



OSPREY COMBAT AIRCRAFT • 36



B-17 FLYING FORTRESS UNITS OF THE EIGHTH AIR FORCE (PART 2)

Martin Bowman



Liam Neill

MARTIN BOWMAN'S interest in World War 2 and contemporary British and US aviation was fired by the proliferation of AAF/USAF and RAF air bases in his native East Anglia. His quest has taken him to all parts of the world, including the USA, Africa, Australia and Russia. He has flown into the war zones of Mogadishu, Somalia and Bosnia, and has participated in German and USAFE air/land and night air drop missions aboard C.160 Transall and C-130 Hercules aircraft.

Bowman is the author of 52 aviation books about US Air Force/US Navy and Royal Navy/RAF operations. All have been built up from many years of painstaking research and correspondence with American, British and Commonwealth aircrew.

For many years he has been a frequent contributor of photographic and written articles to *Flight International*, *Rolls-Royce Magazine* and *Aeroplane* in Britain, and *Air Combat*, *Air Classics* and *Air Progress* in the United States. Recently appointed an official researcher for DERA (MoD), Martin Bowman lives in Norwich, Norfolk.

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SERIES EDITOR: TONY HOLMES

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Front Cover

Delivered new to the AAF in mid-April 1944, B-17G-35-DL 42-107233 *HUMPTY DUMPTY* (this nickname is usually wrongly associated with B-17G 43-37815) was assigned to the 100th Bombardment Group's 351st Bombardment Squadron at Thorpe Abbots, in Norfolk, on 3 May. Decorated soon after arriving in the ETO, the aircraft's stunning artwork was applied by Sgt Frank 'Steve' Stevens, who had been inspired by a painting entitled 'Forced Landing' by Gil Elvgren – the latter artist's work regularly appeared in the famous Brown & Bigelow calendars of the period.

Stevens chose 42-107233 as his 'canvas' simply because his workshop was close to the bomber's home on hardstand No 6, where groundcrew chief M/Sgt Ray Christopher headed up its maintenance team. The titling was applied in orange with a red outline, and a red bomb represented each mission, with every fifth bomb painted yellow.

HUMPTY DUMPTY flew two missions on D-Day, and on 21 June was one of 28 B-17s that participated in the first *Frantic* shuttle mission to the USSR. It was piloted by Capts Richard Helmick and Joseph Zeller on this historic occasion. Once back in East Anglia, *HUMPTY DUMPTY* was flown by Lt Luther Bennett's crew to Kiel on 18 July. Missions to Merseburg, Berlin, Ludwigshafen, Munich, Hamburg and Magdeburg followed, before the veteran B-17 headed east once more on 18 September as part of *Frantic II*. Two red hammer and sickle markings were added on the nose to signify these shuttle flights to the Soviet Union. Ten days later Bennett flew his 20th combat mission in *HUMPTY DUMPTY* – to Merseburg – to complete his combat tour.

42-107233 had survived serious flak damage over Osnabruck, Hamm, Berlin and Frankfurt since arriving in the ETO, but had made it back to base every time. However, the bomber's luck finally ran out on New Year's Eve 1944 when the 'Bloody Hundredth' went to Hamburg and lost a dozen B-17s, including *HUMPTY DUMPTY* (which by then had completed more than 67 missions). The bomber fell victim to an Fw 190A-8/R8 from the specialist 'bomber destroyer' unit, II./JG 300. All nine of Lt Wallace

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To make this best-selling series as authoritative as possible, the Editor would be interested in hearing from any individual who may have relevant photographs, documentation or first-hand experiences relating to the world's combat aircraft, and the crews that flew them, in the various theatres of war. Any material used will be credited to its original source. Please write to Tony Holmes at 10 Prospect Road, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN13 3UA, Great Britain, or by e-mail at: tony.holmes@osprey-jets.freemove.co.uk

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Wilson's crew – on their 13th mission – survived the ordeal to become PoWs. Wilson himself suffered a serious leg injury and 'toggelier'

Herman Eckmeyer hit the left side of the bomber as he bailed out, twisting his ankle (Cover artwork by Iain Wyllie)

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THE 4th BW GOES TO WAR

The first steps in the creation of the 3rd Bomb Division (BD) began in May 1943, when it was decided that the 94th, 95th and 96th BGs of the 1st Bomb Wing (BW) in Northamptonshire would transfer south to form the nucleus of the new 4th BW in Suffolk and Essex. The new organisation's first CO was Brig Gen Fred L Anderson, whose HQ was at Marks Hall, near Colchester in Essex. The 94th BG moved from Thurleigh to Earls Colne, again in Essex, and the 96th BG was transferred from Grafton Underwood to Andrews Field, six miles west of Earls Colne. Finally, the 95th BG left Alconbury for Framlingham, in Suffolk, its departure being marred by a tragic accident on 27 May when B-17F-BO 42-29685 of the 412th BS exploded while in the process of being loaded with ten 500-lb bombs. Nineteen officers and men were killed and 20 severely injured, one of whom later died. Four B-17s parked near the explosion were destroyed and 11 others damaged.

For its first mission, on 13 May, the 4th BW put up 72 B-17s (drawn from the 94th, 95th and 96th BWs, as well as the 1st BW's newly-arrived 351st BG) for a strike on St Omer-Longuenesse airfield. It was hardly an auspicious beginning. The 96th BG lost a B-17 when it crashed into the Wash minutes after take off, and the group subsequently failed to bomb the target due to a misunderstanding among the formation leaders. The straggling 351st BG formation of 14 B-17s fared no better, abandoning the mission in mid-Channel.

The following day 196 bombers made simultaneous attacks on four targets, 15 B-17s of the 96th and 351st BGs bombing Wevelghem airfield, in Belgium, and 42 Flying Fortresses of the 94th and 95th BGs hitting the Ford and General Motors plant and locks in nearby Antwerp. Wevelghem was so badly damaged that its primary resident, the *Jagdwaaffe's* III./JG 26, was

B-17F-95-BO 42-30248 of the 410th BS/94th BG formates with other Fortresses from the group off the Suffolk coast prior to heading for occupied Europe on a clear summer's day in 1943. Christened *The Southern Queen* in July 1943, the bomber joined the 333rd BS the following month and was renamed *The Buzzard*. It later became the *Prodigal Son*, before finally being renamed *Lassie Come Home*. 42-30248 was lost on the 11 January 1944 raid on Brunswick whilst being flown by Lt Robert C Randall's crew – two were killed and eight were made PoWs (via Geoff Ward)



forced to move to Lille-Nord. Flak and Fw 190s tormented the 94th and 95th BGs at Antwerp, and Oberfeldwebel Bach of II./JG 1 applied the coup de grace to the 95th BG's 42-3115, captained by Lt J E McKinley. Badly shot up in an earlier fighter attack, the bomber spun out of formation from a height of 2500 ft and crashed on the Dutch island of North Beveland, killing its entire ten-man crew. Oberleutnant Horst Sternberg, *Staffelkapitan* of 5./JG 26, claimed a second B-17 (possibly a 94th BG machine) over the Scheldt estuary – this was his 15th kill. Altogether, the day's missions had cost the AAF 12 B-17s and B-24s, but in return the bomber gunners and escorting fighters claimed some 67 German aircraft shot down.

On 15 May, 193 B-17s bombed targets in Emden, Heligoland and Wilhelmshaven. Four days later 102 B-17s hit Kiel and 64 Boeing 'heavies' bombed Flensburg, while a smaller force flew a diversion. The Flensburg raiders returned without loss, but six Fortresses from the Kiel group were shot down, three of these being ripped apart by bombs dropped from above them by Fw 190s from 5./JG 11. On 21 May, 98 B-17s attacked Wilhelmshaven and 63 bombed Emden. On the 27th only 11 bombers hit St Nazaire, but two days later 147 aircraft dropped their bombs on the U-boat pens situated within the French port. This proved to be the last raid flown by VIII Bomber Command that month.

In June Gen Ira Eaker, Commanding General of VIII Bomber Command, was able to send the 1st and 4th BWs on two-pronged attacks against Emden, Kiel, Bremen, Wilhelmshaven and Cuxhaven, in northern Germany, on a single day. On the 11th the B-17s set out to bomb Bremen, but the target was covered with a solid layer of low cumulus cloud down to about 5000 ft, which also partially covered Wilhelmshaven. Nevertheless, some 168 B-17s bombed the German port, while 30 others went for the secondary target at Cuxhaven.

About 20 fighters attacked the low groups in the 4th BW, but it was the 1st BW that suffered the greatest onslaught. The 4th BW lost one Fortress, while 62 B-17s returned with damage and 85 enemy fighters were claimed shot down – German records reveal that only seven Luftwaffe fighters were destroyed or damaged, and two pilots injured.

On Sunday 13 June a 4th BW force bombed the U-boat yards at Kiel, this mission seeing the 94th, 95th and 96th BGs taking off from their bases at Earls Colne, Framlingham and Andrews Field for the last time. It had been decided that because of heavy losses among B-26 Marauder groups (see *Osprey Combat Aircraft 2 - B-26 Marauder*

B-17F-105-BO 42-30434 *Betty Boop* – The "PISTOL PACKIN' MAMA" of the 570th BS/390th BG is seen in North Africa in August 1943. The bomber later crashed near Laon, in France, on 25 February 1944 during a raid on Regensburg. Two of Lt Robert B Bowman's crew died and the remaining eight were taken prisoner (Gus Mencow Collection)



Units of the Eighth & Ninth Air Forces for further details), these would be sent south to take over the three B-17 bases so their fighter cover could be improved. When the three 4th BW groups returned from the raid on Kiel, they would land at the former B-26 bases at Bury St Edmunds (Rougham) and Horham, in Suffolk, and Snetterton Heath, in Norfolk.

The B-17 groups' last mission from their old bases was a disaster. It had been hoped that another twin-pronged attack on the coast would split the German fighter force, but it turned out to be a failure, with almost all the fighters forsaking the 1st BW to concentrate on the four combat boxes of the 4th. The 94th BG lost no fewer than nine B-17s, with six falling in the combat area and the rest flying back in a semblance of formation.

Leading the 4th BW was the 95th BG, with Brig Gen Nathan Bedford Forrest III from HQ 402nd Provisional Combat Bomb Wing (PCBW) riding in the co-pilot's seat of the command aircraft, flown by Capt Harry A Stirwalt. Forrest was the grandson of a famous Confederate cavalry general of the American Civil War, whose motto had been 'To win – git there fustest with the mostest'. On Forrest's instigation, the 17 B-17s of the 95th BG's main formation (seven more flew in the composite group formation) were flying a hitherto untried 'flat' formation, wingtip to wingtip, supposedly to be able to concentrate firepower ahead, below, above and to the rear more effectively.

The Kiel force was attacked before they crossed the enemy coast, and just after the bomb run. Many gunners were unable to return fire because their guns, which were lubricated with a new type of oil recommended by Forrest, had frozen. A massive diving frontal attack raked the lead aircraft with cannon fire from one end to the other, and Stirwalt's B-17 fell out of formation and spiralled down. All 13 men aboard bailed out, but only Lt Willard Brown, the group navigator, survived. A strong offshore wind carried the remaining 12 crewmen to their deaths in the cold Baltic Sea. Forrest was the first American general to be lost in combat in Europe.

Among the attackers were 6./JG 11 (with five victories) and 32 Bf 109Gs and Fw 190A-5s from Nordholz, led by Hauptmann Kurt Ruppert, adjutant of III./JG 26. Ruppert's *Gruppe* singled out the six B-17s of the low squadron of the leading 95th BG, made a rear pass and shot down four. His Fw 190 was in turn hit by return fire and he was forced to bail out. Ruppert tried to open his parachute too quickly after vacating his fighter, and the speed of his descent ripped his old hemp harness, throwing him to his death. Ruppert had 21 kills to his credit.

Two more 95th BG B-17s were lost from the high squadron, and three from the composite group formation brought the group's total losses to ten. All told, the 4th BW lost 22 B-17s.

Gen Ira Eaker referred to the mission as a 'great battle', and he stated that he was satisfied with the results. Brig Gen Anderson, CO 4th BW, said 'It was a privilege to lead such men, who but yesterday were kids in school. They flew their Forts in the face of great opposition like veterans'.

The 4th BW put down at their new bases in sombre mood. The new 4th BW CO, Col (later Brig Gen) Curtis E LeMay, who moved into the former HQ of the 3rd BW at Elveden Hall, near Thetford, visited the 94th BG at Bury St Edmunds. 94th BS pilot Capt Franklin 'Pappy' Colby (who, at 42 years of age, was the oldest operational pilot in VIII Bomber Command) recalls;

B-17F-25-DL 42-3082 *Double Trouble* of the 333rd BS/94th BG landed safely in England with a full bomb load after pilot Lt Bill Winnesheik aborted the mission to Bremen on 25 June 1943 when fighters knocked out two of the bomber's engines. The Fortress suffered a similar fate on 4 October that same year when it was attacked by German fighters whilst heading for St Nazaire. This time its No 3 engine was disabled, and the propeller refused to feather. The bomber was so badly damaged during the subsequent crash-landing at Margate, on the Kent coast, that it was salvaged. Assistant engineer/waist gunner Vance Van Hooser was hit in the head by 20 mm shell fragments during the attack by the enemy fighters, and the 23-mission veteran never flew operationally again (USAF)

'He gave us the usual welcome talk and left the impression of being a bit hard-nosed about things, but he had flown a lot of rough ones and had a good record. And he was trying to improve the poor formation flying which had been so troublesome.'

Col John 'Dinty' Moore, CO of the 94th BG, and Col Alfred A Kessler, CO of the 95th BG, were transferred out, and Col Fred Castle and Col John Gerhart took over. Gerhart had been one of the Eighth's original staff officers at its activation in January 1942, while Castle had accompanied Eaker to England in February of that same year.

Meanwhile, the 4th BW was strengthened in early June by the arrival of the 100th BG (first to Podington, then to Thorpe Abbotts, in Suffolk) and by the imminent arrival of two more groups, the 385th (dubbed 'Van's Valiants' after its CO, Col Elliott Vandevanter) and the 388th, which would increase the strength of the 4th BW to six groups.

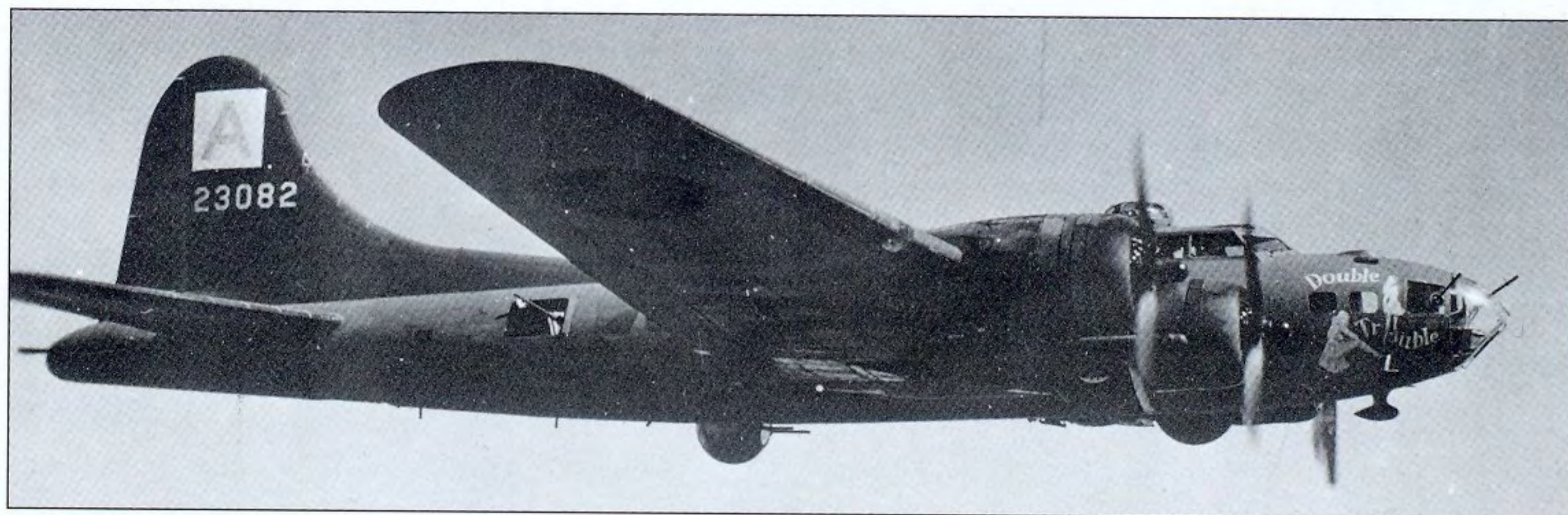
Decisions taken by the Allied leaders at the Casablanca Conference in mid-February 1943 led to Operation *Pointblank*, which emphasised the need to reduce the German fighter force. Therefore, on 22 June, Eaker sent his bombers on the first really deep penetration of Germany, to the chemical and synthetic rubber plant at Hüls, near Recklinghausen.

The plant provided approximately 29 per cent of Germany's synthetic rubber and 18 per cent of its total rubber supply, and was the most heavily defended target in the Reich at the time.

Most of the route was to be flown without escort, so again elaborate diversionary measures were put into operation, with two planned 'spoo formations' making feints over the North Sea. One of the diversions – a formation of 21 B-17s of the 100th BG (making its theatre debut) – was delayed because of ground mist and other problems, and played no major part in the proceedings.

The Hüls force of 182 'heavies' came under repeated attack, as the 94th's 'Pappy' Colby, piloting *Thundermug*, recalls;

'We got the works. They hit us at the Dutch coast and it got progressively worse. Col Castle rode behind me on the campstool and took notes all through the thick of it, cool as a cucumber. We made a beautiful 55-second run and dropped our pattern square on the buildings alongside a burning tank, which had exploded. The flak then suddenly became very heavy. After dropping, the remains of the lead and low squadrons strung along with us, and we caught up with the 95th BG. At Rotterdam, the Spitfires met us and chased off the German fighters. It was a rough mission, and we were beginning to wonder about the invincibility of the Flying Fortress.'





Its bomb load still intact, B-17F-35-DL 42-3190 of the 331st BS/94th BG is guarded by a lone German soldier in a French wheat field. The Fortress had been skilfully force-landed by Capt Kee Harrison after it had been shot up on the Paris-Le Bourget mission of 14 July 1943. Harrison was assisted by the French Resistance, and later crossed the Pyrenees into Spain barefoot. Gunners Richard H Lewis and Eino 'Ossie' Asiala, who were also aided by the Resistance, managed to evade capture until October, when they were betrayed and sent to a PoW camp after Gestapo interrogation. At *Stalag Luft VII* they were reunited with Jim Curtis and Earl Porath. The men later heard that co-pilot Lt David H Turner, radio operator Jeff D Polk and Charlie McNemar had made it back to England with help from the Resistance (via Harry Holmes)

down, although the real score was 12 lost and six damaged. Cloud interfered in the early evening of the 26th too, when 81 4th BW Fortresses bombed Le Mans airfield.

On the 28th 191 B-17s of the 1st and 4th BWs (the latter fitted with long-range tanks for the first time) flew to St Nazaire, while a force of 50 headed further inland to Beaumont-le-Roger airfield. German controllers waited until the Spitfire escort had turned back and then sent III./JG 2 into the fray. Hauptmann Egon Mayer's *Gruppe* duly claimed nine Fortresses for the loss of one Fw 190 and its pilot, three of the B-17s downed hailing from the 95th BG. A further 57 Fortresses of the St Nazaire force returned with battle damage, as well as three dead crewmen.

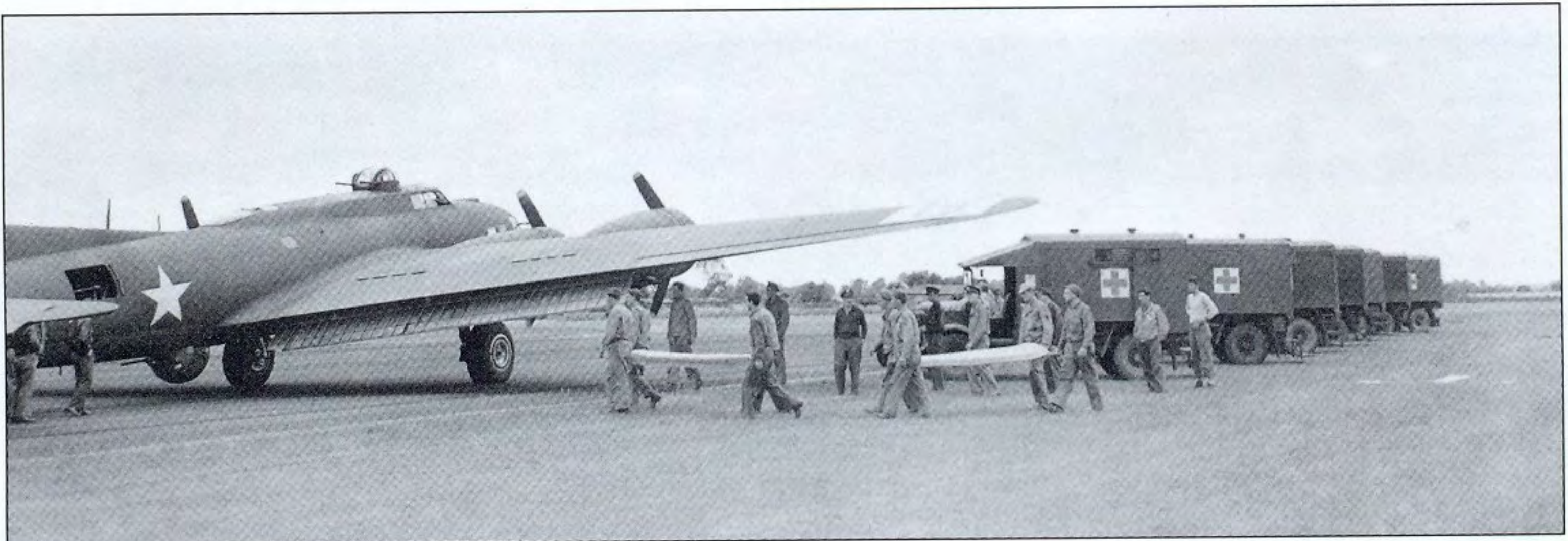
On 10 July a heavy Spitfire and P-47 escort was laid on for 101 B-17s of the 4th BW heading to Le Bourget airfield. None of the Fortresses found the target because of cloud, and three were lost on the return trip. *Exterminator*, a 412th BS/95th BG Fortress flown by Lt James R Sarchet, was one of them, the bomber being shot down by Leutnant Helmut Hoppe, *Staffelkapitan* of 4./JG 26, west of Rouen during his first pass. The Fortress crashed at Elbent, leaving six crew dead. Two others escaped while two were captured. Major Wilhelm-Ferdinand 'Wutz' Galland's Second *Gruppe* continued to attack the bombers for a further ten minutes until low fuel forced them to break off.

One week later a record 332 bombers, including those of the 385th and 388th BGs, which were flying their first missions, were sent to Hannover,

We lost two of our aircraft in the 333rd, and the group lost quite a few more.'

In all, 16 'heavies' failed to return from the main raid on Hül.

On 25 June 275 B-17s were sent to bomb targets in north-west Germany. Cloud hampered bombing at Hamburg, the main objective, and split up the formations, scattering some of the groups – an open invitation to fighter attack. Three 4th BW B-17s were lost while 61 were damaged. Fortress gunners claimed 62 fighters shot



but the operation was cancelled because of bad weather after the bombers had crossed the Dutch coast.

'Van's Valiants' had moved to Great Ashfield, in Suffolk, during the first week of July, and the 388th set up operations at nearby Knettishall. Two days later the 390th – the sixth and final group to join the 4th BW – flew south from Prestwick to a permanent base at Parham, near Framlingham. The Eighth now had the means to launch an all-out air offensive. All that the commanders needed was some fine weather for 'Blitz Week' to succeed.

On 24 July a week-long series of raids went ahead, beginning with a 208-B-17 mission to Heroya and Trondheim, in Norway. One B-17 was lost and 64 were damaged. The following day 218 bombers attacked Hamburg – devastated the night before in the great RAF Bomber Command fire raid – and Kiel. The Kiel force lost four B-17s and 50 returned damaged, two of which crashed on landing. JGs 1 and 11 accounted for most of the 19 bombers that failed to return, claiming 15 shot down.

On the 26th 92 'heavies' bombed rubber factories around Hannover while 54 others attacked shipbuilding yards at Hamburg – 24 aircraft were lost, most to enemy fighters. There was a stand-down on 27 July, and a day later the Eighth sent just over 300 bombers in two forces to hit German targets, but bad weather interfered with the mission and only 49 struck the Fieseler aircraft works at Kassel while 28 hit the Fw 190 factory at Oschersleben. Once again JGs 1 and 11 shot down most of the 22 bombers lost, and I./JG 26 claimed two B-17s as they headed home over Holland. On 29 July four Fortresses were downed from the 81 sent by the 4th BW to bomb the Heinkel aircraft factory at Warnemünde.

The next day 186 B-17s struck Kassel. Their route took them directly over Woensdrecht airfield, in Holland, which had been the scene of an ineffective attack by 11 B-26 Marauders that morning. A number of Fw 190s from I./JG 26 scrambled from Woensdrecht and intercepted the bombers, shooting down two B-17Fs – 42-30208 of the 388th BG, flown by Flt Off E Pickard, fell to Leutnant Gohringer south of Antwerp, while Feldwebel Ernst Christof claimed the other (B-17F 42-30290 *Lucky Lady II*) over Flanders. Christof's ninth kill, the Fortress was being flown by 2Lt Carmelo P Pelusi of the 338th BS/96th BG.

By the time it was attacked, *Lucky Lady II* had already jettisoned its bomb load and had two engines knocked out by flak over Belgium. The B-17 exploded in mid-air and came down near Tielrode, taking five crewmen with it. The remaining five bailed out and were taken prisoner. Feldwebel Christof was killed just over two hours later when he became the first victim of future five-kill ace Lt Kenneth G Smith of the 335th FS/4th FG. The German ace had been bounced by the P-47 pilot over Schouwen, and when he attempted to bale out of his Fw 190 he got hung



30 July 1943 brought down the curtain on 'Blitz Week' when 186 Fortresses bombed the Fieseler Werke aircraft factory at Kassel, a round-trip of some 600 miles. Twelve Fortresses were lost. This photograph was hastily snapped from the port waist gunner's station as the B-17s departed the smoking target area (USAF)

Left
Stretcher-bearers head towards a 385th BG Fortress returning to Great Ashfield with a wounded crewman aboard on 26 July 1943. Fifteen B-17s from the group attacked Wesermünde on this date, and three were lost. Group records indicate that this aircraft was the only B-17 to return with a wounded crewman (M Taubkin via I McLachlan)



up on the fighter's tail. Christof finally broke free, although he lost his parachute in the process and fell to his death.

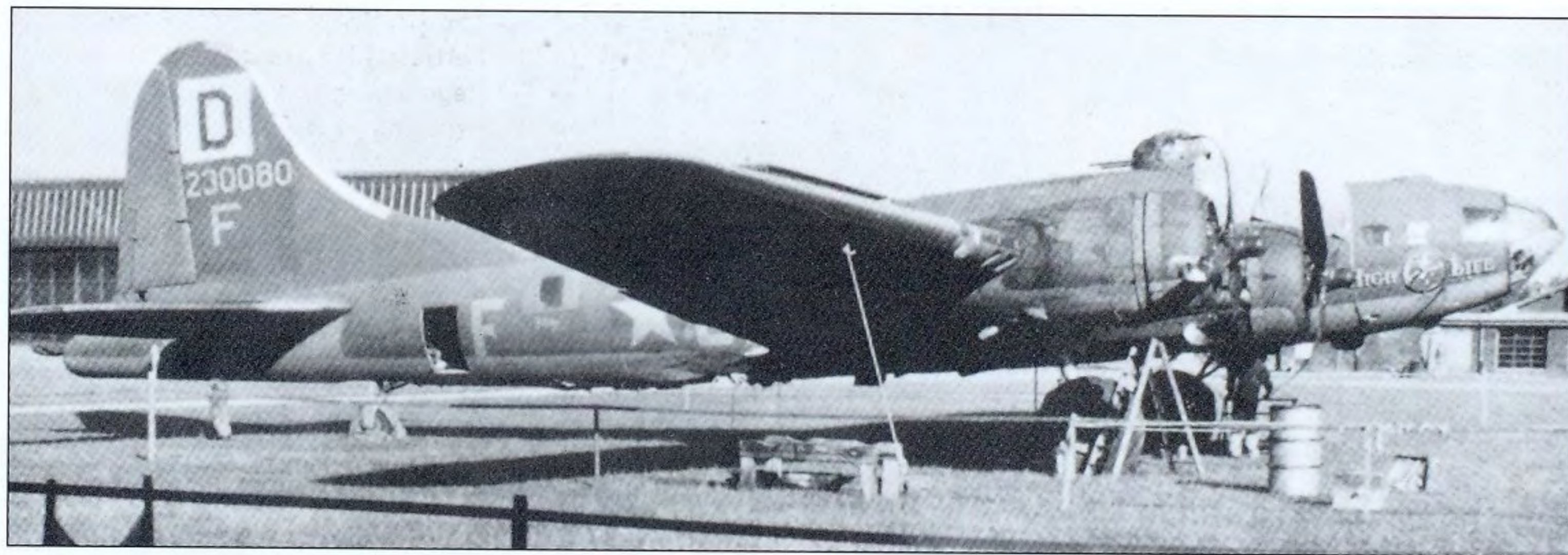
The Fortresses carried on to the target, where 134 bombed. But waiting for them on their return were the fighters from all four of the *Jagdflieger* defensive zones. 10./JG 26's Flieger Hans-Walter Sander claimed a 96th BG B-17 over St Trond, his victim almost certainly being *Dry Run II*, flown by 2Lt Andrew Miracle of the 338th BS. The nine-man crew (and photographer Sgt Bruce), who called themselves 'The Miracle Tribe', lived up to the name, for 2Lt Miracle successfully ditched the bomber in the North Sea, where all ten were picked up by air-sea rescue.

Mid way through the engagement, 107 P-47s of the 4th, 56th and 78th FGs arrived on the scene to prevent further bombers being lost. They were carrying auxiliary tanks for the first time, and these greatly enhanced their range, contributing to the heavy German fighter losses on this day.

The 4th BW's Col Curtis E LeMay (left) led his formation to Regensburg and then on to North Africa on 17 August 1943 (via Ian McLachlan)

B-17F-100-BO 42-30372 *Shack Rabbit III* and B-17F-85-BO 42-30130 *Bubble Trouble* (later *The Klap-Trap II*), both from the 413th BS/96th BG, cross the Brenner Pass, on the Austrian-Italian border, after the raid on Regensburg on 17 August 1943. 4th BW CO Col Curtis E LeMay led the raid, flying with Capt Tom Kenney and his crew in B-17F-100-BO 42-30366 *Fertile Myrtle III* of the 338th BS/96th BG. This aircraft was badly shot up over Bremen on 16 December 1943 and crashed near Norwich after being abandoned over Norfolk by Kenney's crew. *Shack Rabbit III* was shot down by enemy fighters during the mission to Duren on 10 October 1943, four of its crew being killed, four captured and two evading. 42-30130 fell victim to flak on the 7 January 1944 mission to Ludwigshafen, crashing near Thionville, in France. Only two crew survived this incident to be made PoWs (via Geoff Ward)





Lt Donald Oakes' B-17F-85-BO 42-30080 *HIGH LIFE* of the 351st BS/100th BG was the first Fortress to land in neutral Switzerland. A 20 mm shell exploded in the No 3 engine on 17 August 1943 on the raid on Regensburg, and Oakes had little choice but to force-land at Dübendorf, a military airfield near Zurich. The Swiss originally planned to restore the bomber to airworthiness, but several fully serviceable B-17Fs arrived in Switzerland just days after this machine, and *HIGH LIFE* was eventually dismantled and taken to Kloten for storage. It was scrapped here post-war (via *Hans-Heiri Stapfer*)

The US fighters claimed 24 aircraft shot down, including three by Maj Eugene Roberts of the 78th FG – the first triple victory in the ETO. Capt Charles London, also of the 78th, was credited with downing two fighters. Altogether, the AAF lost 12 bombers and six fighters.

Next day, 31 July, VIII Bomber Command announced a three-day stand-down. In a week of sustained operations about 100 aircraft and 90 combat crews (900 men) had been lost.

The Ruhr was hit on 12 August, when 243 bombers ventured into Germany unescorted – 25 were lost. Three days later more than 300 were sent to hit targets in Holland and France. This was part of the *Starkey* deception plan, which had been devised to make the Germans believe that an invasion of France was imminent, thus hopefully relieving pressure on the USSR and halting troop movements to Italy. Strikes against airfields in France and the Low Countries continued on 16 August.

Early that evening base operation staff throughout eastern England waited for their orders for the morrow – the first anniversary mission of the Eighth Air Force's premier bombing raid in the ETO. Eaker and his planners had conceived an ambitious and daring mission to simultaneously attack aircraft plants at Schweinfurt and Regensburg. The *Jagdwaaffe's* operational strength on the western front was showing a significant increase in size, and Regensburg was the second largest plant of its kind in Europe – the largest was at Wiener Neustadt, near Vienna.

The original intention to bomb all three plants on 7 August had been disrupted by bad weather, so the plan had been modified to bomb each target when the opportunity arose.

Production at Regensburg was estimated at 200 Bf 109s a month, or approximately 25-30 per cent of Germany's single-engined aircraft output. It was believed that the destruction of the Regensburg plant would mean a nine-month production delay, with German operational strength being immediately affected for up to two months. The double strike was a bold move, as up until then the campaign against Germany's aircraft industry had been waged within striking distance of the British mainland.

Brig Gen Robert Williams, CO of the 1st BW, was to lead his force to Schweinfurt, while Col Curtis E LeMay would guide the 4th BW to Regensburg. To minimise attacks from enemy fighters, it was decided that Le May's B-17s would fly on to North Africa after hitting the target. The 1st BW, meanwhile, would fly a parallel course to Schweinfurt to further confuse the enemy defences, and return to England after the raid.



Despite the planning, Eaker knew that the B-17 crews would have a running fight on their hands, but hoped that the escorts would keep losses down. Four P-47 groups were scheduled to escort the Regensburg force, but only one group made the rendezvous with the B-17s as planned.

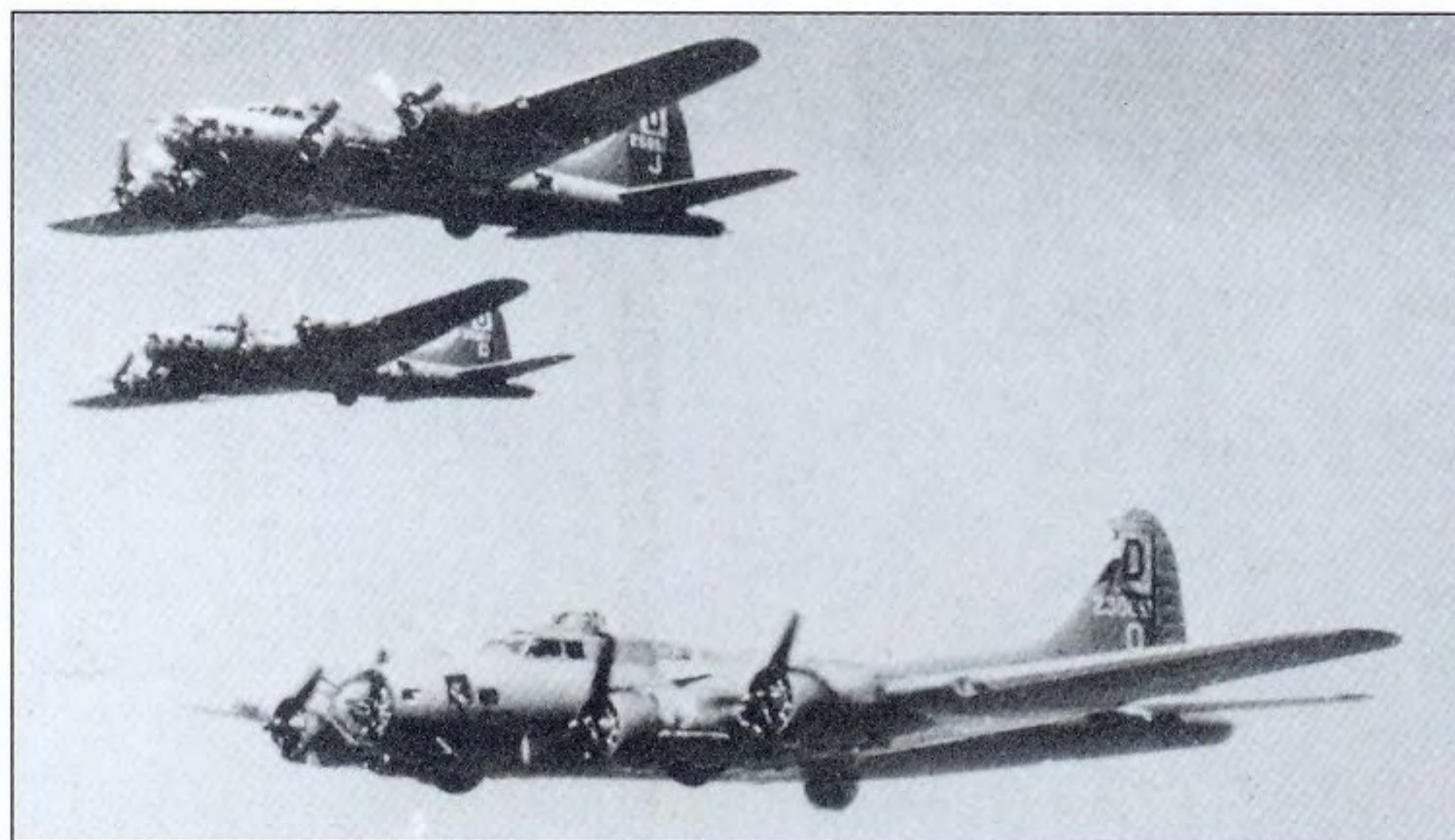
The overburdened P-47s of the 56th FG could not possibly protect all seven groups in the 4th BW, for the long, straggling formation stretched for 15 miles. The B-17s in the rear of the formation were left without any protection, and JGs 1 and 26 commenced their attacks east of Brussels.

The 4th BW encountered a huge number of fighters en route primarily because the 1st BW had been delayed by thick inland mist for 3½ hours after the 4th BW had taken off. In the 1½ hours before the bomb run, 17 Fortresses were shot down. The first to fall was B-17F 42-30389 *Dear Mom* of the 331st BS/94th BG, which went down after a frontal attack by

B-17F-85-BO 42-30063 *Picklepuss* of the 418th BS/100th BG was shot down by Hauptmann Hubertus von Bonin, *Kommandeur* of Bf 110-equipped nightfighter unit II./NJG 1, on the Regensburg mission of 17 August 1943. Six crewmen were killed and four were made PoWs



B-17F-95-BO 42-30325 *Miss Carry* of the 570th BS/390th BG flies over the Alps on its way to North Africa on 17 August 1943. *Miss Carry* was involved in a mid-air collision with B-17F-100-BO 42-30334 *Virgin Sturgeon* near Hamelin, in Germany, on 29 January 1944. The crew of the latter bomber, led by Lt William J Harding, was captured, but *Miss Carry* returned safely to Framlingham. After surviving yet another mishap, the bomber was eventually salvaged on 2 May 1944 (via Ian McLachlan)



Lt Robert Wolf's B-17F-85-BO 42-30061 *Wolf Pack* (bottom) and two other 100th BG B-17s head for North Africa on 17 August after the raid on Regensburg. The tail fin of Wolf's aircraft was struck by 20 mm cannon fire, whilst an errant life raft sucked out of the bomber hit its left tailplane. The top aircraft in the formation is B-17F-30-VE 42-5861 *Laden Maiden*, flown by Lt Owen D 'Cowboy' Roane. Wolf and Roane managed to reach North Africa, but nine other 100th BG Fortresses did not. *Laden Maiden* was shot down by enemy fighters during the Ludwigshafen raid of 30 December 1943 whilst being flown by Lt Marvin Leininger's crew. Only the bombardier and navigator survived, and successfully evaded capture – the rest died. Decidedly war weary by the spring of 1944, *Wolf Pack* was flown back to Homestead Field, Florida, on 12 June 1944 and sold for scrap in April of the following year (*Thorpe Abbotts Memorial Museum*)

A 339th BS/96th BG crew leave B-17F-100-BO 42-30359 after arriving in North Africa after the Regensburg mission of 17 August 1943. This aircraft (and the crew of 2Lt Linwood D Langley) was lost over Oldenburg on 29 November 1943 whilst heading for Bremen, German, fighters shooting the B-17 in half. Only the navigator and the tail gunner survived (*via G Ward*)

it over the treacherous snow-covered Alps.

