

1983

B-29 Bomber Names in the Pacific

Edwin D. Lawson
SUNY Fredonia

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/los>

Recommended Citation

Lawson, Edwin D. (1983) "B-29 Bomber Names in the Pacific," *Literary Onomastics Studies*: Vol. 10, Article 12.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/los/vol10/iss1/12>

This Conference Paper is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @Brockport. It has been accepted for inclusion in Literary Onomastics Studies by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @Brockport. For more information, please contact kmyers@brockport.edu.

B-29 BOMBER NAMES IN THE PACIFIC

Edwin D. Lawson

State University of New York
College at Fredonia

The current wave of nostalgia is also of interest to onomasticians. Let us go back to World War II and the B-29 bombers that operated out of the Marianas and attacked Japan.

Many people, of course, know about the Enola Gay, the B-29 that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. What may not be generally known is that virtually all combat B-29's had distinctive names. This was somewhat unusual since the other bombers such as the B-17, the Flying Fortress, and the B-24, the Flying Boxcar, rarely had individual names.

There is quite a precedent for the naming of airplanes: Lindbergh's Spirit of St. Louis and Wiley Post's Winnie Mae are just a few. Boats and ships are named. Some people name their cars, some their homes. Truckers name their vehicles.

I was a member of the 882nd Squadron of the 500th Bomb Group of the 73rd Wing based on Saipan. My original plane was Z Square 20. How did the naming and identification work? In training in the United States there were no markings at all. The markings appeared

only when the planes were prepared for combat overseas. At first, members of the flight crew were allowed to have a name of someone (usually a wife or girlfriend) painted on the fuselage at the person's position (though one individual had the warcry Oskee-Wow-Wow of the Fighting Illini painted at his position). The names of ground crew personnel were also sometimes painted on the planes.

Shortly after arrival overseas, the planes blossomed with distinctive nose art. This would have been around November-December, 1944 for those based on Saipan. A few months later, there was a brief period when the pictures were ordered removed, but the order was apparently revoked or ignored because most of the nose art stayed on.

Most of the air and ground crew assigned to a plane preferred to refer to it by its distinctive name such as Supine Sue, Slick Dick, or Leading Lady rather than by Z Square 27 or A Square 10.

Most of the drawings were attention-getters and servicemen from all branches from all over the islands would come to the airfields to see the various examples. There was quite a bit of pride associated with the plane, its name and drawings, and its combat

records by air and ground crew.

I was able to obtain 116 photographs of the approximately 1000 B-29's that were combat-ready. The photographs were placed in the categories shown in Table 1. About half of the drawings have a theme which is rather saucy or sexual. Another major category is Cartoon/Caricature. Other categories include: Whiskey, Unique, Persons, Logo + name, and Name Only.

What motives were served by the nose art? Certainly, many show a sexual need, aspiration or desire. But there are other motives as well. Some are listed with examples in Table 2.

Some of the names probably served more than one motive. In any event, the naming of the airplanes was clearly an important morale factor. Attaching a name to a war machine was merely one attempt to humanize a brutal war (out of an original 10 airplanes, my squadron lost 13; this includes replacements that also went down). By naming objects in his world, man attempts to show possession and some form of control.

Table 1
Categories of Nose Art: 20th Air Force, 1944-45

Categories	73rd Wing		Others		Totals	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
A. Saucy/Sexual: <u>Adam's Eve,</u> <u>Ancient Mariner,</u> <u>Teaser</u>	32	57%	24	40%	56	48%
B. Cartoon/Caricature: <u>Slick Dick, Flying</u> <u>Jackass, Special</u> <u>Delivery</u>	8	14%	12	20%	20	17%
C. Whiskey: <u>American Beauty,</u> <u>Four Roses</u>	3	5%	-	-	3	3%
D. Persons: <u>Eddie Allen,</u> <u>Miss Hap</u>	1	2%	2	3%	3	3%
E. Unique: <u>Dreamboat,</u> <u>Christmas,</u> <u>Engineers</u>	2	4%	3	5%	5	4%
F. Logo + Name: <u>Gravel Gertie,</u> <u>Flagship 500,</u> <u>Kansas Farmer</u>	5	9%	9	15%	14	12%
G. Name Only: <u>Filthy Fay II,</u> <u>City of Los Angeles</u>	5	9%	10	17%	15	13%
Totals:	56	100%	60	100%	116	100%

Note. While it is not possible to show illustrations of the nose art in this article, the interested reader may find a number of examples in the references.

Table 2
Motives and Naming of B-29's

Motive Type	Examples
A. Sexual	<u>Adam's Eve</u> , <u>Censored</u> , <u>Double Exposure</u>
B. Attention-getting	Most of those in A, others
C. Ego-enhancement: Pilot Entire Crew	<u>Slick Dick</u> , <u>Bock's Car</u> <u>Lucky 'Leven</u> , <u>Les's Best</u> , <u>Jokers Wild</u>
D. Aggressive	<u>Beaubomber</u> , <u>Devil's Delight</u> , <u>Wichita Witch</u> , <u>Satan's Sister</u>
E. Humor	<u>Honeybucket Honshos</u> , <u>Ancient Mariner</u>
F. Humor: Puns	<u>Double Exposure</u> , <u>Lady in Dis-dress</u> , <u>Nipponese</u>
G. History:	<u>Ramp Queen</u> , <u>Gravel Gertie</u> , <u>Postville Express</u>
H. Honoring: Individuals Organizations	<u>Admiral Nimitz</u> , <u>Eddie Allen</u> <u>CB's</u> , <u>Aviation Engineers</u>

Reference Notes

Appreciation is expressed to Ronald R. Warren and staff of the Instructional Resources Center, State University College, Fredonia for assistance in restoration and copying of old photographs.

Since this article was begun additional sources of photographs have been brought to my attention: Anderton, David B. B-29 Superfortress at War. New York: Scribner's, 1978; Birdsall, Steve. B-29 Superfortress in Action. Carrollton, Texas: Squadron/Signal, 1977; Birdsall, Steve. Saga of the Superfortress. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980; Pimlott, John. B-29 Superfortress. Secaucus, NJ: Chartwell Books, 1980.

Edwin D. Lawson
State University of New York
College at Fredonia