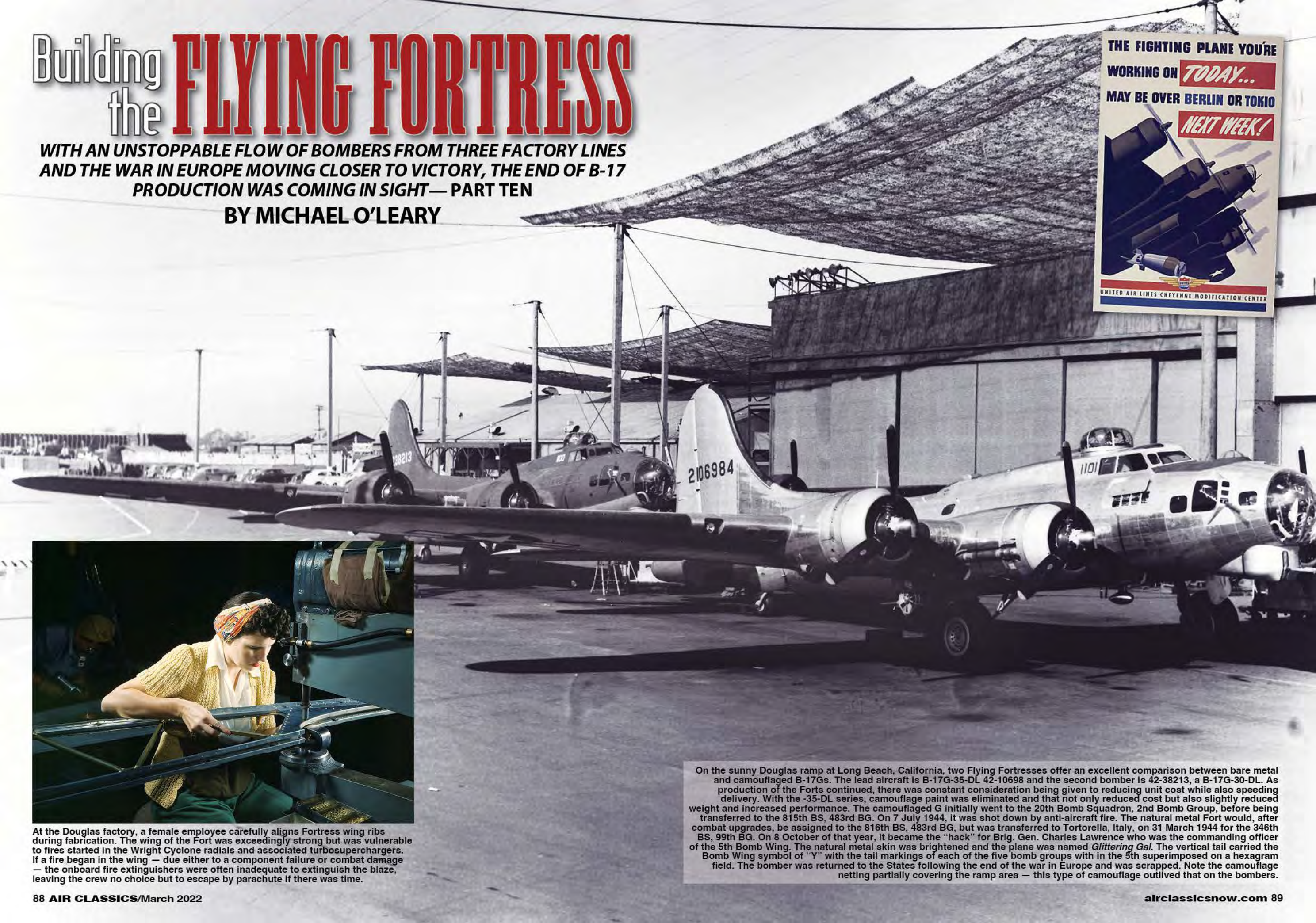


Building the **FLYING FORTRESS**

WITH AN UNSTOPPABLE FLOW OF BOMBERS FROM THREE FACTORY LINES AND THE WAR IN EUROPE MOVING CLOSER TO VICTORY, THE END OF B-17 PRODUCTION WAS COMING IN SIGHT — PART TEN

BY MICHAEL O'LEARY



At the Douglas factory, a female employee carefully aligns Fortress wing ribs during fabrication. The wing of the Fort was exceedingly strong but was vulnerable to fires started in the Wright Cyclone radials and associated turbosuperchargers. If a fire began in the wing — due either to a component failure or combat damage — the onboard fire extinguishers were often inadequate to extinguish the blaze, leaving the crew no choice but to escape by parachute if there was time.

On the sunny Douglas ramp at Long Beach, California, two Flying Fortresses offer an excellent comparison between bare metal and camouflaged B-17Gs. The lead aircraft is B-17G-35-DL 42-10698 and the second bomber is 42-38213, a B-17G-30-DL. As production of the Forts continued, there was constant consideration being given to reducing unit cost while also speeding delivery. With the -35-DL series, camouflage paint was eliminated and that not only reduced cost but also slightly reduced weight and increased performance. The camouflaged G initially went to the 20th Bomb Squadron, 2nd Bomb Group, before being transferred to the 815th BS, 483rd BG. On 7 July 1944, it was shot down by anti-aircraft fire. The natural metal Fort would, after combat upgrades, be assigned to the 816th BS, 483rd BG, but was transferred to Tortorella, Italy, on 31 March 1944 for the 346th BS, 99th BG. On 8 October of that year, it became the "hack" for Brig. Gen. Charles Lawrence who was the commanding officer of the 5th Bomb Wing. The natural metal skin was brightened and the plane was named *Glittering Gal*. The vertical tail carried the Bomb Wing symbol of "Y" with the tail markings of each of the five bomb groups with in the 5th superimposed on a hexagram field. The bomber was returned to the States following the end of the war in Europe and was scrapped. Note the camouflage netting partially covering the ramp area — this type of camouflage outlived that on the bombers.