

Boeing B-17F-50-BO 42-5434 'Lady Luck' aka 'Bob's Boudoir' For Nerds

By

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The B-17 bomber was designed by the Boeing Aircraft Co. of Seattle, WA, unofficially named "Flying Fortress" from a Seattle news reporter who commented on its defensive firepower, saying "It's a Flying Fortress".

B-17 = the 17th Bombardment type aircraft design ordered by the US Army Air Corps

F = 6th major model design change

50 = block manufacture standard, serials 42-5050/5484, 435 delivered September-December 19

BO = built by Boeing, Seattle WA (B-17s also built by Douglas, Long Beach, CA & Vega, Burbank, CA)

42-5434 = the 5434th aircraft ordered by the USAAF (not necessarily built) in fiscal year 1942

B-17 Model	Boeing Seattle (BO)	Douglas Long Beach (DL)	Vega Burbank (VE)	Production Numbers
299, YB-17, B-17A	15			15
B-17B	39			39
B-17C	38			38
B-17D	42			42
B-17E	512			512
B-17F	2,300	605	500	3,405
B-17G	4,035	2,395	2,250	8,680
Total	6,981	3,000	2,750	12,731

<https://www.airplanes-online.com/b17-flying-fortress-production-numbers-plants.htm>



42-5434 Was delivered to Cheyenne, WY Modification Center No. 10 8/12/42;

Aircraft Modification Centers were created during WWII to modify aircraft after they came off the assembly lines. While at first this may not seem to make sense and the sensible thing to do was build the aircraft to the current specification this was impossible under wartime conditions. The issue came down to output. If one stopped or slowed the assembly line to update an aircraft with the current modifications, changes, updates and new equipment and technology, very few aircraft would have been built for the war effort. When it was attempted early in the war to make running changes on the assembly line it was then not known what equipment and modifications were actually in each aircraft, which was totally unacceptable. So, two things were instituted. First was the Block System. Aircraft were built in 'blocks or groups of say twenty-five aircraft. Each one would be the same and there would be documentation as to what equipment was on the aircraft. The larger the number of aircraft in the block the faster the line could run to take advantage of the economies of scale.

However, the aircraft would still not in many cases be up to date on required modifications needed for combat, so then the aircraft would be flown off to a modification center, if one was not at the aircraft assembly plant location. There the aircraft in many cases would have as many hours spent on it being updated as were involved in the original manufacture. While not the desired state, most cost effective or the most efficient manner of building the aircraft, it was the most expedient.

(<https://www.warbirdsandairshows.com/Aircraft%20manufacturing/modificationcenterswwii.htm>)



(<https://www.americanairmuseum.com/archive/place/united-airlines-modification-center>)

B-17 modifications kept Cheyenne busy during the 1940's. Cheyenne was chosen for a new modification center, Modification Center No. 10, which would equip B-17's with the latest technology to fight the war in a variety of environments.

Cheyenne was responsible for the modification of 47 percent of all B-17 aircraft during World War II, 5,736 total aircraft. The center employed around 3,600 employees and by late 1942 averaged 60 aircraft modifications per month.

With the end of World War II and the advancement in aircraft technology, Cheyenne's aviation heyday came to an end. However, while it lasted, it had a real impact on the development of many areas of aviation history.

<https://www.ang.af.mil/Media/Article-Display/Article/435741/aviation-history-wyomings-impact/>

Flown to Morrison Field, FL 6/2/43

In 1940 the U.S. Army Air Corps, forerunner of the U.S. Air Force, established Air Transport Command at Morrison Field, which had opened in 1936 west of West Palm Beach. The army added barracks and other buildings, and a hangar for the 3,000 soldiers who would be stationed there during the coming war.



Air Corps Ferrying Command Distinctive Badge By United States Army Institute of Heraldry

More than 45,000 pilots either trained or flew out of West Palm Beach for destinations such as the invasion of Normandy, France, on D-Day. As many as 250 women from the Women's Army Corps (WACS) also served at Morrison Field. The 313th Material Squadron from Miami Municipal Airport moved to Morrison Field in April 1942 to handle air cargo and maintain both airport and aircraft. A thousand men worked around the clock to overhaul, repair, and flight-test aircraft before returning them to service.

