Berg (43), at 130 lbs., dropped nine inches more. The executioner was Albert Pierrepoint, assisted by RSM Richard A. O'Neill and Alexander Hurry.



On 8 May, 2008, a stele was dedicated to the memory of F/O Jones, Sgt Williams and Sgt Habgood. It stands about 100 yards from the actual crash site of the plane, surrounded by the trees of the Alsatian forest, within the boundaries of the city of Ottrott where Jones' and Williams' graves are on the town cemetery.

At 10.31 a.m., half an hour after Straub and Berg dropped through the Hameln trap doors, doctor Werner Rohde suffered the same fate. A British Military Court had sentenced him to die for a crime he had committed together with Straub and Berg about three weeks before the hanging of Sgt Habgood.



Dr. med. Werner Rohde (11 June 1904), 1942 camp doctor at Buchenwald, 1943/44 at Auschwitz-Birkenau, and from 1 July 1944 at Natzweiler-Struthof*

At about 3.30 p.m. on 6 July, 1944, inmates at Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp noticed a very unusual sight in this men-only camp: four women. Their sight was even more unusual by the fact that they were carrying suitcases and coats over their arms. When Franz Berg first saw them, he thought it was a party inspecting the camp. They were led down the Lagerstraße (camp road) to the Zellenbau (cell block) next to the crematorium, and locked first into one cell, later, at about 7 p.m., in individual cells.

Franz Berg later testified that he had been told by Straub at about 6 o'clock "to have the crematorium oven heated to its maximum by 9.30 and then disappear. He told me also that the doctor was going to come down and give some injections. I knew what this meant."

The room where Berg used to sleep together with two other inmates, Georg Fuhrmann and Alex, a Russian from Leningrad, was within the crematorium building.

"There was a fanlight over the door from which it was possible to see the corridor outside. Fuhrmann, who occupied the highest bunk, was able to look through this without standing up. He whispered to me that 'they are bringing a woman along the corridor outside'. We heard low voices in the next room and then the noise of a body being dragged along the floor and Fuhrmann whispered to me that he could see people

dragging something on the floor, which was below his angle of vision, through the fanlight. At the same time that this body was brought past we heard the noise of heavy breathing and low groaning combined. The next two women were also seen by Fuhrmann and again we heard the same noises and regular groans as insensible women were dragged away. The fourth, however, resisted in the corridor. I heard her say: "Pourquoi?"

A voice which Berg recognized as belonging to one of the camp doctors replied "Pour typhus."

Berg continues: "We then heard the noise of a struggle and muffled cries of the woman. I assumed that somebody held a hand over her mouth. I heard this woman being dragged away too. She was groaning louder than the others." Berg heard the noise of the oven door being opened and shut several times and stated definitely that in each case the groaning women were placed immediately in the oven.

A prisoner later said: "It was common knowledge in the camp that whenever flames were seen to come out of the top of the chimney a body had been put into the crematorium. On this particular night, at intervals of about 15 minutes, I observed the flames coming out of the top of the chimney on four different occasions."

Several camp inmates heard screams that night. Camp inmate Walter Schultz later claimed that Straub had told him that one of the women had come to her senses and was pushed alive into the oven, but not before she had scratched his face severely. Schultz saw the scratches on Straub's face.

When the SS men had left and everything was quiet, Berg and his comrades came out of their cell and on opening the door of the crematorium oven found four blackened bodies within. The next morning, when clearing out the ashes, Berg found a pink woman's stocking garter on the floor near the oven.

During his interrogation by WAAF Squadron Officer Vera Atkins of Special Operations Executive, "F" (=France) section, Berg was shown photos of female SOE agents who were still missing, and he identified Vera Leigh as being one of the four. He believed to recognize another one as Noor-un-Nisa Inayat Khan. (Later it was found out that this was Sonia Olschanezky.)

Busy investigation work established that the two other women were Andree Borrell and Diana Rowden. Leigh, Borrell, and Rowden had been dropped into France by SOE to serve as wireless operators and couriers to various Résistance circuits but had been apprehended after a year or even just a few months of clandestine work. They all had been sent to Karlsruhe prison where they spent nearly a year without trial.

Then, one day at 4 a.m., they were awakened in their cells and taken by lorry to Natzweiler (a distance of 100 miles), accompanied by Karlsruhe Gestapo officers.

