

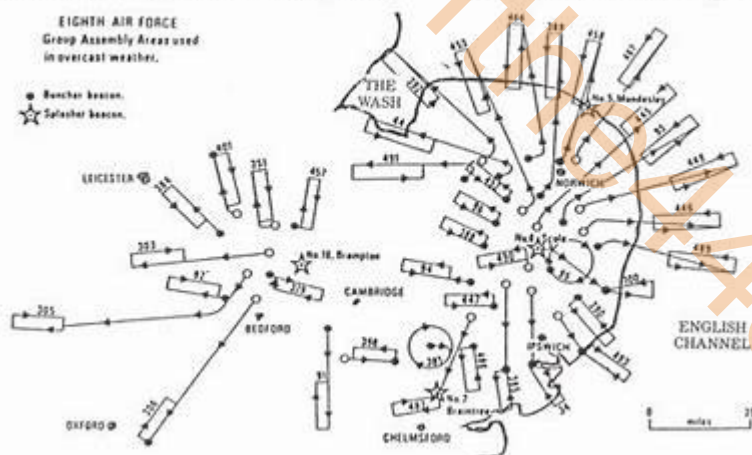
8th Bomber Command & the 448th Bomb Group.

A brief overview of how the many Bomb Groups assembled after take off and the story of the 448th assembly aircraft.

This narrative is intended to give a brief overview of how the aircraft took off from the airfield and assembled before heading towards the target. There is not enough space to go in-depth to any great extent. Should you like to read to a greater depth, then James Hoseason's book "Thousand Day Battle" is very informative and full of technical details. I have used it as the main source to support the beginning of this article.

With so many airfields in such a close proximity to each other, massing of the hundreds of aircraft for battle required a high degree of coordination. At the time the crews were thundering down the runways of their home airfields they had already endured several hours of briefings and prep work. The last thing they were needing were any more stresses. It was said at the time that the take off and forming up was the most dangerous part of the mission. Accidents were unfortunately common; with the crews' attention preoccupied on what was happening in the aircraft after take off, very often little attention was given to spatial awareness. This lapse of attention was sometimes the difference between hitting another aircraft or missing it.

A Gathering Of Eagles — 8th Air Force Style



This issue was of major concern for 8th Bomber Command, so they invested a huge amount of effort into making sure its aircraft took off and assembled as safely as possible. To start with, the aircraft would take off at 30 second intervals. This allowed for the turbulence to subside somewhat, and if there were any issues, the following aircraft could abort. For a 36 ship Group to launch, their time was about 18 minutes. Once

airborne, the aircraft would follow a strict series of routes and procedures to get them to their assembly point. The image opposite shows the assigned routes and assembly areas for each Bomb or Fighter Group. This graphically illustrates the enormous task that was faced in ensuring the aircraft were deconflicted. By developing these procedures 8th Bomber Command were able to improve the time it took for the entire bomber force to assemble before it headed east. It was therefore possible to get the force assembled in about an hour rather than the three usually achieved. This drop in time enabled tighter bomber and fighter formations when over enemy territory, and less fuel wasted.

Once the aircraft was airborne the procedure was to climb up and out away from the airfield. This was a carefully choreographed manoeuvre designed to make sure the aircraft maintained height and distance from each other. Depending on the weather, they would either climb straight out and towards the assembly area or climb up and circle the airfield in a precise spiral before heading to the assembly area. Aids on the ground were provided in the form of radio beacons for the aircraft to home in on. It was these beacons that allowed the aircraft to head to the assigned assembly area in

any weather. One of these locator beacons was codenamed "Buncher". Once in the vicinity of an assigned Buncher beacon the aircraft would fly a precise racetrack pattern until all the aircraft had formed up. For the 448th their assigned assembly area was just north of Great Yarmouth in the vicinity of Hemsby. This is where Buncher 24 was located. The image to the right shows Buncher 24. It was an unassuming tent arrangement inside which was a medium frequency set of radios. The beacons worked with a radio compass in the aircraft that had been tuned to it. They pointed to the beacon which thus showed the aircraft's relative position.



In addition to developing the techniques for take off and assembling, as described above, 8th Bomber Command developed a method of using a single aircraft to act as the airborne collection point. Each Bomb Group was required to pick one of its older aircraft, strip it of all armour, guns and turrets and paint it into a very bright or gaudy colour scheme. Just what colours the aircraft were painted was left to each individual bomb group. The two colour images illustrate a couple of eye catching schemes these aircraft were painted in. We have included both B17 and B24 to show that both aircraft were used, as attention over the years has tended to be spotlighted on the B24. The striped B24 was from the 93rd BG, 41-23667, "Barbers Bob" from Hardwick, Norfolk. The B17 is from the 379th BG, 41-9100, "Birmingham Blitzkrieg", Kimbolton, Northamptonshire. A series of lights were fitted in the tail and in some cases on the sides. In practical use these special aircraft would be the first to take off and head to the assigned assembly area. Here they would fly a predefined racetrack pattern whilst using the lights and coloured flares to make them as conspicuous as possible, quite an alien thing to do in wartime. Initially the Assembly Aircraft were only permitted to fly in the area of the airfield. Following a change in the rules the Assembly Aircraft were allowed to fly to a distance of 25 miles from base without needing authorisation. This allowed the aircraft to fly to the assigned assembly area and with that they were more able to perform their jobs better. Once the Group was assembled the Assembly Aircraft would then turn back to base. Their special role would earn them the grim nickname of 'Judas Goats', after the animal which would lead others to slaughter. In total Seething operated three B24 assembly ships. They are listed separately with as much information currently known.



