

303rd BG (H) Combat Mission No. 144

29 April 1944

Target: City area, Berlin, Germany (PFF)

Crews Dispatched: 18 + 1 Spare

Crews Lost: Lt. Bohle & Lt. Fisher

Crewmembers Lost or Wounded: Lt. Raker KIA, 1 NAV wounded

Length of Mission: 8 hours, 30 minutes

Bomb Load: 3 x 1000 lb G.P.s + 4 X 65 lb M17 Incendiaries

Bombing Altitude: 25,900 ft

Ammo Fired: 320 rounds

Twelve Combat Wings from the three Bomb Divisions of Eighth Air Force, with sixteen Groups of USAAF P-47s, P-51s and P-38s and two squadrons of RAF Mustangs as escort, were dispatched to attack the center of Berlin. Fierce air opposition developed against 2nd Division B-24s and especially against one Combat Wing of 3rd Division, which became separated from its escort and other bombers and was finally forced to attack opportunity targets. However, the entire force of 1st and 2nd Divisions and the main force of 3rd Division attacked the city of Berlin, dropping over 1400 tons, mostly by pathfinder methods, with fair to good results.

The 3rd Division Wings which successfully attacked Berlin reported no air opposition and the 1st Division, which attacked next, reported only one minor attack. Enemy aircraft accounted for 27 of the 63 bombers lost and intense accurate flak over the target was responsible for 11 losses. In general, enemy fighters appeared to successfully evade friendly escort. Although Groups escorting 3rd Division reported about 150 enemy aircraft sighted, many of these remained high and refused to engage, and claims of the escort to 3rd Division are only 3-0-2 for air combats. Total air claims are 14-2-11 and claims of 7-5-5 are made for strafing attacks. Three P-38s and three P-51s of VIII Fighter Command and seven P-51s of IX Fighter command were missing. Two of the 63 bombers lost ditched in the Channel and crews were rescued.

The 303rd BG(H) scheduled 21 B-17s, which included one spare and two PFF aircraft from the 305BG. Only one aircraft, #42-107147, *Sweet Melody*, 360BS-C (Lt. E.C. **Miller**), failed to take-off after the ball turret door broke off while taxiing. Two B-17s returned early: #42-37875 *Empress of D Street*, 427BS-A (**Eisele**), the No. 3 engine was throwing oil; and #42-31177 *Lonesome Polecat*, 359BS-L (**Johnson**), the ball turret door fell off over the Channel.

The inclusion of three navigators in the lead ship was a relatively new procedure. Lt. Harold A. **Susskind**, in the very crowded nose compartment, was forced to stand up for the entire mission. The system of three navigators did not prevent the formation from flying off the scheduled course on several occasions. This was partially caused by winds not being as briefed, the inability to maintain briefed air speeds and the 41 CBW being boxed-in by another CBW on the return trip. Lt. Kenneth L. **Olsen**, after landing, requested that the air speed meter on the lead aircraft be calibrated.

Bombs of the 303rd BG(H) were dropped from 25,900 feet. Forty-two 1,000-lb. M44 and 54 500-lb. M17 cluster bombs were released on the southeastern part of Berlin. One aircraft discharged eight containers of U.S.G.-35 leaflets (Nickels). Visual bombing was prevented by a 6/10 to 8/10 cloud cover. Lt. **Harrison** in *Bad Penny* #42-31183, 359BS-Y, flew and bombed with the 306BG formation when he was unable to assemble with the 303rd BG(H).

Four to 80 enemy fighters were reported by Group crews but there were no attacks on the 303rd BG(H) formation. Attacks were concentrated on stragglers, especially the B-24s. There were no enemy aircraft claims. Fighter support was good up to the target with no support for about 90 minutes after bombing because the Wing was off course.

