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Photographs courtesy of the Army Air Corps Museum

AIRCRAFT NOSE ART



What is nose art?



Courtesy photo

by Stuart Ibberson

Editor

Most people think of the U.S. Army Air Force's World War II aircraft when they think of nose art.

However, nose art has a long history dating back to the early days of aerial warfare, and has been seen in various militaries around the world.

Initially, nose art was used as a way to identifying friendly forces but it evolved into a means to express individuality during war, a way to remember those at home, and a way to "thumb the nose" at military uniformity.

And while nose art is mostly a military tradition, some civilian forms exist — probably the best-known are the "Virgin Girls" on the nose of each Virgin Group aircraft.

The idea of nose art originated with German and Italian pilots, and the first recorded example is a sea monster painted on an Italian flying boat in 1913.

During World War I, German pilots painted a mouth beneath the propeller's spinner.

What is perhaps the most famous of all nose art, the shark-face insignia later made famous by the First American Volunteer Group Flying Tigers, first appeared in World War I on a British Sopwith Dolphin and a German Roland C.II, though often with an effect more comical than menacing. The cavallino rampante ("prancing horse") of the Italian ace Francesco Baracca was another well-known image.

World War I nose art was usually embellished or extravagant squadron insignia.

This followed the official policy established by the American Expeditionary Forces' Chief of the Air Service, Brig. Gen. Benjamin Foulois, on May 6, 1918, requiring the creation of distinct, readily identifiable squadron insignia. World War I examples include the "Hat in the Ring" of the American 94th Aero Squadron (attributed to Lt. Johnny Wentworth) and the "Kicking Mule" of the 95th Aero Squadron. Nose art of that era was often conceived and produced not by the pilots, but rather by ground crews.

World War II

World War II is considered the "golden age" of nose art with both Allied and Axis pilots using the art form.

At the height of the war, artists were in high demand within the U.S. Army Air Forces, despite the "ban" on it. AAF commanders tolerated nose art in an effort to boost morale, and artists were very highly paid.

The U.S. Navy, on the other hand, banned nose art

The largest known work of nose art ever depicted on a World War II-era American combat aircraft was on a Consolidated B-24 Liberator, tail number 44-40973, which had been named "The Dragon and his Tail" of the USAAF Fifth Air Force, 64th Bomb Squadron, 43rd Bomb Group, in the Southwest Pacific, flown by a crew led by Joseph Pagoni, with Staff Sgt. Sarkis Bartigian as the artist. The dragon artwork ran from the nose just forward of the cockpit, down the entire length of the fuselage's sides, with the dragon's body depicted directly below and just aft of the cockpit, with the dragon holding a nude woman in its forefeet.

Post-World War II

In the Korean War, nose art was popular with units operating A-26 Invader and B-29 bombers, C-119 Flying Boxcar transports, as well as Air Force fighter-bombers. Due to changes in military policies and changing attitudes toward the representation of women, the amount of nose art declined after the Korean War.

During the Vietnam War, Lockheed AC-130 gunships of the U.S. Air Force Special Operations Squadrons were often given names with accompanying nose art — for example, "Thor", "Azrael — Angel of Death," "Ghost Rider," "War Lord" and "The Arbitrator." The unofficial gunship badge of a flying skeleton with a Minigun was also applied to many aircraft until the end of the war and was later adopted officially. In addition, Army and Navy helicopter crews often embellished their assigned aircraft with a wide range of nose art and other personalized markings.

Nose art underwent a revival during the First Gulf War and has become more common since Operation Enduring Freedom and the Iraq War began. A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft ladder doors are frequently painted while many fixed and rotary air crews are merging artwork as part of camouflage patterns. The United States Air Force had unofficially sanctioned the return of the pin-up (albeit fully clothed) with the Strategic Air Command permitting nose art on its bomber force in the Command's last years. The continuation of historic names such as "Memphis Belle" was encouraged.

In many other cases at airfields throughout the Middle East during the War on Terror, aviation units instead painted the reinforced concrete T-walls and Bremer barriers that protected the aircrews and aircraft with elaborate murals and graffiti.

Source material for American nose art was varied, ranging from pinups such as Rita Hayworth and Betty Grable and cartoon characters such as Donald Duck, Bugs Bunny, and Popeye to patriotic characters (Yankee Doodle) and fictional heroes (Sam Spade). Lucky symbols such as dice and playing cards also inspired nose art, along with references to mortality such as the Grim Reaper. Cartoons and pinups were most popular among American artists, but other works included animals, nicknames, hometowns, and popular song and movie titles. Some nose art and slogans expressed contempt for the enemy, especially of their leaders.

