

World War II Eighth Air Force Crews That Went Down In the North Sea, English Channel and Adjacent Bodies of Water

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When conducting aerial combat operations during World War II, Eighth Air Force aircraft based in England had to cross the North Sea, English Channel and adjacent bodies of water on their way to and from targets over the continent. At least 751 aircraft went down in these waters during the course of the war. Most of the planes went down on the return to England. Heavy damage from flak or German fighters prevented them from making it to the safety of land. Others were lost on the way out or back because of severe weather conditions or mid-air collisions. Air Sea Rescue boats and aircraft attempted to rescue crewmen from planes that ditched and those who had parachuted from their foundering planes. Often, however, planes went down too close to German occupied coasts to attempt a rescue effort or weather conditions were so severe that it was not possible to locate the downed crewmen. Some crewmen were picked up by the Germans and become prisoners of war. Others were killed on impact or subsequently drowned. In addition, many bombers or fighters exploded or broke apart in the air, resulting in death of the crewmen.

In this account, I record the records of the Eighth Air Force crewmen who went down in the English Channel, North Sea, Zuider Zee, Bay of Biscay, Baltic Sea, and other adjacent bodies of water. I relied upon *The Mighty Eighth Combat Chronology* and *The Mighty Eighth Combat Chronology Supplement* (Paul M. Andrews and William H. Adams; Eight Air Force Memorial Museum Publications, 1997) as the primary sources for the aircraft and crewmen who went down in these bodies of water. I also made extensive use of the WW II Missing Air Crew Reports (MACR) from the National Archives at College Park, MD, World War II Registry (www.wwiimemorial.com/), and records of the American Battle Monuments Commission (<http://www.abmc.gov/home.php>). Information from Group histories also provided a few more details.

MACRs are available from the U. S. National Archives at College Park, MD (8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 220740-6001) and on-line when subscribed to Fold3.com. MACRs typically contain for bombers: "loading list" of all crewmen on the plane, including rank and position on the plane; fate of each crewman; name of next of kin and address; statements of crewmen in other aircraft in the formation as to what they observed regarding fate of the aircraft and number of parachutes observed to come from the plane. If there were survivors, there may be statements as to what went on as the plane went down and what was observed regarding other crewmen. There may be a map showing the approximate location of where the aircraft went down. Some MACRs include German records of crewmen that were recovered, alive or dead. Information for fighter pilots include: rank; next of kin and address; observations of other pilots in the Group regarding what happened to the pilot and aircraft; and sometimes a map with an approximate location of where the

aircraft went down. A few MACRs either are not available on-line or are incorrectly numbered. Serial numbers for crewmen on these aircraft were not available.

In this account, I list: name, serial number (when available), position on the plane, date downed, Group, which body of water went down in, MACR number (when available), aircraft number, aircraft name (if available), and fate of the crewmen. For most of those crewmen picked up by Air Sea Rescue, especially when close to England, there was no MACR and no record of the serial numbers, and even the names of some, of the crewmen. Missing names and serial numbers for most of these crewmen are available from the Mission Files of each Bomb Group in the National Archives, College Park, MD. Fate of the crewmen were taken from The Mighty Eighth Combat Chronology Supplement, and records from the MACRs and American Battle Monuments Commission.

For several long missions, the 354th and 363rd Fighter Groups of the Ninth Air Force were loaned to the Eighth Air Force. Losses incurred by these two Groups when on loan to the Eighth Air Force are included in this compilation.

Records are available for 751 Eighth Air Force Aircraft, including the 354th and 363rd Fighter Groups, (515 bombers: 393 B-17s and 122 B-24s; 236 fighters) that went down in the North Sea, English Channels and adjacent bodies of water. There were 5,349 crewmen aboard these aircraft. Of these, 1,276 were picked up by Air Sea Rescue or other ships and returned to England; 39 reached the continental shores and evaded capture; 854 were captured by the Germans and became Prisoners Of War; 3,180 were Killed In Action. Of the latter, the bodies of 2,507 were never recovered and remained Missing In Action.

