

RB-17 With Airdroppable Boat

The B-17 Flying Fortress played a crucial role in search-and-rescue operations during and after World War II, primarily by carrying a parachute delivered lifeboat.

Specialized Search-and-Rescue Variants

B-17H: Designed late in World War II, these final-production B-17s were heavily modified to serve as dedicated search-and-rescue aircraft. They often had their defensive turrets removed and replaced with search radar and observation windows.

SB-17G: Following the formation of the independent U.S. Air Force, the "B-17H" models were redesignated as **SB-17G** (the "S" designating Search and Rescue). Approximately 130 B-17Gs underwent modifications for USAF air-sea rescue missions, which included equipping them with an airborne lifeboat.



How it worked: A 27-foot, 1.5-ton Higgins airborne lifeboat was constructed from laminated mahogany and featuring 20 waterproof internal compartments, ensured it wouldn't sink even if swamped or capsized. It had two small engines for propulsion. Its sails were deliberately kept small for ease of use by inexperienced operators. It was slung underneath the B-17's fuselage. The vessel, painted yellow, was stocked with enough food, water, and clothing for 12 survivors for approximately 20 days at sea. It was equipped with a "Gibson Girl" survival radio and a kite-elevated antenna.

The Drop: In the event of a crash at sea, the B-17 flew over the survivors and dropped the boat from an altitude of 500 to 1,500 feet, deploying three large parachutes for a safe landing.

