



IN MEMORY of *a Queen*

by Capt. Harold R. Keyt, USAF

LAST SPRING, quietly and without fanfare, a grand old lady died. Over a million men were once so intimately acquainted with her that the dreams of their advancing age are still haunted by her picture. For during a brief and terrible moment of their lives they awarded her a completeness of faith that they have been able to give few women before or since. I know, for I was one of those men.

I remember a July morning in 1944. We were at 30,000 feet and had just released our bombs over the I. G. Farben plant near Leipzig when suddenly our B-17 reeled and shuddered under the impact of a twin burst of flak. The first burst knocked out the No. Two

engine and started it burning fiercely. The second knocked out No. Three, plus the oxygen system and intercom. Minutes later, we were at 5,000 feet—with a crippled airplane and not a friend in the sky.

Although we had managed to put out the fire, we were still faced with a tough decision: should we bail out and try to walk out of Germany, or should we stick with the plane? If we decided to stick, would the old girl hold together long enough to get us back to England? Could we maintain sufficient altitude with only two engines operating? What about the risk of running into further ground fire? What if we ran out of gas and had to ditch in the

Channel? Moreover, in our battered condition, any fighter attack would certainly prove fatal.

In the face of such odds, it may seem surprising that we elected to sit pat. Actually, the decision came as the result of a quite simple fact—we had faith in our plane.

While our aircraft commander ordered the rest of the crew to jettison all non-essential gear and fittings, I plotted a course back that was calculated to keep us as far as possible from known ground batteries and fighter bases.

Hours passed. We encountered sporadic ground fire but managed somehow to survive it. Fortunately, we were sighted by no fighters, nor did we see any. Our greatest trouble was altitude. Too many flak holes had set up too much drag. Despite their boosted power settings, our two remaining engines could do little more than shave the edge off our gradual descent. By the time we reached the Channel we had dropped so low that we could see foam cresting the swells.

I'M NOT SURE what plane the war-time song, "Coming In On A Wing And A Prayer," was inspired by, but it could have been the B-17. That's about all we had when we limped over our home field—at a scant 300 feet. But we made it. That was the main thing. Our trust had been well placed.

And so was the trust of literally

hundreds of other B-17 crews, for our experience was by no means an isolated one. The Flying Fortress returned from missions which, by the book, she simply wasn't supposed to come back from. She came back with two and sometimes even three engines inoperative. She came back with her tail section shot in half, with control cables severed and patched in mid-air. She came back with cannon shells in fuselage and wings, ripped and punctured by scores of flak fragments. But she came back.

I remember one Fort from my unit (the 490th Bomb Group) returning from a raid with 286 flak holes in her—by actual count. Yet, not one member of that crew had been injured. They loved her, that airplane, and would quite readily have flown to hell and back in her. As a matter of fact, they did take her on many other successful missions.

Now she is gone. Her death was a silent one, mourned only by a few of the older pilots of the 57th Air Rescue Squadron stationed in the Azores Islands. From this remote mid-Atlantic base she flew her last missions. It was fitting, perhaps, that instead of missions of death they were missions of mercy—giving assistance to vessels in distress, para-dropping badly needed blood plasma and medical supplies, and flying escort on crippled military and commercial planes. Such feats were not nearly

as publicized as those of her combat days. Gone was the glory, the screaming bannerlines: THOU-SAND-PLANE RAID OVER SCHWEINFURT! Still, the old girl had some mighty fine memories.

Those memories go back to 1935 when the first B-17 was completed by Boeing, who paid out of their own pocket the \$600,000 that the prototype cost. Credit for the plane's concept and design is given Wellwood E. Beall, now Senior Vice President. Mr. Beall disclaims it, remarking: "The knowledge needed to incorporate the latest thinking in stresses, aerodynamics, hydraulics, electricity, and countless other specialties into one airplane, even a small one, just can't be contained in one lone human brain."

BUILT TO ENTER the U.S. Army Air Corps bombing competition at Dayton, Ohio, the first B-17 broke the Seattle-Dayton speed record on her way there. She proved so impressive during the trials that 13 others were ordered immediately for service tests. During the 1936-38 testing period, she shattered the coast-to-coast record in both directions, and chalked up a fresh one by covering a closed course at 259 miles per hour at 34,025 feet, with a pay-load of nearly six tons!

By 1937, a production line had been set up, and the monthly output increased steadily until 1944

when 578 were built in one month at an average cost of \$200,000 each. In all, a total of 12,731 were built. In addition to Boeing, Douglas turned out 3,000 and Lockheed 2,750.

Like the men who went to war with her, she sometimes remained on the field of battle. A total of 4,750 were lost on combat missions, more than any other type aircraft. This was due simply to the fact that she carried the heaviest work load in the heaviest fighting of the war.

The Flying Fortress cut the heart out of the German industrial machine. She dropped 640,000 tons of explosives on European targets—nearly as much as all other U.S. aircraft combined.

She flew her first combat mission with the RAF in 1941, bombing Nazi battleships. During the first U.S. air raid in Europe, led by General Ira Eaker on August 17, 1942, 12 Forts bombed Hitler's stronghold at Rouen, shot down their first German fighter, and returned without a casualty. Later missions were not so easy, but the Fort proved conclusively to the skeptics of high daylight bombing that no bomber force could be stopped from hitting its target.

