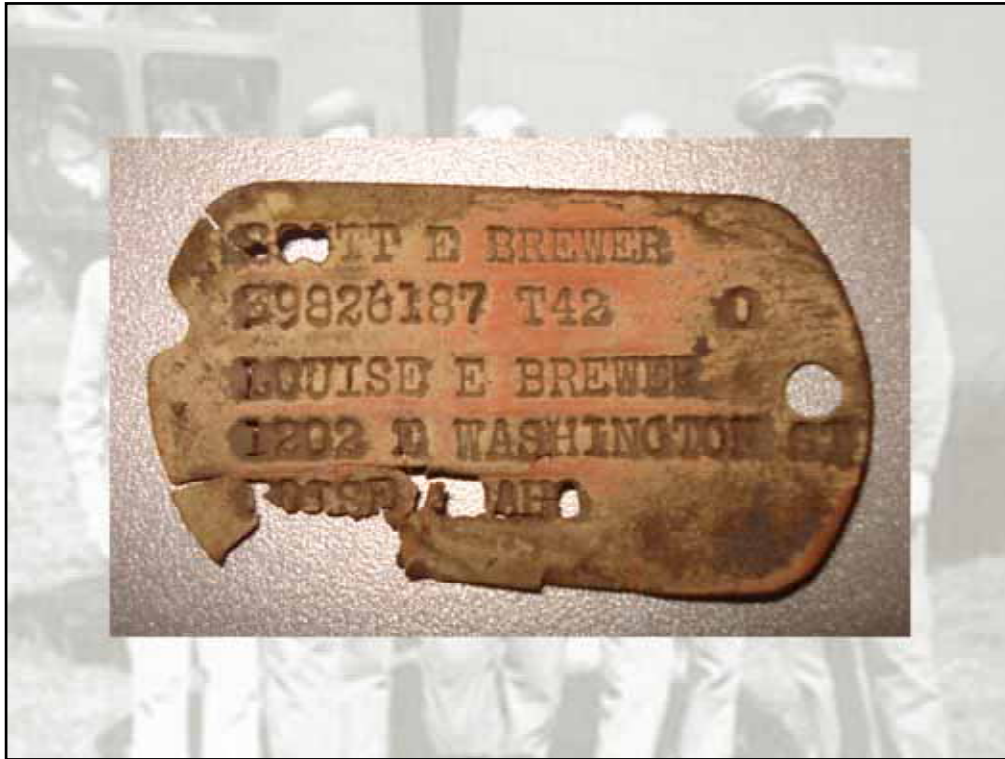




This is a presentation that Jim Hamilton gave at the Ventress Memorial Library in Marshfield, Massachusetts on November 8, 2008 as part of a Veteran's Day program. Others on the program included Bill Dunn, who spoke about Marshfield during the Civil War; Gene Jackson, who spoke about his service with the Tuskegee Airmen; J. Richard Watkins, who spoke about his book "Vietnam: No Regrets"; and Dick Martin from Marshfield's Office of Veteran's Services, who spoke about Operation Hope, which provides care packages for our troops. The event also included a knitting and crochet circle. Participants knitted items for servicemen and women.



This dog tag sat undiscovered in a German farm field for 64 years. It was found this January by a German man named Tomas Hauschild who works for an explosive ordnance disposal unit. He wasn't casually looking for souvenirs. He was looking for unexploded bombs, which still litter the landscape in Germany. Whenever a new house is built in this part of northern Germany, a thorough search must be done to assure that the area is safe for construction. This site was not far from an airfield that had been bombed many times during the World War II. And it was also the site the crash of an American B-24 bomber. The story I'll tell you today is about Scott Everhart Brewer, a tail gunner from Boise, Idaho, who was on that B-24 when it was shot down on February 26, 1943.



I'd like to tell you how I learned about this story. In 1995 my wife and I moved to Marshfield with our toddler son, Gavin (who is now a sophomore at Marshfield High). My daughter Olivia, now an eighth grader, was born a few months later. Before we moved to Marshfield we lived in Sayville, New York on the south coast of Long Island. It was there one day, while on a stroll with my son, that I came across a grave marker in St. Ann's cemetery. These are the words that were on the stone:

In Memory of Robert Perkins Post
Correspondent New York Times
Born September 8, 1910 Killed in air attack over Wilhelmshaven February 26, 1943
Buried in U.S. Military Cemetery Neuville-En-Condroz, Belgium

It amazed me to read this. I was surprised that they would let a reporter go along on a military mission. As I did a little research I found that other journalists had participated in the mission, including three well-known figures in American newspaper and television journalism: Homer Bigart, Walter Cronkite, and Andy Rooney. The stories they wrote about the mission were compelling and thought provoking. In addition to the journalists, several military participants also wrote accounts, most amazingly the German pilot who shot down Bob Post's plane. Pieces of this mission were even caught on film: Hollywood director William Wyler accompanied the mission while filming the movie "The Memphis Belle." This topic fascinated me and after years of research I turned it into a book called "The Writing 69th", copies of which are available in this library. (Note: The cover artwork for "The Writing 69th" was created by Marshfield artist Dot Krause.)



