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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

Terri as *Doc's* Bombardier, July 2018

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

WENDOVER ARMY AIR FIELD 1944-1945

Col. Paul W. Tibbets

SILVERPLATE B-29

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

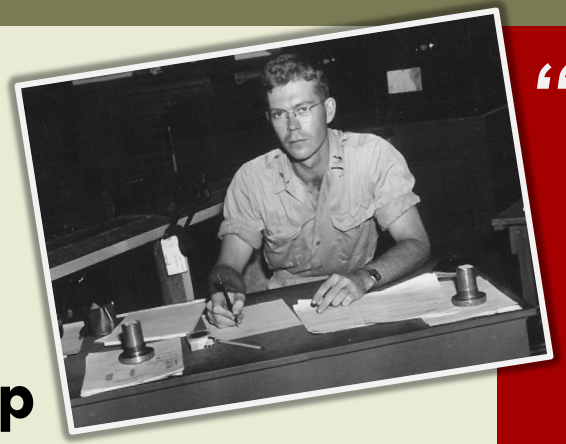
Standard B-29 = $782,000
Silverplate modifications = +$32,700
Today's total estimate = $11,505,465

HOW DOES IT COMPARE?

2019

F-35 = Goal: less than $85,000,00

MAKEUP OF 509TH COMPOSITE GROUP 1944-1945



393rd Bomb Squadron

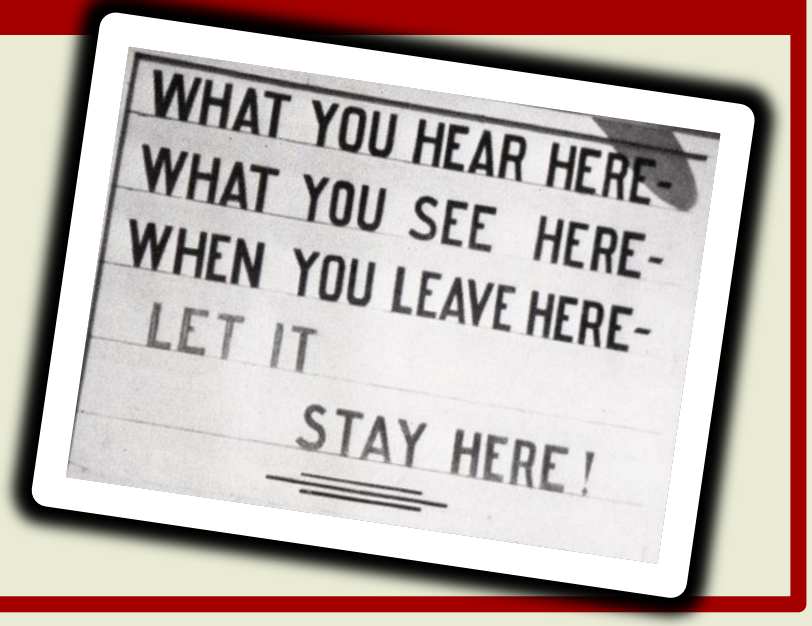
390th Air Service Group

- 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

***Authorized strength was 225 officers and 1,542 enlisted men**

"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



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 **A**
- Victor numbers 77, 85, 86, and 88 **N**
- Victor numbers 83, 94, 90, and 91 **P**
- Victor numbers 82, 89, 90, and 91 **R**

"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

TOP SECRET

44-827302
Victor No. 72

Crew Missions:

- 5 Calibration and training missions
- 8 Practice bombing missions
- 6 Combat missions

Army Plane Lands After Explosion

Several airplane parts and a parachute pack dropped on Oakland last night and led to reports of a plane crash.

On the basis of incomplete information, it was believed an explosion in an Army craft had occured, but that the plane landed safely.

