

# July , 26 th. 1944

.....western of St. Jakob im Walde (AUSTRIA)

MACR :7138 St. Jakob im Walde

MACR :7129 St. Jakob im Walde

MACR : 7000 Alland area

MACR : 7123 Langenwang- Pretulgraben

MACR : 7124 Strallegg

MACR : 7127 St. Kathrein a. Hauenstein

**MACR : 7135 Ratten**

MACR : 7136 Stinatz

MACR : 7141 Prein a.d. Rax

MACR : 7142 Strallegg

MACR : 7143 Alland area



**B17- G “ Flying Fortress “**

**Ing. Christian Arzberger**

## „Who Fears ?“ - The 301st In War and Peace 1942 –1979, Kenneth P. Werrell (P 179)

..... Luftwaffe fighters initially attacked the formation about 60 miles southwest of Vienna.

Perhaps Second Lieutenant **Otto Rinderknecht`s** bomber was the first aircraft hit.

Fifteen minutes prior to the target , he fell back from the formation because of a bad engine that forced him to feather the propeller. Rinderknecht headed for Switzerland . He did not make it as GAF fighters jumped the crippled Boeing, setting two engines on fire and forcing the crew to bail out. Seven or eight chutes were observed.

At approximately the same time, German fighters tore into the trailing squadron of the formation and quickly downed four bombers. Three B-17s fell from the formation with engine fires and aircraft piloted by First Lieutenant **Alonzo Martin** and Second Lieutenant **Charles Starling** (Barr Fly) also had fires inside their aircraft and went into spins before breaking up. Four to six chutes were seen coming from Martins plane and none from Starling`s.

Second Lieutenant **James Lilligren`s** ship was hit in the right wing, he had the vertical stabilizer almost completely shot off and had one engine on fire. It was last seen burning and spinning, with three to four chutes visible.

According to one survivor of First Lieutenant **Ralph Delonney`s** Fort : „ the plane was all full of holes, you could see the sky almost any place “ . With the plane on fire and out of control, he bailed out , one of two survivors of the crew.

Second Lieutenant **John Sullivan`s** Fort(ress) had fires in one engine and the fuselage, and completed a roll before it exploded. No chutes were seen.

First Lieutenant **Robert McManaman`s** , First Lieutenant **Richard Luebke`s** and Second Lieutenant **Leo McDonald`s** bombers all left the formation on fire.

The first one stalled before three chutes were observed. The second had seven chutes and the third was spinning downward, with only one chute observed .

A few minutes later and just short of the target, Second Lieutenant **David Kerr`s** number four engine right wing and cockpit were set afire. The bomber stalled , went out of control and then collided with First Lieutenant **Ernest Howell`s** B-17. An explosion destroyed both aircraft and killed seventeen of the twenty men onboard.

## CREW OF B17 G 42 – 31625 (BS 419)

Crash site: Ratten/ Austria, soccer field – Herbitschek Company

MACR 7135

### KILLED IN ACTION (July 26th.1944) :

- **Vernon D. Thompson, Co Pilot (CA USA)** ID 0-765355 buried: Golden Gate Cem./CA
- **John C. Stever, Navigator (IO USA)** ID 0-757837 buried in St. Avold/ France
- **Johnnie D. Tracer, Bombardier (AR USA)** ID 38451140 buried: Ardennen/Belgium
- **Jesse E. Brenneman, B. T. Gunner (KS USA)** ID 37537162
- **Edwin K. Bishop, Waist Gunner (MO USA )** ID 38512465
- **Herbert J. Herring, Tail Gunner (TX USA)** ID 38069821 buried: Ardennen/Belgium

### SURVIVORS:

- **James P. Lilligren, Pilot (MN USA,1922)** ID 0-551897
- **Richard A. Longo, Engineer/ Gunner (OH USA)** ID 15113562 (+ 2003)
- **Charles J. Allison, Radio Operator (IL USA)** ID 36480748
- **Ira E. Lewis, Waist Gunner (CA USA)** ID 39298268



James P.Lilligren 2002



James P.Lilligren 1943



**J.P. Lilligren Crew**

standing, rear from left to the right : Lt.J.P.Lilligren, V.D. Thompson, D. Nelson \*,Green \*

front row from left to the right : E.K. Bishop, H.J. Herring, C.J. Allison, I.E. Lewis, J.E. Brenneman, R.A. Longo

\* .....not on the mission July 26 th.1944

## **Biography of James Lilligren, 1922, B17 Pilot, crashed in Ratten / Austria** (source: [www.axpow.org](http://www.axpow.org))

I was a B-17 Pilot in the 15th Air Force, 301st Bomb Group (H), 419 Bomb Squadron.

