

Boeing B-17G *Flying Fortress*

1945

General History

America's Queen of the Skies

Hoisting a deadly load of bombs into the frozen skies, the B-17 *Flying Fortress* was the United States' workhorse heavy bomber during World War II. B-17s served around the globe, but they are perhaps most famous for their Eighth Air Force daylight strategic bombing raids on Germany. Flying in close formation and bristling with machine guns, the "Forts" battled through a storm of anti-aircraft fire and swarms of German fighters to reach their targets.

In peacetime, most of these veteran warriors were scrapped. Some B-17s continued their military careers with the recently formed United States Air Force, as weather ships, target drones and rescue planes. In civilian life, a few of these big bombers hauled cargo, starred in movies, sprayed crops and fought forest fires by dropping gallons of orange, sticky fire retardant. Today, only a handful of the more than 12,700 B-17s built by Boeing, Douglas and Lockheed-Vega survive.



One Tough Customer

The B-17 was slower than its counterpart bomber, the Consolidated B-24 *Liberator*. The B-17 carried fewer bombs and couldn't fly as far as the B-24. Yet because of the B-17's sturdy and stout design, its crews trusted their aircraft, believing that their "Forts" wouldn't let them down.

The proof limped back to England daily. B-17s returned with their noses blown open, tails gashed and wings gushing fluids. Often, they touched down with one or two oil-streaked engines stone cold, with the remaining engines moaning under the strain. Some crews felt they owed their lives to "the old bird" that wouldn't give up.

Flying in close formation and bristling with machine guns, the "Forts" waded through showers of anti-aircraft fire and swarms of German fighters to reach their targets.



About This Aircraft

The life story of most B-17s ends in a sickening plunge from the skies over Europe or under the metal scrapper's torch. As for this "Fort," its career had just begun. Built under license by Douglas in California in 1945, it left for the Pacific a month before Japan's surrender. After flying military cargo and VIPs, the plane was sold to a civilian company in 1962.

Intermountain Aviation used the bomber for firefighting and to develop the Fulton "Skyhook." The Skyhook was used to retrieve a man or equipment from the ground without landing! As the B-17 swooped down, it snagged a rope raised aloft by a gas-filled balloon. Attached to the rope was a harness holding the person or object to be retrieved. A powered winch then reeled the dangling person or package into the plane. Evergreen's B-17 demonstrated this technique in the 1964 James Bond movie *Thunderball*.

Acquired by Evergreen in 1975, the B-17 continued operating as a fire bomber. In 1987, the search was on for parts to repair and restore the old bomber. One "legend" is told of a man who displayed a vintage turret in his bar. So rare were the old Boeing parts and pieces for this plane's restoration, that the bar was purchased, the turret removed and the bar promptly sold again!

The first flight of the fully restored aircraft was July 12, 1990. In 2000, several members of the original Fulton Skyhook development team were onboard for in-flight filming. Today the beautifully restored B-17 wears the markings of the Eighth Air Force's 490th Bomb Group, based at Eye, England during World War II.

Specifications

Type:	Bomber Aircraft
First Flown:	Model 299 on July 28, 1935
Wingspan:	103 feet 9 inches
Length:	74 feet 9 inches
Height:	19 feet 1 inch
Wing Area:	1,277.5 square feet
Weight, Empty:	35,839 pounds
Weight, Loaded:	65,500 pounds
Power:	Four Wright R-1820 1,200 horsepower engines
Normal Crew:	Ten
Typical Armament:	12 .50 caliber machine guns; 9,600 pound bomb load

Performance

Cruise Speed:	160 miles per hour at 5,000 feet
Top Speed:	302 miles per hour at 25,000 feet
Range:	3,400 miles (maximum ferry range)
Service Ceiling:	35,600 feet