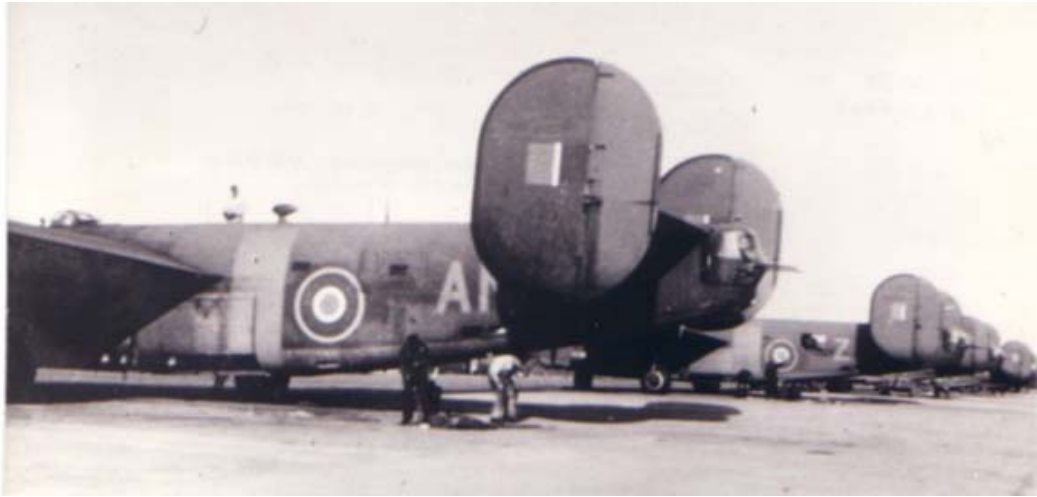


SEAC LIBERATOR BOMBERS IN FAR EAST

5 OTU RCAF - 231GROUP RAF SEAC

By

J.E.H. FAIL



Line up of Liberators at 5 OTU Boundary Bay B.C. Aircraft coded AM, Z, P, AN- Serials KG923, EW217, EW216, KG924. Photographed by the author 23/2/1945 (in the authors log book are AM, 23&24th Feb and Z, 1&22nd of March 1945.



Picture of author prior to service at 5 OTU

Author's note:

In my memory for many years has remained the first time I saw Liberators on the ground. It was a bleak wet day in November 1944 when I arrived at Boundary Bay after a train journey right across Canada from Moncton New Brunswick to Vancouver where I had been picked up by an RCAF truck and driven to Boundary Bay. The dark looming Liberators were an awesome sight, standing in line along the runway on that

dull day in the pouring rain, square and ugly, yet in time those who flew in them got to trust them despite their lethal points.

Lethal points were firstly failure on take-off. A Liberator that failed on take-off invariably crashed straight into the ground and burst into flames. A Liberator that ditched sank like a stone breaking its back and the chances of escape were nil. Yet aircrews were trained how to abandon a Liberator that ditched despite the fact that they were being bluffed by the 'powers that be' because no real chance existed, tests had already proved this, but the results were not made known until after World War 11.

First nose wheels and front wheels collapse were another hazard but seldom fatal. Petrol spillage by trying to increase the aircrafts range amongst the static electricity inside the aeroplane, no one will ever know how many 'never found aircraft' disappeared this way.

The Liberators did a magnificent job and because of this and my affection for them I have tried to put together the Liberator Far East bomber story.

JEHF

WHERE WERE THE AIRCRAFT AND AIRCREW TO COME FROM?

Canada was to supply the answer.

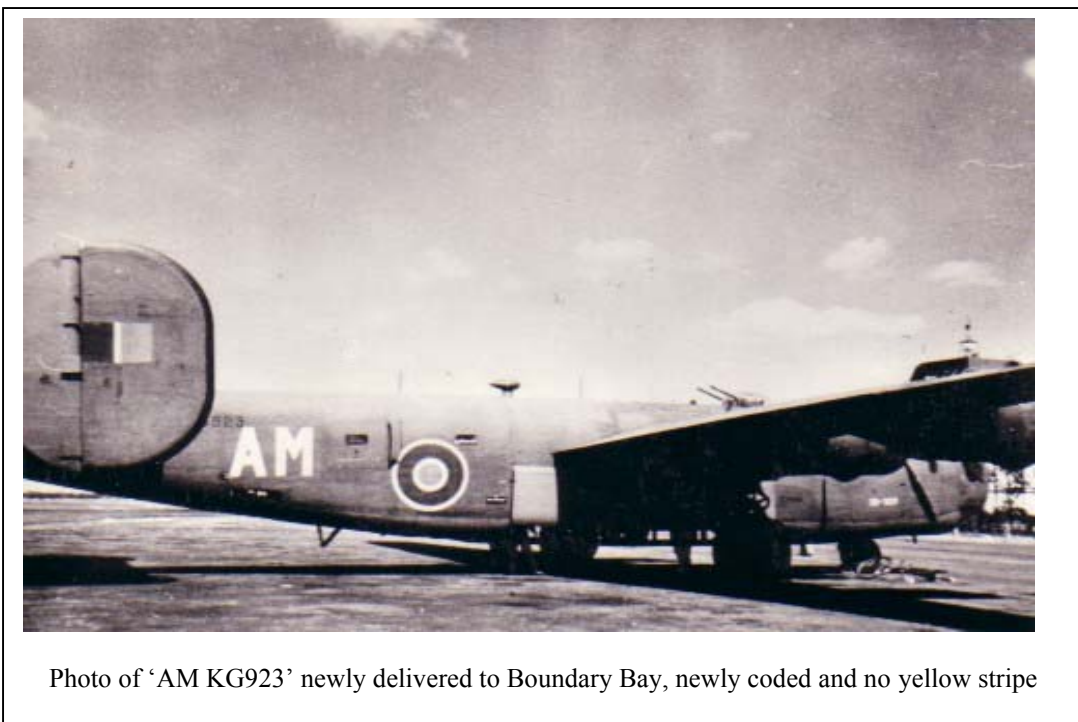
This RAF Liberator Far East Bomber Story was to begin many miles from that area. When the decision was made that Europe was to be given first priority, it left the situation in Southeast Asia where the Japanese forces had almost reached the borders of India having already captured most of Burma, Malaya, and Singapore. It was apparent that if these territories were to be taken from the Japanese a small but elite heavy bomber force of approximately six squadrons must be formed to act in cooperation with the 14th Army as well as being capable of destroying enemy shipping and strategic targets at long ranges. First the RAF needed a heavy bomber force for Air Command South East Asia (ACSEA) no British aircraft of the required type and performance were available as all Lancaster, Halifax, and Stirling production was needed for Bomber Command's offensive against Nazi Germany and none could be spared. So an American aircraft supplied in suitable numbers under Lend Lease would have to be selected and the type chosen was the Consolidated Liberator, the variant most used being the B24J or Liberator BV1 as the RAF was to know it. The

Liberator had the necessary range for the long flights from the airfields in India but need needed a crew of eleven as against the usual crew of seven in a British heavy bomber.

So the question that became of immediate importance was how were the crews to be trained, and made proficient on the liberator.

The Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS) in Canada was producing aircrew in large numbers and by early 1944 the EATS in Canada was so large that some could be diverted for forming this bomber force. The next problem was the ideal situation to reproduce the necessary training conditions for the long over ocean flights. It was decided to use the area of RCAF Western Air Command with its vast expansive Pacific Ocean near at hand.

RCAF Boundary Bay

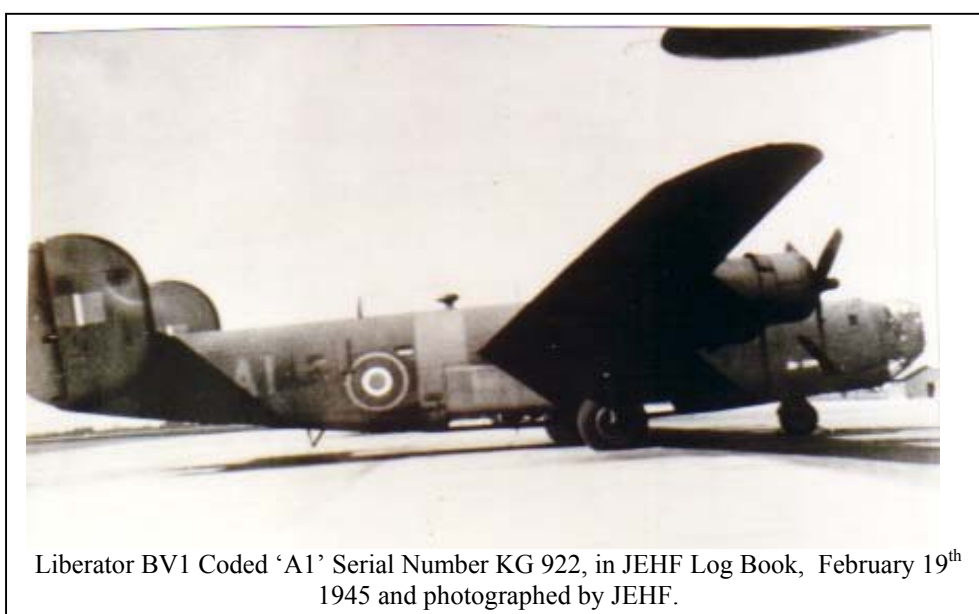


Right on the border of the US & Canada, south of Vancouver, with a large expanse of land was the aerodrome aptly named Boundary Bay. Boundary Bay had been the base for 33 EFTS flying Fairchild Cornells, which were moved out, and the airfield adapted to take much larger aircraft and the large numbers of these aircraft.

