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# Forever United

A Memorial Day tribute: PARADE

# Post Register



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SUNDAY

May 25, 2014

**Yellowstone**  
There is much more to the national park than Old Faithful **D1**

**These colors run**  
Thousands turned out for the colorful Color Vibe 2014 5K Run in Idaho Falls **C1**

**Double time**  
Busch's double bid highlights the Indy 500 **B1**

# Rediscovering Bomber 42-73365



Associated Press courtesy Ford Motor Co., file  
**The B-24 Liberator is shown in this handout photo from the Ford Motor Co. During World War II, Ford adapted its mass production and moving assembly techniques from the automobile industry to build aircraft with great success.**

## Local historian, INL archaeologists revisit World War II-era crash site

By NATE SUNDERLAND  
nsunderand@postregister.com

The fading memories of a downed World War II-era flight crew are coming into sharp focus thanks to a rediscovery by a local historian and archaeologists at the Idaho National Laboratory.

In March, archaeologists pinpointed the location of Aircraft 42-73365 — a consolidated B-24J Liberator bomber that crashed in the Acro Desert during a 1944 training mission.

The entire 7-man crew compliment died in the crash: 2nd Lt. Richard A. Hedges, 25, 2nd



Photo courtesy INL  
**What appears to be a high school class ring from 1935 recently was recovered by INL archaeologists at the long-forgotten plane crash site. It likely belonged to a member of the flight crew of Aircraft 42-73365.**

**INSIDE**  
See a list of Memorial Day activities around the area / **C5**

Lt. Lonnie L. Keepers, 23, 2nd Lt. Robert W. Madsen, 28, 2nd Lt. Richard R. Pitzner, 23, Sgt. Louis H. Rinke, 19, Sgt. Charles W. Eddy, 22, and Sgt. George H. Pearce Jr., 25.

"I think that was the most touching part — that we know that seven people died right here," archaeologist Julie Williams said. "And it's not that we haven't found other places (on the INL site) where people have died, but this was in context ... because we know where and how they perished."

The rediscovery of the long forgotten site is thanks to Marc McDonald, a Pocatello historian and airplane enthusiast. While studying World War II-era plane crashes in eastern Idaho, he came upon the story of aircraft 42-73365. He contacted INL with the suspicion that the crash may have been close to or on the site.

"Julie told me that they'd heard rumors of the plane, but

Part of bomber had hundreds of hours flying experience

**CRASH, Continued on Page A4**



Photo courtesy INL  
**2nd Lt. Richard A. Hedges, left, stands with his brother Edgar W. Hedges. Richard Hedges was a bomber pilot in the 464th Bombardment Group, 776th Bombardment Squadron of the Second Air Force. He died along with his crew during a training exercise in Bingham County on Jan. 8, 1944.**

**"I think that was the most touching part — that we know that seven people died right here. And it's not that we haven't found other places (on the INL site) where people have died, but this was in context ... because we know where and how they perished."**

**JULIE WILLIAMS**  
archaeologist



Courtesy of Robert Tullis  
**Robert Tullis was among the American soldiers who liberated a concentration camp during WWII. He was recently honored at the Holocaust Remembrance Ceremony at the Capitol.**

# So no one will forget

Idaho soldier who witnessed Nazi horrors shares his photos and memories

By ANNA WEBB  
Idaho Statesman

Robert Tullis saw bodies, sprinkled with lime, stacked like cord wood.

He smelled the stench of Nazi death camps. He saw starving camp victims die from just trying to eat.

Sixty-nine years later, Tullis remembers smaller, quieter moments as well, such as the children who were thrilled to get the candy he gave them. Born in wartime, they'd never seen candy.

At 88, he's speaking about his experiences now because he doesn't want anyone to forget what happened. He wants to preserve the memory so that younger people know they should be on guard to not let the unparalleled horrors of history happen again.

## From Nampa to France

Tullis was a 19-year-old football star from Nampa, attending Colorado College, when he became an Army infantryman in 1943. He trained at Fort Shelby, Miss., and shortly after New Year's Day 1945, landed in Le Havre, France.

Months later, he and his fellow soldiers became "liberators." They were among the first allies to reach Nazi concentration camps in Germany.

On an April day in 1945, Tullis and his fellow troops arrived at Ohrdruf-Nord, a satellite camp of the infamous Buchenwald camp 32 miles away.

"By the time we got there, everyone was already dead," Tullis said.

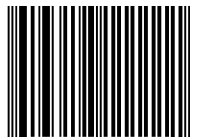
A couple days earlier, the Germans evacuated thousands of prisoners in a forced march back to the main camp. They shot anyone who remained behind.

