BROWN'S CLOWNS

THE HISTORY OF A B-17 BOMBER CREW

August 1990

G. Duane Vieth
This volume is affectionately dedicated to the memory of Captain Gerald Brown, U.S. Army Air Force --

** A skilled pilot
** An effective leader
** A true gentleman
BROWN'S CLOWNS
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What follows is a brief history of the World War II B-17 bomber crew led by Captain Gerald Brown of Los Angeles, California. The crew was assigned to the 100th Bomb Group (351st Squadron) of the Eighth Air Force, and flew missions during the period August 1944 to March 1945. The 100th Bomb Group was located in the East Anglia section of England in Norfolk County near Diss at a base known as Thorpe Abbotts.

The original crew consisted of:

2d Lt. Gerald Brown, Los Angeles, California -- Pilot.


Cpl. Roland Douglas, Peru, Indiana -- Armorer and Ball Gunner.

Cpl. Wayne Page, Merced, California -- Assistant Engineer and Waist Gunner.

Cpl. Clarence Kellogg, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma -- Tail Gunner.

The Brown crew, which referred to itself as "Brown's Clowns," was assembled at Ardmore Air Force Base in Oklahoma in April 1944. The crew was relatively youthful and as a result was the subject of a newspaper story in a base publication accompanied by a photograph of the crew.
Second Lt. Gerald Brown, combat crew is one of the youngest enlisted men; each of the six enlisted men on his crew are under 20 years of age. Lieut. Brown attended Frank Wiggins Trade School, Los Angeles, where he studied radio servicing, then was employed at the North American Aviation plant in Inglewood where he worked in the radio department. He left North American to enlist as an aviation cadet. After the war he hopes to continue in aviation.

His co-pilot, 2nd Lt. Arthur L. Jacobson, Seattle, has one ambition, it wants to become a F-13 pilot. Lieut. Jacobson studied commercial engineering at the University of Washington for three and a half years before enrolling as an Aviation cadet. He is a member of Sigma Chi fraternity.

The crew's navigator is referred to as "Puss" by his crewmates. He is 25 year old 2nd Lt. Ralph W. Bayer, Aberdeen, Wash., oldest member of the crew. Lieutenant Bayer is married and spent two years at Grays Harbor Junior College studying chemical engineering. In civilian life he is a dog fancier, raising, training, and showing and selling Great Danes. Bayer is a member of Alpha Sigma Epialon fraternity.

Second Lt. Joseph J. Lye, Washington, D.C. is the bombardier. He is married and the father of a 14-month-old boy, "Michael." He joined the Air Corps in 1942 and has been a bombardier instructor at Randolph and Carlsbad. Lieutenant Lye was a football and track star in high school and was awarded an athletic scholarship to Toledo University. Before enlisting he had an interest in guns and the navy department. He is a member of Lambda Sigma Fraternity.

The crew's aerial gunner is Sgt. Walter E. Peters, Chicago. In civilian life he was a woodwork pattern apprentice. Sergeant Peters also, plays basketball.

Starred in baseball in high school and his favorite recreation is diving between lake fishing and rooting for the Chicago Cubs.

School to Service

Pfc. Wayne E. Page, assistant engineer, Merced, Cal., was graduated from high school in June and enlisted in October. He worked on his father's farm before joining up. After the war he hopes to study mechanical drafting at college.

The crew's radio operator, Sgt. Clifford D. Vieth, Davenport, Iowa, was a pre-law student at the University of Iowa. He left college in his sophomore year to enlist in the air force. He starred in debating and dramatics both in high school and college and is a member of Sigma Chi fraternity. After the war, he hopes to continue his law studies.

Pfc. George T. Vogelstein, San Francisco, is the assistant radio operator. Before enlisting he studied accounting and mathematics at San Francisco Junior College. A star basketball player, he played on three championship quintets while attending high school. He was named on the all-city court team twice, and also starred on the junior college quintet. He is a member of Tau Delta Rho fraternity and hopes to continue his studies at the University of Southern California after the war.

Youngest member of the crew is Pfc. Roland L. Douglas, 18, Peru, Ind. He is the crew's armorer. Douglas was graduated from high school in May, 1943, and immediately enlisted in the air forces. He is an excellent archer and also participates in fishing and hunting. Because of his age, his crewmates call him "Junior."

Tall gunner is Pfc. Clarence E. Kellogg, Oklahoma, City. Kellogg, nicknamed "Butch" by his crewmates, was an All-American athlete in high school. He earned varsity letters in boxing, wrestling, baseball and basketball.

Bombs Away, Ardmore Army Air Force Base

May 27, 1944
Back - L to R: Brown, Jacobson, Dye, Mayer
Front - L to R: Peters, Vieth, Page, Sogiatisis, Douglas, Kellogg
On June 28, 1944, the Brown crew was dispatched from Rearney, Nebraska to England pursuant to the following order:

RESTRIC TED
HEADQUARTERS 271ST STAGING BASE
REARNEY ARMY AIR FIELD
REARNEY, NEBRASKA

370.5-382 (195-9) 28 June 1944

SUBJECT: Movement Orders, Heavy Bombardment Crew Number FB-333-CJ-139, To Overseas Destination.

EC:

| P | 2nd Lt (1024) | GERALD BROWN | 0763931 |
| CQ | 2nd Lt (1022) | ARTHUR L JACOBSON | 0768562 |
| W | 2nd Lt (1024) | RALPH W BAYER | 0719845 |
| B | 2nd Lt (1035) | JOSEPH J DYE | 0752285 |
| E | Sgt (748) | Walter 3 Peters | 36666943 |
| R | Sgt (757) | Gifford 3 Vieth | 17153205 |
| AG | Cpl (611) | Roland L Douglas | 35895660 |
| CG | Cpl (611) | George Vogiatzis | 39038584 |
| GG | Cpl (611) | Wayne 3 Page | 39418943 |
| CG | Cpl (611) | Clarence S Kellogg | 38397204 |

1. You are assigned to Shipment FB-333-CJ, as crew To. FB-333-CJ-139, and to B-17 airplane number 42-98017, on aircraft project number 92766-R. You are equipped in accordance with the provisions of the movement order.

