

THE MAIL SACK *

"Beech XA-38 Destroyer" - Larry Howeth

Construction on the XA-38 or Beech Model 28 was begun in 1943. The first flight of the two place all-metal attack bomber monoplane took place on May 7, 1944. Flight tests on the two flying prototypes indicated that the aircraft's performance and flight characteristics were excellent; however, because of the lack of suitable engines and the decision of the military that other types of armament were more desirable the XA-38 was never ordered into production. A third XA-38 airframe was built as a static test airplane and delivered to the Air Force along with the other two craft. This third prototype had a zinc-chromate finish and was shipped to Wright Field for tests.

Power for the XA-38 was provided by two Wright R-3350-43 engines which developed 2,300 horse power each. With these engines the aircraft obtained a maximum speed of 376 miles per hour. Maximum speed at sea level was 330 miles per hour. The aircraft had a range of 390 miles at 330 miles per hour at full throttle at sea level carrying a fuel load of 620 gallons. Landing speed with 45 degrees flap was 97 miles per hour. Service ceiling using both engines was 29,000 feet. The XA-38 could maintain an absolute ceiling of 17,000 feet using one engine. The aircraft's rate of climb at sea level was 2,600 feet per minute.

Named "Destroyer" officially, and nicknamed "Grizzly" by its pilots, the XA-38 was the first aircraft that the Beech Aircraft Company designed intentionally for military service. For fire power the XA-38 carried an automatic loading 75-mm cannon plus six five-inch machine guns, two in the nose firing forward and two each in remote controlled ventral and dorsal turrets. A variety of underwing loads such as bombs, depth charges, long range fuel tanks, and M-10 smoke tanks could be carried. Also the forward nose section could be removed and replaced with different armament arrangements. The "Destroyer" could operate from small spaces and would have been excellent for front line use. It could take off and land over a fifty foot obstacle in 2,500 ft. Dimensions of the XA-38 include a span of 67 feet 4 inches; length of 51 feet 9 inches; and a wing area of 625.9 square feet. Weight was 23,230 pounds empty and 31,250 pounds loaded.

* * * * *

"Whatssit?" - Robert F. Pauley

I was prompted to send the enclosed photograph after seeing the photo, on page 161 of the summer 1960 issue of the Journal, under the heading of "Whatssit?" Perhaps some of the readers can identify the airplane; it sure

* Photographs for "Mail Sack" articles appear on page 341.

has me stumped! The photo was taken in August, 1948, in Nebraska by James Dolin. Perhaps it can be identified by the license number (5506N), if it is a license number! Outstanding features are the three wings, with a fourth smaller wing by the nose wheel. The front upper wing appears to serve as elevator. Power is an 85 hp (?) pusher Continental. What is it?

* * * * *

"A Rare Bird BC-1A" - Robert T. O'Dell

On August 6th of this year a local boy (who's just getting started in this aircraft photography game) and I took a trip to Westchester County Airport in White Plains N.Y. to do some shooting. Since this was one of his first times out I was showing him the ropes as far as properly identifying various aircraft goes. We spotted a bright yellow "T-6" type sitting in the clear on a grass ramp area and walked up to it. This type is fairly common, so I didn't even plan to shoot it; but I did want to show my friend how we could positively identify this bird by climbing up on the wing and looking at the plates in the cockpit. After looking in and locating the plate I had the surprise of my life, this wasn't a "common T-6" type at all but a fairly rare BC-1A. The aircraft was registered N-58478, it was painted a bright yellow with red spinner and green anti-glare panel. Here are the serials I took from the ship's plate:

A.A.F. Serial 40-708A

c/n 55-1605

Delivery Date 2-23-40

The aircraft was also interesting in that it had a bulge under the fuselage with provisions to carry an external fuel tank. After returning home that evening I did a little research on the North American BC-1A. Only 92 aircraft were used under that designation. According to the C.A.A., only one was registered in the USA. I had learned my lesson, no more taking aircraft identities for granted. (Editor's Note: Pages 308-09 of the Winter 1959 (4:4) issue of the Journal have additional information on the BC/AT-6 aircraft.)

