

# US Army Air Force Bomber - Bull Session

## Part IV

### Gebranntebierg, Another B-17?



**By Patrick Murphy**

As written by Pierre Eicher, he witnessed in November 1944, translated. (Cliärrwer Kanton, 2011/3)

*On November 30, 1200 B17 bombers (Flying Fortress) bombed the hydrogenation plants of the Leuna works near Merseburg in eastern Germany. At around 1 p.m., one of these four-engine machines circled with howling engines over the Eselborn area, which was shrouded in thick fog. The terrifying noise came closer and closer. Then a brief crash was heard and everything was quiet again.*

Part IV of this series focuses on the verification of a previously known crash site near Weicherdange, which had been unidentified for 76 years, injecting some confusion into the ongoing active case file of Bull Session.

In March of 2018, my initial contact with the family of MIA Stephen P. Wulderk led to progress in the case, with new information shared. The Wulderk family sent several emails expressing an enthusiastic desire to assist in any way they could in the research effort. They also acknowledged that the search might not produce the result wanted.

They sent documents, copies of Christmas cards between the mothers, letters, and pictures of Stephen, and even the last letter he wrote home. The documents included an article in the Cliärrwer Kanton, 2/2003, translated from German to English, about the crash site near Weicherdange, presenting it as Bull Session. The article was written by Guy Diederich of Weicherdange, the village where Bombardier James D. Buescher was taken as a Prisoner of War (POW) for processing.

The article (2003) told a short story about the incident as well as pointing out the location of the wreckage. He also mentioned that James Buescher visited the area (Weicherdange) in 2003 with his wife to see the area and town where he was taken as a POW. The Meisch farm, which has ownership of one of the crash site fields, was the German Red Cross in Weicherdange, which processed the US prisoners.

In mid-March 2018, I began by conducting some reconnaissance of the area and interviewing residents about the incident. After interviews and visiting with Mr. Guy Diederich, I was presented with evidence by Mr. Diederich pointing to a crash site in the area and the date that fit the bomber ( Bull Session) being searched for, as he told me. A scientific, systematic search of the area began with checking the fields, analyzing recovered pieces for part numbers, and identifying the aircraft. The only thing I established was that there was a B-17 crash based on part numbers off engine pieces found in the field. If it was aircraft 43-38911(Bull Session), it was still to be confirmed with non-disputable evidence.

In May of 2018, there was a meeting in Miesau, Germany, with the U.S. government's "Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency" (DPAA). At this meeting, we discussed a systematic plan based on data collected at the time. It was agreed that the location was "highly" suspected to be the correct aircraft in question. Based on the data given, it was pretty convincing that the site was most likely Bull Session, and thus began a search to prove it 100% the identity of this site to whatever aircraft it may be. If I proved it to be Bull Session, it would have established a foundation for searching for the two MIA. If it were another aircraft, then incorrect data would have been revised and that case resolved as well.

Further conversation with Mr. Diederich revealed that at the time of the crash, it was one of the coldest winters in a long time. Also, there were no US bodies found at the site; only one soldier was taken, that being Lt. James D. Buescher. Several boys in the village had gone out to the wreck and taken pieces/parts as souvenirs. They also got into trouble with their fathers, and the "stuff" was thrown back into the town's trash piles in the woods. Also stated, at the time (January), there were no US troops here; the Germans were still in town and had closed the area off to locals, and they were still fighting the Americans. Weicherdange was liberated on 21 January, 1945 by advancing troops of the 28th Cavalry Squadron of the 6th Cavalry Group attached to the 26th Division.

