

UNIQUE SURVIVOR

FEW SURVIVING WORLD WAR TWO COMBAT AIRCRAFT ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE MARTIN MARAUDER NAMED FLAK-BAIT. EXCERPTS FROM A NEW BOOK OUTLINE EACH OF THE BOMBER'S MISSIONS OVER ENEMY TERRITORY

BY ALAN C. CROUCHMAN

322nd BOMB GROUP MARAUDER COLOR PROFILES COURTESY OF OSPREY PUBLISHING

Martin B-26B-25-MA USAAF 41-31773 is a unique survivor from USAAF operations during the Second World War. The aircraft completed 207 missions over enemy territory (this number includes six decoy missions) and because of this record number, a decision was made to save the bomber for a proposed national air museum. The aircraft was named *Flak-Bait* by original pilot James J. Farrell and that name, along with appropriate art work, was painted on the nose section of the bomber. As time went by, more and more mission symbols were added. It is stated that *Flak-Bait* had over 1000 holes from German gunfire during the course of its combat duty and that it returned on a single engine on two missions. It became known as a "lucky" plane because none of the many crewmembers that flew aboard the bomber were killed and only one was injured.

Flak-Bait recorded some 725 combat flight hours in the course of these missions, many of which took place during famous military operations. Bomb missions were painted on the nose of the aircraft in red and those with white tail represented every fifth mission. One bomb is painted in black and that indicates a sole night mission. There are also six red duck symbols and those

indicate when the bomber was flown on decoy missions. A single *swastika* records the fact that the bomber's crew shot down a German fighter.

With the end of the war in Europe, *Flak-Bait* was simply parked with no form of preservation nor protective covering. The aircraft made its last flight on 18 March 1946 when it was flown by Maj. John Egan and Capt. Norm Schloesser to a storage depot at Oberpfaffenhofen in Bavaria. At that location, the Marauder was disassembled and packed into a series of crates for sea shipment back to the USA. It arrived in December 1946 and went through several storage areas. At the time, a major storage facility for future museum aircraft (both Allied and Axis) had been established at the former Douglas Aircraft C-54 factory in park Ridge, Illinois.

Sadly, numerous aircraft slated for preservation were scrapped and the inside storage was lost when the space was needed for the Korean War.

Somehow, *Flak-Bait* kept showing her toughness by surviving years of neglect and outside storage. The Marauder is now recognized as an incredible historical artifact from one of the most significant



Jacket insignia for the 322nd Bomb Group. periods in the history of mankind and it is being prepared by the National Air and Space Museum to preserve its originality for generations to come. The sad thing is that many of those individuals that built, serviced, and flew the Marauder are now gone. It would have been wonderful to have this bomber on display for all to see just ten years ago when many of these were still with us.

The following is an extract from Alan F. Crouchman's new book on *Flak-Bait*. Years of hard work and dedication have gone into creating this volume, which is a magnificent record of one aircraft's life during the Second World War. Please see the advertisement in this issue on how to order the book. Our extract centers on *Flak-Bait's* participation on D-Day and the days that followed. >>



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A very well-worn *Flak-Bait* parked at Kitzingen awaiting its final flight.