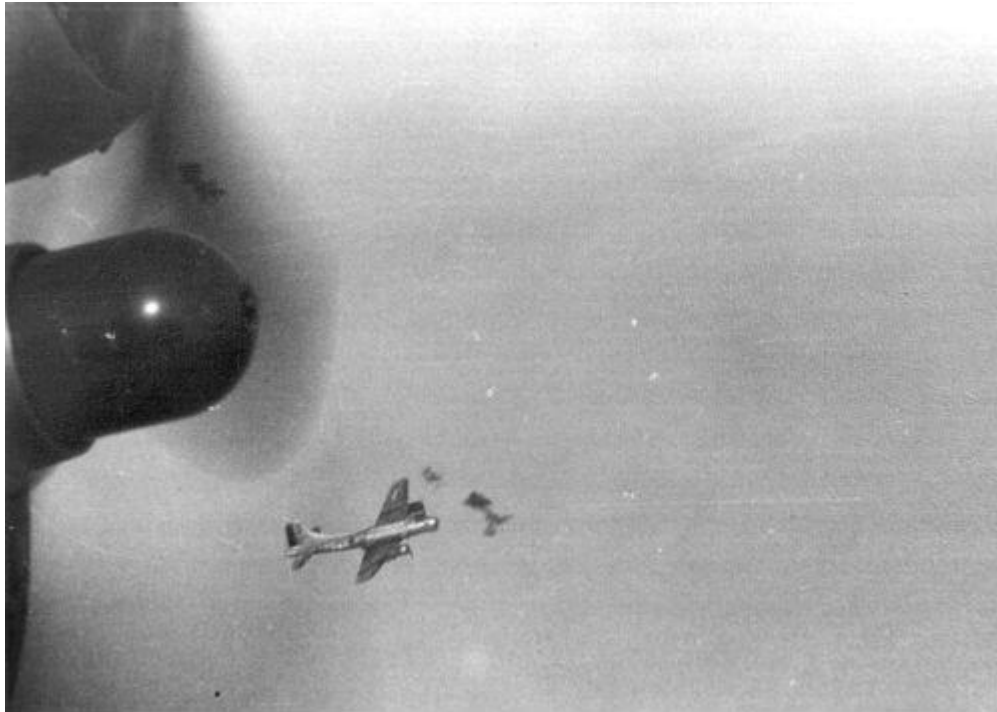


The Last Flight of B-17G #44-6470

By Janice Watterson Snyder
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This photo of B-17G 44-6470 was taken March 31, 1945, during its final mission. Moments before this photo was taken the aircraft had been hit by German ground fire and the Number 3 engine was blown off the plane. Within a few minutes of this picture being taken, the plane crashed. There was one survivor.

Photo from 100th Bomb Group Website Archives

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On 31 March 1945, the 100th Bombardment Group of the US Army's 8th Air Force, stationed at Thorpe Abbots, England, was assigned to bomb a synthetic oil plant near Zeitz, Germany. Due to prevailing winds, the mission plan called for the group to approach their target from the south, bomb the target, then make a left-hand turn to the west and proceed back to Thorpe Abbots.

The raid went well and only one aircraft was lost. That aircraft was B-17G #44-6470, piloted by Lt. Arthur G. Larsen. Larsen's aircraft was assigned to the 349th Bombardment Squadron of the 100th Bombardment Group. The mission crew of B-17 #44-6470 on 31 March 1945 was as follows:

1 st Lt. Arthur G. Larsen	pilot
1 st Lt. Thomas E. O'Neil	co-pilot
2 nd Lt. Dale F. Watterson	navigator
T/Sgt. Charles W. Dineen	togglier
T/Sgt. Raymond R. Bazata	top turret gunner/flight engineer
T/Sgt. Joseph M. Popson	radio operator/gunner
S/Sgt. Willard P. Bostrom	ball turret gunner
S/Sgt. Marvin F. Barner	waist gunner
S/Sgt. John E. Kaiser	tail gunner

One crewmember, Staff Sargent John E. Kaiser, Jr., the tail gunner, survived the mission. He parachuted from B-17 #44-6470, and was captured by the *Luftwaffe*. The US Army liberated him two weeks later. According to Sgt. Kaiser's statements and those of witnesses on other aircraft on the mission, Lt. Larsen's aircraft had just released its bombs when it was hit by German anti-aircraft fire (flak). The number three engine was blown completely off the aircraft and the number four engine was damaged. Lt. Larsen reported by radio that his number four engine was running away. The pilot of a B-17 following Larsen's plane reported he had to take evasive action to keep his plane from being hit by the number three engine from Larsen's plane, which flew over his aircraft with the propeller still turning. Larsen's plane began to lose altitude and began turning to the right. At this time the entire squadron broke up to avoid German flak.

