

303rd BG(H) Combat Mission No. 20

6 March 1943

Target: Power Station & Adjacent Bridge, Lorient, France

Crews Dispatched: 18

Crews Lost: Lt. Plocher, 2 KIA, 7 POWs & 1 REP

Length of Mission: 7 hours, 15 minutes

Bomb Load: 5 x 1,000 lb H.E. M44 bombs

Bombing Altitude: 25,000 ft

Ammo Fired: 10,650 rounds

One B-17 failed to take off, #41-24562, *Sky Wolf*, 358BS-A (Lt. **Morales**). The brake drum broke while taxiing to take off, causing the right tire to blow out.

Another B-17 aborted the mission, #41-24587, *Bad Check*, 427BS-U, (Capt. **Southworth**). The No. 2 engine ran rough above 18,000 feet, the No. 3 supercharger was faulty, and the aircraft could not keep up with the formation.

Seventeen aircraft bombed the primary target. Good bombing results were reported, including direct hits on the railroad bridge near the aiming point which was a power plant.

Flak was reported as slight to moderate and inaccurate. There were a few enemy aircraft. Approximately six FW-190s were observed for a period of ten minutes beginning soon after the bombing run. There were eight encounters, but no claims were made.

One aircraft was missing - #42-5262, (*No Name*), 360BS. It was flying in the No. 3 position in the lead element and was hit by an FW-190 coming in out of the sun. The No. 1 engine was knocked out. It was last seen heading toward the French coast and was in control at the time. 1Lt. **Plocher** ditched the aircraft 40 miles off Lorient. 2Lt. C.A. **Tyler** and Sgt. R.L. **Stevenson**, were killed, and are listed on the Wall of Missing at Brittany American Cemetery and Cambridge American Cemetery respectively. Lt. **Plocher**, 2Lt. Ellera J. **Corwin**, 1Lt. William F. **Kahlden**, Jr., T/Sgt. Henry R. **Legge**, T/Sgt. Everett E. **Friese**, S/Sgt. Louis W. **Rheaume**, S/Sgt. Edwin L. **Matheson**, and S/Sgt. August E. **Tornow** were captured and became prisoners of war. S/Sgt. **Tornow** was later repatriated.

The Terrifying Last Mission of the Martin Plocher Crew

© *Hell's Angels Newsletter*, May 1999, Eddie Deerfield, Editor

Henry Legge, engineer on the ill-fated B-17 #42-5262, says he will never forget the horror of the mission to Lorient on March 6, 1943. In his words, "We were hit by an FW-190. The number one and two engines were knocked out. The co-pilot and left waist gunner were killed instantly. The navigator and the tailgunner were seriously wounded.

"We threw all the loose equipment out of the airplane, but continued losing altitude. Number four engine was overheating, and we were forced to make a water landing in the English Channel.

"We had three men (officers) in one dinghy and five men in the other one. We were in the water about 12 hours when a German boat picked us up and took us to Brest, France."

Seven of the surviving crew members spent the next 26 months as prisoners of war. The wounded tailgunner, A. E. Tornow, was repatriated by the Germans.

Pilot Martin E. Plocher, an accomplished writer, provided the Newsletter with a more detailed and graphic account of the event, which we edited to meet space requirements

It was a beautiful day, not a cloud in the sky. This was hard to believe, because England has so much fog, rain and wind.

We took off on our scheduled time and joined in formation. I was assigned the number three position, the left wing on the lead aircraft. We climbed to our assigned altitude of 22,000 feet while flying over the English Channel. We arrived over the target, dropped the bombs, and headed for England.

There is an old saying "Beware of the Hun in the sun." We were hit by FW190 20mm cannon shells, knocking out the #1 and #2 engines and damaging the #3 engine. The co-pilot was hit and killed instantly, as was the left waist gunner. The navigator and the tail gunner were wounded by shell fragments- A fire in his area was extinguished by the radio operator.

