Learning Guide



BOMBER BOYS

WWII | FLIGHT JACKET ART

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction to *Bomber Boys* as a Learning Tool

Bomber Boys: WWII Flight Jacket Art is a large-format photographic history of the painted leather jackets worn by American airmen in World War II. It is the most comprehensive visual record of A-2 jackets ever produced, with award-winning photographer John Slemp capturing in archival quality the tactile beauty of the leather and the artwork that adorns the jackets.

Beyond a beautiful coffee-table book or a unique way to learn about World War II, *Bomber Boys* is a prismatic invitation to engage with a moment in history that continues to influence life in the United States and around the globe. If the names and dates of battles don't spark interest, the tactile construction materials used to manufacture the jackets might. If the wartime considerations of replacing the jackets' silk linings with cotton to ensure silk was available for the construction of life-saving parachutes don't catch your interest, the ways the young warriors captured their experiences through art might capture your imagination. If folk art or fashion doesn't draw your eye, the design, construction, and development of flight as seen through the eyes of these young airmen and their families may be your invitation to see the world around you in a new way.

The layout of the book is elegantly accessible, using photography to document the painted A-2 leather jackets, portraits of the airmen, and the personal stories of the young men and women who fought in World War II. ***Bomber Boys* creates cross-connections between U.S. and world history, social studies, and career and technical education** as it brings into brilliant focus various pathways of engaging with the world through design, fashion, aerospace, and conservation, and it invites the learner to keep history alive, whether it be through museum curation or through conversation around our dinner tables.

How to Use this Guide

This learning guide is designed to support learning through *Bomber Boys* by John Slemp. As it is unlikely every learner will be able to work directly with the book at the same time, the materials included will allow you to print **Background Handouts, Worksheets,** and **Profile Handouts** for your students to prepare them for group discussions and activities or support their individual analog learning. If your class is already well acquainted with the book, dive right in to the discussion questions and extension activities in the **Group Guides.**

This is a flexible learning guide that can be used in its entirety, in sections, or as stand-alone pieces. You know your learning space the best. Use all the materials, pick and choose, adapt them to your discipline, or let them serve as a springboard for creating your own assignments and learning resources.

ABOUT THE BOOK



Bomber Boys: WWII Flight Jacket Art is a way to bring World War Two alive in a way not previously available. Through a collection of first-person interviews and high-resolution photographs of veterans, lavishly decorated A-2 leather jackets, and other related artifacts, *Bomber Boys* is the most in-depth gathering of American military "folk art" ever assembled and is considered the definitive source on the subject matter.

Hand-painted in bright colors, the jacket symbology represents an airman's record in combat, each one a unique tribute to the sacrifices made in the pursuit of freedom worldwide. Jackets from twelve different museums — including the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum; the 390th Memorial Museum in Tucson, Arizona; and the National Museum of the United States Air Force — make up part of the 104 jackets in the book. Custom maps, aircraft illustrations, and some never-before-published stories bring to life the experiences of these very young men...many just a few years older than your students.

Professionally edited, the volume also includes a comprehensive index, suitable for research. An essay on the fashion and cultural impact the jackets have had, how to care for them, collecting them, and of course a bit of history on how they came about round out the information gathered.

Praised by scholars, historians, and readers alike, *Bomber Boys* is the book to introduce your students to the very real world-wide struggle for freedom, fought by young people just like them.

The book is a 297-page and 12" x 12" sizable research book. While we have included images and first-person interviews in the teaching material, we would encourage your school to purchase one copy for your library so that students may do extended research work on the over 100 jackets and veteran stories included in the book.

For Journey in Film Teachers – USE CODE: TEACHBB to receive the discounted price of $99.
(MSRP $129.99 / ISBN 979-8-9865169-0-5). Go to www.WWIIBomberBoys.com

LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

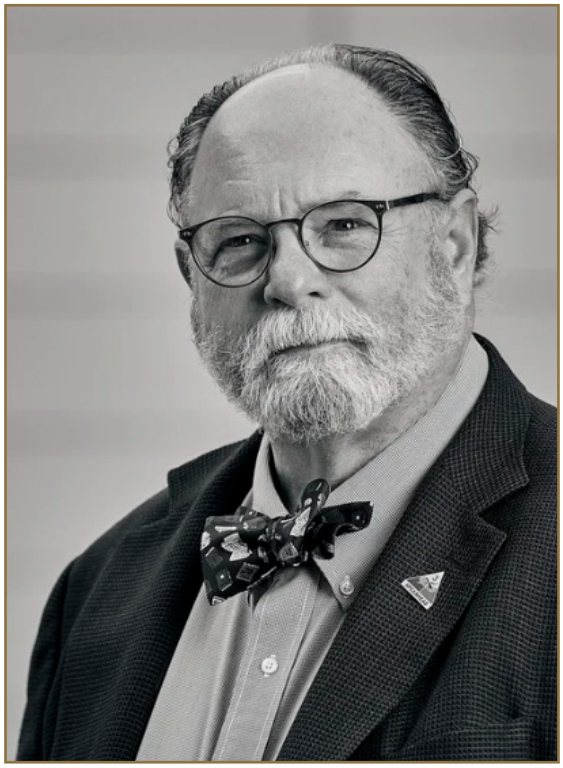
Dear Teachers,

I am pleased to partner with Journeys in Film to help fulfill the mission of presenting my book *Bomber Boys – WWII Flight Jacket Art* to the next generation.

Over 160 jackets were photographed over a period of eight years. As the number of jackets photographed grew, the stories of their owners began to weigh more heavily on my mind. I began to realize that the jackets were mobile signposts reflecting the distinct mortal challenges every flyer faced. I was initially drawn to the artwork and symbology, but their cultural and historical significance became more profound as the project expanded.

The high-resolution photographs provide an amount of detail that most viewers are unaccustomed to. Thus, the emotion these jackets engender has been nothing short of astounding.

The many museums, private owners, family members, curators, historians, aviators, artists, conservators, and collectors that have contributed have led to a much greater understanding of the almost magical draw these jackets have – providing the next generation with real connection. When you care about the people you are learning about, then, like any great story, you care what happened to them.



John Slemp, Author, Photographer

Thank you to you, the teachers, who are the gateway to understanding for our next generation. I hope you'll find *Bomber Boys* to be a valuable resource in your efforts to guide your students.

Respectfully,
John Slemp
Author, Photographer

About the Author

Born in Japan, award-winning photographer John Slemp was a world traveler before he was 10 years old. After attending college on an academic scholarship, he served in the U.S. Army while stationed in Germany and, out of curiosity, spent many hours visiting well-known museums throughout Europe. Little did he know that he was preparing for a life in commercial photography with the world's best art as a spellbinding tutor.

Fast forward more than 30 years, and his extensive photography experience allows him to create a wide variety of images, including environmental still life, portraits, and lifestyle images. Light, shape, and composition are the tools he uses to create images for a wide variety of editorial, corporate, and advertising clients worldwide.

His work has won several industry awards, including being selected for the Best of ASMP competition four times, and as a 2020 Editor's Pick in the annual Aviation Week photo contest. John's photography hangs in a number of private and public collections, and he continues to actively exhibit.

Inspiring Tomorrow's Aviation Professionals

Aviation has always been driven by young people who dream big, are willing to learn, lead, and take on big challenges. During World War II, members of the Greatest Generation, many not much older than today's high school and college students, stepped forward to learn to fly aircraft, maintain complex machines, and plan and execute operational missions that shaped world history. After the war, many of these young aviators helped power the modern commercial aviation industry, guiding it into the jet age and an era of global travel. Today, as our world becomes ever more interconnected, the aviation industry continues to expand and needs a new generation of thinkers, doers, and leaders to carry it forward.

Being a professional pilot is an exciting and meaningful career that connects people and economies worldwide. Aircraft mechanics and technicians are essential to safe operations, applying technical expertise with precision to inspect, maintain, and repair aircraft. Operations and management professionals keep airports, air traffic, and airlines running efficiently by coordinating flights, supporting safety initiatives, and overseeing critical systems across the global aviation network.



The Bomber Jacket adorned with the Auburn battle cry "War Eagle" was worn by WW2 Captain Edward A. Taylor, Pilot in the Mighty Eighth Air Force and Auburn Class of '39.

Start exploring aviation early! Get involved through school programs or aviation clubs; attend airshows; research aviation careers, education, scholarships, and training pathways; and learn the stories of the aviators who shaped the first century of flight. You can then help write the next chapter of flight!

Here at Auburn University School of Aviation, we're proud to be one of the nation's oldest continuously operated aviation education programs, and we look forward to serving the next generation of aviation professionals!

James Birdsong, PhD
Director, School of Aviation
www.aub.ie/aviation



THE A-2 JACKET AS A HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

THE A-2 JACKET: A VISUAL TIMELINE FROM PAST TO PRESENT



The A-2 jacket's origins and development coincide with the history and technological innovations of aviation. Beginning as an attempt to find practical solutions to the sub-freezing temperatures experienced in the cockpit and other physical necessities of pilots, the A-2 went on to become a unique status symbol within the United States military, and continues as an enduring fashion trend with multiple variations in style and meaning.

DRIVING QUESTION

How did the A-2 jacket function as a wearable archive of military history and changing cultural values?

Materials for Students

- **Handout 1:** The A-2 Jacket as a Historical Document
- **Handout 2:** The Bomber Jacket: Influence on Fashion by Laura Mclaws Helms
- **Handout 3:** A-2 Visual Timeline

Personal Reflection

If you had to choose one clothing item from your wardrobe that best tells the story of who you are and the times you are living in, what would it be? What visual clues would it leave behind for a historian 80 years from now?

Discussion Questions

1. A-2 jackets were regulated military uniforms, yet servicemen covered them in unofficial art, squadron patches, and symbols that represented their personal identity and combat history. If you were a commanding officer responsible for the strategic success of the war, what would make you want to curb or encourage the practice?

2. During World War II, the A-2 jacket symbolized elite military status and raw courage. Today, it is a staple of civilian fashion. How did the meaning change when it transitioned from a functional military uniform to a commercial fashion statement? Did the adoption of the A-2 by the wider culture diminish or deepen its significance as a historical object?

3. Historicization emphasizes that history must be examined within the specific political, social, and economic conditions of its time. What do you think the depictions of women on the A-2 jackets say about how the culture of the 1940s characterized women or masculinity? Considering America's visual culture today, how do you feel the culture has changed?

Extension Activities

1. Designing History

Part I:
Using the A-2's in *Bomber Boys* as inspiration, sketch or digitally design a jacket or other article of clothing that represents the historical significance of a major event, movement, or community you belong to.

Take special care to include personal meaning, practical design elements for everyday wear, and how it represents status in your design.

Part II: The Archival Detective:

Select a digitized photograph or museum listing of an authentic, painted WWII A-2 jacket. Research the specific visual symbols on it: Decode the squadron patch, the meaning of the bomb tallies, and the origin of the nose art.

Part III:
Write a 300-word "biography" of the jacket, detailing what it reveals about the pilot's missions and personal life.

2. Zoom Out on History

Historiography, the study of how and why a historical narrative was constructed, ensures history is a continuously evolving conversation as opposed to a static set of undisputed facts and meanings.

Using the A-2 Visual Timeline Handout, imagine it is an artifact that you (a historian) are encountering for the first time.

Write a short essay (500 words or less) describing the document in as much detail as possible. Include what you see, how the images represent (or obfuscate) the history of the time periods as you know them, and what you believe the intention of the curator of these images was. Who was their intended audience? How did the layout reveal information? What was missing from the story told by the collected images?

3. Materials and Meaning Over Time

Note to Educator/Facilitator: This activity can be done as a research project in its entirety. Or, if you wish, it can be divided among three groups, with each group sharing its research with the whole group, culminating in a group discussion. You may also use the **Object Analysis Worksheet** found in the Material Culture section, if it would be useful to your learners.

Part I:
Research three different types of A-2 jackets:

a) Using *Bomber Boys* as a comprehensive archive of the original painted A-2 jackets

b) New retailers selling "authentic" A-2 jackets (start by looking up the companies Cockpit USA, Schott N.Y.C., and Gibson & Barnes)

c) searching vintage resellers, like Ebay.

Part II:
Create a visual display of your research that compares and contrasts the utility, purpose, or other cultural signifiers you find during your research. Include in your presentation how physical wear — such as scuffs, creases, oil stains, and repairs — adds a layer of visual history that fresh, factory manufacturing cannot replicate. How is this represented in the "between medium" of a used-clothing reseller?

Additionally, pay attention to how the layout of a webpage designed to sell new or used clothing compares with that of *Bomber Boys*, an artistic coffee-table book featuring high-quality photographs. How does the design layout give an additional layer or layers of meaning?

THE A-2 JACKET AS A HISTORICAL DOCUMENT



Historicization is the methodological practice of interpreting ideas, events, or texts within their specific historical and cultural contexts rather than treating them as timeless truths. This emphasis asserts that all human creations are products of the specific political, social, and economic conditions of their time.

The A-2 leather flight jacket functions as a historical document because it records information that paper documents omit, providing an unedited, physical archive of an individual airman's wartime reality. A customized A-2 jacket serves as a visual and material record of survival, psychology, and personal identity during a time of extreme duress. By "reading" the physical object, we can cross-reference macro-history (the geopolitical timeline of World War II) with micro-history — the intimate, localized stories of individual young people trying to survive a devastating international conflict.

Historiography is the study of how history is written. Rather than studying past events directly, it examines the methods, biases, and changing perspectives of historians over time to understand why and how historical narratives are constructed.

FAST FACTS ON THE A-2

Compiled and Adapted from *Bomber Boys*

The A-1 Jacket
The United States entered World War I in 1917 when the airplane was a relatively new invention, and many pilots wore the uniforms of their former units. There was virtually no standardization among the wide variety of uniforms across the aviator ranks. After the war, the first aviator's jacket, known as the A-1, was created. It was an olive drab, cape leather, summer-weight flying jacket, and was standardized for use on November 7, 1927. It had button closures, a knit collar, and cuffs. It was officially declared obsolete on September 29, 1944, after stocks were exhausted.

Transition to Modernity (1930–1931):
The U.S. Army Air Corps tested replacement jackets for the A-1 beginning in September 1930 and officially adopted and standardized the A-2 on May 9, 1931. It was a massive leap forward in utility, featuring a pioneering mechanical innovation: the front zipper closure, which drastically improved wind resistance in drafty cockpits. The single back panel was a deliberate engineering choice to eliminate central seams that could catch or tear on the tight, jagged metal geometry of a cockpit. There were no side pockets, as keeping hands in pockets was deemed inappropriate for a member of the military.

Wartime Adaptation:
The government contracted with over 18 civilian companies to mass-produce A-2 jackets. The U.S. government provided raw materials to manufacturers in the northeast United States, then the center of the garment industry. They, in turn, assembled approximately 750,000 jackets at a cost of ~$8.25 each. As the war went on and resources became scarce, materials shifted from horsehide to mostly cowhide, and internal linings transitioned from silk to rugged cotton, freeing up silk for other wartime necessities, like parachutes. The necessary wartime adaptations give individual surviving jackets unique variations that provide discerning eyes with clues to their origins.

A-2 as Status Symbol:
Initially only issued to officers, the jackets were later issued to all members of a flight crew and were sometimes traded to tanker and infantry soldiers. Personalized jackets gave a visual representation of a flyer's combat history.

Identity and Connection:
Because military bureaucracy reduced men to serial numbers and standard-issue uniforms, custom nose art, cartoon mascots, or pin-up girls painted on the backs of jackets reasserted individual humanity. The custom paintings on jackets often matched the artwork on their specific B-17 or B-24 bombers, serving as a psychological bond with their fellow crewmates and the larger mission, while also reminding them of their personal identity and home.

Government Regulation:
As with other military items issued to soldiers, the government required the jackets to be returned so they could be reused. Soldiers personalized and modified their jackets anyway. The art displayed on the leather surface of each jacket was technically "defacement of government property"; however, most commanders did not attempt to stop the practice or report airmen for disciplinary action. It is speculated that the commanders understood the value of jacket art in boosting morale and camaraderie. The surviving jackets document a structural reality of wartime command during World War II: that psychological endurance mattered more than rigid bureaucratic rules.

A Visual Example of Survival Bias:
The A-2 jackets that survived also point towards underrepresented service. Factors that influence the historical record include segregation in the military, whose belongings families and institutions chose to preserve, whose stories collectors and museums historically valued, and simple chance. Author John Slemp notes that he was only able to locate a few authentic A-2 jackets belonging to the 922 pilots who graduated from the Tuskegee pilot training program in Alabama. Also noteworthy is that almost all Women Airforce Service Pilots turned in their A-2 jackets to the U.S. government as ordered. John Slemp only found one original jacket that had been retained and knows of none that were painted. He notes that the A-2 was never modified to fit the female form. The lack of extant pieces from the WASPs when they were disbanded in 1944 is an example of how understanding survival bias can leave clues, so even in their absence we can still learn much about gender, cultural norms, and values during World War II.

Art as Propaganda:
The use of vicious and effective propaganda is well documented from all governments that participated in World War II. A photograph taken by a German soldier of Kenneth D. Williams after his plane was shot down showed him wearing his A-2 jacket sporting the words "Murder Inc." across its back. The image was circulated along with the story that Americans were taking hardened criminals and gangsters from its prisons to crew bombing campaigns against civilians.



Murder Inc. Owned by crewman Kenneth D.Williams, this jacket became the object of political controversy.

Humanity and Hope in the Stories Behind the Pictures:
Imagery can elicit an immediate emotional response, making it an incredible tool for spreading information. Also, it is always worth continuing to research the multiple messages a single image might convey. For example, the German captain who interrogated Williams advised him to remove the artwork on his jacket before arriving at the prisoner of war camp, and Williams spent the night scraping the paint off with his fingernails. Without having been there, a modern reader will never know if the captain's warning was intended to sow fear in his prisoner or as an act of compassion from one soldier to another. What we do know is that Williams's chances of survival were likely bolstered by receiving the warning, and his survival made it possible for him to share his story with his son, who restored the jacket's artwork after the war. The jacket now is part of the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum's collection and is a vibrant example of intergenerational resilience.

Art and Cultural Boundaries:
While the artwork in *Bomber Boys* is fairly tame by today's standards, many of the jackets likely survived because the images of pin-up models or the numbers of kills they displayed made their continued wear in civilian life taboo after the war.

THE BOMBER JACKET: INFLUENCE ON FASHION

By Laura Mclaws Helms

Swaggering, Free-Spirited Masculinity

A SYMBOL

Since World War II the bomber or flight jacket has been a symbol of swaggering, free-spirited masculinity. Zippered into one simple garment is adventure, nostalgia, and pure braggadocio — there are few other items of clothing with such deeply resonant coded messages understood around the world. Its staying power as an item of desire — whether a collectible original, exact replica, or fashionable reinterpretation — is inextricably linked to the power of its symbolism.

FUSING NOVELTY AND NOSTALGIA

Within the fashion and apparel industries the terms "flight jacket" and "bomber jacket" are used interchangeably, and have been used over the years to describe an ever-widening array of jackets that, at times, only share a small similarity with the original. The bomber jacket as defined above is both the starting and returning point. Fashion is an industry built on the eternal search for the new as well as a constant recycling of the past. Novelty and nostalgia fuse, bringing past trends back into fashion by updating them to suit a new era. Since the 1940s the bomber jacket has been the nexus of continuing sartorial negotiation — both a classic staple and a garment that can be reworked into countless new iterations. Across fashion, music, movies, television, and other forms of media, there has been and continues to be a constant dialogue around flight jackets; inspiration and influences cross mediums, producing new garments and projects that further enshrine the bomber jacket into popular culture and into people's closets.

