

303rd BG (H) Combat Mission No. 306

22 January 1945

Target: Synthetic Oil Plant at Sterkrade, Germany

Crews Dispatched: 26

Crews Lost: Lt. Woodson, 7 KIA, 2 POW

Crewmembers Lost or Wounded: 6 WIA

Length of Mission: 5 hours, 47 minutes

Bomb Load: 10 x 500 lb H.E. M43 bombs

Bombing Altitudes: 24,400 & 24,300 ft

Ammo Fired: 4,500 rounds

Twenty-six aircraft were dispatched to bomb the synthetic oil plant at Sterkrade (visual or GEE-H). The secondary target was the Rheims marshalling yard (visual or PFF), with the last resort a landing strip at Lingen, Germany. No aircraft returned early. The 360BS loaned a PFF aircraft to the 351BG.

There were no clouds over the target. In the general area there were 3/10 to 5/10 middle clouds with tops at 8,000 to 10,000 feet, dense, semi-persistent contrails at bombing altitude, and light ground haze. Twenty-four aircraft dropped 20 500-lb. H.E. M43 bombs, ten units of T277 leaflets, and ten units of T274 leaflets from 24,400 and 24,300 feet. Lead Squadron bombing was good. The low Squadron was unable to pick up the MPI due to smoke, their bombs hit 1 1/2 miles NNW of the target. One aircraft jettisoned its bombs before reaching the target.

There was no enemy air opposition. The very good 1st AD fighter support consisted of 36 P-47s and 75 P-51s. Chaff did not curtail the intense and very accurate flak in the target area. Twenty-one aircraft had major battle damage and three, minor damage.

One B-17 was lost over the target: #43-38530 (*No Name*), 358BS, received a direct hit on the No. 2 engine from anti-aircraft fire. Lt. Harry **Gobrecht**, pilot of #43-38999 *Emma*, 358BS, and Lt. Richard H. **Gmernicki**, pilot of #44-8427 *Henn's Revenge*, 358BS, reported seeing #43-38530 (*No Name*), 358BS, piloted by 1Lt. William H. **Woodson**, hit. The left wing broke off, the aircraft went down with the left side burning — it exploded in the air. Two to three parachutes were reported about the time that the aircraft reportedly exploded, as if some of the crew had been blown out.

Co-pilot, F/O Harold A. **Lanigan**, later reported that the accurate flak barrage occurred about 1:38 pm, a few minutes before bombs away. Tail gunner, Sgt. Peter J. **Farrell**, reported that he had been wounded in his leg. He tried, but was unable to stem the flow of blood. Another flak burst hit just aft of the No. 2 engine very close to the fuselage. The fortress went into a 65 degree dive during which the left wing was torn off. T/Sgt. Ray R. **Cooper** exited through a hole in the nose. F/O Russell C. **Finn** was mortally wounded and was unable to exit. F/O **Lanigan**, was able to escape from the spinning aircraft through the nose hatch, despite the centrifugal force caused by the violently spinning B-17. Others weren't so lucky and crashed with the B-17 at Mulheim, Germany.

F/O **Lanigan** was taken to a local police station where he was "bullied" by the German in charge. He was given first aid for his injured ankle and foot plus facial cuts. He was shown the dog tags of "Woody," the pilot, and Sgts. **Burnette**, **Gramiak** and **Riley** and



WILLIAM H. WOODSON CREW - 358th BS

(crew assigned 358BS: 26 Oct 1944 - photo: Manchester, NH, Oct 1944)

(Back L-R) 1Lt William H. Woodson (P), F/O Russell C. Finn (N), F/O Leon P. Foltz

(B), F/O Harold A. Lanigan (CP), T/Sgt Richard A. Brown (E)

(Front L-R) S/Sgt R.L. Burnette (BT), T/Sgt Victor J. Gramiak (R),

S/Sgt Lloyd S. Riley (WG), Sgt Peter J. Farrell (TG)

was advised that one crewman (Sgt. **Farrell**) had a leg torn off. Sgt **Cooper** was taken to a different police station, but later joined F/O **Lanigan**. The night of January 23 was spent in an air raid shelter during a RAF bombing raid. They were taken to a German fighter field, were further interrogated and managed to escape through a small basement window. Captured again near the Dutch border, they were kept on the move for over a month until reaching a railroad station at Landshut, Germany. **Lanigan** again escaped accompanied by a P-51 pilot. Three days later

they walked into some German Home Guards and were captured. They were placed with a group of Army Officer POWs with whom they stayed until rescued by Patton's Third Army.

Lt. **Woodson**, F/O **Finn**, T/Sgt Richard A. **Brown**, T/Sgt Victor J. **Gramiak**, S/Sgt R.L. **Burnette**, S/Sgt Lloyd S. **Riley** and Sgt Peter J. **Farrell** all were killed in the crash. T/Sgt **Brown**, S/Sgt **Burnette** and Sgt. **Farrell** are buried in Netherlands American Cemetery at Margraten, Netherlands.

