

INVASION STRIPES

It's a D-Day Story In Black and White...

By Bill Strandberg



One of the earliest recollections of model airplane building from my grade school years was the use of "Invasion Stripes" to mark the aircraft used in the D-Day landings in Normandy. As I remember, I very carefully taped the lines on the fuselage and wings and painted the appropriate areas black and white (It was at this time I learned the basic rule of