Development of Military Bomber Jackets and Iconic Styles

DESIGN DEMANDS

While many iterations of a flight jacket have been introduced by militaries over the years, several styles have become the most closely aligned in the public consciousness with the phrase "bomber jacket" and have had the greatest influence on fashion and popular culture. From the Wright Brothers' first flight in 1903, it was clear that piloting airplanes — with their open cockpits and high altitudes — would require specialized attire. As the use of airplanes during World War I was new, early military pilots wore crude flight jackets or coats that were created solely with warmth in mind; bulky, they often had high wraparound collars, were lined with fur, and sometimes were full-length or part of a jumpsuit. After the war, designers on both sides of the Atlantic began experimenting, attempting to create a jacket that would fulfill aviation's unique demands.

LESLIE IRVIN

In 1927 the American stuntman and aviation innovator Leslie Irvin designed the now classic RAF sheepskin flying jacket at his factory in Letchworth, England, where his Irvin Air Chute Company manufactured parachutes for the USAF and RAF.[1] Irvin's jacket featured a wide fold-down collar, a buckled belt, a zippered front, and cuffs. That same year the U.S. Army Air Corps introduced their first flight jacket, the Type A-1. These jackets were originally made from sheep leather with a cotton lining and knitted wool cuffs, waistband, and collar. Buttons were used as closures on the center front and on low patch pockets.

AN ICON

The A-1 (pictured on page 10) can be seen as the prototype for the most iconic of flight jackets, the Type A-2. Adopted as standard issue by the U.S. Army Air Corps on May 9, 1931, the A-2 had the same silhouette as the A-1 but was refined and improved for better use. The buttons were replaced with a heavy-duty zipper, the knit collar was changed to a shirt-style leather collar, and leather epaulettes were added to the shoulders. Often painted and patched by their owners (as seen throughout this book), A-2's were initially made from horsehide, but as World War II approached, cowhide became the standard material. Produced in mass quantities, the manufacture of the A-2 came to a sudden halt in 1943 when Air Force General Henry "Hap" Arnold canceled all outstanding orders for leather jackets in favor of jackets made from fabric. With such a large stock of A-2's remaining, they continued to be issued to pilots up until

the Korean War, and many were sold as military surplus. Widely disseminated in the media and Army-Navy stores, the A-2 can clearly be understood as an "iconic symbol of esprit de corps for air crews" and those who admire them.[2]

THE B-3

Inspired by Leslie Irvin's RAF Aircrew Jacket, the B-3 was standardized by the Air Force in 1934 as a warmer jacket for use at higher altitudes and colder climates. Made of sheepskin, it featured a wide collar, zippered front, a single tool pocket, and adjustment belts on the sides of the waist.

THE ANJ-3

In 1943 the Army Air Forces and the Navy introduced the ANJ-3 (Army Navy Jacket 3) to replace the A-2 and the Navy's M-422 (very similar to the A-2 except for a mouton fur collar and a gusseted back). Due to Arnold's decree, only a few dozen were originally produced, but the ANJ-3 is an interesting combination of both previous styles: the leather collar, storm flap, and epaulettes from the A-2 and the gusseted back, rib-rack waistband and cuffs, and goatskin of the M-422. Following some small adaptations in fit and design, in 1947 a fur-collared version of the ANJ-3 was developed, now called the G-1 — occasioning the ANJ–3 to be renamed the G-2.[3]

By 1978, demand for the highly coveted G-1 was overwhelming the Navy's supply system, provoking Congress to cancel it for three years as a budgetary economic measure.

FABRIC JACKETS

The first of the fabric jackets instituted following Arnold's orders was the B-10 in 1943, which had a cotton twill body, an alpaca fur collar, and wool lining. A year later it was replaced by the B-15 with a nylon shell and wraparound fur collar. Lighter and easier to move in, both jackets became immediately popular not just with aviators but also across all of the military.

The B-2 is a cloth adaptation of the G-1, complete with patch pockets while the B-15 features diagonal slash front pockets. At the end of the 1940s, the fur collar was removed from the B-15 and replaced with a knit one, named the MA-1, which would not get in the way of parachute harnesses. Developed by Dobbs Industries, this jacket has a bright orange lining to help with visibility in case of a crash and was made of easy-to-clean nylon. Originally dark blue, the MA-1 was changed to more camouflage-appropriate dark green for the Korean War.

An Instant Icon: The Bomber Jackets in the 1930s and 40s

ELEVATED PERCEPTION

Three decades after the first flight, aviation, whether commercial or military, was still considered the height of glamor. Flying was regarded as dangerous, and therefore plots were seen as innately daring individuals with unique talents. This stereotype was created in media reports and newsreels, and then further reinforced by motion pictures that vividly portrayed the lives of doomed yet heroic airmen. While many of the early films show pilots costumed in cotton flight suits, when photographed in black-and-white the heavy twill appeared drab and ordinary unlike the shiny, eye-catching leather and sheepskin of the newer style bomber jackets.

CONNECTION IN FILM

When worn by major stars in serious roles, the connection was made — and the leather flight jacket became an icon. Made in a material and fit that easily signified rugged virility, the bomber jacket enhanced the romanticized concept of the pilot by bringing their visual identity more closely in line with this ideal. Clark Gable wore an A-2 in *Night Flight* (1933) and *Test Pilot* (1938), and Cary Grant wore one in *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939). While not war films, these aviation dramas laid the foundation for interest in pilots and their jackets that would reach its apex in the 1940s.

SOLIDIFYING THE IMAGE

Little could do more to tie the flight jacket forever together in the American psyche with the idea of powerful masculinity than John Wayne jumping down from a P-40 Warhawk fighter plane just 11 minutes into *The Flying Tigers* (1942). Based on the exploits of the American Volunteer Group (a group of pilots from the United States Army Air Corps, Navy, and Marines who were brought together pre-Pearl Harbor with the purpose of protecting China from Japan), *The Flying Tigers* was one of Hollywood's most brazen wartime propaganda films. Dealing with events that had taken place only a year before and in cinemas just months after the United States joined the war, it was one of a cavalcade of movies designed to improve public morale and support for the war. To the public, Wayne embodied the idea of strong American masculinity and rugged individualism. When he wore an A-2 jacket with the same casual grace that he brought to rough cowboy clothes, that jacket became forever encoded with the same American frontier heroism as Wayne's westerns.

FURTHERED THROUGH MEDIA

Newspapers were the focus of flight jacket information dissemination during the war. Not only did they include news reports and photos from battlefields alongside movie reviews of wartime pictures, but many of the comics also took on a patriotic fervor. Most markedly so was *Terry and the Pirates*, a comic strip created by Milton Caniff in 1934 that was read by 31 million people each day.[4] An action-adventure series involving exotic locations, gold mines, and pirates prior to the war, after Pearl Harbor the focus shifted, with Terry joining the Air Force to become a fighter pilot. For young boys across America longing for their absent fathers, the A-2-clad Terry was both their idol and a comforting paternal connection. Taking advantage of this bittersweet idolization tinged with yearning, children's clothes manufacturers began producing A-2 replicas for boys, allowing them to playact not just as their favorite stars or characters but also as their dads. As one ad for boy's twill and gabardine bomber jackets announced, "Youngsters love 'em because they're warm, they're the heighth [sic] of style… they're action free!"[5]

MILITARY SURPLUS

Following the war, military surplus flooded the American market. The War Assets Administration was established in March 1946 to recoup some of the huge expenses of WWII through the disposal of government-owned surplus material and property. Among the many goods available were a large inventory of A-2 jackets that had been produced prior to General Arnold's cancellation order in 1943. Available at army-navy stores and other liquidators across the country, now any man — no matter his age, health, or military record — could pick up an A-2 or B-15 for under $20 and be instantly imbued with an adventurous heroism (whether deserved or not).[6] According to the feminist writer Susan Faludi, "The United States came out of World War II with a sense of itself as a masculine nation, our 'boys' ready to assume the mantle of national authority and international leadership. The nation claimed an ascendancy over the world, men an ascendancy over the nation, and a male persona of a certain ascendancy over men."[7] America's "sense of itself as a masculine nation" had been created by its wins on the battlefield, both real and on-screen, and there was no better way for an ordinary man to inhabit this new role of global ascendancy than by wearing the actual clothes of battle, bought on sale as surplus.

Sportswear and Rebellion: The 1950s

CHANGE IN LIFESTYLE

World War II was directly responsible, in several ways, for a shift in men's dressing that continues to this day. The GI bill and low house prices combined with a moral panic about inner city violence led to a "white flight" into the newly built suburbs. The American dream was attainable now for more people than ever, and with these new developments came new ways of living and new wardrobe requirements. A more casual lifestyle — centered on driving and entertaining in one's large backyard on the barbecue — called for more casual clothes. At the same time, returning servicemen had become used to the comfort of service clothes and demanded that same level of comfort in their new civilian apparel.[8] They turned away from the tailored suit and to sportswear, and in doing so developed a new, young,

style-conscious market. Casually throwing their flight jackets on over their civilian clothes — due to their comfort, style, and symbolism — ex-servicemen created a fashion for these garments. Outerwear manufacturers realized the potential of this new market and produced pared-down replicas in cheaper, less sturdy fabric (often thin rayon) for the everyman who wanted a more polished version of the military aesthetic. Sports jacket production (led by bomber jacket styles) reached its peak in 1951, when over 2.7 million were churned out.[9]

PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Bomber jacket styles continued to be produced for young boys throughout the 1950s. Usually based on the A-2 or B-15, manufacturers began to experiment with other fabrics including corduroy, wool twill, and satin. New production of flight jacket styles appears to be exclusively for men and boys. Linked so closely in the public's psyche with ideas of masculinity, bomber jackets were not seen as appropriate wear for women or girls. While Amelia Earhart had worn the A-2 in the 1930s, female aviators like her were the exception. The steps towards autonomy that women took during the war (whether as factory workers or the WASPs) were reversed in the years after the war as government, media, and advertising began a concerted campaign to promote an image of perfect, almost unattainable femininity. Images of hyper-feminized women and mothers supported a cult of ultra-domesticity that bolstered capitalism, consumerism, and traditionalism among the American public. Dress for women and girls followed this ultra-feminine mode. Tiny waists (achieved through tight girdles) and full skirts produced an archetypal female silhouette, which was the ideal feminine counterpart to the stereotypical masculinity of their bomber jacket-wearing husbands.

FIT FOR EVERY OCCASION

The comfort, warmth, and style of the flight jacket were appealing to working class men, who found them functional as work apparel. When made from leather or thick cotton, the jackets were hardy and able to withstand all kinds of abuse while protecting the wearer and projecting toughness.[10]

A series of movies in the 1950s featured bombers on working and lower class men, rebels, and delinquents — further reinforcing the rough masculine symbolism of the bomber jacket while adding in a dash of defiant individualism and a new vulnerability. In *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) Marlon Brando wears a satin flight jacket that has the same cut and ribbed collar as the MA-1 but with a snap-front and striped ribbing — the jacket part of a "heavy armor of machismo" that Brando used to perform and construct a new masculinity.[11] Three years later, Marlon Brando again meshed his inimitable brooding sexuality with the bomber jacket when he wore two different styles while playing a dock worker in *On the Waterfront:* a red-and-black plaid wool jacket similar to the A-2 and a version of the B-15 in waxed cotton with a fur collar. Within the film Brando's jackets are used to signify his character's lower-class identity in opposition to the smartly dressed mobsters who run the dockyards.

CELEBRITY AND ARTISTIC LIBERTIES

The bomber jacket was taken down to its most elemental form for *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), in which James Dean wears the very similar Harrington jacket in cherry red poly-cotton. The Harrington jacket was invented in 1937 by John and Isaac Miller of Baracuta for golfers, yet it shares many of the same elements as a bomber jacket — blouson body, ribbed cuffs and waist, center zip — and is often described as a bomber or flight jacket in the media. Dean's stripped-down, windbreaker-style Harrington/bomber clearly differentiates him from the classic leather bomber of his nemesis, motorcycle gang leader Buzz (Corey Allen) — the new, more emotional male versus the bully. Off-screen, Dean was often photographed in versions of the bomber jacket as was another man on the cutting edge of this new masculinity, Elvis Presley, who wore casual cloth flight jackets while relaxing backstage. These jackets illustrate the liberties manufacturers were now taking with aviator jackets. By removing elements and paring down lines, they created jackets that were still identifiably bomber jackets by silhouette but lacked the more aggressively martial connotations. This allowed the simplified styles to more easily suit a range of men across all socio-economic backgrounds and races.

CONSISTENT USE IN FILM

Classic military styles maintained their cinematic importance in war and adventure movies made throughout the decade. Produced in close cooperation with the U.S. Navy, *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* (1954) follows a Naval Reserve aviator called to return to active duty during the Korean War. The returning lieutenant William Holden wears the older style M-422A jacket — likely retained from his previous wartime service — instead of the G-1 then being distributed. The jacket features colorful embroidered patches on the upper arm and chest. Similar to the fantastical plots found in the *Terry and the Pirates* comic strips, the 1952 adventure film *Hong Kong* starred Ronald Reagan as an U.S. Army veteran on the run from the Red Army in China. Clad for the whole film in an original Air Force brown leather A-2 jacket, fedora, and khakis, Reagan's costuming would decades later directly influence another action idol — Indiana Jones. The use of both military and civilian bomber jackets in movies strengthened the powerful symbolism of this style and made them appealing to men of differing values and identities: the patriot, the individualist, the company man, and the rebel.

Mass Culture vs. Counterculture: The 1960s

IDENTITY CRISIS

As with much of American culture, society, and style during the 1960s, bomber jackets went through a crisis of identity during the decade. While Brando and Dean's on-screen bomber jacketed roles were rebels and delinquents, they were still tough and masculine in a way that corresponded to the masculinity of military men and John Wayne. By the end of the decade the flight jacket had taken on a new meaning, through the Vietnam War and the counterculture.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Most greasers and motorcycle gangs wore leather motorcycle jackets with the diagonal zip and with no knit ribbing, but nonetheless similar in style to the bomber jacket. As the public began conflating the two styles, the leather flight jacket, once removed from a military environment, also developed a somewhat negative connotation. For example, the prefame Beatles wore matching black leather bomber jackets on stage in 1960–61. When their record company wanted them to appeal to teenage girls and their parents, the jackets were quickly replaced by strictly tailored suits, proving the deep connection understood between leather bombers and delinquency at this time.

PRESIDENTIAL PRESTIGE

Elected in late 1960, John F. Kennedy became the 35th president of the United States in January 1961. A war hero who commanded several boats in the Pacific theater, Kennedy "presented a youthful vigor, a hardy manhood that, despite his chronic back injury," gave him an active presence both in private and on the public stage.[12] Integral to his carefully orchestrated portrayal of American manhood were his clothes, chosen and tailored to project power in all of his activities. Two weeks after the Cuban Missile Crisis ended, at a time when it was incredibly important for Kennedy to project strength, he purchased three G-1 leather bomber jackets from the Navy — one featured the seal of the Marine One presidential helicopter (HMX-1) and another the presidential seal.[13] Two of the jackets sold at auction in 2020, one for $250,000 and the second for $192,000. While primarily worn on his yacht *Honey Fitz* and around Hyannis Port, photos of Kennedy looking manly in the rugged brown leather jacket were reprinted in newspapers and magazines across the nation. Remarkably, Kennedy was the first president to take advantage of the symbolism of the flight jacket. In 1952 the Air Force gifted President Truman with two flight jackets, nylon in winter and summer weights with the presidential seal, but there is no evidence that Truman ever wore them. Eisenhower was elected president in large part due to his military heroism as a general in World War II, but he made a conscious effort as a president not to rely on that. He was rarely photographed in uniform or in his iconic "Ike" jacket. By coopting the bomber jacket's symbolic manliness, Kennedy then provided the jacket with an aura of charisma and unquestionable power, helping it to become an important part of presidential photo-ops of the future.

HOLLYWOOD MAINSTAY

On both the big and small screen, bomber jackets still made an impact. Most memorably, Steve McQueen wore an A-2 over a short-sleeved sweatshirt and khakis in his role as Captain Hilts in the WWII film *The Great Escape* (1963). Commanding an adventurous break out from a Nazi German POW camp, McQueen looked effortlessly cool in his bomber — so cool in fact that his influence still hangs over men's clothing, with multiple companies continuing to produce exact replicas of his A-2, and one men's fashion blog calling it "the most influential outfit of the century."[14] *Hogan's Heroes,* a television sitcom that also revolved around a group of prisoners in a Nazi POW camp, was a comedy hit that ran from 1965 to 1971. In every episode, Colonel Robert E. Hogan (played by Bob Crane) was dressed in an A-2 jacket with the U.S. Army Air Corps insignia painted onto the left sleeve, colonel's insignia on both shoulder epaulettes, and leather name tag sewn onto the chest. In fact, this was the same jacket that Frank Sinatra wore in the World War II adventure film *Von Ryan's Express* (1965). Now an iconic part of television history, Crane's jacket sold for $22,500 at auction in 2015.

CROSSOVER TO WOMEN'S FASHION

One of the most striking changes in the early 1960s was the emergence of bomber jacket-inspired styles in women's high fashion. Appearing in the collections of American designers in 1964, the "'Air Force' jacket look" featured a hip-band (though lacking the necessary ribbing) and slightly blouson shape.[15] At times the connection was quite tenuous — Paul Parne's "Air Force" jacket featured "rounded lapels, jeweled buttons and a soft satin bow" on the neck-line, but the media and brands repeatedly reinforced the similarities.[16] While this was a passing trend, these stylistic experiments laid the groundwork for fashion's deeper explorations of the garment in the 1980s and beyond.

SOCIAL TUMULT AND VIETNAM

The social tumult of the 1960s reached a fever pitch in the last years of the decade, particularly around the war in Vietnam. The green nylon MA-1 flight jacket was issued to servicemen during Vietnam and worn by crews over their flight suits. For many young Americans, angry at the country's participation in a long-running war far outside its purview, all aspects of the military were tainted, including its dress. At the same time the counterculture and hippie movement created a new understanding of masculinity as the author Eve Babitz wrote, "In the sixties… [hippie] men weren't supposed to look 'buff'; they looked scrawny and poetic."[17] While many males in the counterculture took to wearing flowery or ethnically inspired clothing, those that were most deeply connected with the anti-war movement often dressed in military surplus. The counter-culture fashion magazine *Rags* explained, "War surplus and work clothes are de rigueur for… peace legions" who sought to reclaim the uniforms from the specter of Vietnam and align them with a less aggressive masculinity.[18] Inexpensive and easy to find, green fatigues were the most commonly worn, but flight jackets were also prized for their warmth while on protest marches or at sit-ins and were often covered with antiwar graffiti for extra effect. The sons of the original bombers and other servicemen who fought in WWII, baby boomer youths sought a different life than their fathers — shirking off the conscription and the conformism that so defined their dads' identities in the forties and fifties.

From Fashion to Subcultures: The 1970s

RECASTING THE BOMBER JACKET

During the 1970s, bomber jackets can be seen as having multiple identities — as an easy casual jacket beloved by the everyman, and also within several youth subcultures. The decade was breeding ground for new subcultures with heavily coded aesthetics, values, and uniforms, many of which prized flight jackets. By the end of the decade, men's fashion magazines and brands also began to take a real interest in the garment, removing it from the dusty storerooms of army surplus and recasting it as high fashion.