* * * * *

"Reverse Lend-Lease in Africa, 1942-43" - Lt. Jean Curry

These photographs were printed for propaganda purposes by the official Italian press services early in 1943. One plane was claimed to have been shot down in Tunisia, the other in Italy; but one knows certainly how inaccurate such propaganda claims can be. I managed to obtain these photos, among a lot of others, all showing victims of the Italian offensive spirit, of the invincible Fascist warriors, etc. . . . In the collection were shots of crashed A-20's, B-25's, Albacores, but the most intriguing are the Spitfire 5 and the Kittyhawk herein enclosed.

Both planes carry a mixture of U. S. and British markings as if both had evidently been flown by American flyers when destroyed. The Spitfire displays

the U. S. star on a blue circle, but has kept the squadron identification letters and British serial. Evident around the American star insignia is the yellow outline of the British roundel which had been overpainted. There is a small mystery here since the VF letters do not seem to have been used by a RAF squadron. The Kittyhawk is even more curious since this American built fighter seems to have been in RAF service before returning to an U. S. unit. The plane retained, from its British use, the fin tricolor stripes plus the U.S. star.

Three years ago I sent these two photos to Air Pictorial. They were published with this answer (June 1957):

These two photographs show the degree of co-operation achieved between the Americans and the British in the North African campaign where aircraft maintenance and supply facilities were combined to form a joint Air Service Command.

The Spitfire Vb EP901 was built by Vickers-Armstrong at Castle Bromwich and delivered straight to No. 38 (Air Storage) Maintenance Unit at Llandow. With many others of the EP batch it was shipped during September 1942 to Gibraltar and erected for the air forces participating in Operation Torch, the North African landings due the following 8th of November. Subsequently it would appear to have been allotted to one of the three squadrons of the U. S. 52nd Fighter Group equipped with Spitfires re-marked in U. S. insignia.

As the serial number is not visible on the Kittyhawk, its origin cannot be ascertained, but it was most likely delivered in full British markings as a planned lend-lease allocation. Under the integrated supply arrangements it evidently reached one of the U. S. squadrons using Warhawks, where the roundels were overpainted with the star insignia. Of interest is the retention of the British fin flash, a not uncommon occurrence, but technically an infringement of international convention which cites that military aircraft shall bear the insignia of one nationality only.

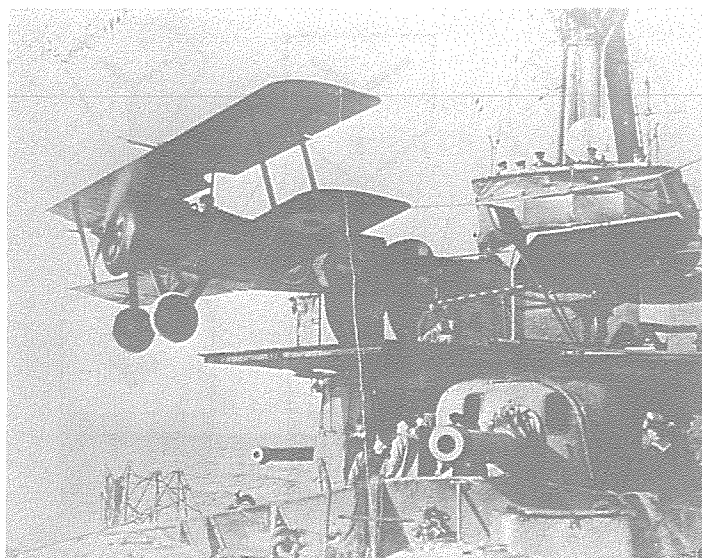
* * * * *

"Otto Lilienthal Memorial Services" - Heinz J. Nowarra

Sixty four years ago, on August 10, 1896, Otto Lilienthal died. His activities in the development of human flight are well known and not related. But probably only a few people know that the place where Lilienthal took his first "hop" is in West Berlin, only 500 meters from the frontier of the Eastern Zone. The enclosed two photos show the memorial site and a replica of the Lilienthal glider.

