

The Allied Invasion Stripes

By ROBERT D. ARCHER

The exact size, color and positioning of the distinctive markings (commonly referred to as the "Invasion Stripes") applied to the Allied aircraft for the invasion of France in June 1944, has been the subject of much controversy and many "expert" opinions during the ensuing 23 years. Late in 1966 the writer was able to locate the position of the original operational memorandum and was fortunate enough to get it finally declassified from the original "TOP SECRET" security classification. The declassification is dated 10/12/66 and the copy sent to the writer was postmarked October 17, 1966. This historic document is now presented in its entirety, together with the original distribution list.

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ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE	

OPERATION MEMORANDUM	}	18 April, 1944
NUMBER 23		

DISTINCTIVE MARKING - AIRCRAFT

1. OBJECT

The object of this memorandum is to prescribe the distinctive markings which will be applied to US and BRITISH aircraft in order to make them more easily identified as friendly by ground and naval forces and by other friendly aircraft.

2. SCOPE

a. The instructions contained herein will apply to the following types of US and BRITISH aircraft:

- (1) Fighters and fighter-bombers.
- (2) Tactical and photographic reconnaissance aircraft.
- (3) Aircraft employed in spotting for naval gunfire and field artillery.
- (4) Light bombers.
- (5) Medium bombers.
- (6) Troop carrier aircraft, including four engine types.
- (7) Glider tugs, including four engine types.
- (8) Liaison aircraft and Air OP's employed in forward areas for fire spotting and adjustment or for advanced aircraft control.
- (9) Coastal Command, Air Sea Rescue and disembarked Fleet Air Arm aircraft except seaplanes and four engine aircraft which need not be marked.

b. These instructions will not apply to the following classes of aircraft:-

- (1) Four engine bombers.
- (2) Air transports.
- (3) Gliders.
- (4) Night fighters.
- (5) Seaplanes.

3. GENERAL

a. The instructions contained herein will be effective on the day of the assault and thereafter until it is deemed advisable to change. Aircraft will be given distinctive markings as shortly before the

day of the assault as it is possible in order to protect the effectiveness of their use.

b. These instructions are in no way intended to change the present US and BRITISH national markings now in use, namely: the USAAF white star on a white horizontal bar; and the RAF red, white and blue roundel.

4. DISTINCTIVE MARKINGS

a. Single engine aircraft.

- (1) Upper and lower wing surfaces of aircraft listed in paragraph 2 a above, will be painted with five white and black stripes, each eighteen inches wide, parallel to the longitudinal axis of the airplane, arranged in order from center outward; white, black, white, black, white. Stripes will end six inches inboard of the national markings.
- (2) Fuselages will be painted with five parallel white and black stripes, each eighteen inches wide, completely around the fuselage, with the outside edge of the rearmost band eighteen inches from the leading edge of the tailplane.

b. Twin engine aircraft.

- (1) Upper and lower wing surfaces of aircraft listed in paragraph 2 a above, will be painted from the engine nacelles outward with five white and black stripes, each twenty-four inches wide, arranged in order from center outward: white, black, white, black, white.
- (2) Fuselages will be painted with five parallel white and black stripes, each twenty-four inches wide, completely around the fuselage, with the outside edge of the rearmost band eighteen inches from the leading edge of the tailplane.

c. Four engine troop carrier aircraft and glider tugs.

- (1) Same as for twin-engine aircraft, wing stripes to be outboard of the outer engine nacelles.
- d. Stripes will in no case be painted over the national markings, which take precedence. Wing stripes will extend from leading edge to trailing edge of wings. Special equipment, such as deicer boots, will not be painted over.

e. Types of paint to be employed:

- (1) USAAF Units - as directed by the Commanding General of the Air Force concerned.
- (2) RAF Units - as directed by the appropriate BRITISH agency.

f. At Appendix 'A' are sample sketches of aircraft painted according to these instructions.

5. BRIEFING

Army, Navy and Air Commanders will disseminate complete information concerning these distinctive markings to all troops under their commands no earlier before the day of the assault than will insure the complete distribution of the information.