The bombing was extremely accurate, and this might well have had something to do with the presence of Col LeMay in the first wave. Six main workshops were hit, five being severely damaged. A hangar was also partially destroyed, and store rooms and administrative buildings wrecked. Some 37 brand new Bf 109s at dispersal were at least damaged if not destroyed, and all production at the plant came to an abrupt halt. Although unknown at the time, by way of a bonus the attack had also destroyed the fuselage jigs for the then still secret Me 262 jet fighter.

The surviving 128 B-17s, some flying on three engines and many trailing smoke, were attacked by a few fighters on the way to the Alps. LeMay circled his formation over Lake Garda, near Verona, to give the damaged aircraft a chance to rejoin the wing. Red lights were showing on all four fuel-tanks in every bomber, and it was a ragged collection of survivors which finally landed at intervals of up to 50 miles along the North African coast. The 4th BW had lost 24 bombers, with the 100th BG's nine losses being the largest of all. Sixty B-17s were missing – this was almost three times the previous highest, when 26 bombers were lost on 13 June – and a further 60 Fortresses had to be left in Africa for repair. In the final analysis, a staggering 147 B-17s had been lost to all causes on 17 August.

Conversely, the Luftwaffe had just 27 fighters shot down, against claims by B-17 gunners and escorting P-47s of 288 aircraft destroyed! The almost non-existent maintenance facilities in Africa ruled out any further shuttle missions.

LeMay and the 4th BW earned the following accolade from Gen Anderson at Wing HQ;

'Congratulations on the completion of an epoch in aerial warfare. I am sure the 4th BW has continued to make history. The Hun now has no place to hide.'



UNLUCKY THIRTEEN

The 'heavies' were stood down on 18 August, although the crews enjoyed only a brief respite from the action, for the following day 45 Fortresses of the 4th BW were sent to hit the airfield at Woensdrecht. None of the aircraft were able to bomb, however, because of bad weather over the target, and one B-17 was lost. Unteroffizier Erich Schwarz of 8./JG 26 claimed a 388th BG Fortress, but it was not confirmed. In fact, B-17F 42-30068, flown by 2Lt B Howe, was hit by flak, which set its No 4 engine on fire and caused it to drop out of formation. Attacked by fighters near Haamstede, the B-17 went down, taking eight of the ten-man crew with it. The remaining two survived as PoWs.

The Schweinfurt losses were still having a huge effect on the B-17 groups, and for three days no Fortress missions were flown. Then, on 24 August, the 4th BW put up 42 B-17s for a raid on several airfields. The Fortresses were out again on the 27th, when 224 B-17s were sent on the first of the raids against V-weapon sites, 187 getting their bombs away on Watten. The 'heavies' were escorted by 173 P-47s, one of which was lost, while they claimed eight fighters shot down. Four B-17s were lost.

Shallow penetration raids remained the order of the day for the B-17 groups throughout September, as VIII Bomber Command was not yet strong enough to mount raids deep into the Reich. On 2 September airfields in north-western France were bombed. The following morning the 'heavies' pounded Romilly-sur-Seine and other targets in France. JG 2 attacked the 4th BW near Paris.

On 13 September VIII Bomber Command was officially divided into three bombardment divisions. The nine groups in the 1st BW formed the 1st BD and the six B-17 groups in the 4th BW were renamed the 3rd BD, led by newly-promoted Maj Gen Curtis E LeMay.

At the same time the Provisional Combat Wings were redesignated Combat Bombardment Wings (CBWs). The 94th and 385th BGs now became known collectively as the 4th CBW, the 95th, 100th and 390th BGs, the 13th CBW, and the 96th and 388th BGs, the 45th CBW. The 447th BG had been activated in May 1943, and would

B-17F-100-BO 42-30362 *Wee Bonnie II*, part of the 561st BS/388th BG, releases its bomb load on target. This aircraft, with Lt Adalbert D Porter's crew aboard, failed to return on 9 September 1943 after flak and a 20 mm shell from a German fighter hit the B-17 during its bomb run over Paris, leaving a large hole in the wing near the No 1 engine. After the bombs were jettisoned the crew bailed out, and the Fortress crashed at Honilles. Five crewmen avoided being captured, while six became PoWs (USAF)





B-17F-110-BO 42-30607 *Pat Hand* of the 337th BS/96th BG, flown by Lt Ken E Murphy, suffered a direct flak hit over Paris just after bombs-away during the raid on the Hispano-Suiza aero-engine assembly plant on 15 September 1943. Just one member of its 11-man crew survived to become a PoW (USAF)

become operational as the third Fortress group in the 4th CBW on Christmas Eve 1943. On 1 June 1943, the 452nd BG had been activated, and it would join the 45th CBW on 5 February 1944. Five more bomb groups – the 486th, 487th, 34th, 490th and 493rd (all equipped with the B-24, but later issued with the B-17G) would also join the 3rd BD during the course of 1944, bringing the total number to 14 bomb groups by war's end.

On 15 September 1943 a force of 140 bombers attacked the Renault

works and a ball-bearing plant in Paris, while a similar number went for German airfields at Chartres and Romilly-sur-Seine.

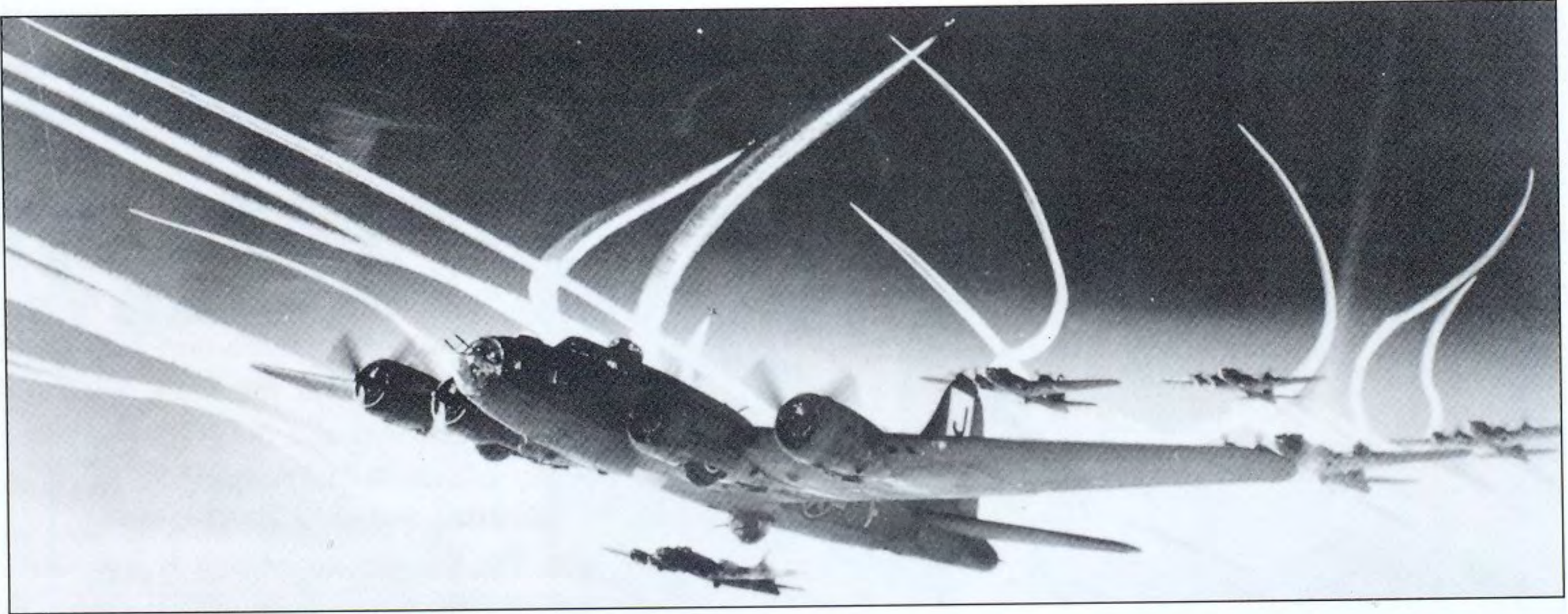
The following day the long-range B-17s of the 3rd BD flew a 920-mile, 11-hour round trip to Bordeaux to attack an aircraft plant, and returned some of the way in darkness. Before the mission, the crews had practised taking off in squadrons and assembling as a group at night. Just off the south-west coast of England the B-17s encountered heavy rain squalls, and these, plus the impending darkness, dispersed the formation. The storm front knocked radio altimeters out of calibration by about 1000 ft, and many pilots got into difficulties. Three B-17s ditched in the North Sea and two others crashed, killing all ten crew in one Fortress and one crewmember in the other.

The 1st BD met heavy fighter opposition on its mission to the port installations at Nantes, while most of the 21 B-17s in a diversionary force bound for Cognac airfield failed to bomb because of thick cloud over the target. In all, the Eighth lost 13 bombers on the 16 September raids.

On the morning of the 24th crews were alerted for a mission to Stuttgart, but poor weather forced its cancellation. Instead, a practice mission was flown by the 3rd BD to test new Pathfinder Force (PFF) equipment and techniques, bomb loads being hastily removed and some aircraft stripped of their guns. The B-17s completed assembly without incident, but over the North Sea they were bounced by 15 fighters.

'Of course we had no fighter cover', remembered 'Pappy' Colby. 'They shot down one ship in the group behind me. As it glided down, one 'chute came out and then the B-17 blew up. Seven Me 109s came on through and one started an attack on us, as we were the last aeroplane. Luckily, our tail gunner had gotten his twin "fifties" installed, and he fired a long burst and the fighter turned away'.

In the 100th formation, *Damifino II* came in for some particularly heavy attacks by fighters using the sun to excellent advantage. They raked the fuselage, and a 20 mm shell started a fire in the oil tank behind the No 3 engine. Pilot Lt J Gossage held the aircraft steady while all the crew bailed out. Bombardier Theodore I Don jumped at 1000 ft and hit the sea almost at the instant his parachute deployed. He was later rescued by a flotilla of Motor Torpedo Boats en route to the Dutch coast, but the co-pilot and the navigator were dead when they were picked up. The two



waist gunners and the ball turret gunner were never found. The bomber hit the sea nose down and quickly began to sink. Gossage was trapped, but managed to pull himself free and float safely to the surface.

Trials of the British-designed airborne ground-scanning H2S radar (dubbed 'Stinkey' by B-17 crews) had been carried out on 23 September, and the results were so impressive that Gen Eaker ordered that similarly equipped Fortresses should accompany the force of 305 bombers to Emden on 27 September. The German port was chosen because of its proximity to water, which would show up reasonably well on the H2S's cathode ray tubes. In all, 244 bombers hit the target, and the radar-equipped B-17s performed very well.

One of the three combat wings in the 3rd BD managed to bomb visually after exploiting a gap in the clouds, but subsequent photographic reconnaissance proved that only the H2S-assisted formations had managed to place a fair concentration of bombs on Emden. Other bomb patterns ranged as far as five miles from the city.

The H2S sets seemed to provide the answer to the Eighth's accuracy problems, and Eaker was anxious to use them again as soon as possible. A period of bad weather gave the technicians time to iron out some of the teething troubles before the bombers returned to Emden again on Monday 2 October with two H2S-equipped aircraft. P-47Ds, aided by 108-gallon belly tanks, escorted the bombers as far as Düren on 4 October, when 282 'heavies' hit Frankfurt, Wiesbaden and Saarbrücken. Twelve B-17s were lost, but without PFF available, cloud ruled out accurate bombing at all primary targets. Losses would have been higher had it not been for the P-47s, and a diversion flown over the North Sea by 42 B-24s.

On 8 October more than 350 bombers attacked Bremen, the 1st and 4th CBWs approaching the target from two different directions in an attempt to fool the German controllers. Airborne *Carpet* radar jammers aboard some of the B-17s were also used for the first time. To crews in the 3rd BD, it seemed that everything was going according to plan. However, the German defences had already calculated the height and speed of the previous wing, and had no need to alter those calculations as the 100th BG sailed over the target at much the same height and speed. The lead aircraft, *Just a Snappin'*, flown by Capt Everett E Blakely and Maj John B Kidd (the command pilot), was hit repeatedly and lost 3000 ft before the crew regained control. It made it to England and crashed at Ludham.

In one of the most evocative photographs of World War 2, B-17Fs of the 570th BS/390th BG are seen being escorted by high-flying P-47s, contrailing above them, en route to Emden on 27 September 1943. This shot was taken by S/Sgt Stan Smith, a waist gunner in B-17F-120-BO 42-30783 *Stork Club*, flown by Capt Keith Harris. In the foreground is B-17F-45-DL 42-3329 *Skippy*, whose pilot, 2Lt George W Harmon, completed 25 missions on November 1943. *Stork Club* and 2Lt Vincent F DeMayo's crew failed to return from a raid on Augsburg on 16 March 1944 – eight crew were killed and two captured. On 5 February 1944 *Skippy* took off for a mission to bomb an airfield at Villacoublay, in France, but while heading from England the No 2 engine exploded. Pilot Lt Thomas J Sutters was unable to feather the windmilling propeller and he decided to return to base, but the engine set the wing on fire and they only made it as far as the Thames. Sutters pointed the B-17 towards the Channel before all ten crew bailed out safely (USAF)



B-17F-50-DL 42-3352 VIRGIN'S DELIGHT, piloted by Lt R E 'Dick' Le Pore of the 410th BS/94th BG, was photographed by Capt Ray D Miller, the 410th BS Flight Surgeon, leaving the burning Fw 190 factory at Marienburg on 9 October 1943. On the bomb run, Le Pore was not using oxygen like the rest of the crew – he was eating a Mars bar from his PX rations instead! The target was completely demolished. *Virgin's Delight* and nine of 2Lt Walter Chyle's ten-man crew were lost on 29 November 1943 when the aircraft ditched in the North Sea – the sole survivor was rescued by a German naval vessel (USAF)

Seven 100th BG B-17s failed to return, including Bill MacDonald's *Salvo Sal*, as well as *Our Baby*, flown by Lt Bernard DeMarco and Maj Gale 'Bucky' Cleven, CO of the 350th BS. Capt Thomas Murphy, another original group pilot flying *Piccadilly Lily* on his 24th mission, was also lost. The remaining four 100th BG B-17s owed their survival to the 390th BG leader, Maj Robert O Good, who encouraged them to move in tightly behind his 20 B-17s after leaving the target. The Eighth lost 26 bombers in total, 14 of them from the 3rd BD.

The following day 378 'heavies' hit targets in East Prussia and Poland on the 3rd BD's longest mission to date. Some 115 aircraft headed to the Arado aircraft component plant at Anklam, near Peenemünde, as a diversion for the 263 bombers from the 4th CBW sent to attack the Polish port of Gdynia (a 1500-mile round trip) and the Focke-Wulf plant at Marienburg. On his third mission, the 388th BG's Leslie C Thibodeau recalls;

'Our group made two runs on the target area before we dropped our bombs because we were confronted by a great smoke-screen thrown up by German destroyers in an effort to protect the ships and installations. Despite this, we set the 550 ft-long liner *Stuttgart* ablaze, and hit the docks, railways and workshops.'

The third force of B-17s, which bombed Marienburg, achieved the greatest success of the day. The normally unfortunate 385th BG led, and lost only two aircraft, one through engine trouble. Maj Colby headed the 94th BG, which followed closely behind.

'The target was demolished', he wrote. 'We had completely surprised them. They just didn't believe we could bomb so far from England'.



Smoke trails from B-17F-100-BO 42-30377 *Roger The Lodger II* of the 412th BS/95th BG shortly before it went down in flames in Dutch territorial waters with Lt Ralph W Ehart's crew on the Marienburg mission of 9 October 1943. Fighters scored hits in the No 2 engine and put a rocket into the No 3 engine. Seven of Ehart's crew bailed out, but two of them jumped with their parachutes on fire. The five survivors perished in the freezing waters of the North Sea. Bombardier Robert D Wing had a premonition the night before that he would not return from this mission (USAF)

Eaker called it a 'classic example of precision bombing'. Twenty-eight bombers were lost.

Next day, Sunday 10 October, Münster was the target. For the first time in the war, the Eighth Air Force was to bomb a residential area to deprive the Germans of its railway workers, who were practically all billeted in the town. Crews were told at their briefing, 'Your MPI will be Münster Cathedral, and you are going to bomb the workers' homes'. They were also told that approximately 245 single-engined and 290 twin-engined fighters could be expected to oppose the mission.

Some 274 B-17s set out for Münster on a direct course so the 216 P-47s could escort the bombers all the way to the target. However, the non-arrival of the fog-bound 355th FG opened up a gap in the defensive cover. There were problems with the B-17 formation too.

John K Gerhart, CO of the leading 95th BG, had taken off from Horham to lead both the 13th CBW and the 3rd BD over the North Sea towards Münster. Following close behind came the 390th and the 100th, the latter being led by Maj Egan and John Brady in *Mlle Zig-Zag*. By the time the 3rd BD crossed the Dutch coast, 27 aircraft had aborted with mechanical problems – the 100th had lost seven of its 21 B-17s. Meanwhile, a diversionary force of B-24s had also aborted, and as they turned for home, German controllers redirected their fighters towards the 3rd.

At 1453 hrs, just nine minutes from the target, the Germans struck. First to attack were the single-engined fighters, which paused only when the flak opened up near Münster. They resumed their onslaught after the Bf 110 and Me 410 *Zerstören* had waded in with rocket attacks to add to the carnage. Worst hit was the unlucky 13th CBW, comprising the 95th, 100th (low group) and 390th BGs. The Luftwaffe concentrated on the 100th BG, and took just seven minutes to tear the 'Bloody Hundredth' formation apart. *Mlle Zig-Zag* was hit by a rocket and went down, 'Bucky' Egan bailing out and becoming a PoW. The 100th reeled under the incessant attacks, and 11 aircraft were lost before they reached the target. Only Capt Keith Harris of the 390th BG, who was flying *Stork Club* in the 100th BG formation, Lt Robert Rosenthal in *Royal Flush* and Lt John Justice's *Pasadena Nena* reached Münster – Justice was subsequently shot down on the homeward leg.

Rosenthal was flying *Royal Flush* because his usual aircraft, *Rosie's Riveters*, was still under repair following its debut in the disastrous mission to Bremen. *Royal Flush* lost two engines over Münster and a rocket shell tore through the right wing, leaving a large hole. Despite this, Rosenthal completed the bomb run and instigated a series of violent manoeuvres to throw off the aim of the flak gunners.

The 18 B-17s in the 390th BG also felt the full impact of the Luftwaffe attacks. Within 25 minutes the 390th had lost eight of its number as the rockets exploded among them. Next, the German pilots turned on the 95th BG, destroying five of its 19 B-17s. The survivors continued to the target, desperately fighting off the intense Luftwaffe attacks. Beyond the target *Tech Supply*, flown by Lt John C Winant Jr, son of the US Ambassador to Great Britain, was hit by a rocket and exploded. Winant, who was flying his 13th mission, was among those captured.

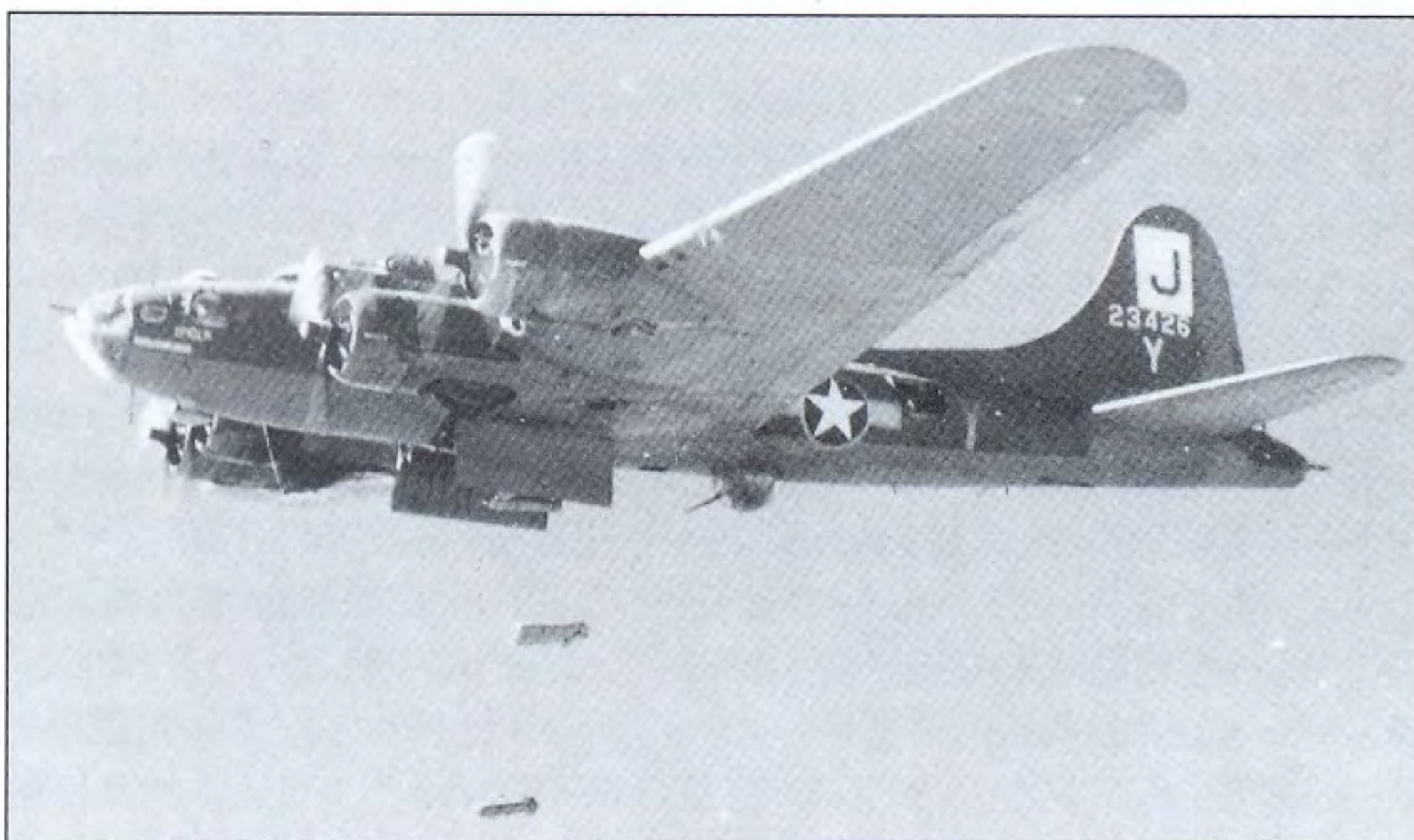
Moments later a rocket struck the starboard wing of *The Eightball* in the 390th formation. 'The rocket sheared a path through the top half of the right wing (about 15 ft from the end)', recalls co-pilot Richard H Perry. 'The wing tip flapped up and down in the windstream and caused us to lose the lift that we should have gotten from the wing.'

The combined efforts of Perry and Bill Cabral, the pilot, were not enough to keep the bomber from falling out of formation, so engineer Tom Ferris was called to the controls. He stood between Perry and Cabral, and despite having been wounded, he managed to put a hand on each of the control wheels and help keep *The Eightball* in formation.

It was a great relief to one and all when the white vapour trails of the Thunderbolt escorts were seen directly ahead. However, there were few B-17s for the 'little friends' to protect. The 390th was now down to a pitiful ten bombers, and even the survivors were not sure that they would reach England. Those that did were badly damaged, with wounded crews and pilots, and they put down as best they could. Bill Cabral and Richard Perry landed at Thorpe Abbots after bad weather ruled out Framlingham. Despite the fog, all ten aircraft in the 390th made it to Suffolk.

It had been a black day for the 13th CBW, which made up 25 of the 29 B-17s lost by the 3rd BD. The 390th had had eight destroyed and the 95th five. Worst of all, 12 of the 100th BG's B-17s failed to return. This brought the group's total losses to 19 in just three days. In all, 88 bombers had been downed on three successive days, and the losses came at a time when intelligence sources revealed that German fighter strength was increasing. The AAF claimed 180 fighters shot down, 105 being submitted by the 13th CBW alone. In fact the Luftwaffe lost just 25 fighters.

No missions were flown between 11 and 13 October. On the afternoon of the 13th Maj Gen Frederick L Anderson, Commanding General VIII Bomber Command, gathered with his senior staff officers at High Wycombe for the daily Operations Conference. At the beginning of the



B-17F-60-DL 42-3426 *Kemy II* of the 571st BS, flown by Lt William W Smith's crew, was one of eight Fortresses from the 390th BG which failed to return from Münster on 10 October 1943. Three of its crew were listed as killed in action and the remaining seven were captured. It was a black day for the 13th CBW, which lost 25 of the 29 3rd BD B-17s shot down (via Ian McLachlan)

month British Intelligence sources had estimated that despite round-the-clock bombing of aircraft factories and component plants, the Luftwaffe had a first-line strength of some 1525 single- and twin-engined fighters for the defence of the western approaches to Germany. American sources put the figure at around 1100 operational fighters. In reality, the Germans could call upon 1646 single- and twin-engined fighters for the defence of the *Reich* – 400 more than before the *Pointblank* directive was issued, although only about a third of this force was ready for immediate use. The rest were either in reserve or temporarily unserviceable.

The Allies' figures confirmed their worst fears. The decision was taken to attack the ball-bearing plant at Schweinfurt for the second time in three months, with the aim of delivering a single, decisive blow against the German aircraft industry, and thus stem the flow of fighters to the Luftwaffe. The 100th BG was still licking its wounds after the severe maulings of 8 and 10 October, but the 'Bloody Hundredth' was expected to contribute to the tonnage of bombs to be dropped on Schweinfurt.

Mission No 115 went ahead on 14 October. Anderson hoped to launch 420 Fortresses and Liberators in a three-pronged attack on the city of Schweinfurt, but the weather and aborts took their toll even before the bombers reached the Continent. Only 29 Liberators managed to form up, and these were redirected on a diversion towards Bremen. Ultimately, of the 320 B-17s and B-24s sent to Schweinfurt, only 229 were effective.

Schweinfurt soaked up 482.8 tons of high explosives and incendiaries but US losses were high. The 1st BD lost 45 B-17s and the 3rd BD 15 – the 96th BG lost seven, the 94th six and the 95th and 390th one apiece. The 100th, 385th and 388th BGs suffered no losses. Of the bombers that returned to England, 142 in both divisions were damaged as a result of fighter attack and flak. Sixty Fortresses and 600 men were missing. Five B-17s had crashed in England because of their battle-damaged condition and 12 more were destroyed in crash-landings or were so badly damaged they had to be written off. Of the returning bombers, 121 required repairs, and another five fatal casualties and 43 wounded crewmen were removed from the aircraft. The losses were softened by claims of 186 enemy fighters downed, although the actual figure was about 35.

Brig Gen Orvil A Anderson, Chairman of the Combined Operational Planning Committee, said;

'The entire works are now inactive. It may be possible for the Germans to eventually restore 25 per cent of normal capacity, but even that will require some time.'

Air Marshal Sir Charles Portal, Britain's Chief of the Air Staff, added;

'The Schweinfurt raid may well go down in history as one of the decisive air actions of the war, and it may prove to have saved countless lives by depriving the enemy of a great part of his means of resistance.'

However, only 88 out of the 1222 bombs dropped actually fell on the plants. Production at the Kugelfischer plant (largest of the five) was interrupted for only six weeks, but Gen 'Hap' Arnold confidently told reporters, 'Now we have got Schweinfurt!'

The losses, and a spell of bad weather, restricted VIII Bomber Command to just two more missions in October. One of these took place on the 20th, when 212 B-17s bombed Düren, and Woensdrecht airfield, and nine Fortresses were lost. Four were claimed by JG 26.

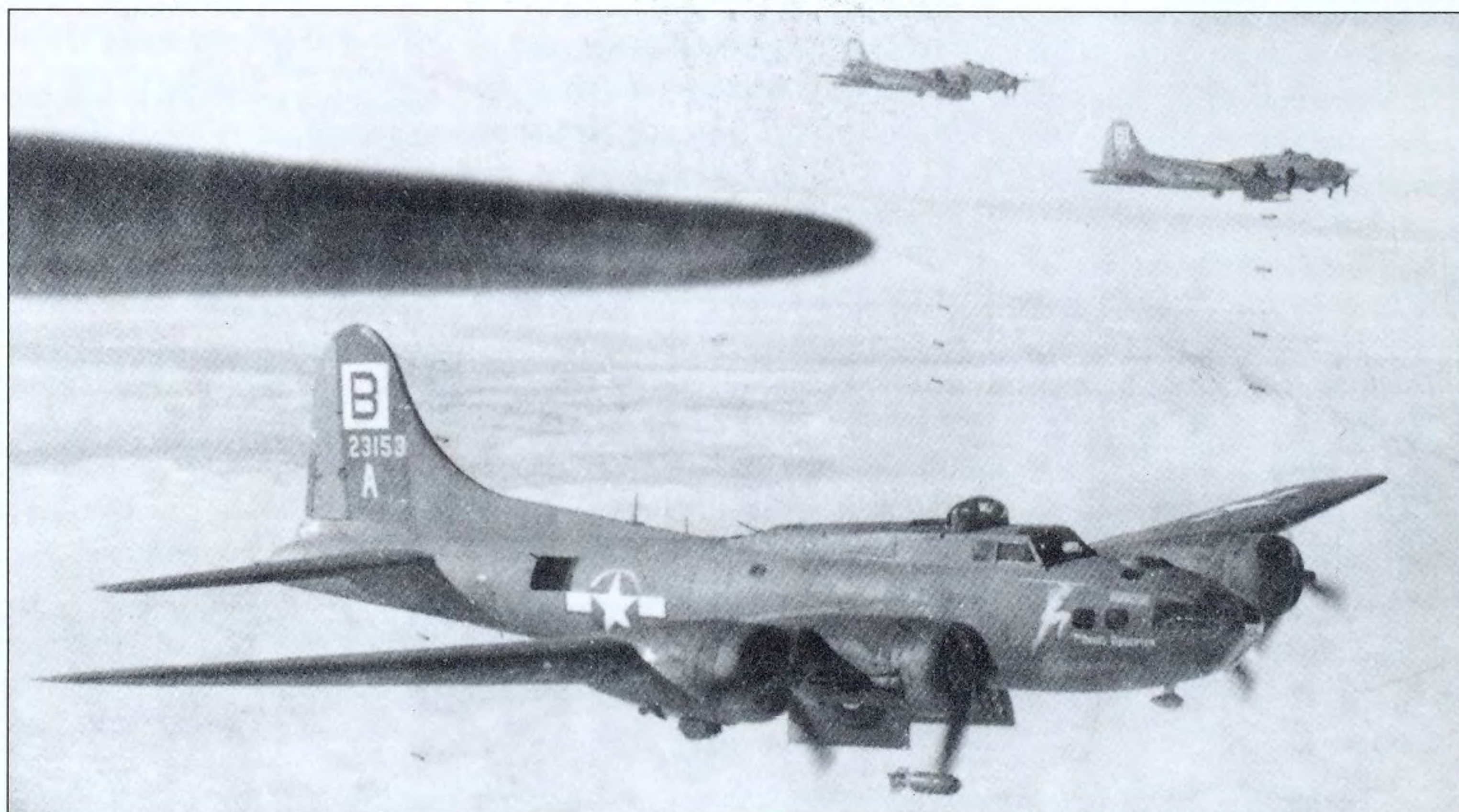
The unit's *Geschwaderkommodore*, Oberstleutnant 'Pips' Priller, claimed a 96th BG B-17 south-east of Arras-Cambrai (his 95th kill) and Leutnant Erich Burkert of 9./JG 26 got a second bomber from the same group. The latter was almost certainly B-17F 42-3439, piloted by 2Lt Charles F Gerger of the 413th BS, which crashed near Utrecht, in Holland, with the loss of five crewmen. Gerger and three others were captured while one man escaped. The other 96th BG machine was 339th BS B-17 *Shack Rabbit II*, flown by 2Lt Robert E Grimes and his crew (on only their fifth mission), which crashed in southern Holland with the loss of four crew. Grimes and the bombardier evaded capture, but four were seized.

On 3 November 566 B-17s and B-24s headed to Wilhelmshaven. Seven bombers were lost in a fierce air battle with elements of JGs 1, 11 and 26, and ZG 26, over the German Bight. German casualties were relatively high – III./JG 1 alone lost eight Bf 109s, including two *Staffelkapitäne*, to escorting P-47s and P-38s. Two days later 323 B-17s bombed Gelsenkirchen and 104 B-24s hit Münster. Three B-24s and eight B-17s were lost, including two from the 388th BG.

During this mission III./JG 26 mixed it with B-17s from the 3rd BD, and their P-47 escorts of the 353rd FG. The latter downed two Bf 109G-6s, and two others force-landed with battle damage. In return, JG 26 claimed a P-47 and a B-17 from the 388th BG, the latter falling to Hauptmann Hermann Staiger, 12th *Staffel* CO. This was his 34th kill.

The 388th lost two B-17s to enemy action, although group records contended that all three of the losses it suffered on this day were attributable to flak – a third bomber crashed in England after suffering battle damage over enemy territory. B-17F 42-30789, flown by 2Lt W J Bramwell, was hit in the No 1 engine just before the target, and when last seen, its No 1 propeller was feathered and the engine was on fire. *Pistol Packin Mama*, flown by 2Lt R M Walker, whose crew were on only their third mission, fell behind just after bombs away when the bomb-bay doors refused to shut. Walker then dropped out of the formation from 27,000 ft

B-17F-30-DL 42-3153 THE DEVIL'S DAUGHTER of the 336th BS/95th BG, flown by Lt R E Fischer's crew, drops its bombs on Wilhelmshaven on 3 November 1943. Originally assigned to the 339th BS/96th BG (where it flew as *The Worry Wart*) at Snetterton upon its arrival in the UK in mid June 1943, this aircraft was transferred to the 336th the following month. It survived almost a year of frontline flying, and was eventually sent back to the US in early April 1944. The veteran bomber was sold for scrap in October 1945 (USAF via Mike Bailey)





Just visible as black specks in the background, a squadron of P-47s protect a formation of B-17s from the 94th BG as the 'heavies' head for Münster on 11 November 1943. Only 58 bombers of the 3rd BD attacked, 111 others having turned back because of bad weather during assembly. Those that reached the target concentrated on the marshalling yards
(USAF via Cliff Hatcher)

with the No 2 propeller feathered and No 3 engine smoking. As the crew bailed out, ball gunner S/Sgt R B Feese got his parachute caught on the tail section of the B-17 and he was carried down with the aircraft.

On 11 November the pilots of JG 26 were successful in intercepting the bombers during the 3rd BD attack on Münster. Mission aborts by the PFF aircraft caused the 95th, 96th, 100th and 388th BGs to turn back before the enemy coast, leaving just 61 unescorted B-17s from the 94th, 385th and 390th (in the 4th and 13th CBWs) to continue to the target. Four B-17s were lost – three from the 94th BG, which was flying as the low group, and one from the 385th BG.

Scrambling from Epinoy, the Fw 190s of II./JG 26 attacked the Fortresses repeatedly from 'six' and 'twelve o'clock', claiming four B-17s of the 94th BG. Three of these claims were upheld, one of which (B-17G 42-39812 *Casey Jones*, flown by Lt Richard W Ralls of the 332nd BS, which crashed at Tilburg, in Holland, killing the crew) proved to be the 44th kill for 5./JG 26's Oberfeldwebel Adolf 'Addi' Glunz. He also claimed a second B-17 destroyed, but this was not credited.

Glunz's intended victim was B-17F *Lil' Operator*, flown by Lt Johnny Pyles. Assigned to the 410th BS, he and his crew were on only their third mission. Despite Glunz seeing the bomber disappear into the undercast in a vertical dive, Pyles brought the Fortress under control, levelled off at 15,000 ft and applied full rudder to keep it on course. Nos 3 and 4 engine throttles were dead, so he shut down the No 3 engine, which was windmilling. Moments later, ball turret gunner Ervin Smith called up on the interphone to say that the undercarriage was in the 'down' position.

Amazingly, Pyles brought *Lil' Operator* home to Rougham 'on two engines, a wing and a prayer'. Sadly, Johnny Pyles was lost on 26 November with a new crew on their first mission when an Fw 190 – probably flown by Oberleutnant Fritz Falke of 8./JG 26, who was most

likely already dead – flew straight into Pyles' B-17, hitting between the No 2 engine and the fuselage. The tail broke away during the explosion and the rear gunner managed to bail out. He was the only survivor.

Returning to 11 November, a second 94th BG B-17 fell to the guns of 7th *Staffel* CO Hauptmann Johannes 'Hans' Naumann (his 27th kill) north-west of Breda, B-17G 42-39855 *Ole Bassar*, piloted by Lt Paul J Kane of the 331st BS, crashing near the Dutch town of Fijnaart, leaving three dead and seven as PoWs. Oberleutnant Rudolf Leuschel, the 8th *Staffel* CO, also had his kill confirmed (his seventh victory), B-17G 42-39868, flown by Lt Robert B O'Hara of the 331st BS, crashing south-west of Numansdorp. Seven crew were killed and three taken prisoner.

For the first two weeks of November England was blanketed by thick fog, and airfields were lashed with intermittent showers and high winds. On the 13th 272 B-17s and B-24s were directed to bomb targets at Bremen, although due to more bad weather many in the 1st BD abandoned the mission during assembly, and only 143 of the 'heavies' were successful. The operation cost 16 bombers, three of which were B-17s. Oberleutnant Wolfgang Neu, 4./JG 26 CO, was credited with shooting down a 96th BG machine north-east of Arnhem, B-17G 42-37830 of the 413th BS, piloted by 2Lt Henry E Marks Jr, crashing with the loss of seven crew.

When the weather front finally lifted on 16 November, VIII Bomber Command struck at targets in Norway. The 1st BD attacked the molybdenum mines at Knaben and the 3rd BD bombed a generating plant at Vermark, in the Rjukan Valley. Both targets were connected with German heavy water experiments, which were intended to give the Nazis the atomic bomb. Five days later the 'heavies' revisited Gelsenkirchen, and on 26 November 633 aircraft – the largest formation so far assembled by VIII Bomber Command – hit targets as far apart as Bremen and Paris. Twenty-nine B-17s and five fighters failed to return, with almost all the 'heavies' lost coming from the Bremen raid. II./JG 27, IV./NJG 1 (attacking stragglers over northern Holland) and ZG 26 all made claims.

On 30 November, 381 bombers were briefed to attack Solingen, in the Ruhr, but only 80 had gotten their bombs away when cloud prevented the 1st and 2nd BDs from continuing to the target. 1 December saw 299 'heavies' sent out again to Solingen. This time the raid was more successful, and 281 sorties were deemed effective, although the 3rd BD was prevented from bombing because of the weather.

Two days later the 94th BG lost three B-17s, and the 385th and 388th BGs lost two Fortresses each. In the 388th BG formation, 2Lt P A Todd's

B-17G-5-BO 42-31134 of the 569th BS/390th BG was photographed en route to the secret German heavy water plant near the Rjukan Valley, about 75 miles from Oslo, on 16 November 1943. In May of the following year 42-31134 was named *Gung Ho*, and on 10 September this aircraft, and Lt Charles F McIntosh's crew, failed to return from a mission, crashing at Nuremberg. Six of the crew perished and three were captured (USAF)



B-17 fell out north of the target with its No 1 engine feathered, and was subsequently shot down. Eight crewmen were killed, Todd became a PoW and co-pilot 2Lt C D Willingham bailed out safely and evaded capture. The second 388th B-17 to be lost was flown by Lt Robert W Moyer, who flew home with a crippled aircraft and ordered the crew to bail out over England. The 390th BG lost a solitary Fortress when it ran out of fuel, *The Bad Penny*, flown by Lt N M Palmer of the 571st BS, crashing in the sea off the Kent coast. Seven men died.

