

# LAST MISSION

[05 Jan 1944]

## MY SEVENTH & LAST MISSION IN WW2

By

ED DAVIDSON

(DECEMBER 1994 - updated 10/24/2016)



*Left to Right - Davidson Crew*

*Back-Wherhan-Kroggel-Drumhiller-Michan-Barrett-Radcliff*

*Front-Davidson-Johnston-Lynch-Trubey*

*October 1943*

MY CREW (CREW #26 IN THE WALKER GROUP) WAS FORMED ON 11 AUGUST 1943 AT EPHRATA, WASHINGTON. WE TRAINED THERE, AND AT REDMOND, OREGON AND SPOKANE, WASHINGTON UNTIL OCTOBER 24, 1943 WHEN WE TRANSFERRED TO

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GRAND ISLAND, NEBRASKA FOR A FINAL CHECK BEFORE GOING OVERSEAS. THE CREW WENT BY TRAIN TO NEW JERSEY AND EMBARKED IN NEW YORK HARBOR ON THE "QUEEN MARY" FOR A FAST RIDE ACROSS THE ATLANTIC OCEAN.

OUR CREW ARRIVED IN ENGLAND ON NOVEMBER 21, 1943. WE WERE ASSIGNED TO THE 96<sup>th</sup> BOMB GROUP AT SNETTERTON HEATH, NORFOLK AS A REPLACEMENT CREW IN THE 339<sup>th</sup> BOMB SQUADRON. SEVERAL PRACTICE FLIGHTS WERE MADE IN THE LOCAL AREA AND THE CREW WAS DECLARED OPERATIONAL.

## **CREW # 88**

PILOT – 2LT. ED DAVIDSON  
COPILOT – 2LT. CLARENCE TRUBEY  
NAVIGATOR – 2LT. JOHN JOHNSTON  
BOMBARDIER – 2LT. MAURICE LYNCH  
TOP TURRET – T/SGT. JACK BARRETT

RADIO OPERATOR – T/SGT. KENNETH WEHRHAN  
WAIST GUNNER – S/SGT. KENNETH KROGGER  
WAIST GUNNER – S/SGT. THOMAS MICHAN  
BALL TURRET – S/SGT. ROBERT DRUMHILLER  
TAIL GUNNER – S/SGT. JAMES RADCLIFF

WE WERE WELL TRAINED AND AN EXCELLENT CREW. BUD TRUBEY, MY COPILOT, WAS A GREAT PILOT AND WAS DESTINED TO HAVE HIS OWN CREW SOON.

THE CREW MADE THE FOLLOWING BOMBING RAIDS ON THE CITIES OF:

[12/11/43] - EMDEN, GERMANY

[12/13/43] - KEIL, GERMANY

[12/16/43] - BREMEN, GERMANY

[12/22/43] - MUNSTER, GERMANY

[12/30/43] - LUDWIGSHAFEN, GERMANY

[12/31/43] - PARIS, FRANCE

[01/05/44] - BORDEAUX, FRANCE

AFTER COMPLETING OUR FIFTH MISSION EACH CREW MEMBER WAS AWARDED AN "AIR MEDAL" AND WE WERE ASSIGNED OUR OWN AIRPLANE, "LITTLE GIRLS", B-17F MODEL, WITH A CHIN TURRET, WITH SERIAL NUMBER 42-3541



LITTLE GIRLS in flight. 42-3541 (John Harris)

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## JANUARY 5, 1944

AT APPROXIMATELY 3 AM, THE CREW WAS AWAKENED BY THE CQ (CHARGE OF QUARTERS) AND TOLD TO REPORT FOR BRIEFING. THE WEATHER WAS COLD AND DREARY AS USUAL. AFTER A BREAKFAST OF POWDERED EGGS, TOAST AND SCALDING HOT TEA WE REPORTED FOR OUR BRIEFING. THE MAIN BOMBER STREAM TODAY WAS OVER NORTHERN GERMANY; THE TARGET FOR THE 96<sup>th</sup> BOMB GROUP WAS THE AIRPORT AT BORDEAUX, FRANCE.

THE FIRST 96<sup>th</sup> BOMB GROUP B-17 WAS LOST EARLY THAT DAY WHEN THE PLANE FAILED TO REMAIN AIRBORNE AFTER THE TAKE-OFF RUN. THE REMAINDER OF THE GROUP ASSEMBLED OVER VARIOUS "BUNCHERS" AND "SPLASHERS" (RADIO BEACONS) AND DEPARTED SOUTH ACROSS THE ENGLISH CHANNEL WITH OUR FIGHTER ESCORT. SOON AFTER CROSSING THE COAST OF FRANCE AT THE BREST PENINSULA OUR FIGHTER ESCORT TURNED AWAY TO RETURN TO THEIR BASE.

