

303rd BG (H) Combat Mission No. 166

31 May 1944

Target: Gilze-Rijen, Netherlands Airdrome

Crews Dispatched: 14

Crew Members Lost or Wounded: 1 wounded by flak

Length of Mission: 4 hours, 45 minutes

Bomb Load: 12 X 500 lb M-43 G.P. bombs

Bombing Altitude: 20,300 ft

Ammo Fired: 205 rounds

The airdrome of Gilze/Rijen, Belgium was bombed when towering storm clouds prohibited the Group from bombing the primary target, the railroad marshalling yards at Colmar, France. The target of opportunity was bombed from 20,000 feet and 320 500-lb. G.P. M43 bombs were dropped. The bombs were seen bursting in the center of a wooded area on the NNW edge of the airdrome. The woods reportedly concealed the barracks area. Hits were also seen on the Breda/Tilburg highway.



B-17G #42-107099 *Ole 99* 427BS (GN-N)
Crew Chief Jimmie Stewart and unknown ground crewmen

Meager and inaccurate flak was encountered over the target and accurate flak in the Brussels area. Two B-17s sustained major and six minor flak damage. Aircraft were "seen targets" most of the time over enemy territory. One aircraft returned without bombing after it was hit by anti-aircraft fire in the Brussels area. Its 12 500-lb. bombs were jettisoned and Lt. **Flick** returned his B-17 #42-107099, *Old 99*, 427BS early and alone.

Six enemy fighters were observed, but due to the heavy haze conditions, they couldn't be identified. No enemy attacks were sustained. Friendly fighters did an excellent job of rendezvousing, especially notable since the Group was far off course. The weather information, according to Capt. **Davis**, lead navigator, was "absolutely no good."

All Group aircraft returned to England. One landed at Chipping Ongar. One man was seriously wounded by flak -- Sgt Theo T. Montfort on the Flick Crew.

AFTER THIS ONE — ONLY ONE MORE TO GO!

Ed Miller's Memories and Recollections

This mission was lead by 1Lt Robert J. Lynch with Colonel William L. Travis as the Air Commander of the 41st Combat Wing. We flew the twelve aircraft formation again and it seemed to be the coming thing. Someone was probably looking out for me — as they didn't put me in as a "tail-end Charlie." I flew as pilot to a brand new crew, with the pilot 2Lt Leonard M. Brown, flying as my co-pilot. This was the normal operating procedure to put an experienced pilot with the new crews as they arrived in a Bomb Squadron.

This mission was planned as a deep penetration into France, as we were carrying 2400 gallons on gas, with a normal bomb load of twelve (12) 500 lb general purpose bombs. But the weather stepped in for me. It turned out that the weather was completely different than briefed. A large bank of clouds rising up to 26,000 feet was observed and a VHF message was received while we were climbing and turning to dodge the cloud formation. We were instructed to abandon the primary and secondary targets. So a target of opportunity was selected and it was the previous target of the 303rd Bomb Group — the Gilze Rijen Airdrome. This was about 4 hours shorter than the original target which was the Marshalling Yards at Colmar, France. Secondary targets were the marshalling yards at Epinal, France and last resort targets were St. Dizier Airdrome and Namur/Rouet Marshalling yards.

We flew aircraft #42-37841 "Banshee" and were in the number 2 position on Bob Lynch and Colonel Travis' right wing. Enemy aircraft were nil today, although a few were seen but were not identified due to the haze and clouds. We approached Gilze Rijen in a zig zag course, as we had to dodge the cloud formations. Visibility was poor and we had to pick out the target with about 6/10 cloud cover. Flak at the target was meager but fairly accurate and seven of the eleven aircraft striking the target sustained flak battle damage, two of them as severe.

The route home was difficult as weather over England and the channel was not good, causing us to make three circles of three hundred and sixty degrees. Some of the groups attacking the target had to spin off from the leaders due to dense clouds. The necessity for avoiding the towering clouds sometimes put the formation unavoidably over known flak installations which was the big problem of the day.

Landing at Molesworth was a bit difficult but it was a happy one! One more to go!

YES-THERE WERE A FEW MILK RUNS
from the book "25 Milk Runs" by Richard R. "Dick" Johnson

The weather briefing for today's mission indicated good weather over the target, but we soon found that towering cumulus clouds had built up while we were en-route. Some topped out at 28,000 feet, well above our planned altitude.