A VAST APPEAL

Utilitarian and designed for a specific function, bomber jackets appealed to men who wanted to convey an attitude of not caring about fashion, showing they meant business by wearing clothes meant for serious business (i.e., war) with no time for frivolity or trends. Of course, anti-fashion is as much a trend as fashion, and the Spartan lines of a bomber jacket are aesthetically appealing specifically for their simplicity. Army-navy stores sold surplus flight jackets next to workwear, making them as much the jacket of choice for laborers as for activists. As one newspaper explained of college students' style, "Work clothes and the uniform are not only functional to the student's way of life, they are clothes with a message — clothes that say something about the wearer and his personal and political sympathies."[19] It is unsurprising then that mass-merchandisers sought to capture this market, making their own, more stylized versions of the cheap surplus. "Military greens, field, and bomber jackets are all part of the newest style ideas, a sort of 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em' concession by the industry."[20]

JACKETS FOR EVERYONE

A major trend for the youth mass-market (child and young adult) in 1971 and 1972, by 1974 bombers were being pushed in the media as ideal for their fathers too.[21] While young men's fashions were getting neater, their dads were getting funkier.[22] Ads proclaimed, "Bomber Jacket explodes on the fashion scene. Zip yourself into the fashion find of this or any winter season. Dashing, durable, warm as proverbial toast. Try not to act surprised, you will be irresistible in this jacket."[23] For only $32.50, what man could resist? Another ad references both the military and countercultural roots of the trend: "Your next flight from conformity, obviously requires a bomber jacket."[24] Even women got in on the new trend — whether leather, nylon, corduroy, or colorful wool plaid, there were bombers for the whole family.

CLONING

Following the Stonewall riots of 1969 and the subsequent fight for homosexual rights, a new gay masculinity began to emerge in major cities in America. Called "clones," these highly muscular men wore hyper-masculine clothes — a bomber or motorcycle jacket, jeans, a tight t-shirt, work boots — perfectly fitted to gym-sculpted bodies in order to perform a masculinity that appeared more manly than that of straight men. In the words of fashion historian Shaun Cole, "All these clothes had a clear meaning in the wider American culture: toughness, virility, aggression, strength, potency."[25] Inspired by the heavily sexualized drawings of Tom of Finland, the clone look hijacked attributes of working class masculinity in a way that eroticized the male body while also providing an easy way for gay men to spot each other at a time when homosexuality was still largely kept hidden.

SKINHEADS AND PUNK ROCK

Emerging from the working class in England, skin-heads were a subculture who were likewise visually identified by their uniform of working class clothes, slightly subverted: oversized MA-1 bomber jackets over slim-fitting collared shirts, straight-leg jeans, work boots, and shaved heads. Though they rejected bourgeois hippie values and style (clearly visible through their closely cropped heads), skinheads were largely apolitical in the 1960s and early 1970s. By the end of the decade, when the subculture was having a resurgence in the UK, they became more closely aligned with the National Front, racism, and neo-Nazism before spreading across the world through these groups, tarring the subculture as a whole by association. There was some cross-over between skinheads and punk rock, a major subculture that emerged in London and New York in the late 1970s, mainly through the subgenre "Oi!". Within punk rock there was a huge range of styles, with leather motorcycle jackets the most commonly worn outer garment, but members of bands like the Ramones and Television often wore leather bombers instead.

HIGH FASHION

Against the backdrop of clones and punks, high fashion discovered the flight jacket for the first time. Those trailblazers were *GQ* magazine and Calvin Klein. *GQ* began featuring the more fashion-conscious bomber jackets in 1973 — remarkably capturing a subtle crossover between the stylish ordinary man and the

clone with more than a dash of couture styling. Of one wool-felt style they asserted, "The neo-traditional flight jacket brings back the Lindbergh era and makes it speak to a new generation."[26] Throughout the decade, rugged male models posed in sheep-skin, beaver fur, or leather-trimmed tweed bombers in rustic, manly locations — the meaning clear: However fashionable they might appear, these were clothes for real men.

CALVIN KLEIN

Calvin Klein launched his first men's collection in 1978, his elegantly pared-down designs an instant success. And the biggest hit of all: his bomber jacket. First in water-resistant cotton, then in iridescent twill, and sometimes with a fur collar, the style was the cornerstone of "today's updated classics" that helped make him the most influential designer of menswear at the time, with jackets that looked good no matter if you were going out for a date in the suburbs or to Studio 54.[27] For fall 1979 he introduced the bomber with a looser silhouette and broad, padded shoulders, setting a precedent for fashionable dress for both sexes for many years to come. Integral to Klein's bomber aesthetic was a simplified palette, an interest in textures, and an overall refined sensibility that would lead the way into eighties menswear.

THE "LOOK"

Flight jackets seemed to be everywhere — even *Seventeen* did an editorial on the style for teenage girls.[28] Issey Miyake showed king-sized checked bombers over short dresses for women for spring/summer 1977, the same year that the *Chicago Tribune* predicted "The Aviator Look" as the next fashion trend.[29] By 1979 nylon bombers were available in every color of the rainbow, prompting a run on military surplus stores by those hoping to nab the high fashion look at low prices. Even the clone look had gone from a subcultural style to a mass fashion; by taking "certain fundamental, very American impulses to conform, coupled with the equally well-worn wish to appear both trendy and indifferent to fashion at the same time," cloning in a bomber jacket, jeans, and t-shirt had become an acceptable look for all men, women, and children.[30]

High Fashion, Heroes, and Hip Hop: The 1980s

TAKING FLIGHT

The 1980s were truly the decade when the bomber jacket took off. The fashion popularity that had been building through the seventies quickened with flight jackets appearing on every runway and sidewalk and then was pushed to the stratosphere by several key box office hits featuring flight jackets. Streetwear and the new hip-hop subculture further broadened the garment's appeal across different racial groups.

MAJOR FASHION DESIGNERS LEAD THE WAY

With Calvin Klein leading the way and doing big business with his bomber jackets for both sexes, other designers followed, and in 1980 it was declared the "hottest outerwear item."[31] Though Ralph Lauren started his career delivering ties dressed in a vintage leather bomber jacket, they did not appear in his collection until 1979 (surprisingly, first for ladies). A designer completely immersed in "Americana," Lauren's men's flight jackets were the closest to the original of any fashion designer. Using leather aged to a perfectly rugged look, he captured the feel of a 1940s jacket but made fashionable through the slightly oversized body. Even master of elegance Giorgio Armani produced bomber jackets with a distressed feel; while made to look like the jacket had WWII battle scars, the leather was of such high quality that it was soft and unctuous to the touch.[32]

THE A-2 PERSONA

Revving interest up further was the debut of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the first Indiana Jones film in 1981. Sporting a brown A-2 inspired jacket, Harrison Ford was an adventure hero in the vein of early 20th century films, with his costume directly referencing Charlton Heston in *Secret of the Incas* (1954) and new president Reagan in the aforementioned *Hong Kong (1952).* Handsome, charming, and incredibly manly, Indiana Jones was an appealing character to all sexes and ages. In *The Right Stuff (*1983) Sam Shepard starred as WWII flying ace Chuck Yeager who is enlisted by the Air Force to break the sound barrier, which he does

wearing a perfectly distressed replica A-2. Based on a true story, Yeager did in fact wear his own A-2 during his record-breaking flight in 1947; for the film, Shepard's was a replica by Avirex, a military apparel company founded in 1975. Set in the 1930s and 40s, these characters — and the actors playing them, Ford and Shepard — seemed to represent a return to an earlier masculinity. Rugged, daring, and with the presence of mind to always know what to do, it was a masculinity that seemed untouched by the societal and cultural changes of the sixties and seventies. While bombers of all styles were already popular, the patch-pocketed A-2 now made a reappearance on the fashion scene.

TOP GUN

The G-1 hit its peak with the release of *Top Gun* in 1986. Maverick, the young naval aviator played by Tom Cruise, wore a brown goatskin G-1 (made by Avirex) heavily covered in embroidered patches — an instant icon of male cinematic fashion. The highest grossing film of the year, *Top Gun* led to a surge in U.S. Navy enlistment. Every man wanted to look like Cruise, and every woman wanted to date him. As the *Philadelphia Daily News* observed, "More than 40 years after World War II, the bomber jacket is still turning us on. Is there any other look that makes us feel so macho, so he-man, than the World War II bomber jacket?"[33] Reproductions, complete with copied patches, quickly appeared on the market and are still produced today. Much was made in the press about how wearing a similar jacket could make an "ordinary man" into "an uncelebrated hero" just through the action of putting it on.[34] The bomber jacket as a signifier of masculinity and virility was so strong that one such man told the *Washington Post* that purchasing the garment "changed my life," while others felt overpowered or unworthy of it. One man reflected, "I don't think people would take me seriously in leather. I tried it on as a fantasy, a fantasy of being a groovin' guy."[35] Women were equally interested in participating in this fantasy, purchasing their own replicas or borrowing their husband's, while their daughters bought in with Air Force Barbie (released in 1990).

THE FASHION CAPITAL

Paris, the capital of high fashion, had shown little interest in the bomber jacket in the decades since its birth. While worn on the streets by teenage rebels, beatniks, and activists, there had been little crossover of this streetwear essential into the Parisian haute couture or prêt-à-porter. Designers Thierry Mugler and Claude Montana were largely responsible for bringing the style into high fashion at the same time as they reconceptualized the ideal silhouette. Though neither put an actual bomber jacket with the ribbed waist on their runway for women until the mid-80s, from 1976 on, both designers sent out jackets that riffed on flight and motorcycle jacket styles — usually leather, enlarged blouson jackets with small waists, sometimes a belt à la Leslie Irvin's RAF jacket, some with a peplum or leather quilted panels. Both men actively played with proportions in their designs, creating a new silhouette of very emphasized shoulders (whether sharp or football player-round), which trickled down through all layers of dress and directly impacted the silhouette of the decade. The broad shoulder-padded jackets of the 1940s were stretched to new limits, creating a craze for both men and women. For fall/winter 1982–83, Claude Montana showed brightly colored leather oversized bomber jackets complete with faux-military badges on the arms, while his fall/winter 1983–84 collection had an aviator themed section of leather-and-sheepskin RAF jackets, full-length flight coats, jumpsuits, and helmets (leather too, of course). At the end of most shows, Montana even took his bow in a black nylon MA-1 and jeans, bringing the clone look to the catwalk.

NORTH BEACH LEATHER

Mugler and Montana's influence was heavily popularized in the United States by Michael Hoban at his company North Beach Leather. What started as Hoban and his then-roommate creating hand-stitched leather clothes for themselves in mid-60s San Francisco had grown into a large-scale business with nine stores across the country by 1980. Hoban designed every possible permutation of a bomber — buckled, belted, knit-waisted, fur-trimmed, cropped, or drop-waisted — but all followed the basic

silhouette of the 80s: exaggerated broad shoulders and an over-sized blouson body coming to a smaller waist. Selling for around $350 per jacket in 1981 (over one thousand dollars today, taking into consideration inflation), Hoban's bombers were still significantly cheaper than the European designers he looked to.

LEATHER JACKET PROLIFERATION

Not everyone was happy about the trend, with some retired servicemen enraged by the co-opting of this sacred garment by fashion. As the journalist Michael Killian angrily remarked, "The essential point is simply this. [The trendy wearers] simply aren't entitled."[36] Unfortunately for them the fad kept growing — they were everywhere: "Bomber flight jackets have become superchic — not only in crazed, jaded New York."[37] Advances in tanning technology made it so that leathers were easier to care for and more supple than ever before, leading the market to be saturated with leather jackets at all price points. Leather jackets of all styles were advertised as the ultimate aspirational purchase. Whether or not they were expensive, they looked expensive, and soon luxury was coded into the leather bomber, combining with rugged virility and rebelliousness into a heady mix that made them irresistible to both sexes and all ages. Every designer seemed to do their own version: Karl Lagerfeld designed a black leather bomber jacket for Chanel for fall/winter 1988, while Gianni Versace produced a leather bomber with an ultra-wide ribbed-and-belted waist.

In his last role, Steve McQueen played real-life bounty hunter Ralph Edgar "Papa" Thorson, Jr. in *The Hunter* (1980). McQueen lived up to his ultra-cool reputation as he chased fugitives around the country attired in a green MA-1 and jeans. The MA-1 was still the jacket of choice for skinheads and far right groups, but it transcended that appropriation. There was a strong crossover between the style signifiers of different subcultures and fashion with brands and magazine stylists looking to the street for inspiration. Influential London-based stylist Ray Petri named his visual imaging company Buffalo, borrowing the name from "Jacques Negrit, the bouncer at Les Bains Douches nightclub in Paris, whose private security business was staffed by large men from Guadeloupe who wore Air Force MA-1 jackets with 'Buffalo' written on them."[38]

Petri's collaborators wore cobalt-blue "Buffalo" MA-1's out on the street and in editorials for avant-garde fashion magazines like *i-D* and *The Face*. Among his inner circle was French fashion designer Jean-Paul Gaultier, who recreated the MA-1 for his Junior Gaultier women's line in 1988. Cropped and ultra-shiny khaki nylon with black ribbing, Gaultier's style tapped into the garment's history as a signifier of teenage rebellion and then sold it back to youths with a hefty price tag. At the lower end of the market, Members Only produced MA-1 inspired fabric bomber jackets in a wide range of colors that were differentiated by their narrow epaulettes and collar strap. Debuting in 1980, they sold for $55 and were an immediate success. By 1984 Members Only was doing $100 million in sales and was the largest-selling outwear brand in the United States, solely from bombers.[39]

HIP HOP AND DAPPER DAN

For the first time since the Tuskegee Airmen wore the A-2 in WWII, Black-American culture developed their own specific approach to bomber jackets within the nascent hip-hop movement in the 1980s. Rap and hip-hop musicians took to wearing oversized MA-1 style bomber jackets, usually made of leather. German sportswear brand Adidas produced a range of leather bombers that became an integral part of the hip-hop wardrobe. While their song "My Adidas" was about the athletic shoes, Run-DMC could equally have written it about Adidas' M45k leather bomber jackets that they were often photographed in — either tracksuit style with stripes down the arms or brightly colored with appliquéd lettering spelling out phrases like "BEST OF TIMES." The silhouettes were often exaggerated — rounder and more puffed-up than the shoulder-heavy bombers popular in high fashion circles. In 1986 "My Adidas" led to the first endorsement deal between a musical act and an athletic company, directly resulting to the collaborations and musician-owned brands that will play a large part in bomber jacket history in later decades.

In 1982 Dapper Dan (born Daniel Day), a Black American tailor, opened his haberdasher-cum-boutique in New York's Harlem. Dapper Dan built a business creating novel looks for gangsters

and street hustlers, expanding to rappers and sport stars. He had the monograms of luxury houses like Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Fendi, and MCM screen-printed onto high-quality leathers and then combined them with rare materials like ostrich, mink, python, and Kevlar to produce wildly original bomber jackets alongside track pants, parkas, and every other possible garment. For wealthy young African Americans who were barred from luxury label stores, Dapper Dan's clothes allowed them to broadcast that they had "made it," especially since his sportswear-inspired, couture garments were often more expensive than the companies whose monograms he had co-opted. According to Dan, his quintessential design was a reversible bomber jacket — one side with Louis Vuitton monogram, the other with mink.[40] His work for hip-hop artists and rappers was instrumental in creating and bringing hip-hop fashion into the public consciousness. For Salt-N-Pepa he produced leather bombers appliquéd with leather lettering, while LL Cool J famously wore a red leather bomber with Gucci monogram for many of his earliest promotional materials in 1987. Hounded by cease-and-desist letters from the European luxury brands he had helped bring to fame in Black circles, Dapper Dan was forced to close his shop in 1992, by which time the bomber jacket was a codified symbol of hip-hop masculinity.

REINSTATED

Perhaps most telling of the bomber jacket's popularity across all groups in the 1980s was the return of the leather flight jacket to the military. The Navy reinstated it in 1983 after 11 years and the Air Force in 1987 after almost 40 years (now produced by Avirex). The Air Force revealed that it was part of a "morale-boosting program" to beat falling retention rates while the Navy sought to inspire more men to enlist.[41] They had realized that, practical or not, pilots associated the job with this quintessentially macho garment and expected to own one. By reissuing the classic WWII look, the Navy and Air Force hoped to instill their pilots with the same drive, passion, and patriotism of their forebears. These messages encoded in the flight jacket were used to forceful effect in this period by President Reagan. As an actor he understood the power of proper costuming, and with JFK as his guide, Reagan took to wearing a brown leather bomber jacket when he wanted to portray vigor and strength. When British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher arrived at Camp David for a diplomacy meeting in November 1986, Reagan greeted her at her plane in a replica A-2 leather jacket and chinos — a cleaned-up version of his *Hong Kong* costume 30 years previous. In contrast to her tailored skirt suit and wool coat, his look was very casual yet calculated — a powerful reminder that, through the might of his military and huge defense buildup, he was the leader of the free world. Although Reagan remained stateside, serving in the Army Air Corps 1st Motion Picture Unit, Vice President George Bush had in fact been a naval aviator and hero in WWII.[42] Though he would have been issued a cloth B-10 or B-15 while in the Navy, Bush chose to also wear an A-2 leather bomber to project masculine strength. Less bombastic than Reagan's particular brand of manliness, Bush leaned into a more restrained masculinity that relied on reminders of his battle history.

The Bomber Jacket as a Classic Staple: The 1990s

RETURN TO COMBAT

The appropriation and recontextualization of the bomber that occurred through streetwear, subcultures, music, and fashion in the 1970s and 80s continued into the next decade and was amplified by a return to actual combat. In August 1990 Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait, instigating the start of the Gulf War in January 1991. The bomber jacket and other military uniforms went from being part of a mythologized, romanticized past to the top of the news daily. Though from the initial invasion to the end of the war it was only 211 days, the impact of Operation Desert Storm on fashion was immediate. While it was difficult for fashion brands to design and produce new military-inspired looks within such a short turnaround, civilians took to the streets in their previously purchased bombers, fatigues, and camouflage or sought them out from Army-Navy stores and outerwear retailers. Companies like Avirex saw an instant increase in sales, similar to the bump they experienced after the release of *Top Gun*.

PATRIOTIC PURCHASING

Patriotic clothing also saw a leap in purchases in that period, with some brands perfectly situated to take advantage of the sudden military develop-ments. In the summer of 1990, Michael Hoban of North Beach Leather had launched an American flag bomber jacket. "White stars are embroidered on a navy leather background and white and red stripes are set into the back of a navy-blue leather jacket."[43] To further enhance the eye-catching nature of the garment, a giant USA was emblazoned down the arm. Priced at $850 for men and $795 for women, sales of the oversized patriotic bomber doubled once air strikes started.[44] Stars including Frank Sinatra, Burt Reynolds, and 2 Live Crew rushed to be photographed in the jackets, while cheaper manufacturers quickly copied them, flooding streets across the country with puffy leather flight jackets that broadcast a flashy, over-the-top patriotism.

