

**... Cloud Level off the South-West Coast of Ireland presumably dropping below
50 to 100 metres...**

„Bruno, get up!“

The NCO on duty of the Wekusta 2 Ob.d.L. (Weather Reconnaissance Squadron 2 of the Luftwaffe Commander In Chief) shook Bruno Noth by the shoulder, who awoke and acknowledged the NCO sleepily *„Ok, cheers Hans.“*

4.45am at Nantes Airfield. Noth looked over at the wall calendar.
It is Friday, the 23rd of July, 1943.

The 32-year old Meteorologist Bruno Noth in the position of an Advisor swung his legs out over the side of the bed. During his wet shave he had time to mull over the current situation here in Nantes. Once again he thought about the rather exceptional relationships between the Air and Ground Crews. Conditions here were much different to the other theatres of war all around Germany. Here there was a peace of sorts, with only an occasional dogfight and there were death, blood and hand to hand combat. He savoured the shave with the sharp straight razor, the expensive soap and the steaming hot water. Both were already a rarity after a total of four years war and the defeat at Stalingrad. He saw the situation with clarity: For him, the war was already lost. He came from a good background and enjoyed a privileged upbringing including an excellent University education following on from which he became a Meteorologist, with a safe job he found at the German Weather Service at Offenbach am Main from 1937 to 1942. From then on he served his time at the Wekusta 2 here in Nantes. Now he was a member of a Junkers 88 D-4 crew, making weather reconnaissance flights west of the Bay of Biscay and to the north-west of Ireland and also keeping an eye out for Allied shipping convoys whose positions were swiftly passed to the U-Boat 'wolf packs'. But normally there was no contact with the enemy and there was always a strong chance of getting back to Nantes in one piece. In Nurnberg, where he was born, his fiancée waited for him and he hoped fervently that he would survive his time in this shitty war and could lead a peaceful life in Offenbach afterwards.

Around a half an hour later he met his fellow crew members – 22-year old Pilot Hans Auschner, 22-year old Flight Mechanic and Gunner Johannes Kuschidlo and the barely 19-year old Radio Operator Gerhard Dümmler – in the canteen of the air base and they began their luxurious breakfast. Of course they only got the finest, having a choice of hard-boiled eggs, fried eggs with bacon, ham, sausage and different varieties of marmalade. Of course there was also hot coffee.

„And on the Eastern Front, our Comrades starve and freeze to death...“

Bruno Noth slurped quietly at his second cup of the strong brew. But this was the norm in France, their unit was a rather prestigious one and this reputation had to be

upheld.

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6.30am local time, the very same day in Allihies, Co. Cork in Ireland. 22-year old Michael Murphy also began his – although more spartan – breakfast. His family worked the land and one day he would inherit the small farm. For the time being he was doing his service as a young soldier in the Irish Army. He was part of the crew who served in the Observation Post on the peak of the Bellinacarriga Hills. He lived in the small stone house there with two of his comrades and waited patiently for his 'German Visitors', who passed almost daily with their aircraft. The Germans hugged the coast using the nearby Bull Rock Lighthouse as a waypoint and it was well known that they usually waved to the Lighthouse keeper from the cockpit or even dipped the wings of their heavy aircraft while the real artists dipped the nose of the Ju88 to a perilous few metres above the sea's surface to show off their skills. Of course, all of these incidents were reported by Murphy and his comrades to the Irish Ministry of Defence.

Michael sipped from his tea and bit into his bread. His mother made two sandwiches, which she wrapped in newspaper and gave him before he set off. „*Good luck, Michael.*“

He went out through the wooden gate and got on his bike. „*A murky kind of a day*“, he thought as he cycled towards the nearby hills, where his comrades were already waiting for him. In typical Irish fashion the weather was all but summery, overcast, drizzle, the mist was turning to fog and the mercury read 12C – and this in the middle of summer!

After a half an hour he reached the small peninsula and started his ascent to the Observation Post. This really was not easy, the grass was wet and slipped and the leather of his Army boots started to get wet and clammy. The higher he got, the worse the visibility became and in 100 metres height he was barely able to see hand before eye. Yet still he found the Observation Post and his comrades, and he was a little relieved to be able to greet the others with a cheery „*Good morning, boys.*“

He walked in, and closed the door. „*Anything strange?*“

Corporal Harrington shook his head and walked over to the window which he could not see a thing through. The fog was as thick as pea soup.
„*No, nothing to report.*“

Michael took off his heavy overcoat. „*Anything from our flying German friends?*“

„*No, no sign of them yet. Maybe they're afraid to fly in this fog. Sure in this kind of weather you'd see the birds walking on the roads.*“

The three men laughed heartily and sat down on the uncomfortable wooden chairs and moments later Michael Murphy, Peter Holland and Corporal Harrington were sitting around the table discussing the few events of the previous day.

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Friday March 9th, 1984 – 9.15 hours.

Lufthansa's Boeing 737 lifts off from Dusseldorf's runway 05 and takes a north-easterly course. The landing gear is retracted and soon afterwards the flaps follow. With a left bank the aircraft takes a course for the radio beacon at Rekken and later in the direction of Spijkerborg.

On board, amongst the other passengers sits yours truly, then a 45-year old man from the so-called 'Blade Town' of Solingen, famous for its knife manufacture, situated 20km east of the state capital, Dusseldorf. Patchy cloud mostly obscures the sun, but at least it's dry. The 737 continues to climb, now with a westerly course towards London.

I look out the window and savour the comforts of flying in a large aircraft. After 1500m the cloud cover closes and there is nothing to see but only cloud. A friendly, pretty stewardess offers a cup of coffee with a smile.

„*Yes please!*“ It's impossible not to smile back.

„*What a classy lady. She looks great in that uniform.*“ I turn to the window and can't see for the cloud. After a cup of coffee my thoughts fly back to Summer 1947. The war had ended two years ago and life in Germany started to return to some kind of normality. Of course the scars of war were visible everywhere. Large amounts of ammunition and mines could still be found in the forests, and the cities still lay largely in ruins.