The senior staff at Natzweiler was taken by surprise when they arrived. The sudden execution order thrown at them spoilt their plans for the evening: Camp doctor Heinrich Plaza should be given a leaving party. Doctor Werner Rohde, his successor, remembers that there was a dispute about how to put the women to death, and that camp executioner Straub (of all persons) had objected to hanging them, saying it would cause "ein großes Theater" (great to-do, big fuss). After checking their stock of Evipan (trade name for hexobarbital, a fast acting hypnotic which is lethal in larger doses) which was found to be insufficient, the doctors settled for phenol, and ordered the medical orderly to report for duty with the phenol bottle, a 10cc syringe and one or two larger-gauge needles. And then the killing took place, witnessed by three pairs of ears... It could not be established beyond doubt whether Dr Rohde made all injections or only part of them. He himself admitted to injecting one woman but was allegedly so upset by having to perform the task that Dr Plaza had to take over.

The case came to trial from 29 May to 1 June, 1946, before the same court and in the same building as the case previously told. Werner Rohde was the only one of the accused to receive the death penalty. Straub and Berg were found guilty, too, but received only prison terms. Heinrich Plaza could not be found at that time, otherwise he would in all probability have been accused and sentenced to death as well.

The British press dedicated comparatively many inches to the coverage of the trial, probably due to the gruesome statement of prosecution witness Walter Schultz that the women had been cremated alive. The Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail called it a "sorry sequel" that of six accused found guilty only one received the death penalty, and stated that "(t)he whole object of these retributory trials is to make their judgment so

drastic that they will be effectual deterrents hereafter.” Other newspapers, in editorials and letters to the editor, published similar sentiments.

This caused the Judge Advocate of the trial, Lt. Col. A.A.H. Marlowe, K.C., M.P. to write a letter to the Times in which he, on behalf of the members of the court who as serving soldiers could not defend themselves, set the record straight: The “lurid story” about the women being burnt alive came from “the most unreliable witness I have ever seen in any court” (meaning Walter Schultz) who “had not been there, knew nothing about it, and was merely drawing on his imagination”. Further: Of the four persons known to have been actually involved in the execution, one was sentenced to death, one had committed suicide, and two had not been apprehended. Under these circumstances it would have been a “great injustice” if the other accused who had played minor roles of complicity or were clearly not implicated “had been dealt with on rumour, mob law, or by a Press campaign”.

This letter caused at least some of the Press to think again: The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury conceded that “newspapers appear to have printed the case for the prosecution and neglected that for the defence. ... Even though paper is lamentably scarce, one-sided reporting of the Courts should be regarded as dead against the tradition of the British Press.”

Two of the persons involved in the crime went free, it seems. It later emerged that Heinrich Plaza had fled to Bavaria where he established himself as General Practitioner at Perach, Altötting county. In 1952, the German prosecutor stopped criminal investigations against him when it was found that he was suffering from an advanced stage of multiple sclerosis. A French military court, however, sentenced him to death in 1954, in absentia. Plaza died in Altötting in 1968.

The other one was the man who in all probability gave the execution order and transmitted it to Karlsruhe. Horst Kopkow was a senior counter-intelligence officer in the Reich Security Head Office in Berlin, department IV A 2 (counter-sabotage). His responsibilities included all parachuted enemy agents in the German Reich. He was responsible for the torture and death of hundreds of Allied agents and German resistance fighters. Either he or his immediate superior Heinrich ‘Gestapo-’ Müller would have been the one to order the killing of the four women.

On 29 May 1945 he was taken prisoner by British Military Police. Instead of committing him for trial, British Intelligence spirited him away and interrogated him comprehensively on his experiences in fighting Soviet espionage. On 15 June 1948, they even lied to the War Crimes Group, declaring him to be dead. In 1949 or 1950, he was released and returned to Germany, changed his name to “Peter Cordes” and worked as manager to a textile company. He is said to have staid on the MI6 pay list and died in 1996, aged 85, in a Gelsenkirchen hospital of pneumonia.

Vera Atkins never tired until she had cleared up the fate of all her missing SOE women, and got them recognized for their service to freedom. In the furnace room of Natzweiler's crematorium, a stone plaque in French commemorates their sacrifice.



Lt. Col. A.A.H. Marlowe, K.C.,
M.P., Judge Advocate of the trial

A
LA MEMOIRE
DES QUATRE FEMMES
BRITANNIQUES ET FRANCAISES
PARACHUTEES EXECUTEES
DANS CE CAMP

BORREL ANDREE
LEIGH VERA
OLSCHANEZKY SONIA
ROWDEN DIANA

Memorial plaque in the furnace room of the crematorium at Natzweiler Concentration Camp. Translation: "To the memory of the four British and French parachuted women who were executed in this camp: Borrel Andree, Leigh Vera, Olschanezky Sonia, Rowden Diana"