B24D-5 CO 41-23809. Originally named Hellsadroppin 2 then became known as Painted Virgin, Checkerboard and You Cawn't Miss It.



This D model aircraft was built at the Consolidated factory at San Diego, California as one of the last of 31 machines that comprised production block 5. As far as we can tell this aircraft was an original 93rd Bomb Group aircraft, flying over to the United Kingdom in early September 1942. The 93rd's first home was Station 102, RAF Alconbury from September to December

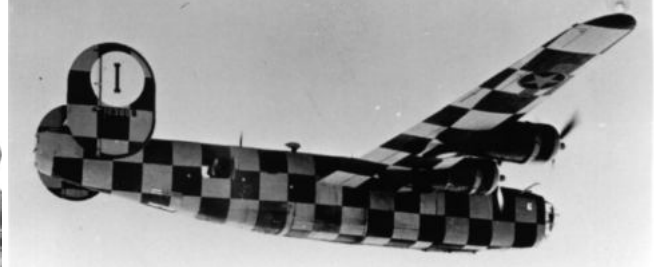
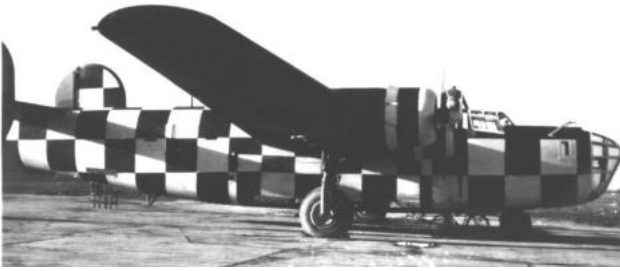
1942 whereupon it moved to its second and last home at Station 104, Hardwick, Norfolk, following a reorganisation of Bomb Groups by 8th Bomber Command.



Of note this Bomb Group was responsible for being the owner of the first aircraft in the 8th Air Force to complete 25 missions. B24 41-23728, named Hot Stuff, completed its 25 missions in February 1943, over 3 months before the more famous B17 Memphis Belle. Tragedy struck, however, when on its way home it crashed in Iceland. Only the Tail Gunner, George Eisel, survived. The colour image opposite shows this aircraft's nose art as it appeared in a film taken at the time.



Aircraft 41-23809, named Hellsadroppin 2, was one of the aircraft sent by the 93rd to North Africa as part of Operation Tidal Wave in June / July 1943 to support the invasion of Sicily with the famous low level raid on the oil fields in Ploesti, Romania. The records indicate that this aircraft had to abort because it lost an engine after leaving the Libyan coast. The colour images above show this aircraft in Libya undergoing maintenance outdoors. Moving on and this veteran of at least 38 missions was now a very war wary aircraft. As such it was chosen, like many other older D model aircraft, to become a 'Judas goat', or Assembly Aircraft.



It is listed as being at Seething 8th January 1944. Shortly after it arrived it was stripped of all armour and guns and repainted into a very distinctive and conspicuous livery of yellow and black checkerboard, as can be seen in the supplied images. As a nod to its former service the mission tally was kept. After take off it would head to the assigned assembly area north of Great Yarmouth and when here it would fly a race track pattern until all the 448th aircraft had arrived. To make the aircraft even more visible they would fire off flares or use very bright lights attached to the fuselage. The aerial image shows to good effect the rear turret modification where it was removed and faired over with formation lamps inserted. After collecting the Bomb Group it would then head home, its job done. The aircraft became out of hours and was salvaged 6th January 1945 at 3 SAD at Watton, Norfolk. For some reason whilst at Seething it was known by three different names, neither of which was painted on the fuselage. However the name “You Cawn’t Miss it” is rumoured to have become about as the personnel based at Seething frequently had difficulty in finding their way around the rural area, and the joke was that any directions given by locals usually ended with the words “You cawn’t miss it” delivered in the rich Norfolk brogue. Certainly with the distinctive paintwork the airmen would certainly not miss it.

Sources used for this article: James Hoseason; Thousand Day Battle: Jeffrey Brett; the 448th Bomb Group: 93rd Bomb Group website; various other websites were used but not noted.

B24D-20 CF 42-63981. Originally named Carol 'n Chick, before becoming known after conversion as The Striped Ape or just The Ape.