But the story I want to tell today isn't about Robert Perkins Post and the Writing 69th, it's about Scott Everhart Brewer, a 28-year-old airman whose dog tag was lost for so many years. Son of a department store salesman, Brewer was good-looking and popular. He'd worked as a bartender at a place called the Smokehouse in downtown Boise. He joined the armed forces early on and was assigned to the 44th Bomb Group, which trained at Barksdale Field in Louisiana and later was posted to Shipdham, England. Part of the original crew of a B-24 bomber called "Maisie" piloted by Captain Howard Adams, Brewer made the trip from Gander Lake, Newfoundland to Prestwick, Scotland in late September of 1942.

L. Atlec Cotterman flew with Maisie to Scotland. Here is his account of that flight:

...Upon leaving the coastline we had clear star-lit sky the water far below looked like new-fallen snow. We continued to climb until we reached our assigned altitude of approximately seven thousand feet. About 500 miles out we observed a large convoy on its way to England and Russia, about the same time a cloud bank was encountered and for several hours we flew in bright moon-light with soft white clouds beneath us.

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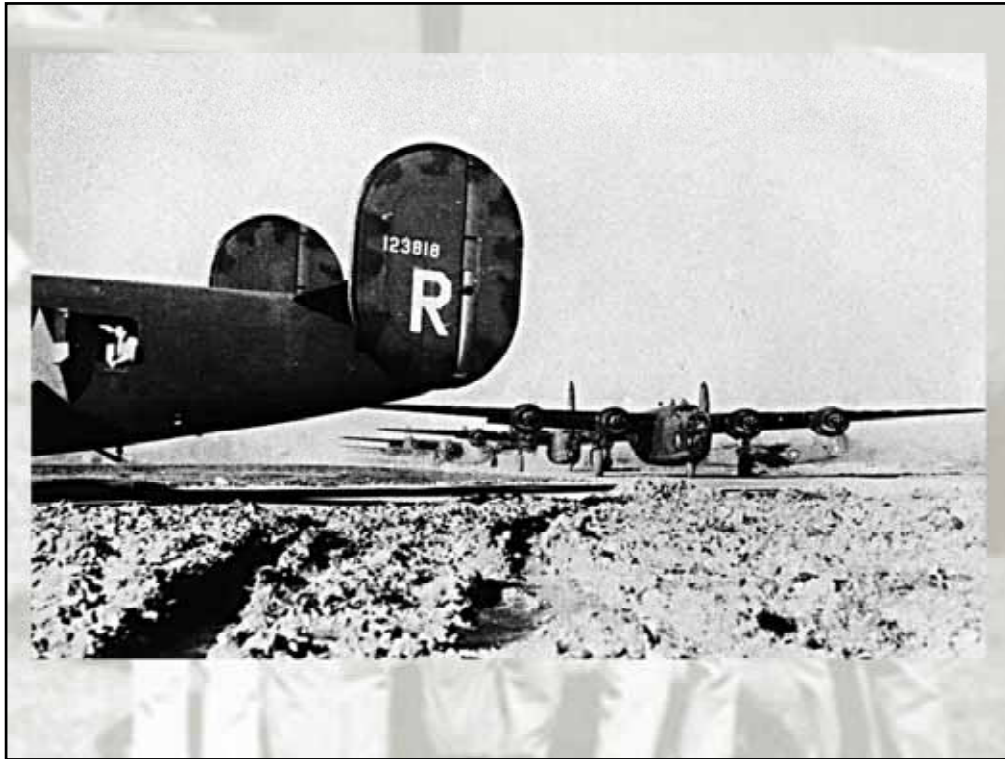
It is often said, men who fly and make the air their home can hear music when alone up there, I didn't hear music as I looked out over that vast expanse of nothing but only the steady throb of those engines, our only hope from a icy death in the cold North Atlantic below. I feel sure another hand was also guiding us that faithful night or we may have never reached our destination safely. I dozed off and on until about 4:30 a.m. when it began to get light in the East. Around 5:00 a.m. Lt. Adams called us on the intercom and we swung the machine-guns out the waist windows just in case – preceding aircraft had at about this point in the crossing run into Jerry fighters from Norway and two had been shot down so we were on the alert. Also at this time we hit our long awaited cold front and we dropped to a scant 300 feet of the waves. For two hours we flew by instruments and as I later found out were quite lost also. We finally broke out of the mist and fog to see before us a most glorious sun rise I shall never forget that morning.