On 30 December the 3rd BD attacked the IG Farbenindustrie chemical works at Ludwigshafen. *Sarah Jane* of the 571st BS/390th BG, flown by 2Lt Campbell C Brigman Jr, was shot down by Feldwebel Heinrich 'Jan' Schild of 2./JG 26 in northern France. Eight escaped and two were captured. JG 26 claimed five B-17s that day, 2nd *Staffel* CO Leutnant Karl 'Charlie' Willius accounting for a 100th BG machine (his 37th kill) over Soissons.

Having reached the target, the 100th had lost two more bombers by the time it returned to the Channel coast. The first, *Laden Maiden*, piloted by Lts Marvin Leininger and Albert Witmyer, reportedly fell behind and went down in flames after being followed by three Fw 190s. Only navigator Leonard McChesney and bombardier Charles Compton, survived. Both evaded capture and had returned to England by 17 April 1944.

All ten men aboard *Heaven Can Wait* bailed out after an enemy fighter damaged the radio room and started a fire. Pilot Francis Smith and co-pilot James Law were taken prisoner. The rest of the crew avoided being captured, and even managed to spend some comfortable time in Paris!

A third 100th BG B-17, piloted by Lt Dean Radtke, barely made it back after being hit by flak in the target area, and then being attacked by two Fw 190s south-west of Abbeville. In all, six Fortresses of the 100th BG returned with battle damage – 17 B-17s and six B-24s, were lost.

To mark the completion of its second year in England, on 31 December VIII Bomber Command mounted all-out raids on airfields in France. However, 25 bomber crews and four fighter pilots would not return to their bases to celebrate New Year's Eve. JG 26 enjoyed mixed fortunes too, having two pilots killed and three wounded. Lt Kurt Vavken of 7./JG 26 added to his unit's overall score with a confirmed victory over a 96th BG machine north of Ault, B-17G 42-31121, flown by Lt Ralph A Woodward of the 338th BS, being one of the Fortresses sent to attack ball-bearing factories outside Paris. Three of Woodward's crew died. Meanwhile, 'Addi' Glunz of 5./JG 26 was credited with destroying a B-17 between Lorient and Aurings. This was his 51st kill.

B-17G-5-VE 42-39927 *The Skillet* of the 570th BS/390th BG made an emergency landing at Wormingford fighter base, in Essex, with serious battle damage in late 1943. Once repaired, it continued to serve with this group until returned to the US in early July 1945
(Russ Zorn via Ian McLachlan)



ARGUMENT WON

1944 was invasion year, and on 13 April overall command of the Combined Bomber Offensive and the Eighth Air Force would officially pass to Gen Dwight D Eisenhower, newly appointed Supreme Allied Commander. Missions would fluctuate between strategic and tactical as the build-up drew near, although defeating the industry supporting the German fighter force remained a top priority.

On 11 January 1944, when 291 Fortresses were sent to Oschersleben and Halberstadt, fighter opposition was said to be the 'heaviest' since the Schweinfurt mission of 14 October the previous year. Altogether, 42 Fortresses and two fighters were lost.

Ten days later 795 B-17s and B-24s set out to bomb V-weapon sites and other targets in the Pas de Calais and Cherbourg. Some aircraft attacked targets of opportunity, while other combat boxes remained in their areas for too long as they tried to identify targets. Indeed, one target is said to have required ten runs before the group dropped its bombs!

A total of 628 escorts were looking after the bombers and protecting them from Luftwaffe attack. However, the delayed runs and constant circling of some groups meant that many fighters ran low on fuel and had to withdraw, leaving bombers vulnerable. Bombing was also hampered by poor weather, with heavy cloud over most of northern France – fewer than half the bombers dropped their loads where they were meant to.

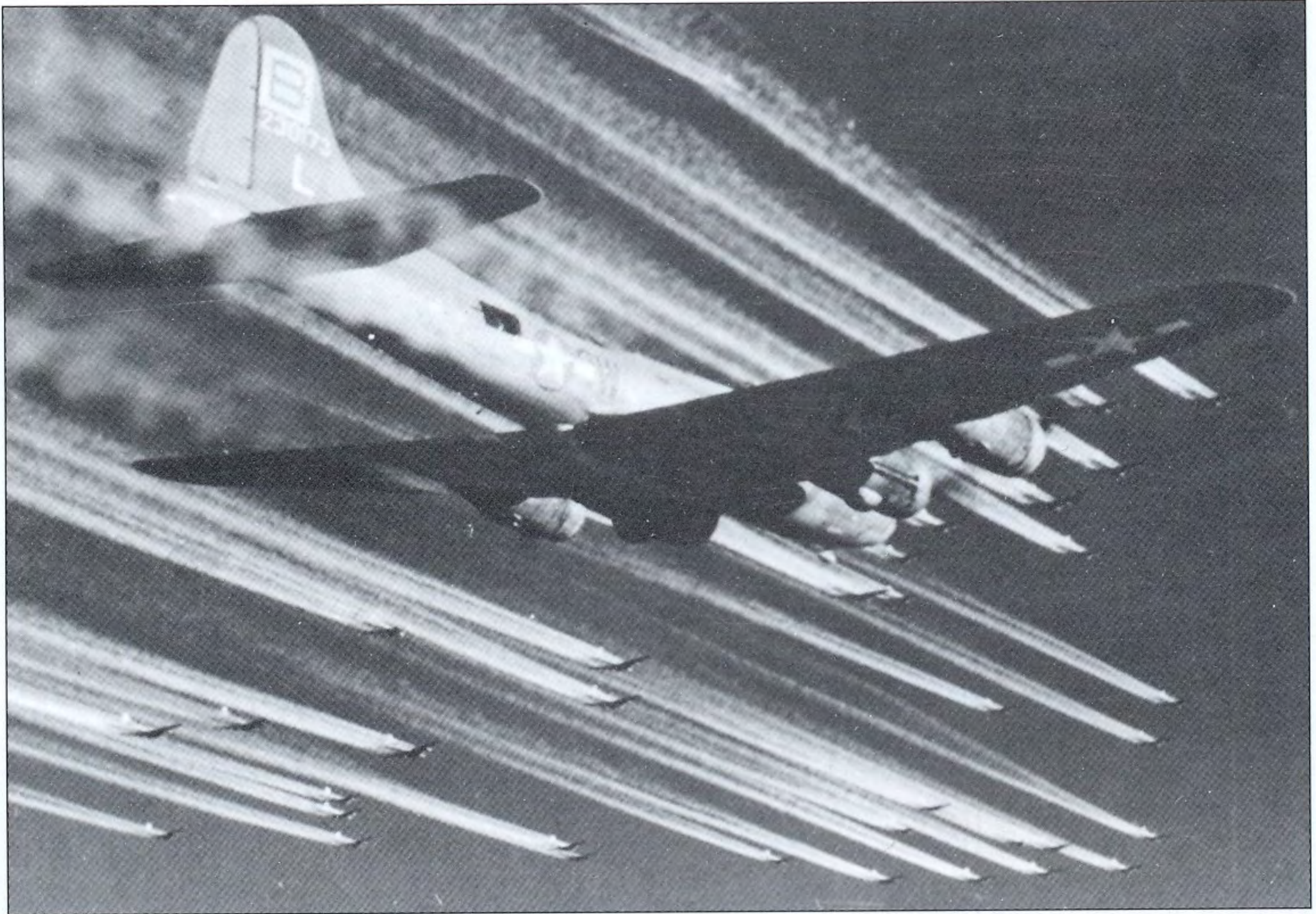
The 'heavies' were stood down for two days but resumed operations on 24 January, when the crews of 857 aircraft were briefed to hit aviation industry plants and marshalling yards at Frankfurt. However, bad weather as they assembled led to them being recalled, although the leading combat wing in the 3rd BD, which had reached the German border, decided to look for a target of opportunity and carried on. Fighter attacks over Belgium claimed *Lover Boy*, piloted by 2Lt Clay A Burnett, and *Roarin' Bill*, flown by 2Lt Charles H Mowers, both from the 95th BG.

The weather remained bad, and the next heavy bomber mission was not flown until the 29th, when crews were assigned targets around Frankfurt. Of the 863 'heavies' sent on their way, 24 B-17s and five B-24s failed to return. Once again the Luftwaffe took advantage of lapses in the bomber formations – these began to go wrong soon after the aircraft crossed the coast at Dunkirk when navigational errors and radar problems caused several combat wings to fly most of the mission without fighter escort.

Oberleutnant Kurt Kranefeld of I./JG 26 downed a 385th BG B-17,

Pilot 1Lt William F Cely (left) and co-pilot 2Lt Jabez I Churchill of the 333rd BS/94th BG inspect their badly damaged B-17G-1-VE 42-39775/K *Frenesi*, which they brought back to Rougham from Brunswick on 11 January 1944 with three wounded gunners on board. Five crew and a cameraman had bailed out over enemy territory because the interphones were out, and they did not hear Cely saying 'Poppa's gonna take you home!' The pilot was awarded the Silver Star to add to his DFC and Air Medal for bringing *Frenesi* back. The aircraft was so badly damaged that it was scrapped, but five of its crew lived on to fight another day in *Frenesi II* (B-17G-95-BO 43-38834) (via Ian McLachlan)





Yet another stunning image from the high altitude air war fought over occupied Europe between 1942 and 1945. B-17F-90-BO 42-30173 *Circe*, part of the 412th BS/95th BG, completed its first operational sortie on 22 June 1943. It was eventually lost whilst being flown by Lt James D Pearson's crew on the 10 February 1944 mission to Brunswick, the aircraft dropping out of formation on fire near Lingen. Three crew died, while seven, including Pearson, were made PoWs (USAF via Mike Bailey)

as did Wolfgang Neu, CO of 4./JG 26 – this was the latter ace's eighth kill. A third bomber was credited to Feldwebel Heinz Gomann, who shot down *Mary Ellen*, a flak-damaged 388th BG B-17 piloted by Lt F P Hennessey that was trying to make it back by flying on the deck. Hennessey and navigator 2Lt C Richardson evaded capture and returned to England on 22 March. Four crewmen were captured and three killed. Less than an hour later Gomann downed a 389th BG B-24 for his 12th, and last, victory. Finally, a claim by Leutnant Wilhelm Hoffman of 8./JG 26 for the destruction of a 95th BG B-17 was also confirmed, giving him his eighth kill.

The 95th BG lost two B-17s on this day – 42-3545 of the 334th BS, flown by 2Lt Andrew Rozentinsky, and the 336th BS's *Spook #5*, piloted by 2Lt James D Higgins.

February 1944 saw the planned launch of Operation *Argument* – the first mass employment of bomb groups assigned to the Strategic Air Forces (USSTAF). Gen Carl 'Tooey' Spaatz and his subordinate commanders, Maj Gens Jimmy Doolittle (Eighth Air Force) and Nathan F Twining (Fifteenth Air Force), planned to make a series of co-ordinated raids on the German aircraft industry, supported by RAF night bombing, as soon as they could.

Poor weather delayed the commencement of *Argument* until the 20th of the month, and it was scheduled to run through to the 25th in an operation that was soon dubbed 'Big Week'. On the 20th 1028 B-17s and B-24s, escorted by 832 fighters of the Eighth Air Force, attacked 12 aircraft plants in Germany, losing 25 bombers and four fighters. The following day 924 bombers and 679 fighters hit aircraft factories in

Brunswick, as well as other targets. This time the Eighth lost 19 bombers and five fighters, but 60 German fighters were claimed as having been shot down.

Two of the Fortresses lost were from the 95th BG, which fell to fighters from II./JG 26. B-17F 42-30634 *Liberty Belle*, piloted by Lt John P McGuigan of the 412th BS, crashed into the Zuider Zee with the loss of six crewmen. The rest were captured after bailing out. B-17F 42-3462 *San Antonio Rose*, flown by 2Lt Morris R Marks of the 336th BS, crashed in the same area with the loss of eight crewmen. Two

were captured. The two B-17s were claimed by Oberfeldwebel 'Addi' Glunz (his 53rd kill) and Unteroffizier Gerhard Loschinski. Glunz would down three more 1st BD B-17s and a P-47 the following day, defending targets in Germany and Holland.

Bad weather kept the 'heavies' on the ground on the 23rd, but on the 24th 238 Fortresses attacked Schweinfurt. Eleven were lost. Meanwhile, 295 B-17s struck targets on the Baltic coast at a cost of five Fortresses. On the 25th the USSTAF brought the curtain down on 'Big Week', with 1300 bombers of the Eighth and Fifteenth Air Forces, looked after by 1000 fighters, heading to aircraft plants, ball-bearing works and components factories throughout the Reich.

Huge damage was done to the Bf 109 plants at Regensburg by the 3rd BD and 176 bombers of the Fifteenth Air Force, the latter hitting the targets an hour before the main force arrived from England. The raids left output at both Augsburg and Regensburg severely reduced for four months. The Eighth lost 31 bombers, while the Fifteenth lost 33. 'Addi' Glunz claimed a 390th BG B-17, but it was not credited to him, and two 96th BG B-17s were also claimed by other JG 26 pilots, although only one was confirmed. In all, 'Big Week' had cost 226 bombers.

On 3 March the USAAF launched its first attack on Berlin, dubbed 'Big-B' by Eighth Air Force aircrews. However, the raid by 748 'heavies' was aborted because of bad weather, so 79 bombers went for targets of opportunity in Wilhelmshaven instead. Berlin almost escaped again the following day, as bad weather foiled a force of B-24s, leaving 502 Fortresses and 770 fighters to continue to the target. More severe weather en route led to a recall, and 219 B-17s hit targets of opportunity. Despite the conditions, 30 B-17s in two squadrons from the 95th, and



B-17F-10-DL 42-37796 *Fletcher's Castoria II* of the 350th BS/100th BG was crash-landed by Lt William H Fletcher at Halfweg, in Holland, on yet another mission to Brunswick, this time on 21 February 1944. The crew were all captured. The bomber was reportedly brought down by a mechanical fault (USAF)

B-17G-5-VE 42-39867 *Boeing Belle* served with the 351st BS/100th BG. Initially issued to the group's 349th BS in November 1943, the bomber survived the war and was flown back to the US in June 1945. By then it had been renamed *Hang the Expense III* (via Mike Bailey)





The 482nd BG's indestructible Medal of Honor winner 1Lt John C 'Red' Morgan mans what appears to be a mobile soup kitchen during his time in a prisoner of war camp after being shot down by flak on the 6 March 1944 mission to Berlin

Twenty-one-year-old S/Sgt 'Larry' S Goldstein was the radio operator for Lt Belford 'BJ' Kiersted's crew from the 563rd BS/388th BG. They flew their 25th, and final, mission of their tour on 4 March 1944 in B-17G-1-BO 42-31103 *Pegasus, Too*. He remembers, 'This was a dangerous game I was a part of – was the glory of being a combat crewman worth it? I never knew if I was a brave man for I was never tested. Our crew never once discussed the possibility of our chances for survival, but I am sure that we all thought the same thing. When we first began flying together, our goal was to not take chances, and to put our faith in our pilots. When I saw another aeroplane get hit and go down, I watched for the parachutes to open. I immediately felt sorry for them, but just as quickly I found myself saying, "better them than us". Self-survival can play mean tricks with the mind' (Larry Goldstein)

mission. The 100th BG was similarly awarded.

The B-17s were stood down on the 5th while B-24s attacked targets in France. On 6 March the Eighth sent 730 B-17s and B-24s and 801 escort fighters to targets in the Berlin suburbs, the 3rd BD being told to hit the Robert Bosch Electrical Equipment factory. The 1st BD would be in the van of the formation, with the 3rd filling in behind and the 2nd BD bringing up the rear.

At Knettishall 33 B-17s of the 388th BG took off. Pilot Lowell Watts recalls;

'The Channel passed beneath us, then the Dutch coast dropped under the wings and fell away behind us. We sailed over the Zuider Zee and were almost over the German border when the storm broke.'

The leading 385th BG, at the head of the 4th CBW, came in for persistent fighter attack.

Brig Gen Russell A Wilson of the 4th CBW was flying in a 482nd BG H2X-equipped Fortress. His crew included 1Lt John C Morgan (who had won the Medal of Honor on 26 July 1943 when he left his co-pilot's seat and brought *Ruthie II* of the 92nd BG back from Hannover with the dead pilot in the cockpit).

Just as the formation approached Berlin the flak guns opened up.



one from the 100th BG, did not get the recall signal and carried on to Berlin alone.

Luckily their Mustang escort was still with them, and they prevented a massacre when, 14 minutes from the capital, the bombers were attacked by German fighters. The 95th lost four aircraft and the 100th one, the latter piloted by Stanley M Seaton. However, the first US bombs had been dropped on Berlin. The 95th became the most highly decorated heavy bomb group in the Eighth Air Force when it was awarded its third Distinguished Unit Citation (DUC) soon after this

Wilson's aircraft was badly hit but continued on the bomb run with one engine on fire. Pilot Maj Fred A Rabo gave the order to bail out when the bomber began losing altitude, but before the crew members could take to their parachutes the aircraft exploded, killing eight men. Incredibly, Morgan survived, being somersaulted out of the aircraft with his parachute pack under his arm. He managed to put it on after several attempts, and was saved from possible injury when a tree



broke his fall. Morgan, Rabo and the two waist-gunners were the only survivors, and they became PoWs.

The unprotected 13th CBW, made up of the 95th, 100th and 390th BGs, caught the full venom of the enemy fighter attacks, and it was another black day for the 100th in particular. Robert J Shoens was the pilot of the 351st BS's *Our Gal' Sal'*, which flew lead;

'I was part of "Fireball Yellow", and the group was going with 20 aeroplanes – one short. It was a spectacular day, so clear it seemed we could almost see Berlin from over England.'

In 30 minutes the enemy shot down 23 13th CBW B-17s, or damaged them so badly they were forced to ditch or crash-land on the Continent. The 3rd BD lost 35 B-17s, with the 'Bloody Hundredth' again suffering unmercifully at the hands of the Luftwaffe. Shoens recalls;

'When we got home we found that we were one of only five B-17s to return to Thorpe Abbots. We had lost 15 aeroplanes. We were upset to say the least, as was everyone on the base. Lt Col Ollen "Ollie" Turner, the 351st BS CO, met us as we parked the aeroplane. He was in tears. Most of the losses had been from his squadron. It was hard to take, but this was what we had been trained for.'

The escorts claimed 81 fighters shot down and the bomber gunners 97 – the Luftwaffe actually lost 64 fighters destroyed and two damaged beyond repair. The Eighth had had a record 69 bombers and 11 fighters shot down, with a further 102 bombers seriously damaged.

Bomber Command's Air Marshal Arthur 'Bomber' Harris sent a message on behalf of the RAF to his opposite number, Carl Spaatz, at High Wycombe;

**Lt Ranton's ten-man crew from the 563rd BS/388th BG study a mission map beside B-17G-10-BO 42-31242 *PATTY JO*. On 4 March 1944, their mission to Berlin was aborted at 1158 hrs and 24,000 ft near Koblenz, and Lts Ranton's and Kiersted's B-17s left the formation and returned home alone. En route, they were attacked by enemy fighters, one of which was destroyed by the bombers' gunners. 42-31242 was subsequently damaged in a mid-air collision with a B-17 from the 452nd BG on 19 May 1944, its pilot crash-landing the bomber at the 453rd BG base at Old Buckenham, in Norfolk. The Fortress was eventually salvaged in July 1946
(via Larry Goldstein)**

'Heartiest congratulations on the first US bombing of Berlin. It is more than a year since they were attacked in daylight, but now they have no safety there by day or night. All Germany learns the same lesson.'

The Eighth was stood down on 7 March, but the following day more than 600 bombers, escorted by 891 fighters, returned for the third raid on 'Big-B' in a week. The 3rd BD led the Eighth to the VKF ball-bearing plant at Erkner, in the suburbs east of Berlin, while the 1st BD flew in the middle and the 2nd again brought up the rear.

More than 460 bombers struck Erkner with 'good results', while 75 others went for targets of opportunity. But again the price was high – the 3rd BD lost 23 Fortresses, 16 of them from the leading 45th CBW, which came under mass enemy fighter attack. Six B-17s were downed from the 96th BG and five each from the 388th and 452nd BG formations. Gunners claimed 63 fighters, while the escorts claimed 79 for the loss of 18 of their own. In fact only 27 German fighters were lost.

The worst-hit group in the 3rd BD during the series of Berlin missions was the 100th BG. On the first American operation to 'Big-B', on 4 March, the 'Bloody Hundredth' had won through to the target with the 95th while all the rest had turned back. One year later the 100th BG was awarded a second DUC for its Berlin actions on 4, 6 and 8 March.

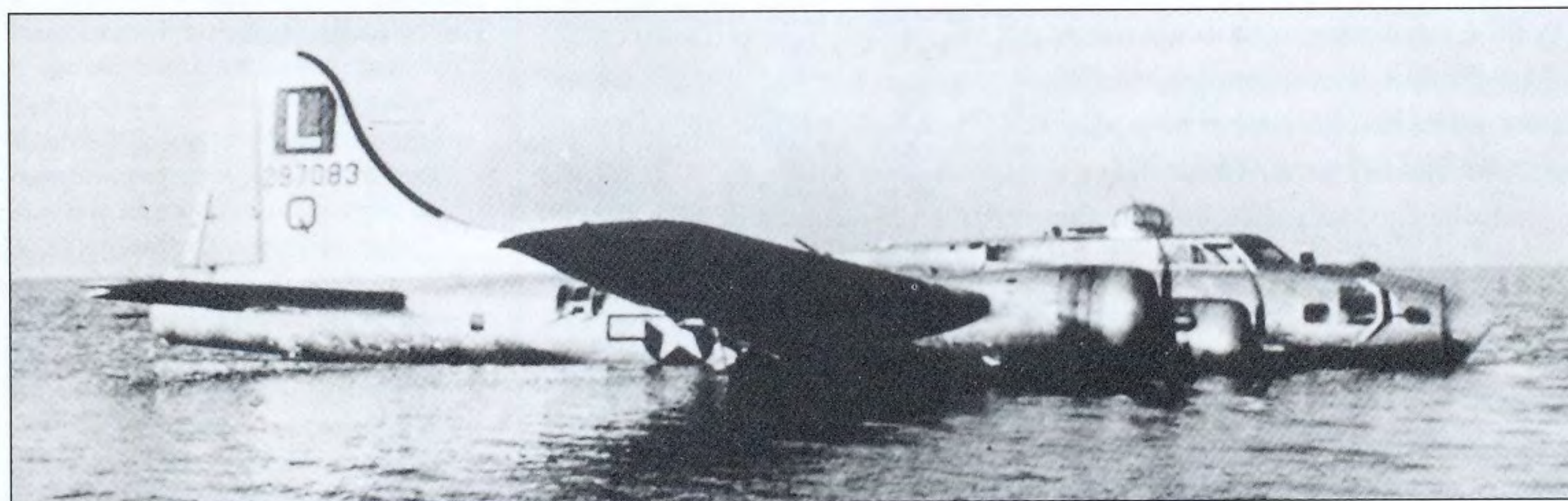
Despite the continued high losses, the Eighth Air Force attacked Berlin again on the 9th when a total of 361 B-17s bombed the city. Weather conditions kept the *Jagdwaaffe* on the ground, and for once enemy fighters were noticeable by their absence. The 800 escorts returned without claiming any enemy aircraft, and the B-17 groups lost six of their number over Berlin, where 10/10ths cloud cover prevented visual bombing.

Smaller raids on targets in France and Germany followed the Berlin strikes of early March, and on the 15th 344 bombers were sent to aircraft component factories at Brunswick. Twenty-four hours later, a force of B-17s and B-24s hit targets in Augsburg, Ulm (*text continues on page 49*)



388th BG B-17G-15-BO 42-31393 SNAFU ('Situation Normal, All Fouled Up', although the acronym was known differently!) and its crew, led by Lt Sullivan. The aircraft's original bombardier, Lt Betastas, was killed by a 20 mm shell from an enemy fighter on the Berlin mission of 8 March 1944. SNAFU, which was eventually renamed *Snaky*, was lost to flak on the 29 April 1944 mission to Berlin, the bomber crashing in France. Eight members of 2Lt Donald E Walker's crew were captured, one evaded and one was killed (USAF)

B-17G-45-BO 42-97083 of the 782nd BS/452nd BG crash-landed on the German Baltic Sea coast after being hit by flak during the mission to Poznan of 11 April 1944. All ten members of the crew were captured (*Hans-Heiri Stapfer*)



COLOUR PLATES



1 B-17F-25-DL 42-3082 *Double Trouble* of the 333rd BS/94th BG, Bury St Edmunds (Rougham), October 1943



2 B-17F-80-BO 42-30207 *BIG RED* of the 561st BS/388th BG, Knettishall, Spring 1944



3 B-17F-85-BO 42-30080 *High Life* of the 351st BS/100th BG, Thorpe Abbotts, August 1943

4

B-17F-95-BO 42-30235 *The ZOOT SUITERS* of the 412th BS/
95th BG, Horham, late 1943



5

B-17F-95-BO 42-30301 *IDIOT'S DELIGHT* of the 332nd BS/94th
BG, Bury St Edmunds (Rougham), and the 710th BS/447th BG,
Rattlesden, April-June 1944



6

B-17F-100-BO 42-30412 *Mischief-Maker II* of the 339th BS/ 96th
BG, Snetterton, Autumn 1943



7

B-17F-115-BO 42-30715 *Cincinnati Queen* of the 569th BS/
390th BG, Framlingham, early 1944



8

B-17F-120-BO 42-30758 "*Rosie's Riveters*" of the 418th BS/
100th BG, Thorpe Abbots, 1943-44



9

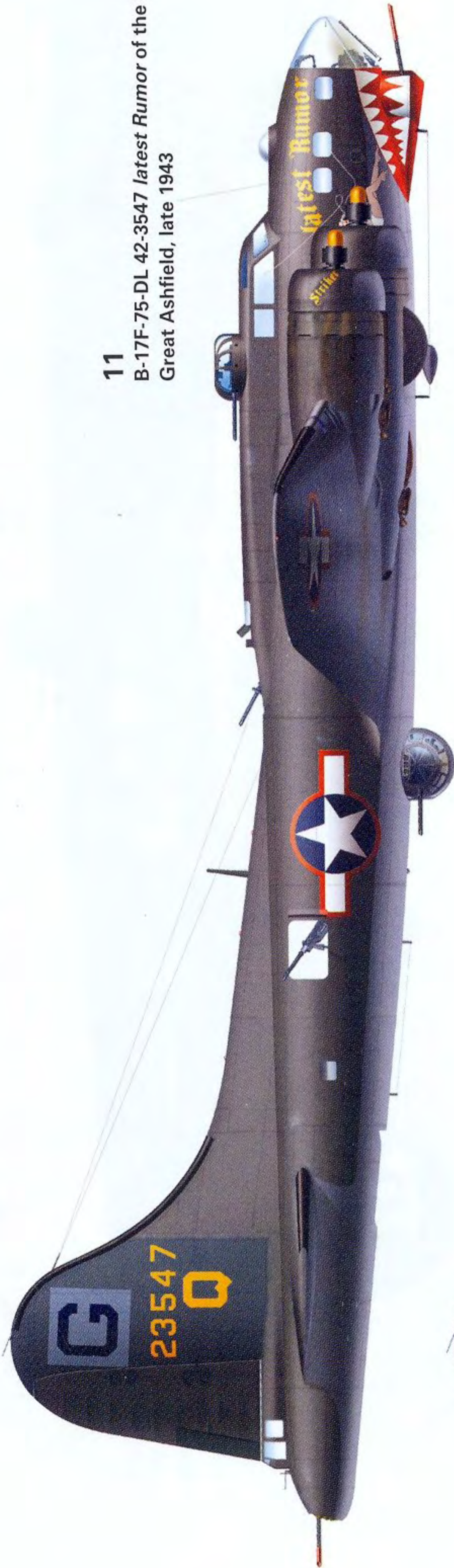
B-17F-120-BO 42-30827 *ROUND-TRIP TICKET III* of the
549th BS/385th BG, Great Ashfield, Autumn 1943



10 B-17G-1-BO 42-31053 *STINGY* of the 338th BS/96th BG, Snetterton Heath, early 1944



11 B-17F-75-DL 42-3547 *latest Rumor* of the 549th BS/ 385th BG, Great Ashfield, late 1943



12 B-17F-75-DL 42-3547 *BLUE CHAMPAGNE* of the 549th BS/ 385th BG, Great Ashfield, early 1944



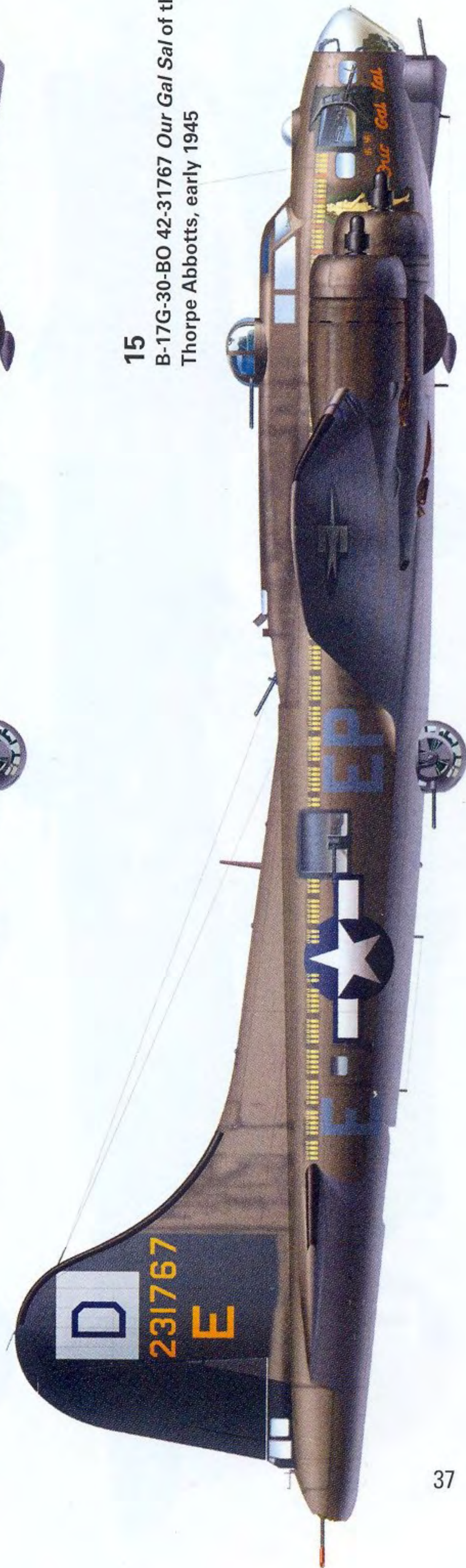
13
B-17G-5-BO 42-31225 SCHEHERAZADE of the 709th BS/
447th BG, Rattlesden, Spring 1945



14
B-17G-30-BO 42-31764 WAR HORSE of the 549th BS/385th BG,
Great Ashfield, late 1944



15
B-17G-30-BO 42-31767 Our Gal Sal of the 338th BS/100th BG,
Thorpe Abbotts, early 1945



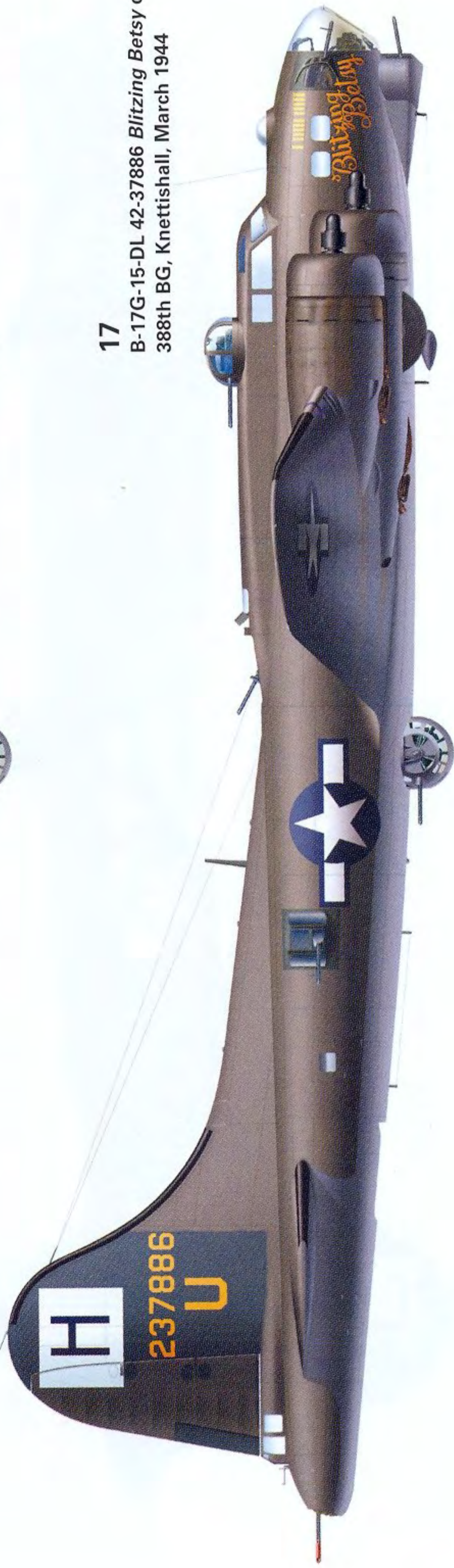
16

B-17G-35-BO 42-31971 *Twenty one or Bust* of the 570th BS/
390th BG, Framlingham, early 1944



17

B-17G-15-DL 42-37886 *Blitzing Betsy* of the 562nd BS/
388th BG, Knettishall, March 1944



18

B-17G-10-VE 42-39970 "*E-RAT-ICATOR*" of the 730th BS/452nd BG,
Deopham Green, Spring 1945





19
B-17G-40-BO 42-97093 *DOC'S FLYING CIRCUS* of the 568th BS/
390th BG, Framlingham, early 1944



20
B-17G-45-BO 42-97230 "*LAY OR BUST*" of the 418th BS/
100th BG, Thorpe Abbotts, February 1945



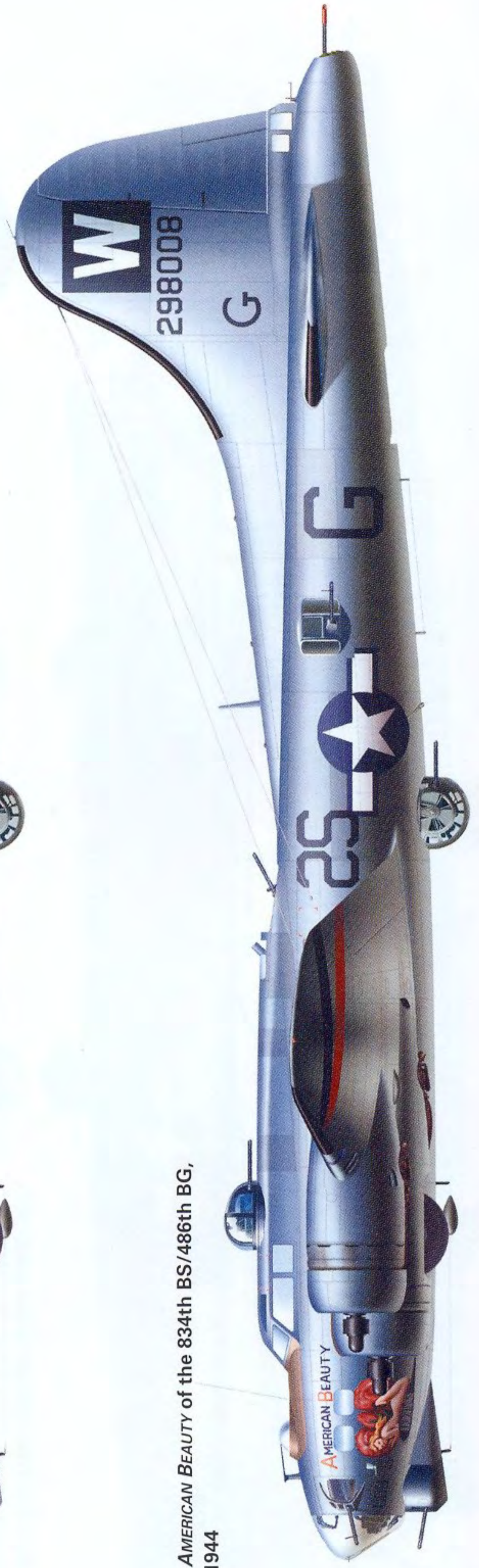
21
B-17G-35-VE 42-97873 *SACK HAPPY* of the 563rd BS/388th BG,
Knettishall, Spring 1944



22 B-17G-35-DL 42-107091 *Forbidden Fruit* of the 728th BS/
452nd BG, Deopham Green, Spring 1944



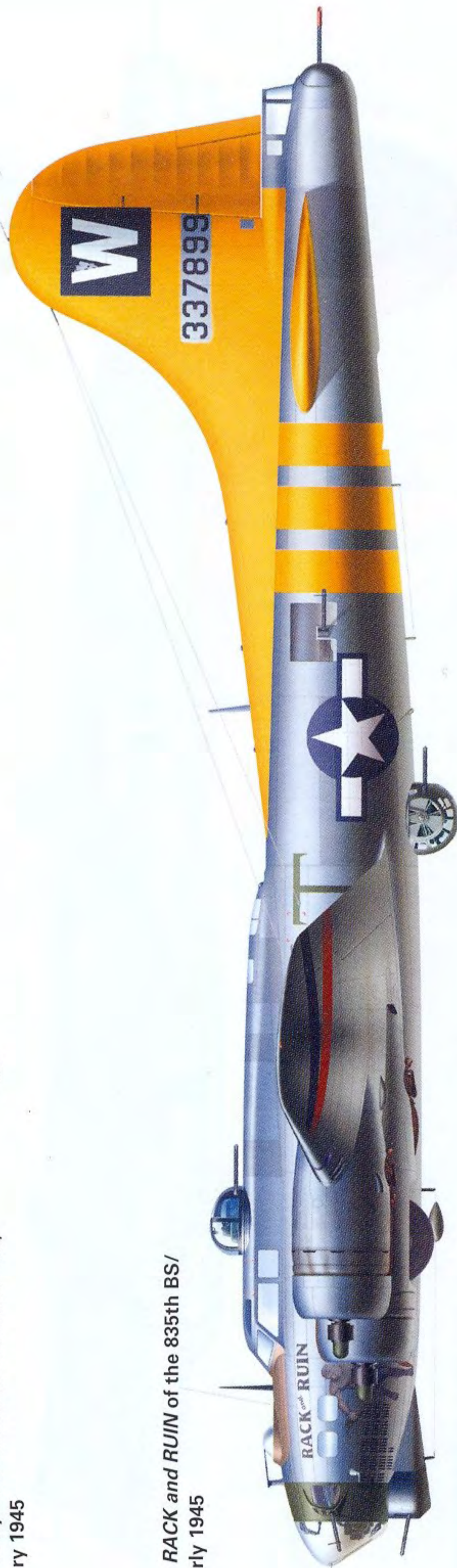
23 B-17G-40-VE 42-97976 *A BIT O' LACE* of the 709th BS/447th BG,
Rattlesden, late 1944



24 B-17G-40-VE 42-98008 *AMERICAN BEAUTY* of the 834th BS/486th BG,
Sudbury (Acton), late 1944



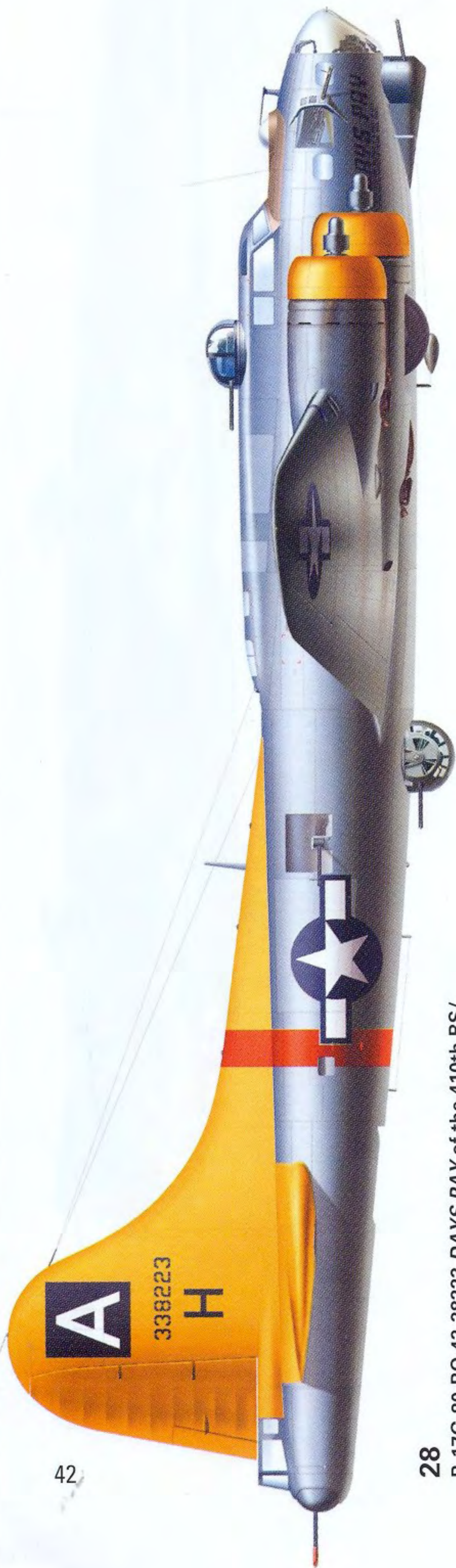
25
 B-17G-50-DL 43-37893 *Betty Jo* of the 550th BS/385th BG,
 Great Ashfield, February 1945



26
 B-17G-75-BO 43-37899 *RACK and RUIN* of the 835th BS/
 486th BG, Sudbury, early 1945



27
 B-17G-75-BO 43-37907 *Carolina Moon* of the 851st BS/
 490th BG, Eye (Brome), late 1944



28 B-17G-80-BO 43-38223 *DAYS PAY* of the 410th BS/
94th BG, Bury St Edmunds (Rougham), March 1945



29 B-17G-85-BO 43-38286 *Flying Dutchman* of the 7th BS/34th BG,
Mendlesham, early 1945



30 B-17G-85-BO 43-38317 *FLAK EVADER* of the 334th BS/95th BG,
Horham, May 1945



31 B-17G-90-BO 43-38478 *HOTTER 'N HELL* of the 570th BS/
390th BG, Framlingham, early 1945



32 B-17G-90-BO 43-38525 *MISS CONDUCT* of the 418th BS/
100th BG, Thorpe Abbots, Spring 1945



33 B-17G-95-BO 43-38728 £5 with *BREAKFAST* of the 851st BS/
490th BG, Eye (Brome), early 1945

34 B-17G-100-BO 43-38991 *Sweet Seventeen* of the 4th BS/34th BG, Mendlesham, Spring 1945



35 B-17G-70-DL 44-6968 *SONOF-A-BLITZ* of the 863rd BS/493rd BG, Debach, early 1945



36 B-17G-75-VE 44-8629 *PURTY Chili* of the 391th BS/ 34th BG, Mendlesham, Spring 1945



37
B-17G-75-VE 44-8694 *DINAH MITE* of the 487th BG, Lavenham,
Spring 1945



38
B-17G-80-VE 44-8702 *FOREVER AMBER* of the 838th, 836th, 837th BSs/
487th BG, Lavenham, 1945



39
B-17G-75-DL 44-83254 *Old Doc Stork* of the 850th BS/490th BG,
Eye (Brome), Spring 1945



This nose-art section has been specially created by profile artist Mark Styling so as to better illustrate the colourful artworks worn by the Flying Fortresses featured in profile. These drawings have been

produced following exhaustive cross-referencing with published bomb group histories, correspondence with surviving veterans and the detailed study of original photographs.





