

SQUADRON MARKINGS: A.A.F. HEAVY BOMBERS IN WORLD WAR II

by

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The peak strength of the U.S.A.A.F. has been given as 264 groups. This fact alone gives a good indication that anyone who embarks upon a study of unit markings of WW-II is faced, with a formidable task. Much information on the subject is probably hidden away in the archives of the Pentagon but it is doubtful if any records exist of the many and varied aircraft squadron markings.

The most popular form of squadron marking, particularly with the heavy bombers, was undoubtedly the use of a distinguishing color applied to some suitable part of the aircraft* Red, yellow and blue were the most popular colors. The fourth squadron of a group was usually white or green. The place of application varied from group to group; tail tips, rudders, prop spinners, cowlings or noses were the usual spots*

Another form of marking was the use of geometric symbols painted on vertical stabilizers* These were nearly always the square, circle, triangle and diamond. Other symbols used for squadron identification were + (plus) and - (minus) signs. Single letters or numerals were also common*

Probably the most interesting form of squadron marking was the two letter, or letter and numeral, code system carried by most 8th and 9th A.F. units in Europe and a few groups in the M.T.O. It is not generally known that these codes were complementary to those used by the R.A.F., and were in fact issued by the same authority in the U.K.

Briefly, the usual method of display on "heavies" was two letters for squadron identification painted together on the fuselage, to one side of the national insignia. A single letter for individual aircraft identification was painted on the opposite side of the national insignia. The letters appeared on both sides of the fuselage and the individual letter was also painted on both sides of the fin. However, the heavies of the Eighth (B-17 and B-24) had many variations in application. B-24's, with a few exceptions, carried only the squadron letters on the fuselage, always aft of the "star and bar". No general ruling can be given for the B-17's. Some groups carried all three letters grouped together, and in this case the first two letters from the left were the squadron code. 384th B.G. takes pride of place for variety; its units frequently splitting the squadron letters on either side of the "star and bar"!

To supplement the two letter codes, a combination of letter and numeral was introduced late in 1943.

During hostilities 8 groups never carried squadron letters although all but two were allocated with them. However, shortly after VE Day all groups began to paint their respective letters under the port wing for the same purpose as the current "Buzz Numbers".

In May 1944 the first group abandoned its code letters in favor of color markings and: by the following year this practice had become widespread.

Against the following list of groups is given a full and accurate list of squadron code letters as carried at some period during the war. The author would be pleased to hear from anyone who can identify any code with its respective squadron or has any interesting comments.

<u>Bomb Group</u>	<u>Squadron Code Letters</u>			
44 th	GJ	NB	QK	WQ
91st	DF	LG	LL	OR
92nd	JW	NV	PY	UX
93rd	AG	GO	RE	YM
95th	GL	QE	TS	XM
95th	BG	ET	OE	QW
96th	AW	BX	MZ	QJ
100th	EP	LD	LN	XR
303rd	BN	GN	PU	VK
305th	JJ	KY	WF	XK
306th	BO	GY	RD	WW
351st	DS	RQ	TU	YB
379th	F0	FR	LP	WA
381st	GD	MS	VE	VP
384th	BK	JD	SO	SU
389th	EE	HP	RR	YO
390th	BI	CC	DI	FC
392nd	CI	DC	EC	GC
398th	K8	N7	N8	30
401st	IN	IW	IY	SC
445th	IS	MK	RN	WV
446th	FL	HN	JU	RT
448th	CT	EI	IG	10
453rd	E3	E8	F8	H6
458th	J3	J5	z5	7V
466th	T9	U8	2V	61
467th	Q2	X7	4z	6A
486th	H8	2S	3R	5N
587th	R5	2C	2G	4F
489th	S4	T4	<u>4P</u>	8R
491st	T8	V2	3Q	6X

COVER ILLUSTRATION

The beautiful drawing on the cover of this issue has been donated by member Fred Freeman Jr., 45-80 157th Street, Flushing 55, N.Y. It has been done to represent the major fields of interest in the American Aviation Historical Society. The Jenny, on the left, depicts a full size airplane, and is meant to illustrate all full size aircraft in our field of interest. The magazine below it is indicative of all the magazine collectors. The fat jar of pencils, pens, brushes etc., is for the field of aviation art and illustrating. To the right the Kodak Monitor (size 616 for sure!), symbol of all aircraft photo collectors, is shown with a roll of film* The latter is most probably exposed but not yet developed if it represents the usual trend of our photographer members. The large Jane's, laying open, is symbolic of all book collectors. The three-view plans to the rear show the model builders interests, and the jet in flight is for those who collect clippings, magazine photos, drawings, paintings etc. Why not drop Fred a card and thank him for this job well done.