The father of the barely five year old boy sat him onto the small second saddle which was mounted onto the crossbar of the gents bike and rode 18km with him to the Rhine. There a small drama was playing out. In the middle of the shipping channel a sunken freight crane was blocking the now more than ever important waterway. Right beside the crane was a second ship which was pumping water out of the sunken vessel and the boy asked his father to wait so they could see the ship surface. This was however impossible as the father answered that this would take some days yet, which was incomprehensible to the boy. And so they continued along the great river, a scarcely comprehensible adventure for a young boy in the post-war era, seared into his memory forever.

Later in the same year he visits the great cathedral in Cologne, naturally once again with his father. The large steel railway bridge (Hohenzollernbrücke) over the Rhine lies broken in the river and all around the cathedral are mountains of debris. Even the

mighty church lies damaged and in this chaos one man works alone with a pressure drill, working on stones which could be reused building houses. After a two-hour long stroll the father asks the small boy on the banks of the Rhine if he's hungry. Hungry? Of course he's hungry, this was second nature at the time! And then the father produces a sandwich made from brown bread, with margarine and best of all, a boiled egg sliced and placed between the two slices of bread, made with love by his mother at home as a surprise - at this time a scarcely credible delicacy.

The boy was completely surprised and almost beside himself. He had not seen such a nice meal for months and coupled with the adventure of this journey to here, to Cologne on the Rhine. The father claimed to not be hungry and only took a small bite from the sandwich.

A further memory burnt into my consciousness.

And now I sit here in Lufthansa's 737 in now commonplace luxury, sipping on my hot coffee and observe the clouds outside the window. The aircraft begins its descent and the cloud level comes nearer. After passing the beacon Ockham it banks right as it settles into its approach path. I look out the window again.

After completing the 90-degree turn I see three other aircraft following our own, stacked up like a pearl necklace, an impressive spectacle. The 737 sinks further through the cloud cover. I close my eyes and another movie in Technicolor seems to run through my mind – rather unusually.

Even earlier memories. I am sitting, as a child on the lap of a neighbour in the cellar of our house. From far away the explosions of the night-time air raid are reaching us. Everyone is afraid, I can feel it. Even at the age of 40, long after the death of my parents, one of the women from that cellar lived as a tenant in my house, respected until the day she died. I waited for the conversion and the modernisation of her apartment to the current standard until the day she died. Under no circumstances did this elderly lady wish to change her simple 2-bedroom flat with a shared bathroom in the corridor dating from the war to a smaller, more modern apartment with a bath and a private toilet.

My mother is running across the pavement of the Main Street in the direction of the bunker, holding me in her arms. It is in the middle of the night and the sky is dark, but in the West it is glowing red – hard to imagine these days. Dusseldorf is being incinerated. A never-ending chain of Fire Brigade Vehicles is passing us, coming from Solingen and moving towards the direction of Hilden, no doubt continuing to Dusseldorf. I can still vividly see the blue lights of those vehicles in the same way I can still picture the burning red sky above Dusseldorf. A picture, that I sometimes see when occasionally I treat my wife and I to a luxurious breakfast on the Königsallee.

The Minister for Propaganda in the Third Reich, Dr. Joseph Goebbels, speaking in

Berlin's Palace of Sport, asked the public in a speech broadcast throughout the whole world via radio if they wanted the 'total war'?

And of course, the idiots present that day in the room roared their approval with gusto. The English didn't have to be reminded, or invited. They came almost every night. Even in Barmen they dropped 1000kg airmines, which by all accounts shattered windows in Solingen. They dropped fire in the form of phosphorous bombs and incendiary devices and my father later told me that the tarmacadam turned to liquid with the heat of the flames and that the victims ran burning into the Wupper river. Elberfeld survived this night relatively well, because there was little or no flak fire. It was planned by the British that the head of the bomber stream would drop their bombs on Barmen and that the later attackers would automatically unload their bombs over Elberfeld and thus reduce all of Wuppertal to rubble. This was based on the effect where during heavy flak fire, the subsequent waves of bombers would not fly all the way to the city centre but drop their bomb loads early and hence, short of the intended target. This effect was calculated by the English strategists but the intended result didn't quite work out as intended because there was effectively no anti-aircraft fire and hence most of the bombers brought all of their payload right to the planned target – straight to Barmen. But my father was not to know that. I often asked myself, if my memories of my early childhood were simply figments of my imagination, because I was only three years old. But a chance conversation with a psychologist confirmed that children at this age can already form vivid memories. A similar question just enters my head on the aircraft.

„... *the English today, are they people like you and me?*“

The film has ended, it disappears somewhere else into my mind. A short time afterwards, the wheels touch down onto the runway at Heathrow.

„*My first visit in England.*“, the man opens his seatbelt.

Since he started his English classes back in school, he dreamed of once visiting England. And now it is time – almost 30 years later, and for what an occasion.

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Outside on the apron, the heavy aircraft engines started their familiar drone. The Ground Crew are starting the power plants and allow them to warm up on steady revs under load. Letting them warm up at idle would cause the spark plugs to build up carbon deposits and would lead to ignition misfires.

Upon reaching operating temperature the engines are stopped and the fuel tanks of the long-distance reconnaissance JU-88 D4 are filled to the brim, ensuring maximum operating range. Going in one direction, the machines could take a westerly course almost 1500km out into the Bay Of Biscay and going the other way in a north-

westerly direction, they could pass the west coast of Ireland and then continue a small distance into the North Atlantic.

Auschner, Noth, Kuschidlo and Dümmler finished their breakfast and paid a visit to the toilets; during the near six-hour flight it was almost impossible to pass the consumed fluids which could present considerable discomfort. All four had received their freshly laundered shirts, and they looked good in their blue airman's uniforms with white shirts and ties. Over this they pulled their overalls and tied their yellow neckties. The thin scarf was fashionable and dashing, but the Squadron Leader had won approval for this item of clothing with the reasoning that it could be used for signalling after a possible emergency landing to attract attention to oneself.

Auschner looked into the mirror with a satisfied expression; he was quite content with himself and the world. The Opel Blitz – commandeered out of private ownership some time ago – brought the four airmen to their craft, which today was the Junkers with the markings D7+DK. The aircraft had been converted somewhat, the rear-facing twin machine gun in the small bottom tub had been removed for weight-saving purposes, as was the forward-firing machine gun of the pilot as the space occupied by the weapon was needed for the meteorologist.