I was flying my 18th mission on July 26, 1944. We were the last group in the entire 15th Air Force.

Our target was the Engine Assembly Plant, Wiener Neudorf, Austria, just south of Vienna.

Shortly after entering the Austrian border we were attacked by 100 enemy FW-190s, ME-109s and ME-210s, lined up in waves behind us firing 20MM Canons and 50 Caliber Machine Guns.

Our P-51 escorts did not meet our formation as planned.

Our B-17 was hit by many 20MM and 50 caliber shells setting the nose section on fire as well as the left wing.

It seemed the entire aircraft was on fire. I later learned from the Pilot of another B-17 that the entire tail section was shot off of our plane. Of the ten members of the crew, only four survived.

In addition to the Engineer, who bailed out immediately, my Radio Operator bailed out but was badly burned, one Waist Gunner made it and me. I was badly burned, losing all my hair and injuring my ankles badly upon landing.

My Co-Pilot left his seat and went back through the bomb bay toward the rear.

One Waist Gunner refused to jump and the efforts of the Radio Operator and the other Waist Gunner to get him to jump were futile. Apparently my Co-Pilot was able to get him out of the aircraft by hanging on to him but was unable to pull the ripcord on his chest chute. My Co-Pilot was found dead on the ground with a person, presumably the Waist Gunner, wrapped around him. As I was coming down in my parachute, an FW-190 began circling me. I was sure he was going to shoot me as that is what they had been doing.

As the FW-190 was circling me a P-51 took after the FW-190.

I heard an explosion and the P-51 came by wagging his wings to let me know all was well. I believe I owe my life to him.

The P-51 was from Squadron 332 of the Tuskegee Airmen who came to our aid after our escort did not arrive.

I spent the remainder of the war in Stalag Luft 1, Barth, Germany.

The Russian Army liberated us and we were flown out by B-17's to Camp Lucky Strike, France for our return to the U.S.A. It took several weeks for the Russians to release us and we recently learned that the Russians wanted to send us to Russia to help rebuild their country.

On August 10, 1945 Lois Erickson and I were married. We had been engaged before I went overseas.

We have had a wonderful marriage. We have two daughters, a son, a foster daughter and eight grandchildren.

We lived in Manhattan Beach, CA for 32 years, moving to Fresno, CA in 1979.

We are both retired, enjoying our grandchildren and traveling each summer in our motorhome.

## **NARRATIVE REPORTS OF WITNESSES :**

**Johann Tösch (Ratten, born 1930) remembers a burning B17 out of control. The plane exploded and broke apart just before the impact.**

**The burning fuselage was extinguished by Ferdinand Gatschelhofer with a hand operated water pump. He saved the wooden house just a few meters near the crash site.**

**One survivor of the crew landed near the Spiegelbauer farm.**

**Mrs. Erna Dampfhofer (born 1935 , Ratten, Grubbauer 65) confirms the memories of J. Tösch and remembers that the fuselage hit the ground just a few meters beside their house. She remembers the terrible smell caused by the fire. Survivors of the Lilligren crew landed near the church and were captured by the authorities .**

**The killed crewmembers were buried in the local cemetery beside the church and exhumed after war.**

**Cäcilia Doppelhofer (born ca. 1925 St. Jakob, Schaberreiter –Spiegelbauer) sat beside the crew member in their house. Her mother provided him with food.**