The original hill from which Lilienthal flew has been levelled artificially and is the site of the memorial. In the memorial is a globe atop a pedestal bearing the name "Otto Lilienthal". The glider replica was present during the ceremonies. It was built by some young aviation enthusiasts.

THE MAIL SACK PHOTO PAGE



Sopwith Shipboard Fighter

Robert Contey

XA-38

W.T. Larkins

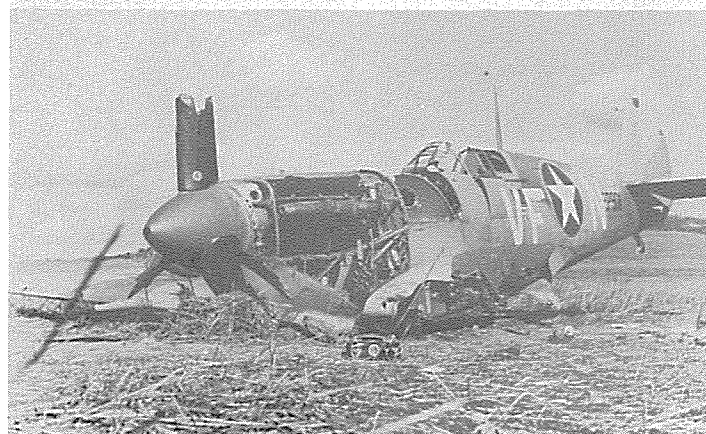


A "Whatsit?"

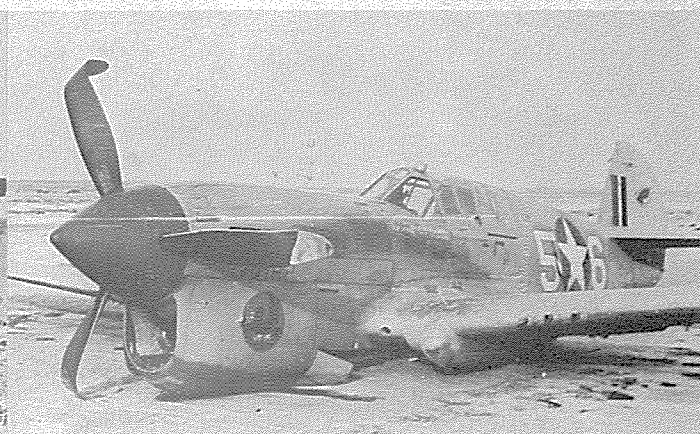
James Dolin

BC-1A

R.O'Dell



"Spitfire V"

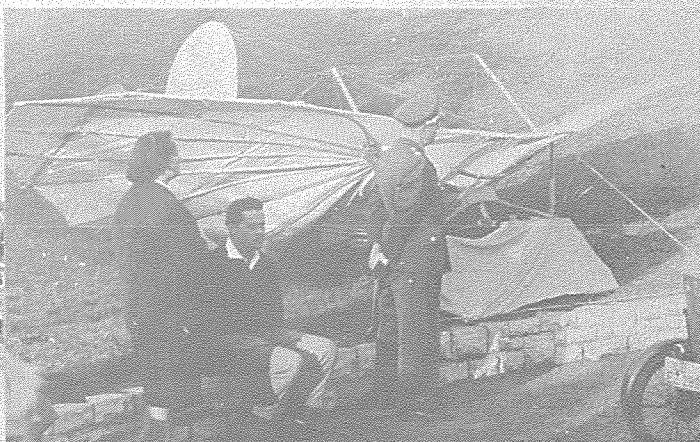


"Kittyhawk"



Lilienthal Memorial

H.Nowarra



Lilienthal Glider Replica

H.Nowarra