

COLORS OF WAR

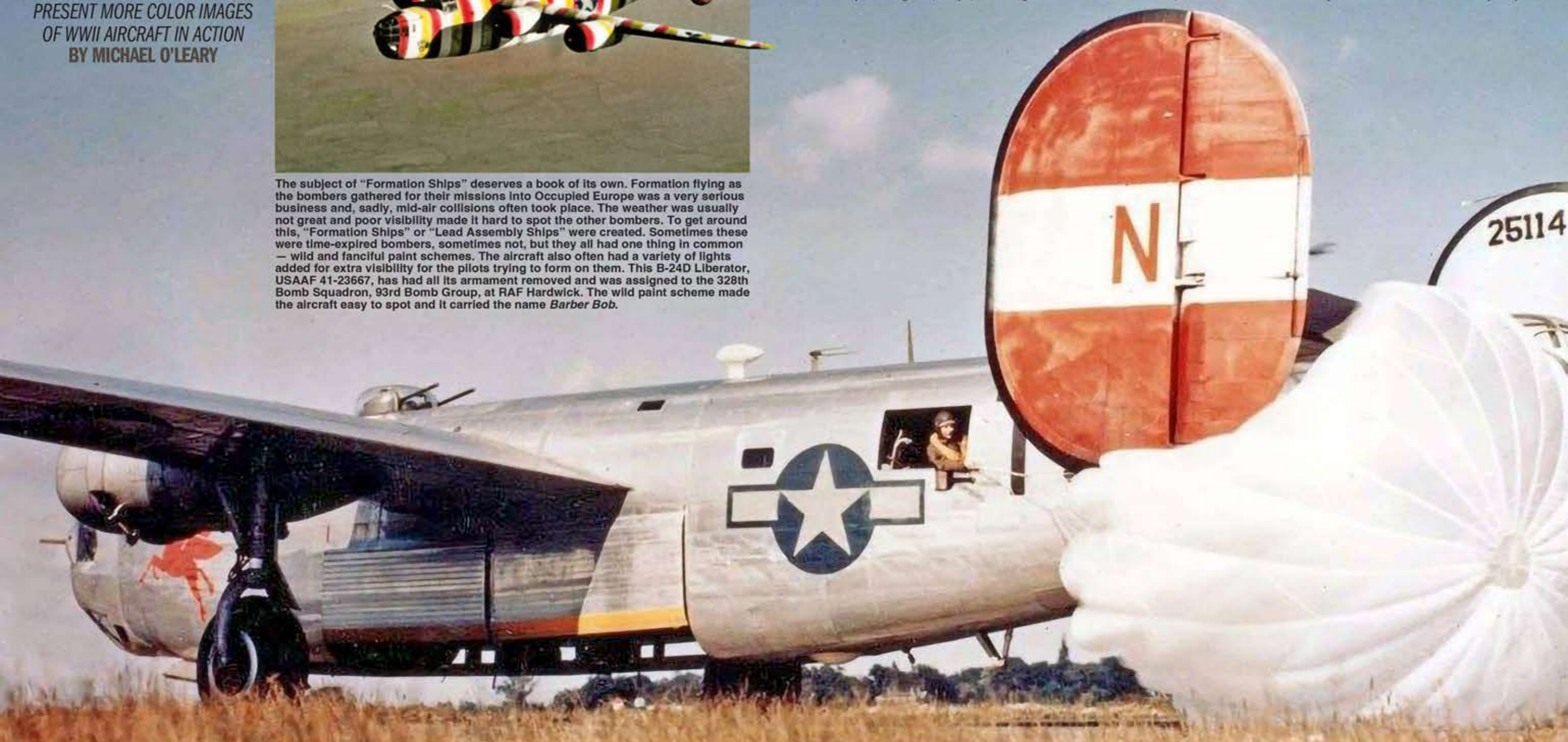
WE DELVE DEEPLY INTO THE CHALLENGE ARCHIVES TO PRESENT MORE COLOR IMAGES OF WWII AIRCRAFT IN ACTION BY MICHAEL O'LEARY



The subject of "Formation Ships" deserves a book of its own. Formation flying as the bombers gathered for their missions into Occupied Europe was a very serious business and, sadly, mid-air collisions often took place. The weather was usually not great and poor visibility made it hard to spot the other bombers. To get around this, "Formation Ships" or "Lead Assembly Ships" were created. Sometimes these were time-expired bombers, sometimes not, but they all had one thing in common — wild and fanciful paint schemes. The aircraft also often had a variety of lights added for extra visibility for the pilots trying to form on them. This B-24D Liberator, USAAF 41-23667, has had all its armament removed and was assigned to the 328th Bomb Squadron, 93rd Bomb Group, at RAF Hardwick. The wild paint scheme made the aircraft easy to spot and it carried the name *Barber Bob*.



B-24D USAAF 41-24109 *Silver Streak* was the assembly ship for the 466th Bombardment Group based at RAF Attlebridge. Previously named *Ready & Willing*, the bomber had flown on the Ploesti mission with the 93rd Bomb Group and returned safely to Benghazi, Libya, on 1 August 1943. Flown to Britain, it was declared War Weary and made into an assembly ship.



Pegasus, The Flying Red Horse makes it home. Consolidated B-24H-25-DT USAAF 42-51141/T9*N was assigned to the 784th Bomb Squadron, 466th Bomb Group, and on 22 February 1945 the aircraft and its fellow Liberators headed out to attack the Peine marshalling yards. It was a low-level mission at 9000-feet and the aircraft were subjected to German anti-aircraft fire. *Pegasus* was hit and all the hydraulic fluid leaked out when the reservoir was ripped open by a piece of shrapnel. The crew had to crank down the gear by hand and then execute a "hot" landing since they could not lower the flaps. To slow

the bomber, parachutes were deployed from the waist gun positions. The top brass did not particularly care for this type of landing but it was later restaged for USAAF and press photographers and this beautiful image of the combat warrior was captured. Items of interest include just how quickly the red paint on the verticals had faded in the English weather and the rather nonsensical "toning down" of the national insignia by mixing white with gray. Also of note is the yellow stripe on the bottom of the bomb bay doors to indicate the doors are open.