Another US type was going to be needed for the conversion to Liberators and a twin-engine aircraft chosen was the B-25D Mitchell 11. The unit was to become 5

Operational Training Unit (OTU) it was formed on the 1st April 1944 with G/C D A R Bradshaw as officer commanding and by now 27 Mitchell's and 17 Liberators had been delivered to Boundary Bay so training could commence.

The course was to have approximately 35 hours Mitchell flying and 70 hours on Liberators and it says something for the standard of training that pilots and crews could become proficient in this time – pilot training for Liberators in the USAAF was around 250 hours. Aircrew for 5 OTU came from both the RCAF and the RAF, second tour RAF aircrew direct from the UK instructors from EATS and newly trained aircrews from the flying training schools.



A fighter affiliation flight of Kittyhawks was stationed at Boundary Bay for fighter affiliation exercises with the Liberators and for evasive action training and photo/gunnery exercises. The Liberators flew up to ten-hour flights and took part in formation exercises bombing and pattern bombing which was practiced on at the bombing range off the coast. Other exercises in training were air-to-air firing. Bolybrokes acting as target tugs pulling a drogue behind them, air to ground firing camera reconnaissance, day and night cross country flights with full armament and bomb load, flights which varied from just over one hour to ten hours depending upon the type of exercise being carried out.

By August 1944, 41 Mitchells and 36 Liberators had been delivered to Boundary Bay and it had become apparent that one aerodrome was not large enough to take this amount of day and night flying, so a satellite airfield was opened.



Line-up of Liberators at Boundary Bay with Kittyhawk. Liberators are coded: AQ, AN, P, Z, AM. Serial numbers are: KH107, KG924, EW216, & KG923. Photo by JEHF
Jan/Feb 1945

There is some dispute as to whether there was ever an 'AN' coding at Boundary Bay but the following picture of JEHF clearly shows that the aircraft behind is 'AN'



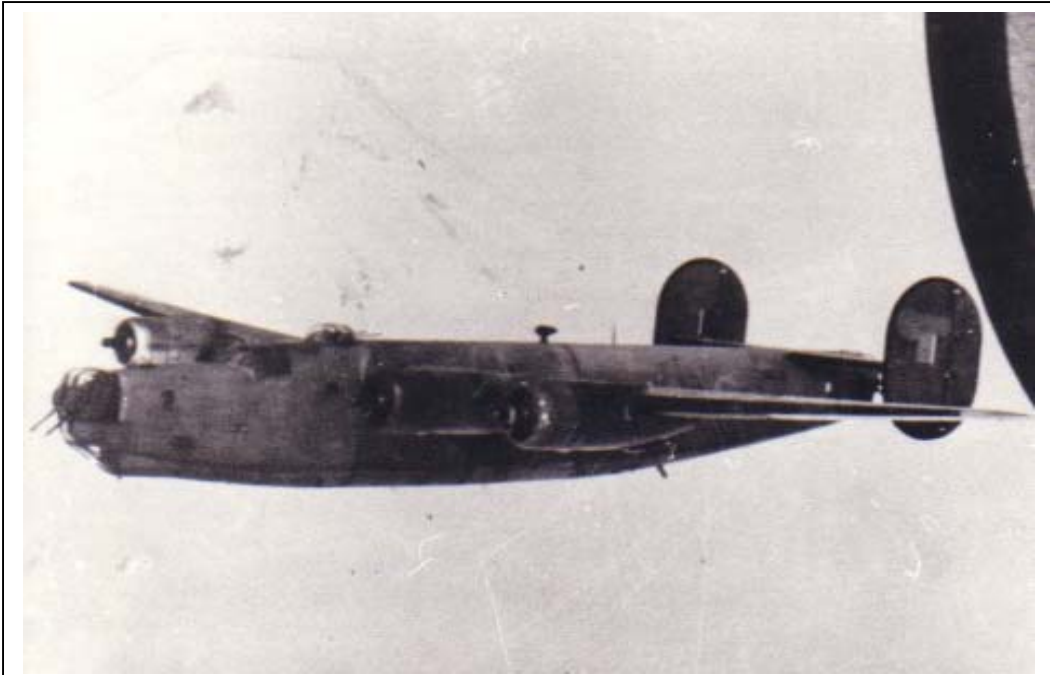
Liberator BV1-KG 978 'XG', plus Mitchell 11D - 'XG' in JEHF log book: 20th February 1945



Kittyhawks of the fighter affiliation flight at Boundary Bay



JEHF with code disputed 'AN' which can be seen at rear end of aircraft.



Liberator BV1 EW 212 'S' Photographed in November 1944 with snow covered Mount Baker, Washington, USA in the background. This aircraft is in olive-drab and grey with the S in grey behind the roundel.

RCAF Abbotsford

The engineer officer at Abbotsford decided that all Liberators at Abbotsford should be stripped down to bare alclad finish to avoid confusion with Boundary Bay Liberators which were to remain in the olive-drab finish.



Liberator BV1 EW281 'AJ' pictured at Abbotsford in alclad finish in March 1945, note the nearness of the mountains in the background.

Abbotsford was near the foot hills of a mountain range which were dangerous to any aircraft if the aerodrome was over flowing, one example of this was the unfortunate fate of Liberator KK 241 VY(B-24J 44-44312) which failed to return from the night flight the 5th/6th of June 1945 with a full crew on board. Fears for the crew were immediate Abbotsford was situated in land with the foothills of the mountains as a back cloth, behind which loomed a formidable awesome barrier of mountains only minutes flying time east of the airfields. To the west lay the vast ocean making the chance of finding the crew very small if they had ditched or parachuted into the sea. All rescue services were alerted and put into urgent operation the person to whom the credit must go for finding the unfortunate Liberator was the Group Captain who was the CO. Flying a yellow painted Noorduyn Norseman RCAF communications *hack* aircraft he personally took on the search of the mountainous area. A brilliant pilot, he had done full tours with the RCAF Squadrons in Europe, he flew in and out of the mountainous area searching systematically for the missing aircraft and he kept this up for days. Liberators including our own were brought into the sea search but could not be used for searching in and out of the mountains as the risk to such large aircraft were too great.

After a while, it was realised that the crew if they had survived must now be in a very desperate state, so an all-out search was organised every available Liberator, including ours, was given an ocean area to search. Meanwhile, the Group Captain, who was one covering the area of Mount Welch and there he sighted the wreckage of KK241. It had flown into the mountain hitting it at 7000 feet up its sheer face the crew died instantly and the aircraft wreckage had disintegrated. The wreckage and the bodies were impossible to reach and were left where they were. Liberator KK 241 was 36 miles east of her home station only minutes flying time east of Abbotsford.



Liberators KK 241 'Y' & KK 239 'X' both later coded VY & VX. VY was the unfortunate Liberator that crashed into Mount Welch 5/6th June 1945. KK 239 in JEHF log book 4th May 1945



Another picture of 'Y' later coded 'VY' KK 241.

Two of the Liberators were involved in fatal crashes on November 11th 1944 and January 9th 1945. The first was KH108 'AT' (B-24J 44-10673) which crashed into the mountains killing a full crew of 11, the wreckage was not found until almost a year later. The other was KH173 'AZ' (B-24J 44-10738) which crashed into the Pacific.

Several other crashes occurred but these two were the worst prior to KK241. Liberator EW 210 'T' (B-24J 42-99896) crashed after a bomb exploded in the bomb bay on January 10th 1945 over the bombing range: most of the crew bailed out but three were killed with the aircraft on impact.

(Note: it was not until several years afterwards that the author discovered there had been two Liberators collide on the Abbotsford runway when one landed on top of the other the aircraft burnt out killing 9 aircrew. The two aircraft were: KH107 'VJ' (B-24J 44-10672) & KG 880 'WR' (B-12J 44-10385) in July 1945)



Line-up of Liberator BV1s at Abbotsford, March 1945. Codes are: VA,WR,WM,WF,VK,--VF. Serials: EW 131, KG 880,EW 137,KH 109,--KG931. 'VK' (KH109) in JEHF log book May 4/9/12th & June 12/14th 1945



'AP' later coded 'VG' KH 106 Photographed by JEHF 'in the wet' April 1945 Abbotsford. In JEHF log book 28th April 1945.



Liberator BV1's coded 'BH', 'AV', & 'AQ, serials: KH 174, KH 171, & AQ not known. In JEHF log book KH 174, April 20th 1945. KH 171 in log book April 30th 1945.



Liberator BV1 Abbotsford March 1945 code 'AK' serial not known.