The farther the planes and crew were from headquarters or from the public eye, the racier the art tended to be. For instance, nudity was more common in nose art on aircraft in the Pacific than on aircraft in Europe.

In this special issue of *Aerotech News*, we share some of the most famous, and not so famous, nose art.

Editor's note: It should be noted that attitudes towards women and minorities have changed since the golden age of nose art, World War II. What was acceptable then is not acceptable now. Please remember that much of the nose art depicted in this special issue is a product of its time.

Boeing KC-135E Stratotanker, based with Sioux City Air National Guard, 2007



National Guard photograph by Master Sgt. Vincent De Groot

"The unique nose art on painted this KC-135, tail number 71447 is about to go on permanent display. The KC-135E had been assigned to the 185th Air Refueling Wing, Iowa Air National Guard.

A-10 Thunderbolt II at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan



Air Force photograph by Senior Airman Willard E. Grande II

Maj. Loren Coulter exits an A-10C Thunderbolt II at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan, on Jan. 11, 2011. Coulter was an A-10 pilot assigned to the 75th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron.

Memphis Belle



Air Force photograph

The crew of the B-17 Flying Fortress "Memphis Belle" is shown at an air base in England after completing 25 missions over enemy territory on June 7, 1943. They are, left to right: Tech. Sgt. Harold P. Loch of Green Bay, Wisc., top turret gunner; Staff Sgt. Cecil H. Scott of Altoona, Penn., ball turret gunner; Tech. Sgt. Robert J. Hanson of Walla Walla, Wash., radio operator; Capt. James A. Verinis, New Haven, Conn., co-pilot; Capt. Robert K. Morgan of Asheville, N.C., pilot; Capt. Charles B. Leighton of Lansing, Mich., navigator; Staff Sgt. John P. Quinlan of Yonkers, N. Y., tail gunner; Staff Sgt. Casimer A. Nastal of Detroit, Mich., waist gunner; Capt. Vincent B. Evans of Henderson, Texas, bombardier and Staff Sgt. Clarence E. Winchell of Oak Park, Ill., waist gunner.

Painting a bomber



National Archives photograph

Sgt. J.S. Wilson paints a bomber based at Eniwetok Atoll, in the Marshall Islands, in June 1944.



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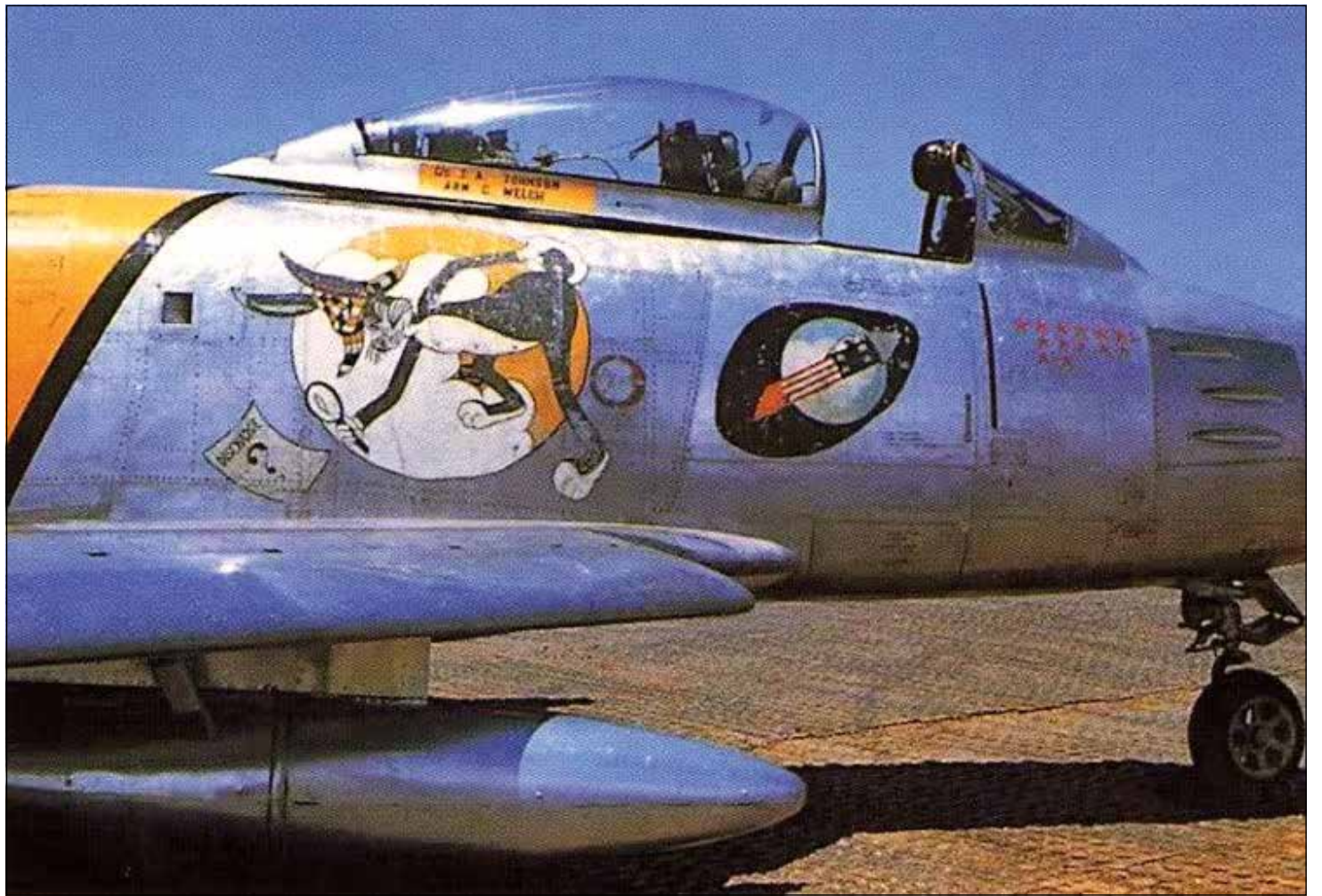
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Robbie Risner's F-86