2. You are relieved from attdd unassigned 271st AAF Base Unit (SB), this station, and WP via nil acft and/or rail to Grenier Field, Manchester, New Hampshire, or such other Air Port of Embarkation as the CG, ATC, may direct, then to the overseas destination of Shipment FB-333-CJ. Upon arrival at the Air Port of Embarkation, control of the above personnel is relinquished to the CG, AEC.

3. This is a PERMANENT change of station. You will not be accompanied by dependents; neither will you be joined by dependents enroute to, nor at the Air Port of Embarkation. You will not discuss this movement except as may be necessary in the transaction of OFFICIAL business. You will not file safe arrival telegrams with commercial agencies while enroute and at domestic or overseas destinations.

4. You will use APO 16209-CJ-(Followed by the numeral ending of your shipment crew number, underlined in paragraph 1 above), c/o Postmaster, New York, New York. Upon arrival at final overseas destination, you will use the mailing address of the troops at that place. Advise your friends and relatives of your permanent APO by forwarding a completed V-Mail WD AGO Form 971; also notify the postal officer of the theater by forwarding a completed WD AGO Form 204.
The crew ferried a B-17 from Kearney to England, making the journey with overnight or longer stops in Manchester, New Hampshire, Goose Bay, Labrador, Reykjavik, Iceland, and Prestwick, Scotland. On July 23, 1944 the crew was assigned to the 100th Bomb Group.

The 100th Bomb Group

The 100th Bomb Group was described in the Foreword by Roger Freeman in the book Century Bombers as follows:

"The 100th Bombardment Group, Heavy, is probably the best known of all the United States Army Air Forces combat units of the Second World War, but rather through its sobriquet The Bloody Hundredth than its official designation. Fame follows close on infamy and that wartime label for the rumoured 'hard luck outfit' of the 8th Air Force became allied with the image of the legions of Flying Fortresses fighting their way through the stratosphere against a determined enemy. For just as the Spitfire and the Battle of Britain has come to symbolise the Royal Air Force in the 1939-45 conflict, so the B-17's air battles tend to be the image which later generations of Americans bring to mind for their own nation's airmen of that war.

* * *

"... The Hundredth's combat history was remarkably eventful. Although the name Bloody Hundredth was undoubtedly resented by 100th Bomb Group personnel during hostilities, it has become an appellation of which veterans are proud, indicative now of the Hundredth's fighting spirit and resilience. A record that has fascinated many and led a band of English people to turn the Group's control tower at Thorpe Abbotts airfield into a museum recording that wartime experience."
In *The Mighty Eighth*, it is said:

"As no news travels like bad news, the 100th's fortunes were soon known at other bases where the Thorpe Abbots group was often referred to as a 'jinx outfit.' The course of events was to change the 'a' to 'the' and bring a telling epithet, known beyond the confines of the Eighth Air Force." (p. 78)

The epithet, of course, was "The Bloody Hundredth."
The identification marking of the B-17s of the 100th Bomb Group was Square D.
Corporal George Vogiatizis

The crew which was assembled at Ardmore and flew to England included two waist gunners, Wayne Page and George Vogiatizis ("Vogie"). Upon arrival in England, the crew was informed that the Eighth Air Force had ordered a reduction in crew sizes to nine, with only one waist gunner per crew. Accordingly, Vogie was reassigned to the Ninth Air Force, where he flew in Martin B-26s. Not long afterward, the Brown crew received word that Vogie had been shot down while on a mission with the Ninth Air Force, and he was later listed as killed in action.

The Brown Crew's Missions


Our first mission was against a synthetic oil production facility outside Hamburg, Germany. We experienced heavy flak. The entire crew was nervous and excited and thought the name of the plane to which we were assigned that day was quite appropriate: "Fools Rush In."

There is more to tell about "Fools Rush In" later in this history -- see the text following the description of our Mission 21.
Mission 1 - "Fools Rush In"

Mission 2 - "Our Gal Sal"

Tactical mission in support of British and Canadian troops in Normandy -- St. Sylvain near Caen, France.

"Over St. Sylvain on August 8, the Hundredth, led by Jeffrey and Neal P. Scott, flew again in support of the ground forces. The target was the Headquarters for the battalions forming the nucleus of the enemy's defense.

"The operation in its larger scope was designed to aid the attempt of the British and Canadians to crush the hedge-hog defenses of the enemy in the Caen sector, which held up a push to the south.

"The R.A.F. was slated to soften up five targets for an advance, after which the Eighth Air Force would attack prior to the final breakthrough."  Contrails, p. 84

This mission convinced Brown's Clowns that B-17s were not intended for tactical support missions. We flew at a low altitude to bomb enemy troop concentrations. Our altitude was much too low, and our heavy bombers became sitting duck targets for flak gunners on the ground. The ship flown by Brown's crew -- "Our Gal Sal" -- received 38 flak holes and our navigator, Ralph Bayer, was wounded in the leg.

The mission is described in Century Bombers as follows (p. 139):

"The bomb run was thirty-four miles long, just behind enemy lines, and at 14,000 feet. The formation got terrific flak along entire run, and hardly a ship escaped damage. Flak was mostly 88, anti-tank guns pointed upward."
"... Flak was reported as the worst the Group has ever encountered."

Nilsson, *The Story of the Century*, notes concerning this mission (pp. 72-73):

"It was smooth flying, 'til the 100th turned to make the bomb run at 12,000 feet, when German 88's began rampantly to throw up the flak, through which the 100th flew for 17 minutes, possibly the most harrowing flak ever encountered anywhere by any air force."

The commanding officer of the 100th Bomb Group, Colonel Thomas S. Jeffrey, flew with the lead crew on this mission. Upon his return to the base, the Colonel was drinking a mug of coffee when another pilot entered the room. Col. Jeffrey said to the other pilot:

"...did you ever see such BIG, BLACK, LOUD, flak in all your life?" -- his hands trembling slightly as he set down his mug. When [the other pilot] noticed that, he didn't feel so bad, because he was shaking himself." *The Story of the Century*, p. 73.

After this mission our plane "Our Gal Sal" was repaired, the 38 flak holes sealed, and the plane managed to finish the war with the 100th Group and was returned to the U.S. after the war.
Lead Crew

After this second mission, Jerry Brown was approached by the powers that be to determine if we would like to be a lead crew. He discussed it with the entire crew. It meant that we'd have to undergo some additional training. But a real incentive was that our required tour of duty would be reduced from 35 to 30 missions. We unanimously agreed to become a lead crew.