DERIVATIVE WORKS

Similar in style to Dapper Dan's and Adidas' over-sized, brightly colored, and appliquéd leather bombers from the mid-80s, Hoban produced a series of themed flight jackets that were incredibly popular in the first years of the decade. In addition to the American flag jacket, he designed an 8-ball jacket (based on billiards) as well as collections of highway signs, sports symbols, and animals. Comedian Arsenio Hall bought one in every available traffic symbol and highway sign, causing the style to be called the "Arsenio Jacket" after he wore them nightly on his talk show.[45]

High fashion looked more to streetwear than the military when formulating the many flight jackets that appeared on catwalks in the early nineties. The first three years of the decade were a whirl of new and novel bomber jackets in every imaginable style and material. Inspired by the acid-house music scene in London, Turkish designer Rifat Ozbek's all-white spring/summer 1990 collection included a "dazzling diamanté bomber jacket… available by order for $24,000" while his following collection featured a rainbow sequined bomber.[46] Inspired by hip hop, Karl Lagerfeld sent out A–2 style patch-pocketed, leather bomber jackets and heavy gold chains at Chanel's fall/winter 1991 show—interestingly at the same time that rap culture moved away from the gaudy flight jackets of the eighties. In Milan, Dolce & Gabbana designed cropped satin bombers and ones in black velvet appliquéd with mirrors and pom-poms. In New York, Marc Jacobs at Perry Ellis produced leather bombers lined with hot-pink sheared mink, while Donna Karan paired deerskin bomber jackets with gold beaded evening skirts for evening. Isaac Mizrahi "tossed a brown leather bomber jacket over a full, pink tweed wrap skirt that was hemmed at the ankle and slit to the thigh."[47] Designers concocted flight jackets for every kind of woman for every kind of occasion. Within the world of fashion in most catwalk appearances, bomber jackets had now moved so completely away from their original military connotations to become a staple garment divorced from any symbolism.

A CLASSIC, FOR EVERYONE

Just as the flight jacket had made the jump to staple within fashion, it had also become a staple for the general public. For most people it was still understood as a signifier of masculinity, but one that also felt like an essential item for every wardrobe. The media's language about bomber jackets reinforced this shift—the idea that it was a garment so loaded with masculine energy that it existed outside of trends or any time period, a true "classic." As one pilot explained to a journalist, "It's nostalgic… [the bomber jacket is] pretty much regarded as timeless."[48] The power of wearing a pilot's uniform was incontestable: "Whether he walks about in an authentic bomber jacket or merely dons a pair of aviator sunglasses, a man can't help adding a little swagger to his stride… Strength seems to emanate from these campaign-hardened wardrobe icons, lending itself to their wearers. Strength imparts confidence; and confidence can be very sexy."[49] Taking advantage of this ability to impart confidence and swagger was President Bill Clinton, who often wore a leather bomber jacket. In 1993 he was given an A–2 replica by the manufacturer Golden Bear Sportswear that he wore often; in later years he wore a Navy-issued G–1 with presidential seal, as well as a sleeker, simplified version by the brand Roots. For a president who had avoided the draft during Vietnam, leather flight jackets allowed him to project a more military-minded mystique than his reputation might express.

COPIES AND COLLECTORS

On the other side of the planet, there emerged a culture of voracious Japanese collectors of American military uniforms. Since the 1950s the Japanese had been interested in American clothing, particularly preppy and Ivy League styles — collecting, copying, and subverting Americana through a culture of obsession that clarified and refined it down to its most pure form. Within Japan's conformist society, there has been a great desire to find ways to stand out with American vintage having a particular appeal. Japanese youths would study and learn everything about their particular area of obsession and then spend thousands tracking down particular garments and shoes to wear. For many, finding an original WWII jacket was the ultimate goal: "Japanese buyers treasure old military clothing that many Americans have hidden in closets or throw away during spring cleaning… the Japanese want them and will pay large sums to get them."[50] One vintage importer remarked in 1997 that his outfit of "navy and gold Nike dunks, pre-1970s dark Levi's jeans, a rayon Hawaiian shirt and a World War II-era leather bomber jacket… would be worth $10,000 in Tokyo"—an impressive sum in any period.[51] While some cultural critics and journalists felt that this GI nostalgia boom was an effort by the Japanese to forget or suppress their part in the war, others saw it as the effect of indoctrination by American popular culture and movies. To these Japanese teens, bomber jackets were as symbolic as they were to their counterparts in the United States, and they sought their transformative powers for themselves.

Diffuse Influences, Timeless Style: The 2000s

THE EFFECTS AND ACCESSIBILITY OF DIGITAL IMAGERY

Fashion and popular culture in the first 20 years of the 21st century has been defined, created, and molded by the emergence of the internet as a power of information and imagery dissemination. Knowledge about military uniforms, fashion trends, and subcultures that previously had to be learned through books, magazines, and word of mouth was now at everyone's fingertips. Now anyone could quickly learn the intricacies of different A-2's and their replicas and order one to be specially made, all while looking at photos of fashionable people in cities all over the world. Trends came quicker, subcultures melded and lost their edge, and collectors grew in number.

SPEED OF STYLE

With so much visual imagery available at all times, the cycles of fashion that were already occurring sped up even more as designers constantly looked to the past, recycling old styles at an ever increasing pace. Bomber jackets have consistently appeared on catwalks over the last 20 years in a multitude of different incarnations for both men and women. Often referencing past fashion bomber jacket trends instead of the original with each reemergence, the flight jacket became more and more divorced from the aviation icon. In the early 2000s many women's-wear brands produced looser, seventies-inspired bombers; in metallic leather (Miu Miu), snakeskin (Gucci), or satin (Yohji Yamamoto, among others) that harked back more to disco.[52] Marc Jacobs at Louis Vuitton sent out monogramed canvas bombers, reminiscent of Dapper Dan's cult 1980s styles. The attacks of 9/11 and the war that followed did little to change the flight jacket's standing in fashion; for the most part, designers continued to show flashy styles. For Madonna's 2006 "Confessions" tour and television appearances, then-Gucci creative director Frida Giannini redesigned the A-1 type jacket with a new-looking shrunken fit that was a clear break from the oversized blouson silhouette of fashion bombers for most of the previous 30 years. Since then both shapes have populated stores and runways.

TRANSFORMATIVE POWER

While some designers wanted to bring depth to their collections through the use of flight jackets and further uniform garments, there were others who sought to upend these codes. For his "Riot Riot Riot!" fall/winter 2001 collection, Belgian designer Raf Simons purchased a camouflage MA-1 made by Fostex (a small European military clothing company) from an army surplus store for around €40 and patched on to it images of David Bowie,

Richey Edwards of the Manic Street Preachers, a Bauhaus poster, and an article about Edwards' disappearance in 1995. Simons was riffing on the way that the jacket's meaning had mutated from military to subcultural due to skinheads and other groups; he then altered the meaning again through his patches and inclusion on the runway. In 2002, he spoke of this transformative power: "I try to turn around the original meaning of clothing. This is something I did particularly with the bomber jacket. Certain things become symbols for certain people, which I find very attractive. When somebody invents their own symbols or codes in dress, I really like that. Bringing those dress codes into the context of what I'm doing, they become a symbol for something else. My interest is in that transformation."[53] Now described as "a piece of streetwear history," this jacket is thought of as "the moment when the Belgian designer started to shape the relationship between streetwear and high-end fashion, years before designers like Virgil Abloh and Kim Jones popularized the trend in the mainstream."[54] Fourteen years after it was created, rapper Kanye West wore the "Raf Riot jacket" (as aficionados call it) on the red carpet and at fashion shows. With photos all over the internet, the oversized and embellished piece was soon coveted by men and women alike. Rihanna has worn it out and about, and both Drake and Travis Scott have worn it in music videos. In 2018 one of these rare jackets sold on Grailed (an archival menswear collectors' resale platform) for $47,000 — still the site's largest sale ever.[55] This single garment connects together many of the diverse threads through this chapter — the military, army surplus, subcultures, hip hop, and obsessive collectors, clearly illustrating the intriguing way that the internet age has allowed for the amalgamation, subversion, and flattening of ideas and trends.

INFLUENCERS

The popularity of the MA-1 in fashion owes much to Kanye West and Vetements, who were instrumental in elevating the classic military version made by Alpha Industries to the forefront of fashion. Alpha Industries (originally an offshoot of Dobbs) began manufacturing military outerwear in the '60s through contracts with the U.S. Department of Defense, producing the MA-1 and other styles.[56] In the 1980s they began producing jackets for the commercial market while between military contracts. For West's Yeezus tour in 2013–14, his team contacted Alpha and ordered over 100 jackets, to which they applied his logo and patches (similarly to his favorite Simons bomber); he wore them on stage and in public, while having many of the tour jackets available for sale to fans. In 2016 Alpha Industries reported a 30 percent increase in revenue for the previous year, in large part due to very high sales of their must-have MA-1.[57] When Kanye launched his own fashion line Yeezy in 2015, nylon MA-1 style bomber jackets in somber colors were heavily featured — their $2,080 price tag a large increase from Alpha's $160. At the same time, Vetements, a Paris-based house designed by Demna Gvasalia, began playing with and reworking the classic MA-1, first creating a super-sized version with extra-long sleeves for fall/winter 2014 and then a pentagram-embroidered style for fall/winter 2016. After helping put Alpha Industries on the fashion map, Gvasalia collaborated with them on Vetements spring/summer 2017 couture show, creating a line of highly desirable oversized and hooded jackets designed by Gvasalia and produced by Alpha.

INCREASED VIGOR

Soon the MA-1 was everywhere for men, whether skinny-fit or oversized; in 2014 the trade journal WWD declared, "Military details, Eighties skin-heads, and Nineties raver influences are of the key elements invigorating the bomber jacket this season. Thanks to these references, the ultimate outerwear piece continues to maintain its status as one statement of rebel youth."[58] Some designers copied the style down to the khaki green with orange lining, closely drawing on the military and skinhead antecedents while others reworked the classic style. Hedi Slimane at Saint Laurent designed velvet MA-1's embroidered with large gold stars for men, while womenswear designers produced them in every possible fabric combination and color — glam rock with no sense of their military beginnings, yet still capable of imparting swaggering energy to the wearer. The multitude of different available styles has made the MA-1 into a favorite of models and streetstyle stars like Bella and Gigi Hadid, Kendall Jenner, and Kim Kardashian.

RECYCLED COPIES

The cyclical nature of fashion and its continual self-referencing resulted in Alessandro Michele, the creative director at Gucci, copying a legendary bomber that Dapper Dan made for Olympic gold medal winner Diane Dixon in 1989. Dapper Dan's balloon-sleeved, fur-paneled bomber jacket was made from leather silk-screened with the Louis Vuitton logo, whereas Gucci's copy featured their own monogram. The ensuing controversy brought bomber jackets to the center of the fashion conversation and led to Gucci establishing a partnership with Dan — together opening The Dapper Dan Atelier in Harlem.

MICROTRENDS

Due to the prevalence of internet-based micro-trends, movies have held less sway over global trends in dress. For a 2009 biopic of Amelia Earhart, *Amelia*, the filmmakers collaborated with Belstaff, a British luxury outerwear manufacturer known for first using wax cotton in motorcycle clothing. Belstaff produced a brown leather A-2 for the film and for retail. Their executive vice president stated, "They say fashion is cyclical, but this is timeless… It comes and goes in fashion, but it plays in our favor that it's a 'trend' that kind of lasts forever."[60]

SYNONYMOUS WITH POWER

Unlike fashion, within politics the bomber jacket's symbolism has remained consistent — they continue to be worn as an analogy for strength and power, to prove military might especially at times when a nation's morale is lagging or when a politician is embattled. George W. Bush and Tony Blair wore G-1s and MA-1s during the military assault on Afghanistan in 2001. Barack Obama wore a brown leather A-2 embroidered with "Air Force One" in Afghanistan in 2010, and Donald Trump wore both an A-2 and a nylon bomber during his first presidency. President Joe Biden wore an AF1 A-2 for his first Valentine's Day in the White House, returning to Kennedy's habit of donning the aviator jacket for relaxing moments.

AN ESSENTIAL ITEM

In less than a century the flight jacket has become an essential piece of clothing worn by all types of people — all genders, ages, sexual orientations, and lifestyles. Timeless, the garment transcends the many detours it has taken stylistically. Designers, collectors, and wearers continue to return to it, seeking out the visual message it broadcasts and hoping to channel some of its power into their own lives. What is clear throughout the decades is the long-lasting popularity of the bomber (whether an A-2, MA-1, or other) coupled with its enduring symbolism. Society has changed, gender roles have evolved, yet the aviator jacket still signifies strength, power, and masculine energy. More than just a jacket, the bomber is a metaphor for all that we aspire to be, neatly sewn up in leather (or satin or nylon or twill).

As *Esquire* magazine put it in 2020, "For decades, men have relied on the leather bomber jacket as the closing argument of a casual outfit — throw it over a T-shirt or sweater and, like that, what began as a lazy Saturday afternoon uniform becomes something altogether more imposing. All because of one powerful (and, yes, simple) article of clothing."[61]

About the Author

Laura McLaws Helms is a fashion and cultural historian based in New York and London. Specializing in the influence of vintage clothing on contemporary design, Laura acts as an exhibition curator and design consultant to stylists, editors, and designers within film, advertising, and fashion industries.

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A-2: A VISUAL TIMELINE

"These A-1 jackets served as the prototype for the A-2. Note the button closure and knit collars that were later updated to zipper closures, shirt-style leather collars, with leather epaulettes added to shoulders."

Bomber Boys, Page 316





"Be a 'Style Leader': Mass Marketing to the Modern American Man"

Bomber Boys, Page 317

"Beyond a national or personal expression of identity, the A-2 served as a protection, both from the elements and as communication technology with enemy forces or civilians."

Bomber Boys, Page 4





"While the A-2 was marketed to the American public as a sign of American heroism and masculinity, this A-2 was used by German propaganda as proof that Americans were morally inferior and dangerous."

Bomber Boys, Page 19

"Future President of the United States Ronald Reagan sporting an original Air Force brown leather A-2 jacket in the 1952 adventure film *Hong Kong*."

Bomber Boys, Page 318



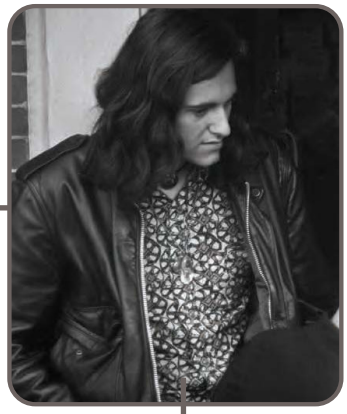


"The most famous band in the world: The Beatles in 1961."

Bomber Boys, Page 313-314

"From Military Issue to Masculinity to Counter-Culture to Subculture. Variations of the A-2 were marketed to women, youth-culture, subverted by anti-war protesters, and reclaimed by high fashion designers like Calvin Klein."

Bomber Boys, Page 324





"President Ronald Reagan campaigned on nostalgia; sporting the A-2 was a visual message of American exceptionalism and economic optimism associated with winning World War II. He is seen here walking with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1986."

Bomber Boys, Page 335

"Ground-breaking female hip-hop trio Salt-N-Pepa sporting custom oversized A-2 style, leather jackets."

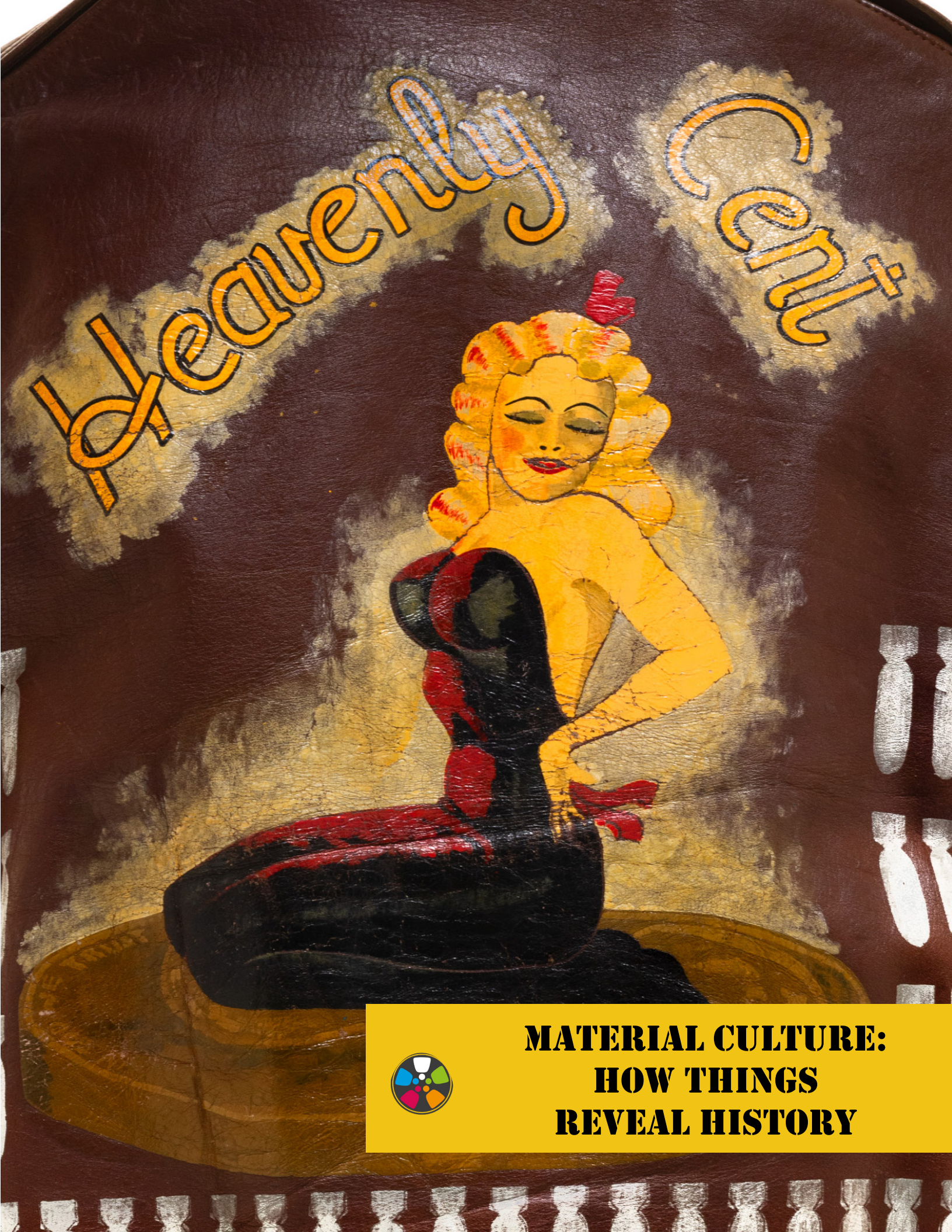
Bomber Boys, Page 330





"Timeless style. Described as 'a piece of streetwear history.'"

Bomber Boys, Page 333



MATERIAL CULTURE: HOW THINGS REVEAL HISTORY

MATERIAL CULTURE: HOW THINGS REVEAL HISTORY



Bomber Boys is built on the insight that objects are historical documents. Beyond the A-2 jackets themselves, the book gathers a whole ecosystem of wartime objects that work together to tell the history of the ordinary men and women who drove the extraordinary efforts of World War II.

While studying material culture has its strengths, like all other methods of collecting history, it also has its limitations. The term "**survival bias**" refers to the bias that occurs when surviving records of an event or culture overrepresent some experiences and underrepresent others, leading to a distorted understanding of history.

Bomber Boys attempts to address this gap by featuring the stories of marginalized service members, such as the Tuskegee Airmen and the Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASP). Segregation in the military, whose belongings families and institutions chose to preserve, whose stories collectors and museums historically valued, and simple chance are all necessary considerations when looking at the visual and material archive.

DRIVING QUESTION

What has survived…and what might still be missing?

