

303rd BG(H) Combat Mission No. 24

18 March 1943

Target: Submarine Construction Yard, Vegesack, Germany

Crews Dispatched: 20

Crews Lost: Lt. C.N. Austin, 5 KIA, 5 POW

Length of Mission: 6 hours, 11 minutes

Bomb Load: 6 x 1000 lb H.E. M44 bombs

Bombing Altitude: 24,000 ft

Ammo Fired: 45,000 rounds

Enemy Aircraft Claims: 8 Destroyed, 5 Probables, 3 Damaged

Twenty 303rd BG(H) B-17s took off. The take-off time had been advanced one hour. Crew members were unaware of the drama about to unfold and the fact that this mission would forever be one of the historic 8th Air Force missions.

Heading the 8th Air Force Task Force of 76 B-17s of the 91st, 303rd, 305th, and 306th Bomb Groups and 27 B-24s of the 44th and 93rd Bomb Groups was Lt. Col. George **Robinson**, the 303rd BG(H) Executive Officer. Bombing was to be by Squadrons.

This was the first time that the 8th Air Force was to use Automatic Flight Control Equipment (AFCE) linked with a Norden bombsight on a wide scale over Europe. The automatic pilot enabled the bombardier to guide the aircraft with his bombsight adjustments during the bombing approach. In earlier trials the AFCE equipment was not entirely satisfactory. After improvement modifications, AFCE equipment was installed in most Group lead bombers, even though its reliability was never assured.

All task force bombers were loaded with six 1,000 lb. H.E. M44 bombs. The 303rd BG(H) was at 24,000 feet with its entire force of 20 B-17s. No flights were aborted. There was 2/10-4/10 cloud cover with unlimited visibility. The task force still had 73 B-17s and 24 B-24s of the 103 originally dispatched.

The B-17s came under attack near Heligoland by 25-75 JU-88s, ME-109s, and FW-190s. The 303rd BG(H) formation bore the brunt of most of the Luftwaffe attacks. During the bomb run, intense heavy, black, concentrated and accurate flak was encountered from the target area. There was also quite a bit of flak from the coast. At one point the 359th BS(H) was bracketed by bursts.

The lead B-17 of the 359 BS(H) was #41-24561, *The Duchess*, piloted by Capt. Harold **Stouse**. *The Duchess* and the **Stouse** crew were one of the Group's original B-17s and crews that flew with the Group's air echelon to England. *The Duchess* went on to survive the 303rd BG(H) 1943 bitter air battles and completed 59 missions before being retired. On 31 March 1944, it was the oldest operational B-17 in the 8th Air Force.



1Lt Jack W. Mathis

1Lt. Jack W. **Mathis** was the lead bombardier in *The Duchess*. He was a proud Texan, born 25 September 1921 in San Angelo, TX. He enlisted as an air cadet on 12 June 1940 and was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant in class 42G at the Victorville, CA bombardier school on 4 July 1942. In July, he became part of the 359th **Stouse** crew while it was undergoing combat training at Alamogordo, NM. Over the target at Vegesack, Lt. **Mathis** was already a veteran of fourteen of the 303rd BG(H)'s twenty-four missions.

As the 359th BS approached the target on its final bomb run, Lt. **Mathis** had his eye glued to his Norden bombsight. Less than a minute from the release point a shell exploded near the right side of the nose of *The Duchess*. Shrapnel shattered part of the plexiglass and hurled **Mathis** back some nine feet to the rear of the nose compartment. Mortally injured, with his right arm nearly severed above the elbow and with deep wounds in his side and abdomen, he somehow managed to drag himself back to his bombsight to release the bombs on time. His last word, as he triggered the bomb release was "Bombs..." Lt. **Mathis** died over his bombsight before he could complete the interphone message with "away."

The navigator, 1Lt. Jesse H. **Elliott**, who occupied the nose compartment with Lt. **Mathis**, was also tossed against the compartment bulkhead and was slightly dazed. He had also been hit by a small piece of flak, later found to be not serious. Navigator **Elliott** watched as **Mathis** rolled himself over onto his hands and knees to his unharmed bombsight. Failing to hear the word, "away," and thinking that **Mathis'** throat mike had been damaged by the explosion, he uttered the final word, "away," finishing the call that the pilot was waiting to hear so he could reverse the automatic pilot and begin evasive action.