The 303rd Bomb Group was to supply 14 aircraft for the wing formation, and we were on our way by 08:00. As we approached the enemy coast, clouds appeared on our route, and we had to deviate from the planned course. This took us almost over Brussels, Belgium, which was well defended with 88mm flak guns. Almost immediately, the B-17 flown by Lt. Flick, who was flying off our right wing, received a direct hit. One man in his crew was seriously wounded, and they turned back to England, landing at an emergency strip at Chipping-On-Gar. We had to abandon our primary target at Colmar, France, and the secondary, St. Dizier airdrome in France. Our target of opportunity became the airport at Gilze-Fijen in southern Holland because we could see it somewhat.

Unfortunately, the clouds caused us to only do a one minute bomb run, and our bombs fell between the runways into a wooded area. For some reason, two planes did not drop their bombs, and returned them to base. We saw six enemy fighters but they did not attack since they were being harassed by our P-51s.

Two B-17s of our group sustained major damage and six had minor damage, including our "Betty Jane" who suffered a fist sized hole in her tail. Vertical stabilizer, that is. We were over enemy territory for an hour and twenty minutes on this mission.

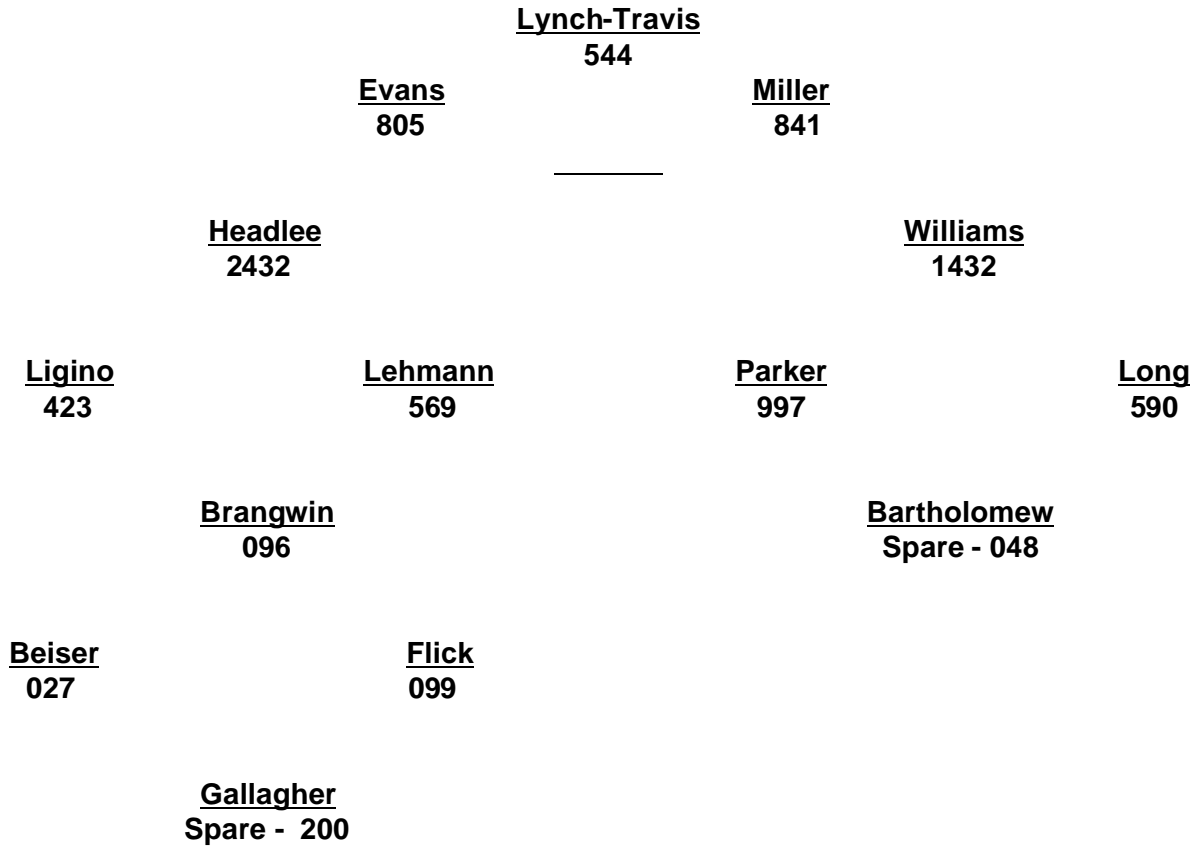
As an interesting sidelight to this mission, I and my wife Marjorie, visited this airfield in 1992, thanks to the leg work by Dutch author, Ivo M. De Jong. He took us there in mid May, almost 48 years after this mission. I was surprised to find that I was the first person to ever officially visit that site who had bombed it. Also the Historian who met us said that our bombs that fell into the wooded area destroyed a large store of fuel that the Germans had hidden there. Our bombs nearly struck the fire station, and one fell into the hundred foot wide pond that supplied water to the fire fighting equipment. This 500 pound bomb struck the pond so centered that it blew all the water out of the pond without changing its contour. This left very little water for the fire fighters to put out the gasoline fire that our bombs caused. And talk about flying fish!

