

WORLD WAR II BRITISH AIRCRAFT WITH AMERICAN INSIGNIA

by

Lt. Colonel Boardman C. Reed

When the United States Army 8th Air Force originally went to England with its first few B-17E bomber groups early in 1942, initially they had neither support nor utility aircraft. In a spirit of helpful cooperation, the British Royal Air Force temporarily provided a number of such aircraft, some for the remainder of the war, under a program which they jokingly called "Reverse Lease-Lend". A few were used in combat. Usually these English aeroplanes carried one of four types of our American star insignia (see AAHS Journal, Volume 1 Number 4, pages 123-124), but often with actual changes of insignia not accomplished until several months after it was official, a common occurrence under field conditions anywhere. R.A.F. shadow-shading camouflage or other characteristic coloring generally was retained.

There were exceptions, of course. There always seems to be exceptions, but isn't that what makes it interesting? Some continued to fly with their old R.A.F. insignia for a long time, examples in my log book being an "Oxford II", W-6646, of 4th Bomb Wing Headquarters in July 1943, and an "Anson XI", NL-137, temporarily at Hq Flight, 8th Air Force Hq, Bovingdon, Hertfordshire in January 1945. At the other extreme, late in 1943 I asked our maintenance paint shop to repaint our "Oxford II", DF-507, with standard B-17F camouflage and current star insignia, and I personally cut the stencil for the model designation (or name) and serial number which went on the left side beneath the cockpit. "C for Charlie" as we called her was assigned to the 388th Bombardment Group (Heavy) at Knettishall, Suffolk near Thetford, where I took many a RAF-type, A.T.C. cadet, or R.O.C. ground observer for a flight. This kite created some humorous recognition problems on a few RAF airdromes where we landed, but the Royal Observer Corps was never fooled.

The most colorful aircraft I ever saw in World War II was a Boulton Paul P.82 "Defiant III", DR-945, lettered JW-U, which retained its RAF "flash" on the vertical fin and "roundel" on its upper right wing, yet had the latest blue and white American star-and-bar insignia on each side of the fuselage, and on the upper left and lower right wings. Together with a rather bright tan and green shadow-shading, yellow undersurfaces, and a damn-great Merlin* out front, it certainly was handsome, and it is regrettable that no photograph is known to exist of this lovely old kite in these fascinating multiple markings. Perhaps one of our members or some British friend can provide one, or maybe an artist can do it justice. The power gun-turret had been replaced with tow-target equipment which may have been removed by this time. I flew this job in June 1944 right after "D Day" at the B-17 bomber base at Rougham, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk.

Conventional examples of American insignia with standard British coloring in which I had time include a DH-89B "Dominie I", X-7403, at Burtonwood in June 1943 when I first arrived in England, and two clipped-wing "Spitfire V" fighters, AR-372 named "The Sad Sack" and BL-680, "Blind Faith", at Oxford in March 1944. A photo of a "Spitfire VB" with a U.S. star appears on page 62 of Fahey's "US Army Aircraft" (1947). In "Life's Picture History of World War II" (1950) is a "Tiger Moth II" (top of page 250) and a cracked-up "Horsa I" glider (bottom of page 251), both with American insignia. Yank combat photo-recon pilots near Oxford also flew starred "Spit Elevens" painted the regular high altitude grey-blue, one example being PL-767.

All silver types were rare, the only ones I observed being a "Clipped Spit V", serial unknown, and several Mark Eleven camera jobs, these also belonging to the 14th Squadron, 7th Photo Reconnaissance Group, 8th A.F. at Mount Farm, Oxford. In March 1945 I soloed an all-silver "Spitfire XI", PA-892, which was trimmed with an olive-green rudder and a fairly wide red stripe along each side of the engine cowling beneath the exhausts.

Some of these British "Reverse Lease-Lend" types originally were Lend-Lease aircraft built in the United States, now war-weary and stripped of armament. My log book shows a DB-7B "Boston III-A" (Boeing-Seattle), AL-452; a Douglas DB-7B "Boston III", AL-672; an olive-drab Lockheed 414-13 "Hudson V", AM-579 (which its Yank crew insisted was a "CA-29" even though it had Twin Wasps, not Cyclones); and a North American "Harvard II", BD-137, all with U.S. insignia. Possibly there were other types, too.

An oddity in the above classification was a Vultee V-72 "Vengeance IV", FD-208, lettered LJ-I, which I flew at East Wretham, Norfolk in May 1944. It carried full RAF insignia and markings, and all AAF paper-work listed it by its RAF name and serial number. Yet an AAF nameplate in the cockpit clearly showed it also to be an A-35B-1-VN, serial AF 41-31397. It belonged to the 3rd Gunnery and Tow Target Flight (Special) of the 67th Fighter Group, 8th A.F. This example points up the fact that usually all of these "Reverse Lease-Lend" aircraft continued to carry their British name and RAF serial number throughout their tour of duty with the American Air Force, and were so listed on all official U.S. records.

The point of the following list, however, is to record only those British-built aircraft known to have carried American insignia during World War II. Canadian-built or similar types which had both AAF model designations and serials (such as the UC-64A, PT-24, PT-26, AT-20, F-8 or others) are not considered in this category. Passing mention should be made, however, of AC 42-94128, a lone DH-94 "Moth Minor". Readers who have knowledge of additional aircraft, human interest sidelights, or even post-war examples are urged to write the editor, providing both RAF serial numbers and photographs wherever possible.

Tiger Moth II	Proctor III	Hurricane II	Defiant III
Master III	Domonie I	Spitfire II	Beaufighter VI
Anson I	Lysander II	Spitfire V	Mosquito III
Oxford II	Horsa I	Spitfire XI	Mosquito XIV

* Note: "Damn-great Merlin" is no longer profanity but now a standard RAF idiom, a term of admiration and endearment by those who flew and loved this magnificent Rolls-Royce aero engine. Both Packard and Continental also built Merlins in the United States during World War II.

Post-script to Pete Bowers: How about working out a simple method to identify the dozen or so types of military insignia for all U.S. service aircraft, such as you did so successfully with German crosses in the June 1957 AAHS Journal (p 107)? The cumbersome "--- latest blue and white American star-and-bar insignia---" could be more easily and clearly expressed by something like "Army Type XI markings", for example. It has good possibilities and would be most helpful.

- - - -

Note photos on page 219. The rare Spitfire photo, with "code letters" EP-A actually shows the personal initials of Colonel E. P. Allen, 9th T.A.C.