The Mighty Eighth describes the early development of lead crews as follows (p. 76):

"Two crews formed in each squadron underwent intensive training for the task of acting as group or squadron lead crews on combat missions—and they were only to participate in combat in this capacity. Further, two aircraft in each squadron were equipped with every approved device to aid location and accurate bombing of a target, and would be flown only as lead bombers. The rear gunner's position in a 'lead ship' was invariably occupied by an officer pilot who could advise the pilot on the state of the formation."

Accordingly, our becoming a lead crew required a number of changes. The co-pilot seat on a lead crew is occupied by a command pilot--usually a different commander on each mission. Our regular co-pilot, Art Jacobson, moved to the tail gunner's compartment. From there Jake had a view of the formations we were leading and for which he was responsible. Our regular tail gunner Clarence Kellogg ("Okie") moved to the waist, so once again we had two waist gunners, Okie and Wayne Page.
Probably the most significant change was the requirement that as a lead crew, the Brown crew flew Pathfinder equipped B-17s. Pathfinder was a radar device (code cover name Mickey Mouse -- later shortened to mickey) which enabled the Eighth Air Force to look through cloud cover. A Pathfinder-equipped B-17 flew lead position in a combat formation with the other bombers in the formation dropping on the lead crew's bomb release. Smoke bombs were used to mark the release point for following formations.

The mickey was located in a dome underneath the B-17, replacing the ball turret. The mickey operator was located in the radio compartment along with the radio operator, and the radioman's gun was removed. As a result, our ball gunner Roland Douglas was reassigned to another crew, and we picked up a new crew member, Lt. Erwin (Tony) Lentz, the mickey operator.

Roland Douglas experienced some hair-raising adventures in his new assignment. See the story on Doug following the discussion of our Mission 21.
Pathfinder ship 009

Note radar dome
Lead ship releases smoke bombs
Mission 3. August 11, 1944 - Airfield outside Paris. We flew Element lead. This was relatively a milk run after our last mission over Normandy. Bombed airfield in support of the rapid American drive through France led by General Patton. Our B-17 was named "Skipper II." This plane also survived the war.


Bombed retreating German columns. B-17 #295. Element lead again. According to Century Bombers, p. 140:

"On the 13th, the Group was assigned a 'ground support job' and attacked the 'roads and railroads at Nantes-Gassicourt, south of the Seine with good results, a six hour flight."

Lay-Off for Training

As a lead crew, the Brown crew spent many days in training. This resulted in a long lay-off between Missions 4 and 5. During this period, on September 1, 1944, the Glenn Miller Air Force band gave a concert at Thorpe Abbotts, enjoyed by all the crew.


Germany. Bombed an aero-engine factory. B-17 #124. This was the first mission in which the Brown crew led a squadron. We were in the air for 9 hours, 20 minutes -- a long time.

"On the 5th, 'the Hundredth put up three groups' and attacked an aero-engine works at Stuttgart with 'excellent results' and 'everyone came back, although the flak was heavy and the battle damage considerable.'" Century Bombers, p. 147.
Pathfinder Training

In mid-September 1944 the Brown crew was assigned to the 95th Bomb Group at Horham for further training with the Pathfinder equipment. Jerry Brown noted about this training period:

"We also were assigned 15 Sept. 44 to the 95th group for a couple of weeks for lead crew training. That's because the 100th did not yet have the maintenance facilities for the Radar equipment. Later, they got it and we went home. While at the 95th we would fly over in the early evening to the 100th when we were scheduled for a mission. They just topped off the tanks and we were ready to go. Landing with a full bomb load and fuel load at the 100th was a little tricky."

Also during this period, on September 30, 1944, the 100th Group celebrated its 200th Mission at a 200 Mission Fiesta Party. General Jimmy Doolittle and Eddie Rickenbacher visited the base during this party. The party lasted for more than a day -- but ultimately --

"The war called a halt to the festivities, and the planes took off at 0740 hours on the morning of October 2 to attack an engine factory at Kassel."  Contrails, p. 89.
Erwin "Tony" Lentz
Mickey Operator
Mission 6. October 2, 1944 - Kassel, Germany.
Our first as a lead crew with Pathfinder. B-17 #183.
Bombed an engine factory and marshalling yards at Kassel.

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While the Brown crew was training at the 95th,
our bombardier Joe Dye was hospitalized, and Bill Titley
was assigned to our crew as bombardier. Titley’s first
mission with the Brown crew was Mission 7. Upon release
from the hospital, Dye was assigned to the Thomas Hughes
crew, and he completed his tour with that crew. Dye was
credited with destroying an enemy fighter on the ill-
fated mission of the 100th Group on December 31, 1944.
Contrails, p. 91.
New Bombardier, Bill Titley
Mission 7. October 15, 1944 - Cologne, Germany.

Into the heavily defended Ruhr Valley for the first time. Bombed marshalling yards. B-17 #696.

Mission 8. October 18, 1944 - Kassel, Germany.

Bombed aero-engine and parts factory; B-17 #009. The oxygen supply in the cockpit and the nose ran out over the target. For two hours Page, Lentz, Kellogg, and Vieth filled portable oxygen tanks and carried them through the bomb bay to the pilots in the cockpit and the navigator and bombardier in the nose. Finally had to let down over enemy territory because of lack of oxygen.


The 100th Group was assigned to the 13th Combat Wing of the Third Division of the Eighth Air Force. This mission was the first time our crew led the 13th Combat Wing. B-17 #226. Bombed marshalling yards.

"... the Third Division was dispatched to the marshalling yards at Munster, where twenty-four of the Hundredth's planes released their bombs by radar with 'good results,' having met 'no fighters and very little flak.'" Century Bombers, pp. 160-161.
Mission 10. October 27, 1944 - Misburg, Germany.

Mission intended for oil refinery at Misburg. Weather abominable -- front extended up to 31,000 feet. Mission recalled.