By command of General Eisenhower:

W. B. Smith
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army,
Chief of Staff.

OFFICIAL:

H. R. BULL,
Major General, G.S.C.,
Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3.

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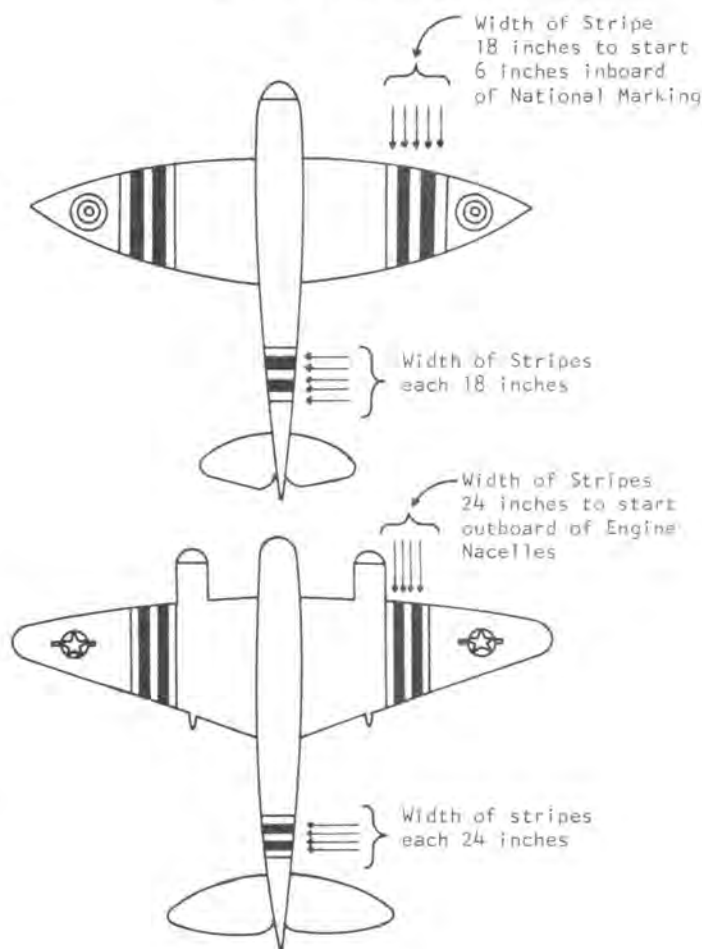
	COPY NO.
Allied Naval Commander, Expeditionary Force,	1-3
Command-in-Chief, 21 Army Group,	4-8
Commanding General, First US Army Group,	9-10
Air Commander-in-Chief, AEA, F,	11-16
The Secretary, The Admiralty,	17
The Under Secretary of State, The War Office	18
(MO 3)	
Commanding General, ETOUSA	19
Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces,	20
The Under Secretary of State, The Air Ministry	21-23
Commanding General, USSTAF,	24
Air Officer Commanding, Bomber Command	25

Chief of Combined Operations,	26
The Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee,	
Offices of the War Cabinet,	27
The Secretary, Combined Chiefs of Staff,	
Washington, D.C.,	28
OPD, War Department, Washington, D.C.,	29
OPD, Navy Department, Washington, D.C.,	30
A.F.H.Q.,	31
Supreme Commander, SHAEF,	32
Deputy Supreme Commander,	33
Chief of Staff,	34
Deputy Chief of Staff,	35
Chief Administrative Officer,	36
Adjutant General,	37
Secretary General Staff,	38
AC of S, G-1,	39
AC of S, G-2,	40-41
AC of S, G-3,	42-47
AC of S, G-4,	48-50
AC of S, G-5,	51
Chief Engineer,	52
Chief Signal Officer,	53
Public Relations Division,	54
Headquarters Commandant,	55
Spares	56-100

TOP SECRET

APPENDIX 'A'
to SHAEF OP MEMO NO 23
dated 18 April, 1944

SAMPLE SKETCHES OF DISTINCTIVE MARKINGS



NOTE: National Markings are not to be painted over by the black and white stripes.

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