**The family received a complaint because of this aid from their neighbor .**

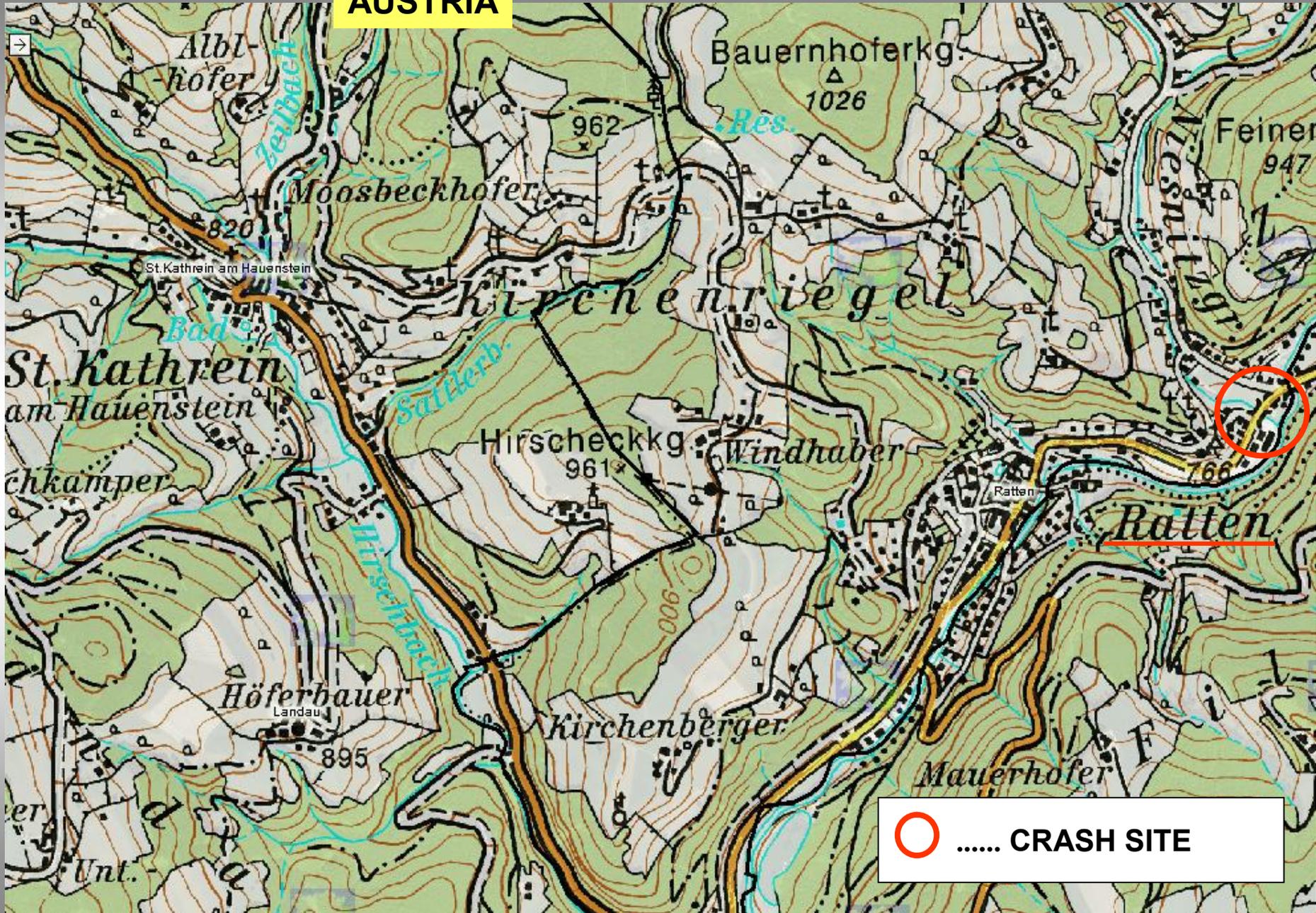
**She remembers that the airman landed with his parachute near their home in the wood.**

