

Inspiring a Nation: The Story of the *Hell's Angels*

By Brian Rukes

RESEARCH NOTES:

1. Harry D. Gobrecht, *Might in Flight: Daily Diary of the Eighth Air Force's Hell's Angels 303rd Bombardment Group (H)*, 2d ed. (San Clemente, CA: The 303rd Bomb Group Association, Inc., 1997), 3, 21, 48. 58.

The First 300: Hell's Angels (London, William Clowes & Sons, Ltd., 1945), 4.

2. Cliff T. Bishop, *Fortresses of the Big Triangle First*, (Eisenham, Bishops Stortford, England: East Anglia Books, 1986), 12.

Boeing Webmaster, e-mail to author, 2 October 1998.

Special Note: Three hundred Boeing B-17F-**-BOs were produced and shipped from 30 May 1942 to 31 August 1942, bearing U.S. Army Air Corps numbers 41-24340 to 41-24639.

3. Irl E. Baldwin, "Hell's Angels: The Naming of a B-17" (photocopy), p. 1.

4. Gobrecht, *Might*, 69.

"Hell's Angels" ground crew chief Fabian S. Folmer, telephone interview by author, 01 October 1998, from his home in Osage, IA.

5. Original "Hell's Angels" pilot Irl E. Baldwin, telephone interview by author, 01 October 1998, from his home in Albuquerque, NM.

Gobrecht, *Might*, 68.

6. "Hell's Angels vs. Memphis Belle," <http://303rdbga.com/h-ha-mb.html>, internet website. (02 September 1998).

7. Baldwin, "Naming," p. 1. Gobrecht, *Might*, 69.

Special Note: Baldwin states that he originally proposed the name "Yakima Queen" or something to that effect since Yakima, WA, was his hometown. The remainder of the crew, having come from other parts of the nation, were less than enthusiastic about the name.

8. Bernie Kastenbaum, letter to the editor, Hell's Angels Newsletter, December 1990, 3.

Gobrecht, Might, 69.

Special Note: Kastenbaum did not paint the "Hell's Angels" artwork on the nose of the aircraft as was traditionally done. Instead, he painted it on the right side of the fuselage above and slightly behind the rear of the right wing. Kastenbaum's artwork was short-lived, though. In either late November or December of 1942, the 303rd issued orders that aircraft identification letters were to be painted on both sides of all its aircraft. These letters consisted of two which indicated the bombardment squadron and a third which was unique to each aircraft within that squadron. "VK" was slated as the 358th Bomb Squadron's identifiers, and "D" was selected as the "Hell's Angels" aircraft code. The problem with this order was that Kastenbaum's original artwork was in the location that the "VK" needed to be painted on the "Hell's Angels." Consequently, the original artwork had to be removed from #41-24577. However, this was delayed until the last possible moment since the aircraft letters were not placed on any of the group's aircraft until sometime in January 1943. Another complication was the promotion and transfer of Kastenbaum. On 19 December 1942, Kastenbaum was transferred to the First Bombardment Wing Headquarters and promoted to Staff Sergeant as a draftsman. Therefore, he could not repaint the artwork on the "Hell's Angels."

9. Gobrecht, Might, 69, 70.

10. Baldwin, interview, 01 October 1998.

Special Note: Baldwin wanted to close the door that separated the nose section from the cockpit, but he could not. That door had to remain open at all times during flight to allow the bombardier and navigator ease of leaving the aircraft in case they had to bail out.

11. Irl E. Baldwin, Albuquerque, letter to the author, 24 September 1998.

12. Original "Hell's Angels" pilot Irl E. Baldwin, telephone interview by author, 23 September 1998, Baldwin in his home at Albuquerque, NM.

Baldwin, interview, 01 October 1998. Baldwin, letter to the author, 24 September 1998.

Folmer, interview, 01 October 1998.

Special Note: Baldwin stated that the gunners took particular care to heat their guns and wipe them as clean as possible. The aircraft was fitted with thermometers that pegged out at fifty-four degrees below zero (Fahrenheit). These thermometers often pegged out right before the aircraft reached its highest altitude. Baldwin estimated that the actual air temperature when maximum altitude was attained was usually around sixty degree below zero (Fahrenheit). At those temperatures, despite what precautions were taken, the firing pins on the .50 caliber machine guns would often not snap down. Master Sergeant Fabian Folmer, the ground crew chief of the "Hell's Angels," stated that mechanically there were no other ways to remedy this problem; it was strictly climate related.

13. Baldwin, letter, 24 September 1998. Folmer, interview, 01 October 1998.

14. Baldwin, letter, 24 September 1998.

15. Baldwin, "Naming," p. 2. Baldwin, letter, 24 September 1998.

16. Baldwin, "Naming," p. 1.

17. Ernest R. McDowell, *Flying Fortress: The Boeing B-17* (Carrollton, Texas: Squadron/Signal Publications, 1987), 79.

Baldwin, "Naming," p. 2. Baldwin, letter, 24 September 1998.