Soon after the bomb release, Pilot **Stouse**, with German fighters keeping him busy, contacted the flight engineer and top turret gunner, T/Sgt. Eldon W. **Audiss**, saying, "Audiss, as soon as those damn fighters leave, I wish you would go down and check on **Jack**. I think he is in trouble." As soon as he got the chance, Sgt. **Audiss** went down to the nose compartment. He saw that Lt. **Mathis** was face down, slumped over his bombsight, the gears still running and his chest harness entangled in the gears. Navigator **Elliott** was sitting at his navigator table in shock. Sgt. **Audiss** rushed to **Jack**. He rolled and lifted the bombardier and with his knife cut the parachute harness that had pulled into the bombsight mechanism. He checked for pulse and there was none. Opening his jacket and finding the wound and blood, he knew that the heroic bombardier was dead.

Even though the German flak had killed Jack **Mathis**, he had destroyed his target and completed his mission.

The Group bombing was highly accurate and Vegesack was described as "extremely heavily damaged." Later photographic reconnaissance revealed that the 268 tons of bombs on the target had severely damaged seven U-boats and two-thirds of the shipyards had been destroyed. The shipyards would not operate again for several months.

Prime Minister Winston **Churchill** recognized the importance of the mission's success and sent the following message to Gen. **Eaker**: "All my compliments to you and your officers and men on your brilliant exploit, the effectiveness of which photographs already reveal."

Sir Charles **Portal**, Chief of Britain's Air Staff, recognizing the effectiveness of this 8th Air Force effort, sent another message to Gen. **Eaker**: "The men and machines have proven themselves. Vegesack was a successful conclusion to long months of experimentation in daytime, high-level, precision bombing. After Vegesack comes a new chapter."

1Lt. Jack W. **Mathis** was an airman that the 303rd BG(H) and the 8th Air Force will never forget. On 12 July 1943, by General Order No. 38, he was commended for "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty" for his contribution to the new chapter that began with Vegesack. He received a posthumous award of the Congressional Medal of Honor--the first such award to be made to an 8th Air Force flier.

The **Mathis** story has been told many times. Of interest was the fact that his brother, **Mark**, was also a bombardier who had just arrived in England for duty with a B-26 Bomb Group. On the night before the Vegesack mission, Mark received permission to visit his brother at Molesworth. Another 359th BS(H) bombardier, Lt. Paul M. **Thomas**, who had graduated from bombardier school with Jack and his brother, had a "Bombardier Party" to end all parties and had planned to continue the party when they returned from the Vegesack mission. During the party, the possibility of Mark transferring to B-17s from B-26s was discussed at great length. Jack had asked another bombardier, Lt. Robert **Yonkman**, to substitute for him on the Vegesack mission so he could spend more time with his brother. Jack awakened Robert a little later stating that the "old man" would give him two or three more days with Mark if he would make the Vegesack run.

Mark anxiously awaited Jack's return at Molesworth. He was on hand to greet *The Duchess* after a red flare was shot over the field and the aircraft landed. Mark, soon thereafter, succeeded in transferring to the 359th BS(H), intending to take Jack's place as a bombardier on *The Duchess*. He was assigned to #42-5243, *FDR's Potato Peeler Kids*, and was lost on his fourth combat mission on the 14 May 1943 mission to Kiel. Lt. Col. William R. **Calhoun**, 359th BS(H) Commanding Officer, remembered the writing of that second letter to the parents of the **Mathis** brothers as the saddest moment of the war. After the war, the airport in San Angelo, TX, formerly Concho Army Airfield, was renamed Mathis Airport in honor of the **Mathis** brothers.

Seventeen of the 303rd BG(H) aircraft landed at Molesworth following the mission. One Fortress, #42-5723, (*No Name*), 360th BS(H), piloted by Lt. **Griffin**, crash-landed in a field three miles southwest of Molesworth. Another, #42-5257, *Miss Bea Haven*, 359th BS, piloted by Lt. **McClung**, crashed at Matlask, near Norfolk, with three wounded.

