

B-17 Flying Fortress in 1943

The term “Greatest Generation” doesn’t mean just people but can be equally applied to some of the finest aircraft designs of all time; the C-47 transport, P-47 Thunderbolt and P-38 Lightning, both superb fighters! And of course the B-24 Liberator, the F4U Corsair (the Navy’s greatest carrier fighter), the P-51 Mustang (arguably the finest fighter aircraft of its time) and finally the B-17 who’s crews said would bring them home in almost any condition and here’s one of those conditions! Tough Bird

A mid-air collision on February 1, 1943, between a B-17 and a German fighter over the Tunis dock area, became the subject of one of the most famous photographs of World War II. An enemy fighter attacking a 97th Bomb Group formation went out of control, probably with a wounded pilot then continued its crashing descent into the rear of the fuselage of a Fortress named All American, piloted by Lt. Kendrick R. Bragg, of the 414th Bomb Squadron. When it struck, the fighter broke apart, but left some pieces in the B-17. The left horizontal stabilizer of the Fortress and left elevator were completely torn away. The two right engines were out and one on the left had a serious oil pump leak. The vertical fin and the rudder had been damaged, the fuselage had been cut almost completely through connected only at two small parts of the frame and the radios, electrical and oxygen systems were damaged. There was also a hole in the top that was over 16 feet long and 4 feet wide at its widest and the split in the fuselage went all the way to the top gunners turret.



Although the tail actually bounced and swayed in the wind and twisted when the plane turned and all the control cables were severed, except one single elevator cable still worked, and the aircraft still flew - miraculously! The tail gunner was trapped because there was no floor connecting the tail to the rest of the plane. The waist and tail gunners used parts of the German fighter and their own parachute harnesses in an attempt to keep the tail from ripping off and the two sides of the fuselage from splitting apart. While the crew was trying to keep the bomber from coming apart, the pilot continued on his bomb run and released his bombs over the target. [Source: <http://picklyman.wordpress.com/2011/06/26/b-17-mid-air-collision-1943/> May 2012 ++]