Instead of these two guns, a rigid forward facing cannon had been installed 'on special request', because amongst the squadron were a few pilots said to have 'neck pains'; those who especially sought to win the Knights Cross through shooting down an enemy aircraft, and this was only possible with amending and strengthening the on-board weaponry. Auschner's crew did not have an aerial battle in mind, but the equipment of the aircraft is worth reconciling.

And so, after alighting from the car, they walked toward the aircraft. Noth looked around him: „*Horrible weather, and this in the middle of summer.*“

Now, on the 23rd July 1943 it was barely 15°C, mist and damp hung in the air below an overcast low cloud level. The entry into the aircraft via the small tubular ladder through the tight hatch in the bottom of the fuselage was the same as always; after Auschner satisfied himself as to the impeccable condition of the machine and confirmed this verbally to the Chief Mechanic, he got in first and made himself comfortable sitting on his parachute, strapped into the armoured and braced seat.

Noth followed, releasing his small folding seat from the wall mounting on the right, propping up the simply constructed back support and sat flanking Auschner to his right, sitting a little deeper but with shoulders almost touching, also facing in flight direction. Radio Operator Dümmler followed and sits back to back with Auschner facing his radio set and the tail of the aircraft. Last of all the Gunner and Flight Mechanic Kuschidlo got in, who has to make do with a seating arrangement consisting of a broad leather strap holding him in place behind Bruno Noth. None of the four were comfortable but nobody thought of complaining – after all, they were

aviators! After Kuschildo had closed and secured the trapdoor, he also connected his hood to the intercom. Auschner triggered the ignition of the left engine and looked out of the cockpit to the Mechanic standing to his left to signal that he was ready to start the engine, who acknowledged his request with a raised thumb, and so Auschner hit the electrical starter.

The humming of the electric motor became louder and louder and after reaching the required revolutions the flywheel clutched into the still stationary engine. With a grumble the big JUMO 211 B engine effortlessly sprang into life. As usual the first ignitions produced a lot of blue and black smoke, which was quickly spread by the prop wash as the engine began to spin at idle level. The procedure was repeated with the right engine, and it was barely running under its own steam when Kuschildo fired up the electrical system and began to check all of its important functions. The intercom was also powered up, allowing the crew to speak via the microphones on their Adam's apples and listen via the headphones built into their helmets.

„Lets get started.“ Auschner set the flaps and pushed both throttle controls forwards. The machine rolled slowly to the start of the runway. Here he pointed the spotter plane against the light north-easterly wind, stopped the aircraft and using the brakes, briefly held the machine stationary under full throttle to check the engine performance, which seemed to be in line with expectations.

Again Auschner pushed the throttles wide open, released the brakes and the heavy machine shakily set in motion. Faster and faster the strip seemed to slip away beneath them; Auschner pushed the yoke slightly forwards and the tail wheel of the D7+DK left the ground. Now the aircraft was really moving. The pilot pulled the controls towards him and the JU88 finally left the ground. With a steady throb she began to climb towards the low-lying cloud. Bruno Noth looked at his watch and entered the start time in his records.

The Controller on duty in Nantes also checked his clock and compared the time with Dümmlers radio report, which also confirmed the starting time.

It was 5.58am German Summer Time.

And what nobody knew was that someone else was looking at their clock also:

Tom Butcher, a member of the Special Division for Code Breaking in the English Defence Ministry in London. *„Well John,“* he said as he turned to John Beam, who was sitting at his desk reading the deciphered message, *„our mates from Nantes are off again. Wonder if they'll go anywhere nice today, maybe out into the Bay of Biscay, perhaps along the Irish coast or maybe even both?“*

John Beam looked up from his desk. *„Well if those boys knew that we've had their ENIGMA in the bag for a couple of years now, are listening to almost all of their*

ciphered messages and reading them moments later, I shouldn't think that pack of rogues in Berlin would be able to sleep soundly by night. It's perhaps not a bad thing that they're feeling all safe and secure, because that way not only can we use the weather forecasts of the German reconnaissance planes, we also know where their U-Boats are hanging around. So we can divert our convoys around them rather well, and then hunt down those steel coffins. How jolly good they have no idea that we know exactly what they're up to. I'd be curious to know how long the Huns can hold out, because we're now well and truly at the Races.“

He leaned back over his desk and continued working under the glow of his lamp, while next door the radio operator on duty pushed his headset to his ears; the incoming signals from D 7 + DK were rather weak today.

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Auschner retracted the landing gear and set the motors to climbing speed. The machine accelerated stronger now and was gaining altitude at an even 2,5 metres per second. As he set the flaps back to 5 degrees shortly afterwards, the aircraft dropped slightly by a few metres. „He still can't do that right“, thought Bruno Noth as he looked up from his Barograph charts. The old hands amongst the pilots would compensate for the slight drop when withdrawing the flaps by pulling the controls towards them, thus elegantly avoiding the uncomfortable sensation. „He'll get it yet, what else do you expect from a 21-year old youngster?“, and with this thought the meteorologist returned to his charts.

The first puffs of cloud flew past and soon they were absorbed by the grey of the cloud level. Auschner now withdrew the flaps fully and the machine climbed higher at a speed of 230km/h in a sweeping left turn, before settling into their chosen westward course.

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After the stopover in London the man from Solingen is on his way to Ireland at about 11.00 hours local time.

This time he is sitting on a Boeing 737 belonging to Air Lingus, the Irish national airline heading for Shannon, this legendary airport of the 60s and 70s, which was the springboard from Europe to America for all of those legendary airliners of the day – the DC7 of KLM and SAS, the Super Constellation of the Lufthansa and the rare Boeing Stratocruiser of BOAC. He saw them all standing on the tarmac as a 13-year old boy at Düsseldorf-Lohausen Airport and later heard them take off in an easterly direction over his parents house in Solingen – only much later did he realise that they were on their way towards the beacon at Germinghausen and were then continuing in the direction of Frankfurt and South America, or Hamburg and North America.