As a matter of interest six weeks after the Japanese surrender 50TU was disbanded and apart from some of the Mitchells, the Liberators were sold off as scrap in 1946.

Note: The Liberators were not the only casualties at 50TU a Kittyhawk on evasive action training for the Liberators struck the wing tip of a Liberator and plunged into the ground killing the pilot. From this time on yellow rudders and yellow wing tips were painted onto the Abbotsford Liberators as shown in the drawing below of VK KH109. Boundary Bay Liberators were given a yellow stripe amidships.



There was also a Mitchell casualty which was hushed up when a Sgt pilot got drunk over the Christmas and New Year period and stole a Liberator which he could not get off the ground alone so he stole a Mitchell and successfully got it flying. He flew low over Vancouver flashing his lights off and on and turned back and flew at naught feet over the C/O's parade, the C/O remarked later that it was the finest bit of flying he'd ever seen and ordered that the Kittyhawks flight should scramble two Kittyhawks to shoot down the Mitchell if it looked as if it was going to cause any danger. The Sgt pilot turned the Mitchell out to sea and flew until his fuel ran out and the aircraft crashed into the Pacific. This Sgt pilot had been commissioned and court marshalled and demoted at an earlier date to Sgt and then posted to Boundary Bay. His act was hushed up and has remained so until this day.

Although it was believed there were no pictures of Abbotsford under construction the photograph below shows Abbotsford towards the end of its construction with two 'testing' Liberators. Spot the second one!

By the end of 50TU there had been 70 Mitchells and 60 Liberators delivered to the unit.



See Appendix 1 for Mitchell and Liberator details

6 Ferry Unit Royal Air Force Transport Command 45 Group

This is a unit, which very seldom, if ever, gets a mention, yet it was one of the most important of the SEAC Liberator story. This unit delivered Liberators from Dorval to ACSEA and without them 231 Bomber Group and 205 Coastal Command Group of Liberators and special duty Squadrons would not have had the large number of B24's that were available in 1945.

Newly trained 50TU crews were posted to 6FU to ferry these aircraft, thereby releasing transport crews for other duties. This was an excellent idea for not only did it get Liberators through to ACSEA but gave the crews more experience on Liberators.



'The one that did not make it' This Ford built trouble and failed to get to ACSEA. When parts and made airworthy it was flown to the UK. as was used for landing trials at Boscombe Down



KL632 was left behind at Dorval with mechanical had been received and the aircraft had been repaired the Japanese conflict was over. In 1946, the aircraft

The first part of the route was Dorval to Gander a flight which took 5 hours over the wonderful forests, and lakes, and rivers, of eastern Canada, flying on over Prince Edward Island until Newfoundland was reached where the aircraft and crew were rested over night. The next day, the aircraft took off through the Newfoundland mist heading south for Lagens on the Azores, flying out of the mist and down over the Atlantic the first sight of approaching the Azores was the cone of a dark-grey ominous volcano, sticking above the ocean, quite eerie really, shades of ‘Jules Verne’.

Eventually reaching the island where an RAF base by courtesy of the Portuguese (Britain’s oldest ally since the days of Napoleon) and now shared with the USAAF here the crews were rested over night after a flight of 7 hours 45 Minutes.

Next stage ‘take off’ on a beautiful morning, which showed the whole island as a rich green with all its dwellings, painted white, looking idyllic. The course now changed to a South-East direction and a boring flight over the Atlantic heading for Rabat Sale in Morocco. After hours of looking at a blue horizon the horizon changed to a sandy colour from the dusty sand in the air and a strange smell became apparent- it was Africa (North Africa to be precise). Finally for this leg the flight had taken six hours fifteen minutes. Here the crews rested over night apart from the hardy ones who went into the town for a night’s carousel in the local ‘fleshpots’!!! Meanwhile, the filters were being changed on the Liberator for the next stage of the journey across the Sahara to Castel Benito (now Tripoli airport) and the aircraft placed under guard.



The French colonial soldier guarding our aircraft at Rabat Sale
16th&17th July 1945. Photographed by JEHF.

The next morning take off was at 0945 GMT heading virtually due East for Castel Benito. The scenery was spectacular in a different kind of way, a sea of sand below with the odd dried up salt lake dotted here and there with the Atlas Mountains to the starboard and later in the flight the brilliant blue of the Mediterranean on the port side as Libya got nearer.

Below, wrecks left from the desert war littered the ground but nothing like what was to come later on the next stage of the delivery flight.

The landing at Castel Benito was an experience in itself on the perimeter of the aerodrome, on the port side was the skeleton of a Stuka, completely burned out and standing on its nose. When taxiing towards the buildings it was soon seen that the hanger doors of the two large hangers were riddled from side to side and up and down with MG and cannon fire.

Castle Benito had changed hands during a desert conflict several times, first the Italians, then the Germans, and the British Air Forces had all held it at various times. At Castel Benito was a very large junkyard and burned out and shot up aircraft the Italians who prepared the meals had been there throughout all the various occupations and the food was extremely good. The flight from Rabat Sale to Castel Benito took 6 hrs 45mins.

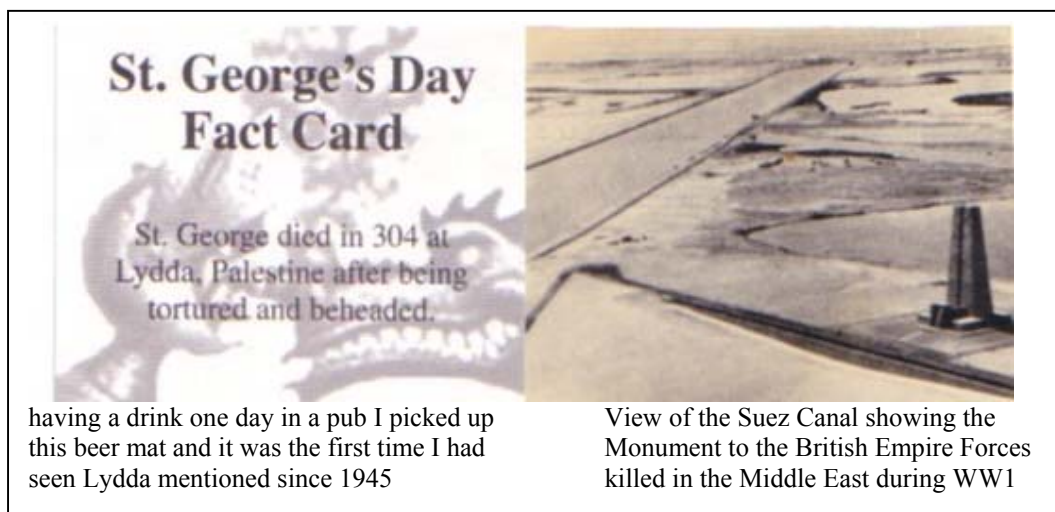


Part of the large 'Junkyard' at Castle Bonito where the only identifiable aircraft are the HE111 in the background and parts of JU52 in the bottom left hand corner. What amazed us all was the fuselage of a Catalina in the middle of the Junkyard for we all wondered how it got there.

The next stage was from Castle Benito to Lydda in Palestine. We more or less followed the coast road and the view of the desert below had changed from sand to a stony surface still a sandy colour and back again to sand littered with the wrecks of hundreds of tanks, half-tracks, guns, lorries, and all kinds of military equipment including aircraft of several nationalities. Especially obvious were the wrecks of Blenhiems which had been particularly hard-hit during the desert campaign.

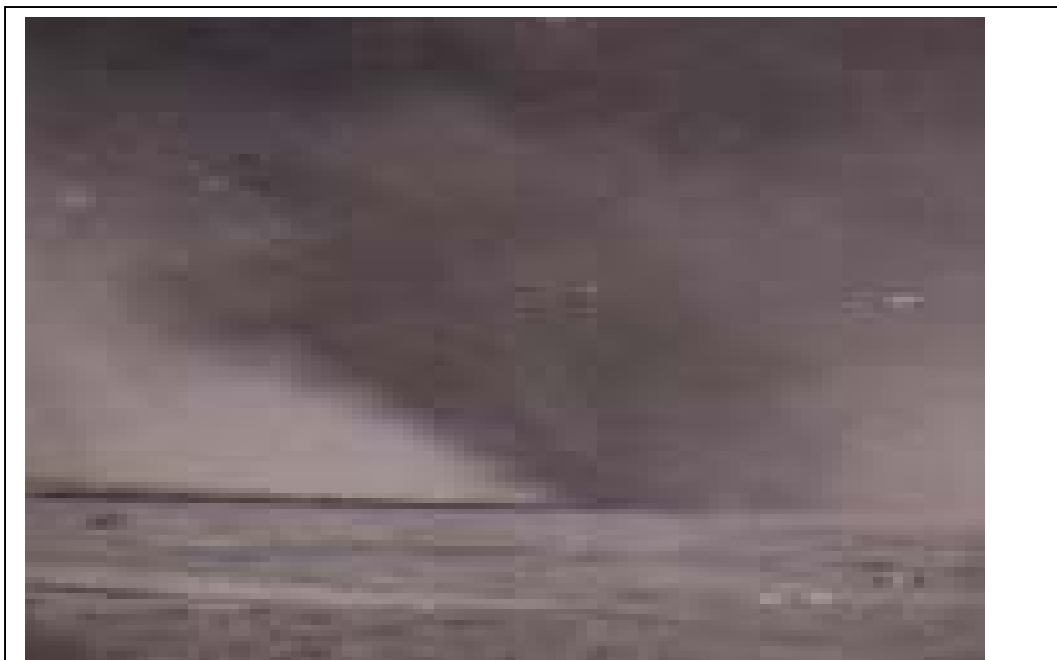


As we approached the Quatara Depression the scene of El Alamein the wrecks ceased as we flew over the pyramids and the Nile where the desert suddenly turned to green. From there we were allowed to fly over part of the Suez Canal and then we turned over Sinai and the Dead Sea until we reached Lydda, in Palestine this stage from Castle Benito to Lydda took 7hrs 30mins.



