

RHAPSODY IN RED

Written by Clifford M. Schultz

I would like to share the story of '959'. This is dedicated to my crew (P) Frank L Adams, (CP) Monte B Adams, (N) Elmer Gettis, (B) Harold Burts, (E) V. R. Chowning, (BTG) Roy Bertrand, (TG) Seymour B Gold and (WG) Gerald L Block. Also my thanks go to the other crewmen who flew her and safely brought themselves and her home. Sincere thanks go to Dale Darling who supplied me with much information and to Lowell Getz, for writing her final chapter.

Clifford M Schultz, 324th (RO)

Rhapsody In Red
42-97959 DF-Y
1942 – 1945

In 1942, '959' was 1 out of 100 a/c that was built in block '40' of the B-17G's built by Vega Aircraft Corporation (B17G-40-VE) This a/c was the same as B-17G-35-VE, except that the lower ball turret disconnect switch was installed; number of supercharger mounting bolts reduced and other minor changes.

On April 15, 1944 she was added to the AAF Inventory, and assigned Serial number 42-97959. Some two months later on June 06, 1944 aircraft '959' was assigned overseas to the Eighth Airforce. After arriving overseas, she was gained by the 91stBG(H) on June 15, 1944 and assigned to the 324th squadron with the squadron code of " DF-Y ".

Aircraft '959' flew 40 sorties as a 'No Name' until October 1944 when my crew finally gave her the name "Rhapsody In Red". My Pilot, Lt. Frank L Adams had red hair (as did his girlfriend at that time also); the October 1944 centerfold in 'Esquire' magazine just came out with a painting by Alberto Vargas of a girl with red hair wearing a red and white sarong. We decided that this Varga girl would be our nose art with the name "Rhapsody In Red" a take off from Gershwin's popular tune "Rhapsody In Blue". Tony Starcer did the artwork on the nose along with painting our A2 jackets. In addition to Starcer painting the noseart on the left side of the a/c, our crew chief had him paint the word "Tranquility" on the right side of the nose.

June 22, 1944, Mission 184 for the 91stBG(H) to attack a Transformer Station at Maxingarbe- Pont A Verdin, France was Rhapsody's 1st Mission, but she never made it to the target, Pilot Lt. Collins aborted as he couldn't find the formation.

Seven more missions were added to her record by various Pilots and crews until July 08, 1944 when John Leslie's crew took over, adding 10 more missions.

Lt. Lawrence Gaddis and crew flew her 20th mission on August 04, 1944 to Peenemunde to attack Electrolytic Hydrogen-Peroxide Plant, Major battle damage sustained caused by flak. Sent to 2nd Strategic Air Depot (2SAD) on August 07 and was regained by the 324th on the 18th. Air worthy again, her next flight would be on the 24th of August to attack Goslar.

Lt. Gould gave Rhapsody 8 more missions; three in the Co-Pilot seat, five as Pilot from the 24th of August until October 9th. He was transferred out of the 324th squadron on October 24th and '959' was assigned to Frank Adams and crew. On October 26, 1944, on my fourteenth mission, I set foot into

Rhapsody In Red for the first time as Radio Operator. She managed to bring me safely home for 12 more missions.

Lt. Adams only flew 3 missions with 'Rhapsody' after we named her, he subsequently became lead Pilot for the 324th. He asked the rest of us if we cared to join him as lead crew, but we all declined. Lt. J. C. Bowlan then became our pilot and we flew 12 additional missions in her with the last one being January 20 1945. Lt. Bowlan completed his tour on the 22nd and 'Rhapsody' was passed on to Gordon Wollard and his crew who took her on 19 more missions, flying her 95th and last on what was also the last mission for the 91stBG(H) on April 25, 1945 to Pilsen.

Though "Rhapsody's" first mission may not of been momentous, her 95th and final mission was. Lowell Getz wrote an excellent story of "The Last Mission of the 91st" which appears on the 91stBG web page. Following is an excerpt on Rhapsody's final mission:

"In the Third Element, Lt. Wollard's plane, No. 959 ("Rhapsody In Red") dropped on the Deputy Lead smoke streamer at 1037. However, the plane was hit very hard by flak over the target. One engine was knocked out and another was pulling only one half power. A piece of flak came up through the bottom and imbedded itself behind the pilot's seat. It had knocked out the hydraulic system on the way up into the plane. With the loss of power, "Rhapsody In Red" could not stay in formation and had to drop out to return alone.

Lt. Wollard was struggling to stay in the air as the plane crossed over the English coast. One engine was out and another pulling only one-half power, the hydraulic system was knocked out so that there were no brakes. The landing gear electrical system was out and the wheels had to be hand-cranked down. Lt. Wollard reached Klette on the radio, requesting permission to land at Alconbury where the runways were longer. Klette came back on the air and told him he would land at Bassingbourn or "not at all". So it was on to Bassingbourn. With no brakes "Rhapsody In Red" took a "tour of the base" when she landed.

The aircraft rolled off the runway veered to the right and headed across the grass towards her hardstand area, hitting the ground crew's tent with her wing as she spun around, throwing part of the tent up onto the radio antenna like wash on a line. She finally came to a stop with only minimal damage to the aircraft. The ground crew chief, S/Sgt. John A Mabray, was taking it all in, apparently more afraid of damage to "his plane" than concern for the flight crew. Lt. Woolard had done a good job of getting the plane down on her, and his, final mission."

Rhapsody In Red 42-97959 DF-Y returned to the USA on May 26, 1945. On November 28, 1945 she was sent to Kingman, AZ and like so many of our 'ladies' was chopped up and smelted. I like to think that maybe she was made into Beer cans, and now when I have a beer, maybe, just maybe, I'll be touching her again!

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