



Damage assessment of the crash on July 19, 1944.

Staatsarchiv Aargau / Ringier Bildarchiv - Arnold Theodor Pfister © StAAG/RBA1-10-32_2

The Ossingen plane crash of July 19, 1944 and the destruction of Max Huber's castle

By Dominik Landwehr, Winterthur (Switzerland)

On July 19, 1944, a downed US bomber crashed into Wyden Castle in Ossingen. The crew had managed to abandon the damaged aircraft before it crashed. That is why we can tell the story from two perspectives today.

On-site visit to Wyden Castle near Ossingen situated between Zurich and the border to Germany. Today, it belongs to the heirs of diplomat and ICRC President Max Huber (1874-1960), who bought and renovated the castle at the beginning of the 20th century. Ulrich Huber, one of Max Huber's grandsons, shows us around the rooms and also takes us to his grandfather's study at the top of the tower. Ulrich Huber is a grandson of Max Huber and something of the family's memory. He knows every object, such as the two Japanese cemetery lanterns that his grandfather bought on a trip around the world in 1900 and 1901. The rooms of his famous grandfather remained almost unchanged after his death in 1960.



*A vertical stabilizer from a B-24 bomber.
Staatssarchiv Aargau / Ringier Bildarchiv
Arnold Theodor Pfister © StAAG/RBA1-10-32_3*

Max Huber was not in Wyden on that fateful Wednesday, July 19, 1944, but at a health resort on Mont Pèlerin. However, five of his grandchildren and other family members were at the castle. Ulrich Huber, now 86, was a five-year-old child – under the care of his mother and an aunt, he played with his one-year-old brother Ruedi. Of all places, a torn-off wing of the aircraft with its fuel tank still burning got caught on the tree under which he was playing. “I realized the terrible noise and saw the excited firefighters and soldiers jumping around. Apparently, I was scared and ran away. Halfway to the village of Ossingen, I was intercepted by strangers and taken to their house.”

What had happened? An American bomber on its way back from Munich was shot down over Friedrichshafen, the crew parachuted out of the plane, and the aircraft crashed unmanned onto the

castle. Miraculously, there were no casualties, although the housekeeper Charlotte Fehr suffered minor injuries.

This was not the only aircraft to suffer this fate: 186 aircraft landed on Swiss soil during the Second World War, many of them at the last minute. Fifty-five aircraft crashed. There were 241 aircraft in total, 166 of which belonged to the US Air Force. Aircraft that were shot down in Switzerland but landed outside the country's borders are not included in this figure, says aviation specialist Dani Egger, citing an official report by the commander of the air force and air defense troops from August 1944.

In addition to Wyden Castle, there was also other war damage, mostly caused by bombing resulting from navigation errors. Among other places, Schaffhausen, Stein am Rhein, and Zurich were affected. The US paid Switzerland an initial compensation of over 60 million francs in 1944 and a second payment after the war. The Huber family also received compensation. The files in the Federal Archives and the US National Archives mention the amount of 179,263 US dollars, which is 769,000 francs at the exchange rate at the time. After the war, the castle was rebuilt according to plans by the renowned Zurich architect Werner M. Moser (1896–1970). He was the son of Karl Moser (1860–1936), who had built the Kunsthaus Zurich between 1906 and 1910.



Max Huber's library in Wyden Castle suffered severe damage, not least from the water used to extinguish the fire. Staatssarchiv Aargau / Ringier Bildarchiv John Gugelmann © StAAG/RBA1-10-879_1.

The story of the US bomber “Jackpine Joe”

The story of the ill-fated flight of the Liberator bomber on July 19, 1944, begins at the Pantanella military airfield in southern Italy. The Liberator aircraft were heavy strategic bombers capable of covering long distances and equipped with ten crew members. Compared to the B-17 “Flying Fortress,” these aircraft were more difficult to fly, and flying in tight formations was particularly problematic. Among the crew was bombardier 2nd Lieutenant Nathan Goldenbloom. His son Josh still has contacts in Switzerland and has provided us with documents and pictures of his father.



A shot-down Liberator B-24 bomber. Symbolic image Wikimedia Commons.

