

World War II Interned and Captured Aircraft

From the collection of
Hans-Heiri Stapfer;
Descriptions by Hayden Hamilton



This fairly well known photo of B-24s and B-17s at Dubendorf Field in Switzerland provides a good perspective on the number of Allied aircraft that diverted due to damage. Many were repaired and return to the US after the end of the war.

The Society recently received a contribution from a Swiss individual, Hans-Heiri Stapfer, of a collection of WWII photos. They fall into three categories. American manufactured aircraft captured and operated by the Axis (mostly Germany), U.S. aircraft Interned by the Swiss after landing or crashing on Swiss territory, and Russian Air Force operation of Allied aircraft (mostly P-39 and B-25s). The following is an sample of this collection with details known about each individual aircraft.

Aircraft Interned by Swiss

On February 22, 1945, 2nd Lt. Robert Rhodes was flying North American P-51B-15-NA, 43-24853, code VF-U, "Little Ambassador" on a bomber escort mission to Ulm, Germany. He was Assigned to the 5 Fighter Squadron, 52 Fighter Group, 15 Air Force, operating from Madna, Italy, at the time. There are conflicting reports as to what caused the situation leading up to Rhodes ditching the plane in the Rhine River near the Swiss town of Buchs. One source states his plane was damaged by anti-aircraft fire, a second claims it received damage in a "fierce dog-fight." Either way, Rhodes realized there was no hope of getting the damaged plane back to Italy and ditched it.

Interestingly, the photo show five aerial victories painted

on the cowlings in front of the canopy. A search of fighter aces in WWII does not show a Robert Rhodes as being an ace, so the assumption is he was flying a plane assigned to someone else.

The plane was apparently too damaged to repair and was scrapped.



A salvage crew hoisting 43-24853 to remove the wings and place the components on carts for removal from the river bed.



43-24853 sitting forlornly in the Rhine River close to shore. Several versions of this photo can be found on the internet. The inset shots the victory marking on the cowlings.



Salvage crew pulling 43-24853's fuselage up the river embankment.



Boeing B-17F-95-BO in the Swiss farmer's field where it was forced to land.



Recovering the B-17 must have been a story in its self, with narrow roads and sharp turns. Here we see 42-30315 negotiating a turn on a rural road.

Boeing B-17F-95-BO, 43-30315, was accepted by the USAAF on May 11, 1943. Flown to England via the North Atlantic route (Bangor, Maine-Iceland-Prestwick, Scotland), it was assigned to the 569 BS, 390 BG based at Framlingham, Suffolk, England on July 17, 1943.

Crew name the plane "Battle Queen, Peg of my Heart" and flew their first combat mission on August 15, 1943. The crew, of Pilot: Steve Rapport, Co-pilot: Elmer Holloway, Navigator: Grover Boyd, Bombardier: Chas Ryan, Flight engineer/top turret gunner: John Scott, Radio Operator: Bill Carter, Ball turret gunner: Theo Obsharsky, Waist gunner: Blair Neal, Waist gunner: Joe Russell, Tail gunner: Ricardo Robledo flew their second mission on August 17, 1943, which was a shuttle mission to bomb the Messerschmitt Me-109 factory in Ragnsburg, and then fly south to land at airfields in North Africa. 42-30315 sustained flak damage and force landed in a potato field at Utzenstorf, Switzerland, just north of Bern. (MACR 391). The waist and tail gunners manage to escape and return to England.

J. Fitzpatrick, Ball Turret Gnr: Charles J. Brown, took off from their base at Torretto Airfield, Italy on a combat mission to bomb the Zahnradfabrik Works at Friedrichshafen, Germany. The plane was observed to leave the formation just before the Initial Point, still under control, for unknown reasons as was last seen headed westward. They landed at Dubendorf Airfield near Zurich, Switzerland, where Schultz and crew were interned. Crew and plane were returned to U.S. control on September 13, 1945.

Whatever the problem, it must have been repaired by the Swiss and operated by them for some period of time, as determined from the photo showing the aircraft with Swiss markings.



North American B-24G-16-NT, 42-78439, in Swiss Air Force markings at Dubendorf Airfield, Switzerland.