In Shannon they took on their last fuel before flying non-stop across the Atlantic to Gander in Newfoundland, or even Reykjavik on Iceland. This depended on weather conditions, but Shannon was well patronised by the wealthy passengers – nobody else could afford to fly to the USA! - and they shopped to their hearts content in the world-famous Duty Free Shop. And this opportunity to spend money still exists in the same size and variety even today.

After landing and retrieving his baggage the man from Solingen passes through Customs and steps out into the arrivals area of the terminal. A man is sitting in the chair reading a newspaper. Perhaps this is the person he has come to meet, and he approaches him and introduces himself. The Irishman lowers his newspaper; it is indeed Greg Dooley who will be both the driver and tour guide of the German for the following two days.

After checking into the hotel near the Airport Greg Dooley collects the man from Germany and whisks him away into a traditional Irish country pub – Dirty Nellys – near Limerick and there awaits a supper for the German guest which he will never forget: for the first time in his life, the finest Irish salmon in unlimited quantities.

A similar quantity of the Irish whiskey which followed rounds the evening off perfectly, but the next morning comes early.

The alarm call is set for 6.00am.

Greg is already standing at Reception, wide awake and cheery at 7.00am as the Guest, still tired and sore forces down his last cup of coffee. This day will yet show him the strength and condition of his Irish hosts. Minutes later they are sitting in a comfortable Volvo heading for the south coast of Ireland, their destination: Allihies.

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After about ten minutes it started to get bright above the still climbing reconnaissance plane. „*We're almost through,*“ announced Noth over the headphones.

The altitude gauge showed 850 metres above sea level.

Auschner cast an eye over his motor instruments. The temperature and pressure gauges all read normal and the electrics also showed no faults, not to mention all of the other clocks. All of a sudden a few beams of sunlight flashed through the cockpit, the clouds seemed to tear open, just a few more scraps of them, and now the sun shone with full intensity from the left into the cockpit glazing.

Dümmler and Kuschidlo who were looking directly into the light were blinded momentarily and closed their eyes in reaction, Bruno Noth and Hans Auschner also took a short amount of time to get used to the glaring sunlight, which now surrounded the aircraft. The while cloud cover also seemed to reflect each and every ray.

But finally sunshine, as befits a summer! Each of the four sighed slightly.

Auschner reduced the engine revolutions to cruising speeds and the aircraft was now at a steady 320km/h. As he was doing during the ascent also, the meteorologist took temperature, humidity and atmospheric pressure readings and noticed a typical weather inversion: the temperatures at ground level read 15°C, at 800m 9°C and at 1000m 12°C. Dümmler encoded the messages and sent them per short wave to Nantes. At the same time he also radioed the location of the D7+DK which he had established through dead reckoning.

Auschner took the machine higher still. At around 6.40am, 250km into the flight on a westerly course they encountered haze at a height of 1600m. After a further height gain to 1900m Noth determined the top of the haze and ordered Dümmler to send the results of his measurements to Nantes, along with the usual location report. There were, however as already encountered, communication issues with the ground radio station as the signals were received clearly, but were very weak.

As a result, Dümmler and the radio operator in Nantes sent their signals via the large apparatus at Quickborn near Hamburg. This was a little more effort, but not unusual. The radio traffic from the Weather Reconnaissance aircraft far out over the Atlantic were regularly compromised by atmospheric conditions. On this day, the weather was sapping a lot of energy from the shortwave radios, although Dümmler had deployed the 25m metres long towed array made from copper wire with a fist-sized lead counterweight at the end, which now protruded from the left-hand side of the aircraft. But even that did not help, each time they still had to go via Quickborn.

After passing the haze Auschner throttled back and dived into a 9/10 stratocumulus at 1500m altitude. He then took a north-westerly course and Noth reported Haze and Fog after they passed through the thick 10/10 stratocumulus cloud cover.

They reported their position as being 7 degrees longitude south-west of Brest. „*Well Hans, lets get up towards the sun again, towards freedom.*“ quipped Bruno Noth, Auschner set the engines to a climbing speed again and minutes later the machine climbed through the closed, grey cloud into the sunshine above at 900 metres. Noth still had his hands full with his measurements and Gerhard Dümmler had plenty to do with constantly reporting Noth's findings.

Around 7.30am they dropped through the clouds again to discover light drizzle and around 7.45am they reached their standard destination around 300km west of Brest at co-ordinates 49' North, 9' West.

Here the meteorologist measured the air pressure at ground level as 1023 millibar right over the sea's surface and continued to pass constant measurements back to Nantes as they ascended through the clouds again, without forgetting to mention the discomforting, still present drizzle within the stratocumulus cloud.

To complete their report for the Weather Service of the Army Leadership back in Berlin the D7+DK climbed to 1500m and took a northerly course directly for the south coast of Ireland. As the glaring sunshine once again flooded the cabin, Auschner had to sneeze and in doing so, reached for his handkerchief in the breast pocket of his overall. There his hand felt a folded piece of paper, which he pulled out and unfolded, to find that this was his Flight Order of the aircrafts check flight on the 11th July 1943 where he flew the D7+FK after installing two new engines.

Against the standing order, never to bring any files of this sort on an enemy sortie, he had this piece of paper in his pocket, having simply forgotten to remove it from his overall to leave it behind in Nantes.

„Ah well, it's not like anyone will notice. You'll just have to remember to remove it when you get back to Nantes.“ He looked at the onboard clock. 8.00am.

Moments previously Bruno Noth had turned to the radio operator: *„Gerhard, could you do a cross bearing? I'd like to see if we are where we're meant to be.“*

Dümmler immediately tried to locate a signal from the beacon at La Coruna, which did not work as there was too much disturbance and this meant he didn't even have to try Stavanger.

The beacon at Brest could be heard and he could also not receive the radio transmitter at Droitwich clearly.

So he tried Rennes, which worked. But where should he take the station for the cross bearing from? It was punishable by death to listen to enemy radio stations, but when it was unavoidable for technical reasons, one had to listen for London, which Dümmler then did.

„Say Gerhard,“ said Noth into his microphone as he heard the voice of the English speaker *„but we're not on the way home yet!“*

Each of the other three airmen smiled. It was an unwritten tradition to listen to BBC News on the way home from Ireland – always because of the same unavoidable technical reasons! - in order to hear the latest, propaganda-free news of the war.