**He got rid of the strings and walked to the near farm house. The American was arrested later by the authorities.**

**Because of the nearness from the landing site to the crash site the man was likely member of the Lilligren crew.**

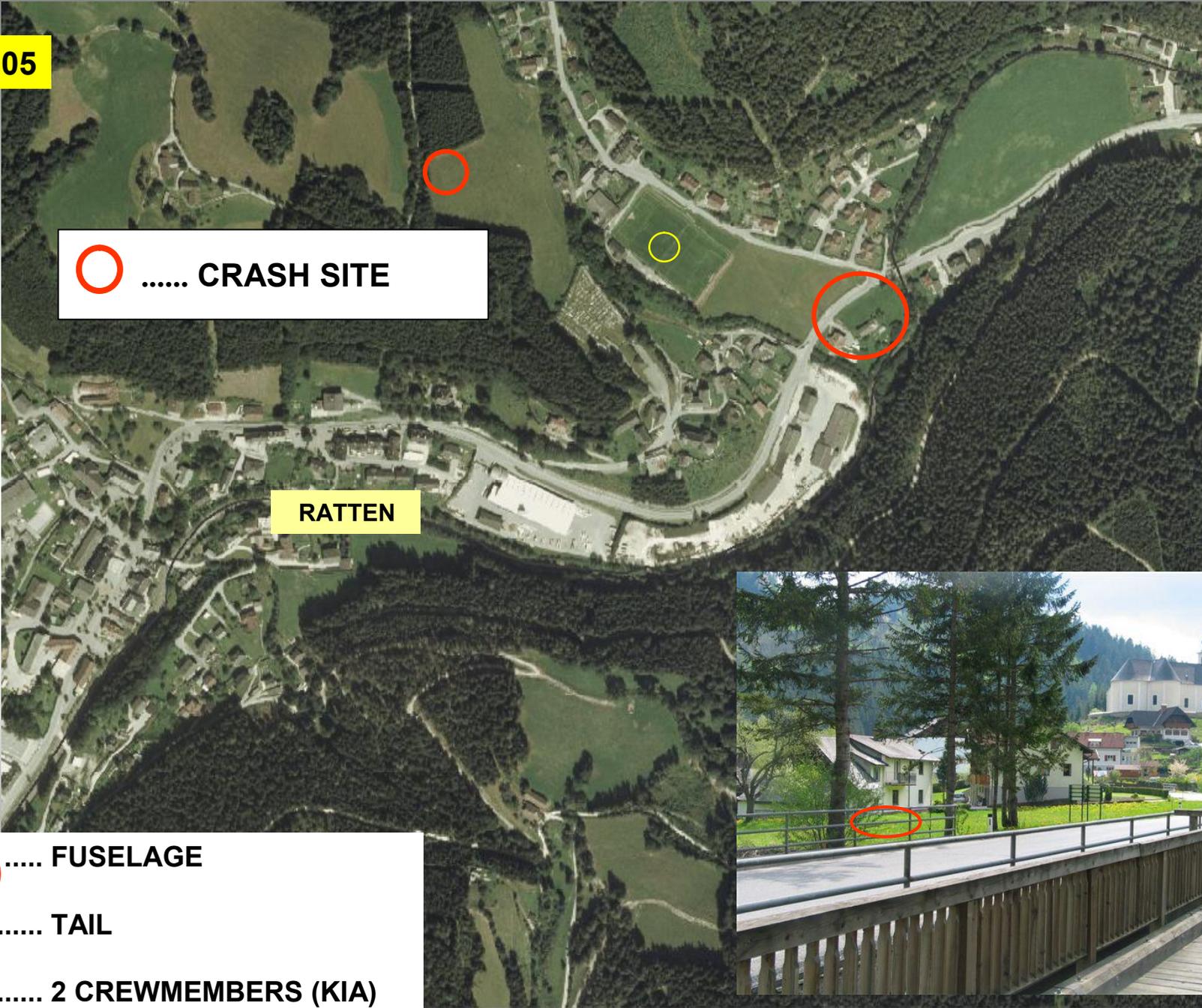
**Mrs. Doppelhofer remembers the American very well and is sure that the man she recognized on the crew photograph in 2008 is James Lilligren.**

**AUSTRIA**



 ..... CRASH SITE

2005



..... CRASH SITE

RATTEN

- ..... FUSELAGE
- ..... TAIL
- ..... 2 CREWMEMBERS (KIA)