A third B-17 went down over the target on Jadesusen flats area of Wilhelmshaven after being hit by flak. *Hunga Dunga*, #41-24558, an original Group aircraft, had completed

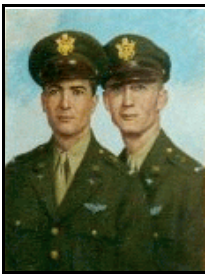
19 missions. Lt. **Austin**, Lt. **White**, S/Sgt. **Snipes**, Sgt. **Gergash** and Sgt. **Eckard** were captured and became prisoners of war. Lt. **Feldman**, Lt. **Coltrane**, S/Sgt. **LeBlanc**, Sgt. **Mikkelson**, and Sgt. **Deal** were killed. Lt. **Feldman**, S/Sgt. **LeBlanc** and Sgt. **Mikkelson** are buried in Ardennes American Cemetery near Liege, Belgium.

Lt. **Austin's** crew had been sent to the 303rd BG(H) from the 92nd BG(H) as a temporary replacement crew. He flew one of the original 92BG aircraft across the Atlantic to England.

Seven of the surviving men were wounded due to flak and frostbite. There was a considerable amount of battle damage to most of the aircraft and many landed with one engine out. The pilot commended on the mission was Lt. **Morales** of the 358th BS(H), who landed his B-17 with the starboard engine out and a flat tire. A high price was paid for this significant mission.

Ceremony Honors Two Mathis Brothers

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About 30 members of the 303rd Bomb Group Association turned out to honor Lt. Jack Mathis at a ceremony in San Angelo, Texas, practically 45 years to the day that he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously on July 12, 1943.

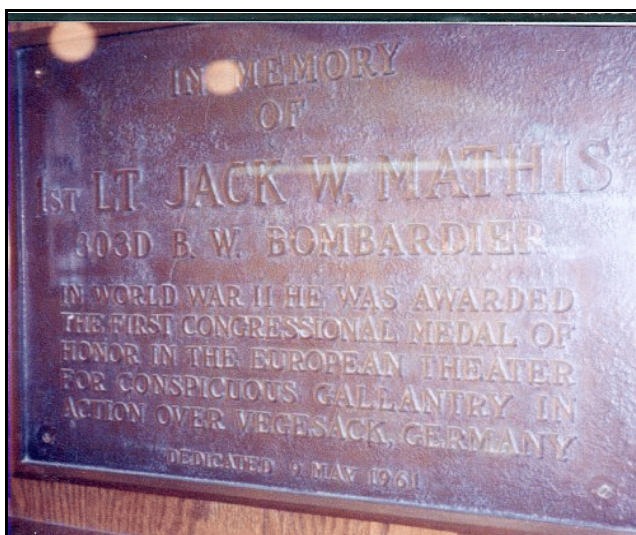
On July 21, 1988, a plaque honoring the memory of Jack Mathis was unveiled at Mathis Field, named in honor of the two brothers who died on bombing missions over Germany while serving with the 359th Squadron of the 303rd Bomb Group. The plaque that now graces the Mathis Field terminal entryway was first placed in a Tucson, Arizona, airbase hospital to memorialize Mathis when the 303rd Bomb Group was reactivated as a wing at David Monthan AFB in the 1950s.

Tom Harrelson, a member of the 303rd Bomb Group Association, found the plaque at the hospital and started negotiations with the base commander to have it moved to Mathis Field in San Angelo. After further negotiations with John Schwab, the airport manager, it was moved to the hometown of the Mathis brothers and to the airport which bears their name.

Dedication speaker for the ceremony was Ross McSwain, Chairman of the Tom Green County Historical Commission. Other speakers included: San Angelo Mayor Dick Funk; Col. William R. Calhoun, Harold A. Susskind and Wilbur "Bud" Klint from the 303rd Bomb Group; John Schwab and Neal Bradshaw, Chairman, Airport Board. Calhoun, who was commander of the 359th Squadron, said the Mathis brothers were "good men" who kept up the morale of the unit. Calhoun was on the same mission and watched Mark Mathis' B-17, named *FDR's Potato Peeler Kids*, go down in the North Sea after German fighter planes shot it to pieces.