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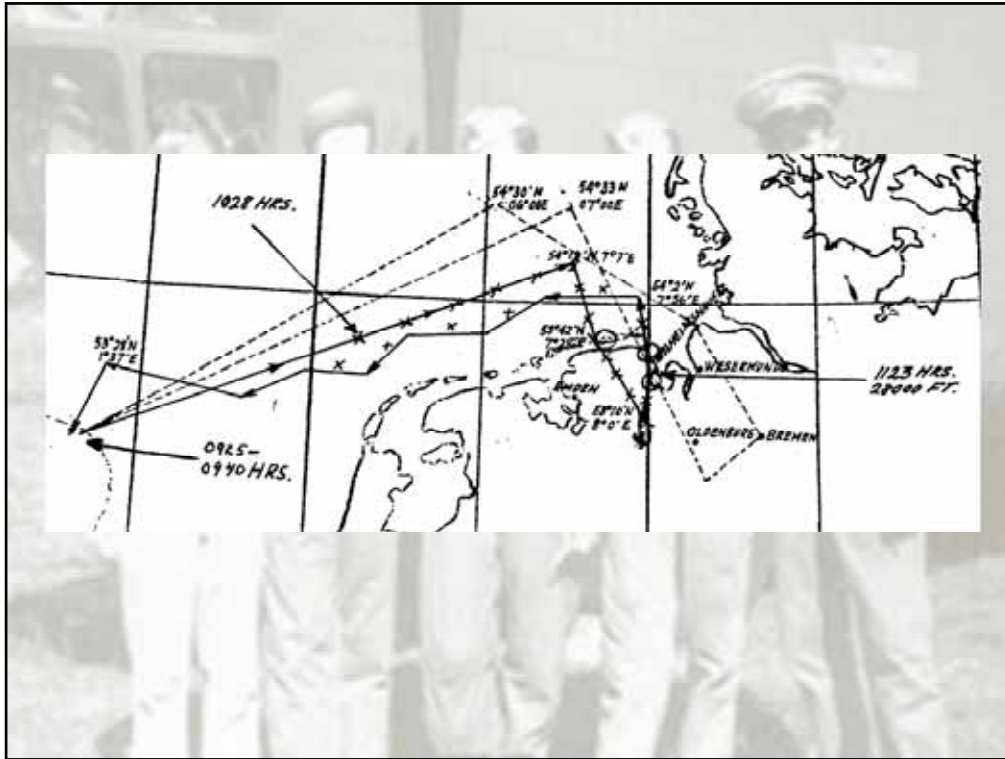
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Shortly after that we began to watch for birds a sign of land not too far distant it was a while before we sighted gulls and when we did we also got a call over the intercom "unidentified aircraft approaching off left wing" our attentions shifted mighty fast from the gulls to this new-comer. We followed his flight until he was well past us, suddenly I heard the tail gunner call the pilot and say "aircraft coming in at 3:00 o'clock position" as he spoke his twin fifties swung to meet the incoming plane at the same moment the strange aircraft rocked his plane and veered showing us the tell-tail circle of the R.A.F. on his wing he was our escort, and is probably as glad to see us as we were him. As every bomber that reached England in those dark early days of war meant more power to put against the enemy and it was sorely needed as we were to find out. Soon we sighted beneath us the coastline and I can say it sure didn't look like America. About 11:30 we sighted Prestwick Scotland the North Atlantic ferry command base for allied planes and within a few minutes we were safely landed and re-united with the rest of the group. All having reached this point without mishaps. So began our tour of overseas duty.