At Lydda we were held up for nearly 3 days due to a severe sand storm along the next stage of the route, which was to Shaibah in Iraq. This was a pleasure because Lydda was a station, which had many amenities and a pleasant C.O. Some of us went into Tel Aviv and were amazed at the anti- British feelings by the Jews. We could not understand why, because, having flown the full length of the Sahara and seen all the wreckage of conflict we thought that if Monty and the 8th Army had not beaten Rommel how long would the Jews in Palestine have lasted had the Germans got there?

On the morning of the 20th July 1945, the Met Officer said the sandstorm had cleared so we could now continue the delivery flight and we took-off at 11.15 GMT. He was absolutely wrong for the first 200 miles it was clear and we could comfortably follow the pipe line east across the desert, then, suddenly, we were right in the middle of the sandstorm it was so severe that although we were flying at 10,000 feet sand formed at least 6ins deep in the bottom of the Liberator, we were now in considerable danger there was no visibility whatsoever and we were flying blind over barren desert. After what seemed a very long time the Navigator reported we must be in the area of Shaibah. So we circled and suddenly to our astonishment there was a hole in the storm and we saw a Halifax we followed him down and landed safely. We had been in touch with Shaibah by radio for the latter half of the journey.



Sandstorm going away from Shaibah.

Although the storm was now subsiding when we got out of the aircraft the sand was everywhere: in ones mouth, up ones nose, etc. We were escorted under cover. What a relief! Gradually the sandstorm moved on. Shaibah was a most interesting place on its own it was supplied with plenty of alcohol and the 'time expired' personnel were, or seemed to us to be strange to say the least. That night we had a great time with them and their favourite sport was scorpion racing where they placed 2 scorpions on a sand covered tray, one with a white dot on its back, and one with a red dot on its back, and all assembled placed bets as to which scorpion would reach the edge of the tray first to the accompaniment of raucous cheering and encouragement, washed down with alcohol. After all of the celebrations when we retired to bed we had to turn back the sheet on the bed to make sure there were no scorpions in it and the following morning we had to turn our shoes upside down to make sure there were no scorpions inside them saw the beginning of the next stage of the flight, which was to Drigh Road, Karachi. The flight from Lydda to Shaibah had taken 4hrs-20mins.

This stage of the delivery flight was straight forward and uneventful and we flew over the Persian Gulf and the mouths of the Tigris and Euphrates until we reached the coast of Baluchstan a most desolated looking landscape, heading for Karachi. As we got near a silver ribbon appeared on the horizon, it was the Indus and as we got closer to our destination we sighted the city of Karachi, which was covered with a heat haze. We turned over the town and made a gentle landing at Drigh Road, the journey had taken 7hrs-10mins.

Drigh Road was where the aircraft for ACSEA were taken on charge by ACSEA. There was a conglomeration of different types the new Tempest 11, Thunderbolts, Dakotas, Mosquitoes, Liberators (of course), Spitfire XIV's, the odd Halifax, and of all the unexpected aircraft a Lysander III, unfortunately, I was running out of film for my 1.20 Brownie Box, which had been given to me on my birthday in 1936- I still have it, I found it the most reliable camera.

At this stage it is fitting that the casualties that occurred on these delivery flights should be remembered. For example on June 30th 1945 Liberator BVIII-KN 768 (B24L-20-FO-44-50073) of 6FU attempted to leave Dorval but as it took-off its undercarriage collapsed.



An immaculate newly delivered Tempest II



A Lysander III of a special duties Squadron photographed at Drigh Road in July 1945

A propeller was seen to fall off and the aircraft rose into the air and immediately lost height and crashed 4 of the 11-ferry crew were killed. Later another Liberator BVIII, KN826 (B24L-20-FO-44-50057) while on delivery with 6 FU to ACSEA, failed on take-off crashed and burned out at Lydda, Palestine killing all 11 crew members. Both these crashes were failure on take-off, which was

invariably fatal with Liberators.

The flight from Drigh Road to Bamrauli (Allahbad) had various things that held our attention, after a while we saw the Ganges and the Jumna the sacred rivers which were brown and muddy and fairly swollen as melted snow of the Himalayas poured down their valleys. In front of us we spotted a monstrously large Cumulo Nimbus cloud which towered up to fifty thousand feet; in the interests of the safety of the crew we decided to fly around it instead of through it to the North this gave us a wonderful view of the massive snow topped Himalayas, awesomely beautiful.

When we figured the route was now clear we made an uneventful landing at Bamrauli, (Allahabad) which, as a matter of interest is where the Ganges and the Jumna join together and go on to the Bay of Bengal.

Bamrauli was the end of this delivery flight it was the Reception Park for aircraft and crews and from there they were dispatched to the Squadrons of 231 Group and others, our aircraft KN 807, went first to 159 Squadron and later to 355.

Until it was decided where the crews would go we were billeted in a mansion in great comfort a great transit camp that was. After the delivery journey we gazed for the last time on the faithful Liberator, which had flown without any mechanical trouble for 11000km in 12 days. The final stage from Drigh Road to Bamrauli had taken 5hrs-30mins, and the overall journey from Dorval in Canada to Bamrauli had taken 50hrs-15mins

*Note: All the details of times etc. of this delivery come from JEHF's flying logbook.
The rest is my personal eyewitness account.*

231 (Heavy Bomber) Group RAF South East Asia Command.



As the Liberators began to get through to SEAC (Then known as the South East Asia Air forces) SEAAF, 159 Squadron had already been operating Liberators since 1942 in India against the Japanese. 231 Group began forming its bomber squadrons in the following order: in August 1943, 355 Squadron was formed and stationed at Salbani.

215 Squadron began converting from Wellingtons in August 1944 and was stationed at Digri. 356 Squadron began as a Liberator squadron on 15th January 1943 and 99 Squadron converted from Wellington X's in September 1944. 356 Squadron was formed from instructors of 1673 HCU at Kolar in November 1944 but after one raid became a Special Duties Squadron, on 358's first raid it lost 7 aircraft and crews plus its C.O.

SEAC's Liberator Squadrons were to have identifying symbols on their fins and rudders so aircraft of allied fighter could easily identify them and fighter-bombers operating in their area.

99 Squadron had the top half of its fin painted black and a white dot above its rear tail markings.



Full rear port view of 'D' KH 284 of 99 Squadron, clearly showing its 'white dot' symbol. Note the word 'SNAKE' above the code letter, this meant that the aircraft was to be delivered nowhere else but the Far-East.(SEAC)



Three-quarter port-side view of 'D' KH 284, which also shows the position of the white dot relative to the aircraft.

215 had the rudders of its Liberators painted black apart from two white horizontal bars, one above and to the rear of the tail marking, and one below to the rear of the tail marking.



Newly delivered Liberator BV1 being prepared to become EW224 'P' for Peter of 215 Squadron in a redoubt at Digri.



Liberator BV1 coded 'E' of 215 Squadron, lines up to land at the end of the runway at Digri.
Note the 2 white bars on a black background on the rudder in both these pictures

355, was a completely new squadron formed on Liberators. It had its Liberator rudders painted with vertical black and white stripes this squadron flew Liberators through all its service career. The vertical stripes were five in all beginning with a

black stripe where the fin joined the rudder and consisting of three black stripes and two white ones alternately all the same width.



Liberator BV1 KG877 'K' of 355 Squadron at Salbani, January 1945 complete with nose art , rudder stripes and snake lettering



Liberator BV1 KH316? of 355 Squadron, clearly showing the black and white stripes. A puzzle about this aircraft is the code 'Z' is in front of the roundel and barred, the bar meaning there were two a/c of the same code in the squadron. The bar is the white line under the code.

356 Squadron was another which flew only Liberators during its service career and had the most recognisable symbol of them all a large white cross on a black rudder.



Clear shot of KH119 'S' of 356 Squadron on a bombing raid on the Akyab coast in Dec 1944.



The C/O's Liberator BV1 (See the Wing Commander's markings under the cockpit) this aircraft has no bombing missions and is a new delivery to 356 Squadron. It is a very early type Liberator, note the extended pitot-tube which was only on the earlier delivered RAF Liberators. The serial is EV860 and the code 'Z'

All the aircraft up to the summer of 1945 were painted olive drab upper and side surfaces and pale grey under services. A few SEAC Liberators were painted night bomber mat black under and side surfaces and olive drab upper surfaces: two examples of the latter scheme were KL611 'W' of 356 Squadron and KL629 'X' of 99 Squadron.