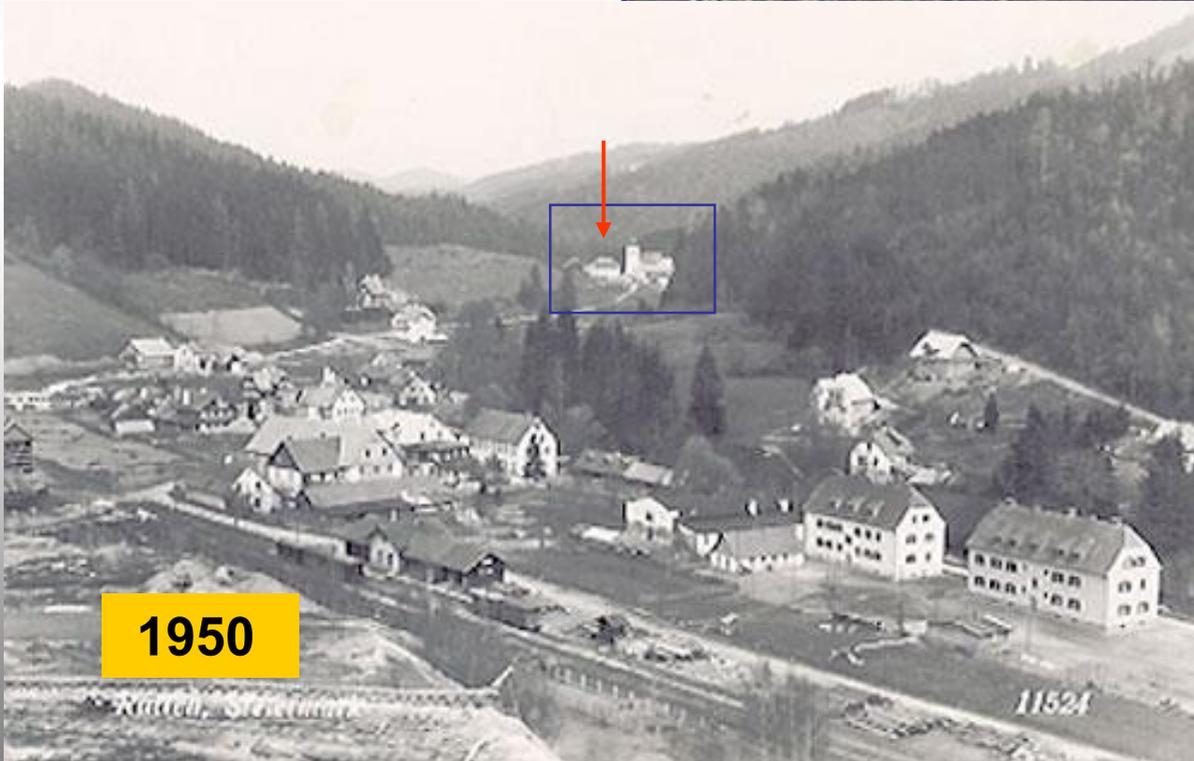
2008

# RATTEN