Materials for Students

- Handout 4: Material Culture: How Things Reveal History
- Worksheet 1: Material Culture Object Analysis
- Worksheet 2: Missing Museum Peer Analysis

Personal Reflection

John Slemp began what became the *Bomber Boys* book as a photographer, not a historian. What is something you are uniquely good at, passionate about, or interested in? If you were to share this passion with a visual learner, what image(s) would you choose to bring the subject to life?

"While researching different units and people for this book, it became imperative to include the Tuskegee Airmen, not only for their outstanding combat achievements but to paint as complete a picture as possible of the men who served in the military. While their story has been told and continues to be told through various means today, it is important to remember the unwarranted discrimination they faced, both in the military and civilian society, and how they nonetheless persevered. I was only able to locate a few authentic A-2 jackets that belonged to the 922 pilots who graduated from the program."

— John Slemp

Discussion Questions

1. How can you know or learn about something that is not being actively taught? What strategies could you undertake, either individually or as a learning community, to find out more about an underrepresented culture or topic?

2. Look around the room. What five objects are in the immediate vicinity that a historian could "read" to learn about your life? What would each reveal? What would they get wrong?

3. Why might a jacket be *better* evidence than a memoir or personal record (like a diary or journal entry) for certain questions? What limitations does an A-2 jacket have as a historical document?

4. If *Bomber Boys* only included the A-2 jackets, without the context of the individual airmen's stories, information about the aircraft they flew, or the geopolitical theaters they flew in, how would our picture of the "Bomber Boys" be distorted?

Extension Activities

1. Object Analysis

In pairs: Choose one artifact image from the book (jacket, map, bomb tag, etc).

Individually: Complete the Object Analysis Worksheet.

Pair share: Compare and contrast your analysis. Discuss anything your partner noticed that you did not.

Group collaboration: Have each pair share any key takeaways from their pair-share analysis with the whole group. As a whole group, brainstorm other sources to consult or next steps to take to further research the key findings the group found most interesting.

2. The Missing Museum

Part I:
In small groups, students design a one-room exhibit representing their school or community using only 10 objects. Adjust the task to the advantages and limitations of your actual environment. If you are limited on space, students can design their exhibit digitally or by crafting images onto poster boards.

Part II:
At random, give each group another group's exhibit to discuss and critique using the **Material Culture Handout** and **Missing Museum Worksheet**.

MATERIAL CULTURE: HOW THINGS REVEAL HISTORY

Material culture is the totality of physical, tangible objects created, used, left behind, and given meaning by a human society. These include **everyday objects** like tools, clothing, furniture, weapons, and utensils; **large-scale structures** like roads, cities, monuments, and buildings; and **art and expression** through paintings, sculptures, tattoos, and ceremonial items.

However, material culture is not just about the objects themselves, but what they reveal about human behavior. The material culture photographed and displayed by John Slemp in *Bomber Boys* gives us a visual representation of **immaterial culture,** in other words, the beliefs, values, laws, and social structures seen in the specific subculture of the United States Army Air Forces during World War II.

By learning history through material objects, rather than relying solely on written texts, we uncover distinct advantages.

Material Culture Bridges Gaps in the Historical Record

Marginalized groups — such as enslaved people, the working class, and women — often left behind few written documents. Their physical possessions provide a direct record of their lived experiences. For eras or societies without widespread literacy, or whose culture was transmitted orally rather than through writing, physical artifacts are the primary source of historical evidence.

Material Culture Fosters Emotional Empathy and Connection

Seeing a tangible object, such as the weathered leather of a WWII flight jacket, transforms abstract historical figures into real people who lived, feared, and created. Engaging with them tactilely or through the photographs in the book humanizes the past. Also, by engaging sensory experiences in the present moment, studying material culture gives multiple pathways to a deeper understanding of the past. Visceral connections to the daily realities of the past can be more fully understood through the weight of a tool, the texture of a fabric, or the scale of a building.

Material Culture Reveals Subconscious Cultural Values

Written texts are often calculated, curated, or censored by those in power. Everyday objects reveal what a society *actually* valued, used, and discarded without the filter of political propaganda, potentially exposing unspoken truths. Physical artifacts chart the exact progression of human innovation, trade networks, and manufacturing capabilities over time, creating a tactile map of technological evolution.

Material Culture Study Enhances Critical Thinking and Analysis

Analyzing an object requires a learner to develop unique analytical frameworks. By deducing an object's material origin, purpose, manufacturer, and user, they sharpen investigative and deductive reasoning skills. Perhaps most importantly, studying material culture naturally leads to cross-disciplinary learning: History blends with science (material degradation), art (design choices), and anthropology (cultural utility).

MATERIAL CULTURE: OBJECT ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Choose an image of an object from *Bomber Boys* and use the graphic organizer to capture your analysis. Your goal is to capture every tiny, minute detail of the image in words. Your observations do not need to be "unique" or "interesting"; simply write down what you see and whatever thoughts or questions arise as you look at the image.

First, only look at the image. Use your imagination to infer answers to anything that is not obvious by viewing, and do your best to ignore the accompanying text.

Next, read the surrounding text and add those details to the organizer, correcting any initial inferences as necessary. If your image refers to another page in the book, read the accompanying page(s) and add in any additional information you find.

Describe (materials, condition, markings, colors, symbols)	**Deduce** (who made it, how was it used, why was it made)	**Question** (What can't the object tell you?)	**Corroborate** (What other sources would we need to research to learn more?)

MISSING MUSEUM PEER ANALYSIS

Put yourself in the mindset of a historian or culturally savvy museum-goer and answer the following questions:

1. Is this an everyday object, large-scale structure, or artful expression?

2. Does this item make you think of any other cultural artifacts?

3. Does this item bridge any gaps in the historical record? Who is represented by the object (or who is not)?

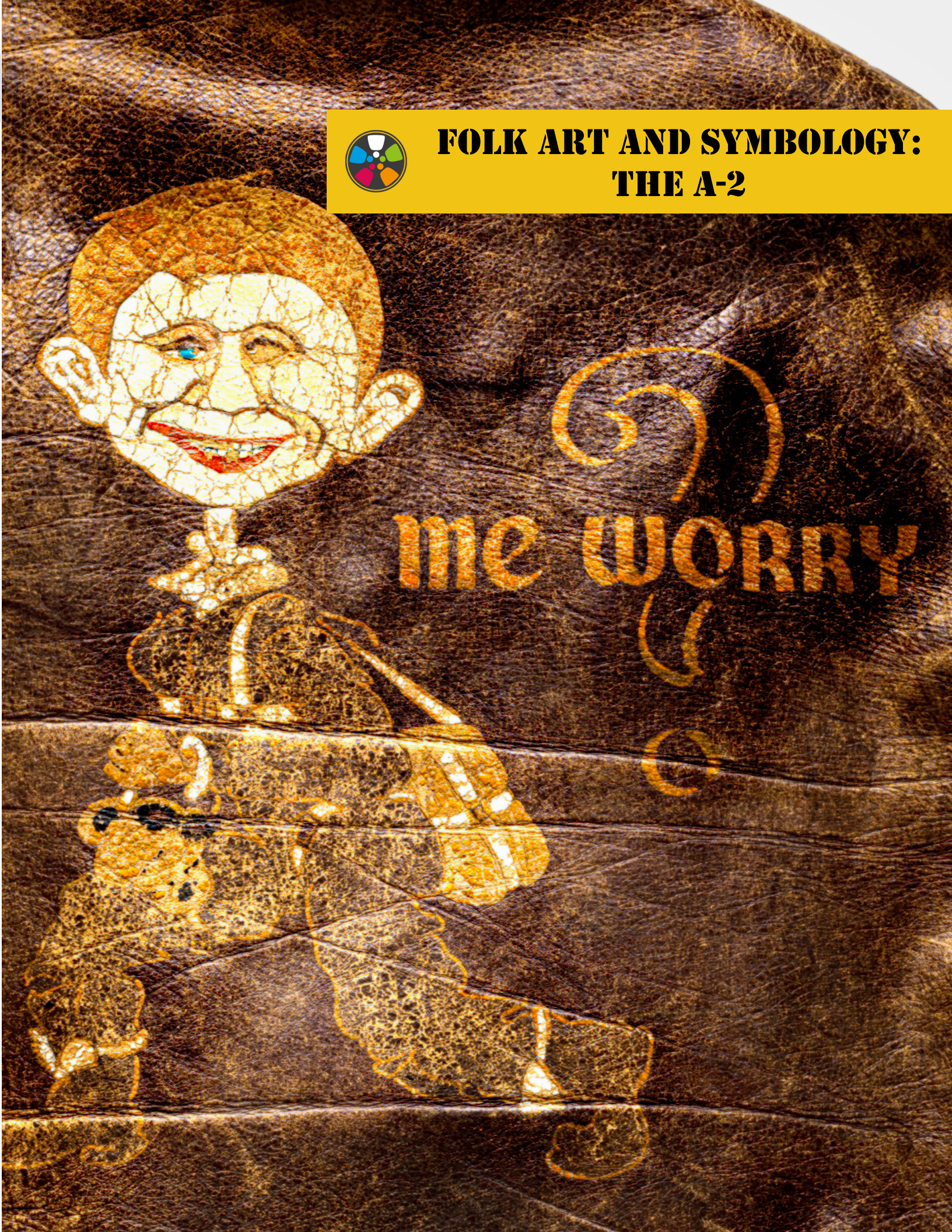
4. Does the object evoke emotional empathy or connection? How?

5. What values does the object represent?

6. Are there other, subconscious values possibly being represented?

7. If you were a cultural outsider (e.g., a visitor from another planet), create some imaginative alternatives to what a few of the objects might do or represent.

FOLK ART AND SYMBOLOGY: THE A-2



FOLK ART AND SYMBOLOGY: THE A-2





DRIVING QUESTION

How do the A-2 jackets in* Bomber Boys *use folk art and symbology to communicate identity, values, and wartime experience? What values or meaning might be missed by "high art" standards?

Materials for Students

- Handout 5: The A-2: Folk Art and Symbology
- Handout 6: Useful Terms
- Worksheet 3: A-2 as Folk Art and Symbology

Personal Reflection

Do you feel there are images from the past that should be permanently retired (e.g., symbols that represent hate or other harmful forms of expression)? Do you agree with the sentiment *"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"*? Why or why not?

Discussion Questions

1. Some of the service men who painted the A-2 jackets were highly trained, professional artists. What makes the artwork on the A-2 jackets "folk" rather than "fine/high art"? Are those useful distinctions when thinking about the artwork on the A-2's?

2. High art is often tied to specialized knowledge and museum curation. What are the risks of using that lens to judge the A-2 jackets? It's unlikely the A-2 jackets would have become museum exhibits when they were created. Why do you think they are considered an important object now?

3. The blood chit is given as an example of artwork that mixes beauty/imagery with a survival function. How does combining utility and aesthetics change how you think about "art"? What does the blood chit suggest about the needs of people at war?

4. Why is it important that symbols operate as a recognizable system within a group? How might outsiders misread the same images?

5. If a symbol is culturally dependent, and American culture shifts over time, how should we approach interpreting A-2 imagery without assuming one universal meaning?

Extension Activities

1. *Bomber Boys* Deep Dive

Choose one A-2 jacket from *Bomber Boys* to do an extended research project on.

Include the following areas of study: **Literal meanings of symbols, indirect representation of symbols, geographical and mission context, symbolic misunderstandings (then or now).**

Communicate your research either in a research paper with images or as a digital or mixed-method display.

2. Patch Design

Part I:
Design a simple "patch" concept that represents an abstract idea (e.g., teamwork, perseverance, a community culture, or a survival value) by sketching or describing the imagery in words.

Include in your design:

- A literal element (an image that already has a literal meaning)
- A symbolic meaning (a specific meaning you have given that literal element)
- A context clue (why or how a group of insiders might correctly interpret your intended meaning)
- Specific color choices (add meaning through deliberate cultural connotations)

Part II:
In pairs, swap designs with a partner. Have each partner share (orally or through writing) what they think the patch represents, linking each assertion to a visual element on the patch or its composition.

Share the intended meaning behind each patch and discuss which visual elements landed (and why). If symbols were misread, try to deduce why.

Part III:
As the creator, write a brief reflection (500 words or less) describing the experience of having your symbolic interpretations upheld or supported and/or disagreed with or misread. Finally, explain why visual literacy or shared meaning through images is a powerful diplomatic tool between cultures.

THE A-2: FOLK ART AND SYMBOLOGY

While there is no single definition of "**folk art**," it is widely agreed that it is material culture and visual art that is created by self-taught or informally trained artists. While some of the painted A-2 jackets were rendered by servicemen who were professional artists in civilian life (of particular note were Disney cartoonists), these jackets are still considered folk art as they display images rooted in community tradition (the military), and reflect its history, values, popular culture (again, Disney), and daily experience, in addition to serving a utilitarian purpose. In these ways, folk art acts as a counterpoint to mainstream fine art standards.

"**High art**" refers to aesthetic expressions considered intellectually or culturally superior. It traditionally encompasses classical disciplines like Renaissance painting, orchestral music, and canonical literature. High art demands deep intellectual engagement, specialized knowledge, and an appreciation for form that is upheld by the economic elite in a society.

High Art vs. Low Art

Historically, artisans largely created aesthetically pleasing functional objects and technically challenging works of art that did not adhere to strict hierarchical categories. However, this began to change in 1563 when the Accademia del Disegno (Academy of Design) was established in Florence. The emphasis on instruction and exhibition increased with the popularization of printed materials, and philosophers and critics began to distribute ideas that divided visual and performing arts into separate categories.

Currently, the line between high art (museum-curated works) and low art (pop culture, pulp fiction, and mass-market entertainment) is still a heavily debated construct. While historical definitions favor the Western classical tradition, contemporary art critics emphasize that the distinction is highly subjective and can gatekeep or exclude certain communities.

Folk Art Characteristics

One of the most fascinating aspects of folk art is that it is tied to a specific population at a specific moment in history and is therefore a unique reflection of its environment and the available local materials. Traditional folk art can be found in textiles, woodwork, ceramics, and other mediums. This is beautifully illustrated on the extant A-2 jackets, where most of the artwork is displayed on the wide leather surface of the back panel. The imagery displayed on the jackets of individual pilots, imagery shared amongst teams of aircrew, and matched on the nose and hulls of the bombers they flew, provide further layers of information and insights into the culture of the time.

Folk art often mixes aesthetics with utility, a poignant example from *Bomber Boys* being the "**blood chit**." A blood chit is a document or patch carried by military personnel (often aviators) that identifies them as friendly and promises a reward to civilians who help them return to safety. They are often printed on silk or durable material and sewn into flight jackets, displaying a flag and a translated message for local populations. Blood chits are still used today and are considered an essential part of military personnel recovery and survival gear.

Symbology refers to the study of symbols. The academic term "**semiotics**" means the study of signs, symbols, and how they communicate meaning.

Symbols stand in or give **representation** to indirect or larger meanings. For example, a heart shape may represent romantic love. As highlighted in *Bomber Boys*, an image of a parachute represented the crewman actually bailing out of his aircraft during a flight mission.

Systems of symbols are context-specific and are defined as a specific set of graphical rules that convey information. The A-2 jackets show systems of symbols that indicate a wealth of information, including unit identification, mission and kill tallies, and which theater of war the service person was active in.

Symbolism is the practice of using objects, animals, colors, or actions to represent deeper, abstract ideas beyond their literal meaning. It allows creators to convey complex emotions and themes indirectly. Found in visual art and literature, symbolism is woven into the shared lexicon of a culture and differs considerably between cultures. Thus, in times of war, symbolism can create a strong sense of unity between members of the same group and also create or strengthen feelings of "otherness" or "inferiority" associated with an enemy. A common example is the color white. In Western culture the color white is associated with purity, innocence, and cleanliness, while in many Asian cultures, white is associated with death and mourning.

USEFUL TERMS

TERM	DEFINITION
Material culture	The physical objects made and used by people, studied as evidence of their beliefs, values, and daily lives
Artifact	A human-made object of historical or cultural interest
A-2 jacket	The U.S. Army Air Force's standard-issue leather flight jacket, introduced in the interwar period and worn throughout WWII
Folk art	Art made by ordinary people (not trained professionals), typically reflecting community traditions and shared culture
Nose art	Decorative painting on the fuselage of military aircraft, often mirrored on crew jackets
Symbology	The study and use of symbols; a system of symbols and their meanings
Provenance	The documented history of an object's ownership, used to establish authenticity
Esprit de corps	A feeling of pride, loyalty, and fellowship shared by members of a group
Survival bias	The distortion that occurs when we draw conclusions only from things (or stories) that survived
Blood chit	A notice carried by airmen, written in local languages, promising a reward to anyone who helped a downed flyer return to friendly forces
Conservation	The professional practice of preserving and stabilizing artifacts
Iconography	The visual images and symbols used in a work of art and their interpretation

THE A-2 AS FOLK ART AND SYMBOLOGY

Study these images from *Bomber Boys* and answer the questions that follow.



1. Which images contain symbols that represent location or other mission specifics (e.g., which theater of war, number of missions flown, etc.)?

2. Which image or images contain symbols relating to luck?

3. Choose an image and describe how it displays ironic humor.

4. Identify and describe an image that both symbolizes identity and has a clear, utilitarian function.

5. Which images contain animal imagery and what do you think they represent?

6. Which images contain examples of situational irony or subversion of expectations?

7. Looking at all the images together, what symbols are most striking or interesting to you? What connections can you make between those symbols and symbols that you commonly see today?

Answer Key

THE A-2 AS FOLK ART AND SYMBOLOGY

Answers may vary. Give full credit to students who clearly articulate their reasoning.

1. Which images contain symbols that represent location or other mission specifics (e.g., which theater of war, number of missions flown, etc.)?

J, I, G, A, D, G, K

2. Which image or images contain symbols relating to luck?

H (Joker/playing cards), K (girl sitting on lucky penny)

3. Choose an image and describe how it displays ironic humor.

Answers will vary. Possible answer: G: "Baby Buggy" juxtaposes the young ages of the servicemen with their deadly purpose as bombers.

4. Identify and describe an image that both symbolizes identity and has a clear, utilitarian function.

Answers may vary. Possible answer: A. The blood chit has a prominently displayed American flag that signifies where the soldier is from. It also gives directions in multiple languages to help the soldier in case his plane is downed in enemy territory while fighting in the Pacific Theater.

5. Which images contain animal imagery and what do you think they represent?

B, C, F. Answers will vary.