It was easier then, as one could enjoy the quiet return flight rather comfortably because apart from the steering of the aircraft and the taking and transmitting of locations there was little else to do. But no other beacons or radio stations would ever work and of course they did not know the frequencies and locations of the Irish stations! And did they not need exact locations if they were not to put themselves in danger! One had to look after oneself, of course, and the big mouths in Berlin could go and fuck themselves...

The bearing conformed to the coupling and showed a position of 50' North/10' West. This time Noth looked at his watch. Still a peacetime item of the finest Black Forest quality; this Kienzle watch was given to him as a present from his father before the start of the war.

He treated it as a personal treasure.

And it read exactly 8.00am. As he reached over his left shoulder with his right hand, he felt the light pressure of his Iron Cross on his left breast. He received this distinction of bravery simply because of the number of successfully completed enemy sorties. He was somewhat proud of the award, but the most important thing for him was to get home in one piece each time. Otherwise his wife-to-be, Ilse would be waiting for him in vain.

There was little to do for Gunner Kuschidlo. Above the clouds he enjoyed the view and he was deep in his thoughts. Due to the low humidity there were views of up to 25km and that did not happen every day. He also looked forward to the substantial midday meal which would be on offer in Nantes when they got home later on.

After a quick chat with the meteorologist Auschner took a slight easterly course of 10 degrees. They wanted to reach the Irish coast at the right point and then continue on a westerly bearing.

„On another flight we won't be able to hit the Bull. The rock with this lighthouse will be in fog or strong haze. We'll certainly not be able to fly there directly and hit it first time.“

Bruno Noth looked at Hans Auschner. *„You're right,“* said the pilot *„I'll try the same approach as our comrades did yesterday. It'll work just as well for us, and I don't intend to be the squadron's laughing stock. We'd be the first to throw in the towel in these conditions and to take the ground reading somewhere out on the sea.*

I want the Bull, and I'm going to find it. Let's get cracking.“

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The drive takes us through the green and sparsely populated Irish countryside to the small town of Killarney. Greg Dooley and his German guest park their car and after a short search find a small Restaurant open at 9.30am, and order a few bread rolls with marmalade and a pot of hot coffee.

- The second breakfast – the owner had only just opened the doors.

„*A sleepy town*“, said Greg, taking a mouthful of the hot coffee. 20 minutes later they pay their bill and leave the small pub. Greg also manages to find and buy a warm woollen scarf made locally from a tiny shop. Then the voyage south continues, towards the Slieve Mish mountains. After passing Lough Leane the earth rises to the highpoint of 600-metre high Peakeen Mountain. Beside the road lies an abundance of nature. The mountainous region is dominated by dense forest which harbour a richness of moss and ferns unthinkable in Germany. One cannot get enough of looking at it, but the men have to continue on their journey and Greg cannot be held back.

The descent into the valley of the Kenmare river follows and soon we are in the town of the same name. A road bridge crosses the bay and immediately after the crossing we turn sharply right in the direction of Coulagh Bay. Shortly afterwards the car reaches the inlet and again we turn right onto a narrower, but paved road which brings us directly to our destination, the small village of Allihies.

After a short search we find the Parochial House of Fr. Michael Maher, who receives the visitors with sincere warmth. It is dinnertime and the priest invites both men in to eat. In a sparsely furnished room a short prayer is said, and then the housekeeper brings an excellent Irish Stew, made with local lamb. The visitor from Germany has never before tasted such wonderful lamb. It cannot be easy to prepare such a rich meal for the no doubt not wealthy priest and the German visitor makes a mental note to acknowledge this with a generous gift upon his return home.

After eating, Fr. Michael Maher leads his guests into his unheated living room, lights the wood in his grate and offers his guests a real Irish coffee. The boiling hot drink does the foreign guest the world of good, because with an outside temperature of 10°C in March it is not as warm as at home, not to mention sitting in an unheated room. But the locals seem to make do against the cold with warmer clothing and with wearing the Aran Sweater, made from sheep's wool. The question as to the cause of the unusual flavour of the coffee is also revealed – the thinner coffee has Irish whiskey added to it, and this is a lot softer in taste than its Scottish competitor!

A car stops outside the window, and an elderly, bald man alights from the ancient Ford. He is wearing wellingtons, grey cord trousers and a jacket over the thick sweater. He has the unmistakable gait of a farmer.

„*There comes Michael Murphy.*“ The priest opens the front door and introduces both visitors to him. For the German there is an unusual welcome in the form of a hearty embrace. The conversation is short, and everyone gets into the priests' car and commences the short journey along the narrow road to Bellinacarriga Hill.

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„Now, lets have a look at the Irish coast. Goodbye, sunshine and blue skies.“ Auschner throttled back, pushed the controls forward and soon the first pockets of cloud appeared as if to grab the aircraft. 20 seconds later the depressing grey had encompassed them, and they approached the surface of the sea in a gradual descent.

Occasionally there was drizzle and drops began to form on the cockpit glass. The lightened mood from the feeling of a bright summer's day above the clouds deepened amongst the crew. The approach to the Irish coast and sighting 'the Bull' would not be easy. Despite this Auschner was in good spirit. His instrument flight training was solid and was paying dividends in the clouds where they could not see the ground. The machine descended further. Noth made his measurements and Dümmler reported via the trailing antenna: *„To field 15 W 01 cloud cover between 200 to 300 and 800 metres. Lowest level off SW-corner of Ireland presumed to drop to 50 to 100 metres. Under cloud cover very hazy. Visibility 2 to 5 km, off Ireland 1 to 2 km.“*

Only Kuschildo had nothing to do, there wasn't even any point in looking out the window, as all he could see was cloud. 200 metres above sea level Auschner pulled out of the descent, accelerated slightly and dropped a little further, until they could see the wavetops from 150 metres height. No wind was stirring the surface, and they now had a course heading directly for the south coast of Ireland. Noth registered visibility of 2000 metres and below. The cloud cover sank to 50 metres in certain places. *„Shitty visibility“*, said Auschner as he turned to Bruno Noth. *„Bruno, it's going to be damn hard to find 'the Bull'. I'm going to try and follow the coast west, the way Fritz Plehn said he did yesterday.“*

Along with the reports of weather conditions and their location, they reported the poor visibility and the difficulties they were having in navigating towards the coast and the lighthouse at Bull Rock. Dümmler took another bearing from the broadcast masts at Droitwich and Rennes and tried again to get a signal from La Coruna. The calculated position was compared by Noth with his dead reckoning and he requested that this be reported to Nantes for confirmation. Dümmler began to send.

