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## News From The Internet

### **Jimmy Stewart: Flying High Without A Scandal!**

(From the 2nd Air Division Memorial Home Page)

In February of 1941, Metro Goldwyn Mayer gave one of its greatest farewell parties to Academy Award winning superstar Jimmy Stewart. Louis B. Mayer, legendary chief of the studio, wanted to fly the flag at half mast." Mayer had used his considerable persuasive talents to convince Stewart that his best interest would be served by remaining in Hollywood. Stewart demurred and nine months before Pearl Harbor he enlisted as a private at age 32, well beyond the draft age. In October 1943 he would lead the 703rd Squadron of the 445th Bomb Group to Tibenham, England and combat with the United States 8th Air Force.

After qualifying and initially assigned as a B-24 Instructor Pilot assigned to an overseas combat unit, Col. Robert Terrell, Commander of the 445th Bomb Group, selected Stewart to command the 703rd Squadron. As its commander, he led sixteen of the squadron's aircraft to England on the Queen Elizabeth. Legend has it that Stewart personally shook the hand of every man in his organization as they embarked in New York.

You will find many prominent members of the Second Air Division Association in the course of Stewart's career, including Andy Low, roommate at the 453rd BG; Gen. Robert Terrell of the 445th who brought him to England. Ramsay Potts, commander of the 453rd when Jimmy was transferred there to become Group Operations Officer after 20 combat missions with the 445th; and Gen. Ted Timberlake, under whom he served as Executive Officer of the 2nd Wing.

Stewart earned a reputation as an officer who had a special regard for his men. Walter Strawinski thinks this was noticeable when he was flying. Stewart was known as being one of the few officers who never left the airfield tower until every single plane returned. Jimmy would never move until every single plane was back on the ground and accounted for.

It was the kind of small detail that was very important among the men, and they all tucked it away. Walter Matthau, another Hollywood legend who recently turned into a "grumpy old man," was then a staff sergeant in the 453rd Bomb Group. Matthau tells of his rapport with the airmen who flocked to briefings to "hear Jimmy Stewart be Jimmy Stewart."

Jimmy continued to serve in the Air Force Reserve until his retirement at age 60 as a Brigadier General. His old roommate, Andy Low, recalls that Jimmy was frequently called upon by senior Air Force officials for advice and counsel regarding Air Force concerns.

### **B-24s in Russian Service By Szymon Serwatka**

The following is my first posting on Russian B-24s, this is an abstract from a Russian article from "Mir Aviati" (World of Aviation) 2195. I did my best to translate all fragments concerning Liberators.

The history of Liberators in the Soviet Air Forces began with B-24 41-23891 which landed in emergency in the Far East. She

was assigned to 890th Air Regiment of 45th Air Division on October 23rd, 1943. Since production of B-24s in Soviet Union was not planned, 41-23891 was not used intensively. 30 airmen were trained on this B-24s by 1945.

As Soviet forces proceeded westwards, more and more American crews chose to land their damaged aircraft in Soviet-held territory. Saving these machines for Soviet AF was not an easy task. Some aircraft were damaged or destroyed by anti-Soviet partisans. Some were robbed by Soviet soldiers of everything which could be sold and even guarding the aircraft did not always help. So many aircraft was useful only for spare parts. The first task in adopting B-24s and B-17s to Soviet service was replacing the white stars with red ones. It was decided Soviet airmen could not fly on machines with naked girls and other things painted on them, so orders were issued to get rid of all nose arts. This was a lot of work in the case of aircraft without camouflage - pictures were scraped, using acetone and sand. The camouflaged machines were easy, the nose art was simply painted over.

In June 1945 it was decided the 203rd Guard Air Regiment would get all Russian Liberators. The regiment had an order to create manuals and regulations concerning operating the B-24s. In 1945 the Soviet heavy bomber Pe-8 became obsolete, thus creating a need for long range aircraft. This role was assigned to B-17s and B-24s. They were used by 45th Air Division during long range training missions.

The Liberator was not liked by Soviet crews due to her low aerodynamics. With reduced engines the speed dropped quickly, take off and landings were difficult. These reasons may explain why the only American aircraft that crashed while in Russian service was a B-24 #42-94800. This machine lost an engine on take off and broke in two parts during emergency landing. All the crew in the tail section perished.

In the beginning of October 1945, the 203rd Air Regiment had 21 B-24s in flying condition. B17s were used in the Soviet AF till the Summer 1947.

The B-24s served longer due to their more durable engines. The main reason for a B-24 to be put out of service was lack of pneumatic parts for nose wheels. In 1948 3 Liberators were moved to Kazan, where Tu-4s (Soviet copy of B-29) were built. B-24s were used there for crew training since it was the only type available equipped with a nose wheel. These 3 aircraft were returned to 203rd Regiment in 1949. The last Liberators in Soviet service were withdrawn in 1950.

The 484th BG planes that were flown by the Russians were all shot down near Kecskemet:

42-52016 Scharf's plane  
44-49580 Fritt's plane,  
44-50437 Helm's Plane  
Via b24@mach3ww.com

### **The Betty Reese Story**

Editor, Ledger-Dispatch Antioch, CA 94509  
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Dear Ken: Mostly because of the increased communications afforded by the Internet, a group of World War Two veterans who flew the B-24 Liberator, and others associated with that magnificent airplane have recently enjoyed swapping tales and