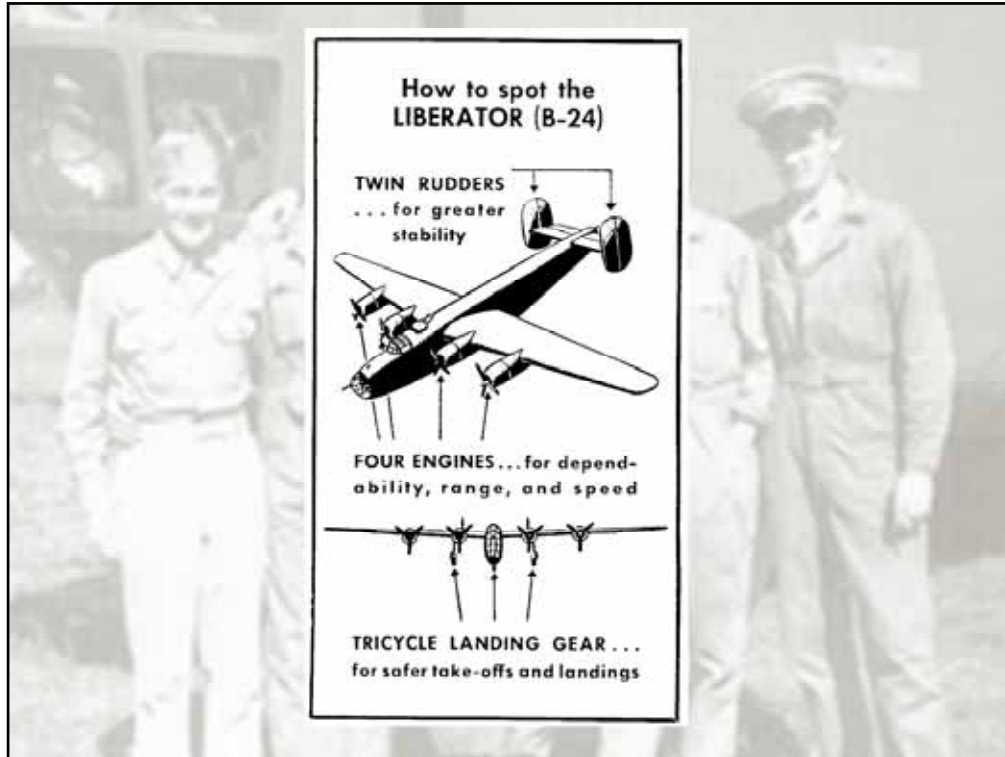
These were the early days of the air war with Germany. The 44th Bomb Group went into battle over occupied territory in November of 1942. In the months leading up to February 1943, they built a reputation as a hard-luck group. Their losses were heavy, both in battle and in training accidents. Of the original twenty-seven crews assigned to the 44th (a total of 273 men), only 25% completed their tour of duty. Nearly 50% were either killed in action or reported missing. Another 14% ended up in German prisoner of war camps.

In the week before the Wilhelmshaven mission, the 44th lost six planes: three to enemy fighters and anti-aircraft fire on the February 15th mission to Dunkirk, France; two more in an air collision on the way to St. Nazaire, France (the air turbulence generated by the propellers of the B-17s ahead was said to contribute to this disaster); and a third in a training accident on the 20th. In his diary, Capt. Adams noted that February 20th "marked the tragic end of a very tragic week."



On Friday February 26, 1943, 8th Air Force crews attended a briefing for a mission to bomb the Focke-Wulf aircraft factories in Bremen, Germany. Submarine facilities at Wilhelmshaven were the secondary target in case weather conditions made it impossible to bomb Bremen. The 8th Air Force had been bombing German-occupied territory since the fall of 1942, but this would be only its third raid on Germany. After the early morning briefing, eleven 44th Bomb Group B-24 Liberators took off from Shipdham around 8:30 am. They circled to 20,000 feet where they were joined by six B-24s from the 93rd Bomb Group. The B-24s were scheduled to join a larger group of B-17 Flying Fortresses around 9:30 am. The formation was made up of B-17s in the front and B-24s in the back. The entire formation continued to climb until the B-24s reached an altitude of 29,000 feet. The formation made its first landfall near the Frisian Islands off the coast of northern Germany near the border of Holland.

Around 11:00 am, the bombers reached the German mainland near the North Sea islands. As the formation moved inland, German fighter attacks intensified. These had begun with a pass through the formation by a single Focke-Wulf 190 and grew more terrifying as a number of Messerschmitts (Me 109s) joined the air battle.