THE GROUP CONTINUED WITHOUT INTERFERENCE TO BORDEAUX. OVER THE TARGET OUR B-17 FORTRESS RECEIVED MINOR FLAK DAMAGE, BUT OUR SQUADRON LEADER TOOK MUCH HEAVIER HITS. AS WE TURNED RIGHT AFTER BOMB RELEASE THE SQUADRON FELL BEHIND THE REST OF THE GROUP. WE WERE TURNING NORTH OVER THE BAY OF BISCAY AND HEADING HOME WHEN WE CAME UNDER ATTACK BY A



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SWARM OF ME-109's. S/SGT ROBERT DRUMHILLER CALLED FROM THE BALL TURRET TO ADVISE THAT HE HAD USED UP ALL OF HIS AMMUNITION. I TOLD HIM TO KEEP AIMING AT THE ATTACKING AIRCRAFT ANYWAY.

ON THE FOURTH FIGHTER PASS "LITTLE GIRLS" WAS BADLY DAMAGED – MY COPILOT, BUD TRUBEY, WAS KILLED INSTANTLY BY A 20 MILLIMETER CANNON SHELL PASSING THROUGH HIS CHEST. THERE WAS A RAGING FIRE IN THE COCKPIT, THE INTERCOM WAS DISABLED, THE #3 ENGINE WAS ON FIRE AND SOON DROPPED OFF THE WING, THE #4 PROPELLER HAD STOPPED TURNING. THE SHORELINE WAS IN SIGHT OFF THE RIGHT WING AND I STARTED A TURN TOWARD LAND WHILE LT. JOHNNY JOHNSTON, THE NAVIGATOR, WENT BACK TO ALERT THE CREW FOR BAILOUT ONCE WE HAD REACHED THE COAST LINE. HE RETURNED WITH WORD THAT THE TAIL GUNNER, BOTH OF THE WAIST GUNNERS AND THE BALL TURRET GUNNER HAD ALREADY BAILED OUT. I SOON REALIZED THAT "LITTLE GIRLS" WOULD NOT MAKE THE SHORE LINE SO THE CREW WAS ALERTED FOR "DITCHING" (WATER LANDING). THE TOUCH DOWN WAS FAIRLY SMOOTH. (Approximate time of touchdown 11:40)

AFTER DITCHING I LEFT THE COCKPIT BY THE SIDE WINDOW, CLIMBED TO THE TOP OF THE FUSELAGE AND WALKED AFT WHERE THE REMAINDER OF THE CREW WERE GETTING THE LIFE RAFTS INFLATED AND SECURED. JOHNNY JOHNSTON AND I RETURNED TO THE COCKPIT, BUT WERE UNABLE TO EXTRICATE THE BODY OF LT. BUD TRUBEY. WE WERE FORCED TO LEAVE THE SINKING AIRPLANE AND WE JOINED THE OTHERS IN THE DINGIES. THE DINGIES HAD BEEN TIED TOGETHER SO THAT WE WOULD NOT BECOME SEPARATED. I ESTIMATE THAT "LITTLE GIRLS" FLOATED EIGHT TO TEN MINUTES FROM SPLASH DOWN BEFORE SINKING INTO THE DEPTHS OF THE BAY OF BISCAY. AFTER ABOUT FOUR HOURS OF PADDLING TOWARD SHORE A FLYING BOAT APPEARED, MADE SEVERAL PASSES OVER OUR LIFE RAFTS WITH ALL OF THEIR GUNS POINTING AT US, THEN LANDED BESIDE US – WE WERE GREETED WITH THE WORDS:

***FOR YOU THE WAR IS OVER.***

MY CREW WAS TAKEN TO THE HOSPITAL IN BORDEAUX WHERE WE SPENT THE NIGHT. DURING THE EVENING A YOUNG GERMAN PILOT CAME TO CONFIRM THAT I WAS ONE OF HIS VICTIMS THAT DAY. THE GERMAN PILOT REPORTED THAT HE HAD BEEN SHOT DOWN BY MY TAIL GUNNER AND THAT HE ALSO WAS RECOVERED FROM THE BAY OF BISCAY. THE GERMANS CONTINUED SEARCHING UNTIL NIGHTFALL BUT MY GUNNERS WHO HAD BAILED OUT WERE NEVER FOUND. THE REPORT BACK AT SNETTERTON HEATH WAS THAT FIVE PARACHUTES WERE OBSERVED BEFORE THE AIRPLANE EXPLODED – **NO OTHER SURVIVORS!**

[THE 96<sup>TH</sup> BOMB GROUP LOST SIX B-17s THIS DAY.]