Two aircraft landed on the Continent after being damaged by flak: #43-38734 *Cheshire Cat*, 427BS, piloted by 1Lt. Grafton N. **Smith**, landed at field #B-61 with three wounded men. S/Sgt. Paul G. **Gray** (TOG) and Sgt. Melvin **Howell** (TG) were hospitalized in a Ghent, Belgium. Sgt. G.F. **Parker** (E) was hospitalized with a back injury after returning to England. #44-8576 (*No Name*), 358BS, piloted by 1Lt. Ingersall J. **Roberts** (427BS), also landed on the Continent with one man wounded. The B-17 was salvaged.

The remaining twenty-three Fortresses returned to Molesworth with two additional crewmen who had been wounded by anti-aircraft fire. S/Sgt Thomas A. **Henn** (TG) had wounds on his head and arms, and T/Sgt Elwood A. **Griffith** (E) suffered a leg wound. The first aid kits were squashed by the flak hits and were of no use. The wounded were treated in the 303rd Station Hospital. The crew later named #44-8427 *Henn's Revenge* after the wounded Tail Gunner.

A SHELL THROUGH THE NAVIGATOR'S TABLE

by Harry D. Gobrecht



The Distinguished Flying Cross being pinned on Harry D. Gobrecht by Lew Lyle, 303rd Bomb Group Senior Advisor, while wife Barbara Gobrecht looks on. Presentation was made in the Lewis E. Lyle Rotunda of the Mighty 8th AF Heritage Museum.

Sterkrade was the primary target for 206 B-17 "Flying Fortresses" of the First Air Division this day. The 303rd Bombardment Group (H) dispatched 26 aircraft and were flying at the end of the bomber stream as the "tail-end charlie" Group. All day the P-51 and P-47 aircraft fighter support kept the German fighters away from the bomber formation.

Anti-aircraft fire (flak), however, was extremely intense and very accurate over the target area. There was a friendly undercast while approaching the target. When about fifty miles from Sterkrade the clouds ended abruptly. The German gunners had a clear view of the

attacking B-17s from their fire became more accurate as the bomber stream passed over them. German gunners were successful in shooting down five of the attacking B-17s.

1Lt Harry D. Gobrecht's crew was flying in the third three-plane element in the Group's formation. The B-17 piloted by 1Lt W.W. Woodson, and flying off Gobrecht's right wing, received a direct hit from anti-aircraft fire. The left wing broke off and the B-17 went down with the left side burning. It then exploded in air. Two members of this crew managed to safely parachute from the stricken Fortress, but the other seven crewmen died when their B-17 hit the ground.

Gobrecht was flying in a B-17 named *Emma*. Their regular aircraft, *Neva-The Silver Lady*, was in the repair shops undergoing repair to damage sustained in a prior flight. At the same time that Lt. Woodson's plane was hit and went down, *Emma* also suffered a flak burst, knocking out one engine and destroying the electrical system.

Another anti-aircraft shell hit the bottom of their B-17s nose. The shell went through the Navigator's table and out the top without exploding. It left a mess in the nose compartment. With one engine gone, and no electricity to operate the flight instruments, Gobrecht was unable to keep up with the rest of the formation and it was slowly disappearing in the distance.

Emma then became a sitting duck to any German fighter that might have been in the vicinity, but fortunately, they were busy elsewhere. Navigator Lt. Walter H. McDonald was dismayed when the undercast again appeared, since he wasn't sure of their position over Europe. Through a slit in the clouds over Holland, he saw a small piece of land and was able to identify the dam that kept the Atlantic Ocean out of the Dutch countryside. He was then able to establish a compass course leading back to Molesworth.

When they arrived to prepare for a landing, Flight Engineer T/Sgt Lenville Benefield was able to manually crank down the landing gear. Flaps, normally used for landing, could not be used because of the electrical system problems.

Red flares were fired indicating that an emergency landing was about to be made. Gobrecht made a "hot" landing using up the entire length of the runway. Upon landing, the ground crew counted over one hundred holes in *Emma* from enemy ground fire. Miraculously no member of the crew was injured from the intense flak hits.

As a result of his actions, Lt Gobrecht was recommended for the Distinguished Flying Cross for his courage, and extraordinary skill as Pilot of the badly damaged B-17. But before the paper work could be completed and processed, his Squadron Commander was shot down and became a POW. But after 50 years, the recommendation was revived by his Squadron Commander, and Lt. Gobrecht was finally approved for his DFC on 12 February 1999.

The award was made by retired Major General Lewis E. Lyle, former commander of the 303rd Bombardment Group, and by retired Lt. General E.G. "Buck" Shuler, Commander of the Eighth Air Force during Operation Desert Storm.