Built at the Consolodated Fort Worth (CF) factory as one of 75 block 20 aircraft, it was assigned to the 448th Bomb Group as one of their very early aircraft. Without up to date information one can only presume that this older D model was assigned to make up the total numbers of aircraft going over seas. It is even more unusual as at this time the 448th had already picked up the newer H model with its Emerson nose turret and numerous other changes derived from experience. Whatever the reason '981 was collected from Herrington Field,

Kansas, by Lt Stanley H Johnson, and flown to the UK via the South Atlantic route to England. It is known to be at Seething in communications to 2nd Bomb Division dated 29th December 1943 which stated aircraft numbers and nose art. The nose art on this aircraft, Carol N' Chick, is said to have been the combination of the Pilot, Lt S. Johnson's, girlfriends name and the Bombardiers, Lt Purcell, wife's name. The image above shows the nose art of the aircraft. As can be seen this aircraft has already had in-theatre modifications done of the extra armour on the side of the cockpit. Of note is what looks like extra armour in front of the cockpit.

On arrival at Seething, which is known to have been at the start of December 1943, it was immediately transferred to the 93rd BG, 329th Bomb Squadron where it flew 7 missions from Hardwick, Norfolk, presumably as a temporary numerical replacement aircraft for those sent over to Libya for Operation Tidal Wave. This aircraft was not sent over seas for the Ploesti mission. The aircraft was back at Seething by the end of December where it was assigned to the 712th Bomb Squadron. Its 23rd and last recorded mission was 29th April 1944 which in the 448th Group Log was to Berlin. Thereafter it was stripped of all its armament, modified with its tail turret being faired over and received a very distinctive paint job of stripes over its camouflage. It was in this guise it was renamed "The Striped Ape" and served as the Groups second formation aircraft from June or July 1944 until it was declared war weary and salvaged at Seething in February 1945, not long after the first formation aircraft was salvaged. The image on the right is the best image available showing the aircraft in its assembly colours, thanks to B24bestweb for that.



References for this article are Tom Brittain, Jeffrey Brett and B24Bestweb

B24H-15 CF 41-29489. Originally named 2nd Avenue “EL” and then known as The Ape.

Built at the Consolidated Fort Worth factory along with 270 others, this olive drab aircraft was assigned to the 486th BG and flown over as their original compliment to Sudbury, Suffolk. The 486th was originally equipped with the B24, an example being

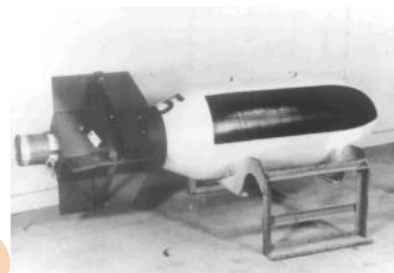


shown right, between May and August 1944 when it was reequipped with the B17. Its relinquished Liberators were redistributed within the 2nd Air Division. Shortly after 41-29489 arrived at Sudbury with the 486th, it was transferred to the 458th Bomb Group at Horsham St Faith, Norwich, where it was assigned to the 753rd Bomb Squadron, becoming known as aircraft I. The last mission it flew there was 31st May 1944. After this date it was reassigned to the 492nd Bomb Group at North Pickenham, Norfolk. It flew its first mission on 6th June 1944 attacking coastal targets. Records show that it flew 6 missions with the both the 753rd Bomb Squadron as aircraft K and also 752nd Bomb Squadron as aircraft T. Its last mission here was the 15th June 1944. Of note the 458th BG was disbanded August 1944 due to high casualty rates, its men and machines being transferred.



The reason for the transfer of this aircraft from the 458th at Horsham St Faiths to the 492nd at North Pickenham was due to Project Azon. This project saw the H models transferred out from the 458th and replaced with newer J models from other bomb groups. Project Azon, which stands for **AZimuth ONLY**, was essentially a forerunner of the smart bomb. It consisted of a set of radio controlled tail fins and elevators attached to

the body of a 1000 pound bomb and an aircraft that was fitted with the radio gear that controlled the bomb in flight. The images show the tail assembly and it fitted in place on the bomb. There is a very good wrote up of the project on the 458th Bomb Groups website on this subject.



After 15th June it was transferred to the 448th Bomb Group. On arrival it was assigned to the 714th Bomb Squadron and it was here that it was given the name 2nd Avenue “EL”, after the elevated subway railroad in New York. Records indicate the naming was done by the crew chief Stephen H Burzenski, who was from New York. He enlisted 17th March 1942 at the age of 25 to serve for the duration. Records indicate the aircraft was reassigned to formation aircraft duty after 12th September 1944.

Preparation for this new duty was quite extensive. By this stage in the war the process of converting the bombers into assembly ships was getting quite processed. All of the turrets were removed and faired over with kits supplied from a modification centre, the top turret being replaced with an astrodome. The Olive Drab paint was removed, as seen in photographs, and replaced with distinctive, black and white stripes. One image shows the aircraft not long after conversion, as can be seen by the bright aluminium and the waist gunner positions still having their original window covers in place. Later images show the aircraft further modified with the waist position covers being replaced with large perspex windows. The paint has also been enhanced with the addition of what is described as maroon stripes. Its war duty complete, it was salvaged by 3 SAD at Watton, Norfolk, between the 26th and 31st May 1945.