Flak was moderate to intense over the target with meager flak at scattered points along the route. Near Hannover moderate accurate flak was encountered. Fifteen aircraft sustained flak battle damage. General **Travis** was wounded above his eye and the lead crew reported blood all over the cockpit. He was awarded the Purple Heart. One navigator was wounded.

2Lt. Homer E. **Raker**, co-pilot in #42-31405 *Wallaroo MKII*, 359BS-X, piloted by Lt. Ernest L. **Roth**, was killed in action. Flak had disabled one engine and wounded Lt. **Raker**. Lt. **Roth** asked him to adjust the engines. Despite being in great pain, he feathered the engine and adjusted the supercharger. He then slumped forward, unconscious and died. For his actions Lt. **Raker** was awarded the Silver Star Medal.



HOWARD J. BOHLE CREW - 427th BS
 (crew assigned 427BS: 11 Apr 1944 - photo: Texas, Feb 1944)
 (Back L-R) S/Sgt Henry J. Jensen (R-KIA), S/Sgt Laurence W. Rice (E-POW), S/Sgt Charley F. Brock (TG), Sgt Paul J. Mulhearn (RWG-KIA), Sgt John A. Derschan (BT-KIA), Sgt Frank Gorgon (LWG-KIA) (Front L-R) 2Lt Howard J. Bohle (P-POW), 2Lt Robert R. Kerr (CP-Evd), 2Lt John K. Brown (N-POW), 2Lt Joseph J. Nevills (B-POW)

Two aircraft and crews were lost on the mission. #42-31241 *Spirit of Wanette*, piloted by 2Lt. Howard J. **Bohle**, received a direct flak hit in the Nos. 3 and 4 gas tanks. The tanks were punctured and considerable gas was lost. The aircraft skidded out of formation, jettisoned its bombs and feathered the No. 3 prop. 2Lt. **Bohle** tried to get back into formation, but turned away when he realized that his B-17 had a gas leak. Lt. Robert **Kerr**, co-pilot, later recounted that "the crew decided to head for neutral Sweden. We had no enemy fighter problems to Rostock over the Baltic Sea. A lone ME-109 appeared from German-occupied Denmark and we were subjected to an intense flak barrage. The Nos. 2 and 4 engines were set on fire, the tail was hit, and flight control cables were severed. Lt.

Bohle gave the bail-out signal and nine men made parachute jumps. S/Sgt. Michael **Musashe** was killed by the flak burst and crashed in the Sea of Smaland, Denmark with

the aircraft. Other crewmen in the rear of the B-17 landed in the sea and drowned. Lt. Robert R. **Kerr** managed to evade capture with the help of the Danish Underground and returned to Molesworth on 30 May 1944. Lt. **Bohle**, 2Lt. John K. **Brown**, 2Lt. Joseph J. **Nevills** and S/Sgt. Laurence W. **Rice** were made prisoners of war. S/Sgt. Henry J. **Jensen**, Sgt. John A. **Derschan**, Sgt. Frank **Gorgon** and Sgt. Paul J. **Mulhearn** were killed and originally buried at Svind Church, Copenhagen, Denmark. Sgt. **Gorgon** was later buried in Ardennes American Cemetery near Liege, Belgium.



JAMES H. FISHER CREW - 427th BS

(crew assigned 427BS: 11 Apr 1944 - photo: Ardmore, OK, Mar 1944)

(Back L-R) S/Sgt August H. Johnson (E), Sgt Monfort (G, not on final crew),
S/Sgt Donald K. Duncan (R-KIA), Sgt Joseph J. Tercek (RWG-KIA), Sgt Irving Bellitt (TG-KIA), unknown

(Front L-R) 2Lt James H. Fisher (P-POW), F/O G.W. Franzen (CP-KIA),
2Lt Harold F. Kauffman (N-KIA), 2Lt Parker (B, not on final crew)