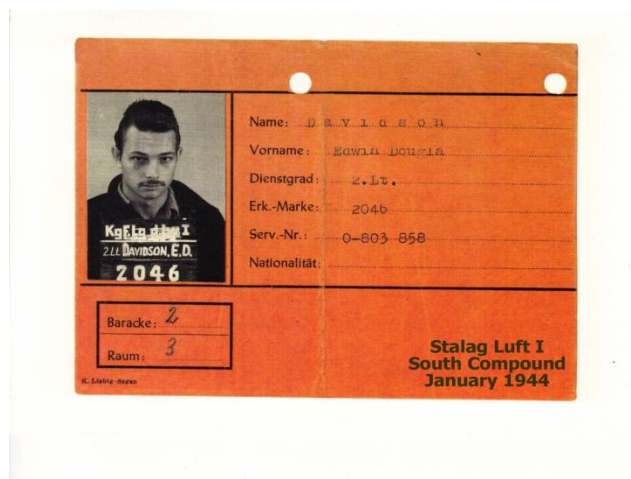
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ON JANUARY 6<sup>TH</sup>, 1944 THE RED CROSS VISITED US IN THE HOSPITAL BEFORE WE BOARDED THE TRAIN FOR PLACES UNKNOWN. SURVIVORS OF SEVERAL CREWS WERE TRAVELLING TOGETHER UNDER ESCORT AND I WAS SEPARATED FROM MY CREW. WE CHANGED TRAINS AT A STATION IN PARIS, THEN ON TO FRANKFURT, GERMANY AND DULAG LUFT.

I SPENT ABOUT A WEEK IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT AT THE DULAG WITH DAILY INTERROGATIONS – NAME, RANK AND SERIAL NUMBER WAS THE ONLY INFORMATION I WOULD GIVE. FINALLY THE INTERROGATOR SAID THAT HE COULDN'T WASTE ANY MORE TIME WITH ME. AFTER SEVERAL MINUTES OF LETTING ME WONDER "WHAT NEXT?" HE OPENED MY DOSSIER AND READ TO ME THE DATE THAT I ENLISTED, WHERE I TRAINED, WHEN I ARRIVED AT THE 96<sup>TH</sup> BOMB GROUP, ETC. THEN HE ASKED IF I HAD SEEN ANY SUBMARINES WHEN I CAME ACROSS ON THE "QUEEN MARY"! I DO NOT RECALL HAVING ANY CONTACT WITH ANY OF MY CREW MEMBERS WHILE AT DULAG. T/SGT.KENNETH WEHRHAN AND T/SGT.JACK BARRETT WERE SENT TO A DIFFERENT POW CAMP (STALAG 17B AT KREMS, AUSTRIA) AND I DID NOT SEE THEM AGAIN UNTIL AFTER LIBERATION WHEN WE MET ON MAY 14<sup>TH</sup> AT CAMP LUCKY STRIKE IN FRANCE.

WE WERE LOCKED IN BOXCARS AND SENT ON THE WAY TO A PERMANENT POW CAMP. WE WERE HELD ONE NIGHT IN THE RAIL YARDS AT BERLIN WHILE THE RAF BOMBED THE CITY – FORTUNATELY OUR BOXCAR WAS NOT HIT. THE TRAIN ARRIVED AT THE RAIL STATION IN BARTH, GERMANY ON THE 16th OF JANUARY 1944 AND WE WERE MARCHED ABOUT TWO MILES TO THE STALAG LUFT 1 POW CAMPSITE. AFTER PROCESSING WAS COMPLETED JOHNNY JOHNSTON AND MAURICE LYNCH WERE ASSIGNED TO NORTH 1 COMPOUND, WHILE I WAS SENT TO SOUTH COMPOUND, BARRACKS 2, ROOM 3. [POW #2046] TWO OF MY BUDDIES FROM FLIGHT TRAINING, FRED KENNIE AND JIM BELLINGHAM WERE ALREADY THERE – HADN'T SEEN THEM SINCE MARCH 1943.



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May 1945    Stalag Luft 1  
Guard Tower near the kitchen  
Corner of Flak School on left  
Looking Southwest- South Compound

STALAG LUFT 1 WAS LIBERATED BY THE RUSSIANS ON MAY 1, 1945. B-17s WERE FLOWN FROM ENGLAND TO THE BARTH AIRPORT ABOUT 3 MILES SOUTH OF THE CAMP AND THE POWs FROM STALAG LUFT 1 WERE FLOWN TO CAMP LUCKY STRIKE IN FRANCE AND RETURNED TO ALLIED MILITARY CONTROL ON MAY 13 AND 14, 1945.

