

## Update #32 – “*City of Savannah*”

B-17 Restoration  
October 16, 2009

This week’s column is a special historical update designed for those of you who have been asking for more on the background on the original B-17 “*City of Savannah*”. We anticipate more details will emerge as the historical research continues both here and in England.

We have to begin our history lesson with a “thank you” to the people that combined to uncover the details of the story surrounding the original “*City of Savannah*”. First, and foremost, is Doug Reed, our project historian, who you have been introduced to in past updates. Over a period of six months Doug was able to learn the story of the original aircraft from the time it left Savannah until its return to the United States. Doug was assisted by Dick Hennegler, the historian for the 388<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group and William Varnedoe, a veteran of 26 missions over Europe, and the historian for the 385<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group. Another friend of the museum who helped with the research is Dr. Harry Friedman. Harry was also introduced in this column when he visited Savannah several weeks ago. Harry is the unofficial CEO of the unofficial nationwide B-17 Co-Op and was in Savannah to welcome our restoration team to Co-Op membership and get some firsthand knowledge of our airplane. Harry is the co-author of the ultimate book on the famous B-17 “*Memphis Belle*” ([Memphis Belle – Dispelling the Myths / 2008 / Portland Press, Kettering, England](#)) with British historian, Graham Simons. Dr. Harry, working as the broker between Doug and Graham on two sides of the Atlantic Ocean, was able to help us confirm the facts that had been gathered about the original aircraft.

That B-17, which we now believe to have had the tail number 43-39049 arrived in Savannah on November 19, 1944, and was selected to be placed in the line of departure as the 5,000<sup>th</sup> airplane to be processed through Hunter Field for the war in Europe. The aircraft would be named the “*City of Savannah*” in appreciation of the efforts of the people of Savannah and Chatham County, who had raised \$500,000 to finance a new B-17 and the training for its crew. One day after the arrival of the aircraft at Hunter Field, 1st Lt. Ralph Kittle and his new crew arrived in Savannah by train and were



chosen as the crew who would fly the B-17 to England. The selection of the Kittle crew might have been influenced by the fact that Lt. Kittle was a native of the state of Georgia. It is the Kittle crew that we see posed in the photographs of the plane and crew at Hunter Field taken during the dedication on December 3, 1944, when B-17G/43-39049 was formally named the “*City of Savannah*” and blessed by USAAF Wing Chaplain Alfred A. Williams. Newspaper reports of the dedication event state that over two thousand people were in attendance. Among the guests was a local artist named Alberta Barber, who would complete, in January of 1945, an oil painting of the “*City of Savannah*” flying over the Savannah skyline.

Following the ceremony Lt. Kittle and his crew departed Savannah and flew up the east coast of the US to Genier Field, located near Manchester, New Hampshire (with a short diversion to fly over Lt. Kittle's home town of Ringgold, Georgia, so that he could dip the "City of Savannah" 's wings to his family). From Manchester Kittle and his co-pilot, Lt. Jon E. Rutt, flew the "City" to Goose Bay, Labrador, Greenland, Iceland and across the Atlantic to a USAAF air depot in Wales, where Kittle turned over his paperwork for 43-39049 on December 21, 1944, the last contact that the Kittle crew would have with the "City of Savannah".



Many of you reading this update are residents of Savannah. If you are aware of family members who might have attended the dedication of the "City of Savannah" and might have memories of that day, or documentation of the events in the form of photos, newspaper articles or dedication paperwork, please contact the museum administrative officer, Sheila Saxon, at 912-748-8888 x 107, or Doug Reed at 301-730-2699.

More to follow...

Next week, the fate of the Kittle crew, B-17G 43-39409, and Alberta Barber's oil painting.