Based on inconclusive evidence and confusion, suspicions arose that there might be two aircraft, two different dates, one Nov 1944 and one Jan 1945, at two separate locations, or one aircraft spread over several locations, or all the above. Prior knowledge of the crash was written in ET Melcher's book, Bombenangriffe Auf Luxembourg In Zwei Weltkriegen, page 280 (30 Nov, Eselborn) and J. Dernelen, Crash Band I, page 238 (Weicherdange 14 Jan-45), Band II, page 250 (Weicherdange 30 Nov 44). The only way to be sure was to recover evidence from the crash site to verify the aircraft identity and establish a fact-based account of events. An in-depth search of US government records, the Missing Aircrew Reports, and a look in the Boeing Flying Fortress Registry, data compiled by Joe Baugher, did not show a B-17 crashing or missing in the area of Weicherdange on 30-11-44, or around that time frame, B-17F or G model.

Something for thought: If this plane, or another B-17, had come down on 30-11-44, as stated in ET Melcher's book, and Crash Band II, Weicherdange 30 Nov 44, the US forces may have recorded it and secured the area, as the US forces occupied that area from 11 September 1944 to 18 December 1944. They would have also secured the crew and returned survivors to the home station. In mid-November 1944, the area was under the control of the 28th Division after exchanging combat zones with the 8th Infantry Division. To date, no reports have surfaced of support interactions from units in that area at the time of the said crash in November.

In the spring of 1945, a salvage company arrived to collect the engines. Before starting work, they roped off the area and warned locals to stay away due to the presence of munitions. Mr. Diederich has over the years acquired several pieces from the site. Among these, he found a piece bearing a data plate marked B-17F and dated 1943. He assumed that the plane was a B-17F, and this tag was displayed at the local military museum in Clervaux. At the museum, there was the piece of the exhaust with the plate and a card labeled "Engine piece, B-17F, crashed near 'Wolfshof' Eselborn, 30 Nov 1944," matching the details written by ET Melcher. A couple of issues with that were, one, the piece came from Weicherdange, not Eselborn and two, the piece does not identify the aircraft, type, or date built/delivered, only that this exhaust part was first built for a B-17F, April 28, 1944. Engine swapping occurred almost daily, as many F models were cannibalized, used as parts surplus from summer 1944 onward as they were old stock. The other confusion was that another piece was a chair, labeled as navigator chair, B-17F **Weicherdange** 3 November 1944. The chair is actually a radio operator's chair.



Clervaux museum, WWIIBRPG





This is a navigator's position and chair, as seen at its station, as compared to a radio operator's chair above.



The goal was to identify the site positively, of course hoping it was Bull Session. It was not the objective to prove others incorrect about what aircraft was there, but be 100% of what plane was on the ground based on conclusive evidence. Of course, post-war salvage had taken the best and primary identifiable components that would have identified the plane, such as serial numbers stamped on the machineguns, aircraft ID tag, vertical stabilizer, and engines.

Another dilemma that had to be resolved was that the aircraft on-site was said to be an "F" model, not a "G", as the aircraft Bull Session was a "G" model. As mentioned, the aircraft is said to be an "F" model based on the exhaust tag in the museum that states B-17F, April 1943. Engines were swapped an average of twice per week due to leaks, breakdowns, and component failures, etc. It is assumed that this plane may have had an engine swap at some time. If the engine data plate is found, it may lead to identifying the wreck with 100% positivity. This data tag contains all summary engine data, including the engine's serial number, which is recorded in the MACR (Missing Air Crew Report). A goal is to find one of these tags to verify against documents. It was thought that maybe if the number did not match the MACR, Bull Session may have had an engine change, but the documentation was not updated.



