B-26 Dates with Destiny

MARTIN B-26 BOMBER

Dates with Destiny



"A Job Well Done"

FIRST FLIGHT - NOVEMBER 25, 1940

RABAUL, NEW BRITAIN
APRIL 6, 1942

BATTLE OF MIDWAY
JUNE 4, 1942

SECRET LG 224, CAIRO
AUG. 10, 1942

LAST B-26 SWPA MISSION
JAN. 8, 1944

OPERATION "OVERLORD" D-DAY
JUNE 6, 1944

OPERATION "DRAGOON"
AUG. 15, 1944

FINAL BOMBING MISSION - MAY 3, 1945

MARAUDER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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November 25, 1940 – First flight – Last mission – Glenn L. Martin's Model 179, designed by a team led by Peyton M. Magruder, was flown by chief Test Pilot, Walter K. "Ken" Ebel. The model breezed through Air Corps acceptance procedures and was designated the B-26. The British dubbed it the "Marauder" – the name stuck. Five years later on May 3rd, 1945 specially equipped B-26s of the Pathfinder Group led formations of Douglas A-26s on the last bombing mission of World War II; target was an enemy ammunition plant near Stod, Czechoslovakia, it was destroyed. Victory in Europe, VE-Day, was proclaimed May 8, 1945.

April 6, 1942 – Rabaul, New Britain – First B-26 attack on Japanese controlled port and airbase in the Southwest Pacific – The 22nd Bomb Group, flying a shuttle mission from Townsville, Australia with a refueling stop at Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, began a campaign to disrupt Japanese air attacks against shipping lanes to Australia. Moving 750 miles closer to Australia, the Japanese started constructing an airfield on *Guadalcanal*; construction progress was watched closely by Allied *"Coast-watchers,"* and by Admiral Chester Nimitz war planners. The airfield was completed, August 6, 1942. The next day Nimitz planners released the fury of amphibious forces. Thirteen days after Marines landed, August 20th, the airstrip was secure, 31 Wildcats and SBD dive bombers began operations from newly named *Henderson Field.*

Operations in the Southwest Pacific intensified; the 22nd BG B-26 Squadrons in Australia were depleted with no hope of replacements, they continued in combat. On Jan. 11, 1943, the 22nd Bomb Group's remaining 16 Marauders were withdrawn from combat; they were exhausted. The battle-scarred airplanes were assigned to the 19th Bomb Squadron; other squadrons were transitioning into newly arrived B-25, Mitchells. All B-26s were sent to the Townsville Air Depot for reconditioning to be stripped of paint; they returned to battle polished and proud, *"The Great Silver Fleet."* Thence-forth combined bombing formations, Marauders and Mitchells included: 9 or more B-26s and two dozen or more B-25s. Between October, 1943 and January, 1944, the *"Silver Fleet Era",* only one B-26 was lost to enemy action.

On January 8, 1944, the venerable Marauders flew their last recorded mission, a seven-plane attack on enemy personnel in a small village on the north coast of New Guinea. The results were reported to be excellent. Three days later, after 22 months in the SWPA war zone Martin Marauders were declared "War Weary" reluctant crews flew them to Brisbane for final break-up. Sadly, no aviation historians were present.

June 4, 1942 – Battle of Midway – 408th Bomb Squadron airplane, *Susie-Q,* was shipped to Hawaii and reassembled, pilot 1/Lt. James P. Muri had the plane completely waxed to improve its

speed. The last four B-26s were waiting to make the trip to Australia. Admiral Nimitz Naval Intelligence discovered a major Japanese attack was planned to hit Midway Island. Muri's

Marauder and three others were commandeered and equipped to launch torpedoes. After several training flights the *torpedo-toting-airplanes* rushed 1500 miles to Midway. Just in time. Standing on alert, Marauder crews were waiting in the cockpit when a briefing officer rushed up and shouted, *"Fly out on a heading of 295 degrees about 190 miles and sink ships!"* Japanese Admiral Chauichi Nagumo's *"Zero"* fighters met the Marauders head-on. Diving to wave-top level two Marauders were shot down, a third flown by Capt. James Collins launched his torpedo at 800 yards and escaped into the clouds. Pressing on, 1/Lt. Muri launched his "*tin-fish"* 450 yards out, closing fast, enemy carrier *Akagi* loomed dead ahead; to avoid a collision Muri lifted *Susie-Q* over the carrier's bow and flew bow-to-stern down the full length of *Akagi's* flight deck. No torpedo hits were made. Enemy "Zeros" chasing Marauders at wave-top level were trapped low unable to mount a high altitude protective Combat Air Patrol to challenge high-flying Navy dive bombers. SBD (V-6) from *Enterprise* was first on the scene unopposed: with planes from *Yorktown* and *Hornet* they destroyed Japan's, *Kido Butai – Mobile Force –* the vaunted *First Air Fleet –* it never recovered. The Battle of Midway changed the course of the war. Muri and Collins limped back to Midway their heavily battle-damaged Marauders were beyond repair and were unceremoniously pushed into the lagoon.