#42-3158 *Max*, piloted by 2Lt. James H. **Fisher**, straggled in the target area and was attacked by enemy fighters just before "bombs away." It was hit between the Nos. 3 and 4 engines on the trailing edge of the wing by flak and started smoking. It then straggled and was attacked by the enemy fighters. It was seen to explode in the air near Hannover, Germany and no parachutes were observed. *Max* was the last B-17F to be lost on a 303rd BG(H) combat mission. 2Lt. **Fisher** and S/Sgt. August H. **Johnson** were captured by the enemy and became prisoners of war. F/O G.W. **Franzen**, 2Lt. Harold F. **Kauffman**, S/Sgt. Edward **Helton**, S/Sgt. Donald K. **Duncan**, Sgt. Robert K. **Eklund**, S/Sgt. Henry **Hoff**, Sgt. Irving **Bellitt** and Sgt. Joseph J. **Tercek** were killed. F/O **Franzen**, S/Sgt. **Helton** S/Sgt. **Hoff** and Sgt. **Bellitt** are buried in Ardennes American Cemetery near Liege, Belgium.

2Lt. Thomas **Minter**, bombardier on *Yorkshire Dream*, said he saw the bombs hit through the clouds. "I saw our bombs light in the middle of the built-up section of town," **Minter** said. "The hits looked so much like flak guns going off that I almost missed them, though, and couldn't see much of what happened." 2Lt. Joseph C. **Sassone**, co-pilot on *Bonnie B*, thought the flak was terrific. "I've been to Berlin six times and that was the worst flak I've ever seen." S/Sgt. Samuel **Ross**, *Yorkshire Dream* tail gunner, saw one Fort go down. "From five to ten ME-109s made two passes at him and he blew up," S/Sgt. **Ross** said. "Then the P-51s came up and chased them down into the clouds, and that's the last I saw of the German Air Force today."

Fifteen aircraft sustained flak battle damage, one aircraft was lost to flak and one aircraft was lost probably partially due to flak.

I HAD TO ABORT ON MY FIRST MISSION AS PILOT

29 APRIL 1944 — MISSION # 144

Ed Miller's Memories and Recollections

How embarrassing can it get — when you get your chance at being a first pilot and you have to abort your first mission? And of course, this first one was to Berlin. There should be no reason to change the pattern of being on every Berlin raid flown by the 303rd Bomb Group.