Photograph of the nose art on flying ace Robbie Risner's F-86 taken in 1953.



Air Force photograph

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National Archives and Records Administration photograph

George McCraw paints nose art on a Vega Ventura

Photograph of George McCraw painting nose art onto a Vega Ventura Bomber as part of the aircraft manufacturing process, taken circa May 1942.

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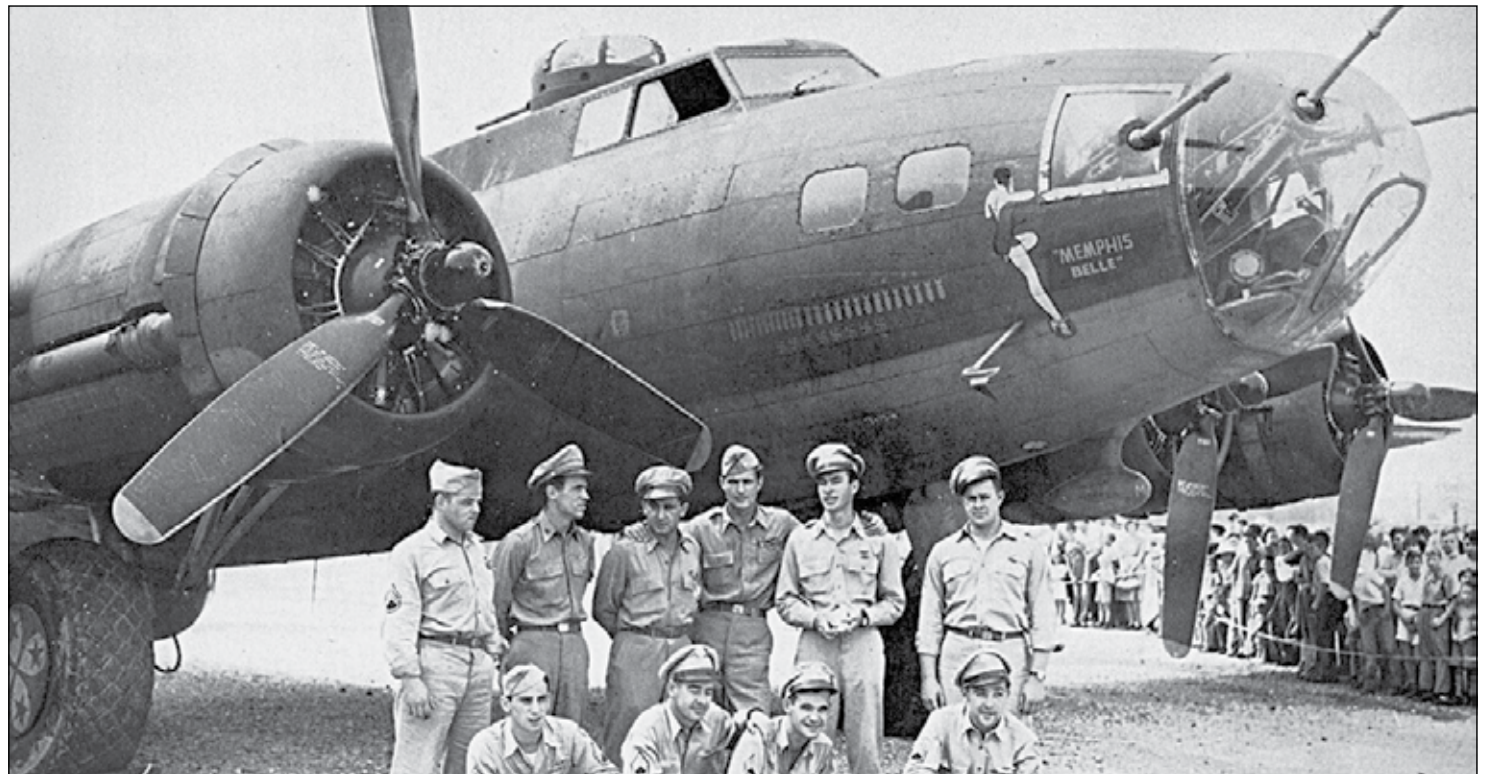


