

A B-17 occupies a place of honor in the combat gallery of the National Museum of the Mighty Eighth Air Force in Savannah, GA. Its nose bears the nickname 'City of Savannah'. Beneath it is the text '5000th plane processed thru Hunter Field, GA, in 1944'. Its tail bears the serial number 43-39049 (correctly represented as 339049) and a 'Square H', the unit marking of the 388th Bomb Group. Unfortunately, this combination is historically incorrect, as the aircraft never flew with this Group. The aircraft flew four combat missions with the 487th Bomb Group and the unit marking thus should have been the 'Square P'.

The original 'City of Savannah'

Through the purchase of 'war bonds' the residents of Chatham County, Georgia, raised \$500,000 to pay for the production of a B-17 bomber and the training of a crew. Standard procedure at that time was that newly trained crews were used to ferry factory-fresh aircraft to the European Theatre. And so, in late November 1944, new B-17s and crews were brought together at Hunter Field (officially Savannah Army Air Base) in Savannah, Ga., and then sent overseas. The crew of Lt Ralph Kittle was assigned to a B-17 with serial number 43-39049, which happened to be the 5,000th airplane to be processed through Hunter Field. It was then painted with the name 'City of Savannah' in honor of the Chatham County fundraisers. Name and text appeared on the right hand nose and the left side of the fuselage. Lt. Kittle and his crew were photographed with the airplane. The citizens of Chatham County were honored for their generosity and support at a ceremony, and a special blessing was bestowed on the crew for its safety. In early December they departed for the European Theatre.



Lt Robert Kittle and crew posing with B-17G 43-39049 at Hunter Field, GA





B-17G 43-39049 in flight before it was assigned to the 487th Bomb Group

As soon as they arrived in England, Lt. Kittle and his crew were separated from 'City of Savannah'. The crew was assigned to the 388th Bomb Group, and was shot down by German anti-aircraft fire on its 13th mission on March 5, 1945. Tail gunner Robert H. Warren was killed in action, all other crewmembers that day survived.

Like all new aircraft arriving in England, 'City of Savannah' went to a Strategic Air Depot, waiting there - with many other new B-17s - to be assigned to an operational unit to replace a B-17 lost in combat. Its time came only in April 1945, when the 487th Bomb Group lost four B-17s on April 10. One of these was B-17G 43-37987 'Mean Widdle Kid'. Its fuselage carried the marking R5 - J. R5 was the squadron code of the 839th Bomb Squadron of the Group; and J was the individual aircraft radio call letter within the 839th Bomb Squadron. Its tail carried a 'Square P' and the aircraft serial number. (see <http://www.487thbg.org/Stories/aircraft%20markings%20487th%20Bomb%20Group.pdf> for more information on aircraft markings in the 487th Bomb Group).

'City of Savannah' was flown to station 137 at Lavenham, home of the 487th Bomb Group, and was assigned to replace 'Mean Widdle Kid'. It was parked at the same hardstand (number 41) and soon also received its markings as 'J' within the 839th Bomb Squadron: R5 – J on the fuselage and a 'square P' on both sides of the vertical stabilizer above the serial number, still represented as 339049. The other distinguishing markings of the 487th Bomb Group were probably also applied.

Its first combat mission came on April 16. 'City of Savannah' was scheduled to be a so-called ground spare, fully loaded with bombs, fuel and ammunition, but only to be used when an assigned B-17 developed problems shortly before take-off. And just that happened: Lt Craig B. Ellis found 'Bonnie Lassie' unserviceable and switched to the 'City of Savannah' and took her to Royan in France. They flew in the number 9 position of the Low Squadron and carried 6 1,000-pound General Purpose bombs.