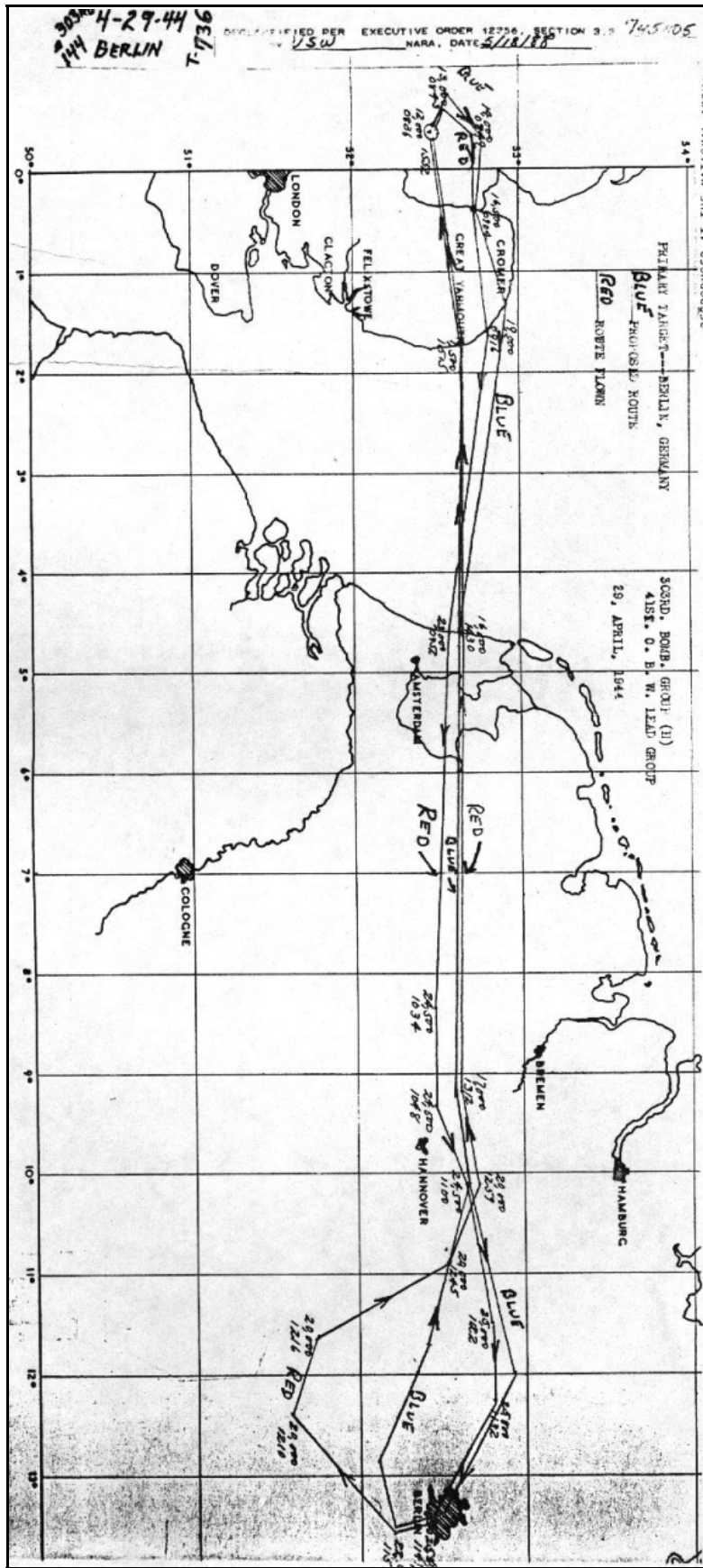
This mission was lead by Brig General Robert F. Travis, Commander of the 41st Combat Wing. Bombing was at 25,800 feet and through intense and accurate flak. Two of our crews failed to make it home. Lt Bohle and Lt Fisher were shot down, Lt. Bohle by flak just before dropping his bombs. Lt Fisher was shot down by enemy fighters when he was attempting to catch up to the formation. One of our co-pilots, Lt. Homer Raker was killed by flak, but because of his bravery, he was awarded the Silver Star.

General Travis was hit over the eye from flak and there was blood all over the cockpit. He was awarded the Purple Heart Medal.

This would have been my seventh trip to Berlin. I am aware that Lt Joseph C. Sassone, a 359th Bomb Squadron co-pilot was on his six mission to Berlin today.

My problem occurred on the ground as we were taxing out for take-off. I had a brand new crew, on their very first mission. My ball turret operator called and advised me that there was something wrong with the ball turret and that he was climbing out of it. He tried to cut the switches while the ball turret was still open and this caused the door to hit the ground and break off.

It is possible, since Lt. Fisher was a spare aircraft, that he took my position in the formation and was shot down. Of course there were two other aborts, one in my squadron — Lt. Eisele who turned back because of low oil pressure, and Lt. Johnston, of the 359th Bomb Squadron, who turned back while over the channel because a door fell off of the ball turret.



