

“Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering, Me and Dean Black”

My favourite quote - Ecclesiastes: AThe race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all.

My favourite movie – The Never Ending Story”

When Terry asked me several weeks ago to address you tonight I was at a loss. I had already been your guest four years ago.

Valerie Evans had covered all my 1939-1946 shenanigans in 250 Wing’s **“We that are left...,Remember”**.

1994, Michael Alder produced “The Lucky Ones” Allied Airmen in Buchenwald for the National Film Board

Then, Mike Dorsey (his grandfather E.C. “Easy” Freeman was KLB78359), a filmmaker of note from California, was in Weimar three years ago with a few of us for the 65th final commemoration of the liberation of Buchenwald and produced **“Lost Airmen of Buchenwald”**. This much-praised documentary is now available on Netflix.

Well! I thought. I have a number of snippets, taken from that wonderful book of remembrance, **“They Shall Grow Not Old”**, published by The Commonwealth Air Training Plan Museum Inc. Perhaps these would be of interest!

Then fate stepped in to give me a sequel to my previous presentation!

A 69 year-old mystery solved

Just a month ago today (19 March) Mike Dorsey e-mails us – “it seems our friend Marilyn Walton and a book have solved the mystery of the Luftwaffe officer who got the airmen out of Buchenwald. It was buried in the book “A Higher Call,”

What a story – many of you have probably seen its background on the internet about the famous German Fighter ace, Franz Stigler who took pity on Charlie Brown’s B17, “Ye Olde Pub”, shattered after bombing Bremen and refrained from giving it the “coup de grace”, which he could have delivered so easily; he even trying to point way to nearby Sweden. In fact, it was his presence that got them through the intensive coastal flak batteries. Too confused to understand his gestures they kept on going and miraculously staggered back to the UK.

Brotherhood of war, an act of compassion and chivalry worthy of the Knights of old.

After the war Franz emigrates; comes to Canada in 1953: through friends at Messerschmitt company he had secured an offer to work on the Avro Arrow project (poor editing - author calls it “Aero”). When

he applied for security our good Canadian Government turned him down. Our neighbours to the South, and the Russians by the way, had no such compunction when it came to capitalizing on German expertise for their aircraft and space developments. However, he loved Canada and settled down to the good life of British Columbia ... 1990 fantastic reunion with Charlie Brown and crew.

Both died, just months apart, in 2008.

Hermann Goering?

Both biographies, Franz Stigler's history as a fighter ace and Charlie Brown as a bomber pilot, are fascinating. Over and above an amazing career (45 victories) Franz paints quite a picture about the problems the Luftwaffe had with Goering who, even in the final stages of the war, stubbornly insisted that the new revolutionary Me262 jet be used primarily as a bomber, rather than a fighter.

Fast forward to 19 January 1945.....they called it "The Fighter Pilots' Mutiny". A cadre of the most highly decorated pilots in Germany, Gustav Roedel (98 victories), Klaus Neumann (37), Gunther Luetzow (105), Johannes Steinhoff (176) and a colonel named Hannes Trautloft with (57) to his credit, calling themselves "The Outcasts", demanded a meeting with Goering at a famous air-force club "House of Flyers" in Berlin; confronted him, calling for his resignation. The famous Adolf Galland (104), being under surveillance by the SS, was not invited to join the group but "knew" of the meeting and had Trautloft call him from the conference room and leave the phone off the hook on a table at the back, so he could hear everything. Goering went absolutely berserk. That's another story in itself.

Back to 1944:

156 of us were transferred to Stalag Luft 111 from Buchenwald on 19 October 1944: 10, who had been confined to the so-called hospital, followed later on 28 November. One can only imagine the stress and agonies they must have suffered being left behind all those lonely weeks.

We know now that we were all slated for "the Chop" by the SS on the 25th. How on earth had we "terrorfliegers" been so fortuitously moved out of "Hell"?

In the Camp, we had formed the unique KLB (Konzentration Lager Buchenwald) Club, with constitution, by-laws and even a logo. It was not until the early 80's that we began tracking down our members; by mid-June 1999 we traced all, save 23. Not many of us left today!

No one ever came up with definite answers. Rumour had it that one of the other inmates had sneaked word to a nearby Luftwaffe airfield about our plight. Just lately we confirmed that 78353 Ben Scharf, an American, who spoke German, had shouted across the wire to a Luftwaffe officer telling of our plight as Allied airmen. All these years of wondering!

Mid-April 1945;

Franz, now with Galland's Jagdstaffel V-44 on ME262's, joins an after dinner party group with the usual stories being tossed around. Col Trautloft, one of the invited guests, revealed that back in 1944, when he was inspector of the day fighters, a rumour had reached his desk of Allied airmen being held in Buchenwald. Under the guise of inspecting damage to the Gustloff-Werk 11 arms factory beside the camp, bombed and destroyed by the USAF on 24 August, four days after we arrived, he asked the SS to show him around. The SS were not at all keen to have him too close to the wire when

someone shouted to him in German, but he pulled rank, told the SS to stand back, and listened to the frantic plea for release. Knowing that the Geneva Convention made captured airmen the responsibility of the German Air Force, not the SS, he returned to Berlin, deeply disturbed and worked quickly to arrange transfer of the Allied airmen out of Buchenwald. Think about it – he was only 32!

