

COLORS OF WAR

WAR

VARIETY OF USAAF AND ALLIED AIRCRAFT IN VARYING MARKINGS AND FINISHES
BY MICHAEL O'LEARY



Famed photographer Charles Brown was given a supply of rare Kodachrome film and, with full military cooperation, he attempted to photograph each type of aircraft operating from Britain during World War Two. One Fortress in particular caught his eye and that was B-17G-40-VE USAAF 42-97976 *Blit o' Lace*. Pilot Lt. John Bauman wrote a letter to famed artist Milton Caniff asking to use his character "Miss Lace" as a subject for nose art. Caniff sent a positive reply and included a sketch of how he thought the nose art should look (painted on the left side). This was carefully applied by Cpl. Nick Fingelly. Arriving in the United Kingdom during June 1944, the bomber was assigned to the 709th Bomb Squadron, 447th Bomb Group, at Rattlesden. On 27 December 1944, the aircraft had a landing accident and this was repaired before having another such accident on 29 January 1945. Repaired again, the Fort would go on to complete 83 bombing missions before heading back to the States and staging through Bradley, Connecticut, on 5 July 1945 before heading to Kingman, Arizona, on 9 November 1945. At that location, the B-17G was photographed by William T. Larkins before being scrapped. The photo shows, once again, just how badly the bombers weathered by being in the British climate. An Olive Drab rudder has replaced the original aluminum-sprayed unit while the rear fuselage stripes have had their tops almost weathered off. The wings and nacelles show the usual collection of oil and grime, even though the ground crews tried to keep them clean. It also appears that the left outer wing panel was an Olive Drab replacement but most of the paint has been removed although the aileron is still that color.



This single photograph defines why the Axis was doomed. A majestic fleet of Flying Fortresses heads to a target deep within Germany — a force that the Germans could not stop with anti-aircraft fire nor *Luftwaffe* fighters. During the early days, the USAAF 8th Air Force suffered terrible losses to the bomber fleet as the unescorted B-17s and B-24s were torn apart by skilled German fighter pilots and an extremely accurate *flak* system. These Forts were from the 379th Bomb Group ("Triangle K") and B-17G-65-BO USAAF 43-37677 *Barbara Jane* was assigned to the 524th Bomb Squadron. The Fort arrived in the UK during June 1944 and was originally assigned to the 351st Bomb Group at RAF Polebrook before being transferred just a day later to the 379th BG at Kimbolton. *Barbara Jane* survived the war to be flown back to Bradley, Connecticut, with a load of airmen on 9 July 1945. The bomber was eventually transferred to Kingman, Arizona, on 13 December 1945 and within two years she had been converted to aluminum ingots. The photo is interesting because it shows a wide spectrum of weathering to the Forts that had to spend their lives outside in the harsh British climate. Also note that several earlier Olive Drab/Neutral Gray B-17Gs are in the formation.

Alice Blue Gown was the name applied to B-17G-85-BO USAAF 43-38400 of the 850th Bomb Squadron, 490th Bomb Group, based at Eye, England. The Fort had recorded 67 bombing missions and what is interesting in this photo is the fact that the two .50-caliber machine guns in the nose turret have been removed and the turret has been turned all the way to the left so that the gun openings will not face directly into the slipstream. This was usually done to the bombers being flown back to the States at the end of the war because this added a couple miles per hour to the cruising speed. *Alice Blue Gown* arrived in the UK in mid-August 1944 and returned to the USA on 16 July 1945, landing at Bradley Field, Connecticut. It was flown to Kingman and cut up for scrap. The photograph was taken by Capt. Arnold Delmonico who was the photographic officer of the 490th BG.