When the flak hit, Sgt. Kaiser was at his position as tail gunner in the extreme rear of the aircraft and could not see if the aircraft was damaged. The flight engineer called on the intercom and asked if he was OK. He replied that he was fine. A second blast, which followed shortly, was very nasty and then he felt the plane turning to the right, heading for Russia, not left toward England. He guessed the plane was 1-2 miles north of Zeitz when it began to turn right. Witnesses in other aircraft reported the #3 engine was gone, and not only the engine, but the brackets and such that held it to the wing. "Like tearing the pocket off a pair of pants," one man described it. Witnesses said one third of the front of the right wing was gone where the engine had been connected. The photo of the plane taken just after it was hit, which appears at the beginning of this narrative, does not provide enough detail to make out much damage on the aircraft. From the picture it is clear the number 3 engine is gone.

John Kaiser said it started to get smoky in the plane. The plane was vibrating heavily following the second explosion. Sgt. Kaiser thought the plane could last perhaps five minutes, maybe less. The bailout bell never rang. On his own initiative, Sgt. Kaiser decided to bail out. He estimated it took him 4 to 5 minutes to get ready, put on a parachute and jump. He said the plane probably went down within a few minutes of his jumping. Sgt. Kaiser lost consciousness briefly during his descent due to lack of oxygen and he did not actually see the plane go down. He said he drifted over a German airfield and saw German aircraft hidden in nearby woods. He was captured by the *Luftwaffe* immediately upon landing.

Upon his capture, Sgt. Kaiser was imprisoned by the *Luftwaffe* at their base near Altenburg. In an interview he recalled the name of this base as, "Morbitz. Mobitz. Something like that." There was a *Luftwaffe* base called Nobitz just southeast of Altenburg. The present day *Regionalflughafen* (Regional Airport) Altenburg-Nobitz matches the position description provided by Sgt. Kaiser regarding his place of capture and imprisonment which he attested to during his de-briefing upon repatriation. A few days after his capture Sgt. Kaiser was given the wedding ring of Lt. Larsen by a German intelligence officer and was told the rest of the crew had been killed in a crash. Sgt. Kaiser believes the fact this German officer at Nobitz had the crew's personal effects is proof the plane came down nearby. If his distance and time estimates are accurate, the plane probably came down a few miles southeast of Altenburg.

In a telephone interview of August 19, 2001, John Kaiser repeated his concern that the official report of his debriefing statement was in error. He was debriefed twice, and did not see the first officer take any notes while the second merely jotted down a few words and wrote the statement later. John did not see the official report until it was forwarded to him in 2000. John specifically and adamantly states that the dog tags and Lt. Larsen's wedding ring were at Altenburg-Nobitz. The basket of dog tags at the Weimar guard house was a different event. John was never held at Weimar, but kept in the guard house at Altenburg-Nobitz. This supports the crash happening near the air base where John was taken and detained. As well as John can remember, the Intelligence Officer talked to John about the crash and dog tags, 5 to 12 days from date of capture.

The B-17 was a large aircraft by 1945 standards. It was powered by four large radial engines, each of which had a three-bladed propeller. When seated in the pilot's seat, these engines were numbered one through four, beginning with the outer engine on the pilot's left and continuing to the outer engine on the pilot's right. When the number three engine was blown completely off B-17 #44-6470 and the number four engine was damaged, all power on the right-hand side of the aircraft was gone. Larsen's turn to the right after his aircraft was hit was probably not by choice. Considering the damage reported and the loss of power on the right side, the B-17 would have become dynamically unstable and would have pulled hard to the right. An aircraft in such condition would most likely continue turning to the right, while the crew tried to bring it straight. The most likely net result would be a slow, curving path to the right. Due to the loss of power and drag, the speed of the aircraft would have slowed markedly during all this. Maintaining altitude and bringing the plane back to straight and level flight would have been very difficult. Indeed, this scenario is consistent with eyewitness reports of the final sightings of Lt. Larsen's plane.

