

***Hell's Angels***  
***Famous Flying Fortress Gives the 303rd its Name***  
by Harry D. Gobrecht

The original 303rd crews received new B-17F aircraft at Kellogg Field, Michigan and were given the opportunity to name their new Flying Fortresses. The flights to Gander Field, Newfoundland allowed crews to check their aircraft for deficiencies before making the over-the-water flight to the UK.



**IRL M. BALDWIN CREW - 358th BS**

**(crew assigned 358BS: 15 Sep 1942 - photo: 13 Oct 1942)**

(Back) Capt Irl E. Baldwin (P), 2Lt Ripley W. Joy (CP), Capt Harold Fulghum (N),  
1Lt Donald R. Bone (B) – (Front) T/Sgt James E. Rodriguez Jr (E), Sgt Russell M.  
"Birdog" Warren (R), Sgt Harry Jim Brody (WG), Sgt Harold E. Godwin (TG),  
Sgt Allerton F. "Fred" Meddaugh, Jr. (WG)

The Group's most famous B-17, *Hell's Angels* was not named when Captain **Irl E. Baldwin** and his crew flew her from Kellogg Field, Michigan to England. On their B-17's 4th or 5th mission, Captain **Baldwin** remarked on interphone that he was thinking about a name. He asked, "How about 'Hell's Angels' from the movie of that name." One of the crewman, commenting on the mission being flown stated, "This is the closest to hell that angels will ever get!" The crew then agreed

that *Hell's Angels* would be a good name for their B-17.

The **Hell's Angels** nose art was designed and painted on the right side of the fuselage by PFC **Bernard K. Kastenbaum** in late November or early December, 1942. Eighth Air Force Headquarters later issued a directive that squadron and aircraft letters would be painted on the side of the fuselage of all bombers. **Bernie K. Kastenbaum** was transferred to the 1st Bomb Wing Headquarters at Brampton Grange on 19 December 1942 and was promoted to S/Sgt as a draftsman. His original nose art was removed to permit the painting of the squadron and aircraft letters VK-D. The artwork was then repainted on the nose by S/Sgt **Harold E. Godwin**, Tail Gunner on the Captain **Baldwin** crew. S/Sgt **Godwin** completed his 25th mission tour on 25 May 1943 and departed the 358th BS for the USA on 2 June 1943.



On 07 January 1944, following several weeks of suggestions, debates and arguments, and by a vote of the 303rd BG(H) staff and Squadron commanders, the name

*Hell's Angels* was adopted by the 303rd Bombardment Group (H). At that time the numerical designation of bomb groups in England was still on the secret list, and the men of the 303rd wanted some name that was simple, descriptive and appropriate for one of the Eighth Air Force's top organizations. The name was taken from the old B-17F *Hell's Angels*, one of the group's original planes that had already made an impressive record of dependability, endurance and mechanical efficiency.



The old Fortress had helped make the group famous by running up a total of 25 missions without returning early (the first heavy bomber in the Eighth Air Force to reach that mark) and went on to the 40th mission before a slight mechanical failure forced an early turn back.

At 48 missions *Hell's Angels* and her ground crew of six men were selected from the Eighth Air Force to return to the U.S. for a tour of the war factories. On hand for the sendoff ceremony was Ben Lyon, then a Lt. Col. in the USAAF on the staff of Gen. Ira Eaker, commander of the 8th AF.

On this tour *Hell's Angels*, both as an airplane and as a Bomb Group, became famous all over the entire United States. The crew told hundreds of thousands of war workers of the trials and hardships of the early days of daylight bombing missions and pointed out the patches that covered the old Fort from nose to tail. They were very proud of the fact that no member of its aircrew was ever wounded in action.

Although this record was surpassed many times by many aircraft during the later years, *Hell's Angels* was the champion of the early days and will always be the champion in the eyes of the 303rd.