August 10, 1942 – Secret Landing Ground near Cairo – The first B-26, sporting RAF roundels, was delivered by air to RAF Middle East Command – *"Desert Air Force"* – Early use by Number 14 Squadron was for long-range reconnaissance, mine-laying and shipping interdiction. On two occasions they successfully torpedoed ships. During the same period the first B-26 was delivered to the UK, September 3, 1942. It was the first new type aircraft to arrive at Prestwick, Scotland and it aroused much curiosity. The impressive-looking machine, beautifully streamlined, made the average British bomber look ancient. Its sinister reputation did nothing to diminish its attraction. The Lend Lease Act channeled delivery of Marauders to North Africa, to the South African Air Force and the Free French Air Force.

November 8, 1942 – "Operation Torch" – Allied landings on North African at Oran, Algiers and Casablanca – Over two dozen B-26s poised to fly from the UK, were awaiting liberation of North African airfields. The 319th Bomb Group was the first to fly November11th, on the perilous route past Nazi occupied France and not-so-friendly Spain and Portugal. Six were reported missing, 15 landed safely at Saint-Leu, 45 Km. (29 miles) Northeast of Oran. A week later, November 18th, they moved 218 miles east to Algiers', Tafaraoui Airport an improved prewar airdrome. They were the vanguard of the 12th Air Force North African Mediterranean campaign. Two Bomb Groups, the 17th joined them at Tafaraoui, on December 30th and the 320th arrived January 28, 1943.

June 6, 1944 – *"Operation Overlord"* – D-Day – B-26 Marauders from eight, 9th Air Force, Bombardment Groups attacked pre-landing Normandy beaches and nearby gun emplacements. Carefully coordinated, no bombs were dropped after 06:25; troops were landing at 06:30. During

the days and weeks following: B-26s ranged all over northern France, targets included fuel storage tanks, ammo dumps, highway and RR bridges at Chartres, Ouzel; guns at Dunkirk and St. Lo. Bridges at: Mantes-Gassicourt, Nogent, Ossel and Maisons-Lafitte near Paris were hit. Bomber crews sighting the armada on the sea below were in awe, "so many ships bridging the channel you could almost walk across," – a never-to-be-forgotten moment in history.

August 15, 1944, *"Operation Dragoon"* – Invasion of Southern France – Prelude to landing on Cote d'Azur – 12th Air Force Marauder Groups, 17th, 319th and 320th hit RR bridges in the Rhone River valley. Follow-up raids to secure the ports of Marseilles and Toulon, bombs hit enemy heavy coastal artillery. At Toulon, the canon could hurl a 700lb shell 20 miles; they pounded Allied forces on the beaches and were protected by heavy, intense accurate anti-aircraft *"Flak"* fire. Six aircraft were shot down during three earlier raids. On August 28th, the guns were silenced and Toulon was liberated. Marauder squadrons of Groups 17 and 320 moved to Dijon, France on November 11, 1944. They supported the U.S. 7th Army's breakthrough along the Siegfried Line and its advance into Germany. The 319th BG rotated to the U.S. it switched to Douglas A-26 *"Invader"* and was sent to the Pacific war zone.

The Poster Photograph and Dates with Destiny – A lone *"Crew Chief"* guides *his* airplane safely *home,* somewhere in France. *"Ginger"* is a proud bird of the 322nd Bomb Group, 449th Squadron. Ground crews will service her and she'll fly another day. – *"Dates with Destiny"* – listed are significant milestone events during the five-year operational life of the B-26, each marks a moment of supreme airmanship. *"Ginger's"* moment came April 21, 1944, while approaching the V-1 flying bomb bunker site at Siracourt, France. *"Ginger"* was badly hit by accurate antiaircraft fire, pilot Flight Officer Thomas Riverbark, ordered *"Bail-out!"* all six crew members exited safely, were captured, interrogated and shipped to POW camp, Stalag Luft III in Poland.

The target, Siracourt, is notorious – A significant *"Buzz-Bomb"* site, a village 26 miles inland from Pas-de-Calais, a mere 130 miles, as the *"doodle-bug"* flies to London, is the most heavily attacked V-1 site, FZG76(V1), of the war. Defending antiaircraft fire, *"Flak"* is intense and accurate. However, unknown to Allied bomber force planners, the Siracourt bunker, for security reasons, is labeled *"Wasserwerk,* (waterworks). True identity as a vengeance weapon launch site was withheld from workers. Siracourt never went into operation but by clever deception the site appeared to be active. For 10 months in 1944, German Flak Regiment members fired away and jokingly called the site *"Bomber-Bait",* their score: 154 aircraft shot down, over 400 seriously damaged. Ironically, the 322nd Bomb Group, 449th Bomb Squadron was home to the famous 202 mission, B-26 called, *"Flak-Bait"* – who knows – she may have bombed Siracourt.

