

The Legend of Otto Hillig's Treasure

This story originally appeared in the Sullivan County Democrat during the summer of 1992. Several clues were given and although several people were close, no one found the coin!

The battles of World War II were fought primarily on foreign soil. Little is known about sympathizers of Hitler who existed here in the United States. Acts of aggression on small communities went virtually unnoticed due to the secretive way in which they were carried out. Sabotage was the main ingredient in their game plan and to the untrained eye, was seldom detected. Electrical plants, telephone switching facilities, railroads and railroad stations in the northeast fell prey to their terrible acts of destruction. The United States was aware of the covert acts but at the time the government was involved in the war effort overseas, and, as a result, usually two steps behind the ruthless organization.

Then one day the saboteurs targeted Liberty, a town located in Sullivan County, New York. Their plan was to blow the railroad trestle in Ferndale, a hamlet of Liberty, to cripple the flow of arms from upstate New York to their ports of departure in New York City. Although it would be a small step for Hitler's army, it would be a severe setback for the Allies. Since explosives were hard to find, German sympathizers had trouble locating the dynamite they needed. Their plan was to force a local pilot to fly them to an airstrip on Long Island and purchase the explosives from the black market. One group began to stake out a local Liberty airstrip for their victim.

In August, 1942, Otto Hillig, a local photographer and his pilot Holger Hoiris were at an airstrip, presently the site of the Grossinger Airport. A decade earlier these two men put Liberty on the map by making the first two-man transatlantic flight, a monumental achievement in aeronautics and for mankind.

Otto and Holger had decided they would take advantage of the evening calm and go up for a sunset flight. It would be a flight they would never forget. As they boarded Otto's plane "The Liberty", two armed men rushed them. They were instructed to continue boarding the plane and to keep their mouths shut. Each time Otto and Holger tried to speak they were told to keep quiet. Confused and scared, they followed their captors instructions. Once aboard the plane, Holger was instructed to take off and fly in a southeasterly direction.

When the plane was off the ground, Otto began to question the two men. One of the two captors, who appeared to be the leader, told Otto and Holger they would never live to tell and began explaining their plot. The two hijackers laughed as the leader pulled a large sum of cash out of his pocket and explained that it would buy enough dynamite to blow the Ferndale trestle and ten more like it. He then described their plans. Otto and Holger were shocked and, looking at each other in disbelief, remained silent.

Later in the flight, Otto carefully attracted Holger's attention and with a finger, pointed to the map pocket in the cockpit where they both knew he kept a loaded revolver. Otto then motioned with his hand to Holger to roll the plane. As Holger rolled the plane, the two intruders were slammed to one side of the plane and Otto was able to grab the revolver. Trying to scramble to position, one of the intruders fired his gun, grazing Holger's flight jacket. Before they could totally recover

from the roll, Otto swung around and shot and killed both men. Shaken up, Otto and Holger regained their composure, turned the plane around and headed back to Liberty.

While flying back, Otto and Holger agreed to contact the authorities and tell them about everything except the money. They were paranoid and afraid that instead of being believed they would be accused of robbing the two men. To be safe, Otto and Holger decided to land at Crary's fields, another airstrip located just outside of Liberty. As soon as they were on the ground, Otto hid the money temporarily and they contacted the police. The money was never mentioned. Otto and Holger were told by agents from the federal government, who had been contacted by the local police agency, to keep the incident to themselves to avoid causing panic among the local residents. They both agreed and were sworn under oath, together with the local policemen who were involved, not to repeat to anyone, even family members, what had happened on the grounds. It was a matter of national security.

The following morning Otto put the money in a small steel box and met Holger at an agreed upon spot, where they hid the money. The years went by, the war ended and they both grew old. During that time they agreed that the money could only be used for a noble cause, believing the money was blood money and agreed it would lead to misfortune. The years went by, the war was ended and they both grew old. They finally decided since it had originally been intended for its destruction, the money should be used to benefit their hometown in Liberty.

In his final years, Otto hired a young man to help him with his daily tasks and responsibilities. The young man, who was to remain unnamed, was well respected in the community. Otto and Holger liked and trusted him and one day they met with him, swore him to secrecy, and told him what had happened to them and of their plans for the money.

They took him to the spot where the money was hidden and asked him not to disclose the secret until August 1, 1992, the 50th Anniversary of their frightful but heroic flight. They further instructed him that on that date, he was to take the money to the Sullivan County National Bank and deposit the money into a savings account. Otto handed the young man a coin and told him to mark the location where the steel box had been hidden when he removes its contents to the bank. The coin was quite large, bronzed colored, and was engraved with OH for Otto Hillig.

Otto and Holger asked that once the coin was placed that the story be publicized in the local newspapers and on the radio. They further instructed that the clues as to the location of the treasure were to be published periodically. The clues were also to be given out in local radio stations, newspaper offices and local businesses.

Otto's young assistant, who is today an elder in the community and remains anonymous, has waited with great patience and carried out Otto and Holger's plans exactly as they asked.

The money is presently in the Fleet Bank located on North Main St. in Liberty, New York, formerly known as the Sullivan County National Bank. Keep your eyes and ears open for the clues. Some will lead to the treasure, others lead nowhere.

A good knowledge of area history will be of assistance in locating Otto Hillig's treasure.

The 25 Clues are scattered throughout this book