No one believed reports of horrors Soviet troops described

**TULLIS, Continued on Page A3**

## The Crew of B-24J No. 42-73365

<b>2nd Lt. Richard A. Hedges</b>	<b>2nd Lt. Lonnie L. Keepers</b>	<b>2nd Lt. Robert W. Madsen</b>	<b>2nd Lt. Richard R. Pitzner</b>	<b>Sgt. Louis H. Rinke</b>	<b>Charles W. Eddy</b>	<b>George H. Pearce Jr.</b>
25, Crockett, Ohio — Pilot	23, Aransas Pass, Tex. — Co-pilot	28, North St. Paul, Minn. — Navigator	23, Chicago — Bomber	19, Virginia — Armament Gunner	22, San Luis Obispo, Calif. — Armament Gunner	25, Canton, Conn. — Armament Gunner



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Births.....C6	Games.....F6, F7	Pet of the Week.....C4	Weather.....A2
Breakfast Briefing.....A2	Lottery Numbers.....A2	Smart Living.....D1	West.....C1
Business Board.....C4, C5	Movies.....C5	Sports.....B1	Voice.....C6
Classified.....E1, F1	Obituaries.....C3, C6, C8	Stocks.....C7	
Comics.....D4	Opinions.....A9	Support Groups.....C6	

\$1 daily / \$2 Sunday

**77** High / **48** Low

**Today: Sunny.**  
Forecast: **A2**



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## The Consolidated B-24 Liberator

This heavy bomber was used extensively by Allied forces during air offensives in World War II. The nearly 40,000-pound aircraft had a wingspan of about 110 feet and was equipped with four main engines. It carried more than 3,600 gallons of fuel and could travel at a maximum speed of 300 mph at about 30,000 feet.

Often compared to the B-17 Flying Fortress, the B-24 was more modern, faster and had greater range, but it was notoriously more difficult to fly. Each aircraft was operated by a 10-man crew, which often was forced to sit in the unheated aircraft for up to 10 hours. Temperatures inside the plane could drop to more than 50 below at altitudes of more than 20,000 feet. The aircraft carried an explosive payload of about 10 500-pound bombs or five 1,000-pound bombs.

The B-24 Liberator is perhaps best known for its use in the Operation Tidal Wave attack on the oil refineries in Ploesti, Romania, in August 1943. The



Associated Press courtesy U.S. Postal Service  
This image provided by the U.S. Postal Service shows a stamp featuring the B-24 Liberator heavy bomber "Black Cat."

Ploesti oil fields supplied 60 percent of Germany's crude oil. The B-24 was used because it was the only bomber capable of making the more than 2,000-mile roundtrip from bases in Libya. A total of 177 B-24 Liberators were launched with 1,751 crewmen in five groups to attack the refineries. Fifty-four aircraft were lost and 532 crewmen killed.

## CRASH

From Page A1

had never seen nor found anything," McDonald said. "So I requested the incident report from the Air Force, got a hold of several news articles, and working as a group, we started to put this whole thing together."

The incident and news reports don't give an explanation for the crash, but do provide insight into the day and night when it happened.

### The crash

The training mission took place the night of Jan. 8, 1944. It was a frigidly cold night in Bingham County with temperatures near zero, but, by all accounts, the sky was clear, winds were minimal and a nearly full moon was shining.

It was an ideal night for flying, which would have boded well for the rotating bomber groups and fighter squadrons based at the Pocatello Army Air Base. During the height of World War II, pilots and their crews frequently practiced high-altitude bombing and air combat training in the sky above what today is INL.

That night, one of the training missions was led by pilot Richard A. Hedges, and co-pilot Lonnie L. Keepers, members of the 464th Bombardment Group. They were to take Aircraft 42-73365 on a nighttime practice bombing run. They were to drop sand-filled practice bombs, with black powder spotting charges, on wooden pyramid targets.

Reports show that earlier in the day, the seven-man crew passed a pre-flight medical check. They were found to be suffi-

ciently rested and "have no physical or mental defects," according to Medical Corps. Capt. Dabney von K. Moon.

The accident report showed that before the crash, Hedges had hundreds of hours of flight time as pilot on the B-24.

The plane took off at 8:05 p.m. and entered the desert bombing range at about 8:40 p.m., according to the flight controller.

Bombing range tower operator Sgt. Nickerson observed the plane make three bombing runs 10 minutes later at an estimated altitude of 20,000 feet.