Roundels and tail markings were SEAC colours of dark blue and light blue these symbols were used for a definite purpose and not purely to create merely 'flamboyant' aircraft to avoid any possible confusion with Japanese markings by allied fighters and fighter bombers. This was because USAAF P38's jumped a squadron of Spitfires and shot 5 down (friendly fire!) later in January 1945, 6 RAF Liberators dropping supplies to insurgents in French Indo-China, were jumped and

shot down by US Navy Wildcats from a carrier, off the coast of Indo-China, (once again friendly fire!) the second incident was hushed up by the Supreme Commander and his staff as it could have had a bad effect upon the morale of the RAF Liberator crews in SEAC particularly, and the RAF in general, we were supposed to be on the same side.

By 1945 when Japanese opposition had virtually disappeared Liberators arriving were left in Alclad finish and even retained, in some cases, their full red white and blue markings. Code letters on earlier olive drab Liberators were grey, later red, and the code letters on Alclad aircraft were dark blue. Each aircraft carried only one code letter to the rear of the waist gunner's position. Smaller code letters were sometimes marked on the nose of the Liberators between the front gun turret and the bomb aimer's window.



Close-up of the front turret and the bomb aimer's window and the code letter 'D'.
The aircraft is KH284 of 99 Squadron

Numbers 159 appear to have carried no identification symbols of the types described so far. A simple explanation is probably that 159 had been operating Liberators long before the other squadrons were formed and was planned to be the pathfinder squadron of 231 Group in 1945. Number 358 after only one bombing mission of 7 aircraft against Mandalay on January 13th 1945, ceased in the bomber role and became a Special Duties Squadron.

ACSEA found the Liberators range and bomb load well below what they required, so 159 Squadron took on the task of improving the amount of fuel carried and the

bomb load. W/C J Blackburn found that the Liberator of the US standards could carry 3000lbs (1362kgs) of bombs (less than a Mosquito) on raids of 1200 miles (1930kms) He successfully experimented with a Liberator, increasing the fuel tankage and load until he could get the aircraft to fly distances of 3000 miles (4287 kms) and increase the bomb load to nearly treble what it had been before. For this work the USAAF, gave W/C J Blackburn an American DFC, and a commendation, and the USAAF adopted his findings for the RAF to their own Liberator squadrons. The RAF repeated its improvements on US aircraft in other theatres also - e.g. the Mustang



A Liberator BV1 of 159 Squadron revs-up prior to take-off



An E Lint of 'C' flight 159 Squadron, coded 'X', being prepared for an op. For details of 159 Special Flight it is suggested that one reads Robert Quirk's 'The Special Flight'.

Bombing Missions by 231 Group

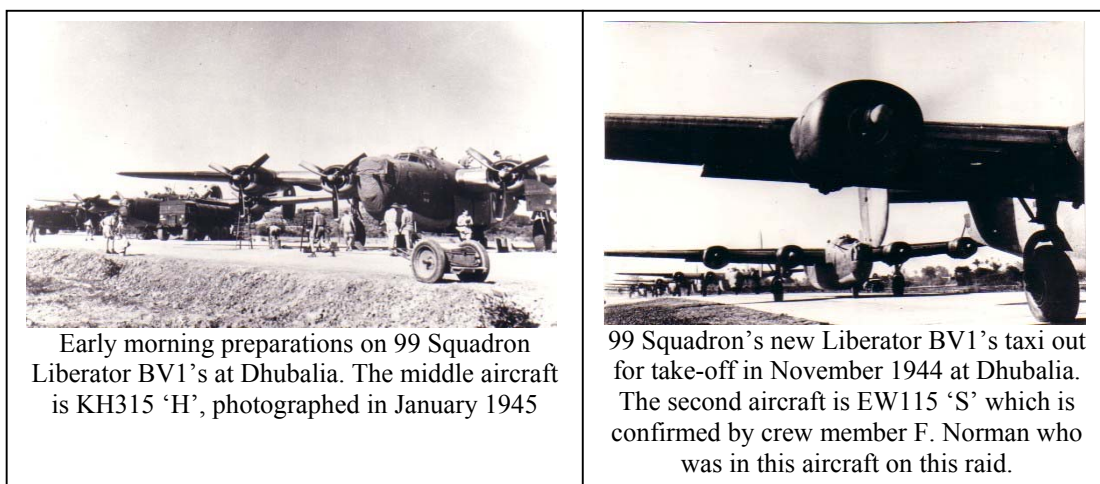
The increase in range was to enhance the strategic use of the Liberator for the RAF in SEAC and was essential due to the distance of some major targets behind the Japanese forward area. Number 159 Squadron soon showed the difference it meant when 12 of their aircraft flew from Digri in India to Penang a total distance of 3000, miles (4827 km) beginning flying on the night of October 27th 1944 and returning the next day after having effectively mined Penang Harbour. Total flight time was 17 hours this feat was repeated by the squadron on January the 10th and 11th 1945 this time with a full squadron compliment of 16 aircraft.

On the 18th of January 1945 F/L F Barrett and the crew of Liberator BV1 – KH408 of 159 Squadron on their way to a target spotted a Japanese ship in the Indian Ocean, off the coast of Burma. They received approval to attack the vessel instead of their original targets. Their bombs hit the ship forcing it to veer round out of control. Suddenly, there was a vivid ‘green’ explosion and the ship completely disappeared at the de-briefing they were informed the ‘green’ explosion was from chemicals contained in bombs. The ship had been a Japanese munitions ship, hence the violence of the explosion, for his part in this action, and many other actions, sometimes under very in bad weather conditions, F/L Frank Barrett was awarded the DFC. KL408 was a B24J-95-CF (44-44279) coded ‘X’ with 159 Squadron and was delivered to that squadron in January 1945, this Liberator was flown by F/L Barrett several times during his service with 159 and was actually returned to an MU by him when it needed a complete overhaul. F/L Barrett also held the longest fully loaded flight of 18hs 10mins on another raid which is mentioned in Robert Quirk’s ‘Special Flight’ on the web.



Liberator BV1's of 356 Squadron, returning to their base after an attack on Ramree off Akyab in early 1945 the nearest aircraft is KH272 'D'. A close up of this aircraft is shown at the beginning of this article.

The 231 Group Squadron Liberators flew mainly unescorted, although in early 1945, 36 Liberators from several of the Group's Squadrons were escorted by Thunderbolts, of 258 Squadron to bomb ammunition petrol dumps and Japanese military installations near Rangoon. Communication routes were well harassed by Liberators and the first mission of 99 Squadron's Liberators, was 12 aircraft against the railway marshalling yards and the station area at Pynmama, Burma, in November 1944 from their base at Dhubalia.



Early morning preparations on 99 Squadron Liberator BV1's at Dhubalia. The middle aircraft is KH315 'H', photographed in January 1945

99 Squadron's new Liberator BV1's taxi out for take-off in November 1944 at Dhubalia. The second aircraft is EW115 'S' which is confirmed by crew member F. Norman who was in this aircraft on this raid.

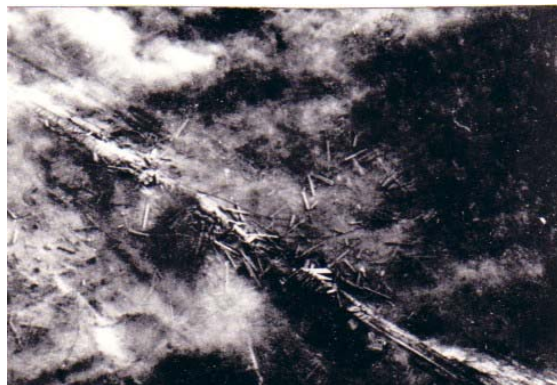
Liberators undertook all kinds of operations against the Japanese Imperial Forces, from close support for the 14th Army to bombing targets up to 1500 miles from their bases. The Liberator was often used as a 'gunship' with its formidable armament of ten 0.5in (12.7mm) Browning machine guns firing 800 rounds per minute, and the type often strafed ground targets such as airfields, river traffic, land communications, Command posts, and enemy gun positions, to assist the 14th Army in its advance through Burma.

When seaborne landings were made at Myedon and Ramree islands after the recapture of Akyab, heavy air support was used to clear as much of the opposition as possible. Once again the Liberators were used effectively and 356 was amongst the units used in particular. Both Myedon and Ramree were recaptured by seaborne landings by XV Corps who then pushed one to Mandalay, which was captured after heavy fighting on March the 20th 1945.

The notorious Burma-Siam railway was a regular target which was not without some irony as it was built by captured British and Commonwealth POW's forced to work at this terrible task under appalling conditions, even though Japan had signed the

Geneva Convention for the treatment for prisoners of war, over 20,000 POW's lives were lost as a result of these conditions. The bombing of this railway greatly reduced supplies to the Japanese as it was an essential logistic link with Bangkok, the Siamese capital.