„Well, well, well“ came Auschners voice over the headphones.

Straight ahead, about 1000 metres away the coastline of Ireland appeared out of the mist. The pilot banked sharply left and said to the meteorologist: *„Bruno, have a look to see where we are. After all, you have the map in front of you.“*

Noth did indeed have the map of southern Ireland open in front of him on the specially made wooden board which the squadron's carpenter had made especially for the weather reconnaissance crew. It sat comfortably on his knees and thighs. He looked to his right through the drops and streaks to find a point of reference on the coast. Kuschidlo, who sat with his back to the rest of the crew, also looked out onto the coast, but faced left.

Noth could not see much as the currently raised right wing and the large engine pod was blocking his view. The clock in front of Auschner read 8.24am and according to their compass they were heading 290 degrees. The wing was lowered again and the meteorologist continued to search for a point of reference, until a loud „*Shit!*“ was exclaimed by Auschner over the headphones.

Noth looked up and Kuschidlo tried to look over his shoulder in flight direction. Dümmlers index finger was hammering out the request to confirm their position via the Morse code straight key. All of a sudden a hilltop appeared directly ahead of them which was slightly higher – above – their aircraft. And this although the coast lay directly to their right!

In vain, Auschner pulled the controls towards him as hard as he could and pushed the throttles wide open. The low rumble of the engines turned immediately to a hard shriek. D7+DK began to climb

8.25am German summer time, Friday the 23rd of July 1943.

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Michael Murphy and his two comrades heard the machine coming through the fog like a phantom. Suddenly they heard the pitch of the engines change as they went to full throttle, and the Irishmen thought simultaneously: „*Lads, be careful in that fog.*“

With that, they heard a loud bang through the lingering fog which seemed to shake the observation post in its foundations. Frightened, Corporal Harrington recorded the time in his notebook, 7.25am. Then all three ran downhill as fast as they could in the direction of the Atlantic.

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At exactly the same time Peter Wendel, the radio operator in Nantes, raised his head with surprise. All of a sudden the radio connection to Gerhard Dümmler had stopped. Wendel recorded 8.25am and tried to call the aircraft repeatedly. He never received an answer. After they failed to respond to his final call at 8.29am he recorded a sudden end to radio traffic at 8.25am and that a crash was suspected due to the poor weather conditions.

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Even the radio operator in London looked up from his records;

„*Well what's going on here then?*“

John Beam came in from the adjoining room and leaned over the intercepted message from D7 + DK. The sudden interruption was unusual.

When the aircraft failed to respond to the calls from Nantes, they recorded their suspicions that the aircraft had crashed. This entry was later recorded in the war diary of the British Ministry of Defence.

* * * * *

The three Irishmen reached the impact site within a minute, at the point where the top of the hill met the cloud which enclosed the observation post and the higher peaks. The north-west of the hill was strewn with wreckage, some of which was burning. Even a nearby haystack was on fire. Larger parts of the destroyed aircraft had almost made it to the front door of the farmer who lived there, and the man emerged from his house in surprise; his first impressions led him to believe that there'd been an enemy attack.

* * * * *

„Well Rolf, and this is where I laid the four dead airmen one beside another into the grass. Their hands were still warm to the touch. I will never forget their lily-white shirts with the blue uniforms and the yellow neckerchiefs. There were three younger, tall and good looking airmen and a slightly older man, darker coloured and he had broken his pelvis. Apart from that they showed little sign of injury, apart from burn marks on their faces. We found the four of them in a radius of 10 metres. They were about 20 metres away from the burning hulk of the aircraft, which was completely destroyed. We could not even determine, what make and model it was.“

Michael Murphy speaks – as apparently all Irish people do – an easily comprehensible form of English, mainly due to the simplicity of the language used; all the visitor has to do is adapt slightly and get used to the pronunciation and the lilt of the words the old man speaks.

The three Irishmen and the visitor from Germany look up to the hillcrest where the disintegrating Ju 88 had scraped along the ground behind the airmen it had thrown out the front window. The graphic description and the way the scene was encountered by Michael Murphy sends the hairs up on the back of my neck!

With some half-hearted poking in a nearby stone wall we find three tin parts of a wing with a riveted manufacturers plate from the D7+DK, which will begin their journey home to Germany in the back of the Volvo. Obviously there are larger bits of wreckage under the grassy outcrop, but what happened to the two large engines, of which a propeller hub was incorporated into a nearby stone wall?

The ascent to the site of impact is steep and demanding for the three men. The stone observation post is still standing on its original site at the mountaintop and the view

on a nice spring day is truly spectacular.

After a short search Michael Murphy finds the point of impact which left a coin-sized indentation in a large rock. The man from Solingen takes off his watch and takes a photo, using the timepiece for perspective.

„And here...“ the former soldier takes a few steps towards the observation post, *„Here a wing cut into the hillside a foot deep, from one end of the field to the other.“*

And Murphy, who is a few years north of sixty years of age, continues to talk about the biggest event in his life, the crash of the Junkers, the recovery and the burial of the German airmen in the graveyard on the opposing mountain with a view to the crash site.

The time has flown and it is getting late, as the three men begin their journey back to Aillihes. At the presbytery goodbyes are said; Michael Murphy still finds it hard to comprehend that after 40 years someone came from *„so far away, from Germany“* especially to hear his life story. His is a simple life, far from the hustle and bustle of the modern world with few moments of joy, characterised by the daily heavy workload of his small farm.

Night begins to fall and the German contemplates the return journey through the mountains with a degree of fear. And Greg Dooley seems to literally fly the heavy car through the small, poorly constructed back roads. With every sharply taken corner the tin parts of the D7+DK rattle in the boot of the car, and the thoughts of the passenger return to the happenings of that fateful July day in 1943.