I leveled off at 500 feet above the water, and ordered the crew to throw all useless equipment overboard. I flew approximately 40 minutes on a course to England when the #4 engine began to belch black smoke, losing power. The crew took ditching positions to brace for impact, and I maneuvered the plane to a large swell. It was a good landing, one you never get a chance to practice.

We climbed into two dinghies, plugging holes in the fabric with torn handkerchiefs. The plane stayed afloat for approximately two minutes, then sank with the bodies of my co-pilot C. A. Tyler and left waist gunner R. L. Stevenson.

I maneuvered the raft to where the navigator, Lt. Corwin, and the bombardier, Lt. Kahlden, were bobbing in the water, and pulled them aboard. I spotted the other life raft with five crew members, and we managed to tie the two rafts together.

The navigator was drenched with blood, but kept insisting he was OK. I asked him if he could place our position. He said we were at mid-English Channel, near the Bay of Biscay, and the currents might take us toward the shores of Portugal. As the sun began to set, we heard an aircraft. A German fighter had spotted us, and flashed its landing lights before veering away.

Around midnight, all of us shivering from the cold and wet after floating for 12 hours, we saw a light sweeping the waters some distance away. A loud and clear English speaking voice asked us who we were. We were not able to see anything so we kept quiet. Again the voice spoke, and I recognized the German accent. It looked as if we were to be taken prisoners of war.

The German vessel approached our rafts and lowered a 30-foot rope ladder. I was the last one to make the climb.



**Ooold Soljer #41-24559 (360BS) PU-C
102nd PBCW #2 (360BS) - Pilot Capt L.E. Lyle / CoPilot 1Lt K.W. Davey**

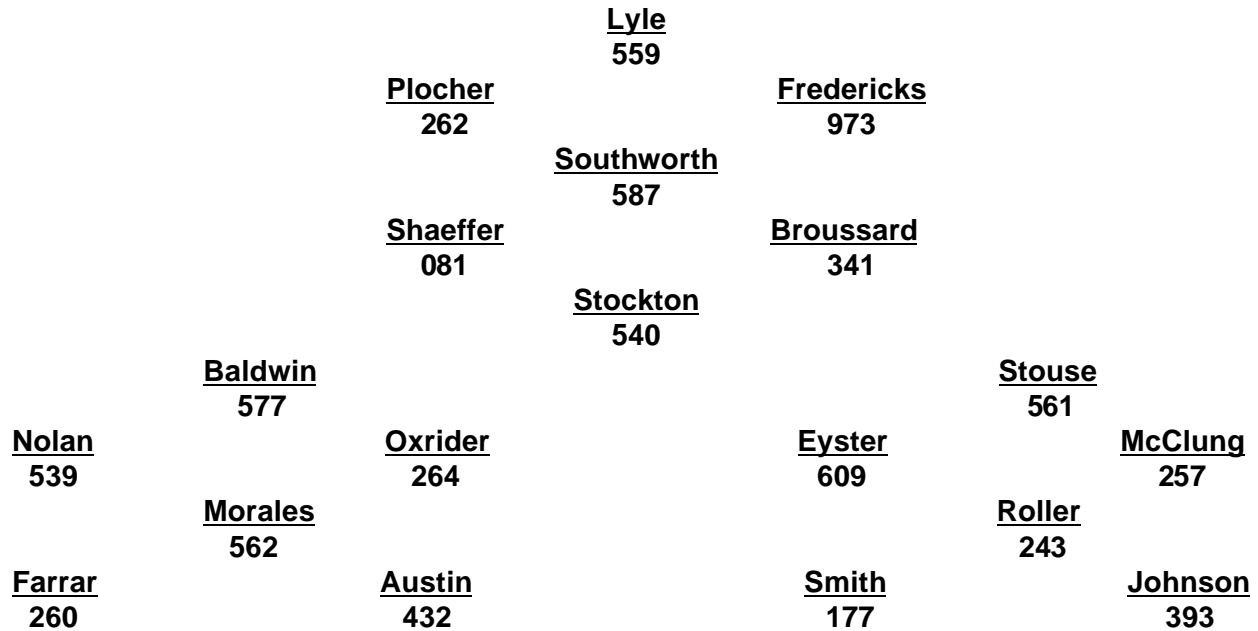
Capt L.E. Lyle (P), Lt K.W. Davey (CP), Capt P.G. Moore (N), Lt M.S. Fonorow (B), Lt S.H. Anderson (N)
T/Sgt G.K. Smith (E), S/Sgt E.A. Bradford (WG), T/Sgt C.S. Bolcombe (R),
T/Sgt W.W. Smith (BT), Sgt T. McGriffin (TG), S/Sgt C.A. Hamilton (WG)
(crewmembers are not in order)