Assigned to Molesworth 6/3/43

This B17F arrived at Molesworth, Cambridgeshire, via the South Atlantic route to England, having passed through Marrakesh, North Africa.

Molesworth in Cambridgeshire is now a non-flying facility under the control of the United States Air Force and is one of the two Royal Air Force (RAF) stations in Cambridgeshire currently used by the United States Air Forces in Europe (USAFE). In WW2, from November 1942, Molesworth was occupied by the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortresses of the 358th Bombardment Squadron, the first of four squadrons that would comprise the 303d Bombardment Group. The 303d remained at Molesworth until shortly after V-E Day in late May 1945.



(Photo <https://www.rallypoint.com/locations/raf-molesworth-uk/followers>)

The 358th flew the first mission for the group on 17 November 1942 and the group became one of the legendary units of the Eighth Air Force. Initially missions were conducted against targets such as aerodromes, railways, and submarine pens in France until 1943, when flying missions commenced into Germany itself.

'Lady Luck'

Assigned to 360 Bombardment Squadron, 303 Bombardment Group on 6th March 1943, it began combat flying with a mission to Wilhelmshaven on the 22nd, under the command of Lt Griffin. It was lucky 13 for First Lt Lloyd Griffin, later made Captain, as he completed that number of sorties in Lucky Lady before finishing up in mid-July. Thereafter, 9 different crews took the Fort to targets across France and Germany until misfortune overtook Robert Cogswell's crew.

(<https://www.americanairmuseum.com/archive/aircraft/42-5434>)

Crashed Alresford, Hants., UK, 26/9/43 . Salvaged 20/12/43. BOB'S BOUDOIR aka LADY LUCK.



Why the two names? Commonly, the ferry crew would choose a name (so 'Bob's Boudoir'), but then the first operational crew would choose their own name for the aircraft - in this case 'Lucky Lady'. The picture of Griffin's crew would imply that he chose the name.

Not forgetting 'Lucky Lady's' ground crews:



(L) Donald N. Richter, Shuster, Donald I. Lau,

Wilbert B. O'Neil, Charles F. Prosser, "Little Shot" Ward, "Greenie", Samuel P. Rodman (nose art artist)

[photo from the 303rdBGA Archives]
(R) M/Sgt Walter C. Melton, Crew Chief (back row, 3rd from left)

Sgt Joseph H. Conklin (front row, 3rd from left)

T/Sgt Meyer "Mike" Levin (front row, far right)

[photo courtesy of Bill Conkli]





The painted 'Tail Art' "This is one of the two known tail art paintings done by Sam Rodman.

This languishing beauty adorned the tail fin of a Fort which carried the simple title of 'Lady Luck' on the nose – perhaps one of the most popular and understandable names chosen by the numerous air crews around the world. Standing on the horizontal stabiliser of the Fort and painting onto the huge tail would have made the task of painting much easier for Rodman (and other artists), and it is surprising that the tail was not used more often for embellishment.

(<http://www.303rdbg.com/news/2014-04-25.html>)

From <https://alresfordmemories.wordpress.com/2015/11/15/the-crash-of-lady-luck-1943/>:

The Library display of 2013 and Alresford Museum

Seventy years after the event, Hilary and Ray Cornford from Old Alresford, enthusiastic Lady Luck supporters, set up a library display, in the Alresford Library on Broad Street, showing the stories and artefacts available surrounding the B17 crash in Alresford. The file of documents they collected has been passed over to the Alresford Museum, so that they are all available for future researchers (Accession number D1031a). Anyone joining the newly established Membership of the NATT will have access to the Museum resources, by arrangement. The tail panel is Alresford Museum item A1060.