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The case for preserving WWII-era nose art

by Bob Alvis

special to Aerotech News



The crew of the "Memphis Belle."

Courtesy photographs

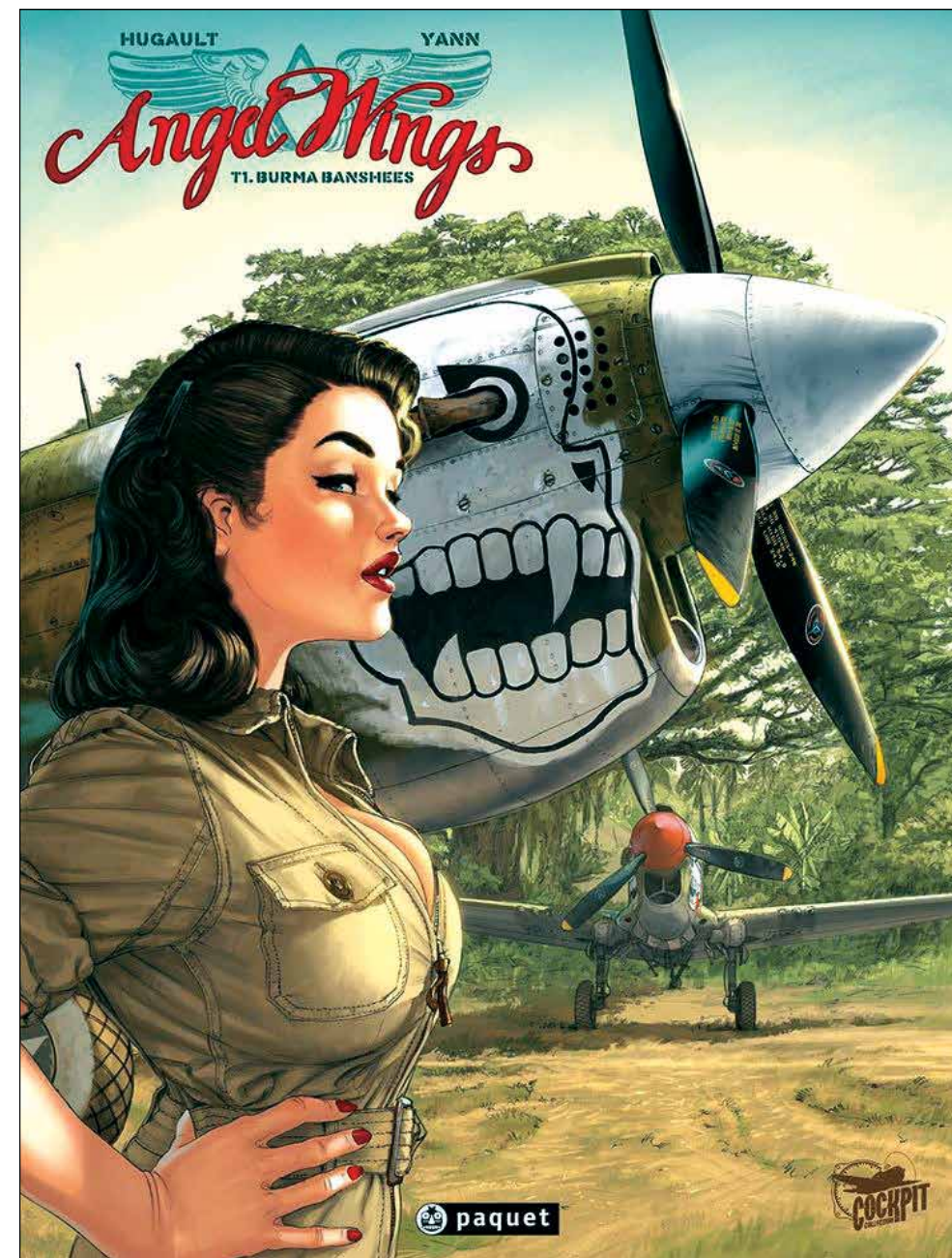
Some time back, I met a graphic novel author at a local air show who wanted me to review his work and give an opinion.

