Metal Storytellers: Reflections of War Culture in Silverplate B-29 Nose Art from the 509th Composite Group

Terri Wesemann
Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/gradreports

Part of the Folklore Commons, and the Other American Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Wesemann, Terri, "Metal Storytellers: Reflections of War Culture in Silverplate B-29 Nose Art from the 509th Composite Group" (2019). All Graduate Plan B and other Reports. 1426.
https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/gradreports/1426

This Creative Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Plan B and other Reports by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.
METAL STORYTELLERS:

REFLECTIONS OF
WAR CULTURE IN
SILVERPLATE B-29 NOSE ART FROM
THE 509TH COMPOSITE GROUP

By Terri Wesemann
Utah State University
2019
METAL STORYTELLERS: REFLECTIONS OF WAR CULTURE IN SILVERPLATE
B-29 NOSE ART FROM THE 509TH COMPOSITE GROUP—ORDINARY
MEN TASKED WITH AN EXTRAORDINARY MISSION THAT ENDED
WORLD WAR II

by

Terri D. Wesemann

A project submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Science

in

American Studies Specialization Folklore

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah
2019
509th Composite Group Nose Art
METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Methods:
- Internet
- Narratives
- Books
- Archives

Interviews
- Descendants connected to the 509th

Museums
- Hill Aerospace Museum
- EAA Aviation Museum
- Strategic Air Command & Aerospace Museum
- National WASP WWII Museum
- National Museum of the Pacific War
- Bradbury Science Museum

Experiences
- Historic Wendover Field
- Flight on B-29
- Manhattan Project National Historic Park
- Pratt, KS Army Airfield

Terri as Doc’s Bombardier, July 2018
Phase 3 Modifications:

**Improved power plant: the wright R-3350-41**
- Better cooling features
- Fuel injection
- Fuel flowmeter/manifold system

**Curtiss Electric propellers with reservable pitch capabilities**
- Improve braking power on landings

**Pneumatic bomb bay door activators**
- Enabled rapid opening and closing of the bomb bay doors

**No turrets and armor protection except for tail gunner**
- Reduced weight by 7,200 lbs.

**H-frame installation modification**
- Correct deficiencies
- Improved sway bracing components for atomic bombs

**Dual electric and mechanical bomb release systems were installed**

**Addition of electronics test officer position and related equipment in the forward pressurized compartment next to radio operator’s station**
- Needed to monitor the atomic bomb mounted in bomb bay during flight

**1945**
- Standard B-29 = $782,000
- Silverplate modifications = +$32,700
- Today’s total estimate = $11,505,465

**HOW DOES IT COMARE?**

**2019**
- F-35 = Goal: less than $85,000,00
MAKEUP OF 509TH COMPOSITE GROUP 1944-1945

393rd Bomb Squadron

390th Air Service Group

- 603rd Air Engineering Squadron
- 1027th Air Material Squadron
- 320th Troop Carrier Squadron (C-54s)
- 139th Military Police Squadron
- 1st Ordnance Squadron, Special, Aviation—after March 6, 1945
- 1st Technical Detachment, War Department
- Miscellaneous Group (scientists and technicians both military and civilian)—after June 1, 1945

"Every member of the squadron and group probably has a story to tell concerning the then top-secret A-bomb project."

-James Payne
Supply Officer, First Ordnance Squadron

*Authorized strength was 225 officers and 1,542 enlisted men
1. Nose art was a canvas for expressive culture.
HISTORY OF NOSE ART
WHY WERE THE 509TH B-29 TAILS DIFFERENT?

• Victor numbers 71, 72, 73, and 84

• Victor numbers 77, 85, 86, and 88

• Victor numbers 83, 94, 90, and 91

• Victor numbers 82, 89, 90, and 91

"Many evenings were spent down in the Enola Gay with Dick Nelson listening to Tokyo Rose on the radio. She would say that the fighter planes would be waiting for the Black Arrow Squadron planes. She played good old American music so it was worth while."

-Kenneth L. Eidnes 393rd Bomb Squadron, Computer Specialist
Crew B-8
Airplane Commander: Charles F. McKnight
Pilot: Jacob Y. Bontekoe
Navigator: Jack Widowsky
Bombardier: Franklin H. MacGregor
Flight Engineer: George H. Cohen
Radio Operator: Lloyd J. Reeder
Radar Operator: William F. Orren
Tail Gunner: Roderick E. Legg
Ass’t Eng/Scanner: Donald O. Cole

Ground Crew
Arnold E. Sleipnes
Carmine A. Genova
Chester J. Krajewski
Oscar J. Thigpen
Francis J. Schramke
Frank E. Sutton

Crew Missions:
• 5 Calibration and training missions
• 8 Practice bombing missions
• 6 Combat missions
STRAIGHT FLUSH

Crew C-11
Airplane Commander: Claude R. Eatherly
Pilot: Ira C. Weatherly
Navigator: Francis D. Thornhill
Bombardier: Frank K. Wey
Flight Engineer: Eugene S. Grennan
Radio Operator: Pasquale Baldasaro
Radar Operator: Albert G. Barsumian
Tail Gunner: Gillen T. Niceley
Ass’t Eng/Scanner: Jack Bivans

Ground Crew
Donald D. Beaudette
Howard A. Thompson
Yive J. H. Ping
William E. Smith
Chester S. Chudy
Harold E. Knisley
William J. Jacks

44-27301
Victor No. 85

Crew Missions:
• 6 Calibration and training missions
• 6 Practice bombing missions
• 6 Combat missions
NOSE ART READS LIKE POLITICAL CARTOONS

Coding in Nose Art:

- Symbolism
- Exaggeration
- Labeling
- Analogy
- Irony
GENDER IN 509TH NOSE ART

MALE

GENDER NEUTRAL?

