

Monument in Czech Republic for downed B-17G tail number 42-97185

A beautiful granite monolithic monument was erected in 2005 to commemorate the crew of Eighth Air Force, 306th Bomb Group (Heavy), 369th Squadron, Aircraft B-17G (Flying Fortress) # 42-97185. This bomber crashed at the monument site near Hridelec, Czechoslovakia (now Czech Republic) on 14 Feb 1945.

The crewmembers were:

Capt. Boylston B. Lewis Jr., Pilot
2nd Lt. Robert S Whitelaw, Co-pilot
1st Lt. Lester A Harrison, Navigator
1st Officer Joseph R. Sicard, Bombardier
T/Sgt. James F. Standlee Jr., flight engineer and top turret gunner
Sgt. Hardin F. McChesney Jr., radio operator
Sgt. Alfred S. Lubojacky, ball turret gunner, Id. Num. 38 561 682
Sgt. Frank L. McDonough, waist gunner
Sgt. Leon Nahmias, tail gunner

This is the story of how the monument came to be.

Milos Podzimek, Czech citizen, part-time historian, and member of Ornamental Society of Army History, first visited a crash site of a B-17G Flying Fortress in 1990 after the Soviet Union collapsed and Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia ended. (*Czechoslovakia peacefully separated into Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993.*)

Mr. Podzimek wrote a booklet in 2005. The introduction, translated from the Czech booklet, follows:

It was 15 years ago when I visited the place of the air crash for the first time. I did not know what I would expect during the investigation into the events forgotten for a long time, life stories of young airmen who voluntarily decided to fight against the evil far from their homes. Memories of several members of the crew who are still alive, witnesses of the crash, fieldwork activities, correspondence and thousands of hours of my investigation moved me forward. Gradually, as parts of a mosaic, I was putting all the facts together to reveal the story of the last flight of one Flying Fortress B-17G whose crew tried to save their lives on the territory of occupied Czechoslovakia.

While visiting the crash site, Milos learned from local citizens the bomber crashed on 14 February 1945 around noon. He set about researching the crash. During research, he interviewed local citizens. He was also able to obtain some photographs and remnants of the crashed airplane from local citizens who managed to pick up the items before the Germans arrived to remove the wreckage. He stored them for a future museum.

He and his son, Milos Jr, obtained additional information of the crash from U.S. Air Force Historical Research Center, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama and U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, D.C. They learned the names of the crewmen and the mission they were on. He set about contacting each crew member or their family to learn what happened to them after the war was over.

Over the years, he was able to contact crew members and their families to get their written recollections of that fateful day. He eventually completed a 32-page Czech language booklet chronicling the details of the mission of this particular Flying Fortress, the initial attack by a FW-190, the crash, and fates of the crewmen. All survived except Alfred Lubojacky. The booklet is titled **Ohen v oblacich** [translation **Fire in clouds**]. It also provides insight into the lives of the crewmen after the war. (*Only the text of the booklet has been translated into English, so it does not have any of the pictures from the Czech version.*)

Milos then set about getting a monument erected at the crash site. He and his son cataloged and setup displays of the remnants and photographs collected to create the museum. Initially, the museum had temporary quarters in the nearby town of Lazne Belohrad. Milos and his son renovated an abandoned concrete fortress bunker dating from 1938 and moved the museum into it. The bunker identification is TS-5 and is located near the Czech/Polish border town of Hronov.

In late 2004, Milos Podzimek contacted Barbara Neal, niece of Alfred Lubojacky and ball turret gunner on the crashed B-17G Flying Fortress. He and his son Milos, Jr. obtained her name through painstaking research and a language barrier. Milos told her about the monument to be dedicated on Sunday 8 May 2005, the sixtieth anniversary of liberation of Europe.

He invited Barbara as well as other still-living crewmen, their families, and families of deceased crewmen to attend the dedication of the monument. Barbara contacted all her family members and plans were made for 24 family members to go to the Czech Republic to attend the monument dedication.

When the family's tour bus arrived at the monument site out in a farm field near the village of Hridelec shortly after noon, we were completely surprised at the crowd that had gathered. Jim Whitelaw & his wife (he is the grandson of crewmember Bob Whitelaw) joined us.

Approximately 300 Czech citizens from the surrounding towns and villages attended the dedication. Nachod Swing Band, a sextet, was playing familiar American marches and other music from the war period. As the ceremony started, they played the Czech and American national anthems. Col. Ing. Jaroslav Hlavaty of the Czech Military, complete with Honor Guard, conducted the dedication ceremony. Ludvika Svoboda of the Czech House of Representatives also spoke. U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Scott Reuter, assigned to the U.S. Embassy Prague represented the United States government.

This was our first face-to-face meeting with Milos Podzimek. Our family really didn't know what to expect, but we were treated like celebrities. All of us thought that Mr. Podzimek and the Czech attendees should be the celebrities for going to the great effort and expense of creating the beautiful monument and setting up the dedication ceremony.

The dedication ceremony lasted approximately a half hour and included the laying of wreaths and flowers. During the course of the dedication, Walter Lubojacky, younger brother of crew member Alfred Lubojacky and eldest of the family attending, spoke to the attendees through an interpreter with the following words.

First, thank you to our hosts here today. You are doing a wonderful thing here.

Thank you to the wonderful people of the Czech Republic for your spirit of honor to the American and British military men who fought during World War II.

I would like to read from a letter sent 20 April 2005 by Field McChesney to our family. Mr. McChesney was the radio operator on the B-17 aircraft # 297185 on 14 Feb 1945 that crashed here.

Mr. McChesney writes: "I, too, am grateful that new generations remember what we did so many years ago. It was no more than young men of any time would have done."

Later in the letter he continues: "I am sorry we will not be able to make the trek to the Czech Republic next month. It is such a nice and friendly thing that the people there are doing. I hope those who attend will let them know that our absence does not mean we are any less appreciative."

Now, to all the nameless Czech citizens who risked their lives to help the airmen whose aircraft were shot down, a great thank you. You put your own lives in peril when you helped our men in many different ways. You provided food and shelter. You hid them from the enemy. You guided them to safety.

We have special gratitude for Mr. Milos Podzimek for fifteen years of his time and effort in research about this particular aircraft. You were able to find the detailed facts of the fate of our brother and uncle that day sixty years ago. Now we finally know how he died in his service to our country.

Today we celebrate the liberation of the Czech people and we honor those who helped bring about that liberation.

After the dedication, we were treated to the grand opening of the museum and, in the evening, a banquet followed by a concert of swing music of the 1940s.

Using Google Earth, the monument can be seen at Latitude 50.446287° Longitude 15.540902°. The museum in bunker TS-5 can be seen at Latitude 50.47906° Longitude 16.165038°.

Věnováno všem těm,
kteří se nevrátili
a také těm,
kteří je dodnes postrádají.



Na památku členům posádky bombardéru
B-17G #42-97185 od 306. BG a 369. BS 8. USAAF,
kteří se 14. února 1945 z mise na Drážďany
zachránili na padácích před zánikem jejich letadla,
jehož trosky dopadly v okolí obce Hřídolec.

Posádku tvořili:

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2Lt. Robert S. WHITELAW, 2. pilot
1Lt. Lester A. HARRISON, navigátor
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Spodní střelec Sgt. Alfred S. Lubojacky zahynul.



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