DUTCH ZUIDER ZEE GIVES NAVIGATOR HIS BEARINGS

Memories of Lt Walter H. McDonald

On the 22nd of January 1945 we flew into the Ruhr Valley — one of Germany's most highly industrialized areas. This area was avoided in much of the war. Some say because it was so heavily defended, but other, more cynical people say the reason was the amount of American capital invested in the region.

I can vouch from experience that it was heavily defended. We came into the Ruhr Valley from the north over a very friendly under cast cloud layer. However, just about fifty miles from the target the clouds ended abruptly, and we were highly visible to the gun crews on the ground.

The radio man did dump out some bales of tin foil to fool the radar on the guns, but we took quite a beating that day.

We came away from the target with one of our four engines gone, no electrical system for our instruments, and over 100 holes in our plane. With one engine gone, we could not keep up with the formation, so we watched as they slowly disappeared into the distance.

To further complicate things we were soon back over the undercast. We had been able to follow the formation long enough to know the general direction we should go, but we were unable to see the ground to know when we should make a left turn and go back to England.

It was lonely out here by ourselves and we were sitting ducks to any German fighter pilots that might have been in the vicinity. We did manage to find a slit break in the clouds and I saw enough of the ground to know where we were —the small piece of land I saw was the dam the little Dutch boy stuck his finger in — the one that keeps the Atlantic Ocean out of the Zuider Zee.

Time for a left turn and head straight for the base. Since the main formation had to take the customary tour of England, the fact we went straight in made it possible for us to beat them to the base. I had now had my fifteen seconds of fame everyone is supposed to have at least, with nine other people in the plane.

A PLATE IN MY SKULL — COURTESY OF GERMAN FLAK

by S/Sgt Thomas Henn, 358th Tail Gunner

On January 22nd, 1945, on our 30th mission over Sterkrade, Germany, I was badly injured. We had flown in intense flak for 20 minutes and during this time, a piece ripped into the tail section of the aircraft. It cut through my metal flak helmet and my leather helmet, knocking away my oxygen mask. I was immediately unconscious and as I slumped forward, the oxygen mask miraculously swung back into place, thus saving my life until crew members could come to my aid.

We made it back to Molesworth and I was immediately taken to the hospital where a leading neurosurgeon performed surgery. A good sized piece of flak had entered my skull just above my right ear, resting precariously close to delicate brain tissue. The surgeon removed the flak and placed a titanium plate over the injured skull.

I experienced severe paralysis of my entire left side as a result of the injury. After several weeks of recovery and therapy in England, my mobility improved. Later I was sent to the DeWit Hospital in Auburn, CA for more rehab, before being discharged in May 1945.

A partial paralysis on my left side remained a factor all my life, leaving me with no sensitivity in my fingers and weakness of arm and leg muscles.

I am grateful to God for sparing my life when my oxygen mask swung back into place and for having such a great crew, where friendship and concern supported me all my days.

A PREMONITION THAT CAME TRUE

by T/Sgt George F. Parker, 427th Bomb Squadron

On January 22nd, 1945 we were sent to Sterkrade, Germany on our 14th mission. We were hit by flak which wounded T/Sgt P.G. Gray, our Toggler, and Tail Gunner, Sgt Mel Howell. It also knocked out our hydraulic system. We lost altitude and started getting rid of everything. We dropped the ball turret over Amsterdam and leveled off and found an airfield near Ghent, Belgium.

We landed wheels down, but no brakes. As we neared the end of the runway one of our tires, which had been hit with flak, blew out. We turned around staying on the runway. As I was getting out of the plane I slipped and fell about 6 feet from the ball turret and landed on my back. We were trying to get Gray and Howell out of the aircraft. I have a permanent disability due to the back injury, and didn't fly anymore.

At the time, Lt Alderman had to fly 3 more missions. He told me he was not going back home when he finished. I told him he "was going to go home" and that I would be with him when he went out to his plane on the final mission. And that I would be waiting for him when he got back.

He flew his 33rd and 34th mission, and we were told that he was grounded because he was too nervous to fly. I went to the Air Surgeons office to check with them. The air surgeon asked who I was and I told him he was my co-pilot and that I would wait for him when he came back from his missions. I told him if he was grounded I would take my 3 day pass, if not I would be waiting for him. He said that he was too nervous and he was grounded and to take my pass.

I went on my pass and visited relatives in England. I had a premonition about him and thought to myself, no he's grounded and passed it off. When I came back to Molesworth from my pass, Sgt Kamen, a lead radio operator asked me if I had heard about it and I said no. He said my pilot would tell me. Right then I knew — Alderman had it. Lt. Smith said there was a mid-air collision, with no survivors.

We found out in 1989, that Lt. Alderman is buried in Zachary National Cemetery, just outside of Louisville, KY. He went down when two B-17s came together. I visited the grave and there are seven bodies in one grave.