North American B-24G-16-NT, 42-78439, (484 BG, 825 BS, 15 AF. On August 3, 1944, 2nd Lt. Harry Schultz and his crew, Co-pilot: Lloyd A Bjerga, Navigator: Donald O. Christensen, Bombardier: Stanley L. Greenberg, Engineer/Waist Gnr: Marion A. Case, Radio Op./Waist Gnr: Arthur J. Smith, Nose Turret Gnr: Henry W. Kiefer, Tail Turret Gnr: John



Douglas-Tulsa B-24H-20-DT, 41-28948, at Dubendorf Airfield, Switzerland, with U.S. national markings obscured.

Douglas-Tulsa B-24H-20-DT, 41-28948, "540" of the 389th BG, 565th BS, 8AF. (based on MACR 7570)

Not a lot of information available on this aircraft or crew. The plane was assigned to the 565 BS of the 389 BG, 8 AF and at the time of this flight was based in England. (This squadron and group participated earlier in the was on the Polesti, Romania, raid). The pilot of this flight had the last name of Vann. The target that day, July 12, 1944, was Munich, in which this aircraft sustained flak damage. In the belief that they could not reach England, the decision was mad to divert to Switzerland. A successful landing was made and the plane and crew Interned. It appears that the plane was successfully repaired by the Swiss and the photo indicates it has Swiss Air Force markings.



Douglas-Tulsa B-24H-1-DT, 44-28583, at Dubendorf Airfield, Switzerland, with U.S. national markings obscured.

Another Tusla built Douglas-Tulsa B-24H-1-DT, 41-28583, "Rum Runner," assigned to the 713BS 448BG 8AF diverted to Dubendorf, Switzerland on April 25, 1944.

Based at RAF Seething, Station USAAF-146, Norfolk, England. Landed April 25, 1944, at Dubendorf airfield near Zurich, Switzerland for unknown reason while on mission to marshalling yards at Mannheim, Germany. All nine crewmembers survived and were interned in Switzerland. (MACR 4300)

Crew was returned in 1945, and the aircraft returned October 15, 1945.



Boeing B-17F-25-VE, 42-5841, shortly after being interned by the Swiss in September 1943.

Boeing B-17F-25-VE, 42-5841, was accepted by the USAAF on March 11, 1943. By April 22, 1943, it was in England assigned to the 423rd Bomb Squadron [RD+I], 306th Bomb Group, Thurleigh (Station 111), Bedfordshire, England, where the crew christened it "Est Nulla Via in Via Virtuli" (No Way Is Impassable to Courage).

By the time its diversion to Switzerland it had been in and out of U.K. repair stations three times for battle damage in June, July and early September 1943.

Failed to return from a mission to attack the Bosch Magneto works Stuttgart, Germany September 6, 1943. En route to the target, number two engine was damaged by an enemy fighter attack and the propeller was feathered. The bomb group missed the target because of cloud cover and made a second pass.

Running three engines hard to keep with the formation was using up excess fuel and by now did not have enough to reach the French coast on return trip.

After dropping the bombs, the pilot turned the plane back

towards France but the number four engine overheated. Now alone in the sky, the pilot turned for Switzerland.

Just after doing this, the bomber faced a head-on attack by four Focke-Wulfe 190s. The enemy pilots fired as they passed but without doing serious damage and, fortunately, they made only one pass and the plane was able to land at Magadino, Lucarno, Switzerland. (MACR 519)

The Swiss repaired the bomber and then used for Swiss Air Force for familiarization flights. 42-5841 has the distinction of making the last flight of an American bomber with Swiss marking in a ferry flight from its base at Emmen to Dübendorf, Zurich on September 5, 1945, where it was turned over to U.S. personnel.

Combat Loss

Though not part of the central theme of this essay, the following B-17 combat loss is included because of its historical significance. The photo was within the set donated by Stapfer.



Final resting place of Boeing B-17F-27-BO 41-24619, in a forest near Oderhaus, Germany - February 1943.

Boeing B-17F-27-BO, 41-24619 (MSN 3304) was accepted by the USAAF at Boeing Field Seattle, Wash., on August 26, 1942. After the usual modifications it was assigned to the 427 BS 303 BG on September 26, 1942. By October 31, 1942, the plane and crew had made the jump to England, joining the 8 AF. Based at Molesworth (Station 107), Huntingdonshire, England and coded GN+S (of the 427 BS. Crew named it "S for Sugar, Hi Doc" with artwork of the Bugs Bunny cartoon character.

On February 26, 1943, 41-24619, participated on a mission to bomb the port at Bremen, Germany. This target was obscured by overcast and the group diverted to its secondary target of the docks and harbor at Wilhelmshaven, Germany. Of significance, the plane carried a journalist from the United Press to report on the mission. His account transformed Walter Cronkite into a work-famous correspondent.