As the bomber began its fourth run, something went wrong. Technicians later suspected failure in one or two of the aircraft's four main engines. But, whatever happened, the plane fell into a dive and within three minutes dropped from 20,000 feet to about 100 feet off the ground, according to witnesses.

Somehow, Hedges and Keepers, managed to stabilize the plane before impact. It flew directly over a livestock herding camp where George Hansen of Firth was working. He observed the plane "very close to the ground" trying hard to regain altitude.

"I believe the airplane was having trouble and trying to make a landing. I could not see whether all the engines were running or not," he said in a statement to the military.

The plane regained about 500 feet of altitude and tried to initiate a tight turn, but the maneuver turned out to be too much for its already weakened frame. The stress tore the left fin and rudder from the plane, causing it to spin out of control. It fell very quickly, crashing into the desert and resulting in a bright, loud explosion observed by both Nickerson and Han-



PHOTO COURTESY INL  
A bomb release from the wreckage of B-24J No. 42-73365

sen. The herder jumped on a horse and rode to the burning plane. He looked for injured crew members, but found none. He later guided military personnel to the crash site.

It is unknown when the Army recovered the bodies and large pieces of wreckage. A Jan. 14, 1944, news article from the Acro Advertiser reported five bodies had been recovered, and that a search was underway for two additional crew members. Eventually, their remains were found underneath the wreckage.

The bodies were returned to the crew's families living in various parts of the United States.

Within the next decade, the crash site became part of a restricted area that would house the Idaho National Laboratory. The remaining wreckage sat relatively undisturbed for 70 years.

### Memories of the crew

Most of the Aircraft 42-73365 crew appear to have had no siblings and historic records indicate their lines may have died with them. But a couple crew members did have larger families including pilot Richard Hedges.

Nephew Charles Hedges was 4-years-old when the accident happened, but he still remembers the impact the death of Richard had on the family.

"My grandfather never really talked about it, because I think it really devastated him," Charles Hedges said. "My dad always said that (my grandfather's) hair went totally grey within two weeks of Richard's death."

Richard Hedges was married at the time of his death to a woman named Ruth, who the family later lost contact with. He also has two living brothers who also served in World War II, but neither could be reached for comment.

Another memory comes from flight engineer Frank Ramsey in a history book about the Pocatello Airport. He was a member of the flight crew, but did not take part in the training because he was taking a furlough day.

"I have some good mem-



PHOTO COURTESY INL  
A door handle from the wreckage of B-24J No. 42-73365



PHOTO COURTESY INL  
The data plate from the wreckage of B-24J No. 42-73365

ories of Pocatello and a sad one — you see I lost (seven) men in my crew in a crash there," Ramsey said. "This was the only flight I ever missed. Thank God."

### Making the rediscovery

McDonald and INL historians had no idea where the crash might be. The only clues were some photocopied photos of the wreckage, conflicting eyewitness accounts and a 70-year-old hand-drawn map to the crash site.

"There were so many discrepancies within the report ... the whole thing was very confusing trying to determine where it was," Williams said. "But we started to recognize some of the places and we made some assumptions based on information in the accident report."

Eventually, they turned to Google Earth and satellite imagery to find scars that may have been caused by a plane crash. They identified three potential sites and went out to inves-

tigate with GPS locators.

The first two sites returned no results. But at the third site, Williams stumbled across an aluminum gauge, which led them to the main debris field.

"The debris was covered in vegetation in a slight depression — it wasn't a scar or crater left by the airplane, just a natural dip," she said. "If you had walked by there not looking for the airplane, we would not have paid any attention to the wreckage."

McDonald said the amount of wreckage was about as expected. The large pieces had been carted off, but there was a large swath of smaller aircraft debris and even some personal items belonging to crew members.

"After 70 years, you couldn't really tell anything crashed there," McDonald said.

One of the artifacts appeared to be a high school class ring, bearing the year 1935. It was the only artifact removed from the site. The hope is the owner can be identified and the ring returned to a family member. McDonald has found a few relatives of crew members, but is still searching for more information.

The crash site is not likely to be processed further, unless family members want to memorialize the area. Even if that doesn't happen, the investigation has at least brought some recognition to the lost crew of Aircraft 42-73365.

"Most of the things we find (at archaeological sites on the INL) you don't know who was there," Williams said. "But in this case, we know who the crew members were; their ages, hometowns, and so when we were looking at this debris, we were thinking of those people — and that really struck home for us."

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**ALL RESIDENTIAL GARBAGE COLLECTION WILL BE ONE DAY LATE AND ALL COMMERCIAL COLLECTION WILL BE ON SCHEDULE**

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