There is now an American F-16 squadron based there, and very little of the German presence can be seen. One item of interest was a small section of the old German taxi-way, which had a two inch wide fluorescent stripe in the middle, so that their fighters could taxi in the dark without exposing their lights to the Allies.

The main avenue on the air base is called Piper Cub Way (Way) which led to the F-16 maintenance hangar that we were privileged to visit. German headquarters at the field in 1944 were built next to a Dutch school just off the base, so that the Allies would not bomb it. It worked, as their headquarters never was hit in the half dozen times that the field was bombed.

On a mission to this field on August 19, 1943 the bombs from another group in our wing fell short, and landed in the Dutch hamlet of Hulten, killing twenty-one civilians. This hamlet is almost at the outer gate to the field. The 303rd group also missed the target and lost two bombers to German fighters, with nine men killed and twelve made prisoner. Bombs of the 303rd fell outside the perimeter of the field, but injured no one. This was one of the unfortunate aspects of high altitude bombardment. Every group missed on that day due to poor visibility.

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 - 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
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360th Bombardment Squadron Crew Lists

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

P	Williams, John T., 1Lt
CP	Spindler, Benjamin L., 1Lt
NAV	Ross, Lawrence D., 1Lt
BOM	Cascio, Guiseppe, 1Lt
ENG	Pfeffer, William W., T/Sgt
RO	Uhl, willard H., T/Sgt
BT	McKinnon, Neil W., S/Sgt
TG	Petrie, Joe D., S/Sgt
WG	Fambry, Louis F., S/Sgt

B-17G #42-31997 (*No Name*)

P	Parker, John T., 2Lt
CP	Anderson, John G., 2Lt
NAV	Lacey, Norman R., 2Lt
BOM	Pence, Granville A., 2Lt
ENG	Wall, Claudia W., S/Sgt
RO	Grace, Charles, Jr., S/Sgt
BT	Rhyne, Samuel A., Sgt
TG	Szczudlo, Joseph W., Sgt
WG	Fox, John L., Sgt

B-17G #42-97805 (*No Name*)

P	Evans, Ernest N., 1Lt
CP	Fisher, Stanley L., 2Lt
NAV	McDevitt, Theodore D., 2Lt
BOM	Proud, Rexford I., 2Lt
ENG	Bachman, Clifford D., T/Sgt
RO	Smith, Benjamin H., T/Sgt
BT	Kepics, George, S/Sgt
LWG	O'Hearn, Robert J., S/Sgt
RWG	Cogdell, Clarence L., S/Sgt

B-17G #42-107048 (*No Name*)

P	Bartholomew, Dale E., 2Lt
CP	Ross, James A., 2Lt
NAV	Blume, William H., III, 2Lt
BOM	Andreason, Joseph G., 2Lt
ENG	Litwiller, Harold D., S/Sgt
RO	Allard, Charles G., S/Sgt
BT	Smith, Victor H., S/Sgt
TG	Blackwell, Haywood E., Jr., Sgt
WG	Lowe, Ralph R., Sgt

(Spare - returned)

B-17G #42-97590 *Virgin Mary*

P	Long, Paul H., 2Lt
CP	Caldwell, Frederick J., 2Lt
NAV	Vell, Ona L., 2Lt
BOM	Beasley, Edward E., 2Lt
ENG	Mours, John D., S/Sgt
RO	Habich, Arthur L., S/Sgt
BT	Flammia, Joseph E., S/Sgt
TG	Olson, Keith R., Sgt
WG	Abbott, Wesley C., Sgt

B-17G #42-37841 *Banshee*

P	Miller, Edgar C., 1Lt
CP	Brown, Leonard M., 2Lt
NAV	Edwards, Frank A., 2Lt
BOM	Blythe, Robert W., Jr., 2Lt
ENG	Jamison, Charles A., S/Sgt
RO	Libert, Irving, S/Sgt
BT	LaFranchi, Alfred D., Sgt
TG	Johnson, Francis D., Sgt
WG	Enget, Obert L., Sgt