Engine change out, 91<sup>st</sup> BG, NARA

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | ORGANIZATION: Location <u>Air Station No. 121</u> Air Force <u>Eighth Air Force</u> .<br>Group <u>91st Bombardment Gp (H)</u> Squadron <u>32nd Bombardment Squadron</u> .                                                                                   |
| 2. | SCHEDULE: Place of Departure <u>Air Station 121</u> Course Route to <u>Koln, Germany</u> .<br>Target <u>Koln, Germany</u> Type of Mission <u>Bombardment</u> .                                                                                              |
| 3. | WEATHER CONDITIONS AND VISIBILITY AT TIME OF CRASH OR LAST SIGHTED: <u>No undercast, but a few scattered clouds. Visibility unlimited aloft.</u>                                                                                                            |
| 4. | GIVEN: (a) Day <u>14</u> Month <u>January</u> Year <u>1945</u> Location <u>50:02 N - 06:10 E</u> .<br>(b) Specify whether aircraft was last sighted ( ) ; Last contacted by radio ( ) ; Forced down ( ) ; Seen to crash (x) ; Information not available ( ) |
| 5. | AIRCRAFT WAS LAST, OR IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN LAST, AS A RESULT OF: (check only one) Enemy aircraft ( ) ; Enemy anti-aircraft (x) ; Other circumstances as follows:                                                                                        |
| 6. | AIRCRAFT: Type, Model, Series <u>B-17-G</u> Serial No. <u>43-38911</u>                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 7. | NICKNAME OF AIRCRAFT, if any: <u>"Bull Session"</u>                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 8. | ENGINE: Type, Model, Series <u>B-1820-97</u> Serial No. <u>43-38911</u>                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 9. | ENGINE: (a) <u>SW-030457</u> (b) <u>SW-030461</u> (c) <u>SW-030729</u> (d) <u>SW-030467</u>                                                                                                                                                                 |

MACR from Bull Session with engine serial numbers, NARA

After 4 months, the most important discovery of 2019 was the finding of one of the four engine data plates that would identify an engine by serial number. This found number did not match the engine numbers for Bull Session. The data plate suffered heavy damage, but was partially identified with a luminance bioscopy examination on Spangdahlem Air Base at the Non-Destructive Inspection (NDI) center; the number appears to be AF 43-63662 under AIR FORCES OR BUREAU NO and does not match any of the four engines of Bull Session. There will be more on engine tags and serial numbers in the coming articles about the discovery of the Bull Session site and the numbers found there.



The engine data plate was folded in half and suffered a scrape across the front over the serial number; this is why it was tested. It was still difficult to decipher the numbers; the numbers that were visible did not match any from Bull Session.

Other opportunities for discovery that may have led to the identification of the plane were not found; the key indicators still alluded to reveal the identity. Finally in 2020, the magic piece to confirm the identity of the plane came to light. After 2 years plus of searching and recovering thousands of small fragments, 400+ itemized artifacts by number in the parts listing. Thousands of pieces that are merely fragments having no diagnostic value, totaling approximately 345 kg of debris recovered.



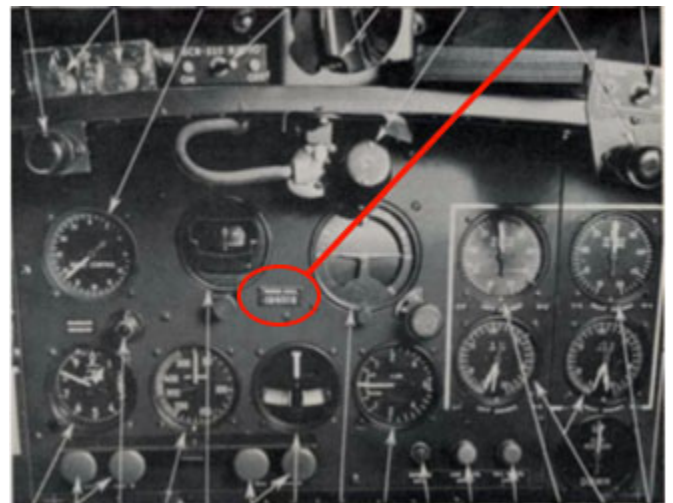
The discovery of the *radio call* plate led to the final definite identification of the plane and thus, the discovery of the mission and what happened to it and the crew. There still has been no MACR or mishap report found on this incident. Although it did not turn out to be Bull Session, a 75-year mystery has been resolved and records corrected. The number on the radio call plate revealed the aircraft number as 44-6141, with the name of "Sneakin Deacon". This aircraft was found to be from the 384th Bomb Group, 544th Bomber Squadron posted at Army Air Station 106, Grafton Underwood.