The Brown crew was a member of the 351st Squadron of the 100th Group. Our squadron received a commendation from Third Division headquarters, as follows:

"...The 351st Bombardment Squadron (H), is commended for outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy during the period 31 July to 2 November 1944. During this period, the squadron participated in fifty-two (52) consecutive missions without the loss of a single crew or aircraft. On these operations, more than 400 aircraft were dispatched and only eleven (11) aborted. Eight hundred and forty-three (843) tons of high explosive and incendiary bombs were dropped on enemy targets which included Venlo, Hamburg, Berlin, Ludwigshafen, Bremen, Magdeburg, Munster, Merseberg; as well as Szolnok, Hungary and the supply mission to Warsaw, Poland."

"'Although many of the aircraft returned from these missions with extensive battle damage, highly efficient maintenance crews expeditiously repaired the crippled bombers and enabled the courageous airmen to resume operations in the shortest possible time. The skill in operations planning and the courage displayed by the combat crews in all attacks have not only insured the high degree of efficiency necessary to establish this record, but have also resulted in a material contribution to the successful prosecution of the war against the enemy.'"
"This splendid teamwork, courage and devotion to duty displayed by the Officers and Men of the 351st Bombardment Squadron reflect the highest credit upon themselves and the United States Army Air Forces.'


Unfortunately the Brown crew managed to lose an aircraft (temporarily) on our next mission.
T Sgt Walter Peters

Flight Engineer and Top Turret Gunner
Mission 11. November 5, 1944 - Ludwigshafen, Germany. Our flight engineer, Walter Peters, said in his diary, "Never want another one like this!"

In B-17 #209 we attacked marshalling yards in Ludwigshafen. Ran into extremely heavy and extremely accurate flak.

Over the target our No. 3 engine was knocked out by flak. Also our hydraulic system. A short time later fire broke out in the cockpit. Pete, our flight engineer, worked hard to extinguish the fire and was finally successful. We had to leave the formation and began losing altitude •• 100 feet per minute. Then engine No. 4 also quit. We were then operating on two engines, both on the same side, Nos. 1 and 2.

Brown knew we could not make it back to England, so we headed for Brussels, Belgium, which had been liberated from German hands several days before, and an airfield outside Brussels.

Capt. Brown made an excellent emergency landing. We had no brakes because the hydraulic system had been destroyed. Our ship ran off the runway immediately upon touching down, but Brown managed to maneuver to a stop without hitting any of the aircraft which were parked all over the field.
Jerry Brown recommended Walter Peters for a Distinguished Flying Cross for his efforts on this mission. We were all delighted that Pete was awarded this medal.

Our crew visited downtown Brussels that night. The populace were still celebrating their liberation, and we were treated royally -- had a great time. Enjoyed our first ice cream in a long time. Also drank more than our share of the local liquor.

Several other B-17s had made emergency landings at Brussels. The next day we were assigned to one which had been repaired and ferried it back to Thorpe Abbotts.

SOME MISSION!
Airfield outside Brussels

November 5, 1944

B-17 #209 - Immediately after emergency landing
engines 3 and 4 feathered.
Members of Brown Crew examining shot-up

German bomber at Brussels airfield

November 5, 1944

Bombed marshalling yards using the mickey through the clouds. Temperature outside the plane mighty cold -- minus 56°F. B-17 #379.

The book *The Mighty Eighth* describes a mission under such extremely cold conditions (p. 101):

"The cold on this mission was intense--as it had been on most missions of the month--the temperature at operating height descending to--50° Fahrenheit of frost and caused ice formations nearly two inches thick on windows. Frost bite struck in a matter of seconds if gloves were removed, oxygen masks iced and made breathing difficult and the icy gale sweeping open gun positions made the rear gunners' lives particularly miserable."


Headed for a marshalling yard but had to be recalled three minutes from the target. Front extended up to 30,000 feet. B-17 #379.

Mission 14. December 4, 1944 - Friedberg, Germany. Our briefed target was Giessen, but weather prevented our hitting this target. Group then took a cook's tour of Germany, looking for a target of opportunity. Finally bombed marshalling yard at Friedberg.
In December 1944, our navigator Ralph Bayer was reassigned. He was replaced by Leo Kimball, who came to us from the J.L. Gay crew.

Lt. Ralph Bayer

Ralph Bayer was then assigned to the crew of John Dodrill. Dodrill's crew was lost on the January 10, 1945 mission to Cologne. According to Century Bombers:

"The Hundredth also lost John Dodrill, who at nineteen, was 'the youngest first lieutenant in the Third Division.'"

"With 'one engine out' on B-17 42-37936, 'he flew down through the clouds' and was never seen again.

"All nine men aboard were killed, including the co-pilot David Williams, navigator Ralph Bayer, from the crew of Gerald Brown, and replacement David Pitman, who flew 'as a nose gunner.' All are memorialized on the Wall of the Missing at Cambridge." Century Bombers, p. 175.

Mission 15. December 5, 1944 - Berlin. Finally the "Big B." Bombed a tank factory at Tegel, a Berlin suburb. B-17 #009.

All the missions now are deep into Germany. They are quite long and we are exposed to enemy fighters. Pete wrote in his diary: "We were lucky on this one -- P-51s drove off enemy fighters which tried to get to our
formation -- saw numerous dog fights in and near target area." Vieth diary notes: "Don't know what we'd do without those P-51s, P-47s, and P-38s. Can't give them enough credit."

We were leading a squadron and when the group leader aborted, we took over the lead of the group.

Capt. Leo Kimball
Wayne Page
Waist Gunner

100th Group assigned to bomb marshalling yards in Mainz. Some squadrons got through. But weather was terrible, and our radar (Pathfinder) equipment failed, so we had to return with our bombs still aboard. Our plane was #209, the one we had landed in Brussels with two engines out on Mission 11. It had been repaired and flown back to our base at Thorpe Abbotts.

Christmas Eve 1944

In mid-December 1944 German Field Marshal von Runstedt initiated the Ardennes counter-offensive, otherwise known as the Battle of the Bulge. His offensive was achieving significant success.

"The war which many had thought would be over by Christmas now looked like enduring for many months. The Allied advance had succumbed to the grip of winter. Then on December 16th von Rundstedt launched his surprise offensive in the Ardennes, the last Nazi gamble, aimed at cutting the Allied front in two and reaching the Channel. The Germans had also chosen a period of bad weather when they knew the Allied air support would be minimised. While von Rundstedt moved, the airfields in England and France were mostly shrouded in fog." The Mighty Eighth, p. 183.

