

Insignia of the "Flying Circus"

The 380th Bomb Group (H) 1942 to 1945

by Tom Britton

HISTORY

The 380th Bomb Group consisting of the 528th, 529th, 530th and 531st Bomb Squadrons were activated 3 November 1942 and immediately began training for overseas duty with the Consolidated B-24 Liberator at Biggs Field, Texas. They were deployed to Australia in April/May 1943 and commenced combat operations from Fenton Field (Headquarters, 528th and 530th Squadrons) and Manbullo (529th and 531st Squadrons). Targets were located in the Netherland Indies, Bismarck Archipelago and New Guinea. The Group was attached to the Royal Australian Air Force during this period. The Group was awarded the Distinguished Unit Citation for raids on Balikpapan and Hollandia, Netherlands New Guinea.

The 380th BG was deployed to San Jose, Mindoro, Philippine Islands in February 1945 to support the ground forces on Luzon. They flew missions to Formosa, Indo-China and Borneo. In August 1945 they moved to Okinawa where reconnaissance and prisoner of war repatriation missions were flown. The Group returned to the Zone of Interior and in February 1946 was inactivated at MacDill Field, Florida.

Group Insignia

"The King of the Heavies" insignia was probably designed by either Sgt. Miller or Sgt. Ebbeson using suggestions from personnel while the group was in Australia in late 1943 or early 1944. The lion as "king" of the beasts is striking at the Empire of Japan. Prominently featured is the operating area of the 380th, the Southwestern Pacific. The insignia was made up as leather patches as well as being used as sign boards and club decorations. So far as is known, the insignia was never painted on group aircraft, or was officially adopted by the Insignia and Design Group, U.S. Army Air Force.

528th Bomb Squadron

The character "Herky" riding a bomb and carrying a 50-cal. machine gun was designed by unknown parties while the squadron was at Biggs Field. The design was officially approved on 5 May 1943 and was made up as both cloth embroidered and leather patches as well as being used on sign boards and club decorations. Beginning in 1944 the insignia was painted on squadron natural metal finish B-24 aircraft as an 18-inch-diameter disc beneath the pilot's window.

529th Bomb Squadron

The character "Little Beaver" holding a B-24 insignia was designed by Cpl. Phil Silverman while the squadron was at Biggs Field, and was approved by Lt. E.E. Smith, S-2 (Intelligence Officer). The insignia was used on leather patches, sign boards, club decorations, and painted on the squadron aircraft similar to that of the 528th squadron. This insignia was never officially adopted by the Insignia and Design Group, USAAF.

530th Bomb Squadron

The character "Bugs Bunny" riding a bomb is a copyrighted design by Warner Brothers and was probably rendered by the studio artists in response to a design suggestion by squadron personnel. The design was adopted by the squadron while at Biggs Field and was officially approved on 10 July 1943. The insignia was produced on both embroidered cloth



528th Bomb Squadron insignia painted above "Herky's Hangout," the Enlisted Men's Club at Fenton Field, Australia. (Clyde Osborne)



528th Bomb Squadron insignia painted below pilot's window of B-24. (Clyde Osborne)

and leather patches as well as used on sign boards and club decorations. The insignia was painted on squadron aircraft in a similar manner to the 528th squadron.

531st Bomb Squadron

The character "Donald Duck" holding an old-style bomb while standing on a cloud is a copyrighted Walt Disney design. Disney Studios produced many insignia designs at the request of units, almost always using the studio artist's own design. The insignia, although used by the squadron while at Biggs Field, was not officially adopted until 20 April 1944. The insignia was made up as leather patches and was used on sign boards, club decorations, and was painted on squadron aircraft in a manner similar to the 528th squadron.

REFERENCES

- Maurer, *Combat Squadrons of the Air Force, WWII*.
- Maurer, *Air Force Combat Units of WWII*.
- Mann, *Air Heraldry*.
- National Geographic Magazine*, June 1943.
- Anon., "The Flying Circus," The 380th Bomb Group (H), Comandy-Roth Co., 1946.

A very special thanks to S/Sgt. Clyde Osborne, USAAF (Ret.), who painted many of the actual insignia during his service as engineer-top turret gunner of the 528th Bomb Squadron B-24 "The Bread Line."



528th Bomb Squadron



529th Bomb Squadron



380th Bomb Group (H)



531st Bomb Squadron



530th Bomb Squadron

BOMBER COMMAND INSIGNIA— SPRING '80 JOURNAL—ADDITION

Tom Britton, Costa Mesa, CA

Subsequent to the completion of the XX Bomber Command insignia illustration, I received a previously unknown 40th Bomb Group patch. This insignia is illustrated in the 40th Bomb Group unit history, *A Pictorial Record* (San Angelo, 1946), and was furnished by the group photo officer, L.B. Eustis.

It is possible that this insignia was only used after the 58th Wing deployed to the Mariannas, though confirmation is lacking, as is photographic evidence that this insignia was painted on the group's aircraft.



40th Bomb Group