"ERATIC TOR"

SACK
HAPPY

Swastika Swastika
Gue Gal Lal

Twenty one
or Bust

Blitzing
Betsy

DOC'S
FLYING CIRCUS

Forbidden Fruit

AMERICAN BEAUTY

MILTON
CANIFF
A BIT O' LACE

RACK and RUIN

Betty Jo

OH!
HARDLUCK



LORRAINE

HAVE A HEART



Carolina Moon

Flying

Dutchmen

DAYS PAY

FLAK EVADER



HOTTER 'N HELL



MISS CON DUCT



S 5 with BREAKFAST

SON OF A BLITZ



Sweet Seventeen



PURTY Chili

FOREVER AMBER

Gessertshausen and Friedrichshafen. Gunners claimed 68 enemy fighters.

After stand-down on the 17th, the 'heavies' were out again in force the following day when 738 B-17s and B-24s attacked numerous targets in Oberpfaffenhofen, Lechfeld, Landsberg, Memmingen, Munich and Friedrichshafen. Forty-three bombers and 13 of the 925 fighters that took part were lost. The fighters claimed 13 kills, while the bomber gunners put in claims for 45 destroyed.

On 29 April 579 bombers hit the Friedrichstrasse Bahnhof (the centre of the mainline and underground railway system in Berlin), while 38 other 'heavies' attacked targets of opportunity nearby, including Magdeburg. The bomb groups encountered strong fighter opposition, and Fw 190s shot down or fatally damaged 17 Fortresses from the 4th CBW in just 20 minutes. The 385th BG, which was flying its 100th mission, lost seven B-17s and the 447th BG eleven. The latter's losses brought its monthly total to 21. The 94th and 96th BGs' losses for April 1944 were also 21 bombers apiece – the Eighth's heaviest of the war.

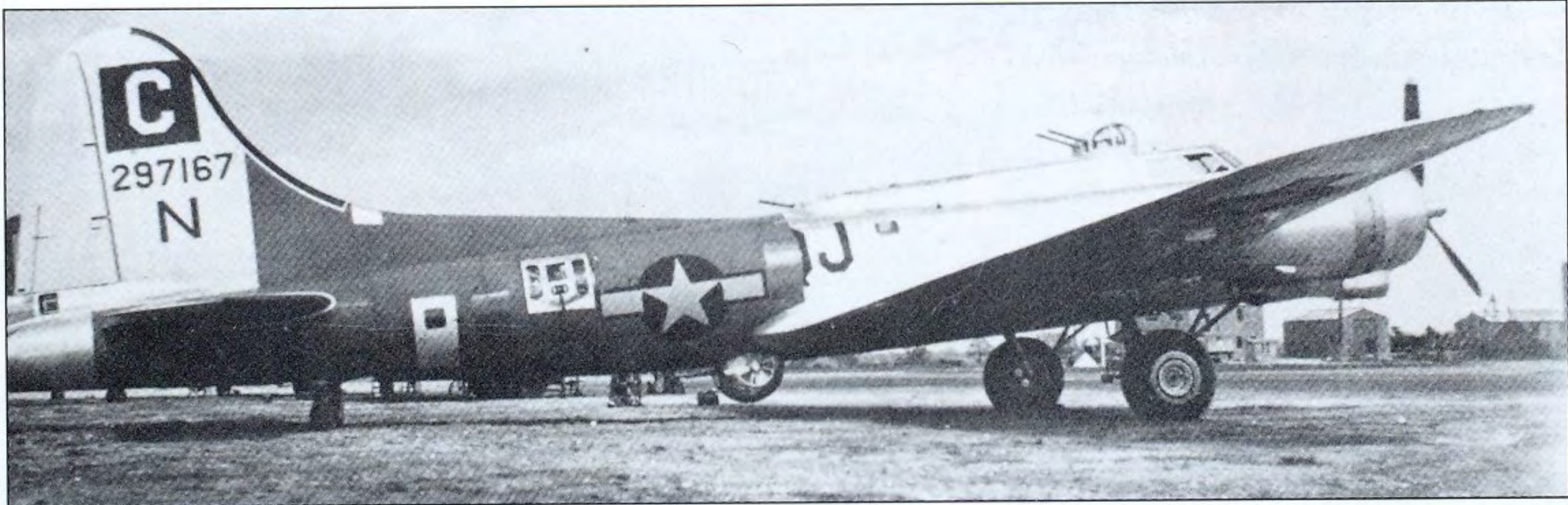
9 May saw 823 B-17s and B-24s targeting marshalling yards and airfields in France, Luxembourg and Belgium, escorted by 668 fighters. Two days later 609 B-17s bombed more marshalling yards in Germany and the Low Countries, while 364 B-24s hit a range of targets in France. Eight Fortresses and eight Liberators were lost. On the 12th 886 B-17s



B-17G-20-BO BX-D 42-31447 *Cookie* of the 338th BS/96th BG was shot down by a German fighter over the Baltic during the mission to Rostock on 11 April 1944. All ten members of Lt Jack W Splan's crew were killed. The second Fortress in this photograph, B-17G-25-BO 42-31718 of the 337th BS, was also lost to enemy fighters, the bomber crashing at Hartmannshein, in Germany, on 12 May 1944 whilst on the mission to Zwickau. Two of 2Lt Jerry T Musser's crew were killed and the remaining eight taken prisoner (USAF)



B-17G-1-BO 42-31053 *STINGY*, which was assigned to the 338th BS/96th BG on 29 September 1943, was lost in a mid-air collision with another Fortress on a training flight over Northamptonshire on 11 October 1944. Seven crewmen were killed in the accident. The bomber had been named by Maj Gen Fred Anderson, Commanding General of VIII Bomber Command, for his son upon its arrival at Snetterton (R Short via Geoff Ward)



and B-24s, with 980 escorting fighters, took part in the first attack on oil production centres in the Reich. Five main plants in central Germany and Czechoslovakia were bombed. At the same time, two composite 4th CBW formations fought their way through 200+ enemy fighters to attack an Fw 190 depot at Zwickau. Swarming around the B-17s for half an hour, they downed 11 bombers, including no fewer than seven from the 447th BG.

The Fortresses which fought their way through to the target at Zwickau achieved a highly effective drop, with the greatest credit going to the 385th BG, led by Col Elliott Vandevanter. He slowed down his formation so that other disorientated groups could reform on them before starting the bomb run. The 385th took the honours, placing 97 per cent of its bombs within 2000 ft of the MPI to earn the group a DUC.

As with the Zwickau force, the bombers striking at the oil centres had also been badly mauled by some 470 *Jagdwaaffe* fighters, and in one of the fiercest air battles of the war, 35 bombers (all except five were from the 3rd BD) were shot down. Worst hit was the 45th CBW, the 452nd BG losing 14 B-17s, the 96th 12 (including two which collided while under attack) and the 388th one.

A witness to this carnage was Mike Wysocki of the 94th BG, who was flying his 26th mission. He was particularly angered by the length of the 10½-hour round trip;

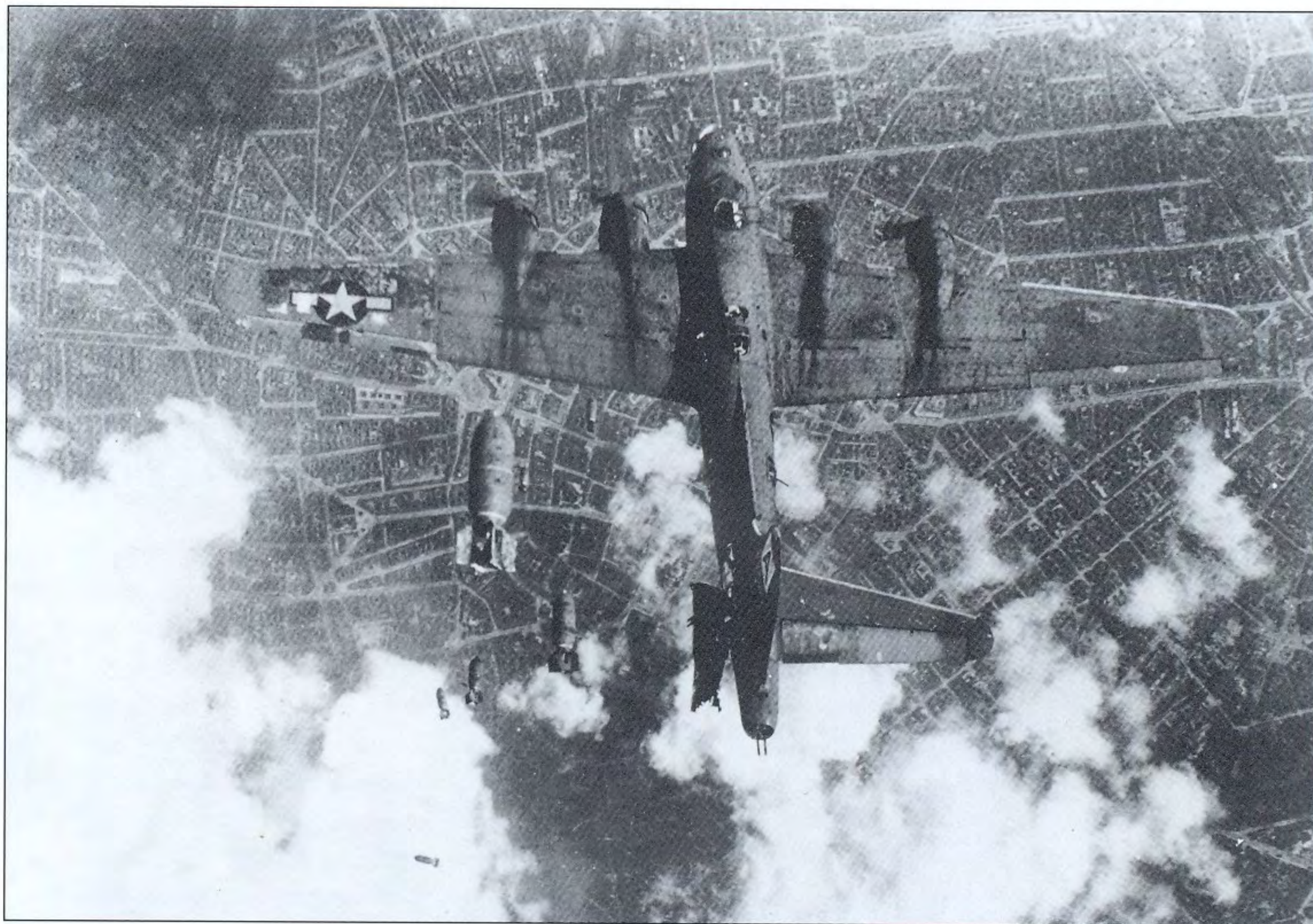
‘Gen Doolittle had said missions were now getting shorter and easier! We were under constant fighter attack for 4½ hours, but we weren’t so bad off, as they attacked us from astern. They would sit out of range of our gunners and lob rockets at our formation. I had a ringside seat of the 45th CBW right in front of us. B-17s, P-51s, Me 109s and Me 110s were going down all over the place. I heard that the 452nd really took a beating.

‘While all this was going on, all that was running through my mind was Doolittle telling us missions were getting shorter and easier. Well, finally we got back and, after debriefing and cleaning up, I went to the officers’ club and proceeded to get gloriously drunk.’

On 13 May 749 ‘heavies’ bombed oil refineries at Politz, on the Baltic coast, and the marshalling yards at Osnabrück. Some 691 got their bombs away and 12 B-17s and B-24s were lost. The fighter escorts claimed 47 enemy fighters shot down for the loss of five of their own.

Two days later 166 B-17s and B-24s bombed V-weapon sites in France. No bombers were lost, and 128 ‘heavies’ dropped 485 tons on the *Noball* sites.

B-17G-40-BO 42-97167 of the 339th BS/96th BG, with Capt Jack E Link’s crew aboard, was shot down by fighters near Hahnsatten, in Germany, on 12 May 1944. Nine of the crew were killed and one made a PoW. When this photograph was taken, the ill-fated bomber had only been partially stripped of its Olive Drab paint (USAF)



A stick of 1000-lb bombs dropped from Lt John Winslett's B-17G-30-VE 42-97791 *Trudy*, part of the 332nd BS/94th BG, over Berlin on 19 May 1944 knocked off the left horizontal stabiliser of Lt Marion Ulysses Reid's B-17G-20-BO 42-31540 *Miss Donna Mae* (from the 331st BS) below it. Reid's aircraft quickly went into an uncontrollable spin, and at 13,000 ft the wing broke off and the B-17 spun crazily to the ground. There were no survivors. The wartime press release for this horrific photograph erroneously stated that the aircraft recovered to the UK, beating all other Forts back to base (USAF via Abe Dolim)

Navigator Lt Abe Dolim served with the 332nd BS/94th BG. A veteran of two combat tours, he witnessed much death and destruction over Kiel on 22 May 1944 (Abe Dolim)

On 19 May 888 B-17s and B-24s were sent off, 588 Fortresses attacking targets in Berlin and Kiel while 300 Liberators went to Brunswick. Fighter opposition was heavy and 28 bombers failed to return. US fighters claimed 70 enemy aircraft for the loss of 19 of their own.

The 20th saw the 'heavies' head back to France, as 367 B-17s and B-24s pounded various targets, while 271 B-24s and B-17s of the 3rd BD hit Liège and Brussels. Heavy cloud forced the 3rd BD to abandon its mission, and led to part of the 2nd BD being recalled. The Eighth Air Force returned to France the next day, and on 22 May the 'heavies' struck Kiel and Siracourt. Five B-17s were lost. A witness to the destruction of two of these 'heavies' was Abe Dolim, a navigator with the 332nd BS/94th BG;



'Monday, May 22, Mission No 12. The 94th BG really fouled up today. At the IP to the target – Kiel naval base – our lead aircraft had trouble with its bomb-bay doors. About five miles from the target it unloaded, and at the same time most of our group aircraft salvoed their bombs too. With considerable disgust, I watched our bombs plough up some damned Kraut farmer's cabbage patch. Large numbers of enemy fighters appeared in the target area, and soon we saw several P-38s and Me 109s in trouble.



'One P-38 pilot with a Messerschmitt barely 50 yards behind him flew under our formation from "twelve o'clock", but we could not help him. A German fighter pilot dangling from a cream-coloured parachute passed within range just under our formation at "one o'clock". It would have been easy to kill him as he floated past our right wing.

'Over at "eleven o'clock" I saw a B-17 straggling and losing altitude, fire sweeping its entire belly while the crew bailed out. An airman left the right waist hatch, his open parachute afire. Minutes later we saw another B-17 on fire. I believe I am more afraid of fire than anything else. God! What a miserable way to die.'

With good weather continuing, the 'heavies' made visual bombing attacks on several targets in France on 23, 24 and 25 May. On the 27th the Eighth again switched to German targets, and 24 bombers were lost. 28 May saw 1341 bombers pound oil targets in Germany, and 32 'heavies' went down. VIII Fighter Command claimed 27 fighters destroyed for the loss of nine of its own. On the 29th 993 B-24s and B-17s were launched – some 888 of them carried out visual attacks on aircraft plants and oil installations in Germany.

For the second day running strong enemy fighter formations opposed the bombers, whose gunners claimed 62 of them shot down. Some 673 US fighters were airborne, and they claimed 39 enemy fighters destroyed for the loss of ten of their own. Actual *Jagdwaaffe* losses on 29 May amounted to more than 50 aircraft shot down, 44 aircrew killed – including two leading aces – and 19 others injured in air combat. Seventeen B-17s were lost (17 B-24s also failed to return). The Leuna

B-17G-35-DL 42-107091 *Forbidden Fruit* of the 728th BS/452nd BG is seen dropping bombs over Schwerte, in Germany, on 31 May 1944. This aircraft encountered propeller wash from another bomber on take-off on 17 February 1945 and did a barrel roll then a slow roll, before entering a flat spin and falling to earth. Only three of Joe Knoll's crew bailed out successfully (Sam Young)

works suffered a 50 per cent drop in production after the raids in May, and the Pölitz works was even worse hit on the 29th.

Pounding of aircraft industry targets in Germany, as well as marshalling yards in France and Belgium, continued on 30 May, with 928 'heavies' in six forces being escorted by 672 fighters. *Noball* sites in the Pas de Calais were also hit. Twelve bombers and nine fighters were lost. On the 31st 1029 'heavies' took part in raids, and only one bomber and three fighters were lost.

6 June 1944 – D-Day. A total of 2362 bomber sorties, involving 1729 B-17s and B-24s, were flown. 3596 tons of bombs were dropped for the loss of just three Liberators (two of which, from the 493rd BG, collided over France). VIII Fighter Command flew 1880 sorties and claimed 28 enemy fighters shot down.

Groundcrews worked through the night of 5/6 June to ensure that numerous sorties could be flown on D-Day. Wilbur Richardson, a ball turret gunner with the 94th BG, was a participant in these missions;

'Whenever I remember D-Day, I feel again the aching sense of suffering and heroics that occurred 18,000 ft below me. Invasion fever was abound. At briefing, this was it. What a contrast to the groans we usually emitted when we learned of our target. What animated talk and yippee! The weather was better for the Channel crossing – it was a go! The pilots gave us a few more details as we repeated last night's run and then to the shoreline targets at dawn before the landings were to begin in about an hour. All of us flew a second mission, and the few that didn't go with us made theirs toward evening just after we returned.

'We stayed on the ramp between flights as our B-17s were refuelled and re-armed. I was interviewed by the press as we waited. By the second sortie the cloud cover had broken up, and we could see even more of the action and the hundreds of boats in the Channel. I remember very well seeing a battleship (the USS *Texas*?) firing her big guns and watching the three 2000-lb shells travel to the target. The view from the ball turret was an awe-inspiring sight.'

On the 8th 1135 bombers were sent to attack communication targets in France. Bad weather prevented 400 'heavies' from bombing, and the following day it ruled out any strikes at all. It also severely curtailed operations on 10 June. Of the 873 bombers airborne, more than 200 were forced to give up because of cloud. Some 589 bombers, including 31 Pathfinders, attacked eight airfields in France and nine coastal installations in the Pas de Calais. On 11 and 12 June bad weather ruled out targets in Germany, so the Eighth ordered its bombers to France again.

Lt Loren E Jackson, aircraft commander of *Crash Wagon III* with the 551st BS/385th BG, participated in his tenth mission (from Great Ashfield) on the 12th when his unit attacked the marshalling yards at Montdidier. Approaching the target, flak disabled Jackson's No 2 engine;

'My co-pilot, Ross M Blake, and I were unable to feather the propeller. It kept windmilling and making a rather unsettling racket. We continued on course but began to lag behind the main formation. Shortly thereafter a flak hit in our No 4 engine disabled it, but we were able to feather the propeller. By now we were considerably behind the formation. When fire broke out and enveloped the entire left wing I rang the emergency bell and instructed the crew to bail out. I finally left my position and went



Based at Rougham with the 331st BS/94th BG, gunner Wilbur Richardson had a spectacular view of the Normandy beaches on D-Day from his ball turret (Wilbur Richardson)

On 12 June 1944 Lt Loren E Jackson, aircraft commander of *Crash Wagon III* with the 551st BS/385th BG, flew his tenth mission from Great Ashfield to the marshalling yards at Montdidier. His bomber fell victim to flak during the course of the mission (Loren Jackson)



out the nose hatch. The smoking, flaming B-17 circled me twice, resembling a huge wounded bird. I landed in tall grass and lay on my back to disengage my parachute harness. I got up and started walking casually toward a forest. Then I heard a shout, "Halt!" I turned and saw a German soldier on one knee with his rifle pointed at me. I threw up my hands. He came toward me, still holding his rifle on me and said the words I dreaded to hear. "For you the war is over".

Tactical targets were attacked until the 15th, when 1225 bombers hit an oil refinery at Misburg. On 20 June oil targets were pounded again, for the loss of 12 B-17s and 37 B-24s (17 were shot down by fighters and 19 by flak, while 19 'heavies' force-landed in Sweden) and 12 escorting fighters.

On 21 June the Eighth flew its second shuttle mission to the Soviet Union from England, the operation, code-named *Frantic*, making use of 1311 bombers. Some 63 B-17s of the 13th and 45th CBWs, each equipped with a long-range bomb-bay tank, attacked the Ruhrland-Elsterwerda synthetic oil plant 50 miles south of Berlin, and then flew on to the USSR, escorted by 70 P-51s from the 4th and 352nd FGs.

Near Cuxhaven four B-17s in the 452nd BG were involved in a mid-air collision. A second formation, made up of the rest of the 3rd BD, the 1st BD and the 2nd BD, bombed Berlin and returned to England. The shuttle force touched down at Poltava, where a Heinkel He 177 high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft, which had shadowed the formation for about 400 miles into Soviet territory, flew off to report its findings.

A few hours later 60 Luftwaffe bombers struck Poltava, destroying 44 of the 72 bombers and severely damaging 26 others. Luckily, further losses were avoided by the 13th CBW Fortresses at Mirgorod, and by the Mustangs at Piryatin, when they flew 150 miles further east to safety at

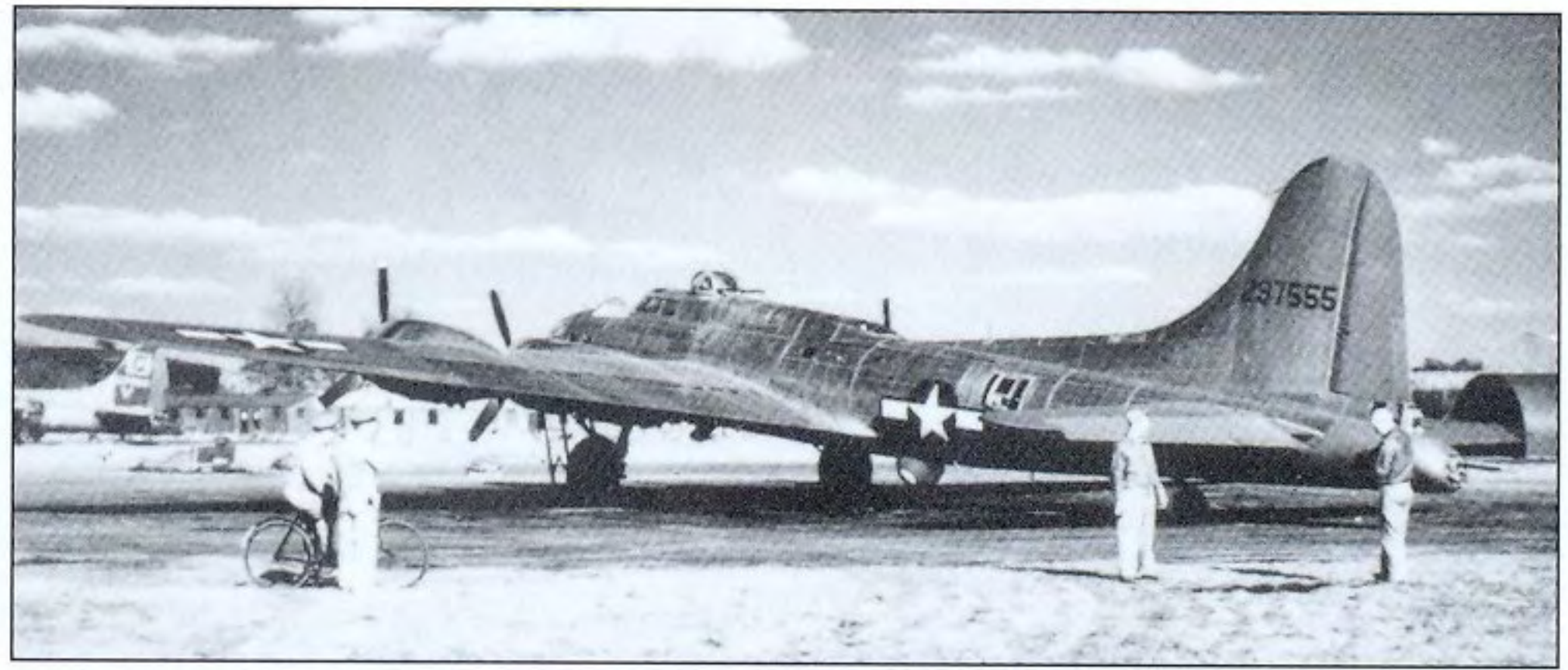


The 96th BG contributed 14 aircraft to Operation *Zebra*, which was mounted on 25 June 1944 in order to drop supplies to the *FFI* (French Forces of the Interior). Photographed from a third Fortress, B-17G-60-BO 42-102978 of the 413th BS (note the 388th BG 'Square H' on the upper right wing) and B-17G-70-BO 43-37775 *OH! HARDLUCK* of the 339th BS are seen flying in close formation over the French countryside. Escorted by large formations of fighters, only two B-17s were lost during *Zebra*, and two others aborted with mechanical problems. Both bombers survived the war and were returned to the US in July 1945. Further large-scale drops were made in July, August and September 1944 (USAF)



H2X-equipped B-17G-25-VL 42-97680 of the 413th BS/96th BG flies past the Alps en route to the Ain and Haute Savoie on 25 June 1944 to drop supplies to the *FFI*. Operation *Zebra* saw 2088 supply containers dropped by 176 B-17s of the 3rd BD at five drop-zones. Like the B-17s seen in the photo above, this aircraft survived the conflict and returned to the US in July 1945 (via Mike Bailey)

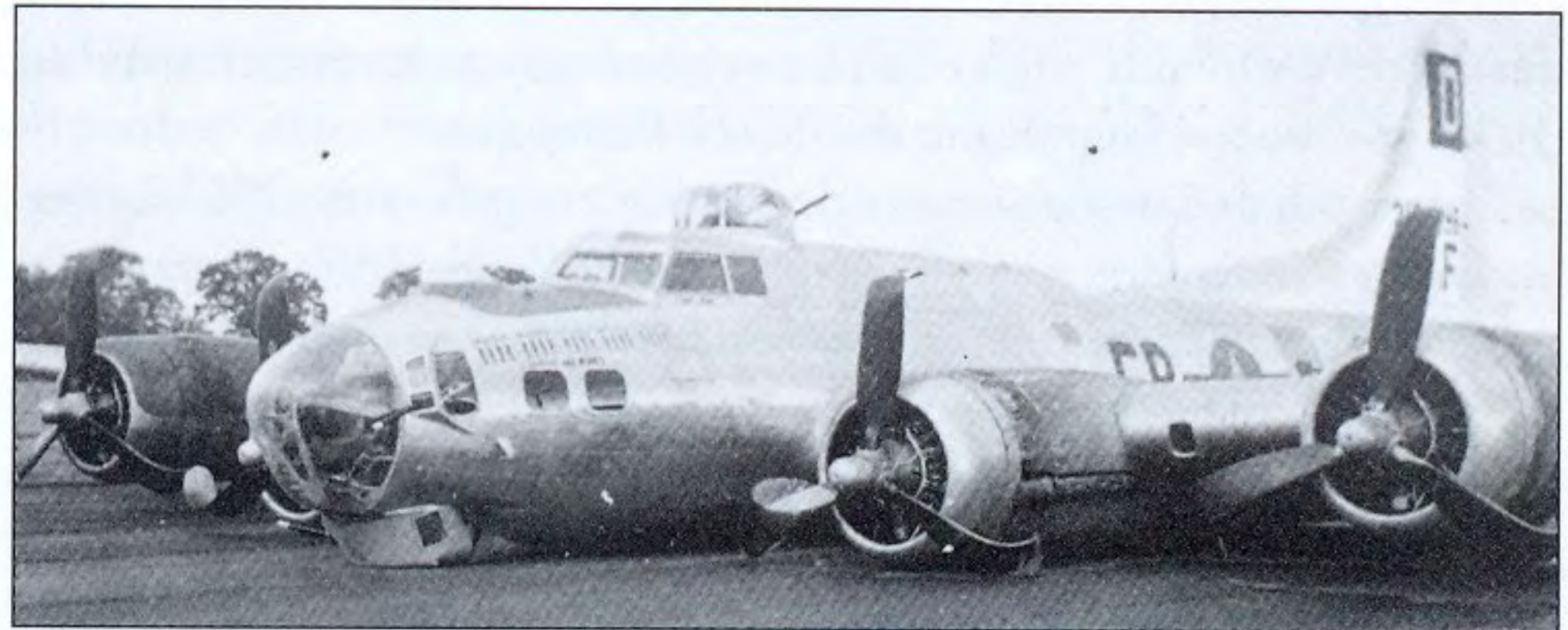
B-17G-20-VE 42-97555 of the 413th BS/96th BG was photographed at Snetterton Heath in early 1944. Subsequently assigned to the 95th BG, this PFF ship was eventually passed on to the 350th BS/100th BG. The bomber was lost to flak on 28 July 1944 while leading a 390th BG formation to the Leuna oil refinery, near Merseburg. Two of Capt Mason's crew were killed and nine captured (*via Geoff Ward*)



B-17G-25-DL 42-38034 *Twat's It to You?*, flown by 1Lt Victor Lewis of the 332nd BS/94th BG, put down at Dübendorf, in Switzerland, on 31 July 1944 after leaving the formation somewhere between the target at Munich and the rally point. The crew had been able to drop only two of their five bombs over the target, the rest having to be jettisoned manually after leaving Munich. By then the bomber had been hit by flak in the No 4 engine, which had to be feathered. The number one engine also had to be shut down due to a loss of oil pressure. After the war this Fortress, along with several others, was scrapped in Switzerland (*Hans-Heiri Stapfer*)



B-17G-55-BO 42-102598 *Super Rabbit* of the 351st BS/100th BG crash-landed at Thorpe Abbots after the mission to Merseburg on 28 July 1944. Although barely four months old, the bomber was not repaired (*USAF via Mike Bailey*)



B-17Gs of the 34th BG are seen in the gloom overhead their base at Mendlesham, in Suffolk, after returning from the group's 100th mission in the autumn of 1944 (*via Ian McLachlan*)



Zaporozhe. Gen Spaatz was to concede that the Poltava raid was the 'best attack the Luftwaffe ever made on the AAF'.

On 25 June more than 1100 'heavies' were sent to targets in France on two missions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. They cost the Eighth Air Force 13 bombers and two fighters.

In the last week of July Gen Doolittle carried out the first stage of his plan to convert his five B-24 groups in the 3rd BD to Fortresses. The 486th and 487th BGs were taken off operations, and by the end of the month they were both ready to begin combat in B-17s. Between the end of August and mid-September the 34th, 490th and 493rd BGs also switched to the Fortress. On 1 August the 486th and 487th BGs flew their first B-17 mission, and on 27 August the 490th BG did likewise.

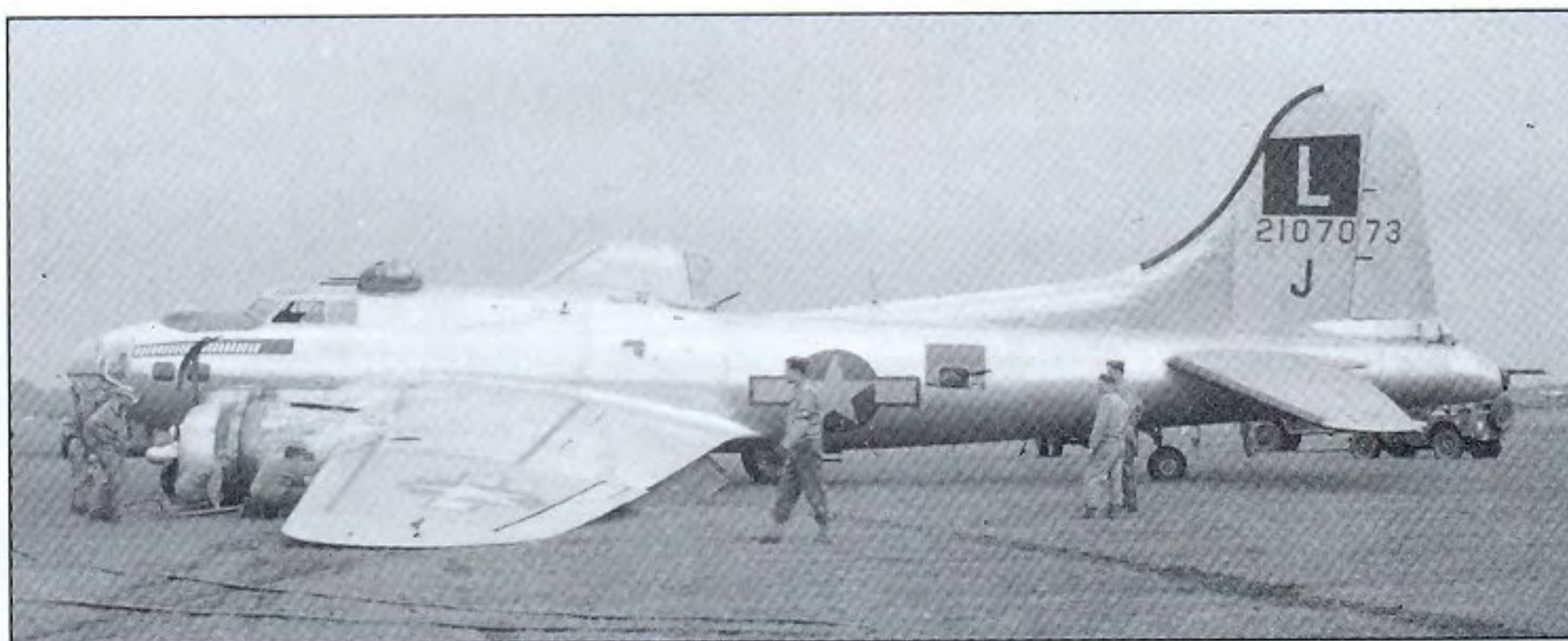
On 8 September it was the turn of the 493rd. The Debach group was nicknamed 'Helton's Hellcats' after its CO, Col Elbert Helton, although the group was also called the 'Last but the Best' due to it being the final bomb group to become operational in the Eighth Air Force – it flew its first mission, in B-24s, on D-Day.

Finally, on 17 September the 34th BG switched to the B-17. Although activated in 1941, the group had remained Stateside to train other cadres, and had only joined the 3rd BD, flying B-24s, in April 1944.

Away from the group conversions, August 1944 had seen the Fortresses bombing airfields in France, as well as strategic targets in Germany. On the first day of the month, while other heavy bomb groups hit French airfields, 191 B-17s dropped supplies to the French Resistance.

On the 4th the bombers returned to strategic targets, with 1250 'heavies' striking oil refineries, aircraft factories, airfields and the experimental establishment at Peenemünde in two separate raids. The pattern continued on the 5th, when 1062 bombers attacked 11 oil-producing plants in central Germany, without loss.

A day later 953 bombers hit Berlin and oil and manufacturing centres in the Reich for the loss of 25 bombers. Some 75 Fortresses in the 95th and 390th BGs bombed the Focke-Wulf plant at Rahmel in Poland. After the raid the two groups flew on to their shuttle base at Mirgorod, in the USSR – the scene of such devastation two months before. During their stay, the 95th and 390th BGs mounted a raid on the Trzebina synthetic oil refinery, before flying to Italy on 8 August, bombing two Romanian airfields en route. Four days later they flew back to East Anglia on the last stage of their



B-17G-35-DL 42-107073 of the 730th BS/452nd BG crash-landed at Honington, in Suffolk, on 30 July 1944. Subsequently repaired, it remained in AAF service until scrapped in the US in November 1945 (via Ian McLachlan)

On 11 August 1944, B-17F-45-VE 42-6087 *Royal Flush* of the 418th BS/100th BG was hit by flak between the No 3 engine and the fuselage during a raid on Villacoublay, near Paris. Flying its 75th mission, the bomber spiralled down and crashed in a field near Mendon. Four of 2Lt Alfred Aske Jr's crew, who were on their fifth mission, were killed, one of whom was reportedly machine-gunned by German soldiers on the ground. Three crewmen were taken prisoner. Radio operator Charles Nekvasil and co-pilot Charles Barber evaded capture and returned to England. This photograph was taken on 13 August by the late Leopold Morehoisne, historian with the City of Ciamart (Charles H Nekvasil)



shuttle, bombing Toulouse-Francaal airfield as they crossed France. This third long-ranging operation had proven more successful than the disastrous one in June, and not a single B-17 was lost.

In England, meanwhile, missions had continued unabated. On 1 September Maj Lamont D Haas, CO of the 490th BG's 848th BS, was lost in a mid-air collision over France between Lt John M Kirklin's lead crew (including Haas) and Lt Charles S Frey's crew in *Miss Ana Bortion* while returning from a mission to Gustavsborg. Only one survived from Haas's ship and none from Frey's. Maj Francis H Dresser, who had just arrived from the States, and was on only his second mission, was also lost aboard *Miss Ana Bortion*.

Sgt Michael T Walsh, a gunner with Lt John D Beach's crew in the 848th BS/490th BG, recalls the mission of 9 September;

'The target for this mission, my 13th, was factories in Mannheim. We had just released our bombs when we were hit directly by flak and set on fire. The aeroplane went into a steep dive and our pilot, Lt Beach, got it levelled off and ordered us to bail out. Bombardier Williamson and I were the last to go. Beach and his co-pilot, John O Terlecky, were then both killed by flak, while tail gunner James S Vogt died when he hit the tail assembly as he bailed out. The Germans later showed us where he had hit the ground, and told us that his 'chute had not even opened.