In an earlier account (<http://hdl.handle.net/2142/60510>), I compiled a list of all crewmen who were killed and their bodies never recovered. In compiling the current list of downed crew members, records were located for an additional four downed aircraft, with 38 crewmen whose bodies were not recovered). Bodies of 118 crewmen in the original MIA list have been re-designated as having been recovered and returned to the States. Most were changed when I was informed by a representative of the American Battle Monuments Commission that, if a crewman's name did not appear in the Tablets of the Missing, the body had been recovered and returned home. Accordingly, I removed most of those who did not appear on these listings from the MIA category. In a few cases, however, given the location of the downed aircraft and that all other crewmen appeared in the Tablets of the Missing, it is highly likely those names simply were omitted. My original designations of MIA are likely to be more accurate than those in this compilation. Irrespective of whether their bodies were recovered, the crewmen were Killed In Action. That is the relevant consideration for this account.

Of the 3,885 crewmen aboard B-17 Flying Fortresses that went down, 2,114 (54.4 %) did not survive; 866 of the 1,228 on B-24 Liberators (71.3%) died; 190 of the 236 (80.0%) fighter pilots who went down perished. Although these comparisons do not take into account weather conditions, distance from land, nearness to England, or condition of the aircraft when it went down, they are what one might expect. B-24 bombers were known to be unable to sustain damage as well as were B-17s, and thus more likely to break apart upon ditching, reducing the probability of survival of the crewmen. The large mortality among fighter pilots

resulted from multiple causes. The smaller, compact aircraft would sink more rapidly than would the larger bombers which contained considerable air spaces, reducing the time for the fighter pilot to escape and for location by Air Sea Rescue. Even if they floated awhile, the smaller planes would be more difficult to locate than would the larger bombers. Also, with only a single crew member, there would be no one available to help a wounded/injured pilot escape the plane and assist him in getting aboard a small dingy. And, Air Sea Rescue would have had much less chance of locating a single dingy, than when two or more from bombers were together in the water.

The number of downed aircraft and crews in the North Sea, English Channel and adjacent bodies of water for each of the three Bomb Divisions and Fighter Command are summarized in Tables 1-4 (up until 13 September 1943, 1 Air Division was designated "1st Combat Wing"; 2nd Air Division, 2nd Combat Wing; and 3rd Air Division, 4th Combat Wing). Air Divisions 1 and 3 flew B-17s; 2 Air Division flew B-24s.

The list of downed crewmen is in a separate file in this website: "Downed Eighth Air Force Crewmen." To search for a crewman, enter the last name in the "Search the Sheet" box at the upper right of the spread sheet and click on enter. The file will scroll down (and box in red) to the first entry of that name. If this is not the correct name, keep clicking enter until the correct name appears.

Abbreviations Used In The Compilations

Normal Crew Positions:

P: Pilot

CP: Copilot

N: Navigator

B: Bombardier

TT: Engineer/Top Turret Gunner

RO: Radio Operator

BT: Ball Turret Gunner

LW: Left Waist Gunner

RW: Right Waist Gunner

TG: Tail Gunner

(Note: If only one Waist Gunner, it is listed as Left or Right, as appearing on the loading list)

Other Crew Members:

AE: Assistant Engineer
 AG: Aerial Gunner
 DM: Drop Master
 MO: Mickey (Radar) Operator
 MP: Mission Pilot; officer not assigned to crew
 NT: Nose Gunner/Toggler
 OB: Observer
 PB: Special Bombardier
 PN: Pilot Navigator
 PS: Passenger
 RN: Radar Navigator
 TOG: Toggler
 WC: War Correspondent

Fate of Crewmen:

EVA: Evaded Capture
 KIA: Killed in Action, body recovered
 MIA: Killed in Action, body not recovered
 POW: Prisoner of War
 RTD: Returned to England by Air Sea Rescue

Compilation Tables

Table 1. Number of aircraft and crewmen on 1st Air Division B-17 bombers that went down in the North Sea, English Channel and adjacent bodies of water during WW II.

