



ART AND THE AIRMAN

TEXT BY JAMES H. FARMER



The B-29's "Starduster" and "Hot To Go" are believed to have been assigned to the 28th B.S., 20th AF on Okinawa circa 1952-53. Photos by Thomas Barron via Thomas Hildreth. All other photos these pages from outstanding collection of Thomas Brewer.



Contributing collector/photographers Thomas H. Brewer and Thomas Hildreth offer our AAHS members their first comprehensive look at the seldom seen nose art of the Super Fortresses during the Korean War period, circa 1952. Here as earlier, during World War Two, the B-29 has offered up its collective flanks for the display of some of the most flamboyant aircraft art to come out the conflict.

There is however to be found here a marked distinction, or trend away from the majority of the B-29 pin-ups which populated that earlier war. Gone now is much of that romanticized, even modest "Hollywood dream girl" image made so popular during the 1940's by the Petty and Varga Girls of Esquire. In their place we find, with increasing regularity, a more "raunchy," heavy-handed, blatantly sexual image which leaves very little to the imagination. Where an article of clothing or a more discreetly posed leg or arm concealed the pubic area we now more often find a new boldness among the artists of the Korean period. Correspondingly a new frankness is also now often found in the accompanying double-entendres of the period.

REASONS BEHIND THE PIN-UP

Though many pages have been devoted here as elsewhere to the display and documentation of various forms and periods of aircraft art little investigation or explanation has been offered up for the function of, or indeed the reasons behind the various categories of such art. The reasons for the pin-up advanced here are based on a number of popular studies on the subject and a personal interview, taped during February of 1974, with Capt. Arthur P. Moser, USAF, a psychiatric social worker formerly assigned to George AFB in California. The conclusions offered below however are strictly those of the author.

It has been suggested that one of man's strongest and most persistent fantasies is that of dominance or conquest of the opposite sex. Male mythology supports the belief that: "The idea of being seized and borne off by a ruthless, aggressive male has a universal appeal to the female sex." We are talking about lustful male conquest; love is not involved, only the assertion of the male belief in his natural dominance.

Here the pin-up comes into the picture. You may note in all of the nose art on the accompanying two pages that there is little hint of the tender side of love. Indeed there is a total absence of the kind of love which suggests mutual respect and emotional bonds of any lasting nature. Such aircraft art, as in fact all art, is of course no more than an extension of self, self-expression or wish-fulfillment. In the case of the pin-up it offers the male viewer an image of what many like himself hope for but will in fact seldom find in real life. That is a woman they can dominate, indeed is waiting to be dominated, who "won't answer back, or demand reciprocity, compromise, or fair treatment."¹

In short the male's deepest and perhaps basest dreams, especially during periods of stress as found in combat, are of times and environments which offer security and clear mastery of the situation. The pin-up is one outlet for such wish-fulfillment.

But just what does the aircraft itself have to do with all of this? It is after all the plane which received the art work and the name. Being labelled as it has and having been given a very personal identity the aircraft now takes the place of the submissive dream girl. To face death or the threat of death regularly presents a kind of insecurity many find difficult, to say the least, to deal with emotionally. Going into combat then a crewman or crew must at least retain some 'faith' or emotional security in the impersonal machine, their aircraft, which they hope to control and use, uncompromisingly, to their own ends. By offering the aircraft the mythical identity of their "dream girl" they are thereby insuring, superstitiously at least, a partial control or male dominance over the most critical part of a crew's environment — the aircraft itself.

1. Gabor, Mark. *The Pin-Up, A Modest History*. New York: Universe Books: 1973, p. 9.