41-24619 failed to return from a mission to the AGO-Flugzeugwerke Fw 190 factory at Oschersleben, Germany, on January 11, 1944. En route, a recall signal was issued. B/Gen Robert F. Travis, Air Commander of the 1st Bomb

Division, chose to continue the mission without fighter cover, as the fighters obeyed the recall order. This resulted in the most disastrous 303 BG mission flown to date with the loss of 11 of 40 B-17s.

For 41-24619, attacks began over IJsselmeer on the run in. Approaching the IP, fighter attacks severely damaged the left wing and rudder, and set the no.1 engine on fire. Expecting the plane to explode or the wing to drop off, the crew all successfully bailed out and were captured.

The plane flew on and crashed in woods at Oderhaus, between Bad Lauterberg and Braunlage, Germany about 40 miles southwest of the target. (MACR 1923)

Captured U.S. Aircraft via France

During WWII the Germans and their allies were able to obtain a number of U.S. manufactured aircraft, both civilian and combat. Many of these were pressed into service as trainers, some were used for flight evaluation and combat tactic development, and some in actual combat. Most of the French Air Force was acquired intact. The collection includes a variety of all of these types. We've focused here on some of the more obscure ones with a few of the others mixed in.

From the French Air Force we have the following:



One of the impressed French NA-57 P-2s in the markings of German Flugzeugführerschule A/B 43 (pilot school)



Another French NA-57 P-2s assigned to Kampfgeschwader 200 (KG 200), a special operations unit that evaluated new and captured aircraft.

France ordered 230 North American trainers designated NA-57 P-2 for advanced pilot training and reconnaissance. Only 111 were delivered before Germany invaded in 1940. The balance of the order (119 aircraft) was never delivered to France and was instead sold to the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). Seized by the Germans in 1940, many of these aircraft were impressed in and absorbed in to the Luftwaffe, which used them as trainers and target tugs.



Curtiss Hawk H75A-1 no.1 on the ramp at an undisclosed location with JG 77 code (DS), which was the only operational combat fighter unit equipped (briefly) with American aircraft.

France purchased 100 export version of the Curtiss P-36As, designated H75A-1 n°1, and 173 engines. The first Hawk 75A-1s arrived in France in December 1938 and began entering service in March 1939. Following the Battle of France in 1940, the Luftwaffe captured a number of French Air Force Curtiss H75s. While most were sold to Finland or used as advanced trainers, some saw temporary service by a single *Staffel* (squadron-sized unit), 7./Jagdgeschwader 77 (JG 77), stationed in Brittany between August and October 1940.

The code "DS+NQ" identifies a particular aircraft within the Luftwaffe's system, as likely belonging to the *Geschwader* (wing) identification letters, "DS," in this case, for JG 77, or a specific training unit later. "NQ" would have been specific to the individual aircraft within the unit and *Staffel*.

This is one of the few instances during World War II where American-built fighter aircraft were operated by the German air force for operational, albeit brief, purposes.



Martin 167 A-3, No. (obscured), shown in French Air Force markings at an unknown location.

The French placed an initial order for 115 Martin GM-156 Marylands, a light attack bomber similar to the Douglas A-20 Havoc in performance, in late 1937. They placed a second order for another 100 planes in 1939, even while their initial order was under U.S. arms embargo. The embargo was lifted in October 1939 and Martin had delivered all 115 of initial order by the end of November. Only about 25 of the second order were delivered prior to the French armistice in June 1940. Most of the French units operation the Maryland fled to French North Africa with their aircraft to avoid capture by the Germans. These units would fight against the Allies (primarily British in Syria



Martin 167 A-3, No. 305, at the Baltimore Martin factor prior to delivery to the French.

and Egypt) and after OPERATION TORCH with the Free French units on the Allies side.

German Luftwaffe: Germany did capture a number of French aircraft, including Martin 167s. The Luftwaffe used some of these captured planes for training, while others were sold to Germany's allies.

Captured U.S. Aircraft



Lockheed F-5E, 44-23725, abandoned on an airfield near Schwangau, Germany.

Lockheed P-38J-25-LO, 44-23725, (converted to F-5E). This aircraft is one of two known P-38s to have been "captured" by the Germans and operated by them during the war. "Captured" is loosely used here as this particular aircraft was stolen by a defecting USAAF pilot.

