

MY GAL SAL



A B-17 taking off from an Italian airstrip, 1944.
(*The National WWII Museum, 2011.160.175*)

In June 1942, the United States sent troops to Europe to buildup forces. B-17 bombers were often used to carry soldiers. Planes would take off from Canada then land and refuel in Greenland and Iceland before arriving in Britain.

Thirteen B-17 aircraft took off from Labrador on June 27 heading to Greenland. Encountering rough weather over the North Atlantic, five planes turned back to Labrador. Five other planes made it safely to the airbase in Greenland and three bombers made emergency landings on the Greenland ice sheet. The crew of one of those planes,

nicknamed *My Gal Sal*, made a relatively smooth landing. The only serious damage was to the propellers of the plane. The bent propeller prevented the engines from starting.

The crew needed to radio for help so that they would not remain stranded on the ice sheet. Unfortunately, they needed to run an engine to power the radio transmitter and receiver. Though it took a whole day, the crew used tools from the plane to cut off the bent parts of one propeller so that they could power up a single engine. Eventually, they got the radio going and made contact with the airbase.



My Gal Sal, a B-17, in The National WWII Museum's US Freedom Pavilion: The Boeing Center.

Because a rescue plane could not make a safe landing on the ice near their plane, the crew had to camp there for 17 days while a rescue was organized. They had to hike 25 miles to a frozen lake where there was enough flat ice for a rescue plane to land. A month later, a crew on dogsleds returned to retrieve the Norden bombsight from the nose of *My Gal Sal*.

After that incident, no one saw the plane until 1964. A US Air Force Reconnaissance plane spotted it, now lying upside down on the ice. The storm had been intense enough to flip over a huge bomber! In 1995, *My Gal Sal* was recovered from the ice and was restored

in 2000. After being shipped in pieces and reassembled, *My Gal Sal* now hangs in The National WWII Museum's collection of planes.

B-17 "FLYING FORTRESS" FACTS

- + First produced in 1941**
- + 12,731 were built**
- + Crew of 10 men**
- + 104 feet in wingspan, 74 feet in length**
- + 4 engines, 1,000 HP each**
- + Maximum speed of 318 mph, cruising speed 226 mph**
- + Maximum range of 3,200 miles**
- + Load of 4,200 pounds**