'We also saw the aeroplane, which had crashed into a farmhouse. I did not see Williamson again after bailing out of the bomber, but our radio operator, Albert Ackerman, armourer-gunner Daniel B Breckenridge and I were picked up by the Germans, along with men from other crews shot down that day, and taken by truck to an interrogation centre at Frankfurt am Main.'

On 12 September 217 B-17s of the 3rd BD attacked the Brabag synthetic oil refinery, Rothensee and the ordnance depot at Friedrichstadt, in the old Hanse town of Magdeburg. The latter was defended by 13 flak batteries, each comprising six – later eight – 88 mm or 105 mm guns, and two railway-mounted flak batteries made up of four 105 mm guns.

Thirty-eight B-17s took off from Debach and two aborted, leaving 36 to bomb the target. It proved to be the worst day in the brief history of the 493rd. When the group returned to base, 12 Fortresses were missing. Lt William C Lawson, co-pilot of the 861st BS's *Ramp Happy Pappy*, flown by Capt Ellis M Woodward, recalled;

'Our crew led the low squadron of the group formation. We encountered what I considered to be the most accurate flak of our entire tour – not the greatest quantity/volume of flak, but those German gunners were blowing aircraft out of the sky that day. Next, we were hit by fighters. *Ramp Happy Pappy* took a "jillion" hits but kept on flying. Back in England, we landed on the emergency strip at Woodbridge. *Pappy* was towed away and dumped in the junk heap. Two other aircraft



Lt Robert A Barraclough, who was the pilot of B-17G-70-DL 44-6893 *LOOKY LOOKY* of the 851st BS/490th BG, poses with his faithful mount after returning from his 35th, and last, mission. Like its pilot, this aircraft survived the war (via Don & Peggy Garnham)

Lt William G Cleaves' crew, who served with the 850th BS/490th BG, pose with one of their customised leather flight jackets. Curiously, the name *Fearless Fosdick* was never applied to the aircraft. Standing in the back row, from left to right, are Lts James W Campbell (bombardier), Gould L Cline ('Mickey' operator) and William Cleaves (pilot). Kneeling, from left to right, are S/Sgt Michael J Lasprogato (waist gunner), T/Sgt Glenn L Case (engineer), S/Sgt Wilbert J Reihl (waist gunner) and T/Sgt James S Collins (radio operator) (via Don & Peggy Garnham)



from the low squadron made it back to Debach. The remaining nine crews from the low squadron formation failed to return.

'Our crew's remaining 15 missions were to Germany. The missions were all long and tough. There was always flak, often intense, but lacking the accuracy we saw at Magdeburg. Our fighter escorts were successful in keeping German fighters at bay, and even though we saw enemy fighters many times, they never again cut through our formations the way they did at Magdeburg.'

In just a matter of minutes over Magdeburg, seven B-17s had either spiralled down or descended on fire. The 493rd's five surviving bombers suffered varying degrees of damage, but remained under control. Gunners claimed as many as four German fighters as they fended off their attackers. Continuing German attacks succeeded in dispersing these remaining Fortresses, and each sustained major damage. The arrival of P-51s finally forced the enemy fighters to break off their engagements with the bombers, leaving the dispersed, crippled B-17s to set course for Allied territory while crews tended to the wounded and assessed the damage.

S/Sgt Hayward F Deese Jr, engineer/left waist-gunner in George M Durgin's crew in the 863rd BS, adds;

'We were leading the high element of the low squadron in B-17G 43-38264 *Ulp*. After the bomb run, Fw 190s with 20 mm cannons hit us from the rear. On the first pass they shot down nine out of the 12 B-17s in the squadron. Our Fortress and two wing crews were left. The fighters came after us, shot down the wing crews, and shot us up with 20 mm cannon and 13 mm machine gun fire. I got three pieces of 20 mm in my back, and right waist-gunner Don Gray had a 20 mm round explode in his face and 13 mm slugs in each leg. Gray died that night.

'I was standing on two flak jackets, and when I picked them up to return them after the mission, there was a hole about eight inches in diameter under them, and a lot of 20 mm shrapnel right where I had been standing. The flak jackets were in shreds. They saved my legs, and my life.

'When we returned to Debach the next day, we were the only crew out of 12 from the low squadron to make it back, and we were two men short.'

In mid-September 1944 B-17 pilots had to call upon all their experience to fly a mercy drop to the beleaguered Polish Home Army in the ruins of Warsaw. The Polish capital was totally cut off from the outside world, with the German army on one side and the Soviets on the other.

Stalin had asked Polish Gen Bor to rise against the German occupiers, but had then stood by while the gallant Poles were gradually annihilated. It was not until early September that the Soviet leader finally agreed to co-operate by allowing the B-17s to fly on to the USSR after the supply drops. An attempt to reach Warsaw on 15 September was aborted because

of bad weather, and it was not until the 18th that the 13th CBW was able to fly all the way.

Col Karl Truesdell Jr, 95th BG CO, led the B-17s over Warsaw, and the supply drop was made from between 13,000 ft and 18,000 ft, amid limited but accurate flak. The strong American fighter escort was unable to prevent the Luftwaffe attacking the 390th BG, which was flying as the low group, during the dropping run. One Fortress was shot down and another landed at Brest-Litovsk. However, the remaining aircraft succeeded in reaching their shuttle bases at Mirgorod and Poltava.

On 19 September they took off again for the now-familiar return flight via Italy and France, but this time without bombing any targets en route because all French territory had now been liberated.

Bad weather throughout September had severely limited missions, and only 14 were flown during the entire month. A mission to the refineries at Merseburg went ahead on the 11th, and the following day the 3rd BD struck the Magdeburg oil refinery and marshalling yards at Fulda. About 450 fighters attacked the formations and 45 'heavies' were shot down.

T/Sgt Terry Parsons, radio operator-gunner in the 862nd BS/493rd BG, recalls another mission in September, flown on the 19th;

'Into Germany again, to Darmstadt, which was a last resort. Couldn't hit our primary because of a particularly heavy overcast above the target. Very accurate flak got two aeroplanes from "A" Group. One got a direct hit which tore off its right wing and sent it down in flames – the entire ship disintegrating on the way down. Poor guys didn't stand a chance. Another crew all bailed out safely on the German-Belgian border. These missions are getting too rough!'

On 27 September the B-17s bombed oil targets and engineering centres in Cologne, Ludwigshafen and Mainz. The 'heavies' targeted Magdeburg, Kassel and Merseburg a day later, for the loss of 30 bombers. Radio operator T/Sgt James S Collins of the 850th BS/490th BG was one of those to have his B-17 badly shot up on this mission, his bomber being hit by flak during the raid on the synthetic oil plant at Merseburg;

'Flak was very heavy, and we took about 20 hits in the tail wheel area. On approaching the base for landing, the undercarriage had to be manually cranked down by the engineer, Glenn Case. We did not know, however, that the tail wheel was broken, and when we touched down the aircraft veered off the runway, ploughing a deep furrow in the adjacent field. Smelling what we all thought was smoke, every man scrambled for the exits when the bomber finally came to rest, listing down on one side.

'Our waist gunner, Mike Lasprogato, dropped to the field from the waist exit, and despite the fact that he weighed about 200 lb, and was normally much slower than I was, sprinted well ahead of me, shouting "Run, Rip, run!" (The crew all called me Rip instead of Jim, after the professional baseball player, Rip Collins). Fortunately, the aeroplane did not catch fire and no one was hurt.'

Eight days later, on 6 October, the 385th BG lost 11 B-17s – most from the 549th BS – when the Eighth returned to Berlin. Only the arrival of the P-51 escort prevented further carnage. Despite mounting losses, there was increasing evidence that the Eighth's bombing offensive, particularly against oil targets, was reaping rewards, and Doolittle continued to apply pressure on Germany's oil manufacturing industry.



Lt Martin Orsan stands in front of B-17G-15-DL 42-37878 *Millie "K"*. This 560th BS/88th BG aircraft was one of six machines that failed to return from Merseburg on 28 September 1944. 2Lt L Frawley's crew, who were on their seventh mission, bailed out near Cologne after losing two engines to flak. All nine men were captured and became POWs (USAF via Robert M Foose)

BLOOD AND OIL

Missions to oil targets had proven costly for VIII Bomber Command, and the price kept going up. No less expensive were airfield targets, which had once been considered 'milk runs'. On 5 October 1944 new pilot William A Johnson filled in as co-pilot of B-17G 43-38546 'S', flown by 1Lt Arthur A Bisaro, for the 493rd BG's mission to an airfield near Münster. He recalls;

'We took off just before dawn, and as we climbed to our assembly altitude, we flew straight into sunlight. It was a beautiful day, and finally I was going to be part of the war! The climb and the assembly was routine. As we left the coast of England, we continued to climb until we reached our assigned bombing altitude, then we levelled off.

'As we turned to the south-east, we could see the coast of Holland and the Zuider Zee. We could also see many other bomber groups ahead and behind us. All were headed east toward Germany. Our "little friends", flying as our escorts, were dodging in and out and crossing and re-crossing our path, but they also matched our progress to the east. We flew all the way to the target without seeing any flak bursts. I was quite disappointed at this, because I wanted to be able to tell my crew back in England what it felt like to be shot at.

'We dropped our bombs when the rest of our group did. Then off to our right wing I spied about eight or nine flak bursts. I was about to ask the pilot if that was all there was to it, when I felt a jarring jolt to the aeroplane. Looking in the direction the jolt seemed to come from, I saw that an 88 mm shell had gone completely through our No 1 engine without exploding. Dense black smoke came from the nacelle. I helped the pilot feather the No 1 engine and trim the aeroplane for three-engined flight.

'By this time we had dropped out of our formation, and had so reduced speed that we were being tracked by the flak battery. Again we were hit by an unexploded shell that had its fuse set for a higher altitude. This time the shell went completely through our right wing between the No 3 and No 4 engines. The No 4 engine went dead and the No 3 engine began to smoke fiercely. I feathered the No 4 propeller. The hole in the wing allowed a steady stream of 100-octane gasoline to spew out like water from a fire hose. By this time I was sure that we were doomed.'

Minutes later later, over Holland, Bisaro's crew were forced to bail out. All survived, two being made PoWs, while the remaining seven, including Johnson, returned to active duty.

H2X-equipped B-17G-60-VE 44-8399 in flight. This aircraft was assigned to the 337th BS/96th BG at Snetterton on 5 January 1945, and it survived the war and was scrapped in the US exactly one year later (via Mike Bailey)



On 7 October 1300+ B-17s and B-24s bombed five synthetic oil plants in Germany for the loss of 52 'heavies'. The 3rd BD was given the refinery at Merseburg. Radio operator-gunner T/Sgt Terry Parsons recalls;

'Had a rough one today. Went to Merseburg – worse than Berlin. Expected again to get fighters because that's their territory. Guess our fighter cover was heavy enough to keep them away. Didn't have any trouble till we started in on our bomb run to the target. I've never seen such heavy flak as we flew through today (it was even worse than Hannover, which was bad). They threw up everything except Willkie buttons, and I still don't see how we escaped being hit badly. We only had a couple of small holes – one was caused by shrapnel, which narrowly missed my head! The 34th lost a couple of ships, but we didn't lose any, though it's a wonder. I looked back after we had come off the target and it was as though a huge black cloud hung there in the sky. We were eight hours and twenty minutes in the air.'

Bremen was bombed on 12 October, and one of the crews hastily assigned to this mission was that led by Lt William J Miller of the 730th BS/452nd BG, based at Deopham Green. Allocated B-17G-10-VE 42-39973 *INSIDE CURVE*, waist gunner Paschal H Powell remembers;

'We were not scheduled to fly, but our aeroplane, *LITTLE MISS AMERICA*, was being flown by another crew. Early in the morning of 12 October, a very rude fellow came in banging the blackout doors of our hut and proceeding to tell us we were flying. "Everything that can fly will fly. The target has been changed. The bomb load has been changed, and you guys are flying". Sure enough we were flying, but not our *LITTLE MISS AMERICA*. We had been assigned *INSIDE CURVE* instead.

'The weather was so bad we could scarcely see for the fog. Pulling up to the hardstand where *INSIDE CURVE* was kept, we could see fog drifting across the old wet B-17. Water dripped off her wings and prop blades, adding to the ghostly effect she had sitting there in that semi-darkness.

'Most B-17s at this time were unpainted – they just had that silver look from the factory. The crew chief met us. I'm sure our faces registered our disappointment for his aeroplane. He had just installed four new engines, and said to Bill Miller, "Sir, she is the fastest aeroplane on the field. This is her 113th mission, and nothing on the field can stay with her. We started counting the painted bombs that represented the 112 missions flown.'

On the climb to the assembly altitude violent propwash was encountered, causing Miller to lose control. Powell continues;

'Seemingly, we went all the way over on our back. Twisting and whirling, we began to spin down to the earth or sea – I was not sure. Oh, I felt so sick. I was so scared. "Please, someone, stop this thing from spinning". Then I realised I could not move. The force of gravity was so strong as *INSIDE CURVE* quit spinning and began to dive, coming down her last three miles (about 15,000 ft) diving straight to the earth, making the most horrifying sound I have ever heard in all my life. I screamed as loud as I could, and I believe it was my death cry, "Oh, God, have mercy on us". As I screamed it seemed I would go through the floor of the fuselage for the force was so great.'

Over Ingham village, ten miles north of Lincoln, *INSIDE CURVE* blew up. Powell and navigator Sidney Solomon were the only survivors.

Solomon was sent back to the US for hospital treatment and Powell went to the Fifteenth Air Force in Italy to join the 815th BS/483rd BG. He became a PoW after being shot down over Ruhrland, in Germany, on 22 March 1945.

On 14 October 1100 B-17s and B-24s bombed marshalling yards and targets in the Cologne area. Eight days later Lt Kenneth H French, bombardier in Lt Curtis R McKinney's crew in the 848th BS/490th BG, flew his 22nd mission – 'a fairly easy' one to Münster;

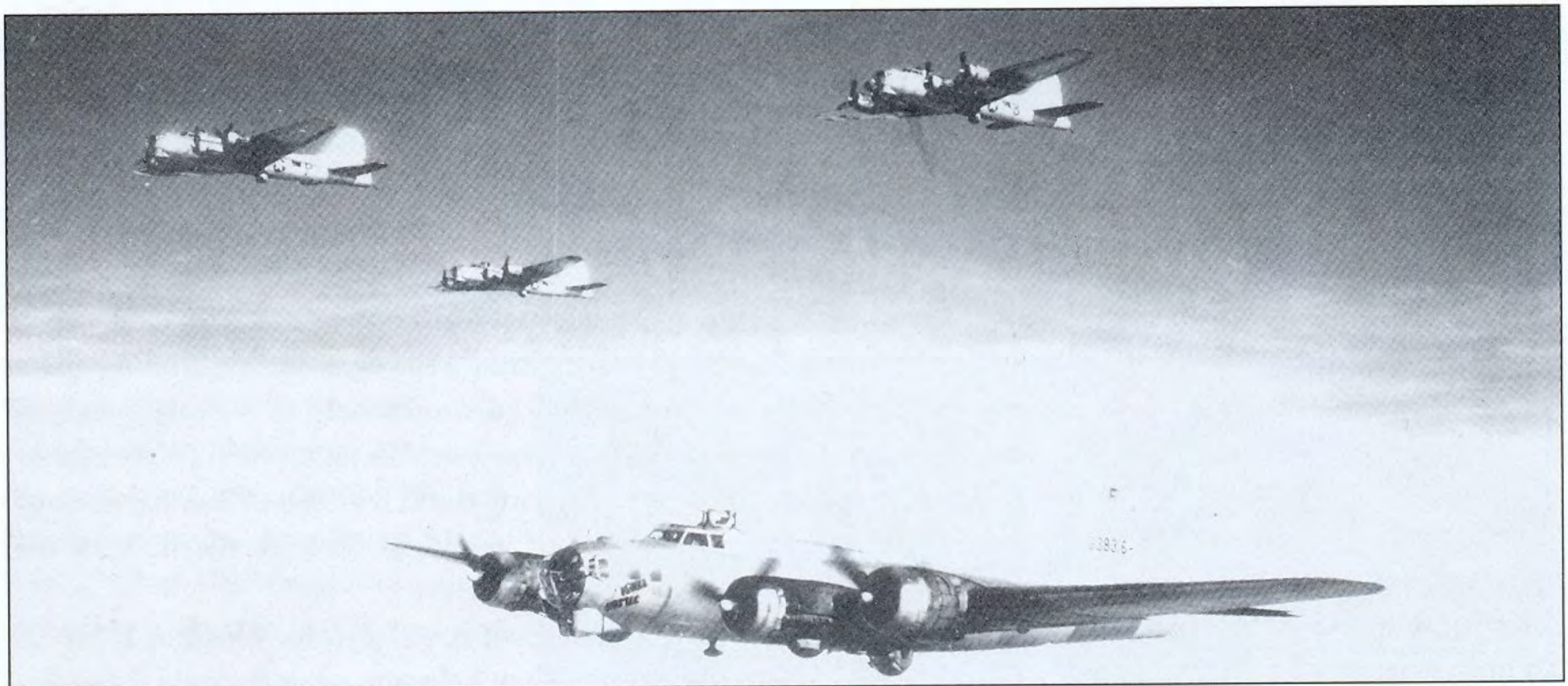
'We took off in a ground fog with 1000-yard visibility. We climbed to 18,000 ft, where we joined in formation with our squadron and then took a course across the North Sea. Our fighter support was good – they left us when we were past the fighter danger zone and continued on with the boys who were going to Hannover and Brunswick. There were no enemy fighters seen or reported.

'After a flak-free run over Holland, we reached the target area, and as we flew past Osnabrück the flak really started. They were sending up a good box barrage and plenty of rockets but thank God we didn't get mixed up in it. We had a box barrage directly in front of us on the target (we had been briefed for 70 guns), but we turned off to the left to make the run. They sent up more flak but it was low and to the rear of us, and we suffered no damage. About 12 rockets came up, right at our altitude and fairly accurate. I saw one explode over Osnabrück and it looked like a flash of lightning.'

Bad weather throughout November slowed down the Allies' advance all along the western front and severely hampered missions. When flown, they were usually against oil targets. For example, on 2 November 1100 'heavies' bombed four large German synthetic oil refineries. The force sent to attack the vast I G Farbenindustrie refinery at Leuna, three miles south of Merseburg, was pounced on by an estimated 500 fighters. Lt John O Ramsey, navigator in Lt Bernard L Iwanciov's B-17 in the 861st BS/493rd BG formation, was a participant in this mission;

'Only a great pilot like Bernard Iwanciov could hold a bomber in the "tail end Charlie" position (the last ship in the group, getting all the prop-wash) all the way to the target and back like he did at Merseburg that day. We were in intense flak for 18 minutes and heavy flak for 30 minutes.

B-17G-85-BO 43-38316 *Hank's Bottle* (foreground) of the 860th BS/493rd BG came under intense fire on the mission to Merseburg on 2 November 1944. Lt Joe Gualano was forced to make an emergency landing at St Trond, in Belgium, with S/Sgt Harry Thoms dead at his left waist gun station. Repaired and sent back into action, *Hank's Bottle* was finally scrapped in the US in December 1945
(USAF via Robert M Foose)



'Somewhere in there, an Me 163 rocket fighter climbed straight up ahead of us at about 500 mph. He then banked towards our right wing ("three o'clock"), turned and went high to "twelve o'clock" and then on around to "nine o'clock". He apparently thought we were going to fall behind and be separated from the group. You can bet that was farthest from our minds. He must have decided that we were not about to become easy prey, and he turned directly away from us at "seven o'clock".

'Tail gunner Phil Eannarino and flight engineer-top turret gunner Gordon A Nelsen were both putting a lot of lead on the Me 163. Although Phil's gun turret jammed, we saw Nelsen's tracers hit the fighter and it exploded. Nelsen was later awarded a cluster to his Air Medal for becoming the first air gunner to down an Me 163 – apparently one of only two destroyed by bombers during the entire war.

'Immediately after we dropped our bombs the 493rd was attacked by six more Me 163s. Two made passes at our squadron, one at a time, from the rear. Our top turret and tail turret gunners got in good shots at them as they came in at "six o'clock". One of them exploded 400 yards behind us. While we were under attack Whitlock's aeroplane (Lt Col George Whitlock, Command Pilot in 44-3246, a 34th BG B-17G piloted by Capt Vernon G Alexander) was shot down by flak. A few minutes later a second B-17 from our group was shot out of formation by flak.'

Henry B Skeen, pilot of B-17G 43-38340 *Milk Run*, flying his first mission with an experienced crew, saw his leader's aircraft beside them blow up during an 'absolutely terrifying trip'. Leaving the target area, *Straighten Up and Fly Right – The Rock*, piloted by Lt Robert I Proudfit Jr in the 863rd BS, was hit by flak in the No 2 engine. The bomber fell behind the rest of the formation, peeled off to one side, and crashed at Pogau. One crewman was taken prisoner, while the other eight avoided capture and were hidden by the Dutch Resistance until May 1945. In his November report, the 493rd BG flak officer said that, including the two aircraft lost, 81 per cent of group aircraft on this mission suffered flak damage.

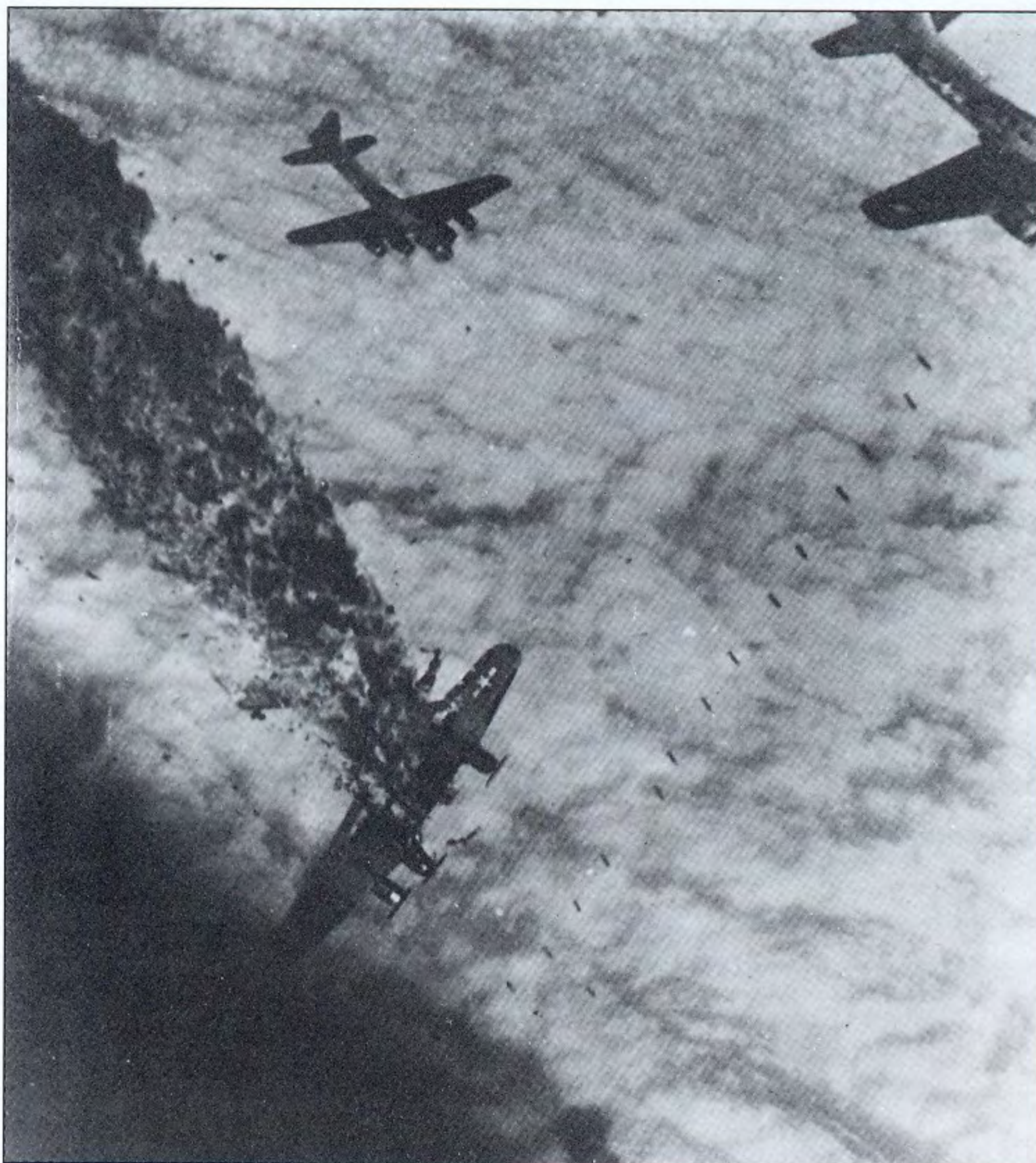
It was for his actions on 2 November that 2Lt Robert E Femoyer, a navigator in the 711th BS/447th BG, was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor. His B-17 was rocked by three flak bursts which showered it with shrapnel.

Femoyer was hit in the back and the side of his body, and refusing all aid despite his terrible wounds, he helped navigate his Fortress back to Rattlesden. Femoyer was propped up in his seat so that he could read



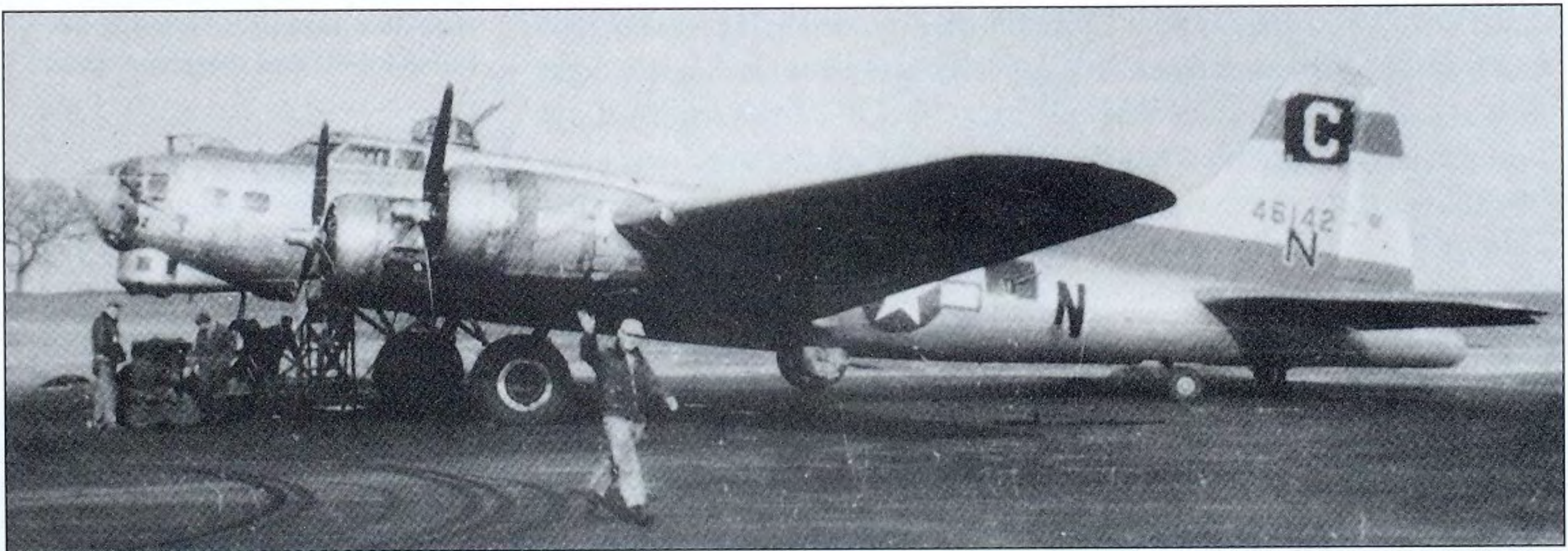
Lt John O Ramsey was the navigator in the crew of Lt Bernard L Iwanciov, lead pilot for the 861st BS/493rd BG on 2 November 1944

B-17G-75-BO 43-37883 *Blue Streak* of the 834th BS/486th BG, flown by 2Lt David Paris, hurtles down after suffering a direct flak hit in the left main fuel tank over Merseburg on 2 November 1944. All nine crewmen were killed (USAF)





B-17G-40-BO 42-97064 *VIRGINIA LEE II* served with the 711th BS/447th BG. The first *VIRGINIA LEE* (B-17G-5-BO 42-31191), with 2Lt Richard Gaskell's crew, crashed at Merignae, in France, on 27 March 1943. Two crewmen evaded capture and the remaining eight were made PoWs. *VIRGINIA LEE II* failed to return with Capt Keller's crew from the mission to Augsburg on 13 April 1944, landing safely in Switzerland. The B-17 had been hit in the No 4 engine by flak near the target, and shortly after crossing the Swiss border the bomber was struck again by flak. Upon landing in Switzerland, the crew counted no less than 20 flak holes in their B-17 (*Herman Hetzel*)



his charts, and the crew did what they could for him. It was not until they reached the North Sea that Femoyer agreed to an injection of morphine. He died shortly after the aircraft landed at Rattlesden. Altogether, the Eighth lost 40 bombers and 28 fighters on the day.

In fact the losses were so bad that groups were stood down for 48 hours after the raid. Then, on Sunday 5 November, a mission to Ludwigshafen went ahead. Sgt Francis W 'Frank' McKinley, a gunner in Lt G D Lyon's crew in the 851st BS/490th BG, recalls;

'We reached our bombing altitude, and all the way in there was a solid undercast, just as there had been on our first mission. As we approached the target area, however, the clouds cleared, giving us a visual bomb run. The lead group had reported bandits in the target area, but by the time we got there our escort P-51s had chased them away. The clear sky meant that we presented a perfect target to the German 88 mm gunners because we were making great contrails. The flak was moderate, but deadly accurate, and within minutes two of our bombers had gone down over the target. It is a very sobering sight to see your comrades shot out of the sky and no parachutes sighted coming down.

'After bombs-away, we made our usual sharp turn and got the hell out of there. We were all saddened on the way back, thinking about the loss of the two crews – 18 men who would not be with us in the mess hall that night. At times like that you start to calculate the odds against completing

B-17G-45-DL 44-6142 *The Stork* was assigned to the 337th BS/96th BG at Snetterton on 4 June 1944 and was eventually returned to the US in early July 1945. The bomber was sold for scrap four months later (*via Geoff Ward*)

This anonymous 490th BG B-17G is seen in the snow at Eye during the bitter winter of 1944-45
(via Don & Peggy Garnham)



B-17G-80-BO 43-38112 'S for Sugar' caught fire on its hard-stand at Eye on 13 November 1944 while its oxygen system was being refilled. Assigned to the 851st BS/490th BG, the bomber was so badly damaged that it was salvaged two days later
(via Don & Peggy Garnham)



Groundcrewmembers from the 730th BS at Deopham Green change an engine on B-17G-10-VE 42-39970 "E-RAT-ICATOR", which was the only original 452nd BG aircraft to survive the war. Assigned to the group on 3 November 1943, the B-17 completed no fewer than 125 missions. The combat veteran was scrapped in November 1945
(via Sam Young)



your own 35 missions. Next day we learned that the 490th had good bombing results, and that the aircraft that went down were those of 1Lt Robert L Jackson and Lt Clarence Bridwell.'

On 9 November the 'heavies' resumed tactical missions in support of Gen George Patton's 3rd Army, which was halted at Metz. The Eighth was called in to bomb German lines of communication at

Saarbrücken, as well as enemy gun emplacements to the east and south of Metz, to enable the advance through Belgium to continue.

The mission was given top priority, and at bases throughout East Anglia Fortresses taxied out in the mist and bad visibility. The conditions contributed to the loss of eight bombers in take-off and landing accidents, and further disasters befell some groups as the mission progressed.

Lady Janet, flown by Lts Donald J Gott and William E Metzger in the 729th BS/452nd BG, was severely damaged by flak. The engineer was wounded in the leg, and a shell fragment severed the radio operator's arm below the elbow. While Metzger attended to the crew, Gott flew on to Allied territory, salvaging the bombs over enemy territory en route. Metzger gave his parachute to a gunner whose own had been damaged in the fire, and all except the radio operator were told to bail out. Metzger and Gott prepared for a crash-landing with only one engine still functioning and the other three on fire.

Gott brought *Lady Janet* in, but at about 100 ft the fire took hold of the fuel tanks and the B-17 exploded, instantly killing Gott, Metzger and the radio operator. Both pilots were awarded posthumous Medals of Honor.

On 16 November the Eighth provided support for the advancing US and British armies. The mission was meticulously planned to avoid bombing friendly troops near the targets, just east of Aachen. The Allied artillery fired red smoke shells every 500 yards along the front, and barrage balloons were placed along the edge of the area. The use of radio signals was especially worthwhile when 8/10ths cloud covered the front lines, and helped ensure accurate bombing. Worsening weather forced some groups to fly to the north of Britain to escape it, and they were unable to get back to their bases for a few days.

B-17G-70-BO 43-37787 *HOLY SMOKES* of the 560th BS/388th BG was being flown by Lt Burkheimer when it made an emergency landing on the Continent during the Berlin mission on 5 December 1944. The bomber was salvaged just days later (USAF via Robert M Foose)



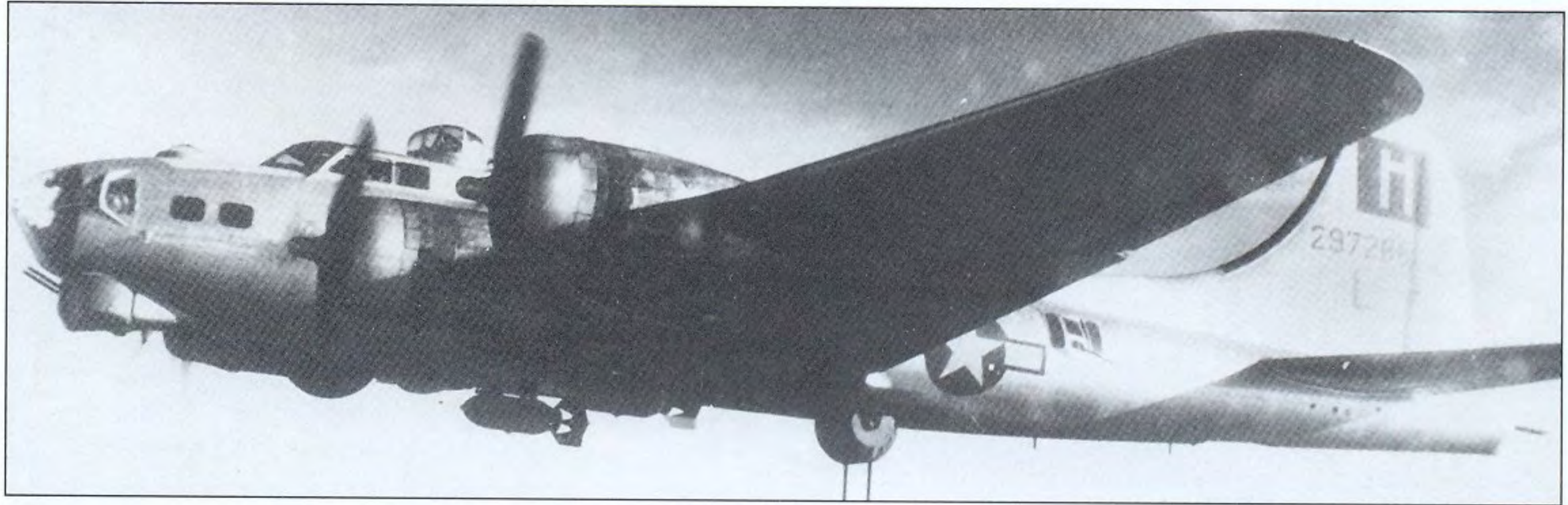
B-17s of the 452nd BG etch their give-away contrails in the sky high over occupied Europe. B-17G-40-BO 42-97069 *Mon Tete Rouge II* (bottom left), of the 731st BS, failed to return from the mission to Kassel on 4 December 1944 with 2Lt Lawrence Downy Jr's crew. Hit by flak, the bomber crashed near the German town of Bitburg, taking three crewmen with it. The remaining six were made PoWs (USAF)



On 21 November the Eighth returned to Merseburg for the first of three more raids on the refineries in a week – synonymous with flak, Merseburg was a hated target amongst bomber crews. Four days later, more than 900 bombers were sent off to oil and marshalling yard targets in Germany. 30 November saw some 1200 'heavies' bomb four synthetic



B-17G-95-BO 43-38687 of the 848th BS/490th BG is seen at 'bombs away'. This Fortress force-landed on the Continent on Christmas Eve 1944 while returning from a raid on Frankfurt (via *Truett Woodall*)



oil refineries in Germany. The 3rd BD struck Merseburg. The Eighth Air Force lost 29 heavy bombers, but Merseburg had suffered its greatest damage too. By the end of November 1944 more than 43 refineries, processing both crude and synthetic oil, had been destroyed.

December 1944 brought the worst winter weather in England for 54 years. On the 16th, using appalling conditions to his advantage, Field Marshal Karl von Rundstedt and his Panzer force, supported by an estimated 1400 fighters, attacked US positions in the forests of the Ardennes on the French-Belgian border and opened up a salient, or 'bulge', in the Allied lines. In England all aircraft were grounded by fog, and it was not until the 23rd that they could offer support in the 'Battle of the Bulge'.

On Christmas Eve a record 2034 Eighth Air Force bombers, as well as 500 from the RAF and Ninth Air Force, took part in the largest single strike flown by the Allied air forces in World War 2. Their targets were German airfields and lines of communication leading to the 'Bulge'.

Participating in this all out effort was Brig Gen Fred Castle, CO of the 4th CBW. He led the 3rd BD on his 30th mission in 487th BG B-17 *Treble Four*, flying with Lt Robert W Harriman's crew. All went well until at 23,000 ft over Belgium, some 35 miles from Liège, the bomber's right outboard engine

B-17G-45-BO 42-97286 *Skipper and The Kids* of the 563rd BS/388th BG is seen carrying wing-mounted 1000-lb bombs. Capt John N Littlejohn and his crew were lost in this aircraft when it crashed on Beinn Nuis, on the Isle of Arran, during a cross-country navigation flight to Prestwick on 10 December 1944 (via *Larry Goldstein*)

B-17G-45-BO 42-97328 *HEAVEN'S ABOVE* at Knettishall. This aircraft served with the 561st BS/388th BG. The electrically-driven Bendix Model D chin turret was enclosed in a movable, aluminium alloy housing





burst into flames and the propeller had to be feathered. The deputy lead ship took over and Castle descended to 20,000 ft, but at this height the B-17 began vibrating badly and he was forced to take it down another 3000 ft before levelling out.

The Fortress was now down to an indicated air speed of 180 mph, and being pursued by seven Bf 109s of IV./JG 3. They attacked and wounded the tail gunner, and left the radar navigator with serious wounds in his neck and shoulders. Castle could not carry out any evasive manoeuvres with the full bomb load still aboard, and he could not salvo it for fear of hitting Allied troops on the ground. Successive attacks by the fighters put

An overhead view of a 96th BG B-17G en route to its target in late 1944. Note the aircraft's group letter marking on the right wing – this was repeated on the underside of the left wing (via Geoff Ward)



PFF ship B-17G-60-VE 44-8355 of the 710th BS/447th BG, flown by 2Lt Miles S King, takes a direct flak hit on its bomb run over Darmstadt on 24 December 1944. The Fortress crashed at Prum, in Germany, with the loss of eight crewmen. The two that survived became PoWs (via Derek Smith)



Top
B-17G-85-BO 43-38459 of the 418th BS/100th BG, with John Morin and crew, was shot down during the mission to Hamburg on New Year's Eve 1944 – just days after this photo was taken. Morin crash-landed in a field near Emden while trying in vain to reach Holland. Eight crewmen were taken prisoner, but tail gunner Dale Brown was already dead from bullet wounds (via Robert M Foose)

Above
B-17G-90-BO 43-38576 of the 413th BS/96th BG was destroyed in a fire at Snetterton after a training flight on 28 December 1944. Piloted by Lt Len Kramer, the bomber overtook Lt Ed Onisko's B-17G-100-BO 43-38930 which had just landed on the main runway. As he did so his left wing and propellers scythed through the vertical stabiliser and right wing of Onisko's bomber. Incredibly, both crews escaped unhurt. Kramer's aircraft was wrecked, but Onisko's was repaired (via Geoff Ward)

ranking officer in the Eighth Air Force to receive America's ultimate military decoration.

