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Martin B-26 Marauder

The Martin B-26 Marauder was designed to meet a demanding US Army Air Corps specification of 1939 for a high speed medium bomber. The Martin Model 179 proposal was considered to be so far in advance of competing submissions that in September 1939 the company was awarded an 'off the drawing board' contract for 201 of these aircraft. This action, unprecedented in USAAC history; required no prototype or preproduction aircraft, and the first production B-26, as the type was designated, was flown initially on November 1940. Issued initially to the 22nd Bomb Group at Langley Field, Virginia it fell to their crews to sort out the initial problems that came to light. Subsequently named Marauder, the aircraft was a cantilever shoulder-wing monoplane with a roomy fuselage of circular cross-section accommodating a crew of five (later six or more), and with retractable tricycle landing gear; it was powered by two 1,850-hp (1380-k W) Pratt & Whitney R-2800-5 Double Wasp radial engines. Official testing confirmed that the B-26 more than met the official specification, but this performance had been achieved at expense of good low speed handling characteristics. The B-26A which followed introduced improvements considered to be desirable from early squadron experience, but the resulting increase in gross weight only aggravated the low-speed handling problem. Training accidents multiplied mainly due to the inexperience of newly trained aircrews and mechanics, and a board of investigation was set up to consider whether to end production; it decided, wisely as it proved, to introduce modifications to improve low-speed performance and to revise handling techniques by increasing the wing span and heightening the rudder. As a result the Marauder went on to record the lowest attrition rate per sortie of any American aircraft operated by the US Air Forces in Europe.

Early deployment of the B-26 by the USAAF was to the Southwest Pacific theatre with the 22nd Bomb Group and later the 69th and 70th Bomb Squadrons. Operating in primitive conditions these units attacked Japanese bases from their own fields in New Guinea and the Fiji Islands, with 4 B26's taking part in the Battle of Midway.

In November 1942 B-26B models began to appear in North Africa, subsequently equipping 12 squadrons of the 17th, 319th and 320th Bombardment Groups of the North African Air Force and later the 42nd Bomb Wing. They provided admirable ground support to Allied ground forces in Corsica, Italy, Sardinia, Sicily and Southern France. After an early tragic start Marauders were used in a tactical role with the US 9th Air Force over Northern Europe where they proved their worth in denying the enemy the use of airfields, roads, bridges, railroads and V-1 guided bomb sites thus denying them tactical maneuverability.

Under Lend-Lease the RAF received a total of 522 Marauders, used by the RAF's Nos 14 and 39 Squadrons and the South African Air Force's Nos 12, 21, 24, 25 and 30 Squadrons, these being deployed most successfully alongside the B-26s of the US 42nd Bomb Wing, and against German targets in the Balkans. From March 1943 Marauders became operational with the Free French Air Force with six squadrons, GB.1/19, GB.2/20, GB.1/22, GB.1/32, GB.2/52 and GB.2/63. Again operating with the Marauders Groups of the 42nd Bomb

Wing they operated in the tactical bombing offensive. The squadrons of the 42nd Bomb Wing along with the French squadrons gave support to the Allied armies in the invasion of Southern France in August 1944 and supported their drive up through Southern France and through into Germany.

The 73rd and 77th Bomb Squadrons came before the 22nd Bomb Group. Fourteen B26's of the 77th BS flew north to Elmendorf, Alaska in January 1941. On arrival half their B26's were transferred to the 73rd BS. During April, May, June 1942 pilots from both squadrons flew south to collect 24 B26's which were shared between the two squadrons bringing them up to operational strength.

All Air Forces US and British originally operated under the control North African Air Force prior to the setting up of control units such as 42nd Bomb Wing. The IX AAF originally operated in North Africa until September 1943 when it was transferred less personnel and equipment to become the tactical air force operating from England. All B26's in England were originally under the control of 8th Air Support Command, 8th Air Force until October 1943 (322nd, 323rd, 386th and 387th Bomb Groups). In October 1943 they were transferred to IXth Bomber Command, IXth AAF. In the Spring of 1944 the new Groups arrived (344th, 391st, 394th and 397th Bomb Groups).