4/16/45

DIAMOND		LOW		LEAD		HIGH	
037 COOPER-BREAKER E-F 31		119 BAUMAN-RIEGEL D-M 47		021 ROBERTSON-CHONISKI E-W 47		878 HUTCHINSON-SMITH, F.I. W-D 5	
530 RICHARDS W-O 10	523 WALDEN W-J 2	013 KING B-E 38 SJ-Peters	694 DESEL'S D-Z 42	002 ORCHARD R-G 24	970 GOLDENROUGH R-H 13	279 RHODES E-G 36	099 YOUNG E-N 23
924 ROLENDROUGH W-Y 3		278-S B-E 38 SJ-Peters	042 CHAPPEE E-K 46	347 THOMAS R-C 21	278-F PARKHURST R-F 17 Chanriel "D"	845 BECK E-J 27	039-C RICH E-C 26
607 MC LINDEN W-H 7 SJ-Rivers	809 MARTIN W-R 6	045 BECKER D-O 38	641 POTTER D-T 40	991 VOLENTINE R-Q 22 Chanriel "C"	792 RUSH R-K 23 SJ-Lucian	254 BUCKEIS E-Q 30 Chanriel "B"	524 OBERNS E-S 31
249 ROSS W-F 6		849 598 ELLIS B-H 44 Lead Pilot BJ 41	974 MC DONAGH B-F 39 SJ-Williamson	735 SCALES R-O 21 SJ-McCalley	332 PRATT R-A 18	034 JUDD E-I 30 SJ-Green	234 MILLER, L. E-H 29 SJ-Lore
893 BATTIEGER W-R 5	892 STRAUSS W-B 1 SJ-Diamond	521 CHRISTENSEN W-P 10	952 TURNER D-X 39	Mission of 16 April 1945.			
PPF SPARE: 039 W-L 8		GND. SPARES: 901 CORBIN R-B 23		P-47 Monitor 766 W-P 9		Lt. Col. Fisher 374 B-Y 49 981 E-B 33 B-J 41	

The 487th Bomb Group formation plan for the mission of April 16. On the lower right 049 is crossed out as a ground spare and replaces Lt Ellis' 598 in the Low Squadron. The B stands for Bluntish, the radio call sign for the 839th Bomb Squadron, J is the individual aircraft letter. 41 is the hardstand where the B-17 was parked.

On April 17 the crew of Lt John A. McDonagh flew 'City of Savannah' to Dresden. This time its load was ten containers of paper leaflets. Since July 1944 the 487th Bomb Group was one of six Groups tasked to provide one or two bombers per mission to drop leaflets in the target area, as a form of 'psychological warfare'. It was not a popular task with the crews, who considered that it was not worth running the risk of being shot down while delivering 'toilet paper'.

LOW Squadron _____ GROUP 487 TARGET Dresden LEAD Kalebaugh TR 1006 LND.T. 1815
 DATE 17 April 1945 POSITION IN LINE 4C TIME OF ATTACK 1434 ALTITUDE OF ATTACK 21,000
 AIR LEADER Capt. Roth

PILOT	A/C NO.	SER.	TYPE	NO.	TYPE	DISPOS.	S.	L.	R.	P.	B.	D.	I.	A.	S.	D.	J.	B.	REMARKS: (ENTER INFORMATION ON JETTILABLE G'S, SEE THE INSTRUCTIONS)
* Kalebaugh	878	838		12	500 G.P.														1434, 025°, 21,100
Rhodes	279	838		12	500 G.P.														
Young	099	838		12	500 G.P.														
Beck	845	838		12	500 G.P.														
Wolfenberger	034	838		12	500 G.P.														
Hammerand	981	838		12	500 G.P.														
Henderson, A.W.	234	838		11	500 G.P.														
McDonagh	049	839		10	500 G.P.														Leaflets
Buckels	254	838		12	500 G.P.														
Ellis	598	839		12	500 G.P.														
9 x 12 x 500 # G.P. 1 AC 5 W 43 5 T 631																			
TOTALS																			
S.C.K. COMMENTS: NO. _____ WHERE _____ LEAFLETS: NO. & TYPE _____ 5 W 43 WHERE _____ TIME _____																			

List of aircraft in the Low Squadron of the 487th Bomb Group on the mission of April 17. Note that 049 carried leaflets; the content of its load (ten containers) is detailed at lower right.