The men on our crew showed a lot of courage on these missions, and I wonder why 1Lt Grafton Smith, our pilot and 2Lt Melvin Alderman, our copilot were never given the Distinguished Flying Cross.



B-17G #44-8351 (No Name) PFF 358BS (VK-Z)

41st CBW-B Lead (427BS) - Pilot Maj R.W. Sheets / CoPilot 1Lt J.W. O'Leary
(Back L-R) 2Lt Preston W. McKeon (TG/O), 1Lt James W. O'Leary (CP), Maj Robert W. Sheets (P),
2Lt Floyd L. Clark (GHN), 1Lt Bert J. Pandy (N), 1Lt F.E. Umphress, Jr. (B)
(Front L-R) T/Sgt Charles P. Kopriva (R), S/Sgt Frank C. DeCicco, Jr. (WG),
T/Sgt John T. Kernodle (E), 2Lt Walter D. Cardwell (MN), Sgt Harold R. Carver (WG)

Aircraft Formation at Assembly Point - Group A

Sheets-O'Leary
351 - PFF

Petersen
248

Roberts
576 - PFF

Schlecht
621

Richter
885

Smith
734

Goodberlet
065

Woodson
530

Greenbaum
318

Walker
316

Gobrecht
999

Gmernicki
427

Ayers
060

Aircraft Formation at Assembly Point - Group B

Lutz-Knudson
439 - PFF

Fravel
944

Holmes
619

Rybaltowski
608

Tarvid
206

Tilsen
546

Middlemas
516

Hardin
672

Stiver
563

Statton
517

Edmunds
860

St. Julien
523

Geiger
544

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	PAS - Passenger	POW - Prisoner of war
	BT - Ball Turret Operator	PHO - Photographer	DOW - Died of wounds
	TT - Top Turret Operator	Y - Y-Operators (YRO,YO)	EVD - Evaded the enemy
	TG - Tail Gunner	RCM - Radio Cntr Measures	REP - Repatriated
	WG - Waist Gunner	SJ - Spot Jammer	RES - Rescued
	LWG - Left Waist Gunner		ESC - Escaped
	RWG - Right Waist Gunner	RESULTS OF MISSION	BO - Bailed out
	GUN - Gunner	KIA - Killed in action	DCH - Ditched
	VI - Voice Interpreter	WIA - Wounded in action	CR-L - Crashed on land
	OBS - Observer	MIA - Missing in action	CR-S - Crashed at sea

358th Bombardment Squadron Crew Lists

B-17G #43-38530 (No Name) CR-L

P	Woodson, William H., 2Lt	KIA
CP	Lanigan, Harold A., F/O	POW
NAV	Finn, Russell C., F/O	KIA
TOG	Cooper, Ray R., S/Sgt	POW
ENG	Brown, Richard A., T/Sgt	KIA
WG	Riley, Lloyd S., S/Sgt	KIA
RO	Gramiak, Victor J., T/Sgt	KIA
BT	Burnette, R.L., S/Sgt	KIA
TG	Farrell, Peter J., Sgt	KIA

B-17G #44-8318 (No Name)

P	Greenbaum, Richard D., 2Lt
CP	Balkcom, Robert E., 2Lt
NAV	Nicastro, John J., F/O
TOG	Brown, James L., S/Sgt
ENG	Bruce, Leonard F., Sgt
TG	Hawes, Kenneth D., Sgt
RO	Dalton, Denver, Sgt
BT	Dooley, Patrick, Sgt
WG	Armstrong, Henry L., Sgt

B-17G #43-38999 Emma

P	Gobrecht, Harry D., 1Lt
CP	Eby, Joe M., 2Lt
NAV	McDonald, Walter H., 2Lt
BOM	Miller, Robert J., S/Sgt
ENG	Benefield, Lenville H., S/Sgt
WG	Mays, Thomas G., Sgt
RO	Quick, Edgar H., S/Sgt
BT	McGrory, William P., S/Sgt
TG	Buske, Phillip R., Sgt

B-17G #44-6316 (No Name)

P	Walker, Barton F., 2Lt
CP	Smith, Orville H., F/O
NAV	Das, Mitchell C., 2Lt
TOG	Magyar, Frank, Sgt
ENG	Wilhelm, Raymond G., Sgt
BT	Diaczynski, Andrew J., Sgt
RO	Jasut, Stanley, Sgt
WG	Frazier, Victor L., S/Sgt
TG	Massey, Ray N., Sgt

B-17G #44-8427 Henn's Revenge

P	Gmernicki, Richard H., 1Lt	
CP	Judd, Chester G., 2Lt	
NAV	Jones, William M., 2Lt	
BOM	Denning, Glenn J., S/Sgt	
WG	McClymont, John W., S/Sgt	
ENG	Griffith, Elwood A., T/Sgt	WIA
RO	Calenberg, Raymond N., Sgt	
BT	Greenberg, Bernard, Sgt	
TG	Henn, Thomas A., Sgt	WIA