The Japanese relied on 5000 miles of railways to bring up their supplies, the most infamous length of the railway being the stretch from Moulmien to Bangkok built by Pow's under Japanese direction. It was not possible for the Liberators to destroy the whole railway so concentration was made upon the bridges as shown in the photograph below and upon depots where any rail traffic may arrive. The Japanese devised locomotives, which could move on track or on land and built alternative bridges but to no avail because the Liberators made round trips to deny the Japanese their supplies. The heavy bomber force cut eighty-five percent of Japanese tonnage per day. Radio controlled Azon bombs were directed against specific targets by the Liberators but more often precision bombing was used.



A reconnaissance picture shows the damage to a bridge and the railway after a raid by 159 Squadron.

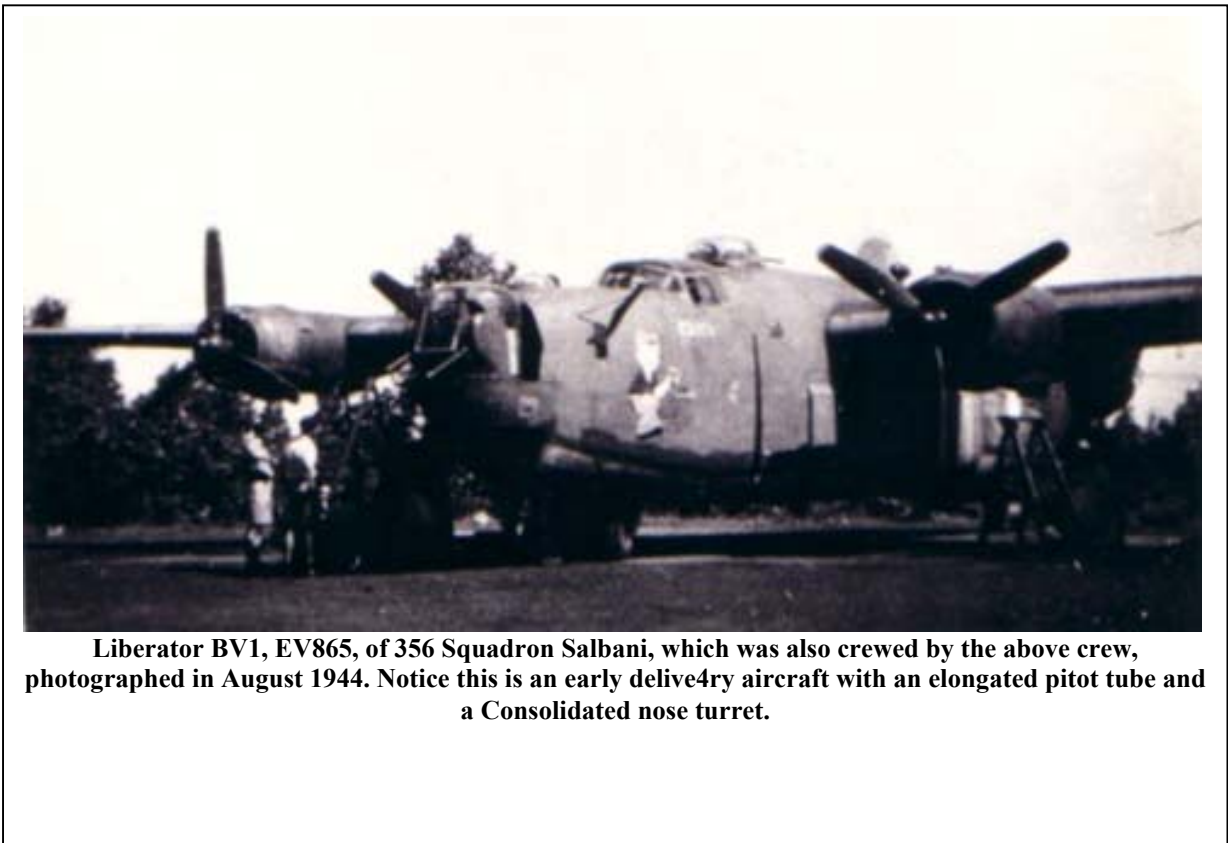
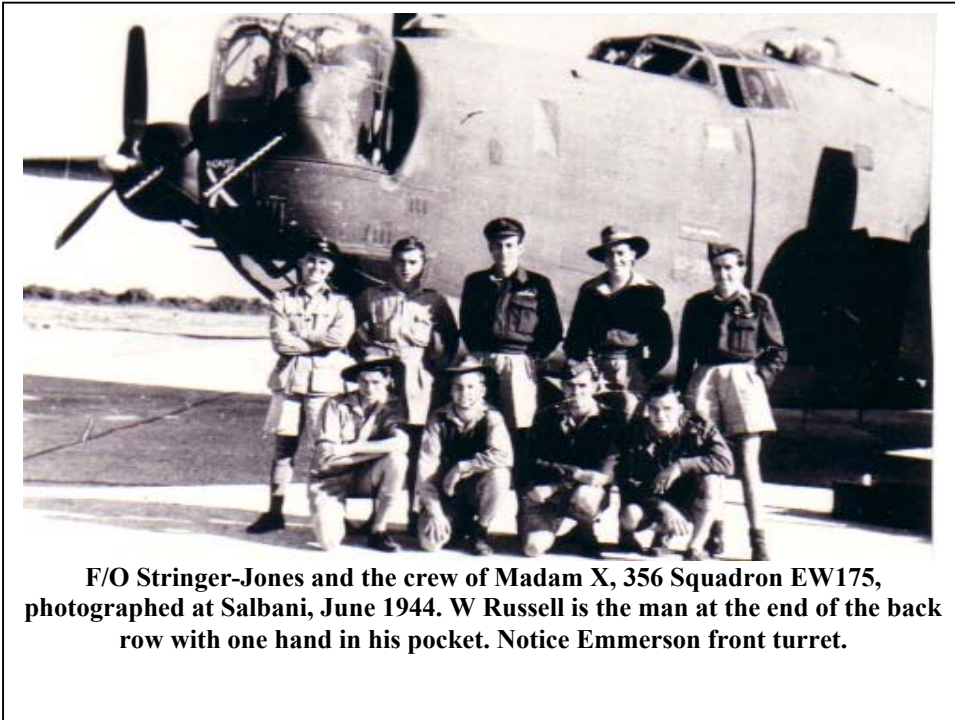


Japanese tanker 'Toho Maru' note one screw out of action, hit first by 356 Squadron and sent to the bottom later by 159 Squadron.

Co-operation between two of the Liberator squadrons brought about a major shipping success. When a Japanese 16,000 ton tanker was found in the Gulf of Siam on June 15th 1945, 356 Squadron attacked the vessel and succeeded in setting it on fire. When 356 left the target for their home base at Salbani 159 Squadron arrived at the scene and finished off the bombing by sinking the tanker, the biggest shipping success in southeast Asia. 159 Squadron at that time was flying from Digri with detachments at Akyab.

No 215 Squadron was to withdraw from its bombing role with 231 Group after a successful run both on Wellingtons and Liberators, its first Liberator raid was against

Insien, but participated in the Group's attacks of the kind described earlier and also finished in style with an attack on two road bridges at Bilin.



Because of the speed with which the 14th Army was advancing and the urgent need of keeping the Army supplied, 215 Squadron was then transferred to Dakotas in an essential transport role in April 1945 and operated non stop in this duty supplying the victorious army from Tuliha. One of 215's Liberators managed to return a 1000 miles (1,609km) after attacking the Burma-Siam Railway despite the fact it had one engine on fire for almost 3 hours. This happened on New Years Day 1945 and the aircraft was KH274 'H'.

Number 355 Squadron played its full part also all the time flying numerous attack sorties. May 2nd 1945 was an unlucky day for 355 and the RAF as a whole. Enemy gun positions in the Rangoon area were so effective that it was decided that they should be attacked and destroyed. Stationed at Salbarni was W/C JB Nicolson VC (the only fighter command VC of the war). He was semi grounded but with the urge of all fliers not to be 'chairborne' requested to go as an observer on the bombing raid. The aircraft he was in attacked the target, but on its return journey developed engine trouble and radioed base that one of the port engines was on fire and the aircraft would have to ditch into the sea. The Liberator ditched into the Bay of Bengal and all on board were killed including W/C Nicolson.

Note: Although all the photographs are from the J E H Fail collection, many thanks are due to the following, in particular: T.L. Henthorne, (99 Squadron and 356) and Frank Barrett (159 Squadron) and J. Slight (215 Squadron) and Wallace Russell (356 Squadron) and Eric Hine (SEAC and IWM) and R.Laing (355 Squadron) and many others whose names I have forgotten over the last 60 years but who were a great help to me.

The continuation of this history continues in other articles: 'FORWARD STRATEGIC AIRE BASE COCOS ISLAND' and '322 MAINTENANCE UNIT AND THE DEMOLITION OF SEAC LIBERATORS' and 'THE SURVIVORS' which are all on Robert Quirk's web site www.rquirk.com

Appendix 1

Known details of all Mitchell and Liberator aircraft

5 Operational Training Unit RCAF

Western Air Command (Headquarters:

Jericho Beach, Vancouver)

Main Base: Boundary Bay, British Columbia, Canada.

Satellite Airfield: Abbotsford, New Westminster, British Columbia, Canada.

Unit Formed: April 1, 1944. Training began April 24, 1944.

Unit Disbanded: October 31, 1945. Training ceased August 31, 1945.

Commanding Officers: G/C D A R Bradshaw – April 1944-May 1945.

G/C R S Turnbull – May 1945-October 1945.

Equipment:

North American Mitchell II (B-25D)

Consolidated Liberator B. V1 (B-24J)

Last Course: No 29 (Liberator)

Mitchell II

(70 aircraft)

RAF Serial	US Model and Serial	Code (where known)	Date delivered
FW220	B-25D 43-3540	'AG'	Mar 16, 1944
FW237	B-25D 43-3557	'AH'	Mar 22, 1944
FW246	B-25D 43-3566	'AI'	Mar 22, 1944
FW251	B-25D 43-3686	'AJ'	Mar 22, 1944
FW259	B-25D 43-3694	'AK'	Mar 22, 1944
FW260	B-25D 43-3695		Mar 22, 1944
FW272	B-25D 43-3710		Apr 4, 1944
FW273	B-25D 43-3712		Mar 16, 1944
FW274	B-25D 43-3718		Mar 16, 1944
FW278	B-25D 43-3751	'AP'	Mar 22, 1944
FW279	B-25D 43-3752		Mar 22, 1944
FW280	B-25D 43-3753		Mar 22, 1944
HD310	B-25D 43- 3764		Feb 21, 1944
HD311	B-25D 43- 3779	'B'	Feb 23, 1944
HD312	B-25D 43- 3780		Feb 23, 1944
HD313	B-25D 43- 3781		Feb 21, 1944
HD314	B-25D 43- 3782		Feb 21, 1944
HD315	B-25D 43- 3783		Feb 21, 1944
HD317	B-25D 43- 3785		Feb 21, 1944
HD318	B-25D 43- 3786		Feb 21, 1944
HD319	B-25D 43- 3787		Feb 21, 1944
HD320	B-25D 43- 3788	'L'	Feb 23, 1944
HD322	B-25D 43- 3790	'H'	May 9, 1944
HD323	B-25D 43- 3794		Mar 1, 1944
HD324	B-25D 43- 3795		Mar 1, 1944
HD325	B-25D 43- 3796		Mar 1, 1944
HD326	B-25D 43- 3797		Feb 25, 1944
HD331	B-25D 43- 3844		Apr 5, 1944
HD332	B-25D 43- 3845		Mar 24, 1944
HD333	B-25D 43- 3846	'T'	Mar 24, 1944
HD334	B-25D 43- 3847	'U'	Mar 24, 1944
HD335	B-25D 43- 3848		Mar 31, 1944
HD337	B-25D 43- 3850		Mar 24, 1944
HD338	B-25D 43- 3851		Apr 4, 1944
HD339	B-25D 43- 3852		Mar 31, 1944

RAF Serial	US Model and Serial	Code (where known)	Date delivered
HD340	B-25D 43- 3853		Mar 27, 1944
HD341	B-25D 43- 3854	'Z'	Mar 31, 1944
HD342	B-25D 43- 3855		Apr 8, 1944
HD343	B-25D 43- 3856		Apr 8, 1944
HD344	B-25D 43- 3857		Apr 8, 1944
HD345	B-25D 43- 3858		Apr 8, 1944
KL133	B-25D 41- 30548		Dec 5, 1944
KL134	B-25D 41- 30596		Nov 24, 1944
KL135	B-25D 41- 30637		Oct 21, 1944
KL136	B-25D 41- 30757		Nov 2, 1944
KL137	B-25D 41- 30758	'BA'	Oct 27, 1944
KL138	B-25D 41- 30759	'AU'	Oct 18, 1944
KL139	B-25D 41- 30760		Nov 8, 1944
KL140	B-25D 41- 30814		Oct 27, 1944
KL141	B-25D 42- 87146		Oct 21, 1944
KL142	B-25D 42-87288		Oct 27, 1944
KL143	B-25D 42-87290		Oct 27, 1944
KL144	B-25D 42-87352		Oct 27, 1944
KL145	B-25D 42-87379	'AZ'	Dec 10, 1944
KL146	B-25D 43-3629		Nov 14, 1944
KL147	B-25D 42-87501		Oct 27, 1941
KL148	B-25D 43-3634		Oct 18, 1944
KL149	B-25D 43-3647	'M'	Oct 18, 1944
KL150	B-25D 43-3300		Jan 5, 1945
KL151	B-25D 43-3301		Dec 9, 1944
KL152	B-25D 43-3302		Dec 12, 1944
KL153	B-25D 43-3303		Jan 19, 1945
KL154	B-25D 43-3304		Dec 14, 1944
KL155	B25D 43-3307		Jan 5, 1945
KL156	B-25D 43-3308		Jan 5, 1945
KL157	B-25D 43-3310		June 29, 1944
KL158	B-25D 43-3311		Jan 5, 1945
KL159	B-25D 43-3312		Jan 5, 1945
KL160	B25D 43-3316		Feb 12, 1945
KL161	B-25D 43-3318		Jan 19, 1945

Liberators				
(70 aircraft, all Mk V1 except for FK216, Mk 111)				

RAF Serial	US Model and Serial	Code (where known)			Date delivered
FK216	B-24D/41-1110				May 26, 1942
EW127	B-24J/42-99793	'A'			May 20, 1944
EW128	B-24J/42-00794		'VA'		Apr 12, 1944
EW129	B-24J/42-99827	'B'	'VB'		Apr 12, 1944
EW130	B-24J/42-99809		'C'		Apr 8, 1944
EW131	B-24J/42-99812	'D'	'WA'		Mar 12, 1944
EW132	B-24J/42-99815	'F'	'WB'		Apr 8, 1944
EW133	B-24J/42-99817				Apr 20, 1944
EW134	B-24J/42-99820				Apr 13, 1944
EW135	B-24J/42-99821		'WC'		Apr 8, 1944
EW136	B-24J/42-99822				Apr 13, 1944
EW137	B-24J/42-99823	'K'		'WF'	Apr 8, 1944
EW208	B-24J/42-99894				Apr 26, 1944
EW209	B-24J/42-99895	'M'			Apr 26, 1944
EW210	B-24J/42-99896	'T'			May 12, 1944
EW211	B-24J/42-99897	'N'		'VC'	Apr 26, 1944
EW212	B-24J/42-99898	'S'		'WG'	May 9, 1944
EW213	B-24J/42-99899	'F'			Apr 26, 1944
EW214	B-24J/42-99900	'O'	'WJ'		Apr 25, 1944
EW216	B-24J/42-99902	'P'	'WK'		Apr 26, 1944
EW217	B-24J/42-99903	'Z'			Apr 29, 1944
EW218	B-24J/42-99904	'U'			May 12, 1944
EW270	B-24J/44-10273	'X'	'WN'		Jun 8, 1944
EW281	B-24J/44-10284	'J'	'AJ'	'WO'	June 8, 1944
EW282	B-24J/44-10285	'W'			Jun 3, 1944
KG880	B-24J/44-10385	'Y'	'O'	'WR'	Jun 8, 1944
KG886	B-24J/44-10391		'AD'		Jun 13, 1944
KG888	B-24J/44-10392		'XA'		Jun 15, 1944
KG891	B-24J/44-10396		'AC'	'WP'	Jun 12, 1944
KG892	B-24J/44-10397	'Z'			Jun 9, 1944
KG894	B-24J/44-10399		'AE'	'WQ'	Jun 15, 1944
KG920	B-24J/44-10425		'VL'		Jun 15, 1944
KG922	B-24J/44-10427		'AI'		Jun 24, 1944
KG923	B-24J/44-10428		'AM'		Jul 4, 1944
KG924	B-24J/44-10429		'AN'		Jul 7, 1944
KG929	B-24J/44-10434		'AH'		Jun 21, 1944
KG930	B-24J/44-10435		'VD'		Jun 28, 1944
KG931	B-24J/44-10436		'VF'		Jun 28, 1944
KG978	B-24J/44-10483		'XG'		Jul 4, 1944
KH105	B-24J/44-10670				Aug 25, 1944
KH106	B-24J/44-10671		'AP'	'VG'	Aug 9, 1944
KH107	B-24J/44-10672		'VJ'		Aug 9, 1944
KH108	B-24J/44-10673		'AT'		Aug 9, 1944
KH109	B-24J/44-10674		'BH'	'VK'	Aug 11, 1944
KH110	B-24J/44-10675		'AU'	'VM'	Aug 14, 1944
KH171	B-24J/44-10736		'AV'	'VN'	Sep 6, 1944
KH172	B-24J/44-10737				Sep 2, 1944
KH173	B-24J/44-10738			'AZ'	Sep 6, 1944
KH174	B-24J/44-10739		'BH'	'VP'	Sep 6, 1944
KH175	B-24J/44-10740		'AX'		Sep 12, 1944
KH176	B-24J/44-10741		'AY'	'VQ'	Sep 6, 1944
KH285	B-24J/44-44156				Oct 10, 1944
KH286	B-24J/44-44157				Oct 6, 1944
KH287	B-24J/44-44158		'BC'	'VR'	Oct 18, 1944
KH288	B-24J/44-44159		'BK'		Oct 10, 1944
KK237	B-24J/44-44308		'BI'	'VU'	Nov 22, 1944
KK238	B-24J/44-44309		'BJ'	'VW'	Nov 22, 1944

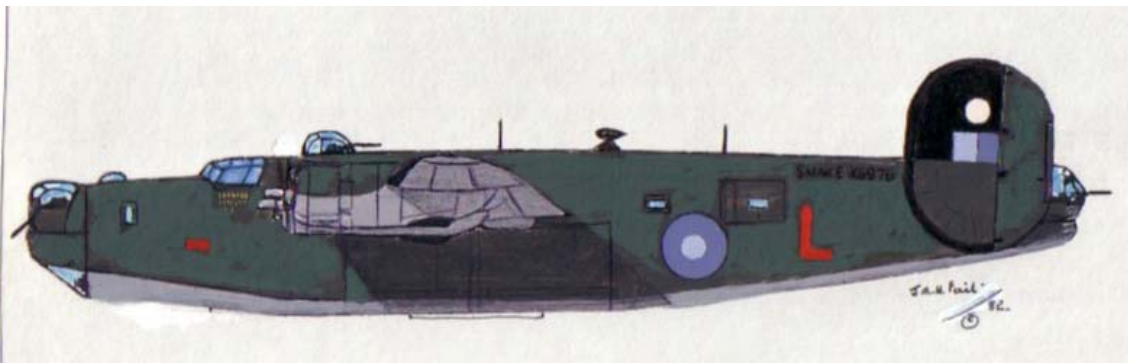
RAF Serial	US Model and Serial	Code (where known)			Date delivered
KK239	B-24J/44-44310		'BK	'VX'	Nov 23, 1944
KK240	B-24J/44-44311		'VZ'		Nov 23, 1944
KK241	B-24J/44-44312	'Y'		'VY'	Nov 23, 1944
KK242	B-24J/44-44313				Nov 23, 1944

Note the aircraft in these lists were diverted by the RAF to the RCAF for 5 OTU. All these Liberators were built by Consolidated at their factory in Fort Worth Texas, with the exception of FK216 which was built by Consolidated at their factory in San Diego. FW216 was used as a simulator aircraft on the ground and never flew with 5 OTU being static in a hanger at Abbotsford. The coding of 5 Out Liberators was very unusual, some being coded as many as three times. Earlier the aircraft began their careers in olive drab and were code behind the roundel in grey, later after the opening of Abbotsford, aircraft had the paint removed down to the bare metal and the codes painted black on the nose. The Mitchells were all olive drab and grey, with the codes behind the roundel and the Liberators which remained at Boundary Bay stayed in olive drab and grey

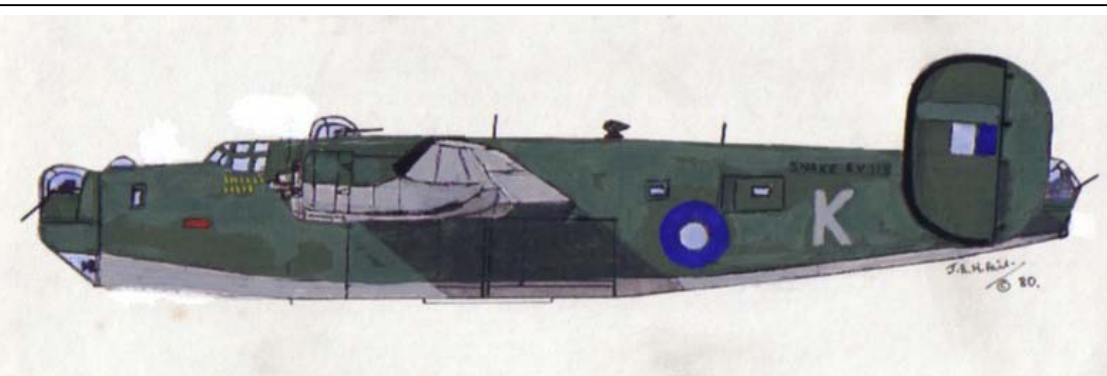
Appendix 2

COLOUR SCHEMES OF LIBERATOR SQUADRONS OF 231 GROUP

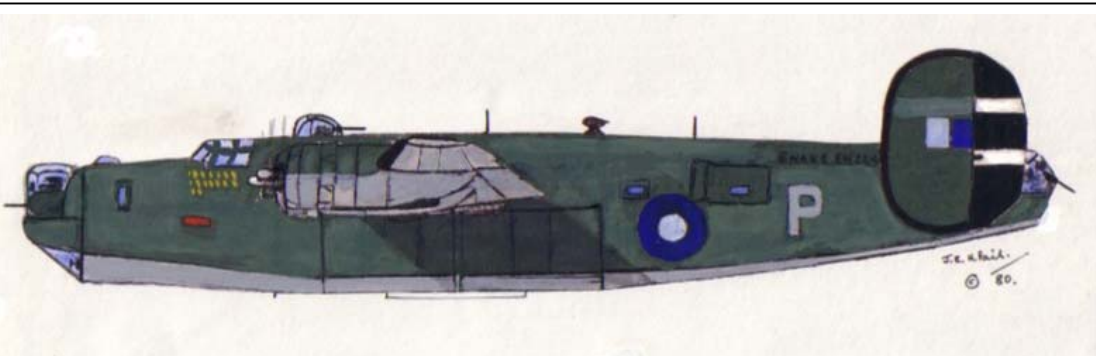
RAF SEAC



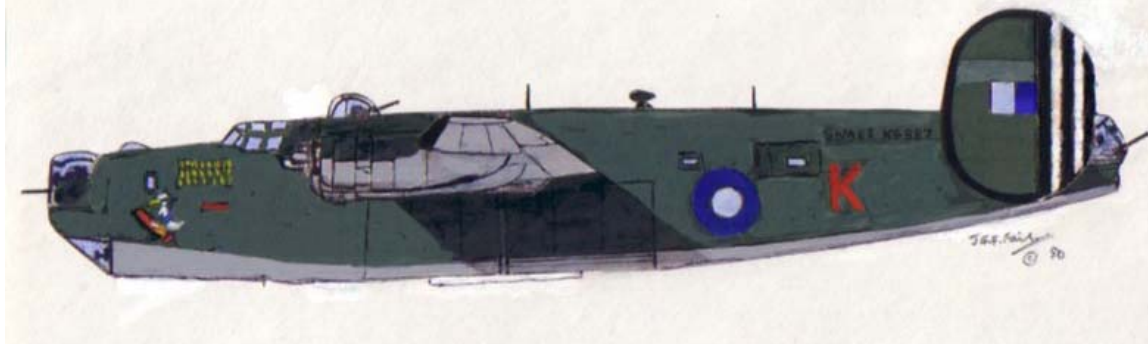
Liberator BV1, 99 Squadron, RAF Dhubalia, SEAC, KG 976



Liberator BV1, 159 Squadron, RAF Digri, SEAC, EV 118



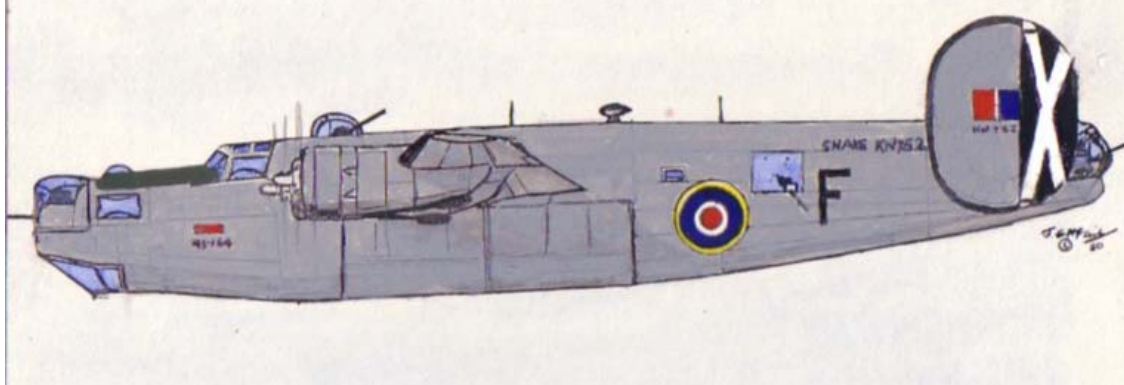
Liberator BV1, 215 Squadron, RAF Digri, SEAC, EW 224



Liberator BV1, 355 Squadron, RAF SEAC, Salbani, KG 887



Liberator BV1, 356 Squadron, RAF SEAC, EW 153



Libertor BV1, 356 Squadron, RAF SEAC, KN 752