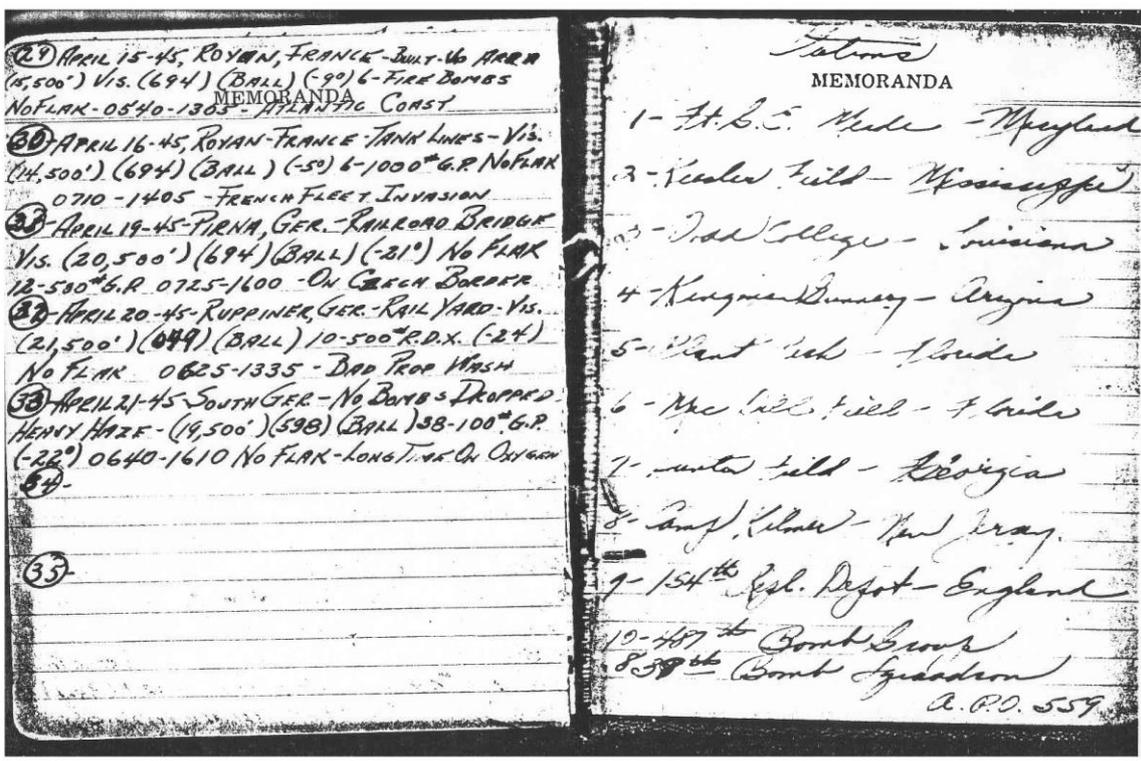
On April 20 'City of Savannah' was again listed to be a ground spare, and again it was needed. This time it was the crew of Lt Roy V. Deselms who took her to Neuruppin in Germany instead of 'Dinah Mite'. They flew as the deputy lead aircraft of the Low Squadron and carried 10 500-pound General Purpose bombs.

REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES
NAVY AIR DIST. 4/25/63

LOW	LEAD	HIGH
878 HUTCHISON-ROTH W-D 5	569 ROBERTSON-FISHER B-B 46	456 MILLER-SHERRILL R-R 12
013 KING, H.C. B-F 38 SJ-Williamson	735 BOEHLI R-Q 21 SJ-Dutson	279 RHODES E-G 36 SJ-Johnson
918 CUDAHNS B-Q 45	901 MUEHLMEISTER R-B 23	099 YOUNG E-N 33
042 CHAFFEE B-K 46	793 RUSH R-K 23 SJ-Goldberg	589 SYLVERNAL E-E 35
975 GERAUD B-A 44	332 KING R-A 18 Channel "C"	254 BUCKELS E-Q 30 Channel "B"
974 HENDERSON, Z.M. B-F 39 SJ-Richter (Leaflets)	002 NELSON R-G 24	845 HECK E-J 27
188 MC DONAGH B-C 45	997 ORCHARD R-E 19	039C RICH E-C 26
	278F BYBEE R-F 17	397 MILLER, L. E-O 32
		034 JUDD E-L 30 SJ-Noyes
	Mission of 20 April 1945.	
923 CORBIN R-P 24	981 E-B 33	049 B-J 41
037 E-F 31	(Bombights in all Ground spares)	