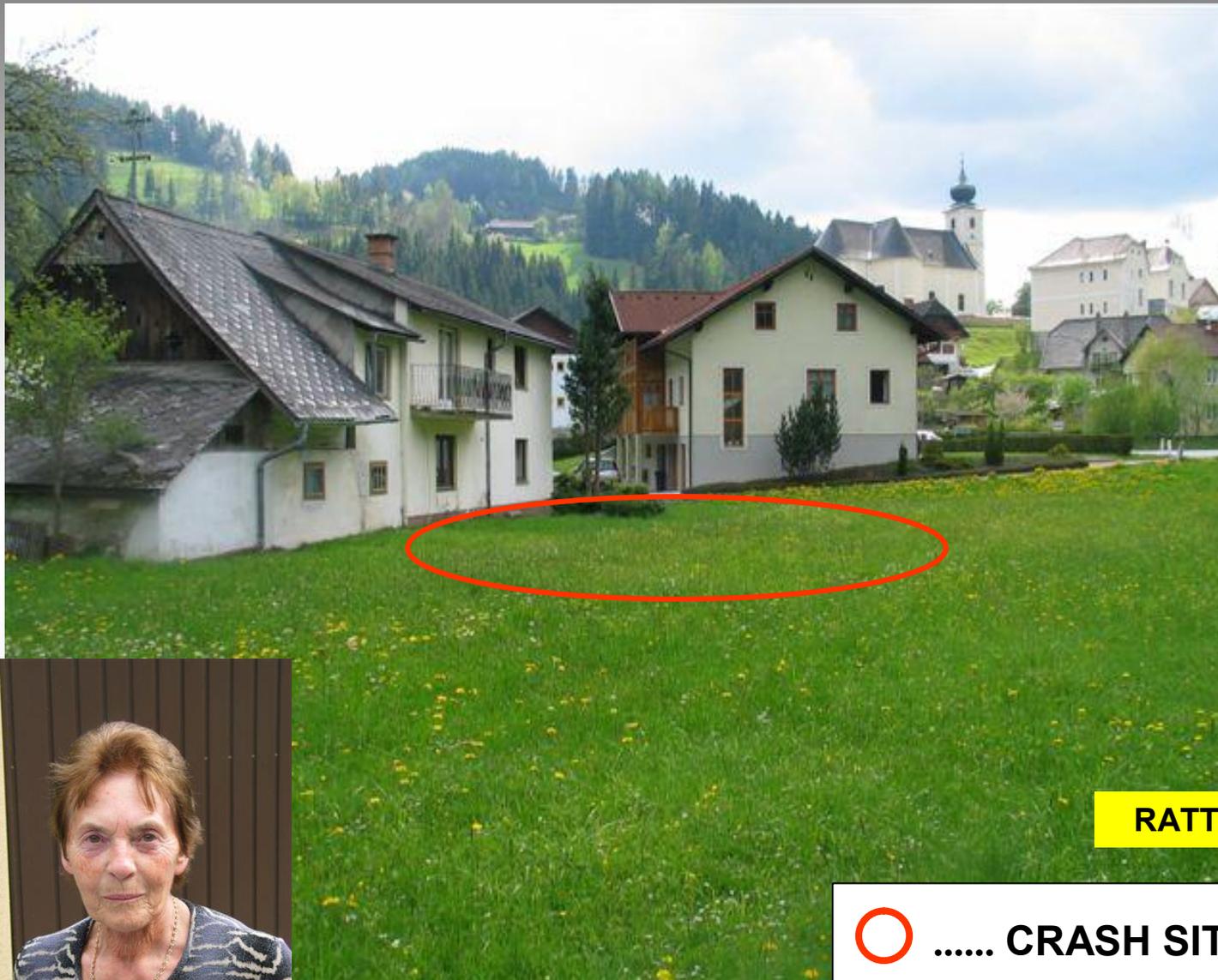


..... CRASH SITE

Ratten. 765 Meter.