In August 1944, 2nd Lt. Martin James Monti, whose father was Swiss-Italian and mother German, was assigned to the 126 Replacement Depot in Karachi, Pakistan. He was qualified on P-39s and P-38s. After cooling his heels for six weeks, he went AWOL by hitching a ride on a C-46 to Cairo, Egypt. From there he traveled to Italy via Tripoli, Libya, arriving in Foggia, where he visited with friends in the 82 Fighter Group. He then traveled to Pomigliano Airfield north of Naples where the 354 Air Service Squadron prepared aircraft for assignment to line squadrons.

While at Pomigliano on October 13, 1944, Monti observed 44-23725 being fueled for a test flight following repairs. He instead stole the aircraft and flew to an Italian airfield near Milan, where he was captured by the Italians, who handed both him and the plane over to the Germans.

When eventually question a to his reason for defecting with

the aircraft Monti stated, "I had been sitting there in India in this replacement battalion for six weeks or more and had grown tired of the inactivity and desired to join the outfit my buddies were in and had been associated with for the past year or more, there was my desire for combat and to be with them".

44-23725 was turned over to the Germans and flown to Erprobungstelle at Rechlin and was given the code T9 + MK, then it went to the *Rosarius Zirkus* KG200 for evaluation. The aircraft was recaptured by U.S. troops in May 1945 at Schwangau, Germany. The above photo is similar to one taken showing U.S. troops. The damage appears to have been from other than a flight accident as the propellers show no strike damage. It is believed that the plane was scrapped.



Curtiss Hawk II, D-3165 / D-IRIS, a "civilized" version of the F11C-2 seen being inspected by German dignitaries.



Curtiss Hawk II, D-3164 / D-IRIK.

Curtiss Hawk II (Export models of the Curtiss F11C-2 Gosshawk). While not a captured aircraft, the design did have an influence on German dive bomber development.

While attending the 1933 National Air Races in Cleveland, Ernst Udet, the highest surviving ace of WWI watch Al Williams' performance in his Gulf Hawk. Udet eventually ended up in Buffalo, N.Y., at the Curtiss plant where he again was impressed with climbing and diving ability of the Curtiss F11C. He was able to convince the German Air Ministry to purchase two export models, Curtiss Hawk II, in September 1933 and oversaw their shipment to Germany. In order to comply with the Treaty of Versailles restriction, they were purchase unarmed as civil aircraft. They were delivered in October 1933 and were registered D-3164 (c/n H-80) and D-3165 (c/n H-81), later

reregistered to D-IRIK and D-IRIS respectively. While flown by Udet, D-IRIS was lost on June 20, 1934. Udet parachuted to safety.

Udet used D-IRIK to fly an aerobatic routine at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Udet also took opportunities to demonstrate the Hawks diving capabilities to simulate dive bombing to the German military. Udet believed that an aircraft capable of dive bombing could be far more accurate than the heavy bombers then up for consideration. It was further theorized that these aircraft could support ground forces as “flying artillery.” Udet’s standing and influence played a significant roll in the development of the dive bomber designs such as the Henschel Hs 123 and Junkers Ju 87 Stuka.

D-IRIK survived the war, somewhat damaged and is located at the Polish Aviation Museum in Krakow, Poland.



The tail of B-42 42-52106, with its U.S. markings, except for its id number, removed and German insignia applied.



The crew of 42-52106 being filmed at Venegono airfield. In the center, is the tail gunner Angelo P. Meichiare, followed by the nose gunner Malcolm Harper (flashing the equivalent of the “middle finger salute, not to be confused with the “V” for Victory sign, which he probably told his capturers it was!). The third man on the right was an unknown Italian dressed as a U.S. flyer.

Ford B-24H-5-FO, 42-52106, made the transatlantic jump in December 1942 and was delivered to the 719 BS 449 BG 15AF, in Grottaglie, Italy, on October 23, 1943. Her crew gave her the name “Sunshine.”

On March 29, “Sunshine” took off on what was its last flight in U.S. markings. During the flight to the target a group of enemy fighters were spotted. The formation tightened up to increase their mutual firepower and braced themselves for an attack but the enemy fighter chose not to attack. The formation pressed on towards Bolzano, Italy (south of Innsbruck, Austria) but before reaching the target Sunshine’s had an engine malfunctioned and had shut it down. With only three engines, the B-24 began to lose speed and altitude. Unable to keep up with the formation, the crew knew that they would be easy prey for enemy fighters. A course was plotted for the nearest point of safety, which was neutral Switzerland to the west. They dropped their load of five 1000 lbs (453.6 kg) bombs onto the side of a barren mountain and they prayed for a miracle.