The parachute pack was marked Wendover Field, Utah, an Army air field. It landed in the front yard of Mr. and Mrs. Marcus Yuvcenco, 921 Willow street, Oakland. Some minutes later, police were told that falling parts had damaged two automobiles in front of 1717 Twelfth street, Oakland. Reports of the sound of explosions

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

STRAIGHT FLUSH

44-27301
Victor No. 85

Crew Missions:

- 6 Calibration and training missions
- 6 Practice bombing missions
- 6 Combat missions

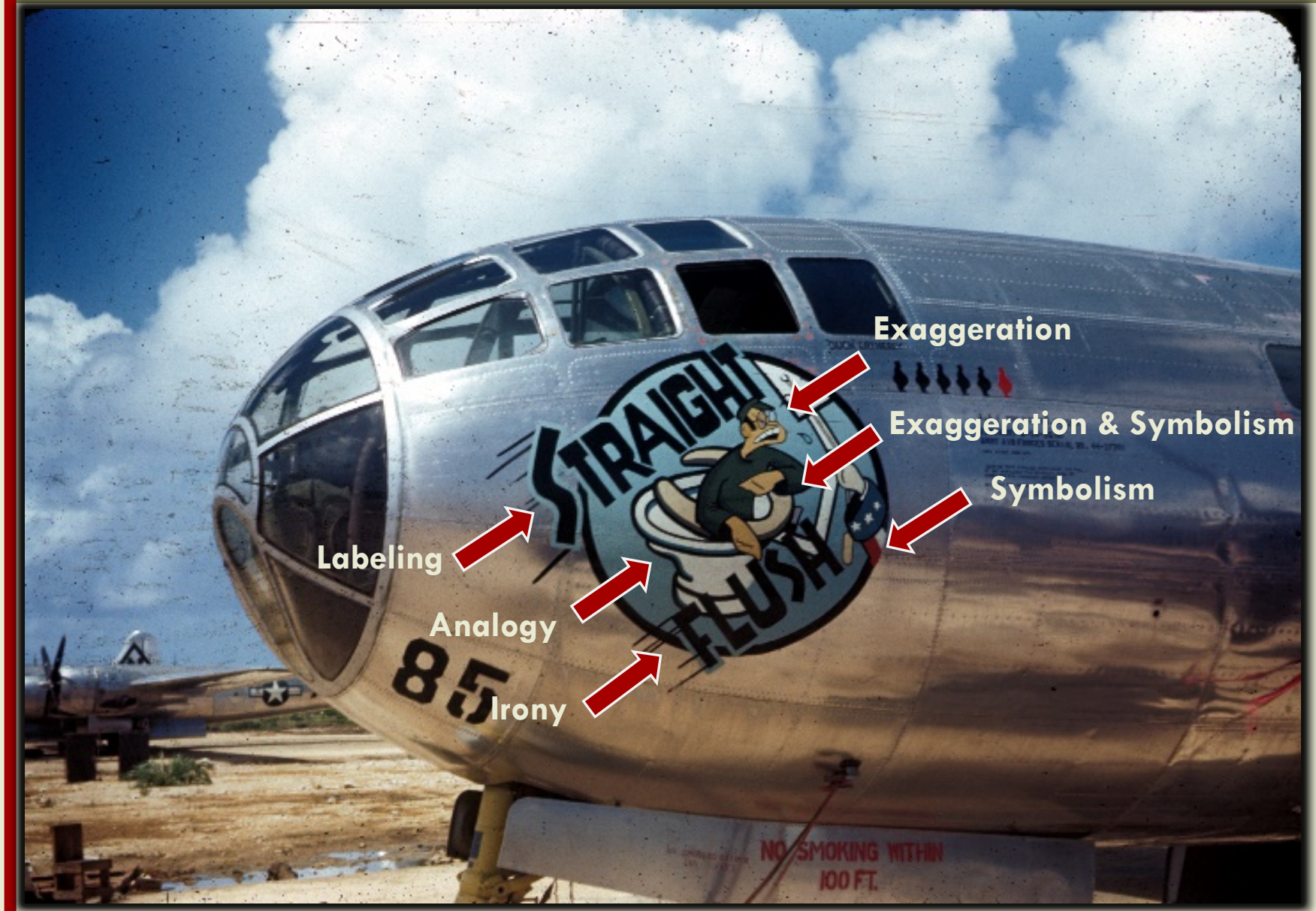
Crew C-11

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

NOSE ART READS LIKE POLITICAL CARTOONS



Coding in Nose Art:

- Symbolism
- Exaggeration
- Labeling
- Analogy
- Irony

GENDER IN 509TH NOSE ART

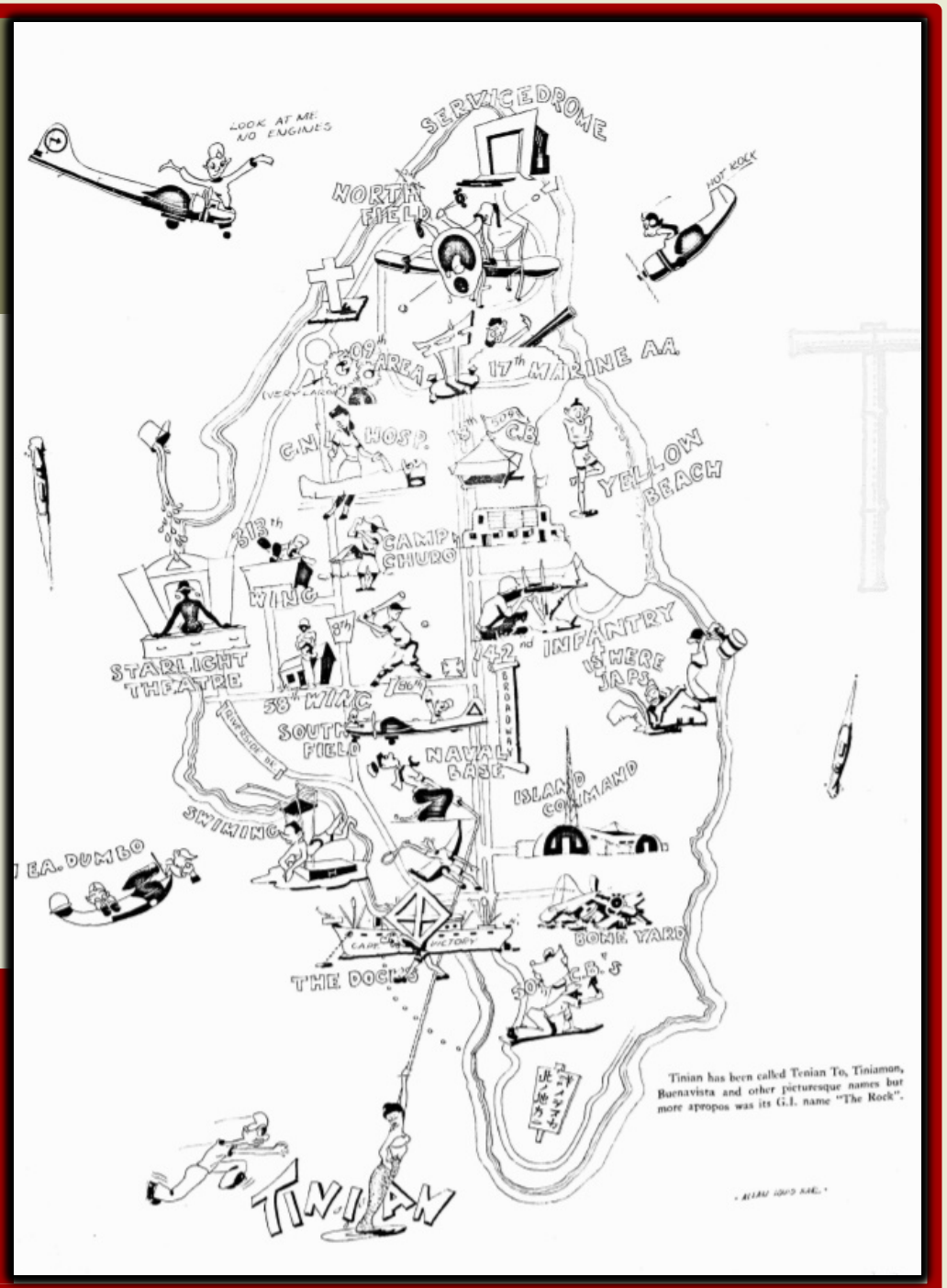
MALE

GENDER NEUTRAL?