B-17G #43-38065 Princess Pat 2

P	Goodberlet, Clarence J., 2Lt
CP	Magid, Malcolm J., 2Lt
NAV	Boland, Anthony J., 2Lt
TOG	Day, Keith E., Sgt
ENG	Cotter, William J., T/Sgt
WG	Reece, Robert H., T/Sgt
RO	LaPerch, William J., T/Sgt
BT	Walling, James M., S/Sgt
TG	Schultz, Frederick W., S/Sgt
YR	Elkin, Samuel, Sgt

359th Bombardment Squadron Crew Lists

B-17G #43-38619 (No Name)

P	Holmes, Alfred M., 2Lt
CP	Haynes, Eugene, 2Lt
NAV	Davis, Daryl W., 2Lt
TOG	Dando, Charles A., 1Lt
ENG	Sprague, Wendell P., Jr., Sgt
RO	Prehatny, Joseph R., S/Sgt
BT	Vowels, Donovan E., S/Sgt
TG	Bartkowski, Edward L., Sgt
WG	Wallis, Elton E., S/Sgt

B-17G #43-38608 Lucille

P	Rybaltowski, Vincent, 2Lt
CP	Olson, John A., 2Lt
NAV	McLeod, Harry A., 2Lt
BOM	Donovan, Thomas A., 2Lt
ENG	Perlowitz, Murray A., Sgt
RO	Capps, Douglas M., Sgt
BT	Hollingsworth, Donald M., Sgt
TG	Reseigh, John R., Sgt
WG	Vitiritto, Joseph A., Sgt

B-17G #42-107206 Old Black Magic

P	Tarvid, Arthur J., 2Lt
CP	Grandwilliams, Louis C., F/O
NAV	Hudson, Glenn V., 2Lt
BOM	Webber, Gale M., 2Lt
ENG	Jenkins, Maurice L., Sgt
RO	Root, Carmen W., Sgt
BT	Muchmore, Gale F., Sgt
TG	Dimick, Richard D., Sgt
WG	Carlson, Dale H., Sgt

B-17G #42-97944 Daddy's Delight

P	Fravel, Harold L., 2Lt
CP	McClurg, Galt L., 2Lt
NAV	Albertson, Edward, F/O
TOG	Roberts, James P., Sgt
ENG	Belcher, Rubin W., S/Sgt
RO	Jones, Walter N., Jr., S/Sgt
BT	Schilling, Lawrence E., Sgt
TG	McDonald, Billy L., Sgt
WG	Schoonover, Howard D., Sgt

B-17G #42-97546 Idaliza

P	Tilsen, Cyril, 2Lt
CP	McDowell, James B., 2Lt
NAV	Bielski, Casimir, Jr., 2Lt
BOM	Barger, Donald T., 2Lt
ENG	Driggers, Sherod R., Jr., S/Sgt
RO	Mawdsley, Arnold, Cpl
BT	Hendon, William G., Pvt
TG	Proctor, Isaac H., Cpl
WG	Cassino, Julian R, Cpl

B-17G #44-8439 (No Name) - PFF

P	Lutz, John R., 1Lt
CP	Knudson, Darwin D., 1Lt
NAV	Moon, Richard Y., 2Lt
MN	Gennaro, Louis T., 2Lt
GHN	Heiser, Kenneth, 2Lt (358th)
BOM	Mitchell, Robert C., 1Lt
ENG	Candito, Christopher A., S/Sgt
RO	Lovelock, Edward N., S/Sgt
TG	Ogborn, Maurice E., 2Lt
WG	Bailey, John R., S/Sgt

360th Bombardment Squadron Crew Lists

B-17G #44-6516 *My Darling*

P	Middlemas, Arthur B., 1Lt
CP	Schultz, John W., 2Lt
NAV	Cooley, Royal D., 2Lt
BOM	Valdes, George J., S/Sgt
ENG	Marshall, Leroy H., Sgt
RO	Avenia, James J., T/Sgt
BT	Parrish, George K., S/Sgt
TG	Cranshaw, John A., S/Sgt
WG	Maurer, John L., S/Sgt

B-17G #43-38672 (No Name)

P	Hardin, Thomas H., Jr., 1Lt
CP	Brown, William W., 2Lt
NAV	Hiebeler, George E., 2Lt
BOM	Driver, Henderson M., Jr., S/Sgt
ENG	Mikulich, Stanley, T/Sgt
RO	Kasper, Raymond H., S/Sgt
BT	Kaber, Harvey N., Sgt
TG	Bur, Robert D., S/Sgt
WG	Sersland, Paul V., Sgt

B-17G #44-6523 (No Name)