I never really shared my thoughts with anybody else regarding his work — I was just happy to think that a French writer and author valued my take on his craft, and wanted a thumbs up or down on his high-end comic book works.

Lately another aspect related to this story has been creeping into our nation's collective thought process about how we view, and sometimes attempt to revise, our history. Being that I'm about all things aviation and history-related, it had me thinking about how far we will go to erase our collective memory of history and how it is portrayed to future generations, when history runs counter to the evolution of today's culture.

You all pretty much know I'm one of those baby boomer guys, raised on a heavy dose of that Greatest Generation "diet."

The popular culture that grew in the 1940s and 1950s around the wars we fought is reflected in all the movies, TV shows and comics of the era — not to men-



The French publication I was asked to review, which I found very entertaining, was loosely based on the Burma Banshees fighter squadron of World War II.



Officials at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force were asked to remove the artwork from Bockscar, which dropped the second atomic bomb, and also remove the name of the Enola Gay. The museum stood firm, and history remains intact.

tion the toys, hours spent building detailed plane and ship models, and the like. We young bucks wanted to know about every bit of that war and what our parents and grandparents did in playing their part to help win it. World War II, as all wars are, was a brutal thing. As we grew older we learned through print, documentaries and firsthand accounts, the hows and whys of how history played out, from the major aspects of combat, to the simple things and tasks that were important in the everyday life of our soldiers.

Over the last decade, the subject of World War II nose art has become a hot button topic as society has worked to overcome prejudices surrounding race and gender. Some of the images that once adorned aircraft and flew into battle by the thousands have now been labeled offensive, and in some cases insensitive. The art form that

has been added to aircraft since World War I slowly over time became a subject that fell out of favor, and societal pressures were put into motion to phase it out of public view.

For those who know, the girls and cartoons that were painted on the noses of aircraft by the GI's of that era served purposes beyond simple decoration. Creating them was a sure-fire way to take their minds off the ugly business of war and to make their piece of Uncle Sam's hardware more like their own than his. A plane became as unique as the man or crew that was flying it. American pop culture was full of inspiration and material to use, including Vargas pin-ups, Disney cartoons, and a whole host of crazy characters around the world creating havoc against the wishes of freedom-loving people.

— See **PRESERVING**, on Page 7

PRESERVING, from Page 6

From patches to jackets, a good piece of nose art showed a spiritual ownership of a plane that the crew took great pride in, and by the grace of God, would always bring them home. Sadly, far too many times that was not the case and when aircrews would see aircraft going down, they would not report tail numbers or aircraft type. It was always by nose art description, because over time all the airmen got to know the crews of particular aircraft from that art work that was their signature. Yes, nose art was more than just a way for airmen to spend a bit of time being creative. It was an integral part of the history of the air war in World War II. Even today, we can hear the name Memphis Belle and we know we're talking about the B-17 that was the first to complete 25 missions in World War II. We know that why? Because the museums have it on display and the history books have the story in print.

So where am I going with all this? I just want to bring to light the concern that, in a world increasingly focused on political correctness and the fear of offending somebody, there is a danger that we could, over time, remove history as it was written and replace it with a history that reflects today's standards.

The losers in this scenario will be future generations who seek the truth about history and only get a watered-down version in their quest to learn of that history. After pressure to remove the nose art on aircraft at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, I was glad to see that history took precedence over today's headlines and management stood with the Greatest Generation, finding value with all



An airman gives a bit of personality to his plane.



A crew with its aircraft and matching jackets.

Courtesy photographs

those aircrews, and what they had created. Today vulgar, racist and insensitive subjects can be debated, as it's the world we live in, and we can let those who write our history tell our story without filters — just as we should let historical artifacts tell their own stories, less filters and without our influence.

So to circle back to my opening statement, why did I bring up that air show encounter? Mr. Yann and his artist, Mr. Hugault, are fans of the World War II era. Their publications celebrate the American airmen of that time

in a very colorful manner which we might say is pretty racy, while following a historical narrative. The art work is what you would expect from a French artist. Glancing through it, I made a lighthearted comment asking if it comes with a rating for content for its racy pictures? He smiled at me and said that's the problem with Americans, they just can't get over that this art work was the reality of the World War II generation. You go to a metropolitan art museum and a painting of a lady, minus clothes, is considered art and the same

girl painted on a plane is called unacceptable.