FEMALE

2. Nose art framed the airmen's wartime experiences and created an identity for the crews.

TINIAN ISLAND: APRIL – NOVEMBER 1945



"To the other outfits on Tinian, we were a bunch of pampered dandies"

-Col. Tibbets

THE GREAT ARTISTE

44-27353
Victor No. 89

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

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

SOME PUNKINS

44-27296
Victor No. 84

Crew Missions:

- 5 Calibration and training missions
- 7 Practice bombing missions
- 5 Combat missions

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

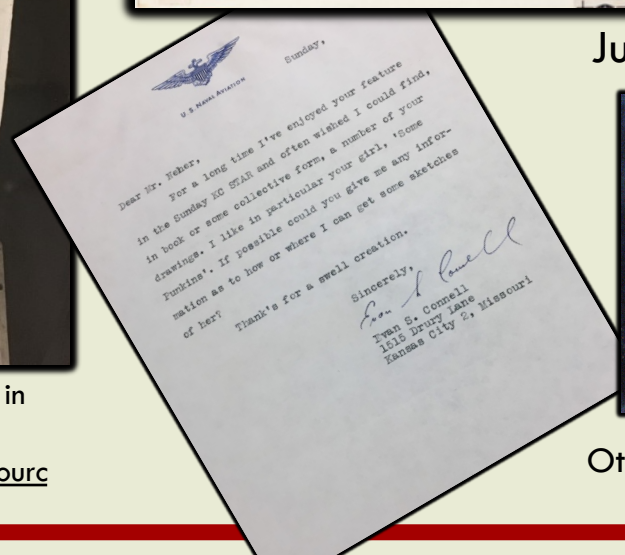
Ground Crew

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

FRED NEHER

Fred Neher's cartoons and memorabilia is housed in the CU Boulder archives: https://archives.colorado.edu/repositories/2/resources/1052

June 7, 1942 Panel



Dear Mr. Neher,

For a long time I've enjoyed your feature in the Sunday KC STAR and often wished I could find, in book or some collective form, a number of your drawings. I like in particular your girl, 'Some Punkins'. If possible could you give me any information as to how or where I can get some sketches of her?

Thank's for a swell creation.

Sincerely,

Evan E. Connell
1615 Drury Lane
Kansas City 2, Missouri

Other admirers of "Some Punkins"