Their mission for that day was to bomb the Allach aircraft factory in Munich, where BMW Flugmotorenbau GmbH was located, a major production facility for aircraft engines for the German Air Force. The “Jackpine Joe” had problems shortly before reaching its target in Munich. At its target in Allach, the aircraft was hit by German anti-aircraft fire, lost altitude, and dropped all its bombs. An emergency landing was unavoidable. The decision was made to land in Switzerland. At 11 a.m., navigator Johnson jumped out of the nose landing gear door near Munich without orders. He survived in German captivity. On the way to Switzerland, the aircraft was again

hit by anti-aircraft fire near Friedrichshafen and was severely damaged. Over Lake Constance, the pilot gave the order to bail out. Co-pilot Ballbach died because his parachute failed to open.



*The crew of the Jackpine Joe. Nathan "Sonny" Goldenbloom is in the back row, second from the left.
Foto Familienarchiv Josh Goldenbloom Kalifornien/USA.*

Shortly before noon, the B-24 crashed without a pilot or crew into the tower of Wyden Castle, which was immediately destroyed. With the wind blowing westward, the men landed on Swiss territory, one man only 30 meters from the shore of Lake Constance.

The nine crew members were interned in Davos, Wengen, and Adelboden in Switzerland. For Switzerland, this was also an opportunity to fill empty hotels and bring guests to the health resorts. After the war, Switzerland billed the US government for these services.



Nathan Goldenbloom after his parachute landing on July 19, 1944 – two members of the local fire department help him with the transport. Photo: Josh Golden family archive

The stories of the American airmen continue to fascinate to this day. Ueli Hebeisen from Winterthur has built various models of the bomber and also of the lock, using original documents wherever possible. The long-time curator of the St. Katharinental exhibition depot – the agricultural history collection of the canton of Thurgau – recounts the following bizarre story: a local farmer made a cowbell from the engine cylinder of an American bomber that crashed near Schlatt TG in 1944 and a manure crane from the large metal parts.

T

he crash as a model



Castle owner Ulrich Huber with Winterthur model maker Ueli Hebeisen at the handover of the model on November 1, 2025. Photo: Dominik Landwehr

To welcome us, we are treated to a souvenir photo with the now 86-year-old ‘lord of the manor’ Ulrich Huber: he is one of the grandsons of the former owner Max Huber – then president of the International Committee of the Red Cross and a respected diplomat.

Winterthur-based model maker and electronics engineer Ueli Hebeisen specializes in replicating historic aircraft. He was inspired to build the Wyden model by non-fiction author Dani Egger, who published a comprehensive reference work in 2018 listing all US aircraft that crashed or landed in Switzerland. He has built two different versions of the Liberator bomber: one on a scale of 1:72 and one on a scale of 1:144. The devil is in the detail with this work: “There are numerous versions of the US B-24 bomber,” explains Hebeisen. Finding the right one requires extensive research. But then it's all about

reconstructing the finer details. This includes, for example, painting the nose of the aircraft, known as

“nose art,” or the details inside the cockpit. Reconstructing the castle as it was before 1944 was also challenging. To do this, Hebeisen consulted the plans he found in the archives of the Zurich Cantonal Building Department. Ueli Hebeisen's model has a little twist: at the push of a button, a red light begins to flicker in the left engine of the aircraft, simulating the engine failure suffered by the bomber.

Castle owner Ulrich Huber is delighted with the unexpected gift. He has been researching the history of Wyden Castle and his famous grandfather for decades and maintains an extensive archive of Max Huber's private papers. Max



The model of the crash on July 19, 1944, on a scale of 1:144. Ueli Hebeisen has recreated the scene in various scales. Photo Dominik Landwehr.



Huber's professional estate has been housed in the Zurich Central Library for many years. "It's now much easier to imagine this accident and its consequences," he says. The model made by the Winterthur resident will be given a place of honor in the castle!

*Ulrich Huber in the family archive. There are thousands of files, letters, and other documents here.
Photo: Dominik Landwehr*

The author has published an extensive collection of material on the crash.
<https://www.sternenjaeger.ch/absturz/>

Dominik Landwehr is a historian and holds a doctorate in cultural and media studies and lives in Winterthur.

Contact

Weierstrasse 76 – 8405 Winterthur

Phone +41 79 411 59 17

<https://www.sternenjaeger.ch/>