WHEN I RETRIEVED MY PERSONAL EFFECTS AFTER THE WAR, I FOUND THAT SOME ONE HAD WRITTEN THESE WORDS IN MY PERSONAL LOGBOOK –

**DIED JAN 5, 1944.**

ED DAVIDSON. DECEMBER 1994

*05 January, 1944. Approximate flying time: 4½ hours. Bombed the airport at Bordeaux, France and then were attacked by a swarm of ME-109's, shot down and ditched in the Bay of Biscay. Copilot was killed and the four aft gunners bailed out and presumably drowned. Plane floated about eight minutes. Hit the water at 11:42 and in the dingies for about 4 hours. Picked up by Germans in a flying boat. Spent night in hospital in Bordeaux, then by train through Paris to Frankfurt. Six days in solitary with daily interrogations. Train through Berlin to Barth. Arrived at Stalag Luft 1 on 16 January, 1944. POW #2046 South compound, Barracks 2, Room 3. Camp liberated by the Russians on 01 May 1945 and flown out on B-17's on 13 May, 1945 and landed at Camp Lucky Strike in France. Returned to USA via "Camp Lucky Strike" and London. On 21 June 1945 the troop ship, "Santa Paula", arrived in New York harbor then up the Hudson River to Camp Shanks. This is the same ship that my Dad came home on in 1919 after his service as a Marine during World War 1. Ed (1992)*

## References:

- 1 - "Snetterton Falcons" - 96<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group – Enhanced Edition Page 93.
- 2 - [www.sdpow.org](http://www.sdpow.org) [click on **50 years later** in left column to read a follow-up]
- 3 - [www.sdpow.org/aboutus](http://www.sdpow.org/aboutus) [to download :18 minute slide show-"B-17 Little Girls"]
- 4 - [http://www.91stbombgroup.com/91st\\_tales/07\\_operation\\_revival.pdf](http://www.91stbombgroup.com/91st_tales/07_operation_revival.pdf)

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Mr. Greg Staphatoes: greg@b17flyingfortressrescue.com

## B-17 Archaeology

by Greg Stathatos

<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/117334197/b-17-archaeology>

A documentary series of the actual flights of the B-17 Flying Fortress and her crews. Based on factual records and eye witnesses.

### About this project

This series is dedicated to WWII airmen and the heavy bombers they flew called the B-17 Flying Fortress. A total of 12,731 B-17 aircraft were built. Throughout WWII, over 290,000 missions flown using the B-17's more than 640,052 tons of bombs were dropped. Between 1935 and 1945, a staggering 4,735 B-17's were shot down or crashed during combat missions killing or wounding around 45,500 airmen. After the war, 1,832 B-17's found their way to Kingman, Arizona for their final mission - the scrap yard.

The research for each one-hour episode will be accurate and verified by reports filed after every mission. The show will be created using computer generated imagery (CGI) and the missions will be recreated for accuracy. Original footage will be used whenever possible and first-hand interviews of the airmen who flew on the B-17's will be included upon availability. With so many missions flown, there are vast numbers of stories to be discovered and told before it is too late.

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This series will be different than any other B-17 documentary ever told. The B-17 was a great aircraft and documentaries have been told about her, but this series will tell the story of actual flights of the B-17 and her crew. From dangerous operation, to successful missions, and finally the tragic endings, each noble story deserves to be told. Some 45,500 heroes never told their stories and now it is the time to let their voices be heard!

Their heroic stories need to be told so that they can be preserved for future generations and to honor those who gave their all.

***So many missions, so many lost airmen, so many stories to be told.***

I cannot foresee a content risk or challenge, but I can if I was to list a challenge it would be spreading the word to generate a following for the show. The longevity of the series is based on viewers and ratings. I am hopeful I have addressed this and have made contact with Radical 3D who have had successful shows on the same networks, Military History and American Hero Channel (AHC). They have agreed to mentor me and introduce me to influential people in Hollywood.

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As part of this project three former B-17 crewmembers (myself included, Harvey Greenfield [bombardier, 96 BG] and Frank Curry, [pilot] met at Steve Beyer's hangar at Montgomery Field, San Diego, CA and were interviewed for the video by Mark Carlson on August 28, 2016

During the video interview Greg Staphatoes surprised me with a "Little Girls T-shirt", "Little Girls cap" and a beautiful color print of "Little Girls".

Furthermore Greg offered to provide a T-shirt & cap for the children of crewmembers-

**Ed Davidson** -- Jon -- Thomas -- Robert Davidson

**John Johnston** -- Messina, Jo-Ann

**Kenneth Trent(Wehrhan)** -- Rick Trent -- Ann Sue Folstad -- Mellissa Nyiri

I hope to make the distribution sometime this week.



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**BEAUTIFUL - THANK YOU GREG!!!**

greg@b17flyingfortressrescue.com

*s/s Ed Davidson 10/24/2016*