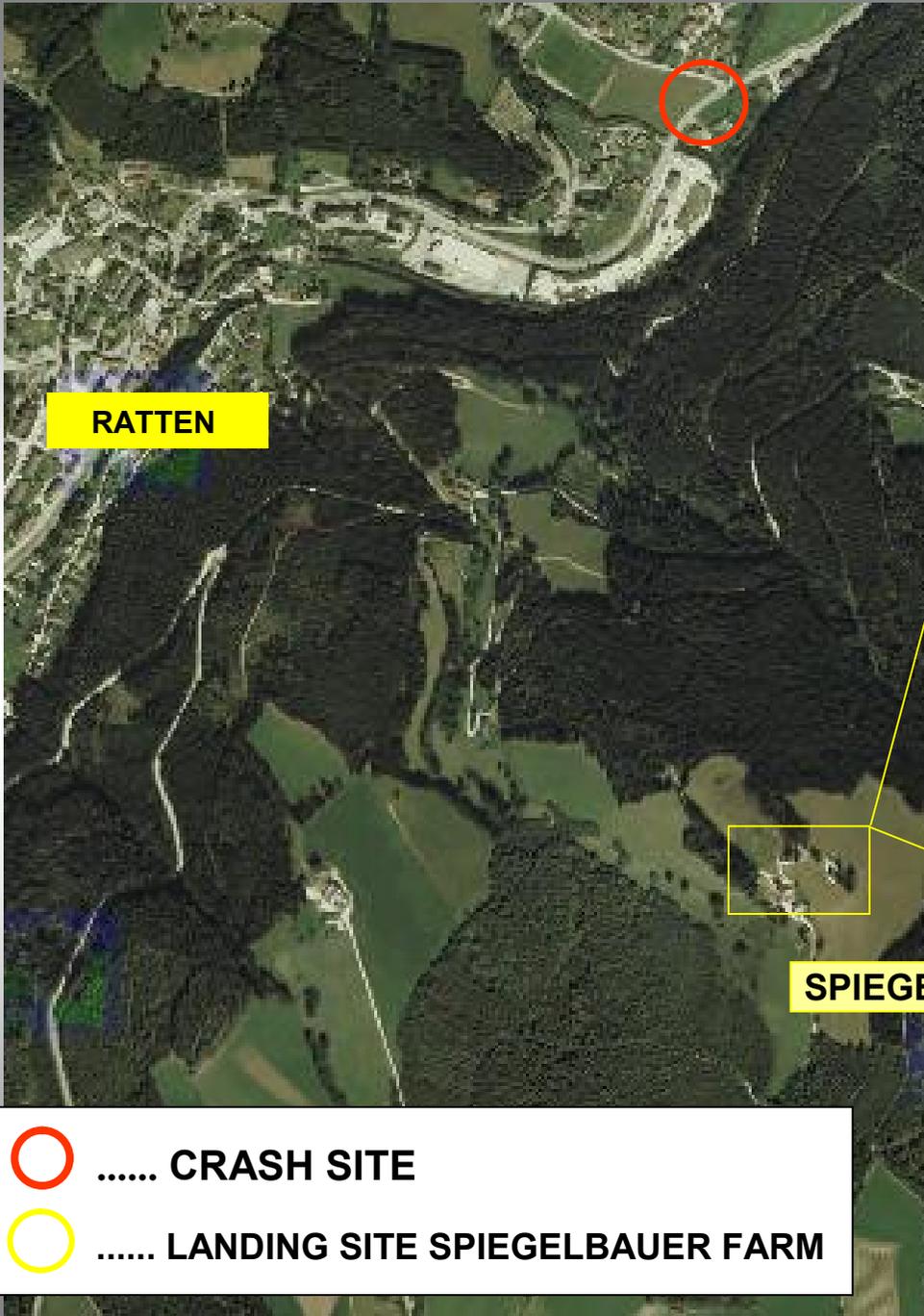
1950



**RATTEN 2008**

**○ ..... CRASH SITE**

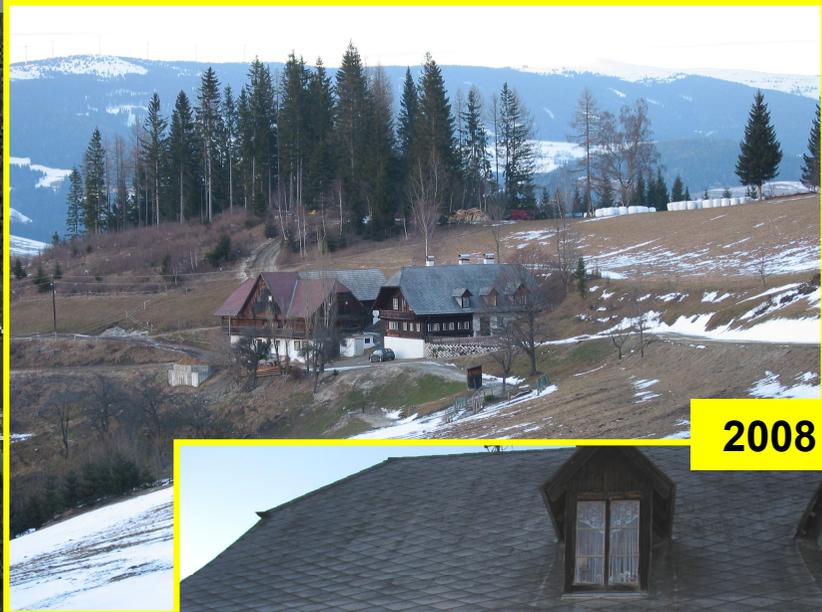
**Mrs. Erna Dampfhofer became witness of the crash on July 26th.1944. She was in the building close to the crash site and saw the flames through the window.**



RATTEN

SPIEGELBAUER

- ..... CRASH SITE
- ..... LANDING SITE SPIEGELBAUER FARM



2008



2005