Lorient, France: Bomb Strike Photo

Mission 020 - 3

Aircraft Formation at Assembly Point



One (1) aircraft failed to take off:
Lt. Morales in 562

One (1) aircraft aborted this mission:
Capt. Southworth in 587

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

CREW POSITIONS CMP - Command Pilot P - Pilot CP - Co-Pilot NAV - Navigator ANV - Ass't. Navigator MNV - Mickey Navigator ENG - Engineer BOM - Bombardier RO - Radio Operator	TOG - Toggler BT - Ball Turret Operator TT - Top Turret Operator TG - Tail Gunner NG - Nose Gunner RG - Radio Gunner WG - Waist Gunner LWG - Left Waist Gunner RWG - Right Waist Gunner GUN - Gunner	VI - Voice Interpreter OBS - Observer PAS - Passenger PHO - Photographer RESULTS OF MISSION KIA - Killed in action WIA - Wounded in action MIA - Missing in action POW - Prisoner of war	DOW - Died of wounds EVD - Evaded the enemy INT - Interned in neu cuntry REP - Repatriated RES - Rescued ESC - Escaped BO - Bailed out DCH - Ditched CR-L - Crashed on land CR-S - Crashed at sea
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358th Bombardment Squadron Crew Lists

B-17F #41-24577 *Hell's Angels*

P Baldwin, Irl E., Capt
CP Mitchell, Kirk R., Capt
NAV Madsen, Parley W., Jr., 1Lt
BOM Bone, Donald R., 1Lt
ENG Rodriguez, James E., Jr., T/Sgt
RWG Meddaugh, Allerton F., S/Sgt
RO Warren, Russell M., S/Sgt
BT Brody, Harry J., S/Sgt
LWG Weiskopf, Dennis, Sgt
TG Godwin, Harold E., Sgt

B-17F #42-5432 *The Hunting Club*

P Austin, Charles N., 1Lt
CP Feldman, Norbert B., 1Lt
NAV White, Richard G., Jr., 1Lt
BOM Coltrane, Robert A., 1Lt
ENG Snipes, Samuel O., S/Sgt
LWG Mikkelson, Delbert, Sgt
RO Hogue, Earl, T/Sgt
BT LeBlanc, Alex, Sgt
TG Deal, Fred O., Sgt
RWG Eckard, Eugene W., Sgt

B-17F #41-24539 *Jersey Bounce*

P Nolan, Robert J., 1Lt
CP Kruse, Richard L., 2Lt
NAV Anderson, William J., 2Lt
BOM Hopper, Richard R., 2Lt
ENG Hively, Roy J., T/Sgt
BT Bruskotter, James E., S/Sgt
RO Hamill, Milton, T/Sgt
RWG Isham, Lawrence W., S/Sgt
LWG Martin, James C., S/Sgt
TG DeMuth, Edward L., S/Sgt

B-17F #42-5264 *Yankee Doodle Dandy*

P Oxrider, George J., 1Lt
CP Hurlburt, Donald W., 2Lt
NAV Grant, Donald L., 2Lt
BOM Steele, Earl A., 2Lt
ENG Ziemer, Frederick B., T/Sgt
BT Smith, Robert H., S/Sgt
RO Dasher, Everett A., T/Sgt
RWG Maxwell, Samuel P., S/Sgt
TG Sterling, Robert W., S/Sgt
LWG Heaps, Theodore C., Sgt

