

Unit History

“Hell from Heaven” 398th Bombardment Group (H)

B-17, aircraft No: 42-102516-30-H, on Training Flight Near Rapid City - Spring 1944. “Roy” Test was the Ryan Crew’s co-pilot. He took this photo from his plane, probably 42-97252. The planes are in close formation flying on a 398th training mission and out of the Rapid City Army Air Base. The timeframe was early 1944, the terrain below is probably South Dakota. Credit: “Roy” Test.



Cullinan's Crew - 603rd Squadron - 19 July 1944. Original Crew No. 67
Back Row (viewer's left to right): S/Sgt. Florence A. Kowalczyk, Waist Gunner; Captain Steve P. Cullinan, Pilot; 2nd Lt. Lloyd M. Sundheim, Navigator; 1st Lt. Walter E. Marsh, Bombardier; Captain Robert L. Hopkins, Squadron Operations
Front Row (viewer's left to right): T/Sgt. Harold B. Butler, Radio; 2nd Lt. John O. Hobbs, Co-Pilot; T/Sgt. Ben Mendes, Engineer; S/Sgt. Ellsworth Wright, Ball Turret

Photo taken on 398th Mission No. 52, to Lechfeld, Germany, 19 July 1944. On this mission the Cullinan crew flew High Group Lead. The aircraft in the photo is: No. 42-97357, "The Railroader"

Information courtesy of the 398th Bomb Group Memorial Association (www.398th.org)



8th AF



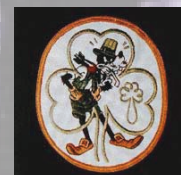
398th BG



600th BS



601st BS



602nd BS



603rd BS

The 398th was part of the 8th Air Force 1st Air Division during WWII and was one of many B-17 Bomb Groups stationed in England. The 398th was formed in the United States in 1943 and was stationed in Nuthampstead, England from April 1944 until June 1945.



Above: "The Tar Heel Lemon" and the 398th Ready for Takeoff - Unknown Date in 1944/1945

398th Bombardment Group Description:

Constituted as 398th Bombardment Group [Heavy] on 15 February 1943. Activated on 1 March 1943. Prepared for combat with B-17's, but interrupted these activities from July to December 1943 to train replacement crews for other organizations.

Moved to England in April 1944 and assigned to Eighth Air Force. Entered combat in May 1944, and until VE Day operated primarily against strategic objectives in Germany, attacking targets such as factories in Berlin, warehouses in Munich, marshalling yards in Saarbrucken, shipping facilities in Kiel, oil refineries in Merseburg, and aircraft plants in Munster.

Temporarily suspended strategic missions to attack coastal defenses and enemy troops on the Cherbourg peninsula during the Normandy invasion in June 1944; strike gun positions near Eindhoven in support of the air attack on Holland in September 1944; raid power stations, railroads, and

bridges during the Battle of the Bulge, December 1944-January 1945; and attack airfields to aid the Allied assault across the Rhine in March 1945.

Flew last combat mission, attacking an airfield in Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, on 25 April 1945.

Transported liberated prisoners from Germany to France after VE Day.

Returned to the US, May-June 1945. Inactivated on 1 September 1945.

Stations

- Ephrata AAB, Washington, 1 March 1943
- California, 5 April 1943
- Geiger Field, Washington, 29 April 1943
- Rapid City AAB, South Dakota, 10 June 1943-4 April 1944
- Nuthampstead Air Field, England, 22 April 1944-26 May 1945
- Drew Field, Florida, 3 July-1 September 1945

Campaigns

- American Theater
- Air Offensive, Europe
- Normandy; Northern France
- Rhineland; Ardennes-Alsace
- Central Europe

Lower Right: Takeoff from Nuthampstead probably in the Summer of 1944. Credit: The Norman Rudrud 398th Photo CD compiled by Eric Rudrud.



Activation March 1st, 1943

The 398th Bombardment Group, consisting of Group Headquarters and the 600th, 601st, 602nd, and 603rd Bombardment Squadrons [H] was activated under General Order Number 30, Headquarters, Second Air Force, Fort George Wright, Washington, Section II, Paragraph I, quoted as follows: Pursuant to instructions contained in immediate action, confidential War Department Letter, AG 320.2 [02-12-43] OB-I-AFDPV-M, February 15, 1943, subject: "Constitution and Activation of certain Army Air Force Units", the following units having been constituted and assigned to the Second Air Force, are activated as indicated-

Unit Effective Date of Activation

Headquarters, 398th Bombardment Group [H] March 1, 1943.