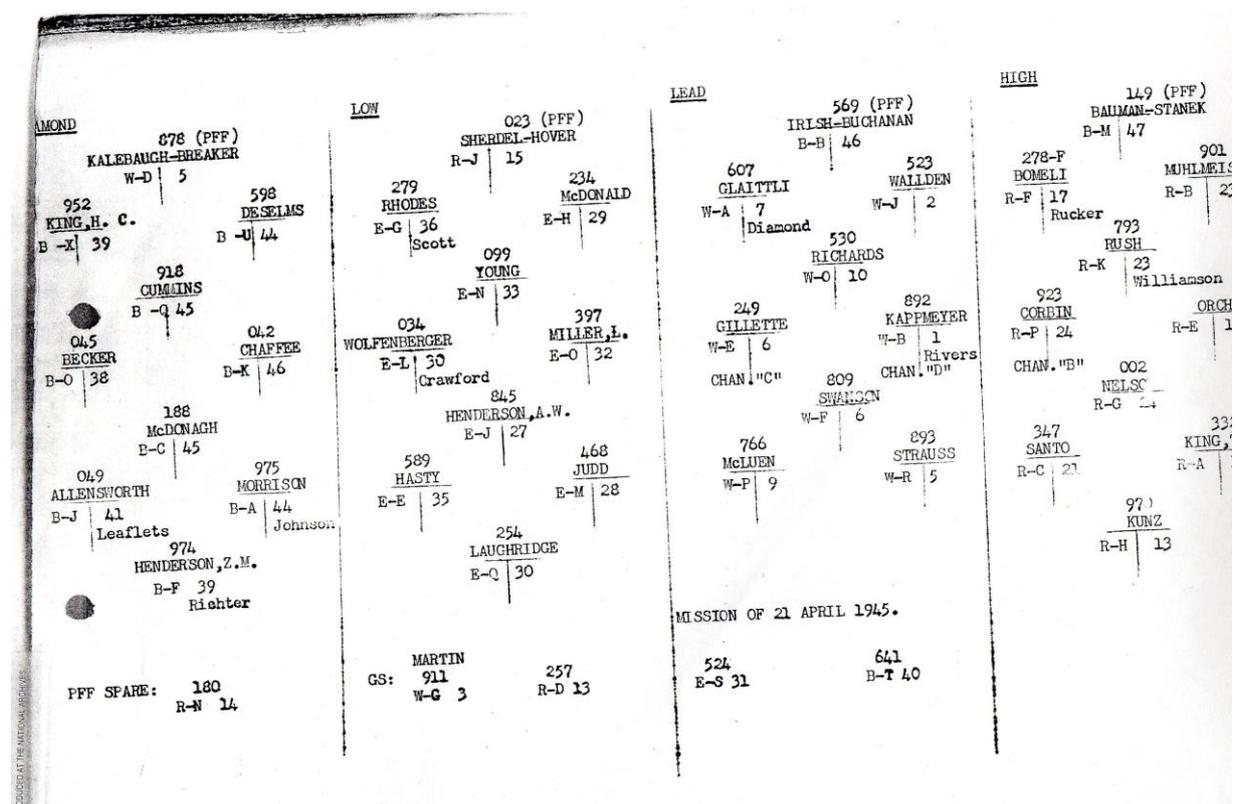
Ops 4-19-45/jam/jth/adw

The formation plan for the mission of April 20, 1945. Again, a pencil mark on denotes that 'ground spare' 049 replaced an aircraft (this time B-17G 44-8694) that encountered mechanical troubles shortly before take off.



Anthony B. Calega was the ball turret gunner on the crew of Lt. Roy V. Deselms. He kept a diary of his missions and it substantiates that he flew his 32nd mission on April 20 in '049' with his crew. On the right hand page he listed all stations that he passed through during his training and operational phases. Note that he and his crew passed Hunter Field in Savannah, Georgia (7) on their way to England, just like Kittle's crew.

Finally, on April 21, the final combat mission of the 487th Bomb Group, 'City of Savannah' was flown by the crew of Lt William B. Allensworth in the number nine position of the Diamond Squadron. Again, it carried leaflets, this time to Ingolstadt, the third priority target, since the others were covered by inclement weather.



Leaflets again; this time 'City of Savannah' was flown by the crew of Lt William B. Allensworth for their first (and last) combat mission.

After hostilities ceased, the Eighth Air Force returned to the United States. 'City of Savannah' also returned, with a flight crew and passengers on board. And like almost all other B-17s, it ended up in the desert at Kingman Army Air Field to be scrapped.

The new 'City of Savannah'

Production of B-17s continued well into 1945. In May a B-17 produced in the Douglas factory in Long Beach, CA received serial number 44-83814. However, it was built too late to take part in the war, so the Army Air Force simply removed the airplane from its rolls and sold it. So it escaped the scrappers at Kingman and passed through a series of civilian owners who used it for a variety of tasks. In 1984 the plane was acquired by the Smithsonian Institution and was placed in long-term storage. In 2009 it was presented to the National Museum of the Eighth Air Force, and was diligently restored to become the focal point of its collection. To underline the link of the location of the museum to Hunter Field and Savannah ('the birthplace of the Eighth Air Force' in 1942), it was decided that the restored aircraft should carry the appropriate nickname 'City of Savannah' that was once bestowed on B-17G 43-39049. And perhaps to honor the crew of Lt Kittle, it also received the 'Square H' markings of the 388th Bomb Group. Unfortunately this is historically incorrect, as B-17G 43-39049 'City of Savannah' was never assigned to the 388th Bomb Group, nor did the Kittle crew fly this ship again after leaving her at the reception depot after arrival in the United Kingdom. Sadly, its brief service and combat history of the original 'City of Savannah' with the 487th Bomb Group goes unnoticed to the visitors of this fine museum.





The new 'City of Savannah' on display at the National Museum of the Eighth Air Force, displaying the 'Square H' of the 388th Bomb Group.

Authored by Ivo M. de Jong, January 2017