359th Bombardment Squadron Crew Lists

B-17F #42-5177 *Fast Worker MK II*

P Smith, Sanford T., 1Lt
 CP Farrell, Lawrence C., 2Lt
 NAV Kelley, James F., 2Lt
 BOM Dwyer, Robert P., 1Lt
 ENG Zaorski, Roman R., T/Sgt
 RWG Adams, Ralph B., S/Sgt
 RO Thornton, Edmund R., Sgt
 BT Hardaway, Sidney T., Sgt
 TG Howard, Earl R., S/Sgt
 LWG Murphy, Murel A., S/Sgt

B-17F #42-5393 *Thumper Again*

P Johnson, Hans C., 1Lt
 CP Gibson, Charles E., 1Lt
 NAV McNeely, Robert T., 1Lt
 BOM Owen, Jedediah G., 1Lt
 ENG Broyles, Harold D., S/Sgt
 LWG Morton, George T., Sgt
 RO Himes, Albert A., Sgt
 BT Chandler, U.M., Sgt
 RWG McKagan, Azzon C., S/Sgt
 TG Treon, John E., Sgt

B-17F #42-5257 *Miss Bea Haven*

P McClung, Guy H., 1Lt
 CP Nix, James S., 2Lt
 NAV Stettler, Donald G., 2Lt
 BOM Rothman, Theodore I., 2Lt
 ENG Coykendall, Ralph A., T/Sgt
 RWG Traban, James J., S/Sgt
 RO Gentry, Robert, T/Sgt
 TG Piatek, Casimir P., S/Sgt
 LWG O'Reilly, Francis W., Sgt
 BT Phillips, Carl W., S/Sgt

B-17F #41-24561 *The Duchess*

P Stouse, Harold L., 1Lt
 CP O'Connor, Squire T., 1Lt
 NAV Elliott, Jesse H., 1Lt
 BOM Mathis, Jack W., 1Lt
 ENG Audiss, Eldon W., T/Sgt
 RO Richardson, Donald R., T/Sgt
 LWG Tupper, Theron S., S/Sgt
 BT Garriott, John A., S/Sgt
 TG Owen, Calvin H., S/Sgt
 RWG Brown, Houston B., Jr., S/Sgt

B-17F #41-24609 *Holy Mackerel*

P Eyster, Ercil F., 1Lt
 CP Hayward, Fred H., 2Lt
 NAV Shanks, John D., 2Lt
 BOM Cargill, William D., 2Lt
 ENG Dunham, Harold J., T/Sgt
 LWG Fortunak, Richard C., S/Sgt
 RO Terry, Charles R., T/Sgt
 BT Nicosia, Eugene A., Sgt
 TG Stephen, Willard W., S/Sgt
 RWG Altizer, Robert C., T/Sgt
 NG Mulgrew, William C., S/Sgt

B-17F #42-5243 *FDR's Potato Peeler Kids*

P Roller, Jack, Capt
 CP Cline, William J., 2Lt
 NAV Henson, Walter G., 2Lt
 BOM Shoup, John R., Jr., 2Lt
 ENG Marcelonis, Joseph G., T/Sgt
 TT Ketron, Frank M., S/Sgt
 RO McCoy, Gordon K., Sgt
 BT Beringer, John L., Jr., S/Sgt
 TG Burnham, Arthur L., S/Sgt
 LWG Gonsalves, John D., S/Sgt

360th Bombardment Squadron Crew Lists

B-17F #42-2973 *Iza Vailable*

P	Fredericks, Jacob W., Capt
CP	Way, Arthur C., Lt
NAV	Hoyt, Otis A., Lt
BOM	Stamper, William B., M/SGt
ENG	Hlastala, Michael S., T/Sgt
LWG	Schneiderman, Henry G., S/Sgt
RO	Smith, Richard J., T/Sgt
BT	Nardine, Howard H., S/Sgt
TG	Murray, Gilbert A., Jr., S/Sgt
RWG	Collins, Harvie L., Sgt