All I want to get across with this commentary is: let's allow history to stand on its own merits, good or bad, and let future generations make their own decisions based on all the facts and photos — not what we deem appropriate by today's standards. History belongs to all of us, every bit of it.

Until next time, Bob out ...

Editor's note: This article was first published Feb. 21, 2020.

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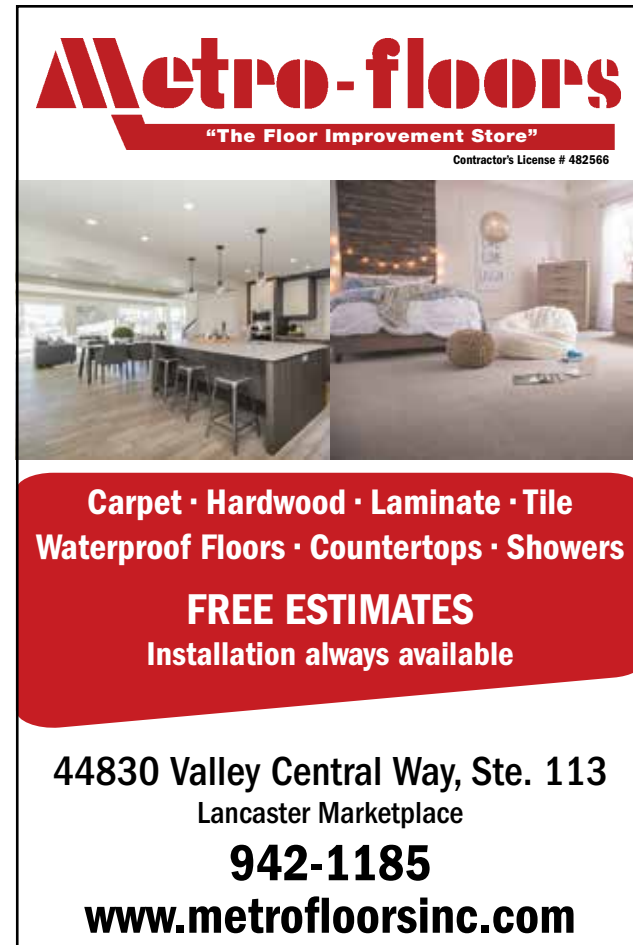
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B-24s in the South Pacific:

THE MYSTERY OF THE DISAPPEARING NOSE ART

by Bob Alvis

special to Aerotech News

Here is a great little story from World War II that I got from an old B-24 guy who trained at Muroc, or what we, today, call Edwards AFB.

Aircraft nose art from World War II is pretty much legendary — an art form all its own.

In today's world you will get opinions from folks who either love it or hate it but the reality is, it was just a part of that World War II generation and part of the morale of winning that Great War.

The Airmen who “decorated” their aircraft paraded their creations around in the war zones of the skies and used it as inspiration to carry on with the battle. Featuring themes as varied as political statements, comedy and cartoons, or a racy look at the girl back home, the art work became their Excalibur of protection, and nobody better mess with their personal feelings about their aircraft and its featured art.

B-24 operations were moving at a brisk pace in the South Pacific. Planes and crews were being moved around to different theaters to fill the requirements of plane losses and crew rotations or, as we old military folks understand, “The needs of Uncle Sam.” One day a call came in to operations that a squadron of B-24s was going to be redeployed to a location in the Middle East, and to get the crews ready to make the long journey to their new assignment.

After much moaning and groaning, the crews were up to speed and ready to make the hop, when an additional instruction came down from leadership regarding their new assignment. It was felt that it would be insensitive to local cultures if aircraft with scantily-painted women on them were allowed to operate from the base to which they were being transferred. When the pilots of the aircraft were called into the head shed, they were instructed to have the nose art removed from all the aircraft. After some more moaning and groaning, they left to tell their support crews to remove the “offensive” artwork by the next morning.

The next morning, the base commander looked out on the flight line at the B-24s getting ready for the long journey and was pleased to see standard government issue-looking Liberators sporting olive drab and dull silver paint, with the only adornment being the Stars and Bars on the wings and fuselage. Later that morning the flight took off with no incident, and it was just assumed that the war would continue on and the new assignment location would be pleased that American “Art Work” would not be present to upset the locals.