Overall, the Christmas Eve raids were effective, and they severely hampered von Rundstedt's communication links. The cost in aircraft, however, was high. Many crashed on their return over England as drizzle and overcast weather played havoc with landing patterns. Tired crews put down where they could. Only 150 aircraft were available for another strike on 26 December. The following day the wintry conditions were responsible for a succession of crashes during early morning take-offs. On 30 December the Eighth again attacked German communication links.

New Year's Eve saw 3rd BD crews return to oil production centres. Hamburg was the scene of another disaster for the 100th BG, which lost 12 B-17s to JG 300 and to flak – half the total lost by the 3rd BD.

The 493rd BG did not escape either. Lt Col Hank Orban led 38 Fortresses of the 493rd to Misburg. B-17G 43-38223 *Day's Pay* was forced to abort, as co-pilot Walter Faulkner recalls;

'Our last mission was supposed to be a "milk run", but like all our "milk runs" it turned out to be BAD. As we were climbing through cloud to make formation, our No 2 engine blew up and caught fire. Four crewmembers bailed out before we got the aeroplane under control – they perished in the Channel. We contacted air-sea rescue and searched ourselves, but with no luck. We salvaged our load and landed at the emergency field on the coast.'

LAST BUT THE BEST

January 1945 marked the start of the Eighth's fourth year of operations, and it seemed as if the end of the war was in sight. On the 1st the Bomb Divisions were renamed Air Divisions, and the following day the B-17s once again pounded communication lines. Raids like this went on for several days until the tactical position in the Ardennes gradually swung back in the Allies' favour.

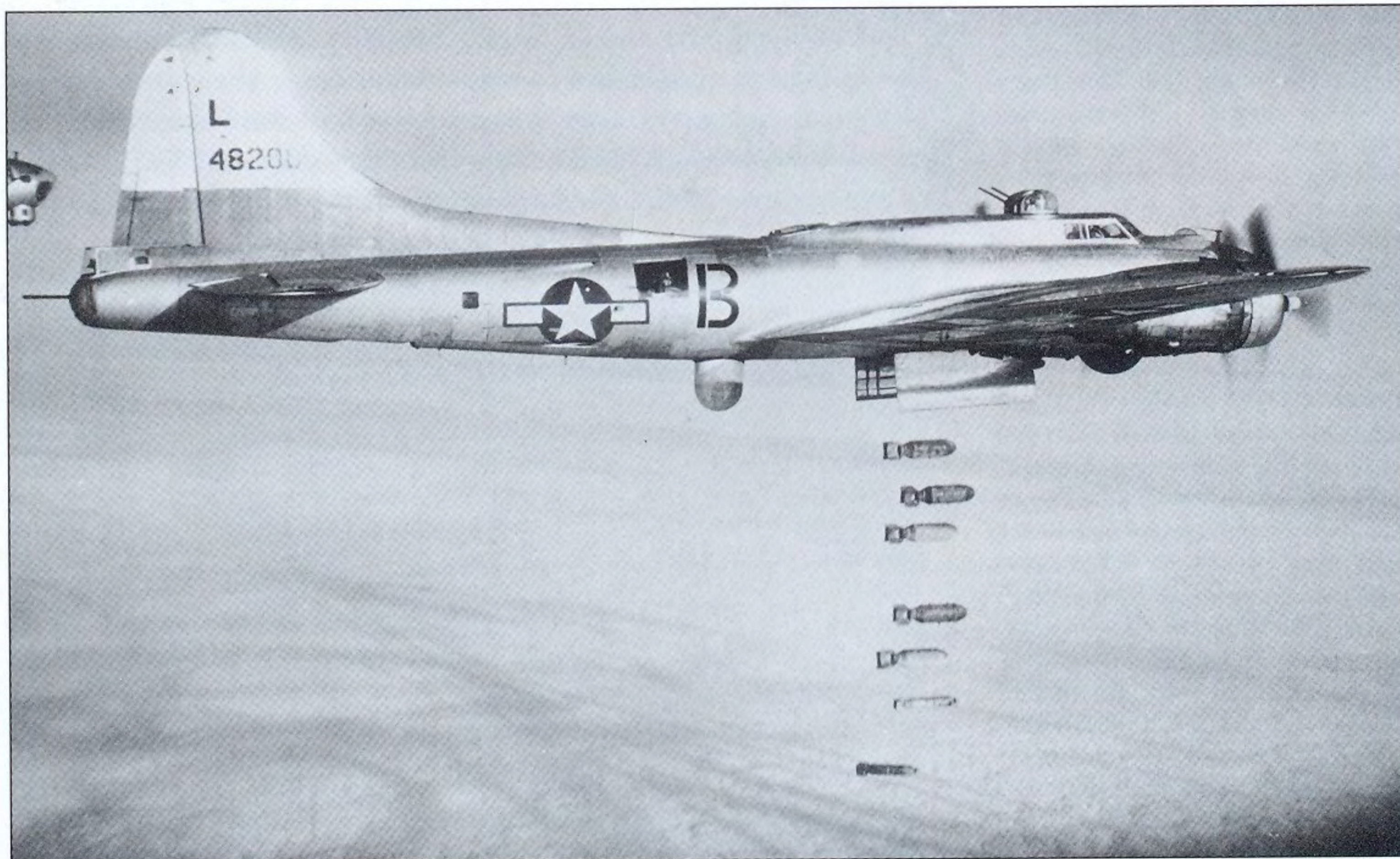
On 5 January the severe wintry weather over England was responsible for several fatal accidents during take-off for the mission to Frankfurt. However, a period of fine weather, beginning on the 6th, once again allowed the 'heavies' to fly missions in support of troops on the ground. These were mostly against lines of communication, airfields and marshalling yards. Finally, the German advance in the Ardennes came to a halt and ultimately petered out. Hitler's last chance now lay in his so-called 'wonder weapons', the V1 flying bomb and V2 rocket.

Missions were flown to tactical targets throughout the remainder of January, but when the weather intervened, the Eighth mounted shallow penetration raids on V1 *Noball* targets in France. It also attempted several tactical missions, but continual bad weather saw operation after operation scrubbed, often just after take-off. Crew morale sagged dramatically.

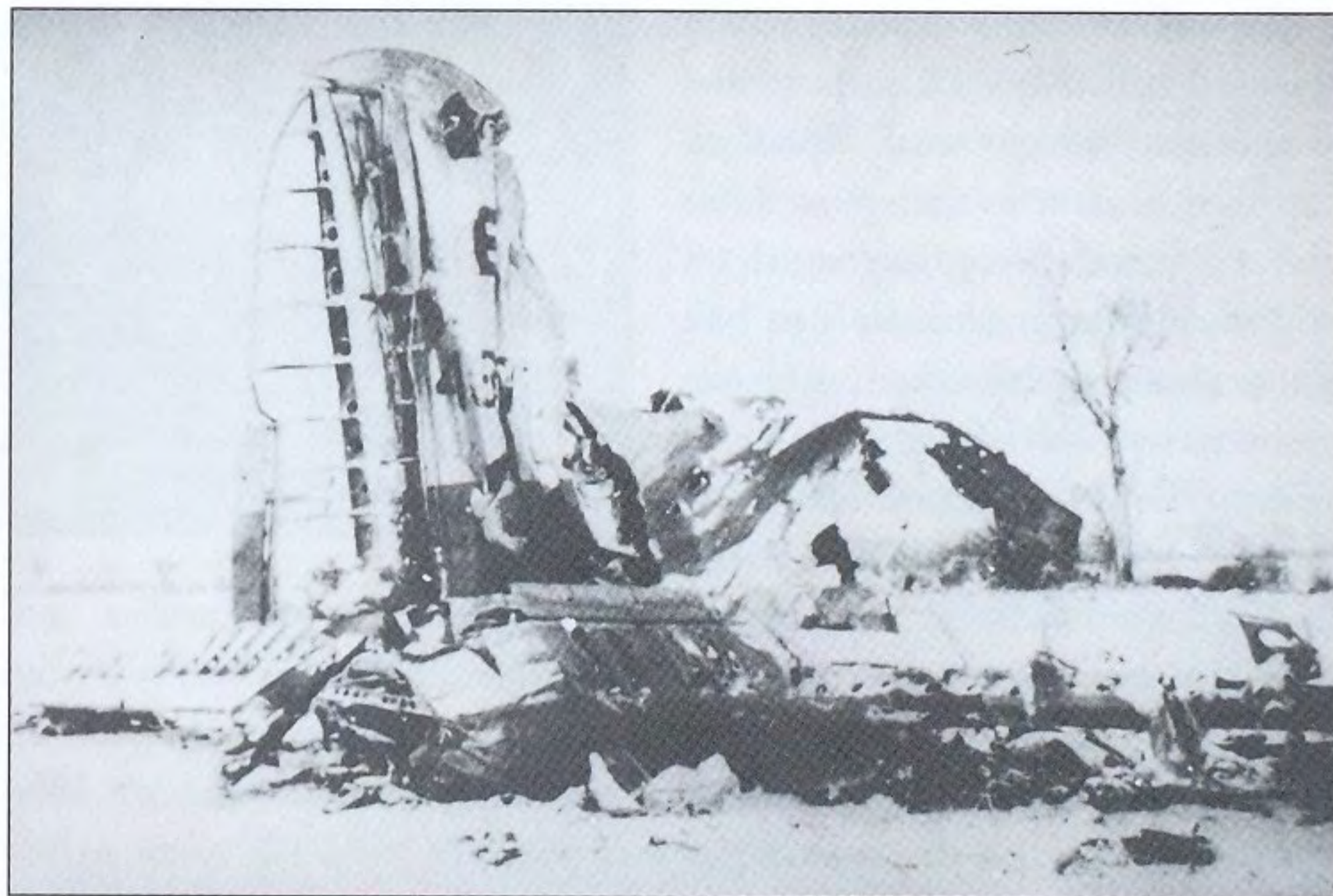
Lt Elwood Samson Jr, co-pilot in Capt David L 'Doc' Conger's lead crew in the 861st BS/493rd BG, recalls;

'Mission 100 Cologne, 10-1-45. Terrible weather with heavy snow. Our aircraft were de-iced with a spray prior to taxi. However, we had at

B-17G-50-VE 44-8200 of the 861st BS/493rd BG drops its bombs in early 1945. Note the H2X scanner (in its extended position) fitted in place of the ball turret. This aircraft was later salvaged by the Ninth Air Force in Germany in June 1946 (via Mike Bailey)



It had been snowing for several days when, on 10 January 1945, at least six inches of snow lay on the ground at Debach. In fact it was still snowing when aircraft took off bound for Germany. B-17G-60-VE 44-8304, piloted by Lt William H Butler of the 862nd BS/493rd BG, was fully loaded with 2700 gallons of fuel, four 1000-lb bombs and several hundred pounds of chaff. Struggling to a height of 300 ft, it refused to climb any further and crashed into a large tree at Rookery Farm, Monewden, about two miles north of the airfield. The bomber caught fire and slithered some distance before coming to rest in a ploughed field. About five minutes later two of the four 1000-lb bombs exploded and the other two were hurled more than 30 ft, but failed to explode. Butler, co-pilot Lt S B Jones and engineer-top turret gunner S/Sgt R H Beeles were all killed. The tail gunner died on the way to hospital (via *Truett Woodall*)



least one and possibly two holds in take-off position. I was the command pilot. We were the lead group in the bomber stream of about 1000 aircraft. It was a high-priority attack against the Cologne marshalling yards. By the time we got the green light from the tower our wings were covered with snow and the runway had a good coverage as well. I did not expect our bomber to fly, but being a B-17 it made it! We could not see the star on the top of the wing until the ice had melted at about 20,000 ft.'

Sgt Arthur Dobias, a 493rd BG waist gunner at Debach, remembers;

'It was the morning of 13 January 1945. It was dark and it was snowing. Each man went about his job in the usual way – some not knowing it was their fatal flight. Our bomb load was four 1000-lb bombs instead of the usual six, as we were the chaff ship. We had just gotten airborne and were slowly gaining altitude. I was standing at my usual position at the right waist station, looking out, when suddenly the entire aeroplane began to shudder like a live thing. The engines were roaring their all it seemed, but we were losing altitude fast. I felt the treetops of a hedge beating against the belly as we just cleared a wood. The next instant we struck the ground. I remember falling forward, then nothing.

'The next thing I saw was flame – flame all over the waist. I was lying somewhere there where the lower ball turret had been. It was burning up. Only one thing entered my mind – get away, and fast. I got up and ran back to the waist door. The ball gunner and the radioman were trying to

get it open, but it was jammed. Just how I do not know, but somehow we got it opened and stumbled out into the snow. We had covered only a short distance when the gas tanks went up in one big "whoosh", shooting flame high into the air. After this I can recall very little, except that I wanted to return to the B-17 to rescue my pals who were still in the aeroplane. The lower ball man would not let me go, and I reckon he saved my life.

B-17G-70-BO 43-37797 *American Beauty* of the 708th BS/447th BG also fell victim to the weather when it crashed at Rattlesden on 9 January 1945. The aircraft was repaired, and continued to serve until it was scrapped in December 1945 (via *Ian McLachlan*)



‘Two of the bombs exploded when we were half-a-mile or so from the wreckage. I faintly recall that they knocked us over in the snow. After this I remember nothing until we walked into a farmhouse. The ball gunner bandaged my head, as I had a cut that was bleeding some. Our pilot William H Butler, co-pilot Sidney Jones, engineer Ray H Beeles

and tail gunner A B Muenzer were all killed. The bombardier and navigator were severely injured. It seems like a dream, but the empty bunks in our barracks prove it is not. Yesterday, we attended the funerals of our fellow crewmen whom we learned to love as brothers. And I feel it is only by the Grace of God that we escaped with our lives.’

By 3 February 1945 Marshal Zhukov’s Red Army was only 35 miles from Berlin, and the capital was jammed with refugees fleeing from the advancing Soviets. Accompanied by 900 fighters, 1200 B-17s and B-24s dropped 2267 tons of bombs on the centre of Berlin, killing an estimated 25,000 inhabitants, destroying 360 industrial targets and heavily damaging another 170. Reconnaissance showed that an area 1½ miles square, stretching across the southern half of the ‘Mitte’, or city centre, had been devastated. The Eighth lost 21 bombers shot down, and another six crash-landed inside Soviet lines. Of the bombers that returned, 93 had suffered varying degrees of major flak damage.

Further German disruption in the face of the Soviet advance occurred on 6 February when 1300 ‘heavies’, escorted by 15 groups of P-51 Mustangs, bombed Chemnitz and Magdeburg, and the Eighth resumed its oil offensive with raids on synthetic oil refineries at Lutzendorf and Merseburg. The 490th BG lost four Fortresses, three of them in mid-air collisions. B-17G 43-37894, piloted by Lt John W Hedgecock, collided with a 388th BG machine near Newmarket while forming up, whilst an 851st B-17, flown by Lt Lawrence M Flannelly, developed mechanical failure during assembly and went down at Darsham, some 20 miles from Eye. Finally, two 490th BG B-17s collided as they were returning from the mission. They were piloted by Lts William S Schoenfeld and Marshall C Dunn. Five men from Schoenfeld’s crew were killed and six of Dunn’s crew perished.

Schoenfeld’s co-pilot, Lt Raymond D Schar, describes what happened;

‘We were on our way back to Eye, returning from our first mission. The squadron was flying at about 13,000 ft between two layers of cloud, with unlimited visibility between all the aeroplanes in the formation, and we were in the low element. We had reached a position which put us just on the French side



By the time this B-17G of the 413th BS/96th BG crashed at Eye on 18 January 1945, much of the snow had thawed. It came to grief during a training flight when the pilot landed with the gear retracted (via Don & Peggy Garnham)



Nose art worn by multi-mission veteran B-17G-75-BO 43-37907 *Carolina Moon*. This aircraft served with the 851st BS/490th BG at Eye (Don & Peggy Garnham)

B-17G-45-BO 42-97175 *Lady Satan* was lost over Strasbourg on her 85th mission, on 6 February 1945. She was part of the 728th BS/452nd BG (the late Marvin Barnes)





Surrounded by flak bursts over Germany, B-17G-100-BO 43-38945 of the 351st BS/100th BG heads for its target in early 1945. The bomber survived the war (TAMM)

was having engine trouble, which may have accounted for his loss of altitude. Lt Schoenfeld later told me that six of Dunn's crew were killed and the other three survived.'

The survivors from Schoenfeld's crew were subsequently lost when their aircraft was downed by flak on a mission to Schleissheim on 9 April.

On 9 February the 'heavies' returned to the oil refineries in the ever-diminishing *Reich*, which was now seriously threatened by the Soviet armies converging from the east. At the Yalta Conference, held in early February, Soviet leader Josef Stalin and his army chiefs asked that the RAF and Eighth Air Force paralyse Berlin and Leipzig, and thus prevent troops moving from the west to the eastern front.

Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Franklin D Roosevelt agreed on massive air attacks on the German capital and other cities such as Dresden and Chemnitz. These cities were not only administrative centres controlling military and civilian movements, but also the main communication centres through which the bulk of the enemy's war traffic flowed.

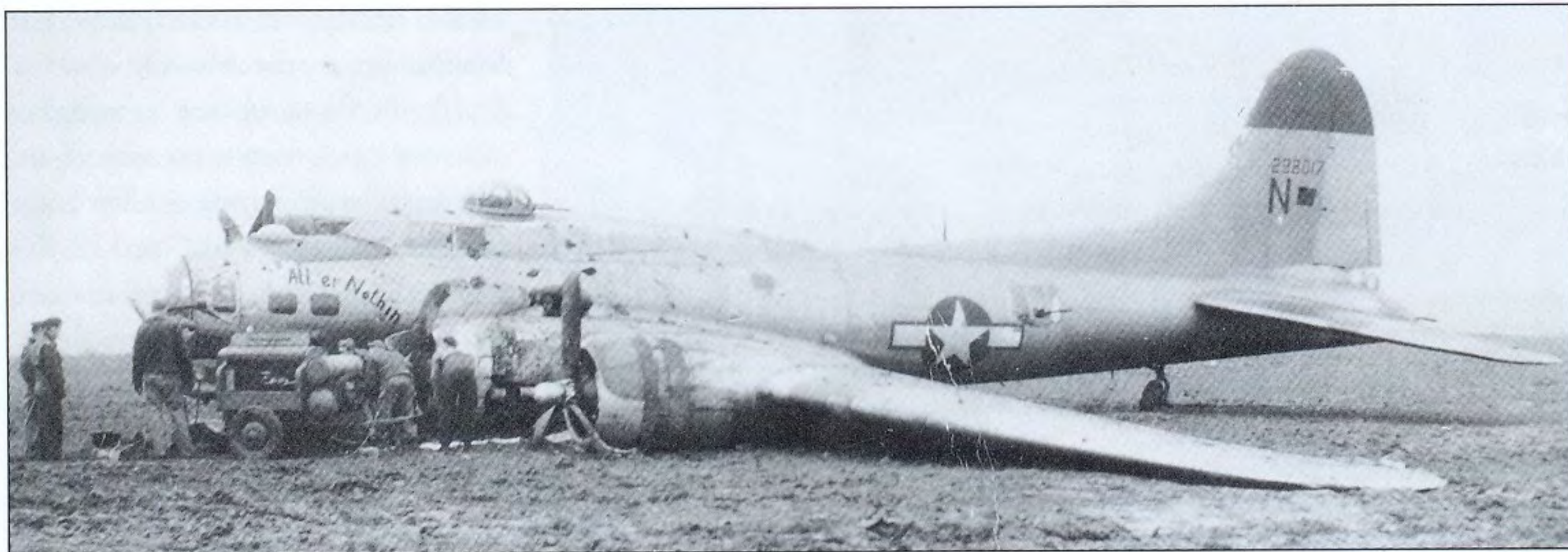
Spatz had set the wheels in motion with the 3 February raid on Berlin. As previously mentioned, Magdeburg and Chemnitz were bombed three days later, but the most devastating raids of all fell upon the old city of Dresden in eastern Germany, starting with an 800-bomber mission by the RAF on the night of 13 February. Two waves of 'heavies' produced firestorms and horrendous casualties among the civilian population. The next day, 400 US bombers attempted to stoke up the fires created by RAF Bomber Command, while a further 900 attacked Chemnitz, Magdeburg and other targets. Although Eighth Air Force crews were to return to the pottery city of Dresden again in March and April, the Allied air forces' top priority remained the oil producing centres.

Indeed, on 15 February more than 1000 bombers hit the Magdeburg synthetic oil plant yet again. A day later a near identical number of B-17s and B-24s struck oil targets in Salzbergen, Gelsenkirchen and Dortmund, as well as the latter city's Hoesch coking plant. An estimated 1000 tons of benzol was being produced here every month. Bombing was completed visually, and the Luftwaffe was noticeable by its virtual absence. However, bomber losses continued, mainly as a result of the bad weather which affected assembly operations over England, and because of flak.

On 22 February Operation *Clarion* (the campaign to destroy the German communications network) was launched. More than 6000 Allied aircraft from seven different commands were airborne that day, and they struck at transportation targets throughout western Germany and northern Holland. All targets were selected with the object of preventing

A 95th BG B-17G approaches the 486th BG base at Sudbury (Acton), in Suffolk, after completing yet another mission (USAF)





troops being transported to the Russian front, now only a few miles from Berlin. Despite the low altitudes flown, only seven bombers were lost, including two B-17s to an Me 262 jet fighter of III./JG 7 flown by Gefreiter Notter. The following day just four bombers were lost from the 1274 despatched, and on 26 February three bombers were shot down over Berlin.

2Lt William W Varnedoe Jr of the 550th BS/385th BG, who was navigator in 2Lt George H Crow Jr's crew, describes his first mission on 28 February;

'The target for my first mission was a railroad marshalling yard of the Henschel Tank factory at Kassel, in Germany. There was 10/10ths cloud at the target, so we bombed by PFF. Over the target there was light flak, but no fighters. By this stage of the war Jerry had given up attacking each raid, but would at random times send up a massive fighter attack. The flak was

B-17G-40-VE 42-98017 *All'er Nothin'* of the 849th BS/490th BG crash-landed at Eye on 23 February 1945. Soon repaired, the bomber remained in the frontline force until VE-Day (USAF via Robert M Foose)

B-17G-35-VE 42-97873 *Sack Happy* of the 563rd BS/388th BG crashed on take-off when bound for Munich on 24 February 1945. Based at Knettishall since 1 June 1944, the bomber was salvaged the following day (via Larry Goldstein)





In late February 1945, B-17 units of the 93rd CBW began applying a red and white 'checkerboard' design to the tails of their aircraft. This marking is just visible on several of these 385th BG B-17s, while B-17G-45-BO 43-38443 (closest to the camera) has had the old 'Square G' symbol removed ready for repainting (via Ian McLachlan)

inaccurate because of the clouds. We jammed the German radar with chaff. All the jamming seemed to work well. On this mission the 385th lost no aeroplanes. Although non-visual, the bombing results were unusually good, and several of the day's targets were permanently removed from the target list.'

By March 1945 the systematic destruction of German oil production plants, airfields and communication centres had virtually driven the Luftwaffe from German skies. Yet despite fuel and pilot shortages, Me 262 fighters could still be

expected to put in rare attacks, and during March almost all enemy fighter interceptions of American heavy bombers were made by the jet-equipped JG 7, General Major Adolf Galland's *Jagdverband 44*, EJG 2, led by Oberleutnant Heinz Bär, and I./KG(F) 54.

On 3 March the largest formation of German jets ever seen attacked the bomber formations heading for Dresden and four separate oil targets. III./JG 7 put up 29 Me 262s, whose pilots claimed six of the nine bombers lost over Hannover-Braunschweig.

Twelve days later 1353 bombers, escorted by 833 fighters, hit the German Army HQ at Zossen, near Berlin, and a marshalling yard at Oranienburg. Sgt Michael Broderick was the engineer in Lt John D Dolloff's crew aboard *Lotta Stern*, assigned to the 851st BS/490th BG. Flying his 17th mission that day, he recorded in his diary;

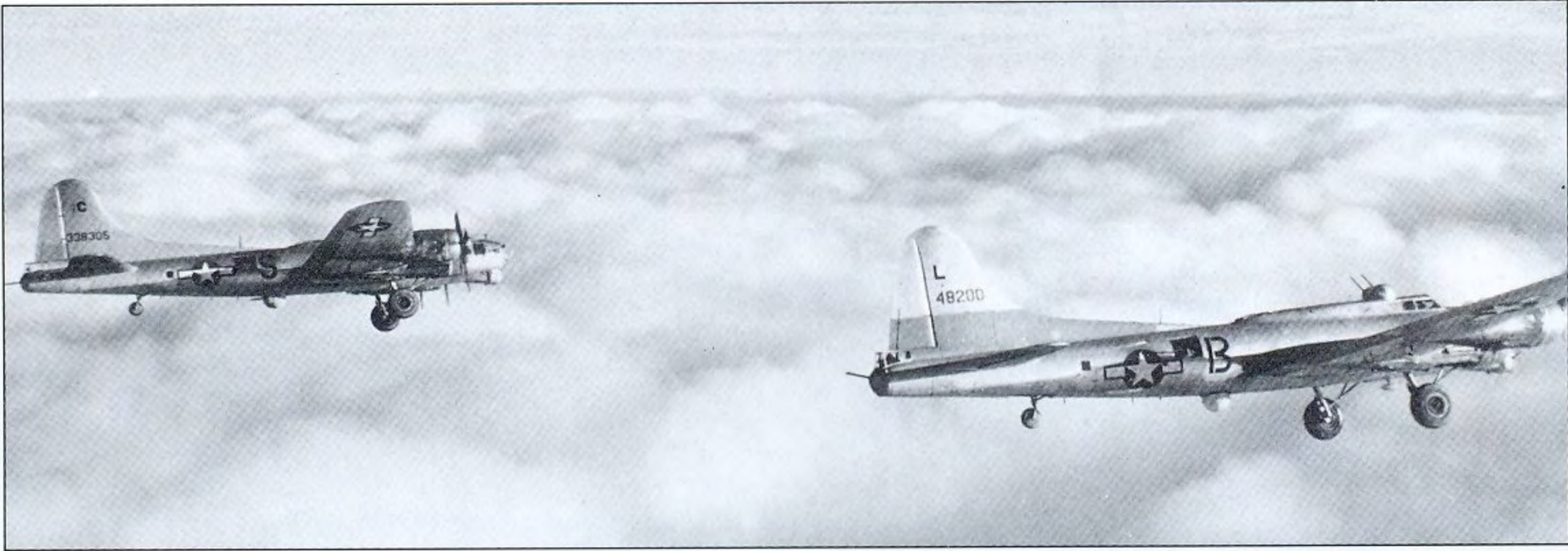
'Target Oranienburg, Germany. Altitude 22,000 ft. Twelve 500-lb GP bombs, timed to detonate one, two, four, six and twelve hours after release. Time of mission 6 hr 15 mins. No fighters. Flak at start of bomb run – they put about 20 holes in our ship and knocked out No 1 engine. We could not keep in formation, so we decided to drop our bombs early and turned left out of the flak area. We could not find the other bombers going home so we circled over north Berlin for ten minutes until we picked them up again and started back, flying on only three engines in the bomber stream.'

On Saturday 17 March 1328 B-17s and B-24s, escorted by 820 fighters, bombed targets in west and north central Germany. Sgt Harry E Thatcher, a gunner in Lt Harry Waggoner's crew in the 849th BS/490th BG, saw two aircraft collide;

'While flying through contrails so thick that I could not see the wing-tips of my own aircraft from my position in the ball turret, two B-17s on the starboard side of their formation collided, blowing their formation apart. The most frightening thing was the voice of the pilot in one of them coming over the intercom, shouting "Every man for himself".'

The two bombers involved were B-17G 43-38071, flown by Lt Robert H Tennenberg in the 849th BS, and B-17G 43-38046, flown by Lt Arthur Stern of the 849th. Tennenberg recalls;

'After bombs-away we headed home, flying back down our own contrails. We were about five minutes from the German border when the



B-17G-85-BO 43-38305 and B-17G-50-VE 44-8200 of the 860th and 861st BSs, 493rd BG, let their wheels down prior to flying through the undercast and recovering at Debach in early 1945. 43-38305 caught fire on 11 March 1945 while being cleaned for nose art to be applied and was subsequently scrapped. 44-8200 survived the war and was eventually salvaged by the Ninth Air Force in Germany in June 1946 (via Mike Bailey)

aeroplane leading the fourth element pulled up in front of me and we collided in mid-air. The other machine just broke in two and went down. None of its crew got out.

‘My bomber had two gaping holes in the fuselage next to the Nos 2 and 3 engines, the Plexiglas nose had gone and so had the pitot tube. Although two engines were out, I still had control of the aeroplane, so I told the crew not to bail out.

‘We flew in the general direction of the group and decided to let down to a lower altitude, because at 29,000 ft the freezing air coming in through the open nose was too much to bear. To our surprise we were picked up by a friendly P-47 pilot, who led us to his base at St Trond, in Belgium. When we had completed our landing roll, and I had shut down the engines, my navigator told me that there was a body on his table. It had no head, no arms and no legs. None of them felt like moving it. From a laundry tag on the under-shirt, we later found out that it was the radio operator from the other aircraft.’

On 18 March a record 1329 bombers returned to Berlin. Twelve B-17s and a B-24 were shot down by the 37 Me 262s of the *Geschwaderstab* and III./JG 7 that attacked. The jet menace was becoming such a problem that, beginning on 21 March, the Eighth flew a series of raids on the specific airfields used by the Me 262s. Lt Elmer L Buckner, a pilot in the 850th BS/490th BG, recalls;



B-17G-105-BO 43-39234 drops its bombs whilst flying over thick cloud. Assigned to the 838th BS/487th BG as late as 3 March 1945, the bomber completed only a handful of missions prior to VE-Day. It was flown back to the US in July 1945 and sold for scrap five months later (via Paul Wilson)



‘Our target was at Plauen, and it was a visual attack only. There were just four groups going there, and we were to be the last in line. At about 0900 hrs we broke into overcast and were immediately hit by enemy fighters that proved to be Me 262 jets. They made straight tail-on attacks, and within the space of about three minutes three of the ships in our squadron had been hit and gone down.

‘Lt William I Audette’s rudder was shot off, Lt Herman L Ballard’s ship was on fire and Schultz’s bomber was raked from nose to tail with cannon

Smoke flares mark the target for Fortresses of the 351st BS/100th BG on a rare ‘gin clear’ day in early 1945. B-17G-70-BO 43-37812 (top left) was lost to flak on the 23 March 1945 mission to Marburg, with the loss of all nine crewmen. Olive Drab B-17G-75-BO 42-38047 *Fever Beaver* survived the war, however, having been in action from January 1944. It returned to the US in July 1945 and was scrapped five months later (TAMM)



Lt Arlys D Wineinger of the 862nd BS/493rd BG signs off B-17G-80-BO 43-38223 *DAY'S PAY* from crew chief S/Sgt Salvadore Leto. Assigned to the group on 9 August 1944, this aircraft had completed 67 missions by the time it was returned to the US on 10 July 1945 (Truett Woodall)



fire from another Me 262 (flown by Leutnant Hans-Dieter Weihs of 3./JG 7), which attacked head-on, and just blew up. We poured lead into the Me 262s, and I got a good view of one as it pulled up right under my left wing. We finally hit Plauen with our 1000-lb GP bombs and then returned safely back to Eye, even though we did have a few flak holes in our ship.'

Lt John J Schultz crashed at Falkenberg, in Sweden, with eight crewmen dead, and six of Audette's crew were killed and three became PoWs. Eight of Ballard's crew also died.

The raids on German jet airfields also coincided with the build-up for the impending crossing of the Rhine by Allied troops. For four days the 'heavies' pounded jet airfields and military installations. On 22 March, 1301 B-17s and B-24s bombed targets east of Frankfurt and ten military encampments in the Ruhr in preparation for the Allied amphibious crossing of the lower Rhine on 23-24 March.

The Eighth also bombed the Bottrop military barracks and hutted areas directly behind the German lines, while 136 B-17s of the Fifteenth Air Force attacked Ruhrland yet again, causing extensive damage to the industrial complex. Twenty-seven Me 262s attacked the bomber formations and claimed 13 B-17s shot down, but only one Fortress was actually lost. P-51s in turn claimed two of the jets.

The following day 1244 'heavies' bombed rail targets as part of the programme to isolate the Ruhr by cutting off the shipment of coal – since the loss of the Saar basin, the Ruhr had become the only remaining source of supply for the German war machine. On 23-24 March, under a 66-mile long smoke screen, and aided by 1749 bombers of the Eighth Air Force, Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's 21st Army Group crossed the Rhine in the north, while simultaneous crossings were made by Gen Patton's Third Army further south.

Groups flew two missions on 24 March, hitting a number of jet bases in Holland and Germany, while 240 B-24s, each loaded with 600 tons of food, medicines and weapons, dropped vital supplies to the armies in the field.

The mission to submarine pens at Hamburg on 30 March cost the 493rd BG three Fortresses – B-17G-85-BO 43-38311, piloted by

Crew No 2053 of the 861st BS/493rd BG pose for a group shot towards the end of their training at Drew Field, in Tampa, Florida, on 23 January 1945. They crashed returning from their first, and only, mission, to the submarine pens at Hamburg, on 30 March 1945. 2Lt Russell A Goodspeed (flying B-17G-105-BO 43-39078) had managed to limp back to East Anglia with his No 4 engine out after taking a flak hit at the target, the crew having made the decision to try to head for their base at Little Walden. With the field in sight, all fuel warning lights were blazing. Being so low on gas, Goodspeed waited until he was well into his final approach before lowering the flaps. When they were lowered the right wing began to drop, and the crew thought that the No 3 engine had run out of gas. In reality, the left flap had moved into position but the right flap had not – a subsequent investigation of the wreckage revealed that the right flap cable had been cut by the flak explosion. The right wing tip struck the ground and the aircraft broke in half at the trailing edge of the wing. The tail section remained upright and the front half of the aircraft skidded to a halt in a farmer's field, upside down. The four airmen in the radio room and the toggelier in the nose were killed instantly. Goodspeed died six hours later. These men are, from left to right, in the back row, engineer Sgt Harry N Davis, radio operator Sgt Frank Lee (killed), waist gunner Sgt Haskell N Newman (killed), tail gunner Sgt Clinton Halverson (killed) and bombardier Sgt George Constandakis (killed). Kneeling (left to right), ball turret gunner Sgt Robert Brewer (killed), co-pilot 2Lt Roger D Laib, pilot 2Lt Russell Goodspeed (killed) and navigator 2Lt Harold G Teters (*via Roger Laib*)



B-17G-55-DL 44-6513 *Boise Belle* of the 560th BS/493rd BG was photographed undergoing major repairs at Debach. Indeed, the bomber had suffered such severe battle damage that the front half of the aircraft was mated with the rear half of another damaged B-17. *Boise Belle* and Lt John E Silverman's crew failed to return from the Munich raid of 9 April 1945, the bomber having fallen victim to flak. All ten crewmen perished (via Truett Woodall)

Lt Lewis B Hoagland of the 860th BS, B-17G-105-BO 43-39226, flown by Lt Martin Dwyer Jr of the 861st, and B-17G-105-BO 43-39078, piloted by 2Lt Russell A Goodspeed again from the the 861st BS. The latter crew were on their first mission, and all failed to return.

Bomber crews were now hard-pressed to find worthwhile targets, and the planners switched attacks from inland targets to coastal areas. Beginning on 5 April, the weather over the Continent improved dramatically, and the B-17s were sent to U-boat pens on the Baltic coast.

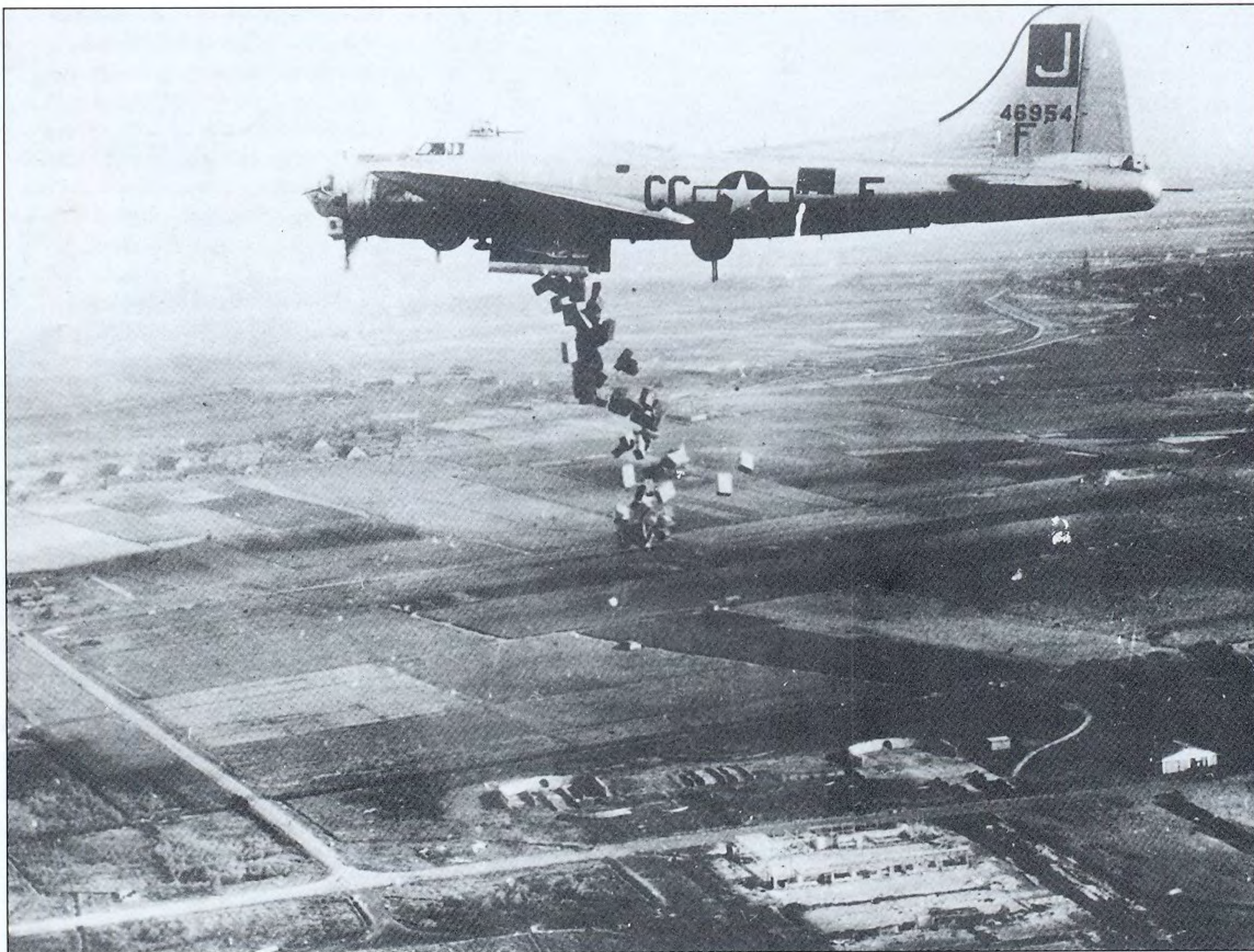
Everywhere the Allies were victorious, but while the Germans kept on fighting, missions continued almost daily. Such was the Eighth Air Force's superiority that on the 5th the B-17s were able to assemble over France, before attacking the marshalling yards at Nürnberg.

In Germany the now desperate situation called for desperate measures. On 7 April, when American bomber streams attacked underground oil refineries in central Germany, the deliberate ramming of American bombers by converted Bf 109 fighters, called *Rammjäger*, was carried out by pilots of *Sonderkommando Elbe*, protected by Me 262s.