P	St. Julien, John D., 1Lt
CP	Newell, Richard M., 2Lt
NAV	Kiehlkopf, George, 2Lt
BOM	Giancola, James V., S/Sgt
ENG	Mitchell, William E., S/Sgt
RO	Flanigan, John J., Sgt
BT	Farthing, Richard M., Sgt
TG	Evans, Marlin D., Sgt
WG	McLellan, Raymond L., Sgt

B-17G #44-6517 *Old Cock*

P	Statton, Roy F., 2Lt
CP	Schroll, David A., 2Lt
NAV	Donahue, Thomas R., 2Lt
BOM	Woods, Heiber J., Sgt
ENG	Rhodes, William H., Sgt
RO	Knowles, Charles D., Sgt
BT	Koci, Robert W., Sgt
TG	Carter, James O., Sgt
WG	Maxson, Gordon H., Sgt

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

P	Geiger, James E., 1Lt
CP	Telford, Donald R., F/O
NAV	Carney, Felix A., 2Lt
BOM	Clippinger, Robert E., T/Sgt
ENG	Stockman, Leonard G., S/Sgt
RO	Licht, Wilfred L., S/Sgt
BT	Wentz, Roland L., Sgt
TG	Germanine, Joseph R., Sgt
WG	Doctor, Gordon C., Sgt

B-17G #42-97860 (No Name)

P	Edmunds, Robert E., 2Lt
CP	Bristol, Clarence D., 2Lt
NAV	Lofquist, Gordon B., 2Lt
BOM	Perry, Franklin W., 2Lt
ENG	Hammel, Norman D., Sgt
RO	Polo, Matthew N., Sgt
BT	Farnham, Gordon W., Sgt
TG	Rumberger, Frank C., Sgt
WG	King, Raymond H., Sgt

B-17G #43-38563 *Jackie*

P	Stiver, Merrill M., 2Lt
CP	Kacus, Alexander, F/O
NAV	Beasley, Leon O., 2Lt
BOM	Hight, Basil D., 2Lt
ENG	Auer, Kenneth R., Sgt
RO	Godley, Walter M., Sgt
BT	Pilgrim, Robert W., Sgt
TG	Cie zadlo, Eugene F., S/Sgt
WG	Marchionda, Guido P., S/Sgt

427th Bombardment Squadron Crew Lists

B-17G #43-38248 *Jigger Rooche II*

P	Petersen, William H., 1Lt
CP	Candido, Anthony N., 2Lt
NAV	Bason, William A., 2Lt
BOM	Price, John B., T/Sgt
TT	Zarella, Anthony A., S/Sgt
BT	Johnson, Gene W., S/Sgt
RO	Whitely, Cull W., Jr., S/Sgt
TG	Mussi, James L., Sgt
WG	Tanner, Loyd H., S/Sgt

B-17G #42-39885 *Sweet Rose O'Grady*

P	Richter, George K., 2Lt
CP	McMullen, Robert A., 2Lt
NAV	Stephens, Walton M., Jr., 2Lt
TOG	Simon, Lawrence E., S/Sgt
TT	Bates, Grover P., T/Sgt
BT	Smith, Donald S., Sgt
RO	Kemmerer, Alfred G., Sgt
TG	Chisholm, Robert E., Sgt
WG	Vernon, James D., Sgt

B-17G #44-8576 (No Name) - PFF

P	Roberts, Ingersall J., 1Lt
CP	Bluethenthal, Arthur, 2Lt
NAV	Russo, William D., 1Lt
MN	Foltz, Leon P., Lt (358th)
BOM	Hansen, Harley L., 2Lt
WG	Carlson, Harold A., Sgt
TT	Riveland, Alf, Sgt
RO	Renzi, Frank, Sgt
TG	Barber, Albert P., Sgt
BT	Campbell, Gerald R., Sgt
(Abortive Sortie)	

B-17G #43-38621 *50 Ragged*

P	Schlecht, Walter J., 1Lt
CP	Ferrari, Walter J., 2Lt
NAV	Tanner, Merlin A., 2Lt
BOM	Leas, Harry D., S/Sgt
TT	Hedison, Ara H., S/Sgt
BT	Hocknell, Raymond A., Sgt
RO	Hradiskey, Joseph R., S/Sgt
TG	Herod, William J., S/Sgt
WG	Warburton, Arlis F., S/Sgt
Y	Conrad, Joseph, T/Sgt
(Abortive Sortie)	

B-17G #42-31060 *Poque Ma Hone*

P	Ayers, Roger D, 2Lt
CP	Danna, Joseph, 2Lt
NAV	Wagner, Charles D., 2Lt
BOM	Cohen, Leonard, F/O
TT	Rys, Valentine J., Sgt
BT	Bailey, George E., Sgt
RO	Morris, Allen L., Sgt
TG	Turkovich, Charles J., Sgt
WG	Clarkson, Robert T., Sgt