6. Which images contain examples of situational irony or subversion of expectations?

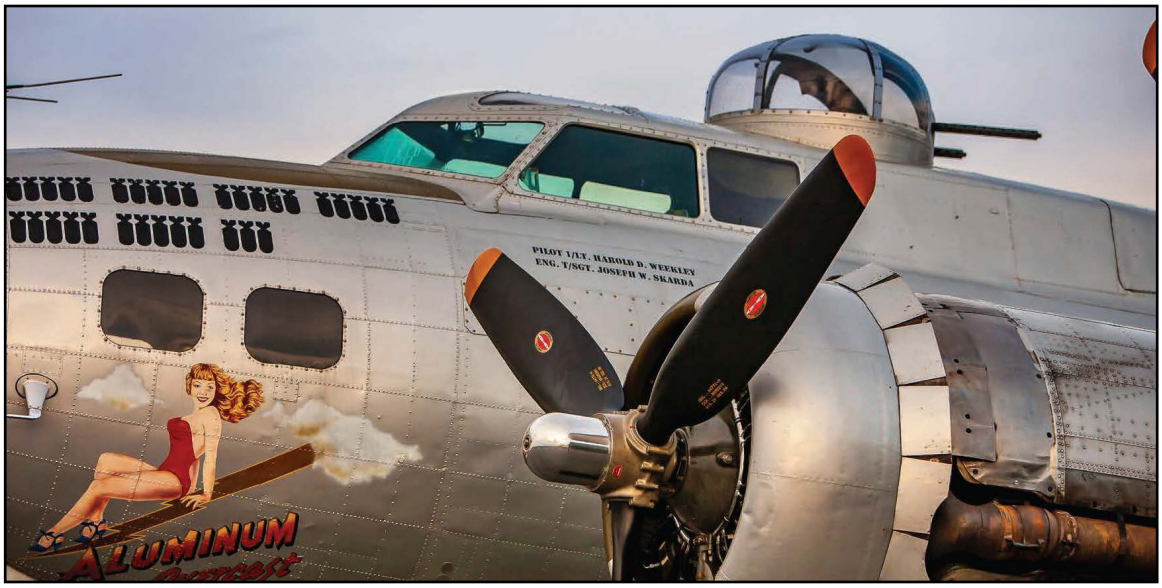
Possible answer(s): I. A diplomat represents someone who finds peace through talking and negotiation, a distinct parallel to the destructive purpose of a bomber pilot. J. Missionaries are usually thought of bringing Christianity to new lands; the halo on the image contrasts ideas of goodness and purity with the bombs actually being delivered by the aircrews. Also of note, "air" is deliberately added into the word "missionaries," further changing its meaning.

7. Looking at all the images together, what symbols are most striking or interesting to you? What connections can you make between those symbols and symbols that you commonly see today?

(Answers will vary)


EXTRAORDINARY
MEETS ORDINARY

EXTRAORDINARY MEETS ORDINARY IN *BOMBER BOYS*



In response to the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, ordinary people mobilized, working together to support the massive war effort overseas. Over 16 million Americans served in the military while those at home rationed goods, bought war bonds, grew "victory gardens" and gathered scrap metal so goods could be shipped overseas to support the armed forces. Patriotism, new industrial jobs, and new wartime demands created the conditions that eventually reshaped the cultural landscape of the United States.

The nation's survival depended on everyone taking part in the war effort. Wartime manufacturing opened job opportunities previously closed to women and people of color, helping pull the country out of the Great Depression. While the national narrative regarding World War II has been largely positive, the United States has had to reckon with its own policies during World War II, including sending Japanese Americans to internment camps, racial segregation in the armed forces, and its treatment of women in the workforce. It was the extraordinary efforts of ordinary people that eventually won the war and, arguably, seeded a cascade of events that laid the foundation for the civil rights movements of the 1960s and beyond.

Microhistory is a historical approach that investigates a small, well-defined subject — a single event, a specific community, or one ordinary individual — to reveal broader socioeconomic, cultural, and global patterns. Through the medium of the A-2 jackets in *Bomber Boys*, we are invited to explore the microhistories of the people who wore them.

As you learn about the people in *Bomber Boys,* explore the U.S. History Primary Source Timeline at the Library of Congress to develop a broader context for the extraordinary events they lived through.

Materials for Students

- Handout 7: *Bomber Boys*: Primary and Secondary Sources in Action
- Handout 8: What is Oral History?
- Worksheet 4: Oral History Quiz
- Worksheet 5: Story Investigation Notes
- Handout 9: Profiles WASP: Women Airforce Service Pilots; Billy Lewis (Video); Robert Mitchell, Jr. (Video); Ray Zisk: A Letter Home; Albert McMahan, Ernest Erickson: Generational Legacy

DRIVING QUESTION

Why is it crucial that historians include the experiences and perspectives of ordinary and marginalized people? What happens when they don't?

Personal Reflection

Considering the stories shared through *Bomber Boys*, what qualities, skills, or interests do you have (or would you like to develop) that could contribute to the well-being of yourself, your people, or a national or global community?

Discussion Questions

1. Why might a veteran tell an interviewer a story in 2020 that he had not told anyone for more than 70 years?

2. Many jackets featured cartoon images, animals, pin-up women, and bomber names that conveyed double meanings or dark or ironic humor. What does the range of visual and text messages on the jackets say about the complexity of the airman's role during the war?

3. What can Billy Lewis's recorded voice tell us that his service file cannot? What can the file tell us that his memory cannot?

4. During the war and in the years that followed, how did the Tuskegee Airmen and the Women Air Force Service Pilots complicate public perceptions of women and people of color? How did their service and heroism contribute to later movements for equal rights?

5. Why did it take over 30 years for the Women Air Force Service Pilots to be officially granted veteran status in 1977? How does this reflect the post-World War II cultural climate?

6. What do the names given to the planes reveal about the ages and outlooks of the men who crewed them? (Examples: "Baby Buggy," "Heaven Sent," "Shuttle Baby," "Murder, Inc.," "Fancy Nancy")

Extension Activities

1. Jigsaw Presentations

Part I:
Assign one profile (from the **Profile Handouts**) to each small group, or use any of the people introduced in the book *Bomber Boys.* Have each group work through the **Story Investigation Worksheet** to jumpstart their research. (Be mindful when assigning groups. Heterogenous, cross-ability groupings are often beneficial for learners.)

Part II:
Have each group create a visual display for their profile to share with the other groups.

Part III: Putting the Pieces Together
Come together as a whole group to discuss:

1. What was fascinating in your own research? How did the person(s) you studied connect to those profiled in the other presentations?

2. Where did stories significantly differ between the people studied? What explains those differences (role, theater, luck)?

3. For the profiles that included video or audio documentation, did that affect your connection to the story? Did it create a sense of urgency to record people's experiences now?

4. Most of the people in *Bomber Boys* were in their late teens to early twenties. How do you think carrying their wartime experiences affected their return to civilian life?

2. Interview Questions Workshop

Part I:
Learners draft 10 open-ended interview questions for a WWII pilot or an aircrew member.

Part II:
Each learner exchanges their list with someone else to provide peer feedback (eliminating yes-or-no, leading, or compound questions).

Part III:
Pairs discuss the feedback each has given, and each person rewrites their final questions with the feedback they've incorporated.

Take it further:
Adjust the questions you've developed and take turns practicing by interviewing the other learners in your group. We often think of history as something in the distant past, but remember, you are creating history now. Capturing your stories is important too.

Bonus action:
If you have access to WWII pilot or aircrew veterans in your community, provide learners with an opportunity to use their interview questions with those individuals, perhaps for extra credit.

3. Mapping Personal Connections

Option 1

Part I:
Make a list of the various job skills and career paths that came up in the *Bomber Boys* stories (aviation, mechanics, electrician, health, communications, fashion, textiles, etc.). Choose a career path that interests you and research what pathways are currently available in that field.

Part II:
Check out local community colleges, technical and vocational programs, and university extension programs and present what you've found to the rest of the group.

Take it further:
Map how the industry has changed and developed since the 1940s, creating a narrative map spanning the decades through your interest.

Option 2

Part I:
Create a visual or narrative chain of connections from yourself to someone who served in or lived through World War II.

Part II:
Present your chain of connection to the past by orally presenting the names, dates, and stories of the people as you trace back your connection to the 1940s.

Part III (optional):
Interview the members of your family or community that link you to World War II. Remember to review the OHA Principles and Best Practices for interviewing ethically.

4. Advocacy Writing

Part I:
The highly trained Women Air Force Service Pilots flew every model operated by the U.S. Army Air Forces, ranging from high-performance pursuit planes to heavy bombers. Research how the Women's Air Force Service Pilots served during World War II, along with the militarization campaign in the 1970s.

Part II:
Write a simulated letter to a U.S. senator in 1977 arguing for or against the legislative bill that ultimately granted these women their military veteran status.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES IN ACTION

Bomber Boys is an excellent portal for interacting with primary and secondary source material. The book itself is a **secondary source** that summarizes, interprets, analyzes, or synthesizes information from primary sources. While there is some variation across disciplines, textbooks, literature reviews, biographies, opinion pieces or commentaries, and general reference materials (such as dictionaries, bibliographies, and encyclopedias) are usually considered secondary sources.

Primary sources are original, first-hand evidence created at the time of an event (e.g., diaries, original photographs, raw data, and eye-witness accounts). While primary sources are usually created at the exact time an event occurs, historians and archivists specifically classify later memoirs and recorded oral histories as primary evidence because they preserve the raw, first-person perspective of an individual involved. The painted jackets, letters, photographs, and recorded oral histories of the airmen are examples of primary sources brought together in *Bomber Boys.*

Letters and diaries act as first-hand, unfiltered windows into the past, offering immediate perspectives from people who witnessed or participated in historical events. They provide authentic details about daily life, cultural norms, and personal motivations that are often left out of official, public records. While these personal narratives are highly valuable, historians (and students of history) must approach them with a critical eye to uncover the complete historical truth. To better understand how to analyze these documents and practice critical thinking, always consider the strengths and limitations of a source.

Strengths of Primary Sources

- **Unvarnished perspectives:** They capture authentic thoughts, emotions, and cultural practices at the moment of creation, or collected later from the people who lived through an event.
- **Micro-historical context:** They provide a vivid picture of domestic life and societal etiquette that may not be recorded elsewhere.

Potential Limitations

- **Subjectivity and bias:** Writers record events from a specific point of view, reflecting personal or societal prejudices.
- **Intended audience:** The purpose of the writing matters. A private diary meant only for the author will be very different from a letter intended for publication or sent to a commanding officer.
- **Reliability of memory:** Human memory is a **reconstructive process** rather than a flawless video recording. This means memories can and do change over time; every time an event is recalled, the memory is pulled into the present, edited with new information, and re-stored.

Use the Historical Thinking Chart, developed by the Stanford History Education Group and outlined below, to practice thinking critically about primary sources.

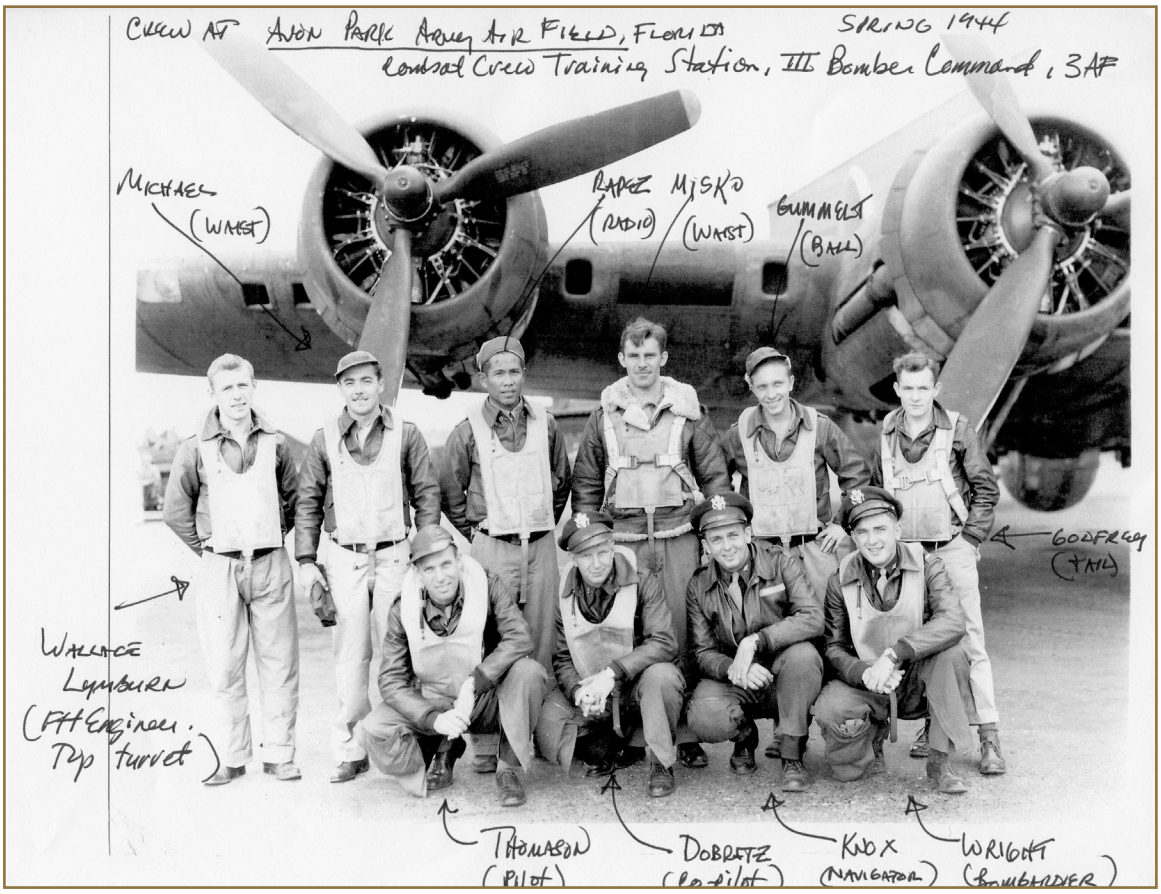
Sourcing: Historians identify *who* created the source, *when,* and *why*. For diaries and letters, this means understanding the author's social class, political leanings, and relationship to the intended recipient. It asks whether a document was a spontaneous private reflection or a public statement meant for an audience.

Contextualization: Examining how the account aligns with the broader political, social, and economic realities of its time. This helps historians separate what the author believed was happening from the actual, documented circumstances surrounding them.

Close reading: Moving beyond the surface narrative to scrutinize tone, word choice, metaphors, and emotional language. This approach decodes the author's implicit attitudes, ideologies, and underlying biases.

Corroboration: Cross-referencing the eyewitness account, diary, or letter against other primary sources (e.g., official records, newspaper articles, or other people's correspondence) reveals where accounts agree, differ, or contradict, helping the historian build a more balanced, reliable narrative.

WHAT IS ORAL HISTORY?



For hundreds of thousands of years, humanity has shared and passed down culture orally through real-time, person-to-person interaction. In this primary form of communication, the "reader" (or listener) was not only learning, filtering, analyzing, and building upon the information they were being told, they were also interpreting non-verbal (unspoken) communication, adding layers of additional meaning.

Today, varying levels of literacy and access to education may limit who is able to share and engage with text/written language. Furthermore, those in power can shape or otherwise "gatekeep" which stories are told and from whose perspectives those stories are told. The result can limit someone in the present from having a more comprehensive understanding of past events. Oral history gives us unique perspectives of ordinary people traditionally excluded from official archives. Oral history also transmits the emotional impacts of historic events. As people age and die, unrecorded memories of their experiences are a permanent loss. This makes documents and collections, like *Bomber Boys,* that record such memories important.

Bomber Boys illustrates what an impoverished history we would have if we were limited to only the "official" voices of the U.S. government, or communications specifically designed to engage national war participation or demoralize the enemy. Official flight documents might tell us the location airmen flew to, but oral histories can tell us what they felt like and point to important details that official narratives might leave out. As a historian or engaged global citizen, studying material objects, official records, and capturing the oral histories of people who lived through extraordinary circumstances transforms what would otherwise feel like a flat, static event into a dynamic, complex, and therefore more accurate account of what a moment in history was really like.

Ethics and Best Practices

The Oral History Association (OHA) sets standards for conducting oral interviews. You can explore the OHA Principles and Best Practices or reach out to your nearest university or regional historical society for local resources.

Ethical guidelines for oral history focus on **informed consent, respect for the narrator,** and **protection from harm.** It is important that interviewers explain how recordings will be used and archived, respect the interviewee's boundaries, and ensure fair power dynamics throughout the entire project.

Informed Consent
Interviewees must clearly understand the project's purpose, who is sponsoring it, how materials will be preserved, and who will have future access. This is typically formalized using a signed release form prior to the interview.

Right to Review and Restrict
Narrators should be allowed to review their transcripts or recordings and have the right to delete, redact, or restrict sensitive portions of their interviews.

Protection from Harm
It is important to prioritize the well-being of interviewees, particularly those from vulnerable or marginalized communities, or those discussing sensitive subjects. Interviewing someone is a privilege that comes with responsibilities. Make adjustments to prioritize your interviewee's well-being before, during, and after the interview.

Transparency and Honesty
Strive for intellectual honesty by avoiding stereotypes and misrepresentation. Interviewers should accurately capture the interviewee's experiences and adhere to all agreements made during the consent process.

Responsibilities of the interviewer:

- Prepare: Research the narrator and era; write open-ended questions.
- Get consent: Explain how the recording will be used; get written permission; ensure the interviewee understands they may decline any question.
- Listen: The interviewee leads the conversation; allow there to be silences so they can continue when they are ready; never argue with a memory.
- Care: Wartime memories can be traumatic — interviewees control the depth.
- Preserve accurately: Don't edit meaning; label, transcribe, and archive what the interviewee says.
- Corroborate honestly: Memory is fallible; historians respectfully cross-check dates and details against documents without dismissing the narrator's truth.

ORAL HISTORY QUIZ

1. What is the primary purpose of obtaining informed consent before starting an oral history interview?

A) To legally transfer copyright ownership of the interview to the interviewer.

B) To ensure the narrator understands the project's goals, how the interview will be archived, and who will have access to it.

C) To protect the interviewer from any future legal action.

D) To guarantee that the interview will be published exactly as recorded.

2. According to the OHA guidelines, which of the following best describes the narrator's rights regarding the interview?

A) The narrator has no rights to the material once it is recorded.

B) The narrator has the right to request anonymity, restrict access to the interview, or edit portions of the transcript.

C) The narrator is required to transfer copyright to the interviewer.

D) The narrator can only request changes if they are legally represented.

3. If an interviewee becomes defensive or emotional during a sensitive topic, what is the best ethical practice?

A) Press the interviewee to answer to ensure historical accuracy.

B) Respect the interviewee's well-being and offer to change the subject, take a break, or delete the segment.

C) Turn off the recorder but continue questioning them.

D) Continue asking about the topic, as it is crucial information.

4. When interviewing marginalized or underrepresented communities, what is a modern best practice regarding interview questions?

A) Keep questions a secret to preserve the raw, spontaneous nature of the interview.

B) Send questions in advance to give the narrator time to prepare, recall events, and communicate any discomfort.

C) Ask leading questions to help the narrator share your specific perspective.

D) Focus only on standardized questionnaires to avoid treating narrators differently.

5. What should an oral historian do during the preparation phase of a project?

A) Secure an appropriate repository (archive) to safely house and preserve the completed interviews.

B) Promise the narrator that the recording will remain private forever.

C) Avoid selecting a specific archive until the interviews are finished.

D) Assume that all oral history requires Institutional Review Board (IRB) review.

ORAL HISTORY QUIZ ANSWER KEY

1. What is the primary purpose of obtaining informed consent before starting an oral history interview?

B) To ensure the narrator understands the project's goals, how the interview will be archived, and who will have access to it.

Explanation: Informed consent is about transparency. It guarantees the narrator knows who is sponsoring the project, where the recording will be preserved, and how it may be used in the future.

2. According to the OHA guidelines, which of the following best describes the narrator's rights regarding the interview?

B) The narrator has the right to request anonymity, restrict access to the interview, or edit portions of the transcript.

Explanation: Respecting the narrator is a core ethical principle. Interviewees always have the right to request restricted access, anonymity, or the redaction of sensitive information.

3. If an interviewee becomes defensive or emotional during a sensitive topic, what is the best ethical practice?

B) Respect the interviewee's well-being and offer to change the subject, take a break, or delete the segment.