This is an account by Wayne Gotke, the navigator of the B-24:

Our ship was under constant fighter attack from the time we reached the Island of Texel until we were shot down. We had fought off the planes with very minor damage until we were almost to Oldenburg, then all hell broke loose. I spent most of my time with position reports trying to get short cuts filled into the flight to allow us to gain and catch the rest of the formation. However, I'm reasonably sure no one was injured up to this point, except Sgt. Welsh the belly gunner who had passed out from lack of oxygen and as far as I know never regained his senses. When we were almost to Oldenburg fighters hit us from all sides. Sgt. Vogt the engineer and top turret operator shot the first fighter down and I shot the next down however not until he had sent 20 mms. into the nose and cockpit. Sgt. Mifflin shot down the third from his waist gun position. At this point my left gun jammed and I know at least two planes made direct hits on nose and flight deck. Some one I'm sure was hurt on the flight deck and I was hit twice in the nose of the ship operating a jammed gun. Engines #3 and #4 had been hit and were on fire. I believe fire spread to the wing tank and caused the ship to explode. I was working on my guns when all at once it seemed someone pushed me from behind and all went black. I woke up falling through space and pulled my rip cord and no results so I reached back and tore the back of my chute out. My last look at the altimeter showed 26,000 ft. and the Germans claim they saw my chute open at 5,000 ft. They picked me up after I had sat between two trees about 20 ft. in the air for about 25 minutes and took me to a first aid station for treatment of cuts around the head and 20 mm. wounds.



One of the Messerschmitt pilots, a lieutenant named Heinz Knoke, had singled out Capt. Adams' B-24. He wrote an account of this attack in a book called "I Flew for the Fuehrer" that was published after the war. Here is what he wrote:

I select a target. I will attack from the front. Clearly the American sits in my sights. Quickly he becomes larger. I feel the buttons on the control stick. Tracer bullets fly over my cabin. They're shooting at me! At the same time I open fire, pressing both buttons. The recoil of my cannons and heavy machine guns leaves my bird shaking lightly. My aim is not good. I can see only a few hits on the right wing. I swoop under the fat stomach of my opponent. The draft of his four propellers shakes me around in such a way that I think for a second that my tail assembly is torn. The combined speeds of our two approaching planes is over 1,000 kilometers per hour. Steeply I pull above to the left. Tracer bullets from the guns of the Liberator follow me...For the second time I attack, this time from the front and below, and shoot until I am within ramming distance. My shots hit! I let myself fall away below. In falling away I turn my head. My Liberator is burning underneath. It turns in a wide curve to the right away from her group. We are about 8,000 meters high. From behind and above, once again I attack. Strong defensive fire comes toward me. My high explosive shells hit in the top side of the fuselage and the right wing...The fire has overcome the right side of the wing. The inside motor has stopped. The wing has ripped away! Perpendicularly the huge fuselage falls heavily to the earth, turning along its long axis. A long black flag of smog follows it. A crewmember tries to climb out of the upper part of the fuselage. He gets free, but his parachute is burning. Poor fellow! His somersaulting body falls after the spinning fuselage of the fatally hit Liberator.

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At 1,000 meters above the earth a violent explosion rips the wreck. Burning single parts fall two, three hundred meters along the runway of Zwischenahn airport near a farm that is immediately set on fire by the gas tanks flying around. In its insane flight to the ground, I follow my booty and land on the runway below me. I roll my machine in the direction of the burning farm, turn my motor off, and swing out of my seat. I hurry to the site of the crash. There is a crowd of people trying to put out the barnyard fire. I help move furniture, animals, and appliances out of the smoke and flames to safety. The smoke bites my eyes, takes my breath, and the flames singe my flying suit as I pull a pitifully squealing pig on its hind paws out of a burning stall. The stall burns to the ground. The house and the barn are saved. What is left of the Liberator is scattered in an animal pen. When the machine exploded in mid-air, the crew was blown out. With limbs broken a hundred times they lay close to one another among the smoking rubble. 100 meters further on the other side of an earthen wall, I find the pilot's seat and the nose wheel. Undamaged, a doll, a mascot, sits next to the splintered cockpit glass...



On a farm near the airport lived a young girl named Leni Eilers. When the air raid warning sounded on that February day, she was at school. Her mother and brother sought shelter in an earthen bunker on their property. Her father was at work in the fields when he saw the bombers approaching. He watched the air battle and saw the debris of the B-24 fall to the ground. Happy that it hadn't hit him, he soon found that the burning fuel from the plane had set his house on fire. Neighbors helped rescue household belongings, farm machinery, and livestock. Leni's cat, frightened and confused by the fire, returned to the burning farmhouse and died there. Leni's mother and brother emerged from the bunker unharmed. The doll that Heinz Knoke found in the wreckage of the bomber was given to Leni Eilers, and it remained in her possession long enough for her own daughter to play with it many years later.