In addition to the loss of power on the right side of the aircraft, the hole caused by the loss of the engine would have caused considerable drag on the right side of the plane, causing further difficulty controlling it. Also, Larsen reported his Number 4 engine "running wild." Normal procedure was to feather the engine in such circumstances to reduce drag. The pilot had a narrow window to do this, fifteen to twenty seconds before hydraulic feathering control was lost. If the pilot was unable to feather the engine the drag on it would cause severe vibration. Sargent Kaiser reported the aircraft was vibrating wildly prior to his bailout. To add to Larsen's problems, with the loss of the #3 engine and its mounting brackets, the right main landing gear would also have been lost, since it was housed behind the number three engine nacelle. Damage severe enough to blow an engine off the aircraft undoubtedly did serious damage to the main support structure in the right wing. Such a situation almost invariably led to loss of the wing and the plane spinning uncontrollably to the ground. Landing a B-17 safely in this condition would have been impossible.

Of the eight men killed in the crash of B-17 #44-6470 only one body was ever recovered and identified. An OQMG Form 371 contained in the Individual Deceased Personnel File (IDPF) of T/Sgt. Charles W. Dineen, the toggler on B-17 #44-6470, states that his body was recovered from "Hospital Hohenstein-Ernstthal, Germany." According to information contained in his IDPF, after recovery his body was moved to Utzberg, Germany, for temporary burial, then was subsequently moved to St. Avold, France, where his remains are permanently interred in the American Cemetery, Plot N, Row 17, Grave 1932. Sgt. Dineen's IDPF states his body was badly mangled, with several major bones broken, but was not burned. The condition of Sgt. Dineen's body is

consistent with that of a person killed in an aircraft crash. Sgt. Dineen's remains were positively identified using dental charts.

The fate of the other seven crewmembers remains unknown. However the IDPF of Lt. Larsen indicates that "political" considerations stopped the search for the bodies of other crewmembers. This area was in the Russian Zone of Germany. Lt. Larsen's IPDF indicated the aircraft probably went down south, or southeast of Chemnitz. This turned out to be incorrect. Given the probable route of B-17 #44-6470 after it was damaged, Sgt. Kaiser's capture near Altenburg, and the recovery of Sargent Dineen's body from a graveyard near the town of Hohenstein-Ernstthal, researchers concluded the aircraft went down west of Chemnitz.

Hohenstein-Ernstthal is a town about 17 miles (27km) southeast of Altenburg, and about 3 miles (5 km) west of Chemnitz. John A. Hey, a researcher who specializes in crashes involving aircraft of the US 8th and 9th Army Air Forces, has obtained recent information that involves this aircraft. Here is what Mr. Hey wrote:

"(Mrs. Sabine Gunther, Archivist of Hohenstein-Ernstthal in Germany) has published a compact story of the loss of the B-17 in a newspaper in the area with the request for comments. Some people reacted and confirmed that the aircraft flew from north to south and crashed in fields near Oberlungwitz. Eye witnesses told that they saw 4 or 7 parachutes. An SS-company searched the area with dogs and warned civilians that they would be shot when they gave shelter to the airmen. In the afternoon the Volkssturm (a sort of Home Guard) had put guards around the crash site.

"Two witnesses declared (independently of each other) that only one body was recovered from the wreckage. The B-17 should have cartwheeled on the ground and then smashed. The body of the airman was taken to the mortuary at Oberlungwitz by a farmer on a horse-drawn cart. It is presumed that this was Dineen, but on the cemetery of Oberlungwitz is any proof that the man has been buried there (sic)."

The actual crash site is near the small town of Oberlungwitz, which is on the southern outskirts of Hohenstein-Ernstthal. Maps of this part of Germany are shown on the following pages with the Altenburg-Nobitz airfield and Hohenstein-Ernstthal marked, along with the probable route of the stricken aircraft. The last map shows the actual crash area in more detail.

The events described above are based on recent interviews with John Kaiser, details contained in Missing Air Crew Report #13714, and the Individual Deceased Personnel File of T/Sgt. Charles W. Dineen. Information has also been obtained from personal diaries of witnesses, the description of the loss of this aircraft on page 192 of *Century Bombers* by Richard Le Strange, and research conducted in Europe by John A. Hey of Holland and Horst Giegling of Germany.