"... The German meteorologists had done their work well and had chosen a week when Allied air power could not operate. The Americans bent and gave ... and the Wehrmacht poured through a sixty-mile gap." Century Bombers, p. 168.
For a solid week the Eighth Air Force could not fly, and the Germans were making significant gains. Finally, on Christmas Eve, December 24, the skies had sufficiently cleared to enable the Eighth to launch a maximum effort aimed at relieving the pressure on the American troops trapped in the Bulge.

"The Field Orders that came chattering out of the bomber station teletype machines in the small hours of Christmas Eve 1944 listed an unusual requirement. A total effort, with every serviceable B-17 and B-24 participating. The vast overcast shrouding Western Europe for a week had begun to lift on December 23rd allowing the Eighth's heavy bombers to play some part in the critical situation that had developed since von Rundstedt launched his offensive in the Ardennes. Their aid was of limited scope, as the damp vapours had only partly cleared, but the signs were there and weather men predicted clear skies for the 24th. Eighth Air Force moved to bring about the maximum bombardment of airfields from which the Luftwaffe might operate in support of the Wehrmacht, and places through which supplies and reinforcements would pass to the front." — *The Mighty Eighth*, p. 201.

"All the bomb groups operated and 2,046 B-17's and 24's, including a number of gaily coloured assembly ships and war weary hacks, were despatched into 'the freezing fog.' Of these 1,884 released 5,052 tons of bombs.

"At Thorpe Abbotts, sixty-two planes and 556 men set out from Runway 10, 'in the greatest display of strength since beginning combat operations.'

"The formations were led by Captain Neal Scott and Donald Jones ..., by Captain J. Robinson [command pilot] and Gerald Brown ..., by Captain E. Wooten and Jean DePlanque ..., by Captain J. Gibbons and Captain John Ernst ..., and by Captain J. Ricker and F. Craft ...
"Arthur Juhlin recalls: 'First day we were able to fly since the Germans began their big counter-offensive and everything flyable in the Eighth was airborne.' *Centau Bombers*, pp. 168-69.


**Mission 17. December 24, 1944 - Kaiserslautern.**

Germany. The Brown crew's contribution to this massive Christmas Eve effort was to bomb the marshalling yards at Kaiserslautern in B-17 #379. We had overrun our primary target Biblis. Vieth diary notes:

"Finally had our chance to hit back at the German counter-offensive after six days bad weather. Quite a thrill to participate in the largest single air operation of the war -- 2000 heavy bombers of the Eighth Air Force. Hit many airfields and marshalling yards directly behind the lines. Visual conditions made for excellent results."

The Brown crew lost one engine to flak over the target and, as we discovered later, flak had also blown out our left tire. Eight of our bombs hung up in the bomb bay. Tony Lentz tried kicking them out but could only kick out four, so we landed with four. Upon landing at Thorpe Abbotts, our flat left tire caused our plane to cartwheel into the mud where the B-17 became struck with a wing still across the runway.
All of us on the crew jumped out and we were joined by others on the ground, all attempting to push our plane out of the way. The planes behind us were diverted to an alternate runway, but shortly later another plane had a mishap there and it became necessary to use the runway our B-17 was partially blocking. The next plane to land on our runway struck the wing of our plane and almost tore it off. This at least cleared the runway and the rest of the planes in our group were able to land.

WHAT A CHRISTMAS EVE!
A White Christmas
"Winter now had most of Western Europe in an unusually icy grip. Freezing fog clung to the East Anglian countryside. Even at mid-day the sun was unable to diminish its persistence. Thin films of ice formed on everything, coating the surfaces of aircraft and building up inside stilled engines. Such severe conditions had never been experienced at Eighth Air Force bases during either of the previous winters and during this spell the number of take-off accidents rose alarmingly. At 08.40 hrs on the morning of December 27th, a 390th Group Fortress rose from the east-west runway at its base, gained fifty feet and then started to drop away following the fall of the countryside to its limit before plunging into a roadside bank in the centre of Parham village. The crew perished but despite the explosion of fuel and some of the bomb load, the local inhabitants were uninjured, although every house in the vicinity was blast damaged. Icing was the suspected cause of this, and many other crashes that pushed the accident rate to its highest point, often claiming more victims than the enemy. Many crashes occurred during take-off in poor visibility and adverse conditions, ...." The Mighty Eighth, pp. 202-03.

Mission 18. December 27, 1944 - Fulda, Germany.

Bombed these important marshalling yards. B-17 #209 again. Flak knocked out our mickey (Pathfinder). But weather was good so we bombed visually. "The bombs were released 'with very good results,'... The Eighth Air Force is doing its best to throttle supplies for the German salient at every possible point." Century Bombers, p. 169.

Vieth diary notes: "Think the bombardier Willy Titley will end up with a D.F.C. for this fine job."

Century Bombers (p. 170) describes the mission:

"... the Group, led by Major John Wallace [command pilot] and Gerald Brown, set out for Frankfurt, where at 13.18, the 'lead bombardiers, William Titley, Eugene Lockhart and Thomas Barrett, put the bombs squarely on the marshalling yards.'"

Our bombardier Bill Titley received some well-deserved recognition for this mission. He was dispatched to London to appear on an Armed Forces radio interview to be beamed to the folks back home. Our navigator Leo Kimball also was appropriately recognized, with the Distinguished Flying Cross. Kimball was now a lead navigator and was occasionally assigned to another lead crew.

On these missions, where the Brown crew led the 100th Group -- and sometimes the entire Eighth Air Force -- we always had a lead navigator, and sometimes a squadron or group navigator. Julius Krepismann, the 100th Group navigator, was assigned to our crew on several missions.
Bill Titley in his office

Bombed marshalling yards at Kassel for the third time. B-17 #209 again. Extensive cloud cover required bombing with Pathfinder.

The Germans had developed sophisticated radio aiming devices for their anti-aircraft guns. We attempted for the first time to jam these devices by releasing billows of tinfoil chaff (called window).

"The whole of Thorpe Abbotts was now 'covered in rime frost' and even with six or seven blankets on their beds, 'the men still woke up freezing cold.' The latrines 'had frozen solid ....!'" Centurion Bombers, p. 170.