This aircraft, 44-6141, was lost on 30 November 1944, suffering damage during a bombing mission to Zeitz, Germany

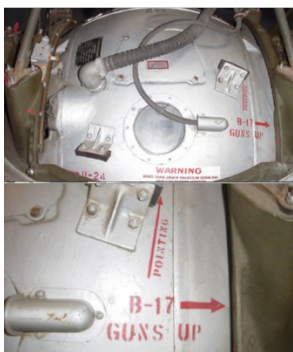
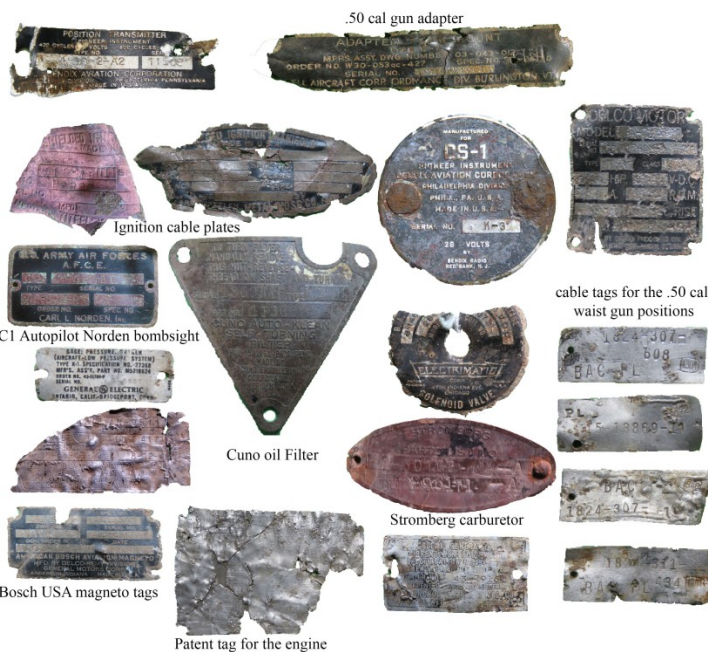
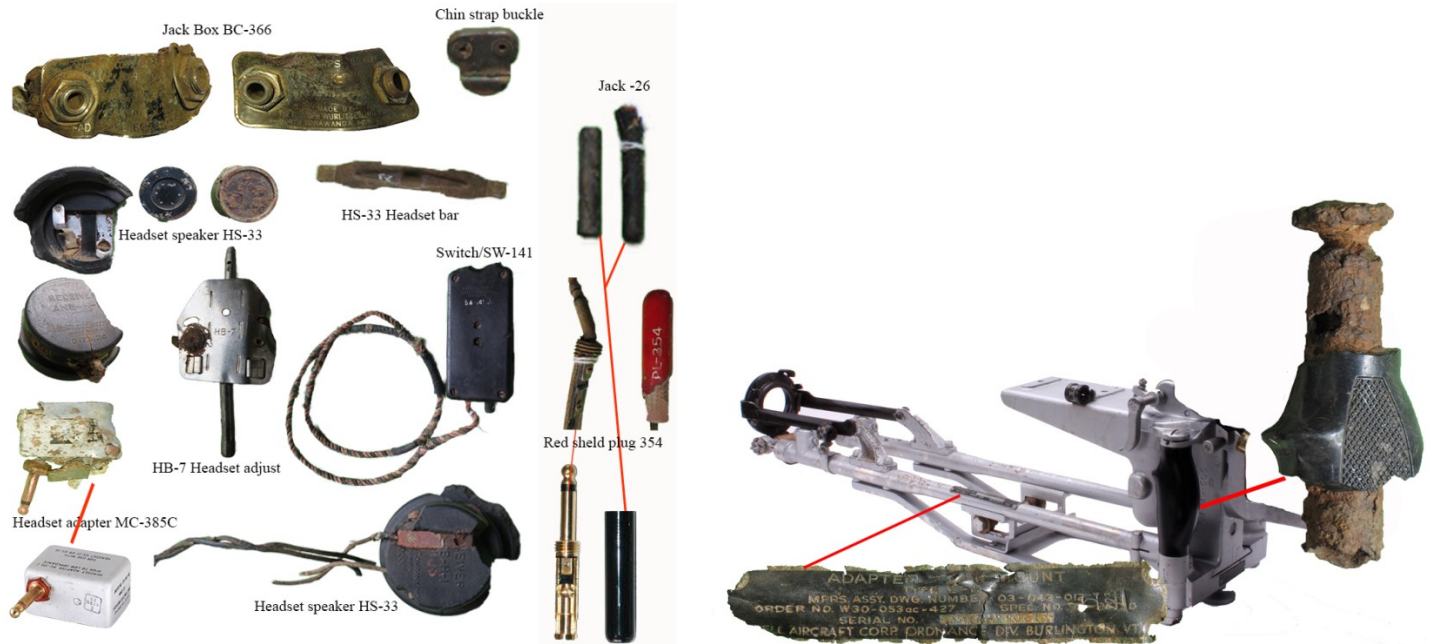
#### CREW DATA:

| POSITION       | CREWMEMBER               |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| PILOT          | FLESHMAN, WARREN GRAY    |
| CO-PILOT       | LANEY, JOHN NEAL         |
| NAVIGATOR      | COCHRAN, JOHN EDWARD, JR |
| TOGLIER        | DECKER, FLOYD VIRGIL     |
| RADIO OPERATOR | RICHARDSON, WILLIAM H    |
| ENG/TOP TURRET | WOODRUFF, WALTER C, JR   |
| BALL TURRET    | MITCHELL, OREAL H        |
| TAIL GUNNER    | GALETTA, ANTHONY J       |
| WAIST GUNNER,  | BAUMANN, FREDERICK H     |



For further detailed reading about this aircraft, you can download a copy of the final report at <https://www.wwiibrpg.org/projects> and the first articles of the DCK about the Bull Session series. It also appears in the new book by John Derneden, Crash III.

Here are some of the many artifacts recovered at the site. An exhaustive search for a place or museum to put these on public display has yielded no results, as there is no room at any local museum. Someday a solution may be found.



Ball Turret Section, found in Z-1

## References

### **Online sites**

384th Bombardment Group (Heavy) in World War II website

Boeing Flying Fortress Registry (2), data compiled by Joe Baugher

Fold3 Research, Black and White and Color Photographs of US Air Force Personnel World War II

Fold3 Research, Personnel files, draft records

NARA, German KU files, Kampfflugzeug Unterlagen (combat aircraft documentation) “Abschließende Meldung über Anfall von Luftwaffe-Feindgerät und gegnerischen Flugzeugbesatzungen” RG-242

The Luftwaffe Archives & Records Reference Group

Wikipedia

<https://www.boeing.com/history/products/b-17-flying-fortress.page>

USASC-USAAS-USAAC-USAAF-USAF Military Aircraft Serial Numbers--1908 to Present, <http://www.joebaugher.com>

### **In addition:**

John Derneden;

“CRASH” band I, 1999, B-17, 14 January 1945, Weicherdange “Gerbrantebierg” pg238.

“CRASH” band II, 30/11/44, B-17 Weicherdange, pg250, and pg. 245 30-11-44 Weicherdange, “Gebrantebierg”

E.T. Melcher’s BOMBENANGRIFFE AUF LUXEMBOURG IN ZWEI WELTKRIEGEN,  
pg. 280, 30-11-44, Eselborn, “Wolfshof”

Musée de la Bataille des Ardennes Clervaux