Update: In the summer of 2002, Mr. Giegling was informed that a US Mortuary Services team would go to Chemnitz in August and interview the eyewitness to the burial. Nothing was done but in January, 2003, Mark Baldwin of Mortuary Services contacted Janice Watterson Snyder requesting all information gathered including IDPF's, MACR, and reports from German eyewitnesses. No word has come from Mark Baldwin since a brief email the end of January. On May 15, the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office assigned Lieutenant Colonel Suzanne Walker as the Army Casualty Office Representative for this file. Contact with that office is now being made. (May 23, 2003)

June 23, 2003

Lt. Col. Suzanne Walker, U.S. Army Repatriation and Family Affairs Division, contacted Janice Snyder with the following information.

“I have forwarded your inquiry to the experts at the United States Army Central Identification Laboratory Hawaii (CILHI) for their review and analysis. They are responsible for processing and investigating each case and determining if and when recovery operations can be undertaken...I am sure that the World War research and analysis section at CILHI will capitalize on your efforts and proceed with determination of the next steps.”

At this time, Lt. Col. Walker requested a copy of the data as sent to Mark Baldwin, and a Family Reference Sample of mitochondrial DNA. She also invited the family to the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office Family Member Update Meeting to be held in Seattle in August 2003.

Jun 28, 2003

At the Town Meeting for Congressional Representative Jay Inslee, Janice talked with a member of his staff, Olivia Robinson, who specializes in Veterans Affairs. Previously, a packet of information and a request for assistance had been made to the Congressman. At this date, Ms. Robinson stated that she had contacted the Pentagon and personnel there were definitely interested and would take the case of AC #44-6470 under advisement.

July 3, 2003

Lt. Col. Walker requested assistance in locating mtDNA donors from Dale's family in case remains were found. Three eligible relatives have offered to be donors and will be contacted by Family Affairs.

August 11, 2003

Janice contacted family members of Raymond R. Bazata, the flight engineer and top turret gunner on the aircraft. Helen Bazata Uher (Raymond's sister) agreed to be a mtDNA donor. Her name was forwarded to Suzanne Walker.

August 23, 2003

FAMILY UPDATE FOR POW/MIA ACCOUNTING Meeting in Seattle, WA. We have been advised that the Defense Joint Personnel Recovery Agency will look into the information we have provided them and, if justified, will initiate recovery operations in Germany. The case should be considered re-opened with Lt. Col. Suzanne Walker, Chief, Repatriation and Family Affairs as acting liaison.

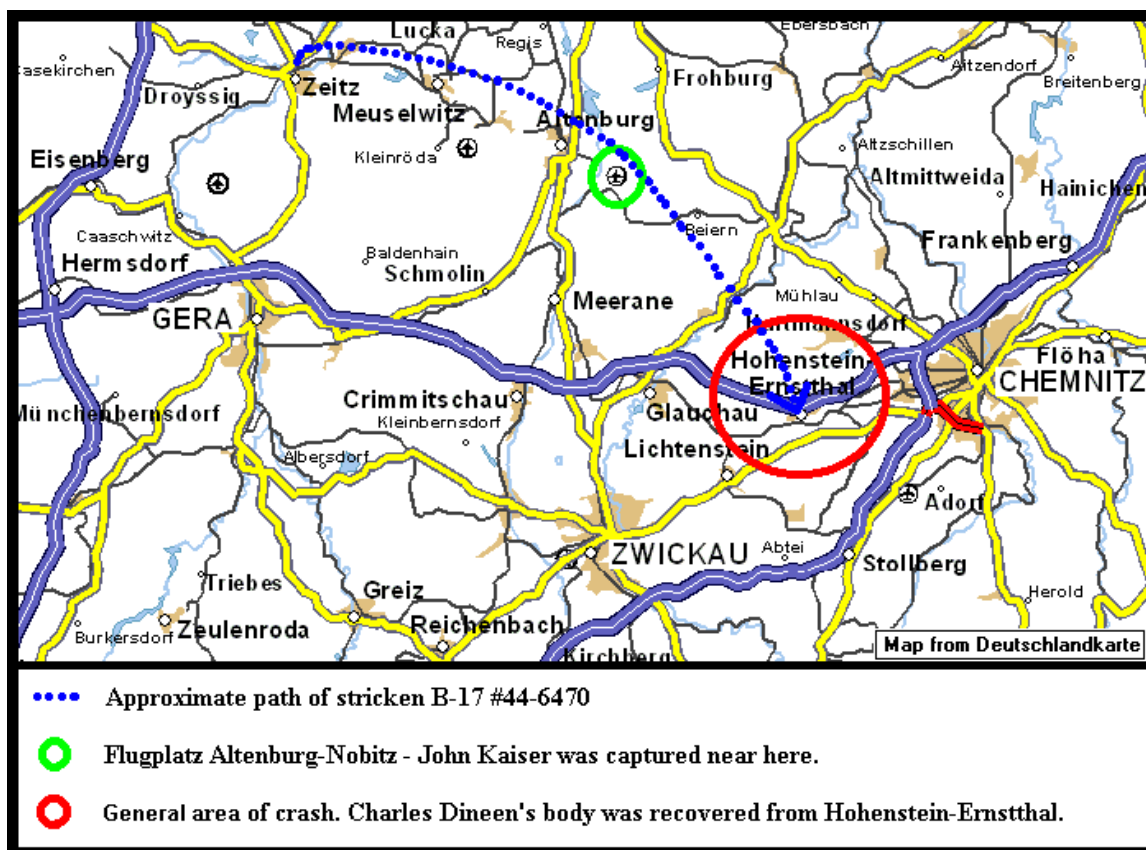
The red circle on map to the right shows Germany where the events of this