The *Rammjäger* dived into the bomber formations from a height of 33,000 ft and destroyed 17 aircraft. However, these tactics were too little,

B-17G-70-DL 44-6888 *Sweet Chariot* of the 339th BS/96th BG, flown by Lt Harry Loveless, was written off in this crash landing at Snetterton Heath on 11 May 1945 (via Robert M Foose)





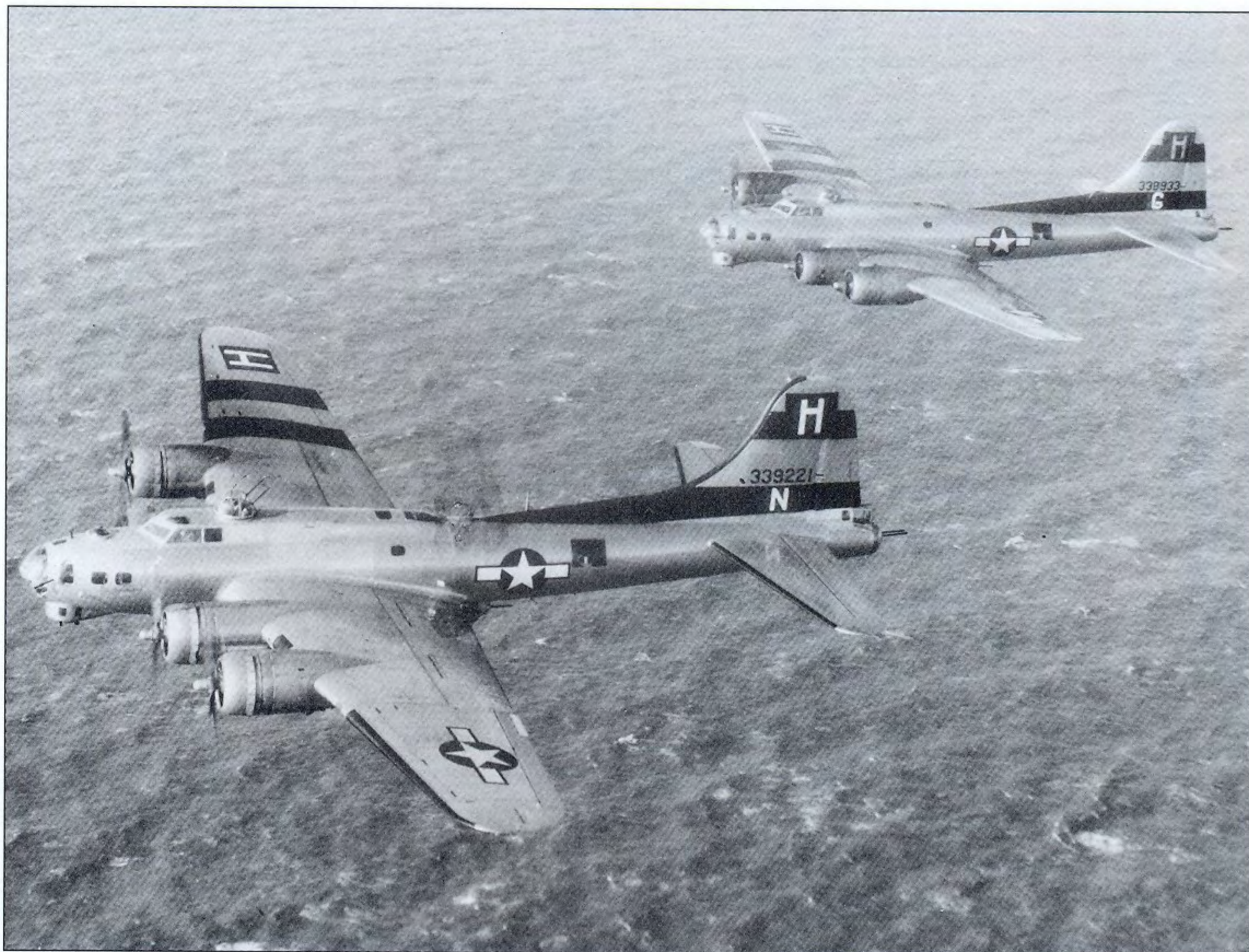
too late to seriously affect the outcome, and on 8 April the Eighth put up 23 groups of B-17s and ten groups of Mustangs to bomb targets in Germany and Czechoslovakia. More than 1150 B-17s and B-24s, escorted by 794 Mustangs, attacked targets in the Leipzig, Nürnberg and Chemnitz areas. On 9 and 10 April the German jet airfields were again bombed, forcing nearly all Me 262 units to withdraw to the Prague area.

Four days later an estimated force of about 122,000 Germans holding out and manning 22 gun batteries along the Gironde estuary, in the Royan area of France, and denying the Allies the use of the port of Bordeaux, were bombed by 1161 'heavies'. The 389th BG lost two Liberators when 3rd AD B-17s, making a second run over the target, released their fragmentation bombs through their formation. Two more crash-landed in France and a fifth limped back to England.

On 15 April nearly 850 'heavies' of the 2nd and 3rd ADs employed napalm for the first time when they dropped 460,000 gallons in 75-85 gallon liquid-fire tanks on the stubborn defenders of Royan. The 1st AD added 1000- and 2000-lb GP bombs to the mix, while three fighter groups strafed gun emplacements. No flak was encountered, and French forces later captured the port.

16 April saw Gen Spaatz announce an end to the strategic mission of the Eighth Air Force, and only some tactical missions now remained. The following day Dresden was bombed by almost 1000 aircraft. Eight B-17s and 17 fighters were shot down, including six B-17s by Me 262s of JG 7. The end of the Reich was nigh, and during the week of 18 to 25 April,

Dropping bread and blankets rather than bombs, B-17G-70-DL 44-6954 of the 569th BS/390th BG, flown by group CO Col Joseph A Moller, releases its cargo of supplies to starving Dutch civilians at Valkenburg on 1 May 1945 (USAF via Mike Bailey)



B-17G-105-BO 43-39221 and B-17G-100-BO 43-38933 *Dear Mom* of the 388th BG fly in close formation over the North Sea in early 1945. Having survived the war, *Dear Mom* hit a hill near Land's End during a navigational exercise on 17 May 1945, killing pilot 2Lt H J Cole, co-pilot 2Lt V Ferguson, two navigators and two groundcrew, who had come along for the ride as a makeshift engineer and radio operator (via Robert M Foose)

missions were briefed and scrubbed almost simultaneously as the ground forces over-ran objective after objective.

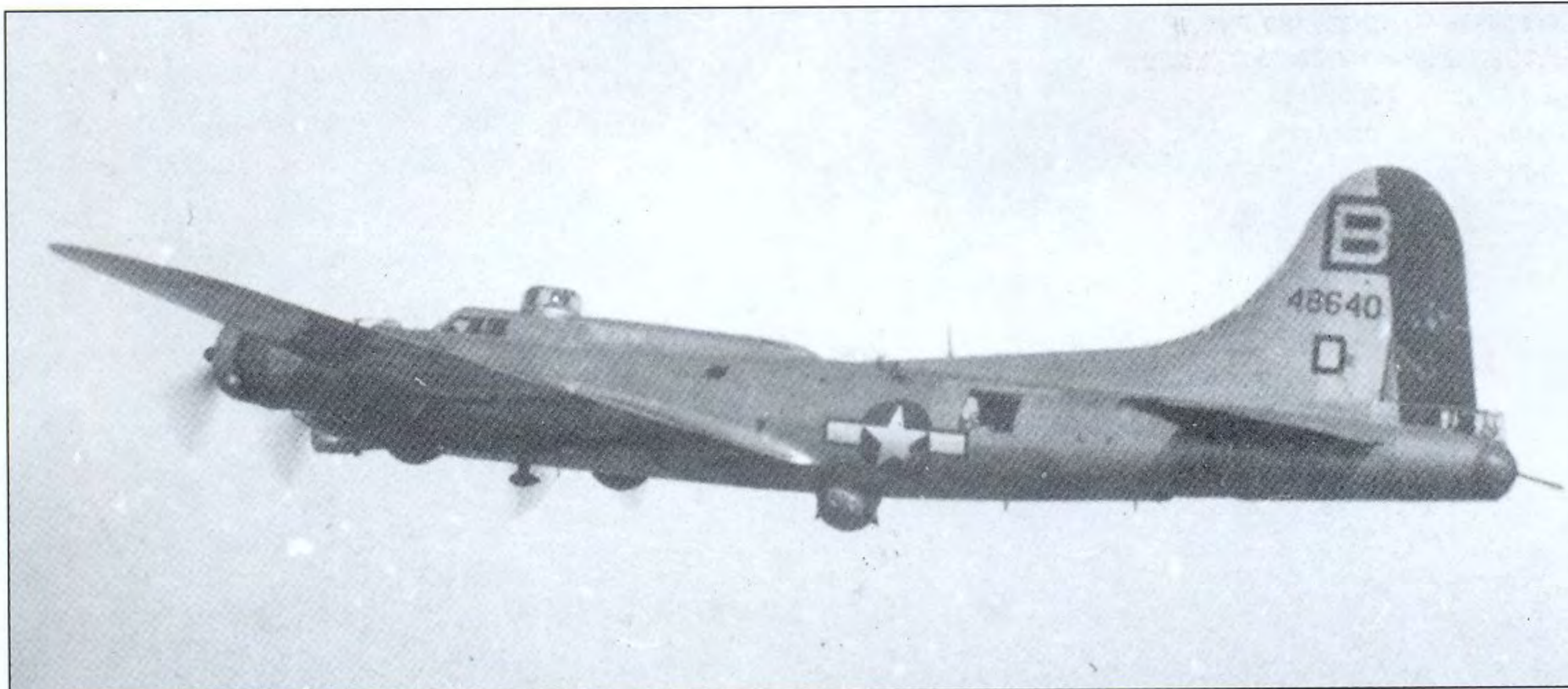
However, losses still occurred. Thursday 19 April was a bad day for the 490th BG, which lost four B-17s on the raid on marshalling yards at Aussig, in Czechoslovakia. Lt Larry J Bellarts of the 849th BS recalls;

'On this, my last combat mission, I was flying lead of the third V, with Lt Burford E Stovall on my right wing and Lt William E McAllister on my left. The fourth element in the squadron was a diamond led by Lt Robert A Norvell, who was below and behind me. Near the target, an Me 262 came in from "two o'clock high" and Stovall went down. Norvell brought up the diamond and took up position on my right wing. The Me 262 came in again, this time from "ten o'clock high", and McAllister, on my left wing, was hit and went down.

'The enemy fighter made another attack, from "two o'clock" again, and Norvell went down. It came in once more from "six o'clock", but was hit before it could pick me off. I had told all the gunners to start firing even before it was in range, and I think that might have saved us. As it came by, passing just under us, it was close enough for me to see the shattered cockpit, with the black-suited pilot hanging lifeless out of the left side.'

Others had survived despite the odds. Jule F Berndt, navigator in Lt Rolland B Peacock Jr's crew in the 850th BS, who had already completed a tour with the 490th BG, reflected on how he had cheated death;

'It almost seems like a bad dream to me now. I just can't visualise myself as having gone through a complete tour of missions in Europe, of having



been in England and over Germany, of having flown the ocean and of having crossed it by liner. The memories of those anxious moments over targets, of seeing the face of our wounded ball turret gunner, of the times over Duisburg and Merseburg when there just didn't seem to be a plausible excuse for emerging unscathed from the clouds of flak that we entered – all these now seem like parts of one of those bad nightmares that are hard to reconstruct after you wake up.

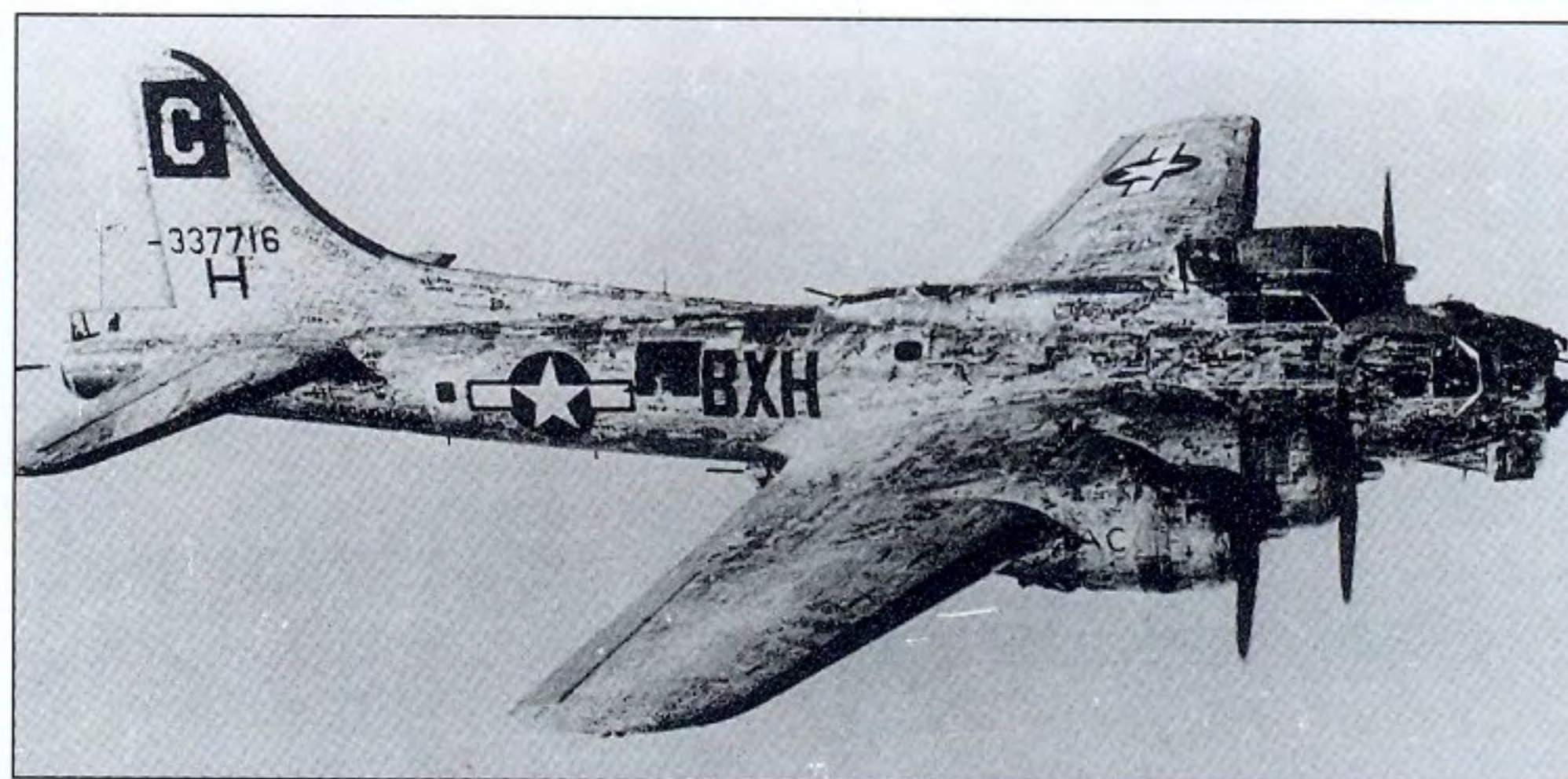
'The long hours of thinking before falling asleep on the night before a mission and the anxious moments spent contemplating the thought of dying so young – worrying about such things not just for yourself but also for your parents, who you knew were praying for your safety back home. All this has become just a part of the past, and I am here now, today, whole, alive and writing about it. It is almost too good to be true.'



On 7 May 1945 the Eighth Air Force flew its sixth, and final, *Chowhound* mission to Holland. Two Fortresses had already been lost earlier in the operation when they collided soon after take-off, and on the 7th the supply drops claimed a third victim, B-17G-75-VE 44-8640 of the 334th BS/95th BG. A veteran of 58 bombing missions and six food drops, it was lost over the North Sea with Lt Lionel N 'Spider' Scurman's crew of eight, and six passengers from the Horham photographic section, after their food drop near Hilversum. Co-pilot Lt James R Schwarz and toggelier S/Sgt David C Condon, were picked up by an air-sea rescue crew in an OA-10A Catalina of the 5th ERS at Halesworth. Navigator Lt Russell J Cook was also rescued, by an RAF Walrus, but died before reaching hospital. No one else survived. 44-8640 was the last Eighth Air Force aircraft lost in World War 2 (via the late Ken Wright)

Once victory in Europe was finally secured, the bomb groups were hastily re-tasked as transports and pressed into service shuttling former Allied PoWs home and airlifting displaced people from all over Europe. They also transported troops from the UK to Casablanca, where they continued on to the CBI Theatre, and helped move fighter groups to bases in Germany. In the summer of 1945 B-24s and B-17s, such as B-17G-80-VE 44-8753 of the 388th BG, were also used to airlift German PoWs, including General Major Adolf Galland (extreme right), home to Germany (H-H Stapfer)

B-17G-35-DL 42-107180 *THE EAGLE'S WRATH/LUCKY REBEL* of the 410th BS/94th BG was put on display at the post-war victory exposition staged beneath the Eiffel Tower in Paris in the summer of 1945 (USAF)



The first B-17 to leave Knettishall for the USA, on 9 June 1945, was B-17G-70-BO 43-37716 *5GRAND* of the 338th BS/96th BG. This particular machine happened to be the 5000th Boeing-built Fortress produced in Seattle since the attack on Pearl Harbor. Constructed in early 1944, the bomber had been christened by Mrs Gertrude Aldrich (a Boeing worker who had lost her son in a B-17) on 13 March that year by the breaking of the customary bottle of champagne against the chin turret. *5GRAND* was autographed by workers from the Boeing plant, who scratched or wrote their names all over it. By the end of the war it had completed 78 missions, plus two food missions and two PoW trips. As the 96th BG were remaining in Germany as part of the army of occupation, the honour of returning *5Grand* to the US went to Lt Thompson's crew of the 560th BS/388th BG. Sadly, the veteran *5GRAND* was cut up for scrap at the huge Kingman reclamation plant in Arizona before it could take its rightful place as a memorial in the city of Seattle (USAF)

by one to Montgomery at Lüneberg Heath, to Devers at Munich, to Alexander at Casserta and finally to Eisenhower at Rheims in the early hours of 7 May. Starting on 1 May, before the Germans surrendered, Fortress crews flew food mercy missions, called *Chowhound*, to starving civilians in Holland (together with RAF *Manna* operations, which had begun on 29 April) until the end of hostilities.

Gunner Sgt Harry E Thatcher, who was with Lt Harry Waggoner's crew in the 849th BS/490th BG, remembers the food drop mission of Thursday 3 May;

'My last mission of all was a food drop over Holland. We came in at 600 ft, low enough to see that the roofs of the buildings were jammed with people waving what seemed to be hundreds of flags. One man waved an American flag so big that I'm surprised it did not take him off the roof. Two German soldiers were riding down the street in a horse-drawn wagon. Startled by the aeroplanes, the horse reared up and I can still see the fright on those soldiers' faces.'

The sixth and final Eighth Air Force *Chowhound* mission was flown on 7 May 1945 – the day before VE-Day – when 39 B-17s in the 493rd BG dropped their last consignment of British rations over the airfield at Schiphol. This group had played a major role in *Chowhound*, with 38 B-17s dropping 3414 cases of food on Rotterdam on 1 May, and a further 40 bombers (led by group CO Col Robert Landry) resupplying Haarlem with 3510 cases 24 hours later.

Robert 'Gus' Gaustad, navigator in Lt Munday's crew at Debach, remembers that on VE-Day, 'in front of a neat and flower-bordered farmhouse not overly far from my hut, a small American flag was displayed, along with a large sign which read, "Thank You America!" I was moved to tears.'

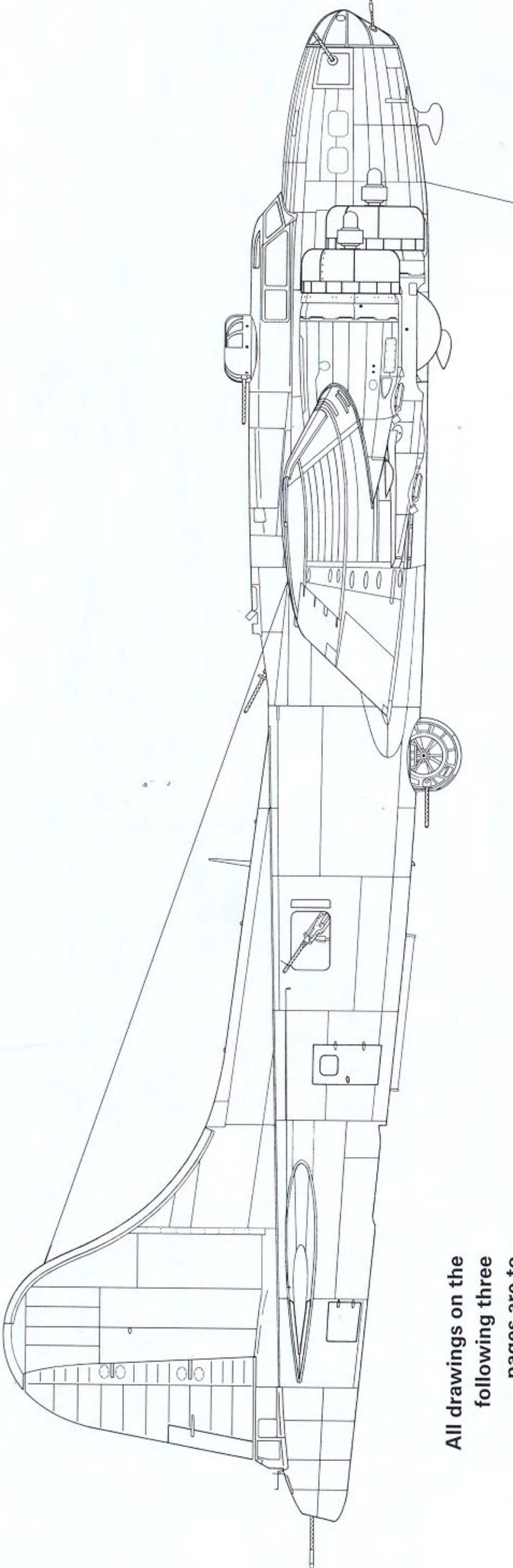
APPENDICES

FINAL B-17 BOMB GROUP ASSIGNMENTS

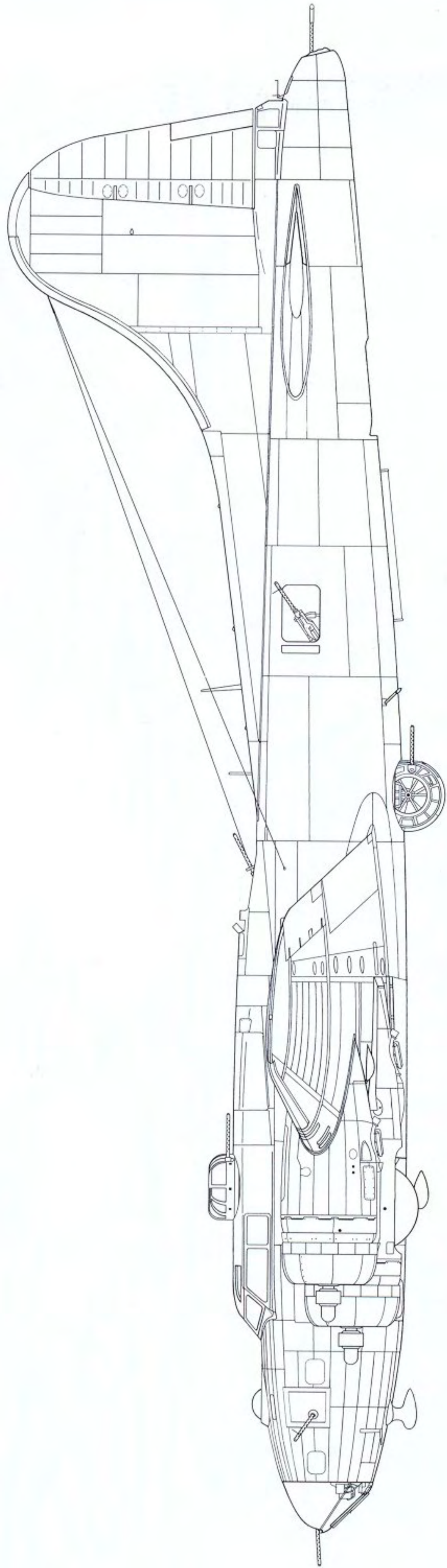
3rd BOMB DIVISION, EIGHTH AIR FORCE 1945

<i>Group</i>	<i>Squadrons</i>	<i>Sqn Codes</i>	<i>Combat Wing Assignment</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>Squadrons</i>	<i>Sqn Codes</i>	<i>Combat Wing Assignment</i>
34th BG	4th BS	(Q6)	93rd CBW	390th BG	568th BS	(BI)	13th CBW
	7th BS	(R2)			569th BS	(CC)	
	18th BS	(8I)			570th BS	(DD)	
	391st BS	(3L)			571st BS	(FC)	
94th BG	331st BS	(QE)	4th CBW	447th BG	708th BS	(CQ)	4th CBW
	332nd BS	(XM)			709th BS	(IE)	
	333rd BS	(TS)			710th BS	(IJ)	
	410th BS	(GL)			711th BS	(IR)	
95th BG	334th BS	(BG)	13th CBW	452nd BG	728th BS	(9Z)	45th CBW
	335th BS	(OE)			729th BS	(M3)	
	336th BS	(ET)			730th BS	(6K)	
	412th BS	(QW)			731st BS	(7D)	
96th BG	337th BS	(QJ)	45th CBW	490th BG	848th BS	(7W)	93rd CBW
	338th BS	(BX)			849th BS	(W8)	
	339th BS	(AW)			850th BS	(7Q)	
	413th BS	(MZ)			851st BS	(S3)	
100th BG	349th BS	(XR)	13th CBW	493rd BG	860th BS		93rd CBW
	350th BS	(LN)			861st BS		
	351st BS	(EP)			862nd BS		
	418th BS	(LD)			863rd BS		
385th BG	548th BS	(GX)	93rd CBW	486th BG	832nd BS	(3R)	4th CBW
	549th BS	(XA)			833rd BS	(4N)	
	550th BS	(SG)			834th BS	(2S)	
	551st BS	(HR)			835th BS	(H8)	
388th BG	560th BS		45th CBW	487th BG	836th BS	(2G)	4th CBW
	561st BS				837th BS	(4F)	
	562nd BS				838th BS	(2C)	
	563rd BS				839th BS	(R5)	

B-17E-BO

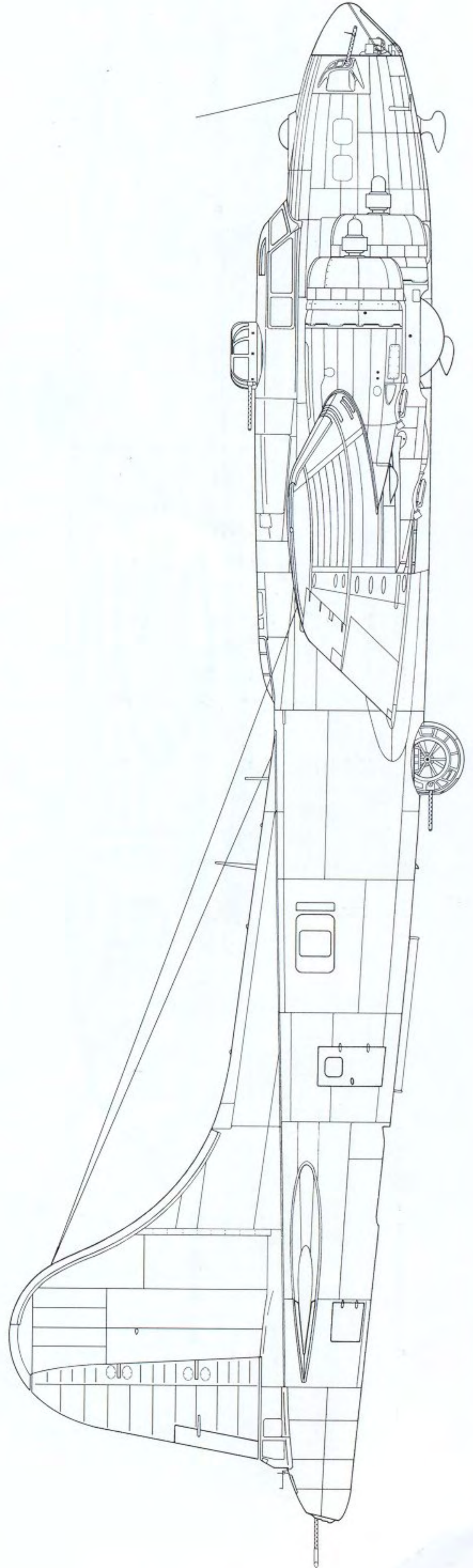


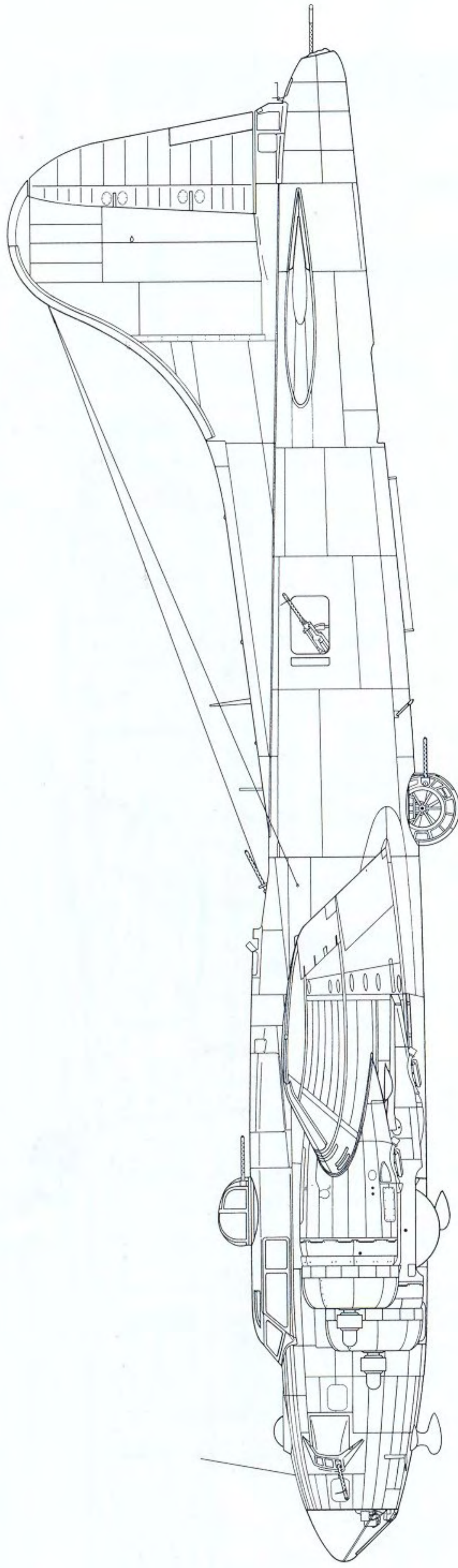
All drawings on the following three pages are to 1/108th scale. Increase in size by 1.5 to achieve 1/72nd scale



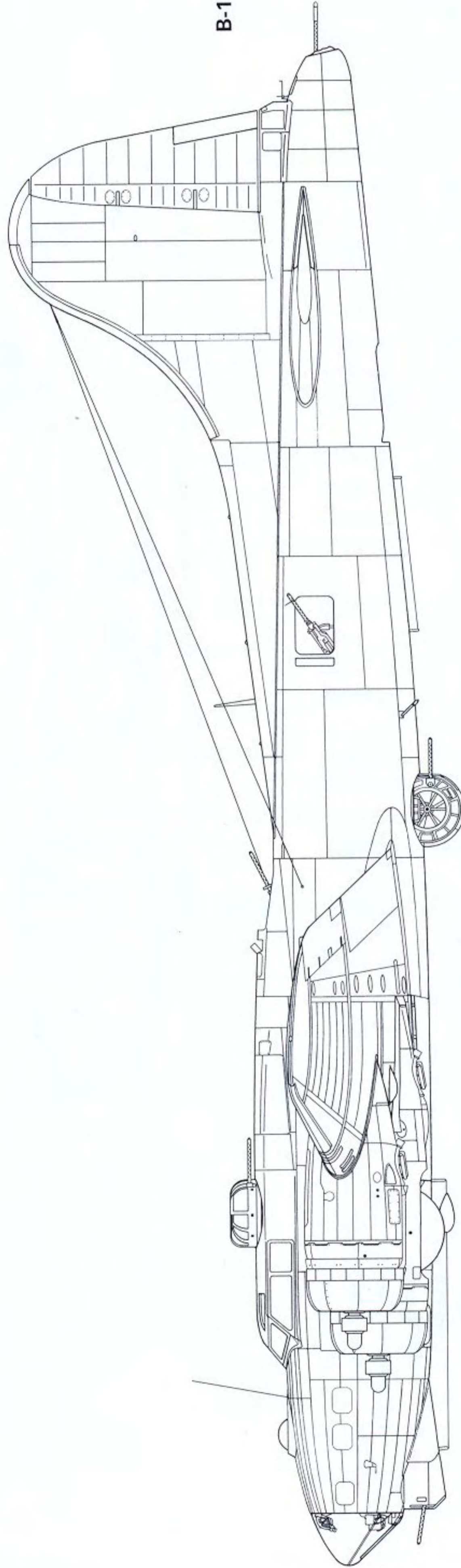
B-17F-70-BO

B-17F-115-BO

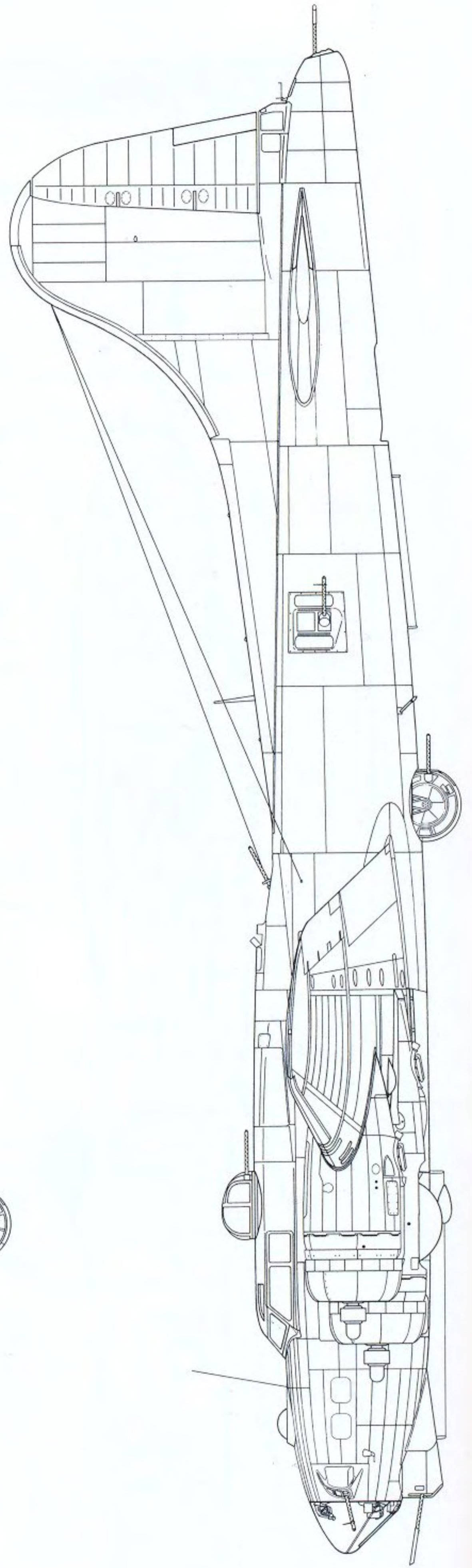




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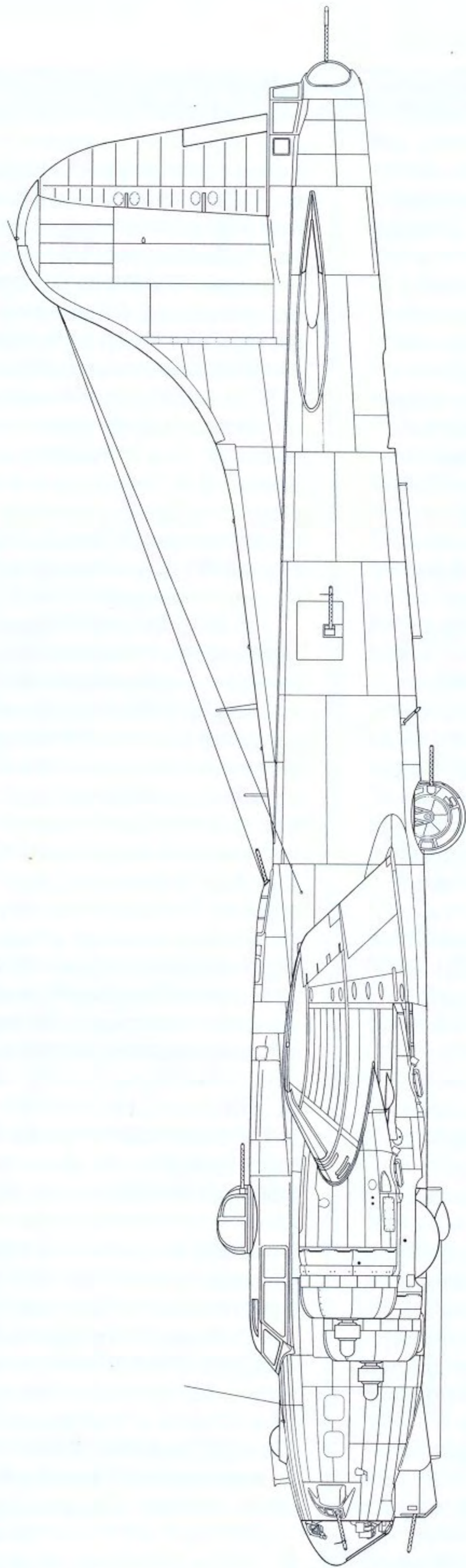
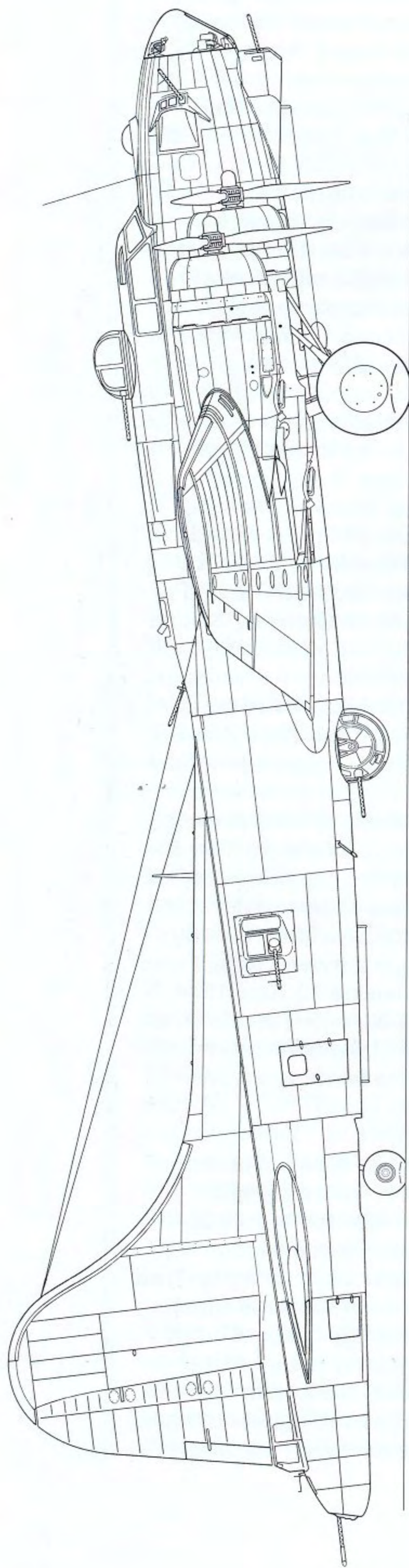


B-17F-75-DL/G-5-DL



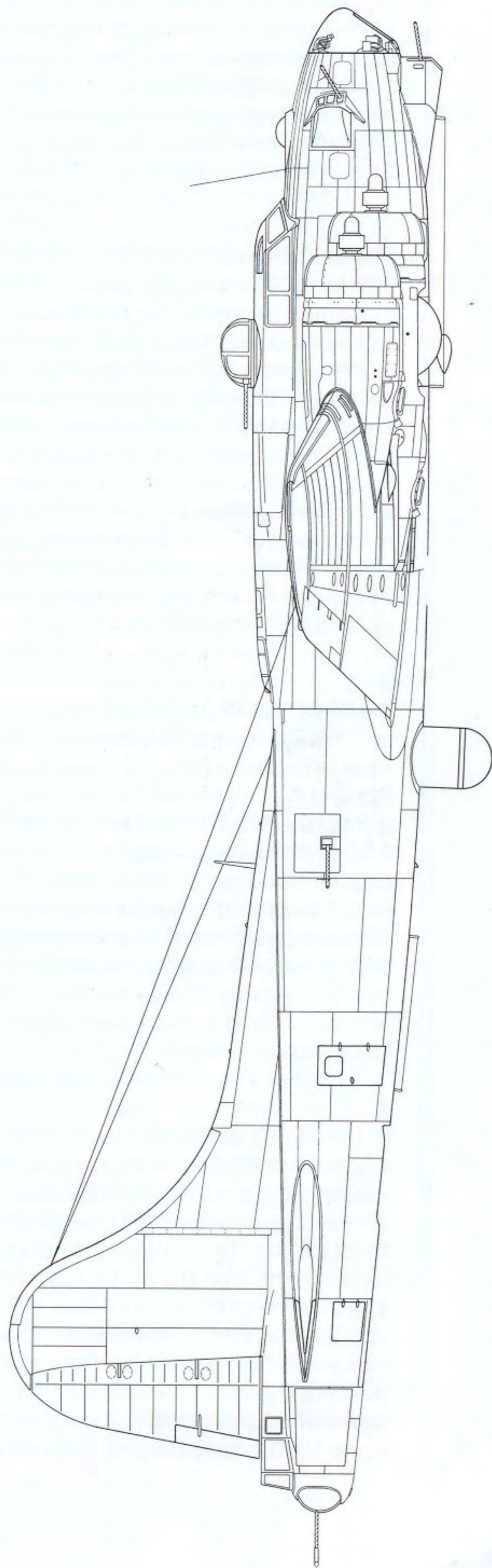
B-17G-15-BO

B-17G-30-BO



B-17G-70-BO

B-17G-50-VE Mickey Ship



COLOUR PLATES

1

B-17F-25-DL 42-3082 *Double Trouble* of the 333rd BS/94th BG, Bury St Edmunds (Rougham), October 1943

This Fortress certainly lived up to its name, pilot Lt Bill Winnesheik being forced to abort the mission to Bremen on 25 June 1943 after fighters knocked out two engines. He landed in England despite a full bomb load. On 4 October 1943, during a mission to St Dizier, in France, fighters again disabled the No 3 engine, and this time the propeller refused to feather. However, the crew managed to crash-land at Margate – the bomber was duly salvaged.