FEMALE

MALE

FEMALE
2. Nose art framed the airmen’s wartime experiences and created an identity for the crews.
“To the other outfits on Tinian, we were a bunch of pampered dandies”
-Col. Tibbets
Crew C-15
Airplane Commander: Charles D. Albury
Pilot: Fred J. Olivi
Navigator: James F. Van Pelt
Bombardier: Kermit K. Beahan
Flight Engineer: John D. Kuharek
Radio Operator: Abe M. Spitzer
Radar Operator: Edward K. Buckley
Tail Gunner: Albert T. Dehart
Ass’t Eng/Scanner: Raymond G. Gallagher

Ground Crew
Chester V. Pawiak
Charles B. Rinard
Claude C. Gilliam
Allan L. Moore
James J. Reilly
Theron L. Blaisdell

Crew Missions:
• 4 Calibration and training missions
• 3 Practice bombing missions
• 2 Little Boy test drop missions (44-27299 Next Objective)
• 3 Fat man test drop missions (44-27297 Bockscar)
• 5 Combat missions
SOME PUNKINS

Crew B-7
Airplane Commander: James N. Price, Jr.
Pilot: Everist L. Bednorz
Navigator: William J. Collinson
Bombardier: Thomas F. Costa
Flight Engineer: James A. Adkins
Radio Operator: Robert H. Byrd
Radar Operator: Joe R. Brown
Tail Gunner: Clyde L. Bysom
Ass’t Eng/Scanner: Frederick E. Brown

Ground Crew
Russell D. Carrigan
Raymond G. St. Myers
William R. Compronio
William R. Crotty
Joe M. Madrid
Edward M. Josefiak
Donald E. Miller

Crew Missions:
• 5 Calibration and training missions
• 7 Practice bombing missions
• 5 Combat missions

44-27296
Victor No. 84
Fred Neher’s cartoons and memorabilia is housed in the CU Boulder archives:
https://archives.colorado.edu/repositories/2/resources/1052
NOSE ARTISTS

PORTER RICHARDSON

ALLEN L. KARL

HAL OLSEN

UNKNOWN AT ROSWELL
NECESSARY EVIL

Crew C-14
Airplane Commander: Norman W. Ray
Pilot: John E. Cantlon
Navigator: Stanley G. Steinke
Bombardier: Myron Faryna
Flight Engineer: George L. Brabenec
Radio Operator: Francis X. Dolan
Radar Operator: Richard F. Cannon
Tail Gunner: Martin G. Murray
Ass’t Eng/Scanner: Thomas A. Bunting

Ground Crew
William E. Egger
Richard E. Blouse
Woitto T. Laine
Paul C. Schafhauser
Barton B. Crespin
Edgar A. Poe
Troy B. Scott

44-8629
Victor No. 91

Crew Missions:
• 5 Calibration and training missions
• 2 Practice bombing missions
• 5 Combat missions
Crew B-10
Airplane Commander: George Marquardt
Pilot: James M. Anderson
Navigator: Russell E. Gackenbach
Bombardier: James W. Strudwick
Flight Engineer: James R. Corliss
Radio Operator: Warren L. Coble
Radar Operator: Joseph M. Dijulio
Tail Gunner: Melvin H. Bierman
Ass’t Eng/Scanner: Anthony D. Capua

Ground Crew
Joseph I. Gulick
George J. Brown
Matthew W. Huddleston
George P. Hammons
Frank W. Berzinis
Aram E. Bezdegian
Carl C. Mason

Crew Missions:
• 5 Calibration and training
• 7 Practice bombing
• 4 Combat
MULTIPLE ROLES OF NOSE ART

(Courtesy of Steven Marquardt)

American Cemetery on Tinian

Nude Statue From French Neoclassical Cemetery
(Courtesy of Jeannie Thomas)
3. After the war, the men reframed their war experiences by transitioning the art from the plane to their story telling performances.
Nobody knows
to those who laugh last...

Into the air the secret rose. Where they’re going, nobody knows. Tomorrow they’ll return again. But we’ll never know where they’ve been. Don’t ask us about results or suck. Unless you want to get in with Dutch. But take it from one who is sure of the score. The 509th is winning the war.

When the other groups are ready to go. We have a program of the whole damned show And when Halsey’s 5th shells Nippon’s shore. Why, shucks, we, hear about it the day before. And McArthur and Doolittle give out in advance. But with this new bunch we haven’t a chance. We should have been home a month or more, For the 509th is winning the war.

Crew B-9 in the early morning hours of 6 August 1945, prior to the Hiroshima bombing mission.
CONCLUSION

**Enola Gay**
National Air and Space Museum Annex, the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center
Chantilly, VA

**Bockscar**
National Museum of the United States Air Force
Dayton, OH

**Original Silverplate B-29s**

**Replica Nose Art**

**The Great Artiste**
The Great Artiste Whiteman AFB, MO

**Straight Flush**
Straight Flush Hill Aerospace Museum Ogden, UT
• See Notes