B-17G #42-102544 *Sack Time*

P	Lynch, Robert J., 1Lt
CP	Travis, William L., Col
NAV	Davis, Darius R., Capt
NAV	Roche, William J., 2Lt
BOM	Bowen, Richard R., Capt
ENG	Roszell, Thomas M., T/Sgt
RO	Schuler, Frank H., T/Sgt
BT	Chudej, Josef R., S/Sgt
TG	Krogh, Kenneth R., S/Sgt
LWG	Schoonmaker, Elwood, Jr., S/Sgt
RWG	Pleasanton, Kenneth H., S/Sgt

427th Bombardment Squadron Crew Lists

B-17G #42-32027 *Betty Jane*

P	Beiser, Theodore R., 2Lt
CP	Johnson, Richard R., 2Lt
NAV	Gepner, Isadore, 2Lt
BOM	Cooper, Edward G., 2Lt
TT	Buchanan, Lonnie J., T/Sgt
BT	Latta, Charles W., Sgt
RO	Gorchesky, Benny J., S/Sgt
TG	Brackey, Carroll H., Sgt
LWG	Haines, James W., Sgt
RWG	Glass, David, Sgt

B-17G #42-102569 *Miss Lace*

P	Lehmann, Elroy C., 2Lt
CP	Heil, Lee C., 2Lt
NAV	Gast, William J., 2Lt
BOM	Miller, Charles F., 2Lt
TT	Sydor, Joseph, S/Sgt
BT	Koon, Bennie, Sgt
RO	Kelley, James D., S/Sgt
TG	Ruhge, Wayne L., Sgt
LWG	Garlick, Darrell L., Sgt
RWG	Smith, Leonard C., S/Sgt

B-17G #42-31423 *Jigger Rooche*

P	Ligino, Steve, 1Lt
CP	Tyler, Frederick B., 2Lt
NAV	Smith, Arthur M., 2Lt
BOM	Dugger, William A., 2Lt
TT	Rau, Harvey L., S/Sgt
BT	Howard, George R., Sgt
RO	Dahms, Edward R., S/Sgt
TG	Dudley, Howard E., Sgt
RWG	Czerwonka, Joseph A., Sgt
LWG	Gainer, Philip B., Sgt

B-17G #42-31200 *Old Crow*

P	Gallagher, John W., Jr., 2Lt
CP	Bitel, Peter, 2Lt
NAV	Hibbard, Troy W., 2Lt
BOM	Tow, Weyman J., 2Lt
TT	Lynn, William V., Sgt
BT	Kail, Nicholas F., Sgt
RO	Gervais, Joseph R., S/Sgt
TG	Jacques, Warren, Sgt
LWG	Joyce, Jess, Sgt
RWG	Soltero, John, Sgt

(Spare-returned)

B-17G #42-102432 *Tiny Angel*

P	Headlee, Dale C., 1Lt
CP	Fogerson, Joseph E., F/O
NAV	Skarsten, Albert B., 1Lt
BOM	Kennedy, William J., 1Lt
TT	Rusinak, John C., T/Sgt
BT	Almanzor, Berton F., S/Sgt
RO	Wagner, Wayne, T/Sgt
TG	Bell, Alton R., S/Sgt
LWG	Wilson, Robert J., S/Sgt
RWG	Miller, Norman L., S/Sgt

B-17G #42-97096 (*No Name*)

P	Brangwin, Kenneth R., 2Lt
CP	Johnson, Charles E., Jr., 2Lt
NAV	Pere, Aloysius R., 2Lt
BOM	Dombrowski, Alexander, 2Lt
BT	Wiley, Nathan H., S/Sgt
RO	Sullivan, James J., T/Sgt
TT	Frey, James L., T/Sgt
TG	Ross, Samuel C., S/Sgt
RWG	Swanson, Charles A., S/Sgt
LWG	Keely, Eugene F., S/Sgt

B-17G #42-107099 *Old 99*

P	Flick, Chester E., 2Lt
CP	Keating, Donald W., 2Lt
NAV	Curley, Walter A., 2Lt
BOM	Fontaine, Clifford F., S/Sgt
TT	Forry, Harvey W., S/Sgt
TG	Montfort, Theo T., Sgt WIA
RO	Abeyta, J. Charles, S/Sgt
BT	Eberly, Charles P., S/Sgt
RWG	Brock, Charley F., Sgt
LWG	Ford, Thomas P., S/Sgt

(Abortive Sortie)