Gobrecht, *Might*, 178, 179, 183, 329, 330. "Belle," internet site. First, 12. 14.

18. Irl E. Baldwin sortie record (photocopy).

Baldwin, "Naming," p. 2. Baldwin, interview, 23 September 1998.

Gobrecht, *Might*, 181, 182.

19. Charles A. Rawlings, "Six Sergeants Come Home," *The Saturday Evening Post*, 15 April 1944, 14, 15, 103.

Folmer, interview, 01 October 1998.

Baldwin, interview, 23 September 1998. Baldwin, "Naming," p. 2.

20. Rawlings, "Sergeants," 14, 103. Baldwin, "Naming," p. 2.

Special Note: Baldwin referred to the "Hell's Angels" air and ground crews collectively as being a "cohesive unit with a pride that can only be felt by having been a part of that team."

21. Ben R. Spears, letter to the editor, *Hell's Angels Newsletter*, February 1988, 2.

Rawlings, "Sergeants," 103.

Special Note: The ground crew members referred to stealing parts off of other aircraft for use on their own as "moonlight requisitioning" since this was usually done at night.

22. Fabian Folmer, orders to wear Legion of Merit, issued 03 February 1944. (photocopy)

Folmer, interview, 01 October 1998. Gobrecht, *Might*, 293, 326.

Special Note: On 22 September 1943, President Franklin Roosevelt indicated that M/Sgt. Folmer was to be awarded the Legion of Merit. Folmer was actually awarded the Legion of Merit on 6 December 1943. He went to London where General Ira Eaker, commander of the Eighth Air Force, pinned the Legion of Merit on him.

23. Gobrecht, *Might*, 241. Rawlings, "Sergeants," 103.

Special Note: Sergeant John R. Kosilla was responsible for the #3 engine on the "Hell's Angels." Three of the other ground crew members were individually responsible for the maintenance of the other three engines, one engine per person. Since those four men had their own engines to take care of, they put whatever name they wanted on the cowl of their engine. Kosilla, differing from the other three members who all put their girlfriend's names on their engines, Kosilla put the name of one of his sisters--Helene--on his engine.

24. William D. McSween, letter to the editor, *The Hell's Angels Newsletter*, December 1986, 5.

25. Gobrecht, *Might*, 282, 283.

26. 300, 12. Gobrecht, *Might*, 315.

27. "Hell's Angels Ground Crew Identified," *Hell's Angels Newsletter*, February 1988, 1.

Gobrecht, *Might*, 326.

Special Note: When signing the "Hell's Angels," many people wrote their names and addresses on the B-17, while others wrote phrases on it. Someone even wrote the name and address of a lady from Oklahoma City on the tail fin. One of the phrases painted on the side of the "Hell's Angels" was, fittingly, "Hell's Angels Bomb Group, European Theater of Operations, World's Most Famous Bomb Group." The idea of having people sign the aircraft came from the practice which first occurred at manufacturing plants. Someone at one of the plants got the idea of having people who built a landmark aircraft (such as the 1000th one built) sign it. This carried over to combat crews who decided to sign famous veteran aircraft.

28. Irl E. Baldwin, letter to the editor, *Hell's Angels Newsletter*, 2.

Baldwin, interview, 23 September 1998. Folmer, interview, 01 October 1998.

Rawlings, "Sergeants," 15, 103.

29. Rawlings, "Sergeants," qtd. on p. 103. Folmer, interview, 01 October 1998.

Special Note: Folmer commented that the men aboard "Hell's Angels" were treated like royalty everywhere they went. Also, while on the tour, they worked long hours since they were to talk to every shift of workers in the war factories, which were open long hours. In the article "Six Sergeants Come Home," Rawlings indicated that after the ground crew left "Hell's Angels" after landing, they returned to the bomber the next day to find that the Oklahoma City girls had covered it in lipstick and fingernail polish. The girls wrote their names and phone numbers on everything they could reach, including the propellers and exhaust manifolds. One even left a note inside the aircraft.

30. Peter M. Bowers, 50th Anniversary Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress: 1935-1985 (no city: Museum of Flight), 52.

Folmer, interview, 01 October 1998. Baldwin, interview, 23 September 1998.

31. Jeff Handwerker, assistant curator of the Stillwater Airport Memorial Museum, Inc., Stillwater, to Irl E. Baldwin, Albuquerque, 06 January 1996. (photocopy)

Special Note: "Hell's Angels" arrived at Searcy Field in Stillwater, OK, on 07 August 1945. The aircraft was sold to Paul Mantz, who intended to mount out along with numerous other World War II aircraft over gasoline service stations. The proposed names for the chain of service stations was the "Flying Service" or "Bomber Gas." It is unclear if Mantz ever mounted the "Hell's Angels" in such a fashion, but there was at least one B-17F mounted that way over a gasoline station near 39th Street and Pennsylvania in Oklahoma City.