"Although it's been 45 years since they were killed, it seems like yesterday," said Calhoun. "The night before Jack was killed, we were sitting around in my quarters wondering what we would do after the war. Mark and Jack said they were coming back to San Angelo. You can be proud of your two native sons and the feeling they had about their community."

McSwain, who dedicated the memorial, said, "The heroism of the Mathis boys provided inspiration to thousands of airmen who followed them into the skies over war-town Germany. World War II was over several generations ago, but heroic deeds like those of Jack Mathis and his comrades will always remain strong in our memory."



One Final Moment

by Herbert E. Kalhoefer

Shows 1Lt Jack W. Mathis dying over his bombsight. Herbert Kalhoefer was a close friend and 359th BS bunk mate of Lt Mathis.



STOUSE CREW - 359th BS
B-17F *The Duchess* #41-24561 (BN-T)
(original crew assigned 359BS: 24 June 1942)

(Back L-R) 1Lt Harold L. Stouse (P), 1Lt William J. Neff (acft maint),
 2Lt Squire T. O'Connor (CP), 2Lt John R. Shupe (N), 2Lt Jack W. Mathis (B)

(Front L-R) S/Sgt Eldon Audiss (E), S/Sgt Donald R. Richardson (R),
 Sgt Theron S. Tupper (WG), Sgt John A. Garriott (BT), S/Sgt Calvin H. Owen (TG)



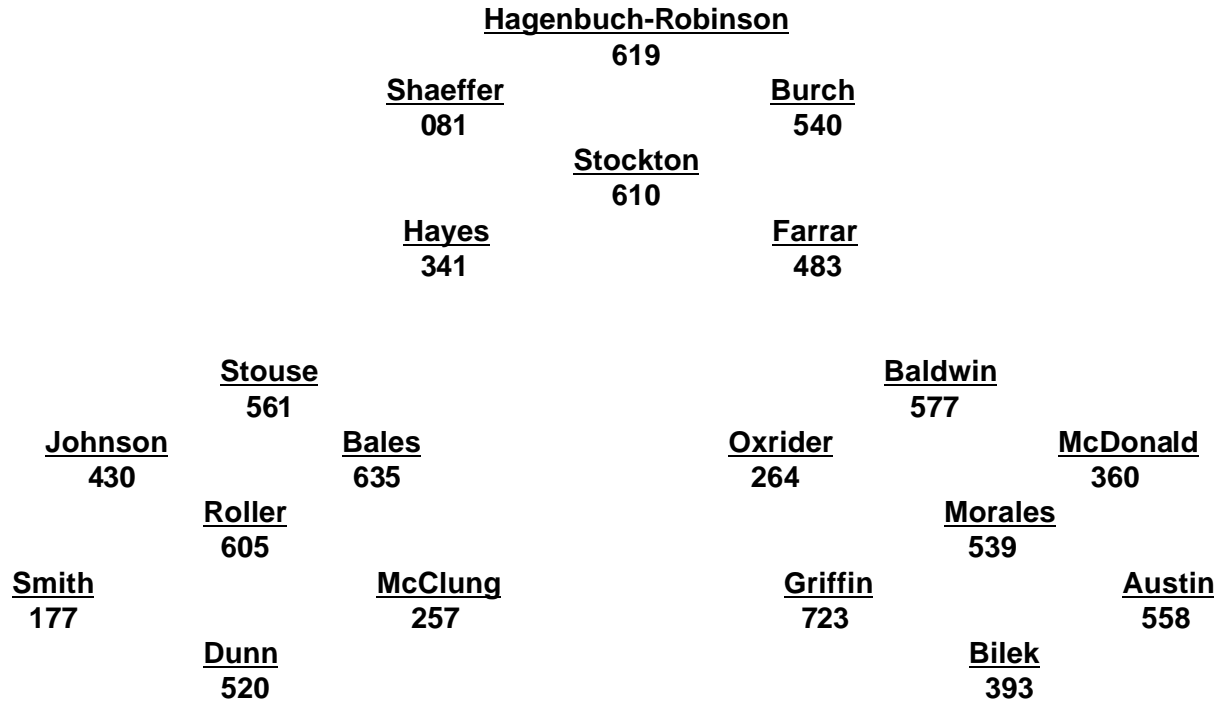
S-for-Sugar #41-24619 (427BS) GN-S
102nd PBCW #2 (427BS) - Pilot Capt G.E. Hagenbuch / CoPilot Col G.L Robinson

