

## USAF Aircraft in Switzerland

### By Robert M.Foose

Imagine being a sailor adrift in a large ocean and rejoicing upon the sight of a small island: this would be a good comparison to how many of the bomber crews viewed Switzerland as a haven for their crippled aircraft during World War II. The U.S. 8th and 15th Air Forces, as well as RAF Bomber Command and the Mediterranean Tactical Air Forces, on numerous occasions during 1943 thru 1945, sought the sanctuary of Swiss territory when bombing targets in southern Germany and occupied Europe. An aircraft with serious combat damage, wounded crew members, major mechanical problems or low on fuel was faced with a long trip back to either England or southern Italy. The odds were greatly against them, especially if they were forced to lag behind the main bomber force, thus making them easy prey for the Luftwaffe fighters which were almost always on the prowl for cripples.

This article will focus on some of the U.S. aircraft which found refuge in neutral Switzerland, and hopefully stir interest and feedback from some of the readers who "visited" that country during the aforementioned time period. On August 13, 1943, a B-24 from the 93rd Bomb Group became the first of 167 of U.S.A.A.F. aircraft to find refuge in Switzerland. A total of 82 B-24s and 76 B-17s from both the 8th and 15th Air Forces would eventually end-up in Swiss hands. Many of these bombers were repaired and returned to the U.S. forces by late 1945, after the end of hostilities. The large majority of crew members also returned after the war, with the exception of those who were repatriated early or returned to Allied territory by "other" means. There were also those who did not return, a total 43 aircrew members died in crash territory of wounds received in combat.

A bomber crew's worries were not always over upon reaching Swiss airspace. The Swiss flak and fighter units (equipped with several versions of the ME-109) would, and on some occasions did, fire upon Allied aircraft if they felt the aircraft was not following their instructions or was not trying to land at the nearest airfield.

A topic of discussion which invariably always comes up when either historians or veterans talk about the aircraft which were interned in Switzerland and Sweden, is the question: Did any of the crews intentionally seek internment? The one item that originally struck me in my early years of researching the air war over Europe, was the fact that many of the photos of interned aircraft showed them to be in good condition. As I interviewed aircrew members for several other projects, I found the following points need to be considered before passing judgement on this topic. 1. Serious combat damage was not always obvious in photos. All that was needed was one or two pieces of flak or 20mm in the right spot (fuel tanks, oxygen supply, supercharger, etc.) to cause serious trouble. This damage is not always viewable in photos taken from a distance. 2. The need to seek immediate help for a wounded crew member was also a key factor in the decision to enter neutral territory. 3. Some inexperienced crews or aircraft used excessive fuel and would have been forced to ditch in the sea or crash land in hostile territory if they tried to return to their home bases. 4. The stress of the moment also has to be considered when combined with any of the other aforementioned points. It is always easy to say "How I would have handled it." 5. The Swiss (and I'm sure the Swedes did too) completed a written report on the condition of all aircraft which landed in their country and noted combat damage or equipment malfunctions.

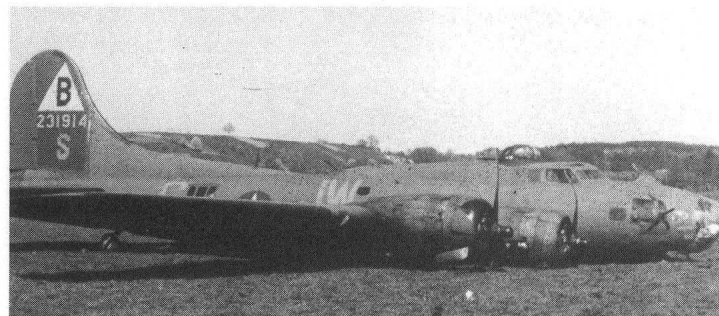
The accompanying photos will add some additional information concerning USAAF aircraft interned in Switzerland, and I hope will be of general interest. Any comments, personal experiences, or additional information concerning the aircraft in the following photos or other aircraft interned in Switzerland will be most welcomed.

#### REFERENCES:

Deutsche Luftwaffe uber der Schweiz, Karl Ries  
The Yoxford Boys. Merle C. Olmsted

Escort to Berlin, Fry and Ethell

Photo Credits: 1) Hans-Heiri Stapfer except as indicated, Horgen, Switzerland, 2) Hans Dubler, and 3) USAF



**Photo # 1** When the 1st Bomb Division of the 8th Air Force went to Oberpaffenhofen on April 24, 1944, three aircraft from the 92nd Bomb Group would end-up in Switzerland. The B-17G in this photo (#42-31914) is from the 326th Bomb Squadron and was flown to Dubendorf airdrome by Lt. Rosenfeld. A total of thirteen B-17s and one B-24 landed or crashed in Swiss territory on this day, one B-17 crashed with all ten crew members perishing. Photo by Hans Dubler



**Photo #2** On 13 August 1943, "Death Dealer" from the 67th Bomb Squadron, 93rd Bomb Group, 8th Air Force, became the first American aircraft to land in Switzerland. This aircraft (#42-40611) was damaged over Wiener-Neustadt by a bomb from another aircraft, and was landed by 1st Lt. Raymond Lacombe on a grass field near Thurau-bei Wil. Unsure as to their exact location (Germany or Switzerland) the crew set the aircraft on fire. The photo will attest to their success in doing so. The crew of 11 were interned (the extra crew member was Capt. Robert L. Cardenas, who was aboard as Command Pilot).