With Michael Murphy's words still ringing in his ears he imagines the four dead, who's fate has occupied him for many months now, lying on the hillside – Bruno Noth with a broken pelvis. He looks left out of the car's window to the roadside with its large boulders.

Is that not the face of one of the four men looking back at him, but with a long beard? *„Nonsense, you're starting to lose your mind. You're not in an American horror movie here.“*

The man gathers his thoughts and concentrates on the road ahead.

„There. Greg, stop!“ The passenger almost kicks a hole into the footwall looking for the imaginary brake pedal. On exiting from a corner taken at high speed the headlights have illuminated four large bodies in the road. Shocked, the German's eyes open wide. *„There's the four men from the Ju88 lying in the road.“*

The impressions gathered in the past two days along with his tiredness are playing tricks with the German's mind. The car steps out under braking and manages to stop

just in time. In the glare of the headlamps lie four life forms – four of the scraggy Irish mountain sheep which are no doubt using the warmth emission from the road to keep warm in the cold night.

The bearded face on the roadside belonged to a fifth animal. We continue. It seems like news of the invention of crash barriers has not yet travelled to this part of the world.

„Say Greg, what would happen if we crashed down one of the steep slopes to our left or right on this road?“

Greg turns in his seat with a smile: *„Ah, the next person passing would surely give stop to give us a hand.“*

In their journey to the junction with the main road at Kenmare – after a 45 minute drive – no other car passes them going the opposite direction, and even in the rear view mirror no headlights appeared. The fast drive continues in the direction of Killarney. It really is pitch black and on the tight road through the mountains before the town every car seems to come at them on the wrong side of the road. The German takes time out to try and explain a current joke doing the rounds in Germany to his host in English:

(Explanation: The German equivalent of the Kerryman - the national butt of jokes - are the inhabitants of Ostfriesland, a small province located in the extreme north-west of the country)

Two friends meet in Ostfriesland. The first tells the other that he is going on a holiday in England and is to take his car along so he can explore the island, and that the journey with the Hamburg to London ferry was already booked.

Says the second chap:

„Don't be mad, they drive on the left over there.“

„What do you mean, drive on the left?“ says the other.

„Well, they drive on the left hand side of the road.“

The first man shakes his head in disbelief, and continues on his journey. A few weeks later they meet again.

„Well, how was the holiday in England?“

„I cancelled the trip, and didn't go.“

Surprised, the second man says: *„Well, why not?“*

„Well, I enquired in the travel agents and you were right, they really do drive on the

left. So be sure, I tried it out for three days on the road between Leer and Aurich. You'd be amazed at how dangerous that is.

Greg laughs out loud and with the excitement pulls sharply at the steering wheel, causing the car to almost leave the corner sideways. This finally causes a brown trouser moment for the passenger – literally speaking.

12.30am. Greg wants to go to the dance. Neither the drive or the climb up the hill appears to have affected him. Like the two men in Allihies, the cold temperature does not seem to bother him either. The German literally falls into the bed in his heated hotel room in Shannon and turns out the light.

Tomorrow morning he has to get up at 5.30am. His flight via Dublin to London leaves at 7.00am. But sleep does not come easy to him.

The four dead men from Bellinacarriga Hill are still haunting his mind and the pieces of wreckage which are now lying in his suitcase beside him bring the hairs up on the back of his neck again. What he would give now to know his wife was beside him!

Monday March 12th, 1984

This morning the man from Solingen is sitting on a Boeing 747 "Jumbo Jet" belonging to Aer Lingus, the Irish national airline. He is on his way to Dublin, to the archives of the Irish Republic's Ministry of Defence. There he has arranged a meeting which was confirmed some months ago. Commander Peter Young is friendly and attentive. He not only provides all necessary files, but also produces dusty maps which are especially important. At this point he also telephones with a nearly living Historian specialising in Irish Aviation, Tony Kearns. He also arrives shortly afterwards and shares his knowledge with the German's thoughts.

The half day flies by during the study of the files and the discussion with both Irishmen. All papers can be photocopied for the German's files and included is the most important piece of paper yet – a German Flight Order!

The flight back to London passes off without any issues, and in Heathrow Michael Turner is waiting at the Lufthansa counter. The two discuss the first sketches he has made and then decide on which one to use for the final painting of the Ju88 D7+DK. Photos and further details of the aircraft which met its fate on the 23rd July 1943 are to be sent to the artist later. The picture will show the situation of the Ju88 D-1 with its crew off the Irish coast as it was moments before the crash. Sorting out the details and discussing these is difficult for the German as the conversation naturally takes place in English. And Michael Turner speaks such a carefully cultivated Oxford-English with a corresponding use of vocabulary, so that the German has to constantly ask after the meaning of the expressions and idioms he does not understand and has to concentrate deeply.

As he finally gets off a Lufthansa Boeing 737 in Dusseldorf that evening and is collected by his wife, her first words as she casts a quick glance over her husband are: „*You look exhausted!*“

* * * * *

Two years later they met again but in the artist's studio:

„*Now Michael, here are your photos and a preliminary report.*“

Michael Turner – one of the most famous English aviation (and motorsport) illustrators of the 20th Century – is leaning over the table in his suburban London studio to look at the photos. These exposures of bombers of the type Junkers Ju-88 D-1 all originate from the archive of the 'great old man' of German Aviation history,

writer Heinz Nowarra. He had generously made them available to the man from Solingen, and now they are lying on the table of this world famous painter, who is trying to make a composite image from the subtleties and perspectives shown – a drawing of the Ju88 with the markings D7+DK, which will only become apparent later.

I'll show you my designs with the different viewpoints. You'll then just have to decide on which one you like.“ Michael Turner smiles and offers his guest a whiskey. The workroom is filled with drawings, designs, pictures as well as half-complete and finished Gouaches and acrylics. They mainly show English aircraft from the First and Second World Wars, modern jet fighters but also scenes from maritime history.

Airliners of civil aviation are missing almost entirely; there is almost no demand for them. Disappointing for the man from Germany. A nice picture of a DC9, Boeing 727, 737 or DC3, DC6, Lockheed Electra or a Super Constellation would really bring him joy. But such things don't exist, not as reprint and especially not as an original for sale.