B-17G #43-38734 *Cheshire Cat*

P	Smith, Grafton N., 1Lt	
CP	Alderman, Melvin, 2Lt	
NAV	Blessing, Gerald D., 2Lt	
TOG	Gray, Paul A., S/Sgt	WIA
TT	Warner, Vester W., T/Sgt	
BT	Miller, Raymond M., Sgt	
RO	Parker, George F., S/Sgt	WIA
TG	Howell, Melvin, Sgt	WIA
WG	Dussliere, Albert L., Sgt	

B-17G #44-8351 (No Name) - PFF

P	Sheets, Robert W., Maj
CP	O'Leary, James W., 1Lt
NAV	Pandy, Bert J., 1Lt
MN	Caldwell, Walter D., 2Lt
GHN	Clark, Floyd L., 2Lt
BOM	Umphress, F.E., Jr., 1Lt
TT	Kernodle, John T., S/Sgt
RO	Kopriva, Charles P., T/Sgt
TG	McKeon, Preston W., 2Lt
WG	DeCicco, Frank C., Jr., S/Sgt
WG	Carver, Harold R., S/Sgt

17 1/2 Minutes - An Eternity

by Al Dussliere

January 22, 1945 the G. N. Smith Crew was scheduled for a mission. This would be our first mission after spending ten days on the continent in Luxembourg and Paris. January 10, 1945 our plane was involved in a collision with another B-17 over Bonn, Germany. We made a forced belly landing on an airfield in Luxembourg. Our 14th mission was approached with a great deal of apprehension. Less than two weeks before we had lost two of our buddies, Ed Gardner, Navigator and Bill Dohm, Bombardier, when they were forced to bail out over enemy territory. We did not know then if they were still alive. Now we were scheduled to fly again. With 13 missions under our belt and the experience of the last mission we had lost our youthful innocence and faced the stark reality of what our job really entailed.

The target for the day, our 14th mission and number 306 for the Group, was a synthetic oil plant located at Sterkgrade, Germany. The town is located near Essen and Oberhausen. Our plane assignment was #43-38734, "Cheshire Cat". After briefing, I went to our Catholic Chaplain, Father Skoner, received Holy Communion and a blessing. One of my better recollections of Father Skoner was what he said to us on most occasions after the blessing when we were leaving on a mission. He gave us a pat on the cheek and said, "Give 'em hell". It was a somewhat different parting word from a man of the cloth, but we all knew it was in the context of our reason for being where we were, what we were doing and where we were going.

Take-off for the estimated 6-hour mission was between 10:00 and 10:25. The sky was relatively clear and assembling was accomplished with no major problems. Twenty-six aircraft were dispatched from the 303rd Bomb Group. No enemy planes were sighted, possibly because we were very well protected by many of our "little friends" P-47's and P-51's.

As we approached we saw no clouds over the target. This setting was perfect for German anti-aircraft defenses and one, which made it a bit more uncomfortable for us. Flak appeared, and the closer we got to the target the more intense and accurate it became. There was so much flak that the smoke from the bursts partially darkened the sky. We could hear the flak hitting and going through the plane. Never before had we encountered flak like this that we were flying through. Suddenly, Mel Howell, tail gunner, called out; "I'm hit". Within a few seconds we heard the same words from P.G. Gray, togglier. In the waist I thought, first the tail, then the nose. I'll probably get it next. About that time the plane lurched from a very close burst of flak and I pitched forward and down toward the bottom of the waist window. As I pulled myself up to an upright position I stood directly in line with a good-sized hole in the plexi-glass where I had been standing. This was one time being short in height was a great asset. That burst could have wounded me or even taken my life.

The heavy anti-aircraft fire continued throughout the bomb run, the drop of the bombs and as we pulled away from the target. We didn't think it would ever quit. Number 3 and 4 engines were knocked out. With two engines out we could not keep up and fell away from the rest of the formation. For 17 1/2 minutes we were in the intense and accurate enemy fire. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity the flak ceased. We lost altitude steadily. It became mandatory to lighten the load in the plane. The Pilot, G.N. Smith and Co-Pilot, Melvin Alderman ordered Ray Miller, Ball Turret gunner out of his position. He assisted George Parker, Radio Operator and Al Dussliere, Waist Gunner in throwing out everything that wasn't fastened down including guns and ammunition. Still unable to maintain altitude it was necessary to drop the ball turret. This was no simple task and when all the attaching hardware was removed the turret started to move and then lodged in the opening. Someone found something to pry the ball loose and finally it dropped out of the plane

somewhere over Holland. With that heavy weight gone Smitty and Alderman were able to hold the altitude at near 6,000 feet. In addition to the lost engines the plane had incurred considerable other damage. With two wounded, Howell and Gray on board, unable to maintain altitude and the fuel supply running low it was imperative to find a place to land. Finally we reached Belgium and were able to make it to the City of Ghent.