Route Map

Aircraft Formation at Assembly Point

<u>Travis-Stoullil</u> PFF-574				
	<u>Bohle</u> 241		<u>Walter</u> PFF-522	
		<u>Jones</u> 060		
	<u>Estes</u> 051		<u>Oranges</u> 569	
	<u>Edwards</u> 272			<u>Lynch</u> 260
<u>Fackler</u> 284		<u>Roth</u> 405	<u>Cecchini</u> 841	<u>Eisele</u> 875
	<u>Moser</u> 386			<u>Williams</u> 432
<u>Assenheimer</u> 483	_____		<u>O'Beirne</u> 187	<u>Headlee</u> 391
	<u>Daum</u> 830		<u>Johnston</u> 177	
				<u>Fisher</u> Spare - 158

Two (2) aircraft aborted the mission:
 Lt. Eisele in 875
 Lt. Johnston in 177

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 cntry REP - Repatriated RES - Rescued ESC - Escaped BO - Bailed out DCH - Ditched CR-L - Crashed on land CR-S - Crashed at sea
--	---	---	---

359th Bombardment Squadron Crew Lists

B-17G #42-31386 *Sky Duster*

P Moser, Clinton A., 2Lt.
 CP Gorecki, Victor T., 2Lt
 NAV Andreasen, Rolf W., 2Lt
 BOM Campbell, Frank P., 2Lt
 ENG Duffey, Willis A., Sgt
 RO Zionkoski, John T., S/Sgt
 BT Parrish, Vernon, Sgt
 TG Seelock, Joseph J., Sgt
 RWG Mays, Pearl E., S/Sgt
 LWG Raines, Donald E., Sgt

B-17G #42-31830 *Marie*

P Daum, Maurice G., 2Lt
 CP Gibbons, Donald L., 2Lt
 NAV Forve, Frank F., 2Lt
 BOM Grove, Terril M., 2Lt
 ENG Matthews, Fred T., T/Sgt
 RO McLaughlin, William G., S/Sgt
 BT Jenkins, Crawford E., S/Sgt
 TG Taylor, Burt W., S/Sgt
 LWG Sampson, Dale A., S/Sgt
 RWG Frederick, Lee W., S/Sgt

B-17G #42-31405 *Wallaroo MK II*

P Roth, Ernest L., 2Lt
 CP Raker, Homer E., 2Lt KIA
 NAV Beys, George J., 2Lt
 BOM O'Neill, Owen H., 2Lt
 ENG Dexter, Fred E., S/Sgt
 RO Buckingham, Earl W., Sgt
 BT Streicher, Ralph E., Sgt
 TG Gardner, Henry A., Sgt
 LWG Kurzowki, John W., Sgt
 RWG Martens, Arnout C., Sgt

B-17G #42-97284 *Ain't Misbehavin*

P Fackler, David E., 2Lt
 CP Paton, Wallace L., 2Lt
 NAV Hogan, Paul G., 2Lt
 BOM Nance, George H., 2Lt
 ENG Schlottman, Jerome D., S/Sgt
 RO Prendergast, Bert T., S/Sgt
 BT McIntyre, Harold W., Sgt
 TG Pohlman, Wilbert F., Sgt
 LWG Brewer, Ray, Sgt
 RWG Tipton, Bill B., Sgt

B-17G #42-31483 *Bonnie B*

P Assenheimer, Edwin H., 1Lt
 CP Sassone, Joseph C., 2Lt
 NAV Corbin, Frederick A., 2Lt
 TOG Meier, Wayne G., Sgt
 ENG Mayhugh, John C., S/Sgt
 RO Mouser, Lloyd C., T/Sgt
 LWG Rettinhouse, Robert A., S/Sgt
 TG Robichaud, Joseph E., S/Sgt
 BT Jaehne, Charles R., S/Sgt
 RWG Covington, Charles G., S/Sgt

B-17G #42-97272 *Duchess' Daughter*

P Edwards, Kenneth C., 1Lt
 CP Peterson, Edwin V., 2Lt
 NAV Sanders, Coleman, 2Lt
 BOM Trawicki, George J., 1Lt
 ENG Johnson, Kenneth V., S/Sgt
 RO Kennedy, Herbert W., S/Sgt
 BT Guzman, Abel G., Sgt
 LWG Titsworth, William E., S/Sgt
 TG Kowalk, Francis H., S/Sgt
 RWG Abernathy, Fay S., S/Sgt