Used old #209 again to bomb marshalling yards at Fulda. Bombed through cloud cover using Pathfinder. The Story of the Century notes that our crew on this mission against Fulda included "Brown, Leo Kimball, navigator, E.A. Lentz, mickey operator, and W.H. Titley, bombardier" (p. 95).
Roland Douglas

After leaving our crew in August 1944, our ball gunner Roland Douglas was assigned to the Clifton Williams crew. The 100th Group flew a mission to Hamburg on New Year's Eve, December 31, 1944, and suffered some of the worst casualties of the war. "Of the 3rd Division bombers lost, ten fell to flak and fourteen to fighters. Half the Divisional loss was borne by one unit: the 100th Group." The Mighty Eighth, p. 204. Twelve B-17s of the 100th Group went down. The Brown crew luckily did not participate in this mission. But Douglas did, with the Williams crew.

Recall that the first mission flown by the Brown crew (including Doug) was in "Fools Rush In." During the Hamburg raid on December 31, the Williams crew was flying in formation just below "Fools Rush In." On the bomb run, after releasing its bombs, "Fools Rush In" was hit by flak. The plane nosed down and crashed into the B-17 being flown by the Williams crew, including Doug. The Williams plane was cut in two, and both it and "Fools Rush In" went down in flames. Century Bombers, p. 171.

As tail gunner, Doug was in the severed rear section of the B-17 as it went down. He managed to bail out near the ground and landed safely. He was captured by the Germans.
Doug and fellow prisoners of war were placed in a boxcar and were being moved by train to a prison camp. Several days later, on January 3, this boxcar was in the marshalling yards at Fulda, when the 100th Group bombed those yards (our Mission 21). The guards would not let the prisoners out of the boxcars, so they dropped to the floor as bombs landed all over the place. Fortunately Doug’s boxcar was not hit. Doug was ultimately freed by Allied troops in May 1945.
Retired now in Peru, Indiana, Roland Douglas, a 351st ball turret and tail gunner, worked for the C&O Railroad for 40 years and 8 with Amtrak. In 1985, en route to Myrtle Beach, he boarded a train in Peru and heard Sam Hurry asking the conductor if he knew of any 100th Groupers on the train. Since Roland is saving his *Splasher Sixes* for his grandchildren, with this picture they will know how Grandpop looked during the war.

*Roland Douglas, 1944*

This is a note on Doug which appeared in *"Splasher Six"* in the Fall 1988 issue.

Another attack on marshalling yards. Very bad weather – could not even see the other squadrons in our group. Bombed using mickey.


Century Bombers notes that --

"For the next seven days, the weather had a field day and the ships sat on their tires as snow, sleet and rain alternated and filled the static pools, which spread into the roads. Everything leaked ..."

"... all the pipes were frozen. The huts are mighty cold."

"...According to our English friends this was the worst winter in five years." Century Bombers, p. 178.

Mission 24. January 28, 1945 – Duisburg, Germany. B-17 #379. Bombed a bridge over Rhine River -- good visibility. Vieth diary notes, "Titley really plastered it again." According to Century Bombers, the bombs landed just as a train was crossing -- got both the train and the bridge (p. 178).

Bombed tank factory. B-17 #379.

"At 08.00 the following morning, the Hundredth, led by Major Cruver [command pilot] and Captain Gerald Brown, took off from Runway 10 and made its way to Kassel, where at 11.54 and despite the fact that all the radar equipment in the three lead ships became inoperative,' the majority of the planes released their 500 pound bombs on a tank factory with 'good results.'

"On their return, 'the lead navigators Carl Roesel and Julius Krepismann noted: 'Navigation results do not seem too good...,' Later, the Hundredth was commended as being the only group in the entire Eighth Air Force to hit the primary target that day. The report was subject to great discount..." Century Bombers, p. 179.

Lt. Arthur L. Jacobson

Jake was with the Brown crew from its beginning at Ardmore, Oklahoma. He was an excellent pilot and loved flying. The good soldier that he was, Jake went along with the crew's decision to become a lead crew which, as noted previously, meant that he would thereafter fly missions in the tail gun position supervising the formations following the lead plane.

Jake flew 25 missions with the Brown crew. On February 3, 1945 the 100th Bomb Group was assigned to lead the Third Division on a major raid against Berlin. The Russians were now 35 miles from Berlin. The Brown crew was not scheduled for this mission -- the 100th Group lead crew was to be that of pilot John Ernst. Members of the Brown crew and the Ernst crew had been
friends from the days in Ardmore and had trained together and flown together throughout their service with the 100th Group. On February 3 the co-pilot of the Ernst crew was disabled, and Jake volunteered to fly the mission with the Ernst crew. The command pilot was Major Robert Rosenthal, a legend in the 100th Bomb Group. The Ernst lead crew was assigned B-17 #379, the same Pathfinder ship that the Brown crew had flown on Missions 12, 13, 17, 22, and 24. (#379 had been repaired after its wing was damaged during the landing on our Christmas Eve mission, Mission 17.)

The February 3 mission to Berlin is described in *Flying Fortress* (pp. 221-22) as follows:

"The flak had proved to be murderously accurate over Berlin that day--'a beautiful day,' as Rosenthal would later recall it. He was of course referring only to the clear weather. The plane shuddered under the impact of the flak and the air filled with the noises of ripping metal. No. 1 engine spouted flame, a great white sheet spilling into the airstream behind the wing; the fabric-covered aileron shriveled, exposing the graceful metallic structure. The plane bounced again under another hit. The pilot, Captain John Ernst, continued with the run, his eyes darting toward Rosenthal, who mentally weighed the possibility of their continuing against the other possibility of a mid-air explosion before they made it.

"They kept going and bombardier Lieutenant E. Lockhart zeroed in on the Erkner factory and the bombs fell from the blazing Fortress; the rest of the group dropped on the leader. Then Rosenthal pushed the alarm bell signaling 'Abandon ship,' and ordered Ernst to supervise
the bail-out. He then informed Lyster that they were leaving the formation. Another hit set the bomb bay on fire and the middle of the B-17 was an uncontrollable mass of flame. In making his exit Ernst had dropped through the still open bomb bay. He caught his leg on a jagged edge, cutting it so badly that it had to be amputated.

