

CARRIER TASK FORCE MARKINGS

Submitted by THOMAS G. MILLER, Jr.

Distinguishing marks other than the national insignia were seldom, if ever, used on carrier aircraft in the first two years of the Pacific War. However, as the numbers of carriers operating together in Task Groups (2-5 carriers) and Task Forces (two or more Task Groups) increased, various ships introduced the practice of using private markings to identify their aircraft. The SHAMROCK BAY (CVE84), for instance, had a white shamrock with two crossed white clay pipes beneath it painted on the tails of its aircraft. This practice appears to have been officially sanctioned in a revision to Buair Specification SR-2e (Exterior Color, Insignia and Markings of Naval Aircraft) of 26 June, 1944, which revision was dated 7 October, 1944, stating:

"Uniformity of permanent markings is highly desirable for security reasons. However, when in the opinion of the tactical commander, security is not violated or when the need for additional identification aids exceeds the security risk, any or all painted surfaces of the airplane, including those occupied by specified markings excepting the National insignia, may be covered with temporary markings of any contrasting color with the exception of red or reddish-orange. Temporary Identification Paint Specification M521-a in white, yellow and medium green is recommended for this purpose."

It was only two weeks later that Specification SR-2e was further modified by Aviation Circular Letter No. 108-44, which stated:

"Provision has been made for use of additional identification markings when deemed necessary by tactical commanders with due consideration to security. Such markings are preferably applied with temporary identification paint."

With this generalized permission to use identification markings at the discretion of tactical commanders,

markings in use at the time and coming into use in the next few months were never standardized or specifically assigned. No record of these semi-official markings has ever been found by this writer.

Designs were first standardized on 27 January, 1945, when Commander Air Force, Pacific Fleet (COMAIRPAC) issued a set of 28 geometrical patterns for tail and wingtip markings and assigned 27 of them to the CV's and CVL's which constituted the Fast Carrier Task Force. These were painted on the planes of whatever Air Group happened to be assigned to that carrier at the time and were used by it as long as it was attached to the ship. The designs were painted in white against the blue background of the basic aircraft color. It will be noted from the accompanying drawings that LAKE CHAMPLAIN and BATAAN each included a third color in their markings; from the symbols used on the original COMAIRPAC chart, it appears that these were different colors. Because of the mention in SR-2e of yellow and medium green as recommended colors for temporary markings, it appears reasonable to assume that one ship used one color and the other the second in combination with the white color of the wingtip marking. All tail markings were apparently blue and white only. The COMAIRPAC design assigned to YORKTOWN had the blue and white areas of the tail reversed from those shown on the drawing. The design shown is the one actually used by YORKTOWN.

These markings were used until VJ-Day, but toward the end of the war a new system of identification by letters was under consideration.



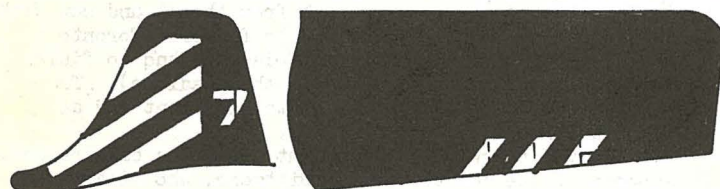
U.S.S. ESSEX (CV 9)



U.S.S. SARATOGA (CV 3)



U.S.S. BUNKER HILL (CV 17)



U.S.S. ENTERPRISE (CV 6)

The chart on which the accompanying drawings are based, as well as the foregoing information, was furnished by the Naval Aviation Historian, Mr. Adrian Van Wyen, who discovered the long-lost markings in an obscure corner of DCNO (Air) historical files. They are submitted for publication in the AAHS Journal with the permission of the Department of the Navy.



U.S.S. LEXINGTON (CV 16)



U.S.S. INTREPID (CV 11)



U.S.S. YORKTOWN (CV 10)



U.S.S. TICONDEROGA (CV 14)



U.S.S. HORNET (CV 12)



U.S.S. FRANKLIN (CV 13)



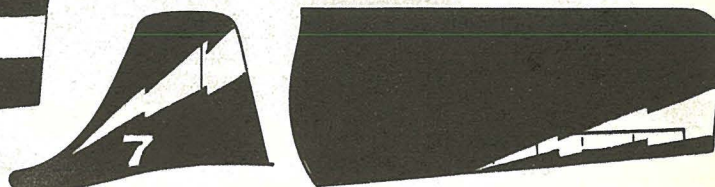
U.S.S. INDEPENDENCE (CVL 22)