B-17G #42-31183 *Bad Penny*

P Harrison, Weldon O., 1Lt
 CP Moyer, William G., 2Lt
 NAV Bates, Robert L., 2Lt
 TOG Kolling, Arthur J., S/Sgt
 UT Ela, Lyman E., Sgt
 RO Hanson, Robert W., Sgt
 BT Salmon, Earl D., Sgt
 TG Miller, Theodore G., Sgt
 LWG Arendt, John L., Sgt
 RWG Neathery, Ralph N., S/Sgt

360th Bombardment Squadron Crew Lists

B-17G #42-97187 *Miss Umbriago*

P O'Beirne, Nelson B., 2Lt
CP Spindler, Benjamin L., 2Lt
NAV Shipp, Gene K., 2Lt
BOM Nebhut, Kenneth E., Sgt
ENG Henselman, Miles A., S/Sgt
RO Blumberg, Marvin R., S/Sgt
BT Faraone, Sam S., Sgt
TG Studt, Allo L., Sgt
RWG Rogers, Winford E., Sgt
LWG Cammack, Francis C., Sgt

B-17G #42-97260 *Bow-Ur-Neck-Stevens*

P Lynch, Robert J., 2Lt
CP McMillan, Murdock B., 2Lt
NAV Sbrolla, Emilio M., 2Lt
BOM Merz, Dick W., 2Lt
ENG Roszell, Thomas M., Sgt
RO Schuler, Frank H., Sgt
BT Chudej, Josef R., Sgt
TG Krogh, Kenneth R., Sgt
LWG Schoonmaker, Elwood, Jr., Sgt
RWG Pleasanton, Kenneth H., Sgt

B-17G #42-37875 *Empress of D Street*

P Eisele, Roy, 1Lt
CP Girard, Louis F., 2Lt
NAV Schenker, Murray, 2Lt
BOM Gladstone, Melvin, 2Lt
ENG Cowley, Louis M., S/Sgt
RWG Bell, Richard L., Sgt
RO Millard, Ralph, S/Sgt
LWG Friedman, Szymon A., S/Sgt
BT Longoria, Efrain, Sgt
TG Vallee, Edward J., S/Sgt
(Abortive)

B-17G #42-31432 *Old Glory*

P Williams, John T., 2Lt
CP Erickson, Roger W., 2Lt
NAV Fazio, Joseph J., 2Lt
BOM Grunseth, Roald J., 2Lt
ENG Schwenke, Howard A., S/Sgt
RO Barber, Stewart, L., S/Sgt
BT Whitten, Cleveland W., Sgt
TG Ott, John E., Sgt
RWG Northam, James W., Sgt
LWG Mitchell, John B., Sgt

B-17G #42-37841 *Banshee*

P Cecchini, Anthony J., 2Lt
CP Fisher, Stanley L., 2Lt
NAV Veigel, Edward J., 2Lt
BOM McDevitt, Theodore D., 2Lt
ENG Bachman, Clifford D., S/Sgt
RO Smith, Benjamin H., Jr., S/Sgt
BT Kepics, George, Sgt
TG Hudson, Ward A., Sgt
RWG Cogdell, Clarence L., Sgt
LWG O'Hearn, Robert J., Sgt

B-17G #42-31177 *Lonesome Polecat*

P Johnston, Donald M., 2Lt
CP Heussler, Robert W., 2Lt
NAV Schultz, Milo R., 2Lt
BOM Huddleston, D.O., S/Sgt
ENG Barnum, Abraham E., M/Sgt
RO Treece, Charles E., S/Sgt
BT Pesetsky, Paul W., Sgt
TG Nestok, Frank, Sgt
RWG Smith, Herbert L., Sgt
LWG Turner, Kenzie H., S/Sgt
(Abortive)

427th Bombardment Squadron Crew Lists

B-17G #42-97391 (No Name)