the general area of narrative occurred.

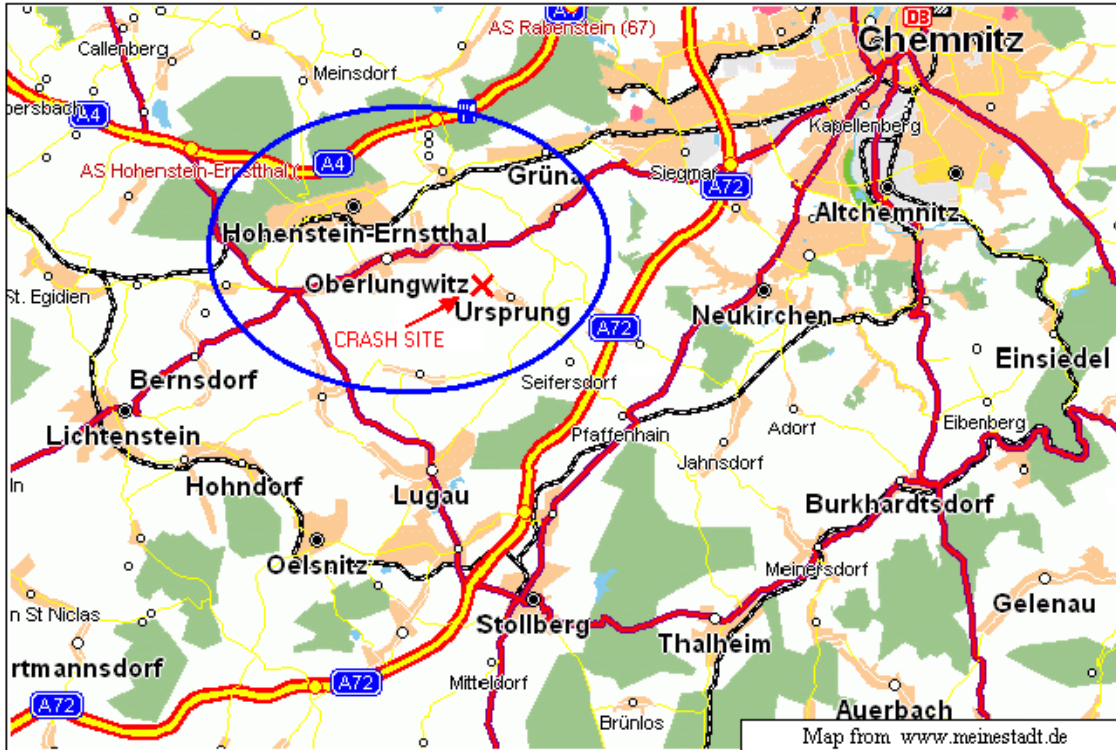


The map below shows more detail of south of Leipzig, including the towns of Hohenstein-Ernstthal, and Chemnitz.

the area of Germany Zeitz, Altenburg,



This map shows the exact location of the crash site.



The crash site identified on the map above is based upon on-site research by Mr. Horst Giegling, a German researcher. Mr. Bauer and Mrs. Müller, administrative officials from the town of Oberlungwitz, assisted him in locating the site. Photos of the site were taken November 27, 2000, and only recently was the information connected to our research. This site is within the circle of previous speculation. Fragments of the aircraft have been recovered from the crash site and I now have in my possession a small metal part from the plane.