Capt G.E. Hagenbuch (P), Col G.L. Robinson (CP), Capt W.H. Soha (N), Capt A.W. Dieffenbach (B)
 T/Sgt C.E. Zipfel (E), S/Sgt D. Smith (WG), T/Sgt D.F. Brandfas (R),
 Sgt W.M. Kirkpatrick (BT), S/Sgt G.W. Henderson (TG), S/Sgt E.Z. Harmon (WG)

crewmembers are not in order

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Aircraft Formation at Assembly Point



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 - Togglier 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 cntry 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	Joy, Ripley W., 2Lt
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 #41-24539 *Jersey Bounce*

P	Morales, Carl H., 1Lt
CP	Swaffer, Calvin A., 2Lt
NAV	Miller, Hubert E., 1Lt
BOM	Zasadil, Frank E., 2Lt
ENG	Hinds, Francis G., T/Sgt
BT	Carroll, Albert V., S/Sgt
RO	Burns, Francis J., T/Sgt
LWG	Hill, John E., S/Sgt
TG	Blake, Robert C., S/Sgt
RWG	Westfall, Max M., Sgt

B-17F #42-5360 *Old Faithful*

P	McDonald, James M., 1Lt
CP	Rogan, Dave L., 2Lt
NAV	Clement, Richard W., 1Lt
BOM	Montgomery, James H., Jr., 2Lt
ENG	Fanning, David D., T/Sgt
RWG	Hardacre, Charles F., S/Sgt
RO	Carpenter, Glenn S., T/Sgt
BT	Bruskotter, James E., S/Sgt
TG	Sterling, Robert W., S/Sgt
LWG	Martin, James C., S/Sgt

B-17F #41-24558 *Hunga Dunga - CR-L*

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

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

P	Oxriden, George J., 1Lt
CP	Hurlburt, Donald W., 2Lt
NAV	Grant, Donald L., 2Lt
BOM	Box, Charles M., 2Lt
ENG	Zierner, Frederick B., T/Sgt
BT	Smith, Robert H., S/Sgt
RO	Dasher, Everett A., T/Sgt
RWG	Maxwell, Samuel P., S/Sgt
TG	Sadler, James K., S/Sgt
LWG	Heaps, Theodore C., Sgt

B-17F #42-29520 *(No Name)*

P	Dunn, James R., 2Lt
CP	O'Connor, Robert S., 2Lt
NAV	Boyd, George H., 2Lt
BOM	Lizotte, Robert A., 2Lt
ENG	Yager, Lamoine D., T/Sgt
RWG	Nowak, Stanislaus, S/Sgt
RO	Hogue, Earl, T/Sgt
BT	Shellman, Carl E., S/Sgt
TG	Clowe, Eugene C., S/Sgt
LWG	Raesley, Wilmer G., Sgt

359th Bombardment Squadron Crew Lists

B-17F #41-24605 *Knockout Dropper*

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

B-17F #42-5430 *Pappy/Good Snuf*

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

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

P	Stouse, Harold L., Capt
CP	O'Connor, Squire T., 1Lt
NAV	Elliott, Jesse H., 1Lt
BOM	Mathis, Jack W., 1Lt KIA
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 #42-5177 *Fast Worker MK II*

P	Smith, Sanford T., 1Lt
CP	Farrell, Lawrence C., 2Lt
NAV	Summers, Thomas E., 1Lt
BOM	Dwyer, Robert P., 1Lt
ENG	Hardaway, Sidney T., Sgt
LWG	Adams, Ralph B., S/Sgt
RO	York, Robert F., T/Sgt
BT	Tibbles, Russell F., Sgt
TG	Howard, Earl R., S/Sgt
RWG	Perryman, Jack L., Sgt