Assistant engineer/waist gunner Vance Van Hooser, who was on his 23rd mission, was hit in the head by 20 mm shell fragments and never flew again.

2

B-17F-80-BO 42-30207 *BIG RED* of the 561st BS/388th BG, Knettishall, Spring 1944

2Lt Julius Lederman's crew flew this aircraft's last mission, to Bordeaux, on 27 March 1944, *BIG RED*, in the high squadron, suffering a fire in the radio room at 1338 hrs just before reaching the target.

The bomber left the formation, circled, and finally went into a steep dive. Six parachutes were seen before the aircraft crashed at Aicenay, 20 miles north-west of Roche-sur-You. Sgt B H Herman, the radio operator, and three of the gunners died.

Seven of the crewmen were on only their second mission, while navigator 2Lt J J Carrol, who ended up as a PoW, was on his first.

3

B-17F-85-BO 42-30080 *HIGH LIFE* of the 351st BS/100th BG, Thorpe Abbots, August 1943

HIGH LIFE is depicted as it appeared after it became the first B-17 to make a forced landing in Switzerland during the Regensburg mission on 17 August 1943.

A 20 mm shell exploded within the No 3 engine nacelle, cutting the throttle cable and causing an oil leak. The pilot, 1Lt Donald K Oakes, feathered the propeller, but was then advised by ball turret gunner S/Sgt Leslie D Nadeau of another major oil leak in the No 2 engine. The aircraft could not keep formation, so a forced landing was made and the crew was interned.

4

B-17F-95-BO 42-30235 *The ZOOT SUITERS* of the 412th BS/95th BG, Horham, late 1943

Initially, this aircraft (which was also known for a time as *Lonesome Polecat*) was assigned to the 401st BS/91st BG at Bassingbourn, but it was transferred to the 95th BG on 16 June 1943. At Horham, *The ZOOT SUITERS* was flown by Capt (later Lt Col) William 'Catfish', or 'Wild Bill', Lindley, whose crew had survived the infamous Kiel raid of 13 June 1943 (when the group lost ten B-17s) flying 42-29967. A 'zoot suit' was a gentleman's outfit popular in the US in the 1940s, consisting of baggy trousers with very

tapered bottoms and a long jacket with wide padded shoulders. Lindley's crew performed the bomber's first operational mission on 22 June 1943. On 16 September Lindley force-landed a battle-damaged *The ZOOT SUITERS* at Great Ashfield. Soon repaired, the bomber was used by Lindley for the last time when he flew it as lead pilot on the 10 October mission to Münster. He remembers;

'This was the first American mission where the target was the city itself and not an industrial complex. One of the purposes of the strike was to destroy a university in the city centre. Apparently, it was being used as a centre for developing hard-line Nazis. Some of the crews had misgivings about using the city centre as an aiming point. Not me. I thought it was great.'

The ZOOT SUITERS failed to take off on 16 November 1943 and the crew was forced to hastily use a spare. On 16 December it force-landed at Bungay, and six days later the bomber's No 4 propeller ran away. The supercharger failed on 4 January 1944, and on the 3 February mission the aircraft could not maintain position in the formation. On 21 February its No 2 supercharger failed and the No 4 engine developed high oil pressure. *The Zoot Suiters* once again failed to take off on 4 March 1944, and four days later it developed fluctuating manifold pressure. Showing definite signs of battle fatigue, the weary bomber flew its final operational sortie on 26 March. 42-30235 was returned to the US at the end of the war and scrapped at Altus, in Oklahoma, in October 1945.

5

B-17F-95-BO 42-30301 *IDIOT'S DELIGHT* of the 332nd BS/94th BG, Bury St Edmunds (Rougham), and the 710th BS/447th BG, Rattlesden, April-June 1944

Originally issued to the 332nd BS/94th BG at Earls Colne on 5 June 1943 (the group moved to Bury St Edmunds eight days later), where it was christened *IDIOT'S DELIGHT*, this bomber was transferred to the 710th BS/447th BG at Rattlesden in April 1944. By then a multi-mission veteran, it survived until it was hit by flak over the Pas de Calais on 19 June 1944. Pilot 2Lt Theodore A Milton was forced to ditch the bomber in the Channel, where nine of its ten-man crew perished. One survived to become a PoW.

6

B-17F-100-BO 42-30412 *Mischief-Maker II* of the 339th BS/96th BG, Snetterton, Autumn 1943

Mischief-Maker II arrived at Snetterton in July 1943, and was soon assigned to Capt Vernon Iverson's crew. They had flown nine missions in their previous *Mischief-Maker* when they returned to base with it so badly shot up that they were told it would never fly again. The crew were eventually assigned the role of squadron lead for the 339th BS, with their bombardier, Capt Michael Arpaia, being responsible for a number of very accurate pinpoint bombing

missions against Germany. Capt Iverson was also something of a legend within the unit, and at one time he was bet a month's pay by a fellow pilot that he could not do a full loop in a B-17. He promptly took the *Mischief-Maker II* up on a 'training mission' and won the bet, making him one of the few pilots capable of this feat. All the crew completed their tours and returned home safely. *Mischief-Maker II's* combat career ended during the Eighth Air Force's first raid to Berlin on 4 March 1944. Piloted by Lt Herring, it was attacked by fighters and finally crashed at Vegenstedt, although all of the crew survived – five became PoWs and six successfully evaded.

7

B-17F-115-BO 42-30715 *Cincinnati Queen* of the 569th BS/390th BG, Framlingham, early 1944

Delivered to the AAF in Denver, Colorado, on 17 July 1943, this aircraft joined the 390th BG at Great Falls Army Air Base just days later, and had flown to England with the group by month-end. Assigned to the 569th BS, and coded 'CC-Y', the bomber was also subsequently named *Blues In the Night*. On 21 June 1944 *Cincinnati Queen* went missing with 2Lt Malcolm M Dinsmore's crew on the mission to Berlin. Although pilot Dinsmore was killed, the remaining nine members of the crew survived as PoWs.

8

B-17F-120-BO 42-30758 "*Rosie's Riveters*" of the 418th BS/100th BG, Thorpe Abbots, 1943-44

42-30758 "*Rosie's Riveters*" was named by pilot Robert Rosenthal for the girls back home who built the AAF's heavy bombers. "*Rosie*" and Rosenthal's crew made their combat debut on the disastrous mission to Bremen on 8 October 1943, when the 'Bloody Hundredth' lost seven B-17s. "*Rosie's Riveters*" needed extensive repairs following the mission before it could return to operational status. The bomber was subsequently lost on the 4 February 1944 mission to Frankfurt whilst being flown by Lt Ross McPhee's crew. Hit by flak, the B-17 crashed near Wiesbaden. All ten crewmen, who were on their ninth mission, bailed out and became PoWs.

9

B-17F-120-BO 42-30827 *ROUND-TRIP TICKET III* of the 549th BS/385th BG, Great Ashfield, Autumn 1943

ROUND TRIP TICKET III is shown in the 385th BG markings that were adopted by the group in the Autumn of 1943. The gunners that crewed this aircraft lodged no fewer than 11 fighter kill claims during the course of 21 combat missions. The bomber's national marking features the short-lived red surround to the 'star and bars'. This aircraft later featured yellow prop bosses as utilised by the 549th BS – the 548th, 550th and 551st used blue, red and bright green, respectively. The 385th BG was unique within the Eighth Air Force for never adorning its B-17s with the three-letter squadron codes that were assigned to it.

10

B-17G-1-BO 42-31053 *STINGY* of the 338th BS/96th BG, Snetterton Heath, early 1944

Assigned to the 338th BS/96th BG on 29 September 1943 and placed in the care of crew chief Joe Rotelli, *STINGY*, flown by Stan Litty's crew, completed many missions. Although said to have been named by Maj Gen Frederick L Anderson, Deputy CO of Operations USSTAF (one among many who attended the group's 100th mission party at Snetterton on 1 April 1944) in honour of his son, one crew who flew it regularly called themselves the 'flying misers'. On 11 October 1944 *STINGY*, flown by Lt Nickolas Jorgenson, was lost during a training flight. One of three veteran Fortresses flying in formation in cloud and rain over Northamptonshire, *STINGY* was involved in an horrific mid-air collision. The accident was triggered when the pilot of B-17G 42-3510 pulled up and hit the nose of B-17G 43-37684 with its tail section. Just as '510 sheared in half, *STINGY* hit '684 with its rudder and also broke in two. Miraculously, Lt Jack C Core of the 337th BS, who was piloting '510, parachuted to safety, while his B-17 and *STINGY* plummeted to earth at Woodend, west of Towcester, in four sections. Core's four crewmen were killed, as was Jorgenson and his six-man crew. Although badly damaged, 43-37684 was able to limp back to Snetterton.

11

B-17F-75-DL 42-3547 *latest Rumor* of the 549th BS/385th BG, Great Ashfield, late 1943

This shark-mouthed B-17 was assigned to the 385th BG in the late summer of 1943 and named by the Vandiver crew. The patch below the forward window covered a hole punched through the fuselage by flak, which killed navigator Phil Vockerath. After months of near-daily missions to Germany, the aircraft was salvaged on 11 April 1944.

12

B-17F-75-DL 42-3547 *BLUE CHAMPAGNE* of the 549th BS/385th BG, Great Ashfield, early 1944

As with many other long-lived B-17s, 42-3547 was later renamed and its nose art modified when the bomber was assigned to a new crew. The *latest Rumor* script was painted out and replaced with the new name *BLUE CHAMPAGNE*, and although the female figure was kept, the colour of her clothing was changed and she was 'sat' in a glass and surrounded with bubbles. Note also that the sharkmouth was overpainted with standard camouflage colours. Anne Hayward painted the nose art on this machine, as she did with many other 385th BG B-17s. This aircraft should not be confused with the 385th's B-17G 42-37977, which was also named *Blue Champagne*.

13

B-17G-5-BO 42-31225 *SCHEHERAZADE* of the 709th BS/447th BG, Rattlesden, Spring 1945

One of the original B-17s assigned to the 447th BG in November 1943, *SCHEHERAZADE* completed an impressive 126 missions. It appears here in the

unit's late war markings, although the earlier chevron group marking has not been removed from the wing underside. Being an early G-model, the aircraft was modified 'in the field', hence the unpainted Cheyenne tail turret which replaced the original turret fitted by Boeing. *SCHEHERAZADE* survived the war and returned to the US on 4 July 1945.

14

B-17G-30-BO 42-31764 *WAR HORSE* of the 549th BS/385th BG, Great Ashfield, late 1944

Delivered to the 385th BG at Great Ashfield in April 1944, this B-17 was eventually assigned to Lt C H Lamping's crew in June 1944. As with all American bomber crews flying combat missions over Germany, Lamping and his men did not always fly in 'their' B-17. Indeed, the repairing of combat damage often kept a bomber out of action for days on end, forcing the crew to fly missions in whatever spare aircraft happened to be available at the time. A tour of duty for a crew in the Eighth Air Force was originally set at 25 missions, but this number was raised to 35 when the attrition rate amongst bombers and crews dramatically increased after D-Day. Seven of Lt Lamping's ten-man crew completed 35 missions. Those that did not were navigator Lt W W Dutt, who was killed by flak whilst bombing a V1 *Noball* site in France on his 15th mission, and Lt Roy Slaper and S/Sgt Marvin 'Skeet' Wolverton, both of whom were shot down over Berlin while flying their 35th mission as 'Spares' with another bomber crew. The *WAR HORSE* itself was destroyed on 11 November 1944 while being flown by another crew. It caught fire during a training sortie and eventually exploded in mid-air, although by that time three of its four-man crew had successfully bailed out. The pilot, who had stayed at the controls to allow the crew time to bail out, was killed.

Frank Reese Mays was the *WAR HORSE*'s ball turret gunner for a time in 1944;

'I remember painting the name *WAR HORSE* on the bomber's nose in yellow. I did not have enough paint to apply it in white – paint was difficult to come by in colours other than yellow! Indeed, I had to get hold of some "house paint" in order to paint the horse grey. Dull black was also available, as it was used by maintenance. Notice the patch under the letter "A" – that patch covered the shrapnel hole through which a piece of flak hit the navigator and killed him! I worked on the picture of the horse in two separate sessions, one day after the other, when we were grounded for repairs. I guess it took me all of about four hours to complete, and I had NOTHING to go by! I painted the picture by sitting up close to the bomber's nose on the top step of a step-ladder – and all from my memory of what I thought an old "Nag" should look like! I was a farm boy – or rather a country boy – from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia remember!

'On one mission we came back with over 250 holes in the wings and fuselage. The holes ranged

in size from one that was as big as the end of a pencil to another so large that I could crawl through it! That hole was behind the No 3 engine, slightly toward the fuselage, and about five feet from where I sat in the ball turret. The vertical rudder had about a dozen patches. There was also a patch that covered a hole just about a foot away from my head in the ball turret! That is one reason why we named the bomber the *WAR HORSE*. It looked like it had been through many battles, and I guess that was true.

'The small squadron ID letter applied to each bomber was used in combination with the squadron ID colour. Each of the four squadrons within the 385th BG was colour coded, Yellow, Blue, Red and Green. The letter usually stood for the name given to the bomber so that it could be readily identified in flight. For instance, the 549th BS was the "Yellow" squadron, and on the *WAR HORSE* the tail letter "S" stood for the nickname "Sugar".

'It was a requirement on all combat missions for the lead bomber to have a pilot sat in the tail gunner's position so that he could watch all the aircraft forming on his B-17. This was an ideal position from which to spot bombers that were shot down, or those which dropped out of formation. The lead bomber tail gunner pilot then knew exactly which aircraft had left the formation, and he could relay this to the lead pilot. He could also instruct other bombers within the formation to move into the positions vacated by aircraft that had dropped out or been shot down. He also watched the formation to ensure that individual bombers were not too close or too far from wing aircraft. This assured the best possible bomb pattern on the ground, and kept bombers from flying into each other. All this directing was done over the formation command radio frequency.

'Every so often – when things quieted down – I would switch my headset over to the command frequency to listen to the numerous conversations going on between the bombers. I well remember hearing the lead bomber tail gunner pilot say, "'Yellow Sugar' (the *WAR HORSE*), move up to element lead to replace 'Yellow Devil' – and watch that right wing as 'Yellow Dog' is a little erratic with turbulence".'

15

B-17G-30-BO 42-31767 *Our Gal Sal* of the 338th BS/100th BG, Thorpe Abbots, early 1945

Originally assigned to 2Lt Robert J Shoens' crew, who completed their tour on 1 May 1944, this aircraft went on to fly over 100 missions – its bomb log ran the length of the starboard fuselage and was continued on the port side. 42-31767's nose art and bomb log were applied by assigned groundcrewman Frank Stevens. *Our Gal Sal* is depicted at the end of hostilities, by which time it had been retrofitted with staggered waist gun positions. The bomber has been adorned with full tail markings, which formed part of the insignia adopted by the 13th CBW in early 1945.

16**B-17G-35-BO 42-31971 *Twenty one or Bust* of the 570th BS/390th BG, Framlingham, early 1944**

Originally named *Bad Penny*, *Twenty one or Bust* enjoyed only a brief combat career that lasted just over three months – a little short of the average four months and twelve days for a typical Eighth Air Force B-17. Assigned to the 385th on 4 February 1944, the bomber was lost with the Cockrean crew on the 13 April mission to Augsburg. Hit by flak, the bomber crashed at Gilze-Rijen, in Holland. Cockrean and another crewman were killed, and the remaining eight became PoWs. *Twenty one or Bust* is depicted after having flown 13 combat missions, by which time its crew had been credited with three fighter kills. The bomber boasts a 12-inch yellow nose band to denote its assignment to the 570th BS, sister-squadrons the 568th, 569th and 571st using red, blue and bright green stripes, respectively.

17**B-17G-15-DL 42-37886 *Blitzing Betsy* of the 562nd BS/388th BG, Knettishall, March 1944**

Blitzing Betsy was assigned to the 388th BG in late October 1943. Having flown two or three missions with other crews, it was permanently assigned to the Lowell Watts crew of the 562nd BS in early December. Its new crew duly picked the name *Blitzing Betsy* because several of them had wives or girlfriends named Betty or Betsy. The Watts crew and *Blitzing Betsy* subsequently flew 22 missions together to such targets as Bremen, Keil, Munster, Frankfurt and Solingen. They also participated in four missions during 'Big Week', which included going to Poznan twice and Regensburg once. On 6 March 1944 four members of the Watts crew prepared to fly their 25th, and last, mission before rotating home. Their target was Berlin, and 69 of the bombers sortied that day would not return – the largest single day loss suffered by the Eighth Air Force in World War 2. One of those 69 was *Blitzing Betsy*. After a 'snafu' in the target area caused the 388th's crews to miss their escort home, they were hit hard by Luftwaffe fighters over the German/Dutch border. A head-on attack by Fw 190s saw *Blitzing Betsy's* cockpit shattered by exploding 20 mm shells. Seconds later the front end of the bomber was engulfed in flames, which were fed by shattered fuel, hydraulic and oxygen lines. The tail was also shot to pieces by simultaneous attacks from the rear, injuring the tail gunner. Out of control, the aircraft nosed up and collided with the Group/Wing leader, before becoming inverted and diving away. Minutes later it exploded in mid-air. The pilot, Lowell Watts, co-pilot Robert Kennedy and navigator Emmett Murphy all managed to bail out before the bomber exploded, while the remaining four survivors were blown out when the aircraft disintegrated. Four crewmen perished, however – tail gunner Harold Brassfield, waist gunners Donald Taylor and Ray Hess (who was also blown out, but without his parachute) and ball turret gunner Robert Sweeney. Six of the survivors were captured and made PoWs for the duration.

Watts, Murphy, Taylor and Brassfield were on their 25th mission, while the rest of the crew were flying their 22nd, 23rd or 24th.

18**B-17G-10-VE 42-39970 "*E-RAT-ICATOR*" of the 730th BS/452nd BG, Deopham Green, Spring 1945**

E-RAT-ICATOR was one of the Eighth Air Force's most famous Fortresses. Assigned to the 452nd on 3 November 1943, this aircraft was the only original B-17 issued to the group to survive the war, completing 125 missions before returning to the US in June 1945. Depicted towards the end of hostilities, its nose is adorned with four ribbons – the Good Conduct Medal, Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal and Purple Heart, all of which were awarded to members of its crew. The B-17 was scrapped at Kingman, in Arizona, in November 1945, after being issued to the 4168th Base Unit (BU) at South Plains.

19**B-17G-40-BO 42-97093 *DOC'S FLYING CIRCUS* of the 568th BS/390th BG, Framlingham, early 1944**

Also known as *Girl of My Dreams* (from June 1944) and *I'll Get By* (from July 1944), this aircraft returned to the US on 29 June 1945, having served with the group from 3 March 1944. Passed to the 4168th BU at South Plains, it was scrapped at Kingman in December 1945.

20**B-17G-45-BO 42-97230 "*LAY OR BUST*" of the 418th BS/100th BG, Thorpe Abbots, February 1945**

Briefly assigned to the 1st AD's 398th BG, based at Nuthampstead, "*LAY OR BUST*" transferred to the 100th BG on 28 April 1944. Remaining in the frontline through to February 1945, the bomber was badly damaged on the Münster raid on the 19th of that month when its pilot, 2Lt Wade D Pratt, crash landed in Belgium. "*LAY OR BUST*" was duly salvaged on the spot and the crew returned to Thorpe Abbots to resume flight operations. The aircraft is seen at the time of its loss, sporting the then standard 100th BG markings. These were soon to be replaced by the 13th BW bands, coloured black to represent the group. Unit codes were retained, but very late in the war coloured nose bands were added – blue for the 349th, yellow for the 350th, bright green for the 351st and red for the 418th.

21**B-17G-35-VE 42-97873 *SACK HAPPY* of the 563rd BS/388th BG, Knettishall, Spring 1944**

On 20 June 1944, whilst on a mission to Magdeburg, 42-97873 was involved in a mid-air collision with B-17G 42-97820, flown by 1Lt R C McGrath. The accident happened as the bombers approached the French coast at 18,000 ft, *SACK HAPPY* inexplicably going out of control. The B-17s collided and then hit a second time. The least damaged, *SACK HAPPY* returned to base. McGrath's bomber fell from 18,000 ft to 11,000 ft before the pilots could bring it under control. The tail gunner was physically pulled back through a narrow opening into the main part of

the aircraft during the dive. Once back over England the crew bailed out, and the B-17 crashed into the sea four miles north-east of Cromer, in Norfolk. On 24 February 1945, 42-97873, flown by Lt Maurice F Radtke, suffered an accident whilst in the process of taking off on a mission to Bremen – the crew escaped without injury. The aircraft was salvaged the following day.

22

B-17G-35-DL 42-107091 *Forbidden Fruit* of the 728th BS/452nd BG, Deopham Green, Spring 1944

Assigned to the 452nd BG in March 1944 (just a month after the group had made its combat debut with the Eighth Air Force), this aircraft was salvaged after it was badly damaged over Belgium on 20 May 1944. The bomber's radio operator during its brief frontline career was S/Sgt John P Chopelas, who remembers;

'It was a "brand new" natural metal finish aeroplane when it was assigned to my crew. It was "love at first sight" for all of us. My pilot, 2Lt Edward M Skurka remarked that it handled extremely well, and my radio room was "state of the art" for that time. Unfortunately, the bomber enjoyed only a brief life – nine missions to be precise, with our first in it being flown on 10 April. Our last was on 20 May, when flak damage caused us to lose all rudder control, most of the aileron function and all hydraulic pressure (with resultant lack of brakes). Shrapnel also badly damaged the bomb-bay, prematurely releasing the bombs. The oxygen system had also been rendered inoperable, and flak had punctured much of my radio room. I was fortunate to have been standing up when the burst exploded in the bomb-bay because had I been sitting at my usual position at the table, the shrapnel that riddled my radio receiver would have "perforated" me as well. The pilot would have preferred a belly landing upon our return to England, but he feared a fire or explosion from all the fuel that was leaking. As it was, as soon as we touched down we began skidding, colliding with a crash truck and killing its driver. Part of the tail-gunner's position also broke off when we landed.

'I remember seeing S/Sgt John R Tinker's body lying half out of the exposed tail section – he had been killed instantly by the first flak burst. I don't think Tinker knew what hit him. It was certainly an instantaneous death. Aside from the pilot and co-pilot, the rest of the crew had taken up crash-landing positions in the radio room, above which was situated an escape hatch. We all quickly exited through this as soon as the B-17 came to a stop. I think all of us expected an explosion or fire, but fortunately neither occurred.

'At briefing, we had been told that this mission was supposed to be a so-called "milk run" – a brief flight to La Glacerie, in France, to bomb a *Crossbow* (V1) target. So much for "milk runs". I spent a week in the hospital recovering from a head wound, and an additional week at Bucklands Manor rest home (or the "flak house", as we called it), after which I went on to fly 24 more missions, completing my

tour on 29 July 1944. As for *Forbidden Fruit*, she was consigned to the Deopham Green "graveyard" to be stripped of parts to replace those damaged in other B-17s. But it was in *Forbidden Fruit* that tail gunner Tinker was credited with destroying a Ju 88 and bombardier Herbert Martin with shooting down an Fw 190. Both victories were scored on 11 April during the mission to Rostock, when we were attacked by three waves of German fighters.'

23

B-17G-40-VE 42-97976 *A BIT O' LACE* of the 709th BS/447th BG, Rattlesden, late 1944

42-97976 *A BIT O' LACE* carried one of the most famous examples of nose art ever applied to a B-17. It was painted by armourer Nicholas H Fingelly of the 709th BS, who produced about ten artworks. Fingelly had been approached in October 1944 by the aircraft's pilot Lt John H Bauman after his crew wrote to Milton Caniff asking permission to use the 'Miss Lace' pose from his very popular Army strip cartoon, *Male Call*. Caniff was so impressed that he sent the crew a personalised 19 in x 4 in sketch to use as a master for the artwork. Fingelly took between five and six hours to paint the fetching comic strip character across the left nose surface of Bauman's aircraft, which by the end of the war had flown 83 missions. Brought back to the US in July 1945, the bomber was flown by a skeleton crew (including Fingelly) to South Plains, in Texas, where it was stored until sold for scrap at Kingman in October 1945.

24

B-17G-40-VE 42-98008 *AMERICAN BEAUTY* of the 834th BS/486th BG, Sudbury (Acton), late 1944

This Vega-built Fortress was assigned to Lt Harry Paynter and crew in August 1944 when the group converted from B-24H/Js to the B-17G. The 834th BS had the distinction of losing no aircraft or crews on its first 100 missions from 7 May 1944 to the first B-17 mission on 1 August 1944. The bomber's striking nose art was painted by Philip S Brinkman, a pre-war commercial artist whom Maj Winfred D Howell, CO of the 834th BS, had transferred to the group just before the unit left for England in the spring of 1943. Brinkman painted many of the group's B-24s (including the famous 12 'Zodiacs') and B-17s such as *Piccadilly Lilly* and *Pistol Packin' Mama*. 42-98008 flew its first operational sortie (as the lead ship of the high squadron) on 1 August 1944 when the 486th BG made its combat debut with the B-17 during a raid on Tours airfield. It would fly a further 60 missions before the Eighth Air Force stood down on 21 April 1945. An early block G-model, 42-98008 was modified 'in the field' through the fitment of a Cheyenne tail turret. *AMERICAN BEAUTY* was returned to the US in July 1945 and salvaged at Kingman in 1946.

25

B-17G-50-DL 43-37893 *Betty Jo* of the 550th BS/385th BG, Great Ashfield, February 1945

Betty Jo was assigned to the 385th BG on 26 June

1944, and the bomber is depicted in the group's late war 93rd CBW markings. These were adopted in February 1945, and consisted of red wing stripes and red tail chequers. This aircraft has a replacement rudder salvaged from a painted B-17, *Betty Jo* having been involved in a mid-air collision with B-17G 43-38233 of the 549th BS on Christmas Eve 1944. Despite serious damage, the bomber was coaxed back to base and repaired. *Betty Jo* flew 78 missions without an abort, a record for which its crew chief, M/Sgt Joseph W Zorzoli, was awarded the Bronze Star. The bomber's pilot also named the B-17 after Zorzoli's baby daughter, Judith.

26

B-17G-75-BO 43-37899 RACK and RUIN of the 835th BS/486th BG, Sudbury, early 1945

RACK and RUIN flew its first combat mission on 1 August 1944 to Tours airfield, this mission also marking the combat debut of the 486th with the B-17. Originally assigned to the 833rd BS, 43-37899 was then transferred to the 835th, with whom it flew its first mission on 24 August. The bomber would complete a further 72 missions for the 486th until it was damaged in an accidental wheels up landing on 6 February 1945. Once repaired, the veteran Fortress was transferred to the 398th BG. Its nose art depicts the Wolfman character from the 1941 Lon Chaney film of the same name. The 36-inch nose band, in Insignia Green, represents the 835th BS. The other squadron colours were yellow (832nd BS), blue (833rd BS) and red (834th BS).

27

B-17G-75-BO 43-37907 Carolina Moon of the 851st BS/490th BG, Eye (Brome), late 1944

Delivered by Boeing to Cheyenne on 3 June 1944, this Fortress arrived at Eye on 2 July, where it was assigned to Raymond M Blankenkenbecker's crew – their earlier B-24J (42-94944) had also been named *Carolina Moon*. The B-17 subsequently passed to Lt Adolph A Barnes' crew within the 848th BS, who arrived at Eye in December 1944. Several members of its new crew painted wives' and girlfriends' names under the aircraft's windows. *Rita* was applied under the left waist gunner's position, used by S/Sgt Louis A Trapolino, and *LORRAINE* appeared beneath the rudder. Tail gunner S/Sgt Robert H Cosgray had a big red heart, along with the line *HAVE A HEART*, painted above his rear turret installation, whilst the navigator had the names *Adeline & Suzy* marked above his window for his wife and daughter. Finally, the nose gun boasted the titling *Eagle's Nest* for toggelier S/Sgt Leo Eagle, and the swastika denoted the destruction of an Me 262 by the gunners. 2Lt Otis G Lancaster flew *Carolina Moon* back to the US in mid-1945, and it was sold for scrap at Kingman in December of that year.

28

B-17G-80-BO 43-38223 DAYS PAY of the 410th BS/94th BG, Bury St Edmunds (Rougham), March 1945

Manufactured by Boeing and delivered to the AAF on 12 July 1944, this B-17 cost about \$300,000 to

build, and all 51,000 employees at the Hanford Engineering Works at Richland, in Washington, contributed a full day's pay in order to buy it. The christening ceremony (the traditional breaking of a bottle over one of the propeller bosses) was performed by Mrs K B Harris, a company employee whose son, Lt J E Harris, had been lost in action over Germany in April 1944. On 23 July the B-17 flew to Hanford Airport, Washington, where it was christened *DAYS PAY*. Flown on to Kearney Field, Nebraska, it was assigned to the crew of Nelson W Warner for ferrying to England. Once in theatre, Warner and his men were sent to the 94th BG at Rougham, while *DAYS PAY* was allocated to the 862nd BS/493rd BG, and assigned to Lt Arly Wineinger's crew. It flew more than 50 missions with this group prior to transferring to the 94th BG following the de-activation of the 862nd BS in February 1945. *DAYS PAY* continued flying in the UK until July 1945, by which time it had completed 67 missions.

29

B-17G-85-BO 43-38286 Flying Dutchman of the 7th BS/34th BG, Mendlesham, early 1945

Delivered to Cheyenne on 17 July 1944, this aircraft flew to Kearney Field, Nebraska, 11 days later, and then on to Grenier on 6 August. Having arrived in the UK by the 18th of that month, the bomber was duly assigned to the 7th BS at Mendlesham. During the course of a lengthy combat tour, the bomber would complete 83 missions, the first of which was flown on 17 September – this was also the 34th BG's first B-17 mission following its transition from the B-24. On this day, the group flew in support of the ill-fated battle for the bridge at Arnhem, 43-38286 being piloted by Claire Zarfoss. It was his crew that named the bomber *Flying Dutchman*, due to the fact that so many of its members hailed from Pennsylvania. During its time in the UK, *Flying Dutchman* was 'home' to at least four crews, who flew the whole gamut of missions, including raids on marshalling yards, airfields and industrial targets. They also flew ground support missions. The bomber ended its European service by flying a food drop to Holland on 7 May 1945. It was then returned to the US by Don McCutchan's nine-man crew – the bomber also carried an additional 11 passengers, and there are rumours of a raucous time being had in the radio compartment on the return trip. Arriving at Bradley Field, in Connecticut, on 21 June, the B-17 was duly issued to the 4168th BU at South Plains, before being sent to Kingman in December 1945 for scrapping.

30

B-17G-85-BO 43-38317 FLAK EVADER of the 334th BS/95th BG, Horham, May 1945

FLAK EVADER was assigned to the 95th BG on 12 August 1944, and the bomber is depicted as it appeared at the end of the war after completing 77 combat missions. The B-17 features the full late war 95th BG coloured markings, comprising a red tail and wing stripe. When these markings were

introduced, the group stopped using its assigned fuselage codes in favour of 12-inch nose bands in yellow, dark blue, bright green or red.

31**B-17G-90-BO 43-38478 *HOTTER 'N HELL* of the 570th BS/390th BG, Framlingham, early 1945**

HOTTER N' HELL was assigned to the 390th BG on 11 September 1944, and it survived combat to return to the US in July of the following year. It is adorned with the revised late war 13th CBW fin markings, which originally comprised a broad band running parallel to the rear edge of the rudder. In practice, this was difficult to apply, as the existing markings had to be masked out. To simplify matters, later aircraft had only their rudders painted in the group colour. Lt Claude Hall was the pilot of *HOTTER N' HELL* at the end of its combat career.

32**B-17G-90-BO 43-38525 *MISS CONDUCT* of the 418th BS/100th BG, Thorpe Abbots, Spring 1945**

Delivered to Cheyenne on 12 August 1944, this aircraft was assigned to the 482nd BG at Alconbury on 8 September. Transferred to Thorpe Abbots the following day, it became 'LD-A' within the 418th BS. Returning to the US on 2 June 1945, the B-17 was issued to the 4168th BU at South Plains and finally to the 237th BU at Kirtland, before being scrapped in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in February 1946.

33**B-17G-95-BO 43-38728 *£5 with BREAKFAST* of the 851st BS/490th BG, Eye (Brome), early 1945**

On 29 December 1944 Lt William G Sutton's crew arrived at Eye (Brome) and were assigned B-17G-95-BO 43-38728 *£5 with BREAKFAST* of the 851st BS – the aircraft had been with the squadron since 19 October. Who was responsible for its unique nickname remains unknown, probably because it refers to the arrangement charged by one of London's 'Piccadilly Commandos'! *£5 with BREAKFAST* returned to the US in July 1945 and was issued to the 4168th BU at South Plains, before being sold for scrap in November of that same year.

34**B-17G-100-BO 43-38991 *Sweet Seventeen* of the 4th BS/34th BG, Mendlesham, Spring 1945**

Sweet Seventeen flew its first mission on 17 September 1944 and its 80th, and last, on 7 May 1945. Its crew chief was Dexter Burwell Jordan, who had originally serviced and maintained the B-24 *The Near Sighted Robin*, as well as various B-17s. He was awarded the Bronze Star for sending his aeroplanes out on more than 100 combat missions without them having to abort due to mechanical failure.

35**B-17G-70-DL 44-6968 *SONOF-A-BLITZ* of the 863rd BS/493rd BG, Debach, early 1945**

1Lt Donald J Schmitt of the 863rd BS/493rd BG arrived at Debach in early November 1944, and first flew B-17G-70-DL 44-6968 on 14 February 1945 – his

15th mission, to the marshalling yards at Chemnitz. As soon as he heard that his son David had been born, on 27 March 1945, he named the aircraft *SONOF-A-BLITZ*, and he had the stork carrying the baby added. The following account of various raids was taken from Schmitt's diary;

'We hit the same target twice in a row. Again, it was a long and tiresome mission. We flew our new ship for the first time (44-6968). The weather was again against us. Contrails were dense and persistent, and we had to fly a very tight formation in order to hold the squadron together. We got a lot of flak on the way back from the Frankfurt-Koblenz area. We bombed through a solid undercast.

'Mission 31, 7 April 1945. Target, Gustrow ordnance plant. We are getting close to the end of our time, but things are starting to get rough.

'Mission 34, 15 April 1945. Target, Royan, France. Heart of City. Well, two "Milk Runs" in a row, and I sure am glad. The target today was the same as yesterday. Today we assembled in France. Our route took us over Paris. It sure is a nice looking city. Very much congestion in target area. Results were very good. It was again a visual run. We had a little flak thrown up at us. We had a squadron above us with their bomb doors open. They had to make a second run. Tomorrow is the day I have been anxiously waiting for. I sure hope we fly.

'Mission 35, 16 April 1945. Target, Roquefort, France. German pocket. Easy mission, and our last. I'm so happy I can't even write anything.'

36**B-17G-75-VE 44-8629 *PURTY Chili* of the 391st BS/34th BG, Mendlesham, Spring 1945**

Harold E Province was a member of the crew assigned to B-17G 44-8629;

'I flew most of my 19 missions as a toggelier in *PURTY Chili*, plus two food-drops to Holland and then back to the US in this aircraft. *PURTY Chili* had been completed by Boeing on 9 November 1944 and assigned to the 391st BS/34th BG, arriving in early December. It was issued to the Dean Hansen crew, who finished their tour with it, and was then reassigned to the William H Wilcox crew, who flew the bomber until VE-Day, and later back to the USA. Other crews used the bomber when the assigned crew was on pass (leave) or stood down.

'Of the 68 missions the 34th BG flew after *PURTY Chili* was assigned, the bomber was involved in 58 of them, including six of the *Chowhound* missions (dropping food to Dutch civilians). It also flew several PoW and displaced-persons flights, in addition to bombing targets in Germany.

'The source of its name is an enigma! One story claims it was applied in honour of well-endowed Hollywood starlet, Chili Williams, whose photo appeared on many of the crew hut walls, clad in a polka-dotted two-piece bathing suit. The other story is that as the Hansen crew was checking out the aircraft, the co-pilot inquired of each crewman how it was at his position? Reportedly, the tail gunner's reply was always "Purty Chili back here"! Hence

the crew selected *PURTY Chili* as the name for their aircraft. And the Wilcox crew saw no reason to make a change. I wrote my girl's name just behind the left cheek gun – we married different people by the way! I painted, with black paint, *ILA* in letters about three inches high immediately above the P of *PURTY Chili*. Regardless of the source of the name, in the few months of its life, the bomber had flown the Atlantic twice, delivered tons of bombs, food and people to their destination, and, by December 1945, was in Kingman awaiting destruction. A sad end for such a noble aircraft!

37**B-17G-75-VE 44-8694 DINAH MITE of the 487th BG, Lavenham, Spring 1945**

Delivered to Lincoln on 26 November 1944, and assigned to the 487th BG on 2 February 1945, this B-17 returned to the US in June of that year and was sold for scrap at Kingman six months later.

38**B-17G-80-VE 44-8702 FOREVER AMBER of the 838th, 836th, 837th BSs/487th BG, Lavenham, 1945**

FOREVER AMBER served with three of the 487th's BG's four squadrons before it was lost, with Flt Off Max C Havenstein's crew, on 10 April 1945. Fighter

attacks over Germany killed one crewmember, and seven survived as PoWs and one evaded capture.

39**B-17G-75-DL 44-83254 Old Doc Stork of the 850th BS/490th BG, Eye (Brome), Spring 1945**

Old Doc Stork was assigned to the 490th on 15 February 1945, and flown in combat by Raymond E Rosenbaum's crew of the 850th BS. He remembers;

'The crew had just left the base theatre one night after seeing a cartoon titled "Old Doc Stork". We were trying out names for our new ship. I believe the ball gunner suggested "Old Doc Stork". This was accepted by the crew. The stork in the movie modified a pot-bellied stove that he wore for protection from flak when he delivered babies in combat areas. The ball gunner painted both the nose art and circular leather patches for our jackets.'

Back Cover**B-17G-70-BO 43-37775 OH! HARDLUCK of the 339th BS/96th BG, Snetterton Heath, Autumn 1944**

Assigned to the 339th BS on 19 June 1944, this aircraft was originally named *Hell's Chariot*. Used as a PFF aircraft with a radome instead of a ball turret, the bomber survived the war and returned to the US on 9 July 1945. It was scrapped at Kingman.

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