

Aircraft markings in the 487th Bomb Group.

During training in the United States in late 1943 and early 1944 the original crews of the 487th Bomb Group used the available B-24s on the various bases. On photographs these training aircraft are easily identified by large three digit numbers, painted on both sides of the nose. Usually these digits are the last three digits of the serial number of the aircraft. Also these training aircraft carried an old version of the national insignia: a white star in a blue roundel.



(B-24H 42-40396 during training at Clovis, NM. Note the absence of waist guns (the windows are closed), the large painted 396 on the nose and the old national insignia).

Upon completion of the training phase the Group was equipped with B-24s, all straight from the factory. Just like the training B-24s, these were 'camouflaged' and painted 'olive drab'. The only markings were the aircraft's individual serial number, which was painted in grey on the outside of both tail fins and the national insignia, which was painted on both sides of the fuselage, on top of the left wing and below the right wing. A serial number (e.g. 42-52618) was painted as 252618, thus dropping the first digit (always a 4) and the -. The national insignia was the latest version: the white star in a blue roundel, but now with white bars to the left and right, all with a thin blue outline.

Each crew ferried a B-24 to England, via the so-called southern ferry route (South America and Africa). Most of the crews decided to add nose art to 'their' B-24. Some used one, others both, sides of the nose compartment.



(Brand new B-24H 41-29528 was assigned to the crew of 2/Lt Mike Volechenisky. The crew decided to name it "Ole Andy from Kansas", as a tribute to Andrew Frank Schoeppel, the state's Governor and adorned it with a sunflower (Kansas is known as 'the sunflower state').

In England the B-24s received some modifications: most visible was that armour plates below the cockpit windows now obscured some of the nose art. Often the nose art was restored, sometimes it was not or only partially.



(B-24H 41-28837 "Trade Winds" had armour plates added to protect the cockpit area. Obviously attempts were in progress to restore the nose art when this photograph was taken).

The 487th Bomb Group became a part of the Third Division. To facilitate the complicated assembly procedures during missions of the Eighth Air Force, markings designating individual Bomb Groups were painted on the B-24s. The Third Division used a square (the First Division had a triangle and the Second Division a circle), and the 487th Bomb Group was assigned the code letter P. A white square with a black P was now painted above the serial number on both tail fins, on top of the right wing and below the left wing. In addition, each individual B-24 received a radio code letter within the Bomb Squadron it was assigned to. This radio code letter was also painted on both tail fins, below the serial number.



(B-24H 41-29527 "Foxy Phoebe" was photographed on May 12. Note that armour plate protects the cockpit area and that the Group marking, serial number and individual aircraft letter are painted on the tail fin. There are no codes on the fuselage yet).

Finally, in May 1944, each of the four Bomb Squadrons in the 487th Bomb Group was given an own code:

836th 2G (radio call sign Winner)

837th 4F (radio call sign Rathmore)

838th 2C (radio call sign Entrap)

839th R5 (radio call sign Bluntish)

The squadron code and individual aircraft letter were subsequently painted in grey to the left and right of the national insignia on each side of the fuselage.



(B-24H 42-52618 "Chief Wapello", an original aircraft of the 839th Bomb Squadron, taxis past the control tower at Lavenham and displays the full range of markings in use in late May, June and July 1944).

Soon the B-24s were further personalized by air and ground crews, with their names or those of their girl friends painted near their position in the aircraft. Bomb symbols, denoting combat missions flown, were also usually added to the nose.



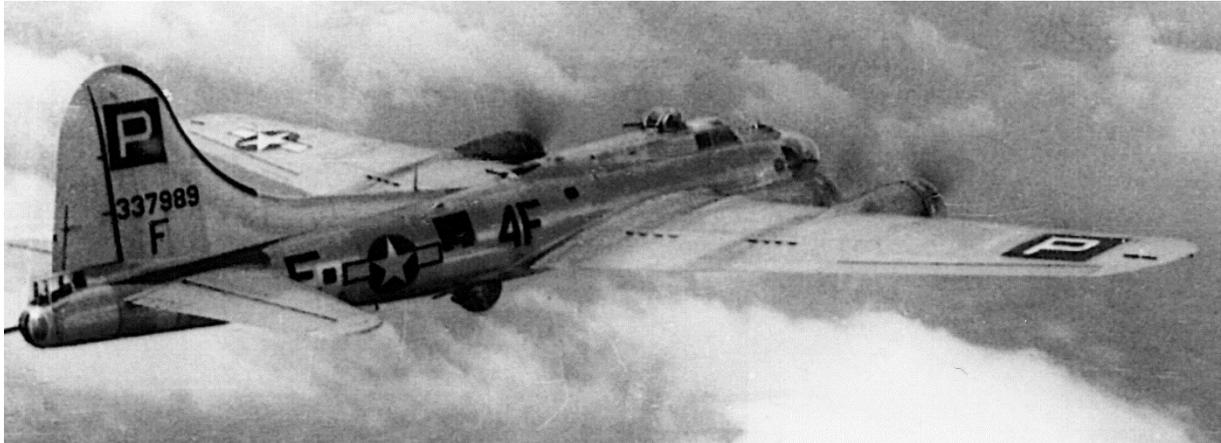
(B-24H 42-52652 "Bashful Marion" was photographed with armour plates, restored nose art and 18 combat missions completed. Pilot 2/Lt Clayton H. Schlemm and crew chief T/Sgt Joe Perisie painted their names on the armour plate, while 'wrong way Kairis' below the navigators window refers to Joseph J. Kairis, the navigator of the crew).