Explanation: Protecting the narrator's well-being and reputation is paramount. Aggressively pursuing a sensitive topic when a narrator shows distress causes harm and violates ethical boundaries.

4. When interviewing marginalized or underrepresented communities, what is a modern best practice regarding interview questions?

B) Send questions in advance to give the narrator time to prepare, recall events, and communicate any discomfort.

Explanation: While traditional oral history often avoided sharing questions to maintain spontaneity, best practices now emphasize sending questions in advance. This prioritizes the interviewee's comfort and emotional safety, especially when dealing with trauma.

5. What should an oral historian do during the preparation phase of a project?

A) Secure an appropriate repository (archive) to safely house and preserve the completed interviews.

Explanation: Oral historians must locate a repository/archive that aligns with the project's goals, has the capacity for long-term preservation, and can legally enforce signed agreements.

STORY INVESTIGATION NOTES

Choose a profile from *Bomber Boys*. Use this worksheet to track your notes and capture your initial thoughts.

1. **The person**: Age at service, role/crew position, aircraft, theater, unit.

2. **The jacket:** What symbols and records does their jacket carry? How do they match (or complicate) their story?

3. **The extraordinary:** What danger, loss, or remarkable event marks their account?

4. **The ordinary:** What details reveal them as a regular person (hobbies, hometown, humor, homesickness)?

5. **The voice** (if applicable): What do you learn from *hearing* the veteran in their own words that text on a printed page can't convey (tone, pauses, emotion, emphasis)?

6. **The evidence:** What types of sources build the profile (interview, photos, documents, artifacts)? Which are primary sources?

7. **Next steps brainstorm:** If you were to continue researching this person, what other primary and secondary sources, documents, or materials could you seek out to ***contextualize*** and ***corroborate*** what you have learned from their account of events.

WASP: WOMEN AIRFORCE SERVICE PILOTS

Excerpt from *Bomber Boys* by John Slemp



Entering the Second World War

When the United States officially entered World War II on December 8, 1941, the U.S. Army was ranked 19th in size in the world — smaller than the army of Portugal! To say that the roughly 180,000-man force was unprepared would be a gross understatement. During the 1920s and into the 1930s, U.S. foreign policy had largely been an isolationist one, and there was no priority placed on financing a large, modern, well-trained military force. Part of this was also a byproduct of the Great Depression, which forced politicians to make tough budgetary choices and often left the military wanting in terms of financial resources.

As the U.S. military machine ramped up in early 1942, the need for stateside pilots was recognized. Since every male pilot that could be mustered was sent overseas to face the enemy, an idea first put forth in 1939 by world-famous aviatrix Jackie Cochran resurfaced, which was to create a unit of female pilots who would ferry completed aircraft from factories to points of debarkation all over the country. Thus the foundation of what later became the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) was laid.

Applicants and Requirements

More than 25,000 women applied, of which 1,830 were accepted. The rigorous training program was completed by 1,074. The requirements to apply were as follows: recruits had to be between 21 and 35 years old and possess a high school diploma, a commercial flying license, a 200-horsepower engine rating, 500 hours of flight time, and cross-country flight experience. Additionally, they had to be at least 5 feet, 2 inches tall and in good health. While they were not trained for combat, their course of instruction was essentially the same as male aviation cadets. In addition to ferrying aircraft, they towed targets for live anti-aircraft gun practice, simulated strafing missions, and transported personnel and cargo.

During the course of the program, 38 women lost their lives — 11 in training and 27 on active-duty missions. In one of the great ironies of the war, the government did not pay for their funeral expenses because the WASP were not considered active-duty military pilots.

Disbanded and Recognized:

When the WASPs were officially disbanded on December 20, 1944, they were allowed to keep one item of clothing. Most chose to keep a skirt or blouse with many choosing to return their A-2 jackets to the government. Because of this quirk of fate, original A-2 jackets owned by WASPs are extremely rare. I was lucky to find one owned by Dawn Seymour and also a knock-off jacket owned by Virginia Mae Hope that is located at the Minnesota Historical Society. Although neither has any artwork, both had original Fifinella patches, which depict a female winged gremlin created by Walt Disney.

In 1977, after many years of lobbying Congress, President Jimmy Carter signed into law an act that officially designated the WASPs as military veterans, and in 2009, the group was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal. It has been a great privilege for me to have met and photographed 16 of these ladies. I can tell you that even at their advanced age, they remained lively, engaged, and supportive not only of efforts to bring more women into aviation, but also of the country they so dearly loved. My hat is off to them, both personally and professionally, as their legacy has been of great benefit to the country as a whole and to women who want to be aviators.



DAWN SEYMOUR



NELL BRIGHT



PEARL JUDD



BERNICE "BEE" FALK HAYDU



MARTY WYALL



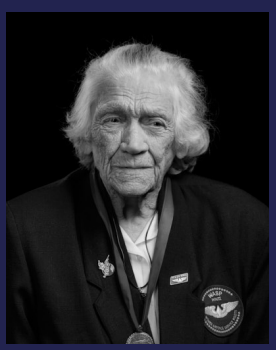
SHIRLEY KRUSE



ELIZABETH "BETTY" STROHFUS



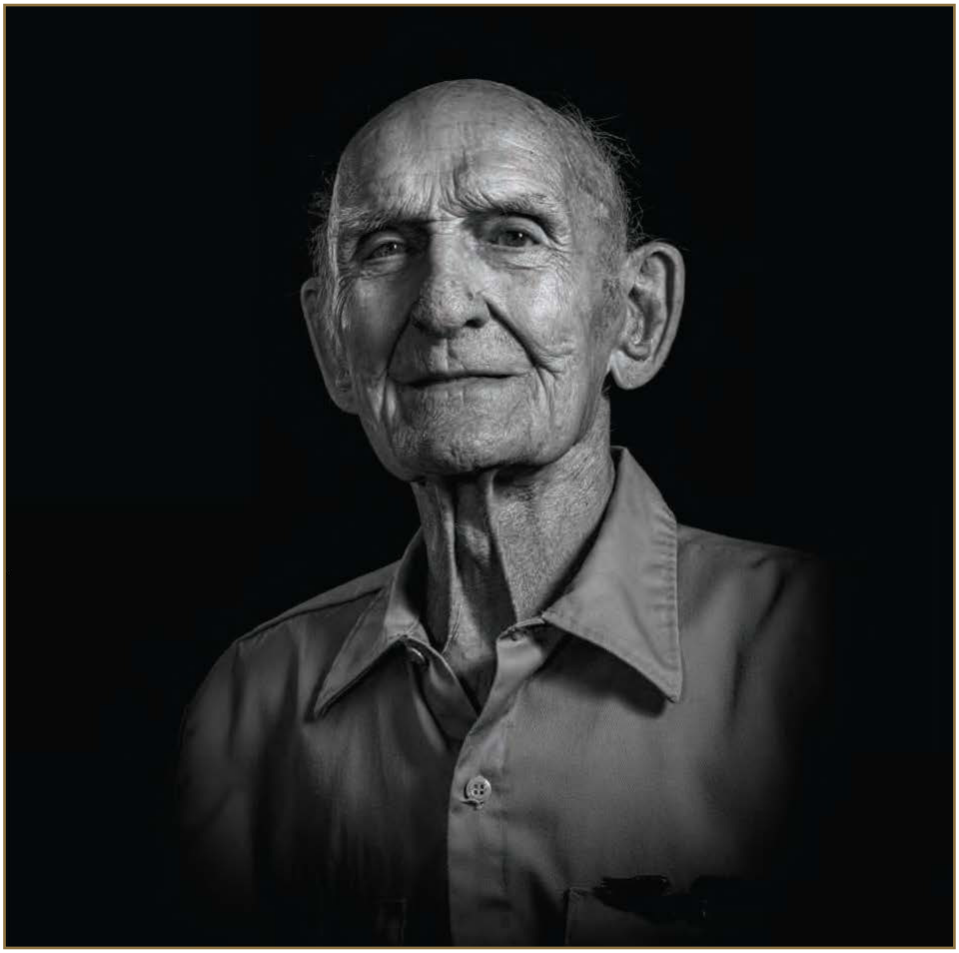
SHUTSY REYNOLDS



MILLICENT YOUNG

BILLY LEWIS

Excerpt from *Bomber Boys* by John Slemp



Video Interview: WWII Airman Billy Lewis

HAUNTED

Even though World War II had ended decades earlier, it was evident that Billy Lewis was still haunted by his experiences as a B-17 waist gunner in the 34th Bomb Group. After the war, he spent a lot of time driving around, trying to forget. "It never goes away, even though you try," said Lewis.

34TH
BOMB GROUP

TREATED FOR PTSD

He spent more than a year in a veterans hospital being treated for PTSD, and credits his recovery to his wife, Betty. "She played a big part in me trying to find myself and went through enough trying to get me normal," he said. He mentioned that he doesn't like crowds and doesn't go to football games. "In my prayers at night, I ask God to not let me dream," he said. "Because it's so much a part of you that you can't get away from it."

42
MISSIONS

SHEEPSKIN A-2

Lewis said that his jacket was made of sheepskin, but that can't be verified as the label had been removed when a new liner was put in. I do know that the artwork was painted on the jacket after he returned to the U.S., something that surprised me, as most were painted in theater. According to Lewis, "They were no good at altitude, but the jackets were very popular when you were down low as it allowed for quick movement through the aircraft."





SHOT DOWN AND UNDERGROUND

Lewis was shot down near Brussels during the Battle of the Bulge in late 1944 and was found by a "nice-looking lady in a long leather coat." She said to him, "You are American," to which Lewis replied, "Yes." She asked him, "Are you hurt?" He had been shot through the leg and replied, "Yes." She said, "Don't move. I'll go get my husband." Thus began his journey to freedom through the Belgian Underground. At one point, they temporarily placed him in the basement of a German Army headquarters.

He relayed the story of a Belgian family that had been found to have harbored a downed flyer. The Gestapo took the whole family out in the yard and executed them, children included.

Lewis survived 42 missions over Europe in 1944 and 1945 and didn't want to fly back to the U.S., so they put him on a troop ship. "Submarines were still active in the Atlantic, so we did a lot of zigzagging, but we got back OK," he said.

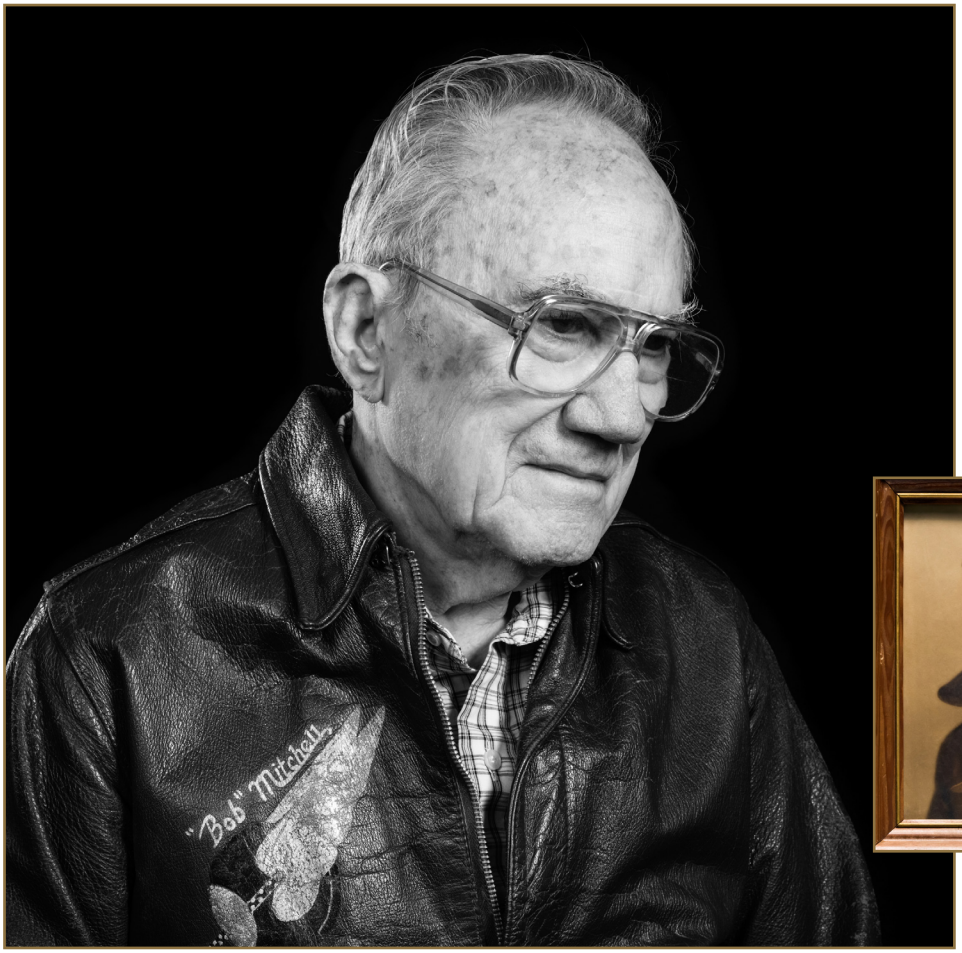
CLOSING THOUGHTS

One of Lewis's most poignant thoughts had to do with the leadership of a country—any country:

"Before the leaders vote to go to war, make sure they have sons who will have to go," he said. "It'll cause them to think about it."

ROBERT MITCHELL, JR.

Excerpt from *Bomber Boys* by John Slemp





[Video Interview: WW II Veteran Sergeant Robert M. Mitchell, Jr., 384th Bomb Group]

544TH
SQUADRON

35
MISSIONS

OPENING UP

Sometimes you just never know what people are going to say. When I photographed Bob Mitchell for this project in April of 2015, he was relatively quiet. He opened up only when a friend who had accompanied me to do a video interview sat Mitchell down to hear his story.

THE CHARGE

Married to his high school sweetheart just before he enlisted in September 1942, Mitchell tells of his dad pulling him aside just before he left for basic training. His dad told him, "The family has a long tradition of military service, dating back to the Revolutionary War, and I want you to come back in one of two ways — either with an honorable discharge in your pocket or with a flag draped over your casket." Mitchell admitted that was a hard thing to hear from his father, who was a World War I veteran.

BALL TURRET VOLUNTEER

Mitchell was eventually assigned to the Frank L. Allred crew of the 544th Bomb Squadron, 384th Bomb Group, stationed at Grafton Underwood, England. Even though he was trained as a mechanic, gunner, and flight engineer, he volunteered for the ball turret, which was considered to be the most dangerous position in a B-17. He flew his first mission on June 15, 1944, in France, and eventually completed 35 missions over France and Germany.

BAILOUT

On August 3, 1944, his plane was unable to drop its bombs over the target due to cloud cover. As the plane was returning to England with battle damage and a planeload of bombs, it caught fire and crash-landed just after crossing the English Channel, 140 miles from base. All of the crew got out uninjured just before the plane blew up, except for the top turret gunner, who cut his arm on one of the propellers.

HIS LIFE SPARED

Mitchell's 35th mission was on September 28, 1944, and were it not for a stroke of luck, it would have been his last. Scheduled to fly that day with the Buslee crew aboard the *Lead Banana,* Mitchell had requested that his last mission be aboard the *Lorraine* with the Allred crew and some friends instead. As the *Lead Banana* was about to depart, a jeep pulled up to the plane and Mitchell was told his request had been granted, so he was driven over to *Lorraine* for the mission.

This was significant because on that mission, another aircraft, *Lazy Daisy,* collided with the Buslee crew in *Lead Banana.* Only one man survived from the *Lead Banana*, while three survived from the *Lazy Daisy.* During the collision, which Mitchell witnessed, the ball turret fell away from *Lead Banana,* leading to the death of that crewman. Mitchell understood and was grateful that he had been spared and was able to return home to his wife, Willette.

DISTINGUISHED CAREER

Returning to the U.S. that fall, his military service wasn't over, and he began training for possible combat missions in the Far East against Japan. Fortunately, the war ended before he had to ship out. His wartime decorations include the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters (OLC), and the European Theater Medal with five Bronze Battle Stars.



Notice the ball turret on the front lapel, which Mitchell designed.



The swastika represents a destroyed enemy aircraft. In this case, it was an ME-109.

"I want you to come back in one of two ways — either with an honorable discharge in your pocket or with a flag draped over your casket."

RAY ZISK: A LETTER HOME

Excerpt from *Bomber Boys* by John Slemp

454TH
BOMB GROUP

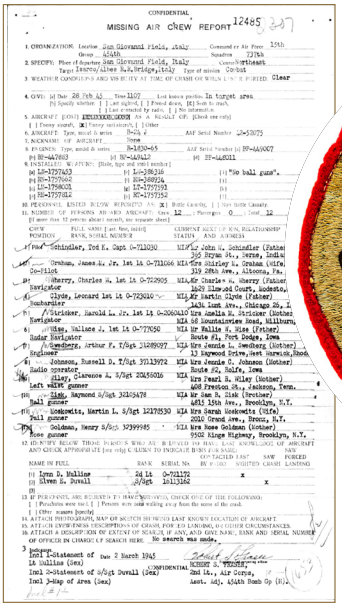
737TH
SQUADRON

34*
MISSIONS



Zisk stands in front of his B24J Dina Mite in late October or early November 1944 at Italy's San Giovanni Airfield.

***Killed in Action:** At 1107 on his 35th mission, Zisk's aircraft suffered a direct hit to the fuselage, just in front of the tail section, which broke away. Since the tail gunner's position was so tight, it prohibited the wearing of a parachute. Zisk was ejected from his position and the aircraft entered a steep dive. No chutes were observed, and the aircraft was seen crashing to the ground, 20,000 feet below.



CONFIDENTIAL

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT 12485

1. ORGANIZATION: Location San Giovanni Field, Italy Command or Air Force 15th
Group 454th Squadron 737th
2. SPECIFY: Place of departure San Giovanni Field, Italy Country Northern Italy
Target Ravenna/Alias A.A.Bridge, Italy Type of mission Combat
3. WEATHER CONDITIONS AND VISIBILITY AT TIME OF CRASH OR WHEN LAST SEEN: Clear
4. GIVE: (a) Date 28 Feb 45 Time 1107 Last known position In target area
(b) Quickly whether [ ] Last sighted, [ ] Forced down, [X] Seen to crash
(c) Whether [ ] Last reported by radio, [ ] No information
[ ] Enemy aircraft, [X] Enemy anti-aircraft, [ ] Other
5. AIRCRAFT: Type, model & series B-24J-5 AAF Serial Number 42-50175
6. NICKNAME OF AIRCRAFT None
7. ENGINES: Type, model & series R-1830-65 AAF Serial Number (a) 42-109007
(b) 42-76863 (c) 42-109410 (d) 42-110011
8. INSTALLED ARMAMENT: [Guns, type and serial number]
(a) 42-37743 (b) 42-38216 (c) "No ball guns".
(d) 42-37760 (e) 42-38024
(f) 42-37580 (g) 42-37719 (h)
(i) 42-37761 (j) 42-37752 (k)
10. PERSONNEL LISTED BELOW REPORTED TO AC [X] Base Cassino, [ ] Not With Unit
11. NUMBER OF PERSONS ABOARD AIRCRAFT: Crew 12, Passengers 0, Total 12
[If more than 12 persons aboard aircraft, see separate sheet]

CREW POSITION	FULL NAME [Last, first, middle] RANK, SERIAL NUMBER	CURRENT ADDRESS OF KIN, RELATIONSHIP STATUS AND ADDRESS
Pilot	2nd Lt Schindler, Ted K. 0-711030	Mrs. John W. Schindler (Father) 705 Bryan St., Berne, Indiana
Co-Pilot	2nd Lt Graham, James H., Jr. 0-711066	Mrs Shirley L. Graham (Wife) 319 28th Ave., Altoona, Pa.
Navigator	2nd Lt Sherry, Charles H. 0-722905	Mr Charles H. Sherry (Father) 1625 Elmwood Court, Modesto, Calif.
Bombardier	2nd Lt Clyde, Leonard 0-722910	Mr Martin Clyde (Father) 3434 Cont Ave., Chicago 30, Ill.
Navigator	2nd Lt Stricker, Harold L. Jr. 0-2060410	Mrs Amelia M. Stricker (Mother) 98 Mountainview Road, Millburn, N.J.
Radar Navigator	2nd Lt Rice, Wallace J. 0-727650	Mr Felix J. Rice (Father) Route #1, Fort Dodge, Iowa
Engineer	S/Sgt Sandberg, Arthur F. 31283027	Mrs Jennie L. Swedberg (Mother) 13 Haywood Drive, West Warwick, Rhode Island
Radio operator	T/Sgt Johnson, Russell D. 37133972	Mrs Jennie O. Johnson (Mother) Route #2, Ruthven, Iowa
Left waist gunner	S/Sgt Riley, Clarence A. 32450026	Mrs Pearl B. Riley (Mother) 408 Preston St., Jackson, Tenn.
Ball gunner	S/Sgt Zisk, Raymond 32434478	Mr Sam B. Zisk (Brother) 4811 15th Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y.
Tail gunner	S/Sgt Moskowitz, Martin L. 32178530	Mrs Sarah Moskowitz (Wife) 2010 Grand Ave., Bronx, N.Y.
Nose gunner	S/Sgt Goldman, Henry 32399945	Mrs Rose Goldman (Mother) 9502 Kings Highway, Brooklyn, N.Y.