Two days later, a radio call came in from a very upset base commander who wanted to talk to the commander who had sent the B-24 boys off to his base! “What’s the big idea of ignoring my request to have all that nose art removed from those planes?” Confused, the only explanation the originating



Courtesy photographs

The B-24 Liberator “Evasive Action” and its crew. The aircraft was assigned to the 819th Bombardment Squadron, 30th Bomb Group, 7th Air Force.



The B-24 Liberator “One Weakness,” assigned to the 68th Bomb Squadron, 44th Bomb Group, 8th Air Force.

commander could offer was, “I personally saw those Liberators off and I can guarantee you there was no nose art on any of those craft when they left my field!”

“Oh, really?” said the caller. “From what I’m looking at, that would make you a liar and I’m going to get to the bottom of this and heads will roll!”

The new base commander sent for the pilots of the flight and before long they were in the hot seat, being grilled as to if they ever got the word that naked ladies on airplanes were NOT to be seen around the Middle East, and were to be removed at their previous base. All the pilots claimed innocence and just said that they relayed the orders to the ground crew and that their prized nose art and good luck charm was to be removed — and that was met with a lot of negative remarks and grumbling.

According to the pilots, overnight the crew followed their orders and painted over the artwork and in the morning the pilots inspected and approved, while feeling a bit guilty for taking away the

—See **MYSTERY**, on Page 12

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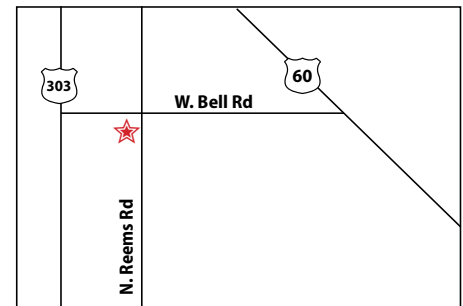
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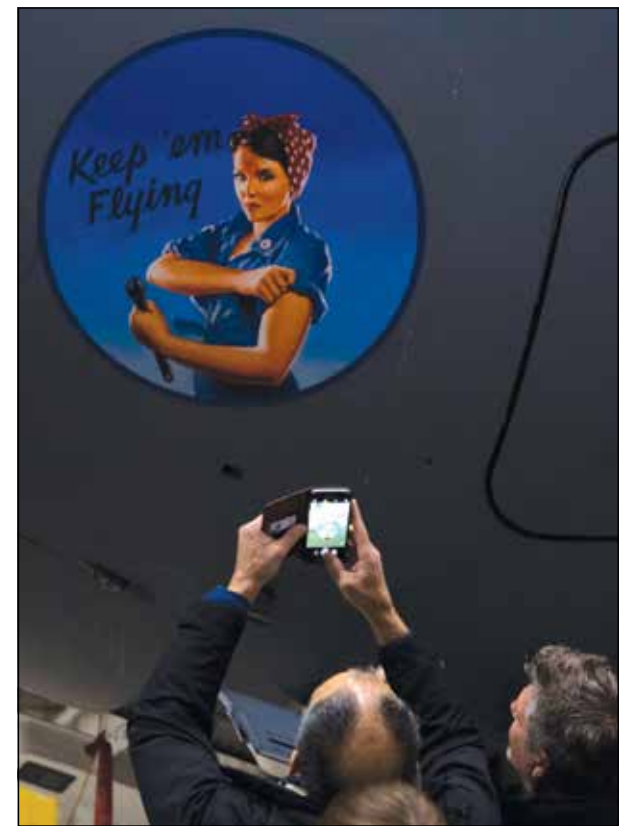
Ian Glead in Figaro the Cat



Royal Air Force photograph

Wing Commander Ian "Widge" Glead, leader of No. 244 Wing, in his Supermarine Spitfire Mk VB at an airfield in Tunisia, April 1943. Days later he was shot down and killed by Messerschmitt Bf 109s over Cape Bon. Wing Commander I R "Widge" Glead, leader of No. 244 Wing RAF, sitting in his Supermarine Spitfire Mark VB, AB502 'IR-G', at an airfield in Tunisia. Below the cockpit is the same "Figaro the Cat" cartoon which Glead had painted on his aircraft in the United Kingdom. After serving as Wing Commander Operations at HQ Fighter Command, Glead was posted to the Middle East in January 1943. He was attached briefly to No. 145 Squadron RAF for operational experience, then led 244 Wing through the fighting in Libya and into Tunisia. On April 16, 1943, while leading a patrol to attack a formation of enemy transport aircraft over Cape Bon, he was shot down and killed by Messerschmitt Bf 109s of JG 77. His final victory score was 16 enemy aircraft destroyed.

