

GHOST OF ATKA ISLAND

THIS CONSOLIDATED B-24D LIBERATOR IS PRESERVED WHERE IT CRASH-LANDED IN 1942
BY NICHOLAS A. VERONICO



Even though the B-24D had the extra safety of four engines, the crews had to put up with the terrible weather. Note the pierced steel planking (PSP) that made the operation of heavy bombers possible on the oft-muddy airfields.



Although 15 Consolidated B-24 Liberators survive today, one aircraft has been virtually forgotten. This bomber currently rests on a remote island in the Aleutian chain, part of the state of Alaska. Although this Liberator's career against the Japanese was brief, its significance is extremely important to military aviation history.

During the opening days of World War II, the 21st Bomb Squadron flew anti-submarine patrols off the west coast of the United States. On 9 January 1942, the 21st Bomb Squadron was loaned to the 11th Air Force's 28th Composite Group, serving as part of the region's offensive strike capability. In March, a new B-24D-CO, USAAF 40-2367, the 19th B-24D built at Consolidated San

Diego, arrived to begin operations with the 28th Composite Group. This aircraft was equipped with ASV surface-search radar, identifiable by the antenna hanging under the port wing. Being a very early D model, the nose compartment had two distinguishing features — it lacked an astrodome and had a small observation window in the port side.

On 11 June 1942, aircraft of the 21st Bomb Squadron were deployed to Umnak, Alaska, to counter the Japanese landings on Kiska and Attu in the Aleutian Islands. Liberators, including 40-2367, soon began flying bombing missions against Dutch Harbor, Kiska, and Attu. The Japanese abandoned Dutch Harbor near the end of June, but were entrenched at Kiska until they evacuated in August 1943.

Shortly after the Japanese pulled out of the region, 40-2367 was assigned to weather reconnaissance duties.

On 9 December, B-24D 40-2367 departed for a weather reconnaissance mission over Kiska, Attu, and Agattu Islands with Capt. John Andrews as pilot in command. The *11th Air Force History, 1941-1945* describes the 9 December flight in detail:

"After the death of Col. Everett S. Davis [in 1942], Col. John V. Hart was named chief of staff of the 11th Air Force and remained in this capacity until the conclusion of the Attu-Kiska campaign. Colonel Hart's beginning as chief of staff was marred by one slight mishap, which, without exceptional skill on the part of one of the 11th Air Force's

bomber pilots might have ended in tragedy.

"On 9 December 1942, Col. Hart and Brig. Gen. William E. Lynd of Gen. Buckner's staff, took off from Adak in a B-24 piloted by Capt. John Andrews. The two officers wished to accompany the weather plane to make personal observations around Kiska and Attu. The plane reached Attu, circled over Holtz Bay, and then returned to Adak. Arriving back at Adak at 1600, the pilot found his base socked in by weather. He notified the tower that he planned to fly to the far end of Atka Island and attempt a crash landing.

"Atka, too, was closed in, and the plane crash-landed about halfway to the eastern end of Atka."



Jacket patch for the 11th Air Force.



Flight jacket patch for the 21st Bomb Squadron.