The initial cadre was formed from the 34th Bombardment Group [H] at the Army Air Base, Blythe, California. Lt. Colonel Frank P Hunter was assigned as Group Commander. The permanent station of the 398th Bombardment Group [H] is Army Air Base, Ephrata, Washington.

Army Air Forces School of Applied Tactics, Orlando, Florida

April 3rd - April 24th, 1943

Under the provision of Special Order, number 88, paragraph 2, Headquarters, Army Air Base, Blythe, California, dated March 29, 1943, a part of the 398th Bombardment Group [H], consisting of 85 officers and enlisted men, with 1st Lt. Jack S. Garland acting as trained commander, left on March 29th for the Army Air Forces School of Applied Tactics,



Above: Cottages in the village of Nuthampstead, Hertfordshire just north of London.

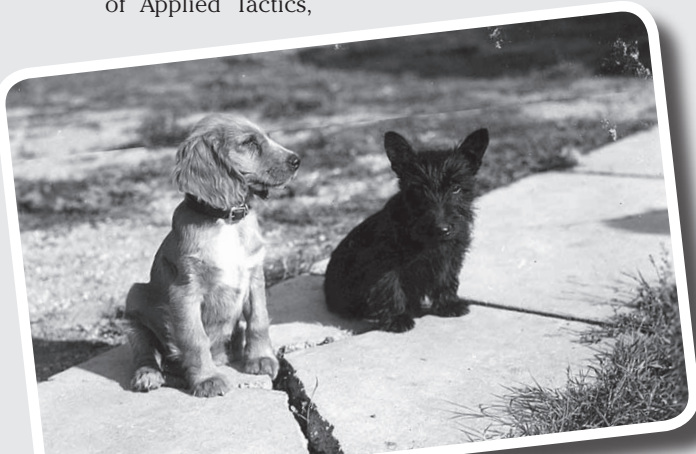
Orlando, Florida, arriving at their destination on April 3rd. Upon completion of the course this part of the cadre under the provisions of the aforementioned Special Order number 88, left Orlando, Florida on April 24th arriving at Geiger Field, Spokane, Washington, on April 29, 1943. This was a temporary change of station.

On April 26, 1943, under the provisions of Special Order number 118, paragraph 6, Army Air Base, Blythe, California, dated April 26, 1943 the remaining portion of the cadre, under the command of Major Earl J. Berryhill, left Blythe, California, and arrived at Geiger Field, Spokane, Washington on May 1, 1943. This was a temporary change of station.

On June 20th, 1943, under the provision of Special Order number 169, paragraph 2, Army Air Base, Geiger Field, Washington, dated June 18, 1943, the 398th Bombardment Group [H], moved to Army Air Base, Rapid City, South Dakota, a temporary change of station. The flight echelon was authorized to travel by motor, air, or rail, and the ground echelon proceeded by rail, arriving June 22, 1943.

On July 8, 1943, on verbal orders from Brigadier General Walter A. Peck, the status of the 398th

Left: Two mascots from the 398th Bomb Group. The light one is an English Cocker Spaniel. The dark one is a Black Scotty dog, possibly named Satan.





Above: B-17 aircraft No: 42-97252, of the 602nd Bomb Squadron, on its way to England in the Spring of 1944. This aircraft was delivered to BAD 1 on 7 May 1944 and then transferred to the 351st Bomb group, 510 bomb Squadron. She was renamed "Devil's Princess" Crew No. 49 as follows: John P. Ryan, Pilot; Lee "Roy" Test, Co-Pilot; Carl Foster, Navigator; Chambers "Dan" Adams, Bombardier; John Cowley, Engineer/Gunner; Lloyd Stovall, Radio; Joseph Horvath, Gunner; Samuel Devan, Gunner; William "Frank" Coombs, Ball Gunner; John May, Crew Chief.

Bombardment Group [H] became that of an arrested OTU Group. [Overseas Training Unit]

Group Performance Record

This group dropped 15,781.2 tons on German and enemy occupied targets and participated in strategical and tactical bombing. It also actively engaged in close support of ground troops in the "D" Day invasion of Normandy; the breakthrough at Caen and St. Lo; the Eindhoven airborne invasion, the elimination of the Metz fortified area; the penetration across the Rhine River; and the destruction of Fort Royan in the liberation of Bordeaux, France.

The outstanding attack made by the 398th was on Derben, Germany, on April 8, 1945, for which an award of the Presidential Unit Citation is under consideration by higher headquarters.