"The B-17 had now descended to about a thousand feet. Rosenthal, certain that all who were able had leaped from the plane, put it on autopilot and, adjusting his chute harness, left the flight deck. The nearest exit was the forward emergency door just below and in front of the pilot's compartment. Rosenthal squeezed down toward the door, and as he did saw that a man still remained in the ship. He would never know that man's identity, for he had been decapitated."

Ten of the men aboard reached the ground safely -- three (including Rosenthal) picked up by the Russians and the others, including Jake, captured by the Germans. The book Flying Fortress indicates that one of the airmen captured by the Germans was lynched by civilians, although there is no mention of this fact in the more recent book Century Bombers.

Jake's description of his ordeal was most interesting:

"Feb. 3 - Bailed out at about 25,000 ft. after several large swigs of pure oxygen. Counted slowly to 30 and looked down to see I was still plenty high so remained falling and checked altitude every few seconds. Saw the ground approaching rapidly so pulled the chord. Chute opened and I found myself very close to the ground and drifting backwards. Touched ground before I had time to face forward and then fell on my back. I had a hell of a time spilling my chute and then took off the harness. I spotted a haystack and started for it. Hit the dirt when a
few bullets bounced off the ground near me. Looked around and saw a farmer with a gun about a \( \frac{1}{4} \) of a mile away. Every time I raised my head he would shoot. I then surrendered when he raised his hand and stopped shooting. I then stood up with my arms in the air and he walked towards me. The farmer told me to pick up my chute and told me to start walking towards his house, about a \( \frac{1}{4} \) mile away. Was completely out of wind when I reached his farm and was then searched for any weapons. I was allowed to take off my muddy flying clothes and started to scrape the mud off my hands and face. The farmer's whole damn family soon crowded around me and seemed to be pleased that I was an American and not a Limey or Russian. Washed and smoked Jerry's cigarettes after being told to put mine back because I only had two in the pack I pulled out. Drank a couple of cups of fresh milk. Was then marched to the nearby village about 3 km away."

While in custody, Jake ran into Roland Douglas, who, as noted before, had been captured after bailing out on the New Year's Eve mission to Hamburg.

Jake remained in custody until he was liberated by the 14th Armored Division on April 29, 1945.

**Lt. William Titley**

Bill Titley had joined our crew on our seventh mission •• to Cologne on October 15, 1944 •• after Joe Dye had been hospitalized during our days of lead crew training at the 95th Bomb Group. At the time, Titley had already logged twelve missions, so he completed his thirty-mission tour of duty on the Brown crew's Mission 25 to Kassel. Our bombardier on the Brown crew's last five missions was Maj. Don Ventriss, the Group bombardier.
Major Don Ventriss
Group Bombardier
Mission 26. February 17, 1945 - Frankfurt, Germany. B-17 #696. Original target a jet engine plant but had to divert to the marshalling yards. "During assembly, 'the weather had been so bad, that several planes were obliged to jettison their bombs after the controls froze up.'" Century Bombers, p. 183.


"On the 20th, the First and Third Divisions, were despatched to Nurnburg, where the Hundredth attacked the station and marshalling yards with 'good results.'"

* * *

"'The target was Pathfinder and the weather stinko. Got flak at front lines--flak over the target was light. Flak again as we crossed lines on the way out. We lost most of our Squadron on the way out because of bad weather and everyone came back alone. Stayed on course all the way back and split over the Field. If the target had been visual, we would have had it because our ground speed was 120 R. Flying time 9 hours. Results good."" Century Bombers, pp. 183-84.

"On the 23rd, the heavies set out for the enemy's marshalling yards, although several groups were obliged to look elsewhere.

"The Hundredth, led by Colonel Frederick Price, [command pilot with the Brown crew] 'visited Treuchtlingen, where Don Ventriss, the Group bombardier, who flew with "A" squadron, dropped his load squarely on the rail junction. A commendation from higher headquarters was forthcoming.' Century Bombers, pp. 184-85.

Walter Peters wrote in his diary: "Bad weather on base on return -- almost collided with another plane -- missed us by twenty-five to fifty feet."
Brown Crew Near End of Its Tour

Front - L to R - Page, Kellogg, Peters, Titley
Back  - L to R - Unidentified Co-pilot/Tail Gunner,
           Brown, Lentz, Krepismann, Vieth

Once again, Brown crew led the Third Division. Vieth out of hospital and back with the crew. Sky was full of attacking German fighters. Vieth diary notes, "Mostly the new jet propelled jobs."

"On the 3rd, Colonel John Wallace, who flew with Gerald Brown, led the Third Division to Brunswick,' where 'the Group's attack was directed against a large motor transport factory."

"The bomber stream was preceded by a chaff force consisting of six aircraft, led by Jack Thrasher. Each of 'these aircraft carried, in addition to their loads of ten 260 pound fragmentation bombs, a load of metallized strips to be tossed from the plane, the purpose of which was to confound the German radar and flak operators, diverting their attention from the main attack ... Before bombs away, with no previous warning, a jet bounced out of the clouds, and as the bombs were dropping, made a pass firing heavy calibre shells. The shells ripped into one wing of Thrasher's aircraft (44-8220), setting it afire. The pilot immediately rang the alarm bell and put the plane into a dive in an attempt to douse the flames. His calm voice sought out the men over the interphone ... "All right boys ... This is it ... Bail out ..." He then remained at the controls, trying desperately to keep out of a spin so his crew could get out ... Then the flaming wing snapped off and an explosion blew the men clear ..."

"The navigator Gerald Rimmel, 'later reported that he never saw Thrasher again.' Century Bombers, pp. 185-86.

"The Hundredth returned to the base after a good bombing job. The lost plane was the first in exactly one month."

Contrails, p. 163.
Mission 30. March 10, 1945 - Dortmund, Germany.

THE LAST ONE.

Bombed marshalling yards at Dortmund.

"The following morning, the Hundredth, led by Gerald Brown, was assigned the marshalling yards at Dortmund, which was attacked with 'fair results.'"

"Captain Brown and five of his crew had now completed their tour, having flown twenty-eight consecutive leads," *Century Bombers*, p. 187.

HOORAY!