Leni remembered details about the crash: the engine that fell into a neighboring farmyard, the crewmember who came down in his parachute in a nearby farm, and the wreckage strewn across the field. Leni recalled that nine coffins stood in the farmyard, one for each of the Americans who died that day. They were buried in a hero's section of the new cemetery in Bad Zwischenahn next to German soldiers who died in defense of the Reich.

12	E. F. Adams	Capt. Pilot		Am 26. Febr. in Diller bröckeltes am 11. Febr. abge- fallen
13	S. W. MacLeod	Co. Pilot		
14	W. Hansen	Lieutenant, Bomberier		
15	Vogt	Leutnant, Ing.		
16	Brewer	" , Gunner	St. 3 Hordwick	
17	Jones	" "		
18	Nelch	" "		
19	Name unbekannt	" "		
20	Name unbekannt			
21	Morse			
22	Lijwart			Am 26. Febr. bei Borden abgefallen

Nine bodies were recovered and buried in a local church cemetery. The pastor recorded seven of the names in the church's burial registry. The two others were marked "unbekannt" (unknown). Presumably, these bodies did not have any easy means of identification. Two members of another B-24 crew shot down around the same time were also buried in the this cemetery. One of the Americans buried there was Scott Brewer.



For months, no one outside of Germany knew for certain what happened to Scott Brewer and the other members of the crew. There was some reason for hope. Men in parachutes had been seen jumping from this plane. Estimates ranged from two or three, all the way up to nine. But there was also a lot of wishful thinking going on, along with some understandable confusion. The high estimates for parachutes almost certainly came from witnesses who had confused Capt. Adams' B-24 with another aircraft. Early in March each family received a telegram with the news that their loved one was missing in action.

For Scott's mother, Louise, the news was doubly tragic. Her husband, Paul, died two days before she got the telegram. By October of 1943 Scott was declared dead. Two of his crewmates had turned up in prison camp, and the Germans had found the bodies of the rest. His grave was found in Bad Zwischenahn, Germany after the war.

The enlisted men of Capt. Adams' crew as shown in the photo above are (from left to right) Scott Brewer, Bob Vogt, Perch Rolfe, Linwood Jones, and Jim Mifflin. Perch Rolfe was no longer flying with the Adams crew due to frostbite he had gotten on an earlier mission when his heating element was destroyed by enemy gunfire. Jim Mifflin survived the February 26, 1943 mission. Brewer, Vogt, and Jones all died that day.



In January of 2008 I received an e-mail from Tomas Hauschild, the German bomb disposal expert I mentioned earlier who found Scott Brewer's dog tag. How did Tomas find me? I have a web site and through a search for Scott Brewer's name he found it and contacted me. He felt it was his duty to return the dog tag to Scott Brewer's family and he asked if I could help. This proved to be rather difficult. I had been in touch with many relatives of the crew from that B-24, but never with any of Brewer's relatives. Brewer had not married and didn't have children that I knew of. But I knew enough about Brewer from his military records that I thought I might be able to help Tomas. I knew Brewer was from Boise. I had his mother's and father's names and their 1943 address. I knew where his father was buried. And I knew that Brewer was wearing a bracelet with the name "Mary" on it. I took this information and contacted the main daily newspaper in Boise, the Idaho Statesman.

The photo shows me with Tomas Hauschild (Tomas is on the left). By chance a business trip brought me to Germany last May and Tomas and his wife traveled several hours to meet me for dinner in Düsseldorf.



Tim Woodward, a columnist for the Idaho Statesman, agreed to write a story about Brewer. Published late in January under the title “Did You Know Scott Everhart Brewer?” the column generated immediate results. The next morning Woodward was inundated with phone calls and e-mails. Before the day was through he’d located a cousin and three nephews, including one named after Scott. We were never able to confirm who the mysterious “Mary” was, whose name was on his bracelet, but the connection that Tomas had hoped for was made. By chance, Scott Brewer’s cousin had a son in England who flew to Germany to meet Tomas. And so only months after the dog tag was found, it was back in the hands of a family member.



I look at the picture of this dog tag and think about what Tomas said his desire to get it back to a family member. "I consider it my duty, when I find personal effects, to find the descendants or direct relatives and get them these artifacts. In addition, through this piece of metal one sees a reference to the events of the time and to a life and its history."



If you are interested in more details on this story, "The Writing 69th", or other books by Jim Hamilton, please visit my web site at www.greenharbor.com.