UPDATE OCTOBER 2013

There were no Family Updates in the West Coast for 2011 or 2012. In 2013, Janice Watterson Snyder was in touch with the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office but was unable to attend the Spokane JPAC meeting due to health issues. She was sent a report on the current status of my father, Dale Franklin Watterson. This report acknowledges the research of Mr. John A Hey, Research Team at the Liberation Museum at Grosbeck, and Mr. Horst Geigling, a German Researcher who located the AC#44-6470 and conferred with JPAC Personnel.

In summary, the report states:

NEXT STEPS: This case is currently on the Master Excavation List (MEL) at JPAC, unscheduled but slated for future excavation. For individuals not recovered, AGRC investigators compared physical identification features and circumstantial information regarding the approximate time and location of each loss with unidentified remains collected. Thousands of unknown remains had been collected by the AGRC. These unidentified remains, often consisting of only partial bodies or skeletons, were labeled with an "X" and a number. These are commonly referred to as "X-files." Many X-file remains were positively identified, usually through dental records. Others remained unknown despite AGRC attempts to make identifications. Analysts and historians at both DPMO and JPAC are currently in the process of reviewing these "X-files." The details of 2d Lt Watterson's loss will be compared with the information within the "X-files" of all unknown burials in American cemeteries in this region of Europe for possible correlation. To date, none of the X-files assessed by DPMO personnel in conjunction with this case thus far that were recovered in the area between Zeitz and Oberlängwitz appear to be connected to MACR 13714.

The details of 2d Lt Watterson's loss continue to be researched and tracked by analysts at both the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (Washington D.C.) and the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (Hawaii). Any new information these agencies receive regarding possible aircraft debris sites or reported isolated burials in the Oberlängwitz region will be compared against the details of 2d Lt Watterson's loss for possible correlation.

May 2013
NKE

Civilians continue to research the Loss of AC # 64-6470 and the seven man crew. Families have been waiting for almost 70 years.

CASE SUMMARY Aug 26, 2014 report from Army

To date, there are still seven airmen unaccounted for from MACR 13714. The witness information provided by Mrs. Watterson suggesting that S Sgt Kaiser was not the only crew member to successfully bailout of the plane must also be considered. If between four and seven additional parachutes were seen leaving the aircraft near the town of Ursprung, as her research suggests, this could account for some or all of the missing crew members from the B-17. If this is the case, then recovery of remains from the aircraft crash site becomes more unlikely. If any of the men other than S Sgt Kaiser did successfully bailout, it is also possible (as Mrs. Watterson has suggested), that they were captured and executed. Unfortunately, the nature of this type of crime makes it extremely difficult to trace. To date, DPMO historians have not found any evidence that members of this crew were the victims of such war crimes.

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August 2014
NKE

DPAA CASE REVIEW FAMILY UPDATE 2016

In January 2015, JPAC and DPMO merged to form the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA). From 27 June to 31 July 2015, a DPAA recovery team led by an archaeologist conducted an assessment and limited recovery operations at the crash site in Oberlungwitz associated with MACR 13714 as the JPAC team that investigated the area in 2007 recommended. The recovery team focused on defining the site boundaries and identifying areas that contained evidentiary material. The archaeologist suspended activities at the site at the end of July due to the end of the mission but recommended maintaining the site's status as open to continue the archaeological assessment on a future mission. All material recovered at the site

was accessioned into the DPAA laboratory and is currently undergoing analysis.¹⁶

In January and February 2016, DPAA historians conducted research in the German Federal Archives in Berlin-Lichterfelde, which houses the records of former East Germany. The historians conducted research on war graves and exhumations but found no records of U.S. or unidentified deceased that may be associated with MACR 13714.

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NEXT STEPS: This case is currently on the Master Excavation List (MEL) at DPAA, slated but not yet scheduled for further archaeological testing and assessment. The details of 2d Lt Watterson's loss will also be compared against the forensic features of unidentified sets of remains collected after the war and currently buried as Unknowns in American cemeteries. To date, none of these remains assessed by DPAA personnel in conjunction with this case thus far that were recovered in the area between Zeitz and Oberlungwitz appear to be associated with MACR 13714.

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March 2016
RLR