P	Headlee, Dale C., 2Lt
CP	Fogerson, Joseph E., F/O
NAV	Schweitzer, Jerome D., 2Lt
BOM	Handley, Donald J., 2Lt
ENG	Klunk, James A., S/Sgt
BT	Almanzor, Berton F., S/Sgt
RO	Moberg, Chester H., S/Sgt
TG	Bell, Alton R., S/Sgt
LWG	Wilson, Robert J., S/Sgt
RWG	Kyle, Clarence, S/Sgt

B-17G #42-38051 My Yorkshire Dream

P	Estes, Shirley W., Lt
CP	McCall, Robert S., 2Lt
NAV	Shemwell, John T., 2Lt
BOM	Minter, Thomas W., 2Lt
TT	Price, Jack J., S/Sgt
BT	Wiley, Nathan H., S/Sgt
RO	Wagner, Wayne, S/Sgt
TG	Ross, Samuel C., S/Sgt
RWG	Silrum, Orvis K., Sgt
LWG	Ford, Thomas P., Sgt

B-17G #42-31060 Poque Ma Hone

P	Jones, Wilbur H., 2Lt
CP	Wallace, Walstein W., 2Lt
NAV	Skarsten, Albert B., 2Lt
BOM	Kennedy, William J., 2Lt
TT	Duerr, William P., S/Sgt
BT	Calnon, Frederick N., S/Sgt
RO	Kosher, Albert J., Sgt
TG	McLaughlin, Jesse W., S/Sgt
LWG	Thompson, Frederick A., Sgt
RWG	Dimowitz, Morris, Sgt

B-17G #42-102569 Miss Lace

P	Oranges, Chester N., 2Lt
CP	Lawrenson, George C., 2Lt
NAV	Brown, Thomas G., 1Lt
BOM	Harper, Kenneth L., 2Lt
TT	Eisenhauer, James A., Sgt
BT	Gentry, Richard A., Sgt
RO	Sorese, Leonard V., S/Sgt
TG	Franklin, Robert E., Sgt
RWG	Korpi, Walfred J., S/Sgt
LWG	Ward, Homer J., Jr., Sgt

B-17F #42-3158 Max CR-L

P	Fisher, James H., 2Lt	POW
CP	Franzen, G.W., F/O	KIA
NAV	Kauffman, Harold F., 2Lt	KIA
BOM	Helton, Edward, S/Sgt	KIA
TT	Johnson, August H., S/Sgt	POW
BT	Eklund, Robert K, Sgt	KIA
RO	Duncan, Donald K., S/Sgt	KIA
TG	Bellitt, Irving, Sgt	KIA
LWG	Tercek, Joseph J., Sgt	KIA
RWG	Hoff, Henry, S/Sgt	KIA

B-17G #42-31241 Spirit of Wanette CR-S

P	Bohle, Howard J., 2Lt	POW
CP	Kerr, Robert R., 2Lt	EVD
NAV	Brown, John K., 2Lt	POW
BOM	Nevills, Joseph J., 2Lt	POW
TT	Rice, Laurence W., S/Sgt	POW
RO	Jensen, Henry J., S/Sgt	KIA
BT	Derschan, John A., Sgt	KIA
TG	Musashe, Michael, S/Sgt	KIA
LWG	Mulhearn, Paul J., Sgt	KIA
RWG	Gorgon, Frank, Sgt	KIA

Members of the 303rd flying in the two PFF Aircraft

B-17G #42-97574 PFF (305BG)

P	Stoullil, Donald W., 1Lt
CMP	Travis, Robert F., B/Gen
NAV	Susskind, Harold A., 1Lt
NAV	Olsen, Kenneth L., 1Lt
BOM	Wallen, George A., 1Lt

B-17G #42-97522 PFF (305BG)

NAV	Peacock, Lawrence A., 2Lt
BOM	Umphress, F.E., Jr., 2Lt