Group	AC DOWN	Total	RTD	POW	KIA	MIA	EVD
91	32	323	88	33	57	145	0
92	18	182	72	23	21	65	1
301	1	10	10	0	0	0	0
303	25	251	83	27	23	116	2
305	21	207	23	53	34	93	4
306	30	302	30	77	17	176	2
351	22	218	109	42	12	54	1
379	17	163	55	40	10	57	1
381	5	49	0	9	6	34	0
384	13	127	67	26	12	22	0
398	4	36	8	6	5	14	3
401	5	48	16	9	3	20	0
457	9	84	54	0	3	27	0
Totals	202	2000	615	345	208	818	14

Table 2. Number of aircraft and crewmen on 2nd Air Division B-24 bombers that went down in the North Sea, English Channel and adjacent bodies of water during WW II.

Group	AC DOWN	Total	RTD	POW	KIA	MIA	EVD
44	22	231	34	31	24	141	1
93	11	108	7	9	33	58	1
389	6	59	8	7	4	40	0
392	20	197	28	24	40	105	0
445	7	69	11	6	7	45	0
446	7	69	4	6	20	39	0
448	9	91	18	8	19	46	0
453	11	110	50	10	11	37	2
458	6	61	9	9	6	37	0
466	5	48	3	9	14	22	0
467	2	19	0	0	2	17	0
489	4	38	17	8	2	11	0
491	1	28	15	0	6	7	0
492	10	90	15	2	15	58	0
Totals	121	1218	219	129	203	663	4

Table 3. Number of aircraft and crewmen on 3rd Air Division B-17 bombers that went down in the North Sea, English Channel and adjacent bodies of water during WW II.

Group	AC DOWN	Total	RTD	POW	KIA	MIA	EVD
34	3	28	10	0	11	7	0
94	35	346	86	77	54	128	1
95	22	223	48	46	28	100	1
96	33	331	35	60	28	203	5
100	17	165	28	30	13	92	2
385	22	215	66	27	18	104	0
388	15	149	29	60	18	39	3
390	10	98	25	12	7	54	0
447	13	126	37	16	29	43	1
452	9	83	32	10	10	31	0
486	1	10	0	3	0	7	0
487	6	58	18	1	14	25	0
490	1	10	9	0	1	0	0
493	2	20	0	1	0	19	0
Totals	189	1862	423	343	231	852	13

Table 4. Crewmen on Fighter Command planes that went down in the North Sea, English Channel and adjacent bodies of water during WW II.

Group	Total	RTD	POW	KIA	MIA	EVD
4	24	5	3	5	11	0
20	18	1	4	1	10	2
31	2	1	1	0	0	0
55	14	0	1	2	11	0
56	27	1	3	5	18	0
78	21	7	1	0	13	0
339	7	0	0	2	5	0
352	15	1	0	1	12	1
353	14	0	0	1	12	1
354	10	0	1	0	9	0
355	8	1	1	2	4	0
356	7	0	0	2	5	0
357	11	2	2	0	7	0
358	3	0	0	1	2	0
359	13	0	1	1	11	0
361	5	0	0	0	5	0
363	15	0	0	0	15	0
364	15	0	4	1	10	0
479	6	0	0	1	4	1
535	1	0	0	1	0	0
Totals	236	19	22	26	164	5

Table 5. Summary of Eighth Air Force Aircraft and crews of the three Air Divisions and Fighter Command that went down in the North Sea, English Channel and adjacent bodies of water.

*One B-24 from Radio Countermeasures Group 36, all 10 crewmen MIA. Two B17s from 482 Bombardment Group.

Air Division	AC DOWN	Total Crewmen	RTD	POW	KIA	MIA	EVD
1 AD	202	2000	615	345	208	818	14
2 AD	121	1218	219	129	203	663	4
3 AD	189	1862	423	343	231	852	13
FTR CMD	236	236	19	22	26	164	5
Other*	3	33	0	15	5	10	3
Totals	751	5349	1276	854	673	2507	39