After so many years, confirmation of what actually happened.

An aside! There were many problems cited with the new jet engines - lack of sophisticated metals and sabotage by foreign workers. It is ironic that much of the clandestine manufacturing may possibly have been at Mittelbau/Dora, with its dreadful toll on human life, in the incredible underground factory with slave labour shipped from Buchenwald.

Dean Black?

Well known to all of us - Executive Officer of the Association, Publisher/Executive Editor "Air Force" magazine. My friendship stems back, well over a decade ago, to the time when he was commanding Officer of 403 (Wolf) Squadron at Gagetown and I was privileged to be the Honorary Colonel.

March 23 he writes..."The story about Buchenwald and Hannes Trautloft is very interesting to me...as Hannes Trautloft was an associate member of the 4 Wing Baden Soelingen Officers' Mess 1969-1971 time-frame and we spoke to him there quite often. I didn't know this story then but we knew he was a fine post-war citizen of Germany and definitely not a Nazi. He spoke perfect English and was one of several remarkable post-war Luftwaffe officers in our mess. He retired finally as a Lieutenant-General."

Time and Chance indeed happen to us all.

Such satisfaction and closure to have the name and face of a true gentleman who undoubtedly saved our lives: what a shame not one of us ever had the chance to thank him personally before he died in 1995!

The Never Ending Story?

One piece of the puzzle still evades us.

Another story had it that the Gestapo may have had a 'plant' in our midst. Who was Gerald Bird (supposedly from Yorkshire, England), born 1917, KLB78398 (definitely one of the series of identity numbers allocated to us Allied Airmen), listed as leaving with the sick in November? None of the 10 KLB Club members remembers him being with them. Certainly, there is no record of his arrival at Stalag Luft 111. Yet another mystery! Does anyone have a telephone number for Hercules Poirot?

I fall back on my snippets.

Good Guys and Bad Guys!

From "They Shall Grow Not Old"

LIDDELL, ARTHUR GEORGE WILLIAM FS(AG) R195410. From Montreal, Quebec. Killed in Action. Aug 5/44. #148 Squadron (Trusty). Halifax aircraft #JP276 did not return from a secret operation at night over South Poland. F/L A.R. Blynn, FS C.B. Wylie, P/O G.A. Chapman, F/O H.L. Brown and

three R.A.F. airmen were also killed. There were two #148 squadron aircraft lost the same night in the same area. 23 aircraft attempted to fly in arms to reinforce the uprising in Warsaw but only 12 made it to the target. Six were shot down, most of them by Russian fighter aircraft. The Russian forces had advanced and stopped just short of Warsaw and told the Polish underground General to rise up and attack the German occupying forces. This they did for two months while the Russian forces never moved – hoping the non-Communist Polish underground army of 40,000 would be destroyed. They nearly all were. On August 14, 1944 a similar raid took place and another 11 aircraft were shot down. The cemetery contains the graves of 7 Canadian, 62 British, 40 South African, and 15 Polish airmen all killed as a result of this bizarre operation.

Go figure! War is so damn cruel and stupid !!!!

I realize that, four years ago, I used a similar conclusion but I hope you will find it still appropriate tonight:

In 2004 a number of us attended the 50th anniversary of the 19 September 1944 seizure, and subsequent incarceration, of every Danish policeman who was on duty that day (a third of the force). In front of the imposing Bell Tower at Buchenwald, which looks over one of the most impressive monuments I have ever seen, (built by the Russians with German labour) I proffered the following, based on the Act of Remembrance and a prayer, prepared by Rabbi L Ginsberg of Beth Israel Synagogue Calgary, Alberta for an RCAF Prisoner of War remembrance ceremony held many years ago in the beautiful foothills of the Rockies.

“They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old; age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn; at the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we will remember them.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee for the gift of memory which unites generation unto generation.

In this solemn hour when we consider the swift flight of the years, our thoughts turn to those whom Thou has taken from our midst.

Our days on earth vanish like shadows. But the speedy flight of life, and the gloom of the grave should not dismay us, but should teach us wisdom. It should prompt us to put our trust in Thee, who wilt not suffer Thy children to see destruction.

For only the dust returns to the dust; the spirit which Thou hast breathed into us, returns to Thee, its everlasting source. Human achievements are transitory and human strivings vain: but Thy word endureth forever, and Thy purposes are fulfilled.

O Lord of life, our times are in Thy hands.

Those who have been summoned from our side shall not be forgotten. We take them into our hearts and give them place beside the cherished memories of our own beloved. They now are ours. May their memory be an enduring blessing to all Thy children.

We name in our hearts all our beloved and in recalling them, we sanctify Thy name”.

Thank You!

Jim KLB 78416