Keep 'em Flying nose art



Air Force photograph by Senior Airman Zachary Cacicia Mike Tatoian, Dover International Speedway president, takes photo of the newly unveiled "Keep 'em Flying" nose art March 22, 2018, at Dover Air Force Base, Del. The artwork is by artist Greg Hildebrand and was placed on a Team Dover C-17 Globemaster III cargo aircraft to pay tribute to lady maintainers.

Sweet LaRhonda



Air Force photograph

World War II military aircraft nose art on the B-17 Flying Fortress "Sweet LaRhonda."

Glamorous Glennis



Air Force photograph Then Capt. Chuck Yeager stands in front of the Bell X-1 named Glamorous Glennis in which he was the first to break the sound barrier. Yeager named all of his assigned aircraft in some variation after his wife.

Little Gem



Air Force photograph

Artist painting nose art on the B-29 Superfortress "Little Gem."

MYSTERY, from Page 10

plane mascot that the crews looked to for inspiration. But the crews didn't seem all that upset that next morning as the pilots departed on their long journey that would see them flying over seas and through tropical thunderstorms typical for the area. The trip was pretty much uneventful, until the planes landed at their new assignment.

For the first time seeing their planes from the outside in the dawn's early light, pilots and co-pilots were witness to a miracle as the nose art had magically reappeared on the nose of all their aircraft! Dumbfounded questions were asked of

the crews and a lot of "I don't know, Sir" or "I can't explain it" was shared, but with no real explanation. Of course, when the new commander made an appearance, no fairy tale explanation was going to do. He wanted answers because, as he saw it, the only logical explanation was that the planes left their original base without ever having removed that nose art.

The secret held for a while until serious accusations started to fly around and genuine trouble began to brew. At that point, it wasn't long until the real miracle showed up in the form of an American Airman who didn't want anybody messing around with his good luck charm. It was finally shared that the crews all got

together and decided they would paint over their symbols — with water-based paint! Pretty much water colors! Everything looked great on departure, but those rain showers and storms along the way to the new base slowly eroded away that paint and exposed the nose art. Upon landing, it looked just like the plane they took so much pride in at their old base!

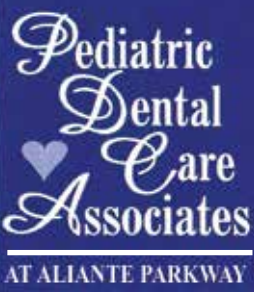
I don't know what happened to all the principals in this episode, as my conveyor of the story just remembered it was a pretty well-circulated tale around the CBI and Middle East. The bottom line is that it never really became that big of an issue with the locals when American aircraft showed up with nose art that was a bit

racy — the feeling being that it was better to have those girls on the planes, than the ones that had Swastikas on them!


American Soldiers and their ingenuity are legendary. It's always reassuring to know that in the worst of times and conditions, that same ingenuity can turn back attacks or advance on enemy positions, but it can also protect that spiritual symbol that gets them to the next day and one step closer to home.

The Nose Art Girls of World War II and the American Airman: two aspects of an aircraft that were inseparable — unless, of course, some water colors were around! But that was only for a while, for some!

Until next time, Bob out ...




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The Undersigned will sell at public sale by competitive bidding at www.storage-treasures.com to end **October 19, 2024 at 10:00 am** on the premises where said property has been stored & which are located at: **Storelocal Challenger Way, 42133 Challenger Way Lancaster, CA 93535 County of Los Angeles, State of California.**

The following Property consists of: Furniture, Wall Art, Appliances, Personal Items & More

NAME:

- Richard Thompson
- Joi Rhodes
- Reginald Goodman
- Tracey Perry
- Catalina Ramirez
- Beverly Rodgers
- William Willis
- Miguel Tohom

ADVERTISEMENT OF SALE

Notice is hereby given that the Undersigned intends to sell the personal property described below to enforce a lien imposed on said property pursuant to sections 21700-21716 of the California Business & Professions code. Section 2328 of the UCC, Section 535 of the Penal Code, provisions of the Civil Code.

The Undersigned will sell at public sale by competitive bidding at www.storage-treasures.com to end **October 26, 2024 at 10:00 am** on the premises where said property has been stored & which are located at: **Storelocal Challenger Way, 42133 Challenger Way Lancaster, CA 93535 County of Los Angeles, State of California.**

The following Property consists of: Furniture, Wall Art, Appliances, Personal Items & More

NAME:

- Cornelius Gonzales
- Shelly Walker
- Censiere Aaron
- Albert Garcia
- Jessica Terracciano
- Jaqueline Miranda Silva
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