Time and time again she flew through flak so heavy that "you could get out and walk on it," as we used to say with only slight exaggeration. Daily she fought off heavy fighter attacks. On some

missions, such as the famous Schweinfurt raids on the German ball bearing plants, "bandits" met flights over the Channel and fought all the way to the target and back. Still, the bombs were dropped.

Her ability to defend herself was unapproached by an other type of aircraft. The 13 fifty-caliber machine guns formed an almost impenetrable barrier when multiplied by the hundreds of other planes in a formation. The Germans learned this the hard way. While U.S. fighters were able to destroy only 11 enemy planes per thousand-plane raid, the Fort more than doubled their record with an average of 23 kills per thousand.

FORTRESSES fought in what may well be the last air war of its type. Just as trench warfare was peculiar to World War I, and thousand-plane bombing raids to World War II, the H-bomb has placed today's emphasis on a few planes, which are capable of delivering fantastic pay-loads at incredible speeds.

From a visual standpoint, this is regrettable, as the air war over Europe was probably the greatest spectacle ever produced by man. Thousands of fighters and bombers—locked in a death struggle at 30,000 feet with their tenuous white contrails splotched here and there with the smudge of oil fires—created a stirring scene that those who were there can never forget.

Each-bomb run was an experience in itself. No one who has ever been on one can forget the mingling sensations of fear and anticipation. Before it started, chatter on the intercom was always excessive. Some voices were overly calm while others were keyed to a high pitch. All were trying to talk out some of their tension before the trip down "flak alley."

Then the run began and conversation came to an abrupt halt. The dead silence was broken only by terse comments from bombardier and pilot as the former cupped his eyes to his Norden bombsight and called for minute variations in headings.

Who can forget that endless wait for the first inevitable burst of flak near the plane, the involuntary cringing at the rattle of hot metal against wings and fuselage, the awesome sight of blue sky blossoming with black patches of death?

It seemed as though the bombardier's cry of "Bombs away!," accompanied by the upward lurch of the plane, would never come. But when it did, and you were finally out of the target area, you felt like laughing for you had made it and your number hadn't come up. But you couldn't, for there was a vacant spot in the formation where Number Three plane should have been. Joe Kelly, with whom you'd played poker the night before, had been in Number Three, and Bob Spivac, who'd made the

last liberty to London with you—and you'd never see either of them again.

Individual forts were given many endearing names by their crew's—some for wives and sweethearts, others for comic strip characters, while some were merely products of the airman's not always decorous sense of humor. Most Americans probably aren't familiar with the plane, "My Assam Dragon," but many will recall the "Memphis Belle," which survived an almost unbelievable tour of duty (all of which was documented on film), and the "Swoose," which broke the flying record between the U.S. and the Phillipines and went on to establish another record of 150 combat hours in one month.

THE LAST Flying Fortress had no special name. To the men who flew her she was simply B-17 No. 3701. This last lady had a plaque attached to the fuselage in the nose compartment which read: "Pur-

chased by the War Bonds of the School Children of Salina, Kansas." The bonds which built her have matured by now, and the children who saved their pennies have probably long since forgotten how their money was spent.

As 3701 took off from Lajes Field in the Azores and pointed her nose westward on her flight to retirement in Tucson, she was watched with mixed emotions. To the young pilots she was simply an old airplane going to the boneyard. To older ones she marked the end of an era—an era of romance and glamour, and the birth of the world's mightiest air force.

It was with no little sadness that I plotted a course for Bermuda and the States. One veteran pilot who saw us off, whom I'd never known as a sentimentalist, told me later: "I stood and watched till you faded away in the west. I dunno, but somehow I got the feeling that she'd never land, that a B-17 would go flying the sky forever."

Sure Sign!

The bus was crowded and the traffic heavy. A woman boarding the bus explained she was a stranger and requested the motorman to tell her when to get off. This he obligingly agreed to do. Several times she reminded him to call her stop.

When, for the fifteenth time, she queried, "You won't forget to call me, will you?" and added nervously, "How will I know when I get close to my street?", he just couldn't resist it.

"By the big smile on my face," he answered. —B. MIKESELL



The Teen-Agers of Balboa

by Winifred Wise Palmer

WHEN AROUSED CITIZENS finally clamped the lid on riotous teenagers in the beautiful Newport-Balboa beach area of southern California, wiseacres said it wouldn't work. They said the lid wouldn't stay on for more than a day or two. They said you couldn't change a tradition that had been growing for more than 30 years.

It was as inevitable as the coming of spring, they said, for 20,000 to 35,000 strange teenagers from all over southern California to swarm in and do exactly as they pleased for the whole week of Easter vacation. Hundreds upon hundreds of them left ordinary rules at home

along with their schoolbooks and came for a frantic fling—a real spring “whing-ding,” symbol of revolt against parents and authority.

The kids called it “Bal Week” for Balboa Island, their favorite destination for the holiday. But the 17,000 permanent residents of Newport-Balboa and the other beach districts under one jurisdiction were beginning to call it “Hell Week.” Nobody got any sleep. Arrests and riots were the order of the day—and night. Drinking was heavy, and shocking all-night beach parties in secluded spots were a scandal that was beginning to hurt the reputation of the whole