B-17F #42-5260 *Yardbird II*

P	Farrar, John W., 1Lt
CP	Trojan, Joseph E., Lt
NAV	Auman, Rictor H., 2Lt
BOM	Stewart, Jack W., 2Lt
ENG	Hassler, Kenneth C., T/Sgt
RWG	Prescott, Paul H., S/Sgt
RO	Lindewall, Erick K., T/Sgt
BT	Sunderlin, Joseph R., S/Sgt
TG	Bartlett, Frank W., Sgt
LWG	O'Connell, Lincoln T., S/Sgt

B-17F #41-24559 *Ooold Soljer*

P	Lyle, Lewis E., Capt
CP	Davey, Kenneth W., Lt
NAV	Moore, Paul G., Capt
NAV	Anderson, Samuel H., Lt
BOM	Fonorow, Milton S., Lt
ENG	Smith, Gene K., T/Sgt
RWG	Bradford, Edward A., S/Sgt
RO	Balcombe, Clayton S., T/Sgt
BT	Smith, Woodrow W., S/Sgt
LWG	Hamilton, Claude A., S/Sgt
TG	McGiffin, Tom, Sgt

B-17F #42-5262 (*No Name*) - DCH

P	Plocher, Martin E., Lt	POW
CP	Tyler, Clair A., Lt	KIA
NAV	Corwin, Ellera J., Lt	POW
BOM	Kahlden, William F., Jr., Lt	POW
ENG	Legge, Henry R., T/Sgt	POW
TT	Matheson, Edwin L., S/Sgt	POW
RO	Friese, Everett E., T/Sgt	POW
BT	Rheaume, Louis W., S/Sgt	POW
LWG	Stevenson, Robert L., Sgt	KIA
TG	Tornow, August E., S/Sgt	POW/REP

427th Bombardment Squadron Crew Lists

B-17F #42-29540 *Shooting Star*

P Stockton, Donald E., 1Lt
CP Lipe, Fort W., 1Lt
NAV Grant, Lawrence H., 2Lt
BOM Shirley, Lloyd A., 2Lt
ENG Smith, Roy Q., S/Sgt
RO Amos, Lee H., S/Sgt
RWG Bryant, Carson, S/Sgt
TG Koch, Vernon E., S/Sgt
LWG Coomes, Clarence S., S/Sgt
BT Jenkins, Robert R., Sgt

B-17F #42-5081 *Luscious Lady*

P Shaeffer, Earl A., Lt
CP Stone, Arthur M., Lt
NAV Stugard, F., Jr., Lt
BOM Fec, A.D., Lt
ENG Murray, G.F., T/Sgt
BT Harris, M.L., Sgt
RO Penley, D.B., T/Sgt
TG Vance, F.S., S/Sgt
LWG Groves, R.W., S/Sgt
RWG Lentz, R.C., S/Sgt

B-17F #42-5341 *Vicious Virgin*

P Broussard, Edward J., Jr., Lt
CP Le Fevre, William G., Lt
NAV Noblin, John D., Lt
BOM Sherwood, Lyle D., Lt
ENG Smock, Edmund L., T/Sgt
RO Brandfas, Dale F., T/Sgt
BT Choice, Hudson, S/Sgt
LWG Bridges, Alvin A., Sgt
TG Brown, Howard T., S/Sgt
RWG Jurosek, Bernard, Sgt

B-17F #41-24587 *Bad Check*

P Southworth, Billy B., Jr., Capt
CP Dillinger, John L., 2Lt
NAV Roberts, Sumner L., Lt
BOM Smith, Abbott M., Jr., Lt
ENG Means, Lucian W., Jr., T/Sgt
RO Doughty, Edward J., S/Sgt
TG Brandt, Waldo B., Sgt
BT Belk, Jack, S/Sgt
RWG Smith, Delvyn, S/Sgt
LWG Henderson, George W., Sgt
(Abortive)