As the stricken bomber flew on a course towards Switzerland, it continued to lose altitude getting closer to the mountains below. There were no enemy fighters in area and the crew thought they were safe when a burst of flak, possibly from Venegono, damaged a second engine causing the B-24 to begin losing altitude more rapidly.

They were only two minutes from Switzerland so the crew decided to stay with the plane while the pilot tried to stretch their rapid descent enough to cross the border into Switzerland and to safety. They spotted an airfield and prepared for an emergency landing. The B-24 made a hard landing at Venegono airfield near Varese, only three minutes flying time from the safety of Locarno-Magaadino airstrip in southern Switzerland.

As the crew exited the bomber, they were puzzled as they were surrounded by armed and hostile soldiers. They quickly learned that they were not guests of the neutral Swiss but prisoners of the Italian Fascists.

After a couple of days of being interrogated and held in local jails, they were returned to Venegono. At the airfield, the crew was brought back to their B-24. A German propaganda motion picture camera crew was there to film their “voluntary” surrender. They were instructed to line up along-side the B-24 and walk toward the front of the aircraft as though they had just landed and deplaned. They were told to show the German people that they were happy to be coming over to their side. They had to do several “takes” since the captive crew were somewhat uncooperative.

A few days after the propaganda film was finished and with the damaged engines replaced, the two Luftwaffe test pilots flew the B-24 via Munich-Riem to Rechlin. After a short evaluation period, the B-24 was transferred to the *Erprobungsstelle der Luftwaffe, Aussenstelle Werneuche*, the radio and radar research center. A Meddo-Berlin radar system was installed aboard the Liberator and after a short test period, the B-24 began night intruder missions against RAF bomber formations over Germany. With its twin tails, the Liberator had a similar silhouette to the RAF four engine bombers which enabled it to join British bomber streams under the cover of darkness.

It was able to get close enough to the British bombers in the stream and with its Meddo-Berlin radar record their direction, calculated air speed and altitude. [Reference: Mikesresearch.com]

42-52105 was shot down by German AAA, April 6, 1945, on a ferry flight from Hildesheim to Bavaria.



This Lockheed Lodestar is believed to be DE+KL prior to the Luftwaffe code being applied. This is based on a similar image of the plane with the code markings applied to the fuselage in the area of the cabin door seen above. Though this is a best guess.

The Lockheed Model 18 Lodestar is an enigma. German records are sketchy on this, and other similar Lockheed models (Model 12 Electra and Model 14 Super Electra). Found reference indicate there was at least one Lodestar DS+KL ("or maybe it was a Super Electra" in one reference).

KLM and Air France both had a number of Super Electras and Loadstar operating in Europe at the beginning of the war. All of the Air France planes are accounted for with none known to have been handed over or captured by Germany. Most of

KLM's Lodestars and Super Electras were purchased and delivered to the Dutch East Indies. KLM did have three that operated in Western Europe at the war's outbreak. Two of these are known to have been destroyed. That leaves the third with no information found as to its disposition.

DE+KL was operated by the special operations unit *Kampfgeschwader 200* (KG 200), which was known for testing and utilizing captured Allied aircraft for various special missions, including long-distance reconnaissance, intelligence gathering (dropping agents behind enemy lines), and evaluation of enemy technology and tactics.

The code "DE+KL" follows the standard Luftwaffe format for unit identification, where the first two characters (or character and symbol) identify the unit, the third character identifies the individual aircraft within the squadron (in this case "K"), and the last character identifies the squadron within the group (in this case "L"). However, the use of a captured aircraft with such a specific code indicates its unique role within the specialized KG 200 unit.

Summary

During the course of the war Germany managed to capture examples of almost all of the combat aircraft operated by the USAAF. This included a number of flyable North American P-51s, Republic P-47s, Douglas A-20 Havocs, and North American B-25s. Most ended up going to *Kampfgeschwader 200* (KG 200) for analysis and evaluation. Very few were deployed operationally against the Allies. When they were, it was often on very specialized missions and generally at night to minimize risks of recognition and to crews operating the captured plane being subjected to "friendly fire." As in most situations, there are exceptions to this. ➔

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