12. (b) BOYS BELOW THOSE PERSONS WHO ARE [ ] LISTED IN ITEM 11 ARE KNOWN TO BE DEAD AND CHECK APPROPRIATE [see orig] CLICKED TO INDICATE BODY FOR SAME.

NAME IN FULL	RANK	SERIAL No.	BY P.O.W.	KILLED	WOUNDED	CRASH	LANDING	SAW PARACHUTE	SAW FORCED
(a) Lynn D. Mullins	2nd Lt	0-711172				x			
(b) Elven E. Duvall	S/Sgt	16113262				x			
(c)									

13. IF PERSONNEL ARE REPORTED TO HAVE BAILED OUT, CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:
[ ] Parachutes were seen [ ] Persons were seen walking away from the scene of the crash.
[ ] Other: reasons [specify]
14. ATTACH PHOTOGRAPH, MAP OR SKETCH SHOWING LAST KNOWN LOCATION OF AIRCRAFT.
15. ATTACH EYEWITNESS DESCRIPTIONS OF CRASH, FOR ITS LANDING, OR OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES.
16. ATTACH A DESCRIPTION OF EXTENT OF SEARCH, IF ANY, AND GIVE NAME, RANK AND SERIAL NUMBER OF OFFICER IN CHARGE OF SEARCH HERE. No search was made.
17. REMARKS:
Incl 1-Statement of Lt Mullins (Sex) Date 2 March 1945 (CONFIDENTIAL)
Incl 2-Statement of S/Sgt Duvall (Sex)
Incl 3-Map of Area (Sex)

SIGNED 2nd Lt., Air Corps, Asst. Sqd. 454th Bomb Gp (H)



Artifacts from the Ray Zisk collection.

GUNNER

While there were many around who could do such menial jobs as cleaning machine guns, air gunners were required to do so. In addition to performing an indispensable maintenance task, it gave them the in-depth familiarity needed to keep them firing properly in combat. Two days before Christmas, 1944, Zisk wrote:

The weather is still very bad for that matter, but during our week in rest camp it did clear up a bit & the 15th AAF was quite busy. That picture you wrote me about that your father-in-law showed you, well, perhaps you shouldn't have seen it. It's not very pleasant. I had hoped you wouldn't see such things, even in the papers.

Today, I flew in an airplane together with Bob & Hank (with their own pilot at the controls). This is the first time we flew together, even if it was only a one hour practice hop. I didn't have to go along, it was merely because I had nothing to do, during the afternoon.

We have a number of fairly new crews in our group. Lots of them are still "virgin." In our squadron, there are only 2 crews who have more missions than we do. And so, we are looked up to with a good deal of awe by the newcomers.

Especially now, since I've got my jacket all painted up with bombs, etc. When we first got here, our squadron was full of veteran crews that were lacking just a few missions to complete their tour. I'll never forget the way some of the hotshots scared the hell out of us with their talk. I resolved never to do like they did. I mean to deliberately fill a fellow full of crap. And I've kept my resolution.



Part of a .50-caliber ammunition belt, found at the Zisk crash site. The rounds have "cooked off" during the resulting fire, thus the bullets themselves are missing. Artifact from the Ray Zisk collection.

ALBERT McMAHAN

Excerpt from *Bomber Boys* by John Slemp



Albert McMahan wearing a replica jacket, December 13, 2014. Photograph by John Slemp.

1940/ALABAMA

The U.S. Army was ranked 17th in the world going into 1940, when Albert McMahan joined the service. McMahan, the oldest of seven children, lived with his family on a 200-acre farm in Alabama. Even though times were tough as the Great Depression waned, he nonetheless had a pleasant childhood and always had plenty to eat and learned to enjoy rural life. However, the work was hard, the days were long, and he knew early on that he didn't want farming to be his livelihood.

369TH
SQUADRON

ARMY TANK CORPS

In 1938, he decided to attend Alabama Polytechnic Institute, which is now Auburn University. Only having enough money for the first year, he tried several jobs to raise the money to further his education but to no avail. Thinking that his interest in electronics would be a path to a better life, he decided to join the Army's Tank Corps to attend their communications school.

25
MISSIONS

AIR CORPS

Immediately after being sworn in on July 12, 1940, McMahan was told by his recruiter that he was being assigned to the Air Corps since he had a year of college. Protesting to the officer in charge, he learned that the Air Corps got everyone who had attended college. So off he went to basic training at Maxwell Field in Montgomery, Alabama.

PROMOTED TO SERGEANT

Eventually, he attended a series of training courses to become an Aircraft and Engine Mechanic and an Instrument Specialist, being promoted to sergeant on February 1, 1942. With the war heating up for the U.S. military, McMahan volunteered for the 301st Bomb Group, and a week later was reassigned to the 306th Bomb Group, 369th Bomb Squadron as an instrument specialist. The "Fightin' Bitin'" 369th was equipped with Boeing B-17F Flying Fortresses. On August 31, he departed from New York for England on the *Queen Elizabeth* luxury liner, along with 17,199 other soldiers.

COMBAT READY

They arrived in Gourock, Scotland, on September 5 after an uneventful crossing. After a period of intensive training, they were declared "ready to conduct combat operations" on September 30, 1942. On October 9, his unit supplied four of the 108 bombers that participated in the first major bombing mission to Lille, France. In November and December, the 306th flew 10 missions, during which eight B-17s were lost.

TAILGUNNER

According to McMahan, the aircraft and officers were replaced, but there were no replacement enlisted men. Because of that, McMahan volunteered for combat crew on November 20 and was sent for nine days of aerial gunner training. When I learned he had volunteered, I asked him, "Albert, what were you thinking?" He said, "I didn't really think about it much." Thus began his time as a B-17 tail gunner.

FIRST MISSION / DECEMBER 20, 1942*

It was a beautiful Sunday. The weather was perfectly clear. Takeoff was at 10:10 a.m., and assembly was perfect. As we flew into France, we could see the German fighters overhead. The FW190 and ME109 fighters attacked us all the way to the target and back to the channel. The fighters used a new attack, from 10 to 2 o'clock (directions are by clock position, 12 is ahead, 3 is off the right wing, 6 is directly behind, and 9 is off the left wing). Our 170-mph speed and the fighter's 300 mph speed resulted in a closing speed of 470 mph. I saw two B-17's shot down before the target with no parachutes from either and one after the target with eight parachutes. We bombed the target at 12:38 p.m., and according to reports this was some of the best bombing that the Eighth had done.

**This account is from the "Personal History of the Life and Adventures of Albert Neal McMahon" and is used with permission.*

UNDER ATTACK

About 10 minutes after bombing the target, *WAHOO* [Albert's plane] was hit by German fighter 20mm cannon projectiles. Because of our damage, we slowed and contrary to regulations the other 306th planes also slowed to provide protection. I knew we were in big trouble, but between this being my first mission and not knowing what had happened in the front of the plane, I was not aware of the seriousness of our situation.

ENEMY AIRSPACE

On the way out we flew close to Paris and the Eiffel tower, but the fighter attacks prevented me from enjoying the view. Seeing the Cliffs of Dover gave me a fantastic boost. It meant that we would soon be in friendly territory! We were under enemy attack for the entire one hour and fifty-three minutes we were over enemy territory.

After exiting enemy territory, Lt. Spelman, our navigator, made a visual check of the condition of each gunner and *WAHOO*'s damage. He had a lighted cigarette. I took it from his hand and took a puff! He said "You don't smoke!" I responded "I just started" and smoked for seven years until 1950.

Dad told us as children that if we did not smoke by age 21, he would give the non-smoker 40 acres of land! As a result, I had strong feelings about smoking! That is why I responded as I did to Lt. Spelman's statement.

ON STANDBY TO JUMP

About this time, Lt. Riordan told us to stand by to jump because it appeared that the damaged right stabilizer would rip off. It did not, and we proceeded to Thurleigh. We laid on the radio compartment floor while landing because of the loss of hydraulic and brake systems. Because the damaged stabilizer caused the plane to veer to the right of the runway, we circled the base, and the second landing attempt was perfect. Lt. Riordan was slightly wounded by glass fragments and was awarded the Purple Heart.

SKILLFUL FLYING AND DEBRIEF

This was the third time Lt. Riordan had brought back a badly damaged plane with unusual skill and courage. He had the reputation that if a plane would stay in the air, he would fly it back to base! When we got on the ground I was exhausted. I thought I was prepared for the mental and physical stress of combat but barely was! The stress of flying at high altitude on oxygen, being shot at by fighters and flak, and being severely shaken from the tail's vibration caused by the damaged horizontal stabilizer was taxing. The tail's vibration caused every muscle in my body to be sore for several days. After interrogation and eating I went to a Bedford pub and drank a couple of glasses of ale. That helped me relax.

LOSSES

The 369th lost three planes. According to the mission report, Lt. Rotter, bombardier, and TSgt. Stevenson, radio operator, each claimed downing an FW190. Lt. Rotter's claim was denied! Due to an electrical problem, SSgt. Bowles had to use a screwdriver to fire the ball turret guns.

BAPTISM TO COMBAT

This baptism into combat provided the answer to my question, "Did I have what it took to endure the strain of combat?" YES! Combat was an exhilarating experience, the most exhilarating experience ever! At the same time, I was fearful that I would be wounded, as had DeJohn and Langley, or that we would be shot down, captured and a prisoner of war, or be killed. I had great faith in the will and ability of Lt. Riordan to get the plane home as long as it was flyable. The question of whether or not I could take the stress of combat—being shot at by fighters and flak—was answered. It was a frightening and stressful experience as I showed by beginning to smoke! But I could manage the fear and perform my duties!

"Combat was an exhilarating experience. At the same time, I was fearful that I would be wounded, shot down, captured and a prisoner of war, or be killed."

ERNEST ERICKSON: GENERATIONAL LEGACY

Excerpt from *Bomber Boys* by John Slemp



95TH
BOMB GROUP

35
MISSIONS

LIEUTENANT / PILOT

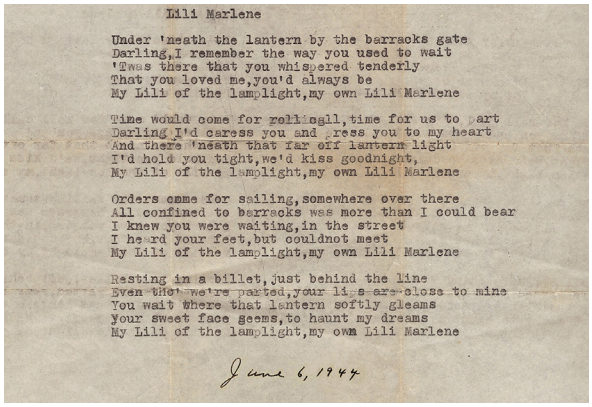
Lt. Ernest Anders Erickson flew 35 missions as a B-17 pilot with the 95th Bomb Group (Heavy) out of Horham Airfield, England, from February through September 1944. The *Lili of the Lamplight* (serial #44-6085) was his usual ride into battle. The aircraft was so named due to an earlier experience in Reykjavik, Iceland, where the crew was fortunate to see movie star Marlene Dietrich perform a USO show on the way to their combat assignment in England.

LILI MARLENE

Witnessing Dietrich singing "Lili Marlene" quite impressed Lt. Erickson, and a modified version of the song title stuck when it came time to name their future Flying Fortress. The then-popular German love song "Lili Marlene," sung by Dietrich, was originally written as a poem in 1915 and set to music in 1937. During the war, it became wildly popular with soldiers on both sides and frequently ended Radio Belgrade's broadcast each night at 10 p.m.

MANUFACTURING

Aero Leather Clothing Company in Beacon, New York, was the manufacturer of this jacket. The contract date was May 25, 1942, for 50,000 jackets. At the time, zippers were a relatively new technology for garments and were a welcome improvement over the original A-1's buttons.



Lili Marlene

Under 'neath the lantern by the barracks gate
Darling,I remember the way you used to wait
'Twas there that you whispered tenderly
That you loved me,you'd always be
My Lili of the lamplight,my own Lili Marlene

Time would come for rollingall,time for us to part
Darling,I'd caress you and press you to my heart
And there 'neath that far off lantern light
I'd hold you tight,we'd kiss goodnight,
My Lili of the lamplight,my own Lili Marlene

Orders came for sailing,somewhere over there
All confined to barracks was more than I could bear
I knew you were waiting,in the street
I heard your feet,but couldnot meet
My Lili of the lamplight,my own Lili Marlene

Resting in a billet,just behind the line
Even tho' we're parted,your lips are close to mine
You wait where that lantern softly gleams
Your sweet face seems,to haunt my dreams
My Lili of the lamplight,my own Lili Marlene

June 6, 1944

The text of the song "Lili Marlene." Note the date, June 6, 1944, the Invasion of France.

An excerpt from Erickson's diary, provided by his son, describes his feelings before his 11th mission, targeting Berlin on April 29, 1944.



Briefing 0330 hours — Getting up this morning was worse, harder than the many others that have passed this year in England. Whether it was the unconscious anticipation of the day ahead, I do not know. Many times this had happened: the tap at the foot of my bed, my name called out in the cold damp darkness of the barracks, the flashlight and footfall of the CQ (Charge of Quarters) waking the chosen for today's flight; all this at 02:30am. As my feet hit the cement floor beside my bed, my head feels dizzy, too many flights and not enough sleep, or was I just tired and afraid of the whole situation.

The bad weather, cancelled missions, changing of targets after the flight had started, the target socked in with two or three layers of clouds, dumping our payload somewhere over the countryside on the way back, ironically called a target of opportunity, when often we knew we were just plowing out something we never see down below, just bursts and smoke as we head back to the Channel and home. Then it was just the miserable, bad weather, back at the airfield, often landing at alternative strips. Waiting for clearing for another mission, all this plus knowing of the fear in the pit of my stomach even on my weekends in London.

"Up Lindy, the truck will pick you up at Barracks C in fifteen minutes" the silhouette with the flashlight said. I noticed my weekend buddy, Taylor, in the bed next to me, slept on, grunted at the invasion of light and then rolled over back to sleep. My crew were the only ones picked for today's flight. I was dressed in less than 10 minutes, in spite of the darkness. We let the rest of the barrack boys sleep away. Many would be fortunate not to be on the day's flights or the unfortunate others if you were in a hurry to get your tour complete and go back home. Either way it was our day up and we would be off in a couple of hours.

As I crawled into the truck, I hit my head on the canopy support, dam!! Everything was going to be bad today! Breakfast of fried eggs, bread and coffee was followed by the normal briefing. Our target was Berlin, my first time over the 800 anti-aircraft guns that could be aimed at us at any one time. I had heard the stories, and they weren't good. I feel I have to get these feelings out of my head, my men are all a bit jittery and I have to show them, all's fine. Berlin? It's a long way back from Berlin to the airfield with 109's on our tails and coming from god knows where. I have to get my mind straight on all this.

Time to go..

Erickson's son Mark wrote these thoughts about his dad's career and contributions to aviation after the war:



Erickson's son Mark wearing his dad's jacket as a child.

In 1949, Ernest earned a degree in aircraft design and engineering from the University of Colorado in Boulder, and two years later took a job with Lockheed Aircraft in Burbank,California. Within the year, he would meet and marry his wife, Bernice, whereupon the couple purchased a home in the Hollywood Hills and began raising a family.

He was soon selected to work on special projects under the supervision of Kelly Johnson, chief engineer at the "Skunk Works" facilities at Lockheed. Kelly Johnson hand-picked engineers to work on small teams tasked with pushing the limits of aeronautical design engineering to develop the world's most advanced air-planes. Lockheed had received a contract from the CIA to build a spy-plane, and Kelly Johnson needed top engineers to design the new airplane. Soon to be known as the U–2, this aircraft was built primarily for the purpose of flying over the Soviet Union to photograph sites of strategic interest.

Getting in on the ground floor, Ernest continued to work for Kelly Johnson for more than two decades, as a design team engineer. Many of the projects were top secret and still to this day I am unaware of what his participation could have been with some. In addition to airplane design, Ernest also played a role in designs of the Mercury spacecraft, collaborating with engineers at McDonnell Aircraft. Before he retired in 1988, he spent time working with Northrop Aircraft.

He spoke about the many flyers and aerospace individuals he met over the years. One acquaintance was the former Air Corps flyer Chuck Yeager, who at the time they met was a test pilot at Muroc Army Air Field (now Edwards Air Force Base). As my father's aerospace career spanned the 1950s and into the early 1960s, their paths again crossed during a NASA project. For a six-year period in the early to mid 1970s, Ernest and his family were transferred to Italy and Germany for various F–104 Starfighter related projects.

Work on Ernest's final project at Lockheed included stress analysis drawings and designs for the F–117 Nighthawk stealth fighter, which utilizes the "Have Blue" technology. It was the first operational aircraft designed for stealth application. The maiden flight of the F–117 was conducted in 1981, and it achieved initial operating capability status in October 1983. The airplane was finally revealed to the world in November 1988.



Drawing of the original 95th Bomb Group insignia.

Some of Ernest's other projects included design work on the C–130 Hercules, the Constellation, the C–141 Starlifter, the L–2000 "SST" Supersonic Transport (he worked on the SST for several years and was quite disappointed when it never came to fruition), the L–1011 Tri-Star, and the immense military transport, the C–5A Galaxy.

Following his retirement in 1988, my parents resided along the Venice Canals in California, partnering in Los Angeles real estate investments and traveling extensively. Influenced by the art work of my mother Bernice and my grandmother Blanche, he delved into drawing, ceramics, and stained glass, and studied art at Santa Monica College. My father, Ernest Anders Erickson, passed away on June 7, 2013, in Santa Monica, California, at the age of 90.

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