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Subsequent History

Five members of the ten-man crew organized in April 1944 at Ardmore, Oklahoma finished their tour of duty together. Just as the 100th Bomb Group seemed to be jinxed, it appeared to be unlucky indeed for a member of the original Brown crew to fly with another crew. Of the five who did so, four were shot down and only Joe Dye, our original bombardier, completed his tour of duty.

The five original crew members who finished together were:

Pilot Brown
Flight Engineer Peters
Waist Gunner Page
Waist Gunner Kellogg
Radio Operator Vieth
Jerrv Brown. Jerry was married at the time the crew was formed. Jerry and Margaret's home is at 821 S. La Grange Avenue, Newbury Park, California 91320. After the war Jerry was employed by the Department of Defense in a number of capacities until his retirement in 1975. He and Margaret had two sons, Richard and Bill, and as of 1982 had two grandchildren. Jerry died on October 1, 1985.

Walter Peters. Pete and his wife Jean were married in May 1947. Their home is at 2700 No. Mont Clare, Chicago, Illinois 60635 (telephone 312/889-8008). After the war, Pete was employed by General Motors until his retirement. Pete and Jean had a son Richard and a daughter Laura. Pete died March 13, 1989.

Wayne Paae. Pagie was married after the war and has three grown children. He was divorced some years ago. He lives at 309 West Caldwell, Visalia, California 93277 (telephone 209/627-5359). He is in the home furnishing business in Visalia.

Clarence Kellogg. We have lost all contact with Okie since our tour ended. His last known address was Route 9, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

The other five members of the original crew:

Arthur Jacobson (shot down Feb. 3, 1945 - POW). After the war, Jake married Jeannine and their home is at 2215 East Howe, Seattle, Washington 98112 (telephone 206/323-0179). They have two sons and two daughters. Jake was in the steel construction business. He was a successful inventor and held several patents on building material products. After a long bout with cancer, Jake died in 1981.

Joseph Dye. Joe was married at the time the crew was formed in Ardmore. He and Doris live at 2 Argyle Court, Parsippany, New Jersey 07054 (telephone 201/887-5023). Joe was employed as an electronics engineer until his retirement several years ago; he now is an electronics consultant. He has a son and two daughters and several grandchildren.

Ralph Baver. Killed in action.
Roland Douglas (shot down Dec. 31, 1944 – POW).
Doug was married after the war and lives at 303 Van Buren Avenue, Peru, Indiana 46970 (telephone 317/473-9629). He has six grandchildren and several great grandchildren. He was employed as a conductor on the C&O and Amtrak for many years and is now retired. Secretary of Foundation building the Grissom Air Force Base Heritage Museum.

George Vociatissis. Killed in action.

Men who joined the crew later:

Erwin (Tony) Lentz. We have lost all contact with Tony, our mickey operator, since our tour ended. His hometown at the time of his service was Chicago, Illinois.

Bill Titley. Bombardier. After the war Bill married Helen and they live at 242 South Fork Road, Mountainside, New Jersey 07092 (telephone 201/233-2841). They have two sons, Mark and William. For many years Bill was a teacher of social studies in junior high school, and he is now retired.

Leo R. Kimball. Lead Navigator. Known in civilian life as Bob. Married Mary Louise and they live at 619 W. Horner Street, Ebensburg, Pennsylvania 15391

Julius Krepismann, Group Navigator. According to "Splasher Six" (Spring 1988), after the war Jules worked as an accountant in New York, taking further training on the G.I. Bill. In 1948 he and Charlotte were married. For thirty years he worked for the State of California but his love was his private practice as a tax accountant. He enjoyed helping young families organize long-term financial programs." Jules died in 1988.

Don Ventriss, Group Bombardier. According to the 100th Bomb Group Association Roster, Ventriss is deceased.
Sources


Contrails, My War Record, John F. Callahan Associates (1947).


Brochure of 100th Bomb Group Memorial Museum.


ONE OF the Believe-It-Or-Not stories of the war was furnished this page by two young Davenporters when they dropped in for a "chat last week.*** one was Sergt. Ross Sidney, Jr., a survivor of 100 days of internment in a German prison camp*** the other was Tech Sergt. Bud Vieth, who knows what it means to make 28 bombing missions on a B-17 and live to tell about them*** they were roommates at Iowa University when the service call came *** their way parted *** the day before Ross crossed the channel to France and Bud got together for the first time *** not so long ago a convoy crossed the Atlantic carrying many American boys *** on one ship was Ross, on another Bud, and they didn't know they were so close, yet so far away *** after docking they went to a certain camp in New Jersey *** quite accidentally they met in front of a PX—and so they traveled to St. Louis together and then from St. Louis to Davenport *** "Imagine that for a break," they both exclaim. "With all our friends away from Davenport, we should get our furloughs at the same time!": *** and so they proceeded to make up for lost time *** you can't talk to Ross about the good Germans and the bad Germans face to face, the only good German is a dead one *** he has a reason for his line of thinking *** it was on Dec. 19 during the bulge battle that he and most of his platoon were taken prisoners *** then followed an experience he would not like to repeat "*** for eight days he and the other American boys were packed like sardines in box cars and then the doors were locked shut *** I'll never forget Christmas eve and Christmas day of 1944," he says. "I spent them under foul conditions in those jammed cars. It was impossible to sit down. For eight days and nights we were that way. Then when the Germans let us out, they marched us for three days*** all that was bad enough, of course but the following information is even more illuminating: 'During those 11 days we had three meals,' Ross explains simply. "It happened, too, that our train was bombed by American planes, and some of the boys died as the result*** he was interned at Bad Orb first and then at Zeigenhain, and the many pounds he lost give ample proof that the going was tough *** I've seen so many things," he adds, "to make me believe that every man, woman and child in Germany was a follower of Hitler"*** Bud Vieth had great goings-on in his B-17 in which he was a radio operator *** once the Germans drew the bead on his plane, put a lot of holes in it and shot away two engines *** so he and his pals had to make a forced landing in Belgium *** his bombing missions took him over Berlin, Cologne, etcetera, and he lost out on only two of the parties *** "I was hospitalized because of a cold," he explained. "Imagine that!"*** there is obvious proof that Bud and his mates did a swell job of helping to put an end to the war *** he wears the Air Medal and three oak leaf clusters and three battle stars for work in the European theater of operations as well as the Presidential Unit Citation, which is quite a collection for a 21-year-old fellow.