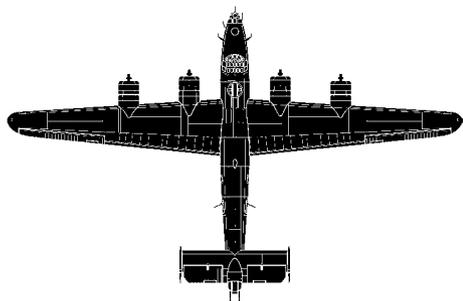


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

B-24 Liberator



Before and during World War II, the US built some 18,000 B-24 Liberators—more than any American warplane in history. It was effective as well as numerous. The B-24 served with distinction in every theater of the war, operating not only as a bomber but also as a reconnaissance aircraft (the F-7), transport (the C-87), antisubmarine patrol airplane (the Navy PB4Y), and aerial tanker (the C-109). The Liberator was used by virtually all Allied air services.

The US Army wanted Consolidated to build Boeing B-17s under license, but company president Reuben Fleet declined. He offered a more modern bomber, and he moved fast. Design began in January 1939, a contract was signed March 30, and the XB-24 made its first flight on Dec. 29, 1939. Designer Isaac M. Laddon adopted the new high-lift, low-drag Davis wing, a tricycle landing gear, and a twin-tail layout. In time, Consolidated had two production lines, and Ford, Douglas, and North American had one each. Ford, at

peak production, turned out a B-24 every 63 minutes.

US B-24s entered combat in June 1942 when 13 of them raided Romania's Ploesti oil fields. On Aug. 1, 1943, 177 B-24s once more attacked the heavily defended Ploesti fields—an action for which five airmen received Medals of Honor. This operation was the Army Air Forces' first large-scale, low-altitude bomber raid on a stongly defended target.

While effective in Europe (especially over the North Atlantic, where it helped silence the U-boat menace), the B-24 made its mark in the Pacific. Liberators first saw action Nov. 16, 1943 at Bougainville and played a major role thereafter. In the Pacific, the B-24's range and bomb-carrying capacity made it the preferred bomber until the arrival of the B-29. By then, the Liberator had helped push Japan close to defeat.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: B-24D Liberator #41-24226—*Joisey Bounce* (formerly, *Utah Man*)—as it looked in fall 1943. It flew in the Aug. 1, 1943 raid on the oil installations of Ploesti, Romania, and was lost in November 1943 action over Bremen, Germany.



In Brief

Consolidated design ★ built by Consolidated, Douglas, Ford, North American ★ first flight 1939 ★ crew 8 to 10 ★ four radial engines ★ number built 18,482 ★ **Specific to B-24H/J:** max speed 290 mph ★ cruise speed 215 mph ★ max range 2,100 miles (loaded) ★ armament 10 .50-cal machine guns ★ bomb load 8,800 lb ★ weight (normal loaded) 65,000 lb ★ span 110 ft ★ length 67 ft 2 in ★ height 18 ft.

Famous Fliers

Eight Medal of Honor recipients: Lt. Col. Addison Baker, Maj. Horace Carswell Jr., 2nd Lt. Lloyd Hughes, Maj. John Jerstad, Col. Leon Johnson, Col. John Kane, Lt. Col. Leon Vance Jr., and Navy Lt. Cmdr. Bruce Van Voorhis ★ Actors James Stewart and Tyrone Power ★ Col. Harry Halverson, leader of first US air attack on Nazi forces in Europe ★ Sen. George McGovern and Sen. (later, Treasury Secretary) Lloyd Bentsen ★ USAF Gen. George Brown, JCS Chairman.

Interesting Facts

Went from contract award to first flight in 9 months ★ 55 variants ★ 1,713 lost in training ★ B-24 *Lady Be Good* missing for 16 years, until wreckage found in Sahara ★ refueled B-17 in tests ★ five Medals of Honor to B-24 airmen in Ploesti raid, most of any USAAF action ★ C-87 variant was to be first Presidential aircraft, but it was never used ★ credited with 72 U-boat kills.



Eighth Air Force B-24s release bombs during a World War II raid in the vicinity of Tours, France.