It was absolutely necessary to prepare the wounded, Howell and Gray, for the landing. The space constrictions in the tail and the narrow opening by the rear wheel well made it necessary for Howell to move toward the waist as best he could by pushing himself along in a sitting position. With a badly damaged leg he made it to the rear wheel well where we were able to assist him into the waist area by lifting and bracing his leg as he propelled himself forward using his hands. We decided that it would be too difficult, with the possibility of doing more damage to the injured leg, to try to get him into the radio room which is the most structurally sound area in that part of the plane. It was becoming more urgent that we land as soon as possible. The landing would be extra precarious because two engines were gone. We prepared a place for him in the waist. I laid next to him bracing his wounded leg against my leg for support and hopefully prevent his moving forward when we landed. The Navigator was taking care of Gray in the nose. D.I. Massengill, Engineer was at his position. As the plane set down and we were traveling down the runway the right tire blew out. Lucky for us we had gone far enough on the runway and slowed down sufficiently that when we ground-looped and swerved off the runway the plane remained upright. Once again the excellent skill and dogged determination of Smitty and Alderman brought us to a safe landing under extremely hazardous conditions.

Emergency personnel at the airfield were at the ship as we came to a stop. Howell and Gray were immediately removed from the plane and taken to a hospital. We all were confident they would be well taken care of. At this time we began assessing the damage to our aircraft. Quoting from the diary I kept while a member of the 303rd, "the Cheshire Cat was a mass of holes". "Gas and oil tanks punctured". Later we determined there were hundreds of holes in the plane. In spite of the damage I think the plane was salvageable.

The wounded were taken to a British hospital. We were able to visit them later and were confident they would be well taken care of. The next time some of us saw them was in an American hospital in England when we received a 3-day pass.

The rest of the crew was taken by truck to small suburb outside of Brussels to await transportation back to England. While on our way to Brussels I told the members of our crew that because of my Belgian heritage I knew a little bit of the language. This, I suggested, should enable us to get along very well. When we had our first encounter with Belgian civilians we immediately discovered the popular language in that area was French not the Flemish I knew. My knowledge of the French language was zero. I don't think I will ever live that down. Some of the crew used to say, "Stick with Deuce, he'll take care of us".

We were temporarily quartered in a schoolhouse located near an airfield that was surrounded by a number of small villages. Directly across the airfield from where we were staying was an old church with a tall steeple. After the war I learned that a family friend who had lived with us for a short time when I was a child lived near that church. He and his family had returned to Belgium shortly before the war. Later we learned that this family friend was deeply involved with the Belgian underground and had assisted many allied fliers by shielding them from the Germans and helping some of them return to safety. After the war this family friend visited us. When he learned how close I was to him he broke down and cried. I still recall seeing that tall steeple when we took off later on our return to England.

There were so many things to remember about my short visit in the land of my forefathers and a few still stick out in my mind. I remember the first time we had a meal at the school where we were quartered. As we left the building and went outside to deposit what remained on our trays in containers we saw a number of civilians standing nearby. Before we could clean what scraps remaining they scraped them into containers of their own. I did not realize that people could be so hungry. After that we managed to have leftovers on our trays without being obvious about what we were doing. I don't think we fooled anyone.

Whenever I hear the song, "I'll Be Seeing You", a popular wartime tune, I am reminded of the time we visited a nightclub in Brussels. The female vocalist, a somewhat buxom person, sang that song in her broken English. The music was great but the lyrics, because of her way of articulating them, were somewhat comical. But who am I to criticize someone for the manner in which they spoke or sang my language when I didn't know a word of theirs. I still have drink coasters from that nightclub in my scrapbook.

While we were at the nightclub some young ladies came over to our table. We asked them to join us. They looked as if they were very young even compared to our tender years but it was refreshing to have some of the opposite gender to talk to. They knew enough English to make conversation possible. We soon realized how young they were when we offered to buy them a drink. Instead they requested ice cream. The concoction was not what we considered ice cream but it was cold and sweet.

That nightspot in Brussels provided another incident, which remains with me. One of the other members of the crew and I went to a restroom. We guessed we were going to the correct one until we entered and saw an older lady standing there. Red-faced we immediately turned around and departed. As we were leaving we saw other men entering. When they were leaving we asked them if that was the men's rest room and if so, why was there a lady in there. They laughed and told us having a female valet was an accepted practice. Hesitatingly we re-entered but were very careful accomplishing our tasks privately as we could.

We returned to the 303rd January 29 after an overnight stay in London. We rested on the 30th and 31st. The crew was scheduled for a week at a "Flak Home", but because there were no openings we were given a seven-day furlough. Some of us went to Scotland to get as far away from the war as we could.