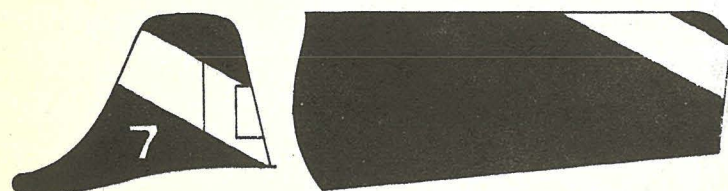
U.S.S. RANDOLPH (CV 15)



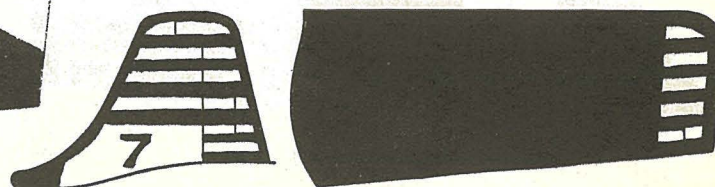
U.S.S. WASP (CV 18)



U.S.S. SHANGRI-LA (CV 38)



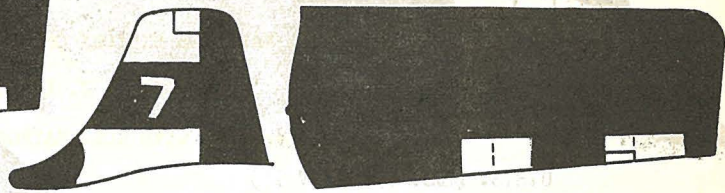
U.S.S. HANCOCK (CV 19)



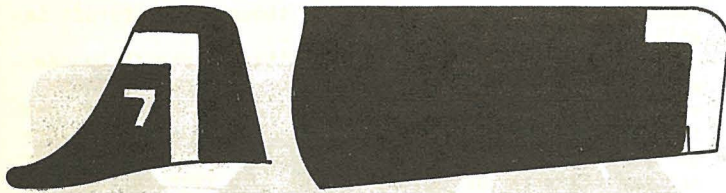
U.S.S. BONHOMME RICHARD (CV 31)



U.S.S. ANTIETAM (CV 36)



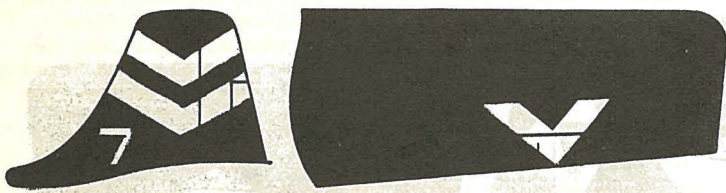
U.S.S. GOWPENS (CVL 25)



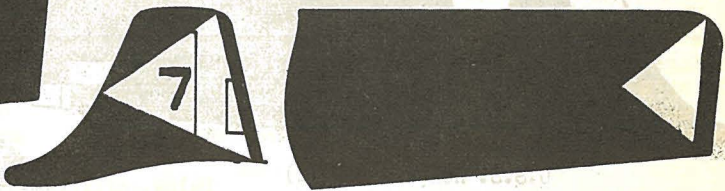
U.S.S. LAKE CHAMPLAIN (CV 39)



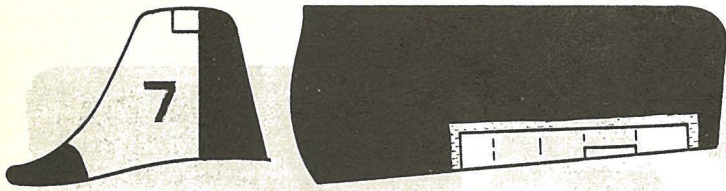
U.S.S. BENNINGTON (CV 20)



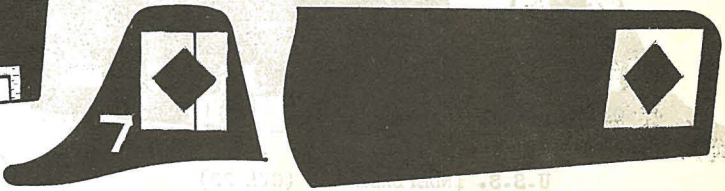
U.S.S. BOXER (CV 21)



U.S.S. MONTEREY (CVL 26)



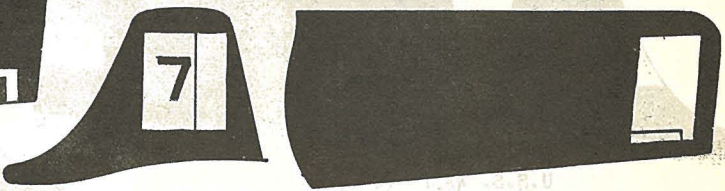
U.S.S. BATAAN (CVL 29)



U.S.S. LANGLEY (CVL 27)



U.S.S. BELLEAU WOOD (CVL 24)



U.S.S. SAN JACINTO (CVL 30)



U.S.S. CABOT (CVL 28)