

A German account of the last days of 43-38904 and her crew.

Translated from German

The following account was sent to me by Pat Davis whose uncle was Lt Robert Botwright, copilot on the Edward P. McGroarty crew. Both were killed when their plane was shot down on November 6th 1944. Only one crew member survived. The description was obtained from a German resident of the town [Boenmerwold] near where the plane crashed and is a translation from German. It gives an account of what was seen by those on the ground at the time of the crash of 43-38904. Any words in brackets [] were added by the interpreter in order to try to clarify some issues.

Hello Libby Ilson, I greet you from Boehmerwold.

The report I am sending you comes from our town chronicle [archives]. Our mayor at that time was Anneus van Lessen, he kept a very exact journal, without which we would not have this report. But I will finally begin with the extract from the chronicle.

On November 6, 1944, a four engine American bomber crashed burning into the meadow here. The airplane came from an easterly direction from over the [river] Ems. It had already been shot, and received further hits from our flack, so that it broke into a [began to] crash. It buried itself deep in the ground, and then burned up. At first, it looked as if the airplane would crash into the houses here. But then it made a turn to the left. On the street there was a woman with two children, who was fetching animals from here [the town]. The woman fell unconscious. The airplane lay approximately 150m from the street. It burned until the next day.

Soon, people streamed to the crash site from all sides, by foot and by bicycle.

First the land watch (civilian auxiliary to the police) barricaded [the site], then later, military personnel from Leer (a city on the Ems) came to barricade [the site] and by evening two soldiers from Delmenhorst air base. They both came here by quarter [possibly 'to be stationed'] and stood watch during the day near the crash site.

The airplane, which had pressed into the ground from the crash, soon filled with water. One man from the [plane's] crew had rescued himself with a parachute. He found himself in the back of the piece [of land] "Schoettelboerg" (the name of a meadow.) To the question of his name, he said, "My name is Dekker." [this was Clyde A Decker, the only survivor] He did not give any further information. He only said that there had been another seven men with him in the airplane.

In the afternoon, an air force officer came from Zwischenahn [a town], also the governor came to view [the site].

In the evening two dead flyers, who had fallen from the airplane, were brought here with sleds from Jemgumgeise (a neighboring town.) We laid them in our cemetery.

In Jemgumgeise, different pieces of the airplane were also found. A machine gun fell through the linden trees in front of a house. Pieces of machinery lay from Jemgumgeise to the crash site. On November 7, we searched in the wreckage at the crash site for the rest of the crew under the supervision of the police. We ascertained from the remains, that at [the time of] the crash, there had been another four men in the airplane. Since from the entire crew complement of eight men [actually nine], one man had still not been found, we assumed that he was still to be found in the hole [made by the plane] at the crash site.

We brought the remains to the cemetery, and buried them with their comrades who had been found in Jemgumgeise. On November 9th, a salvage crew came, who had to clear away the rest of the airplane. The detachment was made up of thirteen men, four Germans and nine Italians. Because the detachment was short of gasoline, the rest of the airplane had to be taken to the railroad by horse drawn wagon after being bundled up.

On November 10th, it was reported that one more dead member of the crew lay in a meadow. After we contacted the police, we fetched the corpse from there with a sled. The body had imprinted itself into the earth during the impact to ground, but then flew up again, and lay next to the hole.

On November 11th, we buried him next to his comrades in a single grave. The police had searched the bodies for papers and identification tags. Two tags were found with the inscription McGroarty 0825216 Edward F.J., [he was the pilot] The other tag was apparently from an officer Henry D. McLeroy JR 344464413 T43-44cp [toggleer].

The salvage crew cleared away the wreckage from the airplane in a short time.

In the winter of 1949/50 American officers were here again, because they were still missing two men. The members [of the contingent] pressed for an explanation. A bulldozer dug up the hole again. Over the days, parts of machinery and the remains of one man appeared. The parts of the corpse were placed in a coffin in Leer and sent to America by plane.

That is the story from our side, maybe you [all] also have something to report. It would be very interesting for me, since at this time, a book about Boehmerwold is being put together, in which this story appears, but it [the book] won't be published until next year. Good luck, Libby, and pleasant greetings to Pat Davis, your Diddo Aeissen

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