

When he got a few too many drinks, he would usually get up in the bar, kind of cock his head over to one side, and he'd say, 'Folks, I am the roughest S.O.B. in this place.' And everybody would stop and listen," Shaw recalled recently, as four of Fearless Fowler's crewmen got together for their first reunion in Midland. They eagerly told tales of their beloved command pilot. "It was amazing how often somebody disputed his word. It didn't matter where we were.

Fearless ... was pretty good with his dukes," Shaw noted in a reunion with three former crew members: Howard "Red" Higgins, the B-24's co-pilot, now a retired helicopter pilot out of St. Louis, Mo.; Leroy "Ham" Hamilton, the B-24's radio operator and top-turret gunner who is a retired driver's-license examiner living in Dodge City, KS.; and Bob 'Buck' Bufford, the B-24s nose-turret gunner and flight engineer who became a Tennessee automobile-parts dealer.

Fowler, who was a crop-duster during the postwar years, had died, as have at least two other crew members. Shaw was unable to locate three other crew members.

Of a stateside brawl, Bufford recalled a time when Fearless Fowler whipped 19 out of 20 sailors in a Nebraska bar." They'd make some smart remark, and it didn't take much to tick him off" Bufford recalled.

"There were 20 sailors and one Marine in this bar. And one of these sailors jumped on him, and he whipped 19 of them," Bufford said. "The 20th (sailor) picked up a big quart whiskey bottle and was fixing to crown him with it, and this little Marine jumped down off the stool and decked him (the 20th sailor) ... to keep him from hitting Fowler in the head with that quart whiskey I bottle. "Fearless Fowler was "blood from his head down," Bufford said "but he didn't have a scratch on him. He never saw anyone or anybody he was scared of in any situation. He was tough."

During the war, Hamilton figured that many servicemen drank to relieve pressure of the war "You'd have to go somewhere to get it off your mind," Hamilton said. "It was that I.W. Harper that got it off your mind."

Of his B-24 crew members, Hamilton said that it was "a privilege being with these boys. "And of the Consolidated B- 24 Liberator, of which 18,000 were built during the war, "the '24 was great" and contributed toward winning the 1939-1945 war against the Axis powers. "We haven't won a war since."

While Fearless Fowler was daring and eager to fight on liberty, he was a by-the-book pilot and stalwart commander on duty. "We were pretty close." Shaw said, "because we had to rely on the rest of crew, Higgins, who was Fearless Fowler's co-pilot, was fond of the old B-24, which was produced in greater numbers than any other American aircraft, including the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress. "It had three ways of doing everything, yes, sirree," said Higgins: "Manual, hydraulic, and electrical. It needed it (the redundancy), but it would get you back (home). It was harder to fly than the B-17—more work.

We could fly it today," Higgins surmised. Of Fearless Fowler, Higgins said that "He was recognized by others as a good one (aircraft commander). He'd look out for you." While Higgins figured that pure old "luck" got many fliers through the war alive, "You've got to remember, you're flying along there, and you're protected by 032 aluminum; that's pretty thin."

The Fearless Fowler air crew was assigned to the 15th Air Force's 484th Bomb Group out of Cerignola, Italy. Shaw flew 49 missions in Fearless' Fowler's B-24 "Duck" and flew two

additional missions in other B-24 heavy bombers.

"All of it was scary," Shaw said of bombing missions into Germany, Poland, Romania, and France. Fearless Fowler's air-crew did not lose any crew members but the aircraft did pick up battle damage, including flak.

Airborne formations of B-24s which were escorted by P-51 Mustang, P-38 Lightning; and P-47 Thunderbolt fighters, were assaulted by German fighters, including the Focke-Wulf 190 and Messerschmitt ME-109.

In his war service, Shaw said that his steel helmet took on flak. "I've got a piece of flak out at the house that stuck in my steel helmet. I got hit a couple of times, but it never broke the skin. We were pretty close."

Shaw's tribute to the reliability of the B-24 was simply put: "well, it got me home every time" Members of the Fearless Fowler B-24 air crew and their wives gathered recently.

Submitted by Art Shaw, 827 Sq.

[Bud484BG@aol.com](mailto:Bud484BG@aol.com)

Hi Bud,

I had requested information about cowling colors in the 461st Bomb Group and here is what their webmaster responded with: The 461st engine cowlings were color coded by Squadron. Someone correct me if I'm wrong (as if you wouldn't) 764th - White, 765th - Red, 766th - Yellow, 767th - Green

One of the other interesting idiosyncrasies of the markings was the way the width of the red bar on the tails of 461st A/C was sometimes varied to allow coverage of a previous 484th or 451st BG marking. The 484th transfers seem to be slightly thicker, but the 451st transfers are very thick, to cover the circular marking below the red upper half. See the picture of "Stinky" in the aircraft section. I don't have documentation, but I'd bet dollars to doughnuts it's a 451st transfer. Sorry I don't have any information on the 484th cowling colors, but I bet someone will chime in now that you've brought it up. I'd love to know more about the other 49th Wing A/C markings. Did the 484th Bomb Group paint their cowlings a different color by squadron?

Do you know what the colors were? I hope you're doing well and I look forward to hearing from you. When will the next Torretta Flyer be published? I always look forward to seeing what you come up with next.

Sincerely, Dick Olson

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Redondo Beach, CA

Hi Dick:

In response to your e-mail of 5/12/99, I did not know about the cowling colors of the 461st, or if indeed the cowlings were actually painted. Some aircraft did have painted cowlings. But color determination of back & white photos is difficult to determine.

The maintenance personnel charged with the application of the group combat color (red) would apply the insignias freehand as there were no patterns available. Some bow ties were large almost touching the edges of the rudder/fin, others were smaller.