In the Alresford Library there are other locally produced documents about the event, such as Nelson Trowbridge's April 2001 essay, called 'Lady Luck – What Really happened?', a copy of this paper is also held in the Museum (Accession Number D1031b). Other comments from Nelson about the Lady Luck crash were quoted in an earlier Alresford Memories story –

<https://alresfordmemories.wordpress.com/2013/01/18/flying-fortress-crash-in-alresford-pond/>

Hilary Cornford has enabled the Alresford Museum to retain and display an interesting modern memento of the event, which is an aeroplane panel painted up to make a replica of the tail of USAF Flying Fortress 25434. Known as "Lady Luck", the tail was decorated, as many wartime aircraft were, with a mascot. Their original mascot was painted by Sgt Sam P Rodman, of the US 303rd Bomb Group, when he was based at the Molesworth USAF aerodrome in the UK.

A modern reproduction of this tail panel, now in the custody of Alresford Museum: this repro tail panel was painted by and is on loan from Tim Barnes, produced when he was working at the Lasham aircraft works near Alton. His employers kindly donated an aircraft panel from a modern Boeing 757 airliner, to make the repro tail panel look more authentic



How did 'Lady Luck' look on the day of her loss? The answer is not as clear as one might hope.

Beware! Although captioned as 42-5434 at (https://www.reddit.com/r/WWIIplanes/comments/re9nwi/b17_flying_fortress_425434_lady_luck_of_the_94th/) this is a different aircraft with a later-style cheek window gun mounting typical of a Vega-built later-block machine.



'Lady Luck' scale model by Tim Barnes:



The excellent model represents her appearance on her first missions, but a series of changes should have followed

The 'Hell's Angels' website <http://www.303rdbg.com/> is a mine of information, reproduced with their kind permission:

The model is based on the fine artwork of Mark Styling:



303rd BG(H) TAIL INSIGNIA on both sides of the tail surface

Original B-17Fs (October 1942)

No triangle group insignia.

Serial number painted in yellow. The first number of the full aircraft serial number was dropped, viz.: 41-24577 became 124577

Aircraft Radio call letter painted in yellow, 36 inches high, below the serial number. The 358th & 360th BS used "A" to "K", less "E" & "I". The 359th BS & 427th BS used "O" to "W". The size was reduced to 24 inches high around September 1943. By winter of 1943 the whole alphabet was used by all Squadrons. On a few replacement aircraft, the radio call letter was painted in white when yellow paint became unavailable.

Late June / Early July 1943 to August 1944 - Group triangle insignia added above serial number

Equilateral white triangle with a black letter "C" in the center of the triangle.

Note: On some aircraft the letter "C" was painted in blue.)

Black letter "C" placed in center of the white triangle

Note: When natural metal finished B-17Gs were introduced in March 1944, the Group Triangle "C" was changed to a black triangle with a white letter "C" on some B-17s. All 1st Division B-17 Groups utilized the triangle to identify the parent division. 2nd Division B-24 Groups utilized a circle and 3rd Division B-17 Groups utilized a Square. Each group had its identification letter that was placed inside the division triangle, circle or square.

FUSELAGE IDENTIFICATION on both fuselage sides

SQUADRON CODE LETTERS & AIRCRAFT RADIO CALL LETTER

Squadron Code - Double letters, 48 inch high, rectangular shaped - Placed forward of the waist gunner window and after the national insignias, viz.:

"VK" 358th BS; "BN" 359th BS; "PU" 360th BS; "GN" 427th BS

Aircraft Radio Call Letter - Single letter, 48 inch high, rectangular shaped - Placed aft of the waist gunner window

Note: In making radio transmissions to or from lead aircraft, other aircraft, control towers, etc the aircraft was identified by using the radio call letter plus the last three numbers of the serial number, i.e. "Cowboy leader this is Q-590"

Fuselage letter colors - Early B-17Fs - Yellow, late model B-17Fs and early B-17Gs with Dark Olive Drab and Neutral Gray factory finish - Gray, B-17Gs natural metal August 1944 - Black

U.S. NATIONAL INSIGNIA

Placed between the Squadron code letters and aircraft radio call letter

1942-1943 - Blue circle with five-pointed white star inside blue circle

1942-1943 - Yellow border placed around the blue circle

29 June 1943 - "Star & Bar insignia" adopted - White rectangle bars, with red borders, placed on each side of the Blue red bordered circle

14 Aug 1943 - Red border around insignia removed. Blue border around white side bars.



GROUP IDENTIFICATION ON WINGS OF THE B-17

U.S. National Insignia - Lower side of right wing. Upper side of left wing

303rd BG(H) Triangle "C" Insignia - Upper side of right wing and lower side of left wing. The wing device did not carry the aircraft serial number or the squadron identification number

Note: Triangle "C" insignia was not placed on wing surface until late June/early July 1943 when the 303rd BG(H) group insignia was adopted.