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

P	McClung, Guy H., 2Lt
CP	Roseberry, William E., 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	Ryan, Francis J., Sgt
BT	Phillips, Carl W., S/Sgt

B-17F #41-24635 *The '8' Ball MK II*

P	Bales, Ross C., 1Lt
CP	Dooley, Walter E., 1Lt
NAV	Browning, Richard C., 2Lt
BOM	Thomas, Paul M., 2Lt
ENG	Winter, Raymond K., Jr., T/Sgt
RWG	Thornton, Edmund R., Sgt
LWG	Kilgore, Raymond H., T/Sgt
BT	Nicosia, Eugene A., Sgt
TG	Snell, Jack D., S/Sgt
RG	Van Ravenstein, Edward A., S/Sgt

360th Bombardment Squadron Crew Lists

B-17F #42-5723 (No Name) - CR-L

P	Griffin, Loyd D., Lt
CP	Swanson, Walter C., Lt
NAV	Preston, William M., Lt
BOM	Currie, Herman C., Lt
ENG	Eason, William M., T/Sgt
BT	Plummer, Robert, Sgt
RO	Schwartz, Vernon E., T/Sgt
TG	Wiegand, Lynwood D., S/Sgt
RWG	Edwards, Samuel L., S/Sgt
LWG	Hamilton, Claude A., S/Sgt

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

P	Bilek, A.F., Lt
CP	Kelly, C.J., Lt
NAV	Kelley, James F., Lt
BOM	White, Raymond R., Lt
ENG	Sage, L.G., T/Sgt
RWG	Savickas, J.J., Sgt
RO	Fogarty, J.J., S/Sgt
LWG	Henderson, Paul E., Sgt
TG	Brannan, H.P., Sgt
BT	Glaspell, T.D., Sgt

B-17F #42-5483 *Red Ass*

P	Farrar, John W., 1Lt
CP	Davey, Kenneth W., Lt
NAV	Auman, Rictor H., 2Lt
BOM	Stamper, William B., M/Sgt
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., S/Sgt
LWG	Kelly, Thomas F., T/Sgt

427th Bombardment Squadron Crew Lists

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	Coomes, Clarence S., S/Sgt
TG	Vance, F.S., S/Sgt
LWG	Groves, R.W., S/Sgt
RWG	Lentz, R.C., S/Sgt

B-17F #41-24610 *Joe Btfsplk*

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

B-17 #42-29540 *Shooting Star*

P	Burch, Armand F., Lt
CP	Cardwell, Burt J., Lt
NAV	Noblin, John D., Lt
BOM	Carlson, Robert C.A., Lt
ENG	Barlow, Benjamin, T/Sgt
BT	Sink, Robert K., S/Sgt
RO	Ashworth, George W., S/Sgt
LWG	Clapshaw, Keith L., Sgt
TG	Brown, Howard T., S/Sgt
RWG	Johnson, Otto D., Sgt

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

P	Hayes, Ralph S., Jr., Lt
CP	Rolfson, Jack G., Lt
NAV	Illgen, Frederick, J., Lt
BOM	Smith, Abbott M., Jr. Lt
ENG	Gray, J.R., T/Sgt
TG	Bednarchuk, Antonio, S/Sgt
RO	Jessee, Jesse J., S/Sgt
BT	Longo, Angelo L., Sgt
LWG	Cooney, Robert M., Sgt
RWG	Barron, Dante G., Sgt

B-17F #41-24619 *S For Sugar*

P	Hagenbuch, Glenn E., Capt
CP	Robinson, George L., Col
NAV	Soha, Walter M., Lt
NAV	Anderson, Samuel H., Lt
BOM	Dieffenbach, Albert W., Lt
ENG	Zipfel, Charles E., T/Sgt
RO	Brandfas, Dale F., T/Sgt
LWG	Smith, Delvyn, S/Sgt
TG	Henderson, George W., S/Sgt
BT	Kirkpatrick, Ward M., S/Sgt
RWG	Harmon, Edward Z., Sgt