Below: Lewis' Crew's B-17, aircraft No: 43-39227, over Kohlenbissen - 7 April 1945. The below photo shows 398th, 601st Squadron B-17G A/C #339227-S, Squadron 30 (601st) at 23,600 feet over Kohlenbissen, Germany on 7 April 1945. Guns are pointed and alert for enemy fighters. The crew at the time this photo was taken: 1st Lt. David W. Lewis, Pilot; 2nd Lt. Albert L. Morton, Co-Pilot; 2nd Lt. Charles G. Bolthouse, Navigator; S/Sgt. Theodore D. Paxson, Togglier; T/Sgt. Frank E. Gabriel, Engineer / Top turret T/Sgt. Thomas H. Cole, Radio Operator; S/Sgt. Lynn W. Barnes, Waist gunner; S/Sgt. Leslie E. Woelflin, Ball Turret; S/Sgt. Billy M Bourlon, Tail Gunner





Three B-17s from the 600th Bomb Squadron on Bomb Run over Paderborn (Petska and Others) - 9 February 1945. The middle B-17 was flown by the Pestka Crew and known as "MIAZZIZ DRAGON". The 398th target that day was a railway bridge and viaduct at Paderborn/Altenbeken. It is not clear if this group went to Paderborn or Altenbeken.

The Petska Crew at the time of the photograph: 1st Lt. Albert Petska, Pilot; 1st Lt. Thomas B. Van Matre, Co-Pilot; S/Sgt. Charles E. Fellows, Navigator; S/Sgt. Raymond R. McGee, Bombardier/Toggler; Sgt. George W. Forsyth, Engineer/Top Turret Gunner; S/Sgt. Thomas Spencer, Radio Operator; S/Sgt. Donald J. Shaw, Waist Gunner; S/Sgt. Homer D. Newman, Bottom Turret gunner; S/Sgt. James S. Froelich, Tail Gunner.

Photo Credit: Richard Shaw Collection.

Were there any survivors?

A monthly inventory of the B-17's assigned to the four 398th Squadrons exists in the 398th basic data tapes, those that are referred to as the "Statistical History of the 398th" (now available for purchase on CD-ROM in the 398th PX). It was a relatively easy task to compare the April 1944 monthly inventory with that of the April 1945 inventory. Were there any survivors? YES - of the original sixty eight (68) B-17's that the 398th began flying combat with - there were six (6) survivors - that is, they were still on combat flying status at the end of the war.

Tail Numbers:

600 Squadron: 42-97249P, 42-102487B and 42-102507F

601 Squadron: 42-102596N and 42-107190L



Pettus Crew Visits the "Sweet and Lovely" - Spring 1945. It is B-17 No. 42-30721 from the 601st Bomb Squadron. Crew at time of Photograph: The 398th did not fly this plane in combat; however, it was a good photo op. Pictured with the "Sweet and Lovely" are a few members of the Pettus crew: L to R: S/Sgt Kasch (KIA), M/Sgt. Ben Winninger - Radio, S/Sgt Ernie LaCoste - Gunner, S/Sgt Keegan - Gunner, in the foreground: T/Sgt Wickens, Engineer (KIA). Sweet and Lovely, B-17F 42-30721 was assigned to a number of groups over its history. The 398th (601st Squadron) acquired it from the 381st. The 398th records shows this B-17 listed in its aircraft inventory report, designated as "W W" (War Weary), every month from Dec. 6 1944 until the 398th pulled out May/June 1945. Credit: Lee Bradley.



602 Squadron: 42-102593C
603 Squadron: None

While these are only numbers and letters to some readers, to a few 398ers they may represent an intimate and dramatic moment in their life. I remember 42-107190L, it had just the name *Maxine* painted on its nose and the record shows it was flown on eighty one (81) missions. Richard Schmidt was it's ground crew chief. What a shame that these noble survivors all met the wrecking ball and were sold as junk!

Wally Blackwell

Above: 602nd in Formation Over Target - 1944/45

Six three-plane elements can be seen. One to the left, a 2nd to the lower left, a third to the lower right, a 4th in the upper right, a single plane emerging from the darkened area, perhaps the lead of another element, and the 6th, the large plane above, which is probably the element lead with the photograph being taken from his left wingman. A single plane below 2597-V appears out of formation. Close examination of the left wingman of the formation to the far left suggests the fuselage lettering is N8-N, or the 600th Squadron. Credit: Vic Jenkin's Collection.

The photo on the right shows several elements (groups of 3 B-17s) on a combat mission over Germany. The plane from which the photo was taken is probably to the left rear of the large plane in the middle of the photograph. The tail markings for the largest plane in the photo has very clear tail markings. The triangle W is the 398th and K8-H indicates it was the 602nd Squadron. Probably all the planes were in the 602nd. The A/C number of the largest plane is 43-38775 K8-H. The planes in the upper element are labeled K8-M and K8-J. It might be possible someday to identify the date based on the A/C number and the letters H, M, and J being on the same mission.