* * * * *

Until the day before yesterday the author – and he is the man who travelled to Ireland, as the keen reader will no doubt have guessed – did not know which markings the aircraft had, where she came from and where it was travelling to.

He simply knew only that a Ju88 had crashed in Ireland. Apart from the young members of the Luftwaffe – soldiers – there was also a civil servant in the rank of Government advisor, who was 32 years old. The most important question was, what was a German bomber doing over neutral Ireland with a 32 year old civilian on board? And how did this 32 year old civilian get himself into this situation, when his biggest objective in the war would be to make it home alive?

Now I had the clue to solving the mystery in my hand: in 1943 the Irish found the German flight order for the aircraft's test flight after changing the engines in Hans Auschner's pocket and I had obtained a photocopy of it in the Irish Ministry of Defence! The order originally contained the name of three crewmen and a master tester. The names of the crew were crossed out and contained the names Auschner, Dümmler and Kuschidlo instead.

As these were certainly dead, it stood to logic that the three crossed out names and the master tester were survivors. And most importantly: the name and signature of the Officer on the flight order.

The Wehrmacht (Army) Information Office for War Losses and Prisoners Of War in Berlin informed me, that the three listed airmen which were crossed out either died or were still missing in action. They had no information on the master tester.

In the meantime, at the National Archives in Freiburg I had managed to find an original flight order for the crew of the D7 + DK for the 23rd July 1943 with the aid of a former member of another weather reconnaissance squadron – a further piece of the puzzle that was deciphering the clues about this crash. From Berlin I now discovered that the later Squadron Leader of the Weather Reconnaissance Squadron 2 of the Luftwaffe High Command (Wekusta 2 Ob.d.L) was thought to have survived the war and was last known to live in Bremen. This was the same man who had signed the order for the aircraft's test flight.

The telephone directory enquiries listed three telephone numbers in Bremen which corresponded to this name. With the first call the owner of a Stables answered, and I cited my enquiry only for him to declare he knew nothing of the sort – but he had a girlfriend and she was Stewardess with Lufthansa and had told him of the gentleman with the same name. And this man was a trainer at Lufthansa's pilot school in Bremen. The other two calls led to nothing.

The result was quite simple: For two days I sat and spoke with Hans Auschner's former squadron leader in the Restaurant of Bremen Airport, and since then the photocopy not only bears the signature of this man from 1943 but also the original from 1983!

I received photos, detailed written reports, met another former pilot of this unit via telephone and met a former gunner. Dr M. Teich, the meteorologist who for many years gave the weather forecasts on ZDF (German State Broadcaster), himself served as a weather reconnaissance crew member in the war, flying off the extreme north of Norway. He also helped me and gave an insight into the world of the flying meteorologists of that time. The Weather Bureaus of Offenbach and Dublin, the Defence Ministries of England and Ireland, the eyewitness Michael Murphy and the Parish Priest Michael Maher, the German National Archives and many other individuals also helped me.

And so I am certain, that the last flight of D7 + DK took place beyond all reasonable doubt as I have described it. And still, the story of what happened in Ireland in 1943 was almost lost in time. It is a warning to all who have remained untouched by the happenings back then but who now have an open mind on life and its inherent dangers.

During my time researching this I set out on a drive to Lake Constance. Now throughout my entire life I always enjoyed driving and even today usually arrive at my chosen destination without any drama.

On the drive the radio traffic broadcasts reported a traffic jam on the motorway before Heilbronn, and so with a quick look at my road map I decided to neatly bypass it via country roads. The opportunity also presented itself to show my wife how good her husbands navigational skills were and to highlight her own navigational

shortcomings. So she took the wheel and we left the motorway just before the start of the traffic jam. We were going in the right direction, I had the map on my knees and saw no reason, not to be able to demonstrate my infallibility. But we encountered some fog, and without being able to see the sun I not only lost my sense of direction, but also our location on the map which was on too large a scale to be of any help.

Thanks to the road signs we found the motorway again with considerable effort, but not at the exact on-ramp I had envisaged. However, we had cleared the traffic jam. Still, the scorn of my driver caused me some distress, but worse was the pain of my own failing! It was not a good day for me and I began to get more and more mad at myself with each passing kilometre. Shortly before Stuttgart, in the direction of Singen on the motorway I started to search for an apple which was somewhere around the centre console in a plastic bag. Normally we keep a small bag as a bin there for longer trips. I could not understand why the apple would be in the bin bag, still persisted in searching for it there and of course, didn't find it.

My wife insisted however that the apple was in the bag, and a row started where started to look in the bag with her right hand while looking at it, holding the steering wheel with her left.

At the same time the autopilot – we usually drive with the autopilot on – held the car at a steady speed of 130km/h. And then I made an error which I still have not forgiven myself for – I also looked down at the bag, swearing. At some point my wife looked up in the direction of travel and I heard a „Dear God!“ as the car was pulled dramatically to one side.

We had not seen a slight bend approaching and with a speed of 130 were already on the hard shoulder and getting very close to the guardrail.

Only two seconds later and the next day the papers would report on a crash on the motorway near Stuttgart. With clear conditions, a dry surface and light traffic a car with two passengers would have left the road without any kind of explanation and hit the guard rail without skid marks. The following barrel roll would have killed the people in the car.

And nobody would have discovered, that all the crew of a crashed Ju88 in Ireland in 1943 needed was two more seconds of climbing time to survive. Since then I cannot fathom what really controls or decides who dies in one crash to the next.

For example, how was it recently possible that two solitary aircraft flying in the three dimensions above the Atlantic collided or that the same happened a few years later above Lake Constance. My numbers coming up in the lotto would be more probable, while I do not expect to ever receive an answer to my question.

* * * * *

Rolf Hölterhoff
December 1997

Postscript:

Mr Michael Voigt from Osnabrück called me on Monday, 10th December 1997. He is a great-nephew of Hans Auschner. After investigations into his great-uncle he found a homepage mentioned on a German Air Force forum regarding the magazine Jet & Prop. There he found my article and called me after finding my telephone number in the national directory.

It is a sensation and perhaps my last chance after all this time to make contact with a relative of the crew. I have sent Mr Voigt not only the pieces of wreckage of the Ju88, but also copies of my most important research documents. We remain in contact with each other.