IMPORTANT NOTICE - MANY VARIATIONS EXISTED

Authorized and mandated changes in aircraft identification were not implemented overnight. It sometimes took several weeks to implement all of the changes.

Some Squadrons made variations in colors, letter placement and size on some B-17s. The aircraft markings shown apply only to the 303rd Bombardment Group (H). Other Bombardment Groups and Divisions had substantial differences from the 303rd in their aircraft identification marking

INFORMATION SOURCES

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[Illustrations courtesy of the Mark Styling]

‘Authorized and mandated changes in aircraft identification were not implemented overnight. It sometimes took several weeks to implement all of the changes.’

No photographs appear to have survived to show ‘Lucky Lady’s’ later appearance. Painting priority was usually given to newly delivered aircraft, so, although the above regulations indicate how she should have looked it is by no means certain that the July/August changes would have been made by September 1943. The sequence **should** have been:

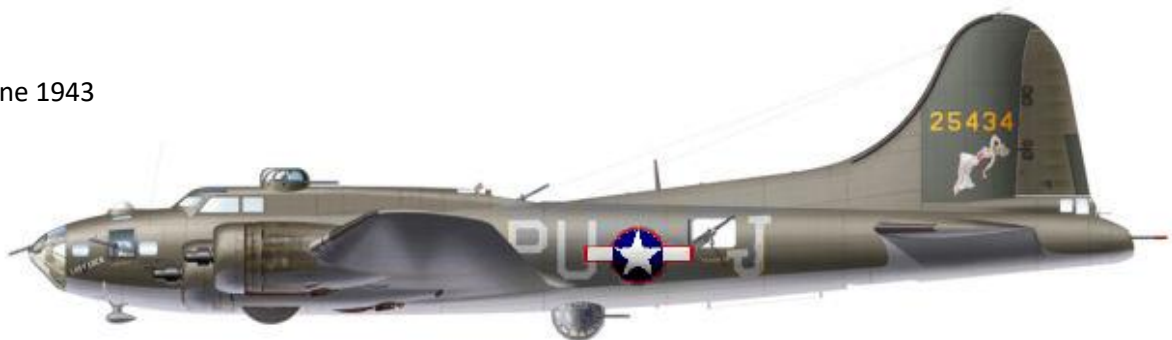
March 1943



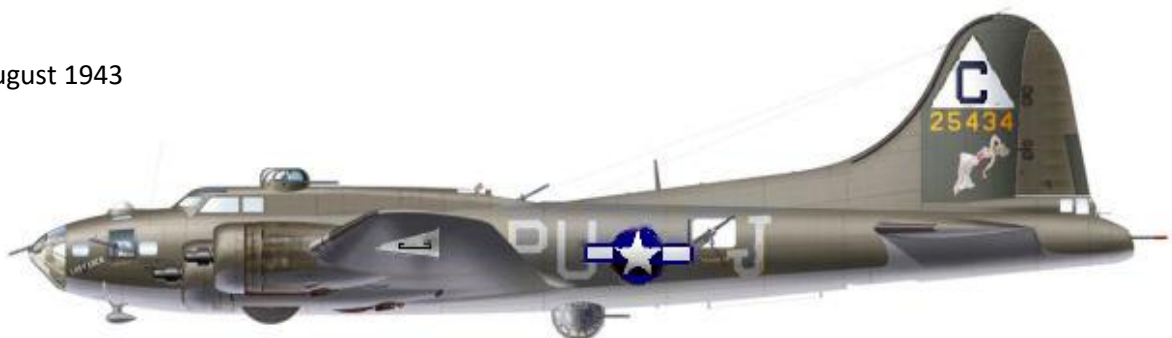
May 1943



June 1943



August 1943



Any good evidence would be very welcome.