Operational losses soon led to the requirement for replacement aircraft. These were no longer camouflaged and retained their bare aluminum skin. The same markings as on the camouflaged B-24s were applied, but the square was now painted black with a white P inside. The other markings (serial number and squadron and individual aircraft codes) were all applied in black. Some, but not all, replacement B-24s also received nose art.



(Replacement B-24H 42-50373 "Hard T Find" of the 839th Bomb Squadron photographed on Woodbridge on June 20. This photo shows the typical markings of the bare aluminum replacement B-24s in the 487th Bomb Group).

In the second half of July the 487th Bomb Group switched from B-24s to B-17s, just like all other Bomb Groups equipped with B-24s in the Third Division. New (bare aluminum) B-17s were received, and these received similar markings as the bare aluminum B-24s. Many of the B-17s also carried nose art, personal markings and bomb tallies.

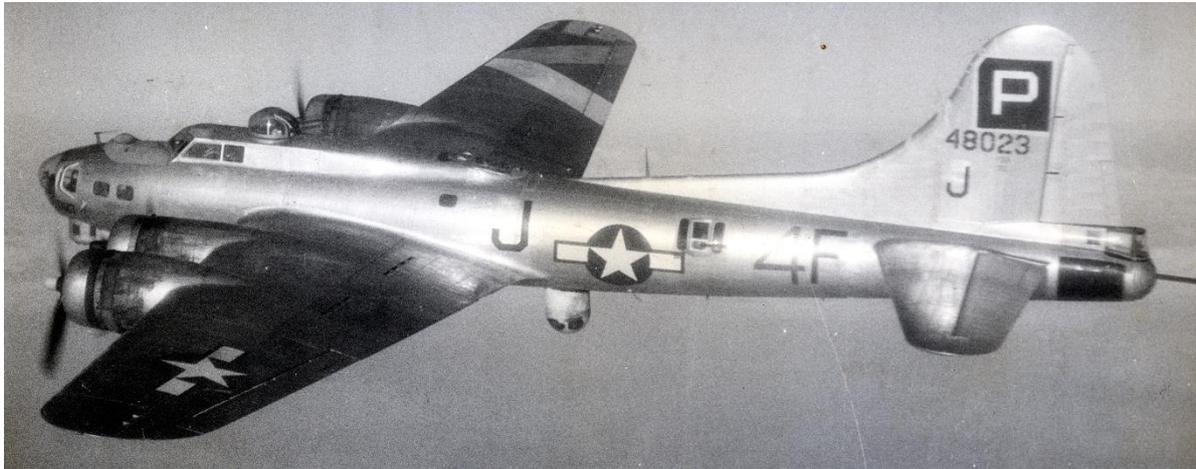


(B-17G 43-37989 of the 837th Bomb Squadron, photographed in August 1944 displaying the markings in use from August to late 1944).



(Crewchief Joe Perisic obviously traded B-24 "Bashful Marion" for B-17 "Peg-o-my-Heart". His name and those of her other two ground crewmembers Jim E. Thweatt and Charles P. Raides adorned the nose, as well as a proud list of bombs, denoting combat missions flown).

With the increasing number of bombers on missions and take off and assembly for the missions shortly after dawn, identification became even more important. In late 1944 red and yellow bands, forming a chevron with the red band toward the tip, were applied to the top of the right wing and under the left wing. The black square P on the right wing was first removed or crudely painted over with white paint.



(B-17G 44-8023, a lead ship of the 837th Bomb Squadron with an H2X-radar dome replacing the ball turret, displays the new chevron marking on the right wing. On black and white photographs the red doesn't really stand out well from the yellow).

In late January 1945 a final change to the unit markings was made. All units in the 4th Bombardment Wing (94th, 447th, 486th and 487th Bomb Groups) had their wing tips and entire tail painted yellow. The square P and serial number on the tail remained, but the individual aircraft letter was painted over.





(These two photos of B-17G 43-37974 "The Big Drip Jr." show the change in markings in early 1945. On the bottom photo the wing tips and tail are painted yellow and the individual aircraft letter on the tail has disappeared. Note how the chevron on the wing obscures the square P that had been there since August 1944).

(An occasional aircraft, in this case B-17G 43-38042 of the 839th Bomb Squadron, carried a different group marking when the tails were painted yellow).



(A formation of the 487th Bomb Group in April 1945. Note how well the yellow tail and wing tips and the yellow and red chevron help to identify the aircraft from a distance as belonging to the 487th Bomb Group. Note that the B-17 in the top right does not yet have the chevron applied).

Photographic evidence proves that in 1945 many aircraft carried color markings on the right side of the chin turret, often with the individual aircraft letter (or in instances the last digits of the serial number) painted in black. The 837th Bomb Squadron used yellow and the 838th Bomb Squadron used white paint. Some aircraft in the 839th Bomb Squadron apparently had the entire chin turret painted red. No additional markings for the 836th Bomb Squadron are known.



(B-17G 43-37923 4F-P "Naughty Marietta" of the 837th Bomb Squadron).



(B-17G 43-39034 2C-L "The Outlaw" of the 838th Bomb Squadron).



(B-17G 43-38598 R5-U "Bonnie Lassie" of the 839th Bomb Squadron).

Authored by Ivo M. de Jong, February 2016