NOSE ARTISTS

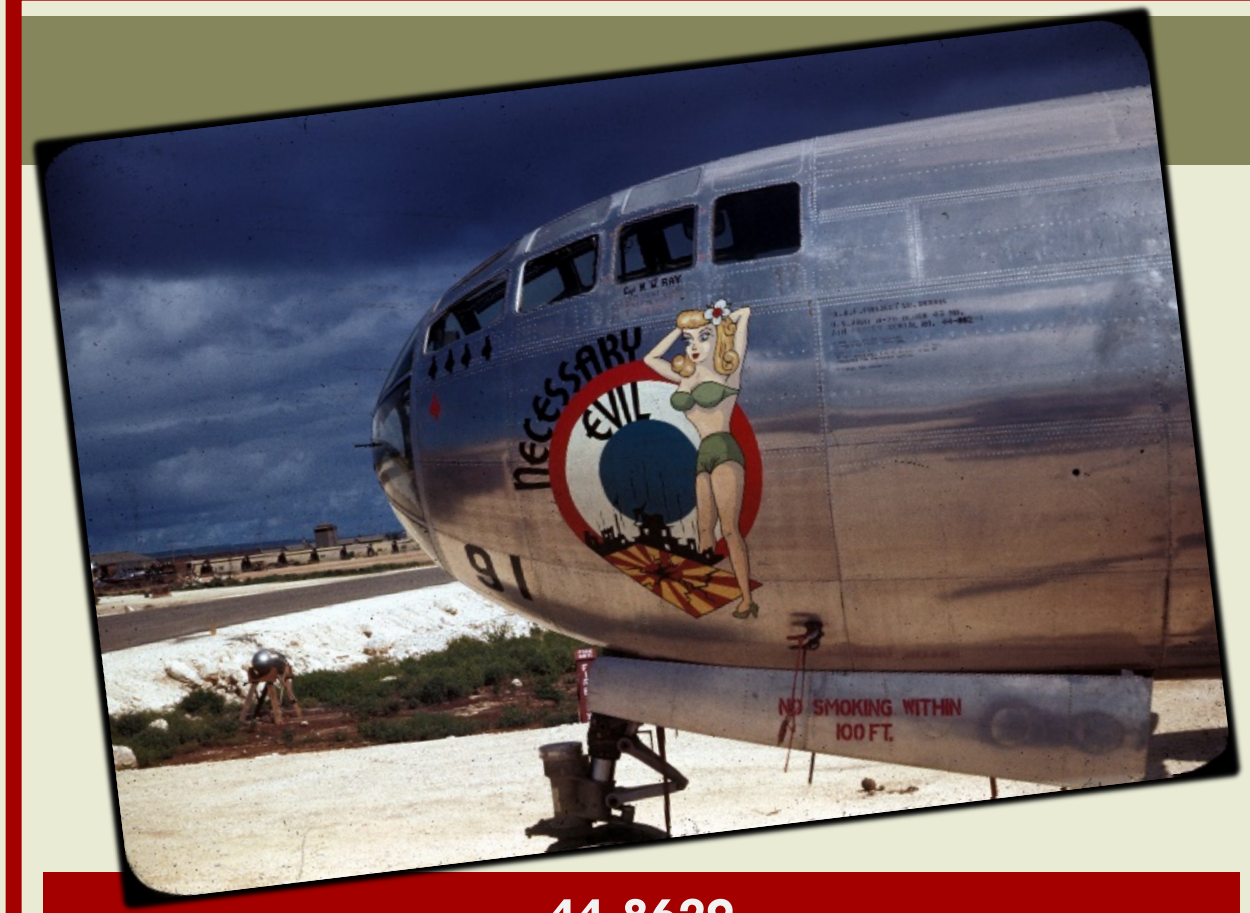
PORTER RICHARDSON

ALLEN L. KARL

HAL OLSEN

UNKNOWN AT ROSWELL

NECESSARY EVIL



44-8629
Victor No. 91

Crew Missions:

- 5 Calibration and training missions
- 2 Practice bombing missions
- 5 Combat missions

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

UP AN' ATOM

44-27304
Victor No. 88

Crew Missions:

- 5 Calibration and training
- 7 Practice bombing
- 4 Combat

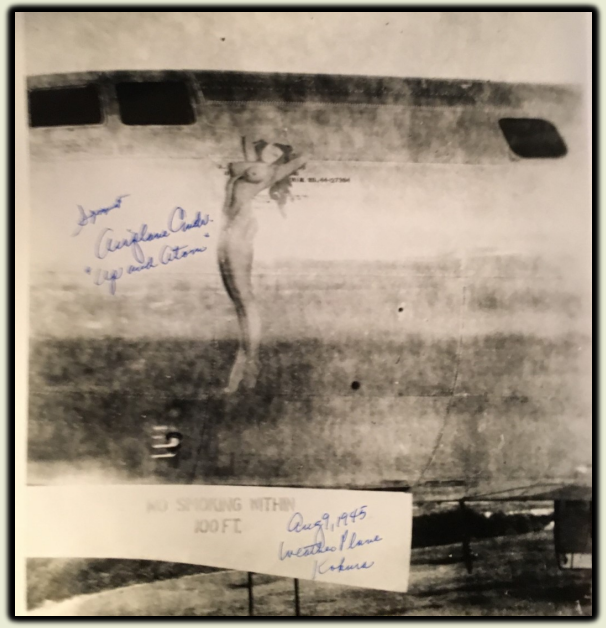
Crew B-10

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

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…

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

TOP SECRET

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.

CONCLUSION

Enola Gay

National Air and Space Museum Annex, the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center

Chantilly, VA

Original Silverplate B-29s

Bockscar

National Museum of the United States Air Force

Dayton, OH

Replica Nose Art

The Great Artiste

Whiteman AFB, MO

Straight Flush

Hill Aerospace Museum Ogden, UT

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- See Notes