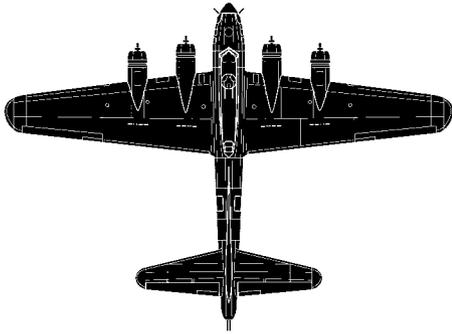


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

B-17 Flying Fortress



The B-17 Flying Fortress was the first mass-produced, four-engine US bomber in history. It may also have been the most famous bomber of World War II, becoming the symbol of the US Army Air Forces' daylight precision bombing campaign against Germany.

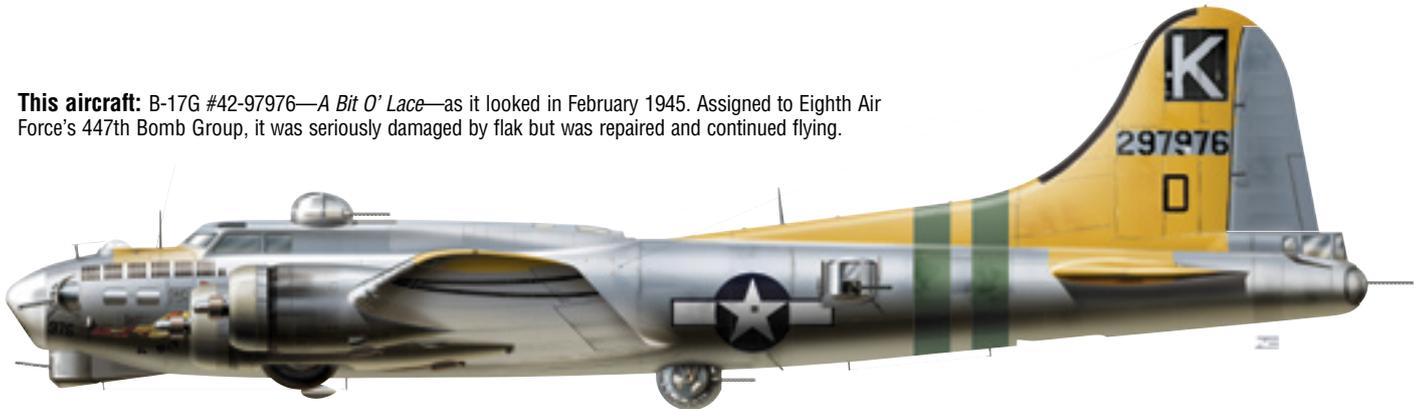
The Boeing-designed "Fort" was an airplane of legendary toughness, surviving with, as one author put it, "wings punctured and ablaze, tail surfaces shredded, with chunks of its graceful body gouged out by cannon fire, flak, or midair collision." Thousands returned to base torn apart by bullets, cannon shells, and flak. This characteristic gave the B-17 a certain mystique, and aircrews loved it.

The B-17 began as a kind of riverboat gamble; Boeing in the 1930s bet its own money and future on the four-engine "Model 299" aircraft. Air Corps leaders immediately recognized its long-range potential and

succeeded in initiating production. The design went through six major changes, but the definitive version was the last—the B-17G, whose two-gun chin turret resolved a serious problem of head-on attack by enemy fighters. The B-17 is most closely associated with Europe, where Eighth Air Force bomber missions over Germany frequently featured hundreds of Forts in a single raid. However, the bombers served in all theaters of the war and were, in fact, the first to mount an offensive attack on Japanese forces in the Pacific.

Boeing, Douglas, and Lockheed-Vega built a grand total of 12,731, of which some 4,750 were lost in action. Following World War II, the B-17 was declared obsolete, but its fame only grew. Gen. Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, Commanding General of the US Army Air Forces, said the B-17 was critical to America's "worldwide aerial offensive."

This aircraft: B-17G #42-97976—*A Bit O' Lace*—as it looked in February 1945. Assigned to Eighth Air Force's 447th Bomb Group, it was seriously damaged by flak but was repaired and continued flying.



In Brief

Boeing design ★ built by Boeing, Douglas, Lockheed-Vega ★ first flight 1935 ★ crew of six to 10 ★ four radial engines ★ total number built 12,731 ★ **Specific to B-17G:** max speed 300 mph ★ cruise speed 180 mph ★ max range 2,000 miles (loaded) ★ armament 13 .50-cal machine guns ★ bomb load 6,000 lb ★ weight (normal loaded) 55,000 lb ★ span 103 ft 4 in ★ length 74 ft 9 in ★ height 19 ft 1 in.

Famous Fliers

Seventeen B-17 Medal of Honor recipients—Brig. Gen. Frederick Castle; 2nd Lt. Robert Femoyer; 1st Lt. Donald Gott; 2nd Lt. David Kingsley; 1st Lt. William Lawley Jr.; Sgt. Archibald Mathies; 1st Lt. Jack Mathis; 2nd Lt. William Metzger; 1st Lt. Edward Michael; 2nd Lt. John Morgan; Capt. Harl Pease Jr.; 2nd Lt. Joseph Sarnoski; Sgt. Maynard Smith; 2nd Lt. Walter Truemper; TSgt. Forrest Vosler; Brig. Gen. Kenneth Walker; and Maj. Jay Zeamer Jr. Lt. Col. Immanuel Klette set a record for heavy bomber pilots—91 missions and 663 combat hours.

Interesting Facts

Dropped more bombs than any US aircraft in World War II ★ flew first US bomb missions against Germany ★ flew first US bomb missions against Japanese forces ★ *Memphis Belle*, the most famous B-17, now at the National Museum of the United States Air Force ★ name "Flying Fortress" coined by Richard L. Williams of the *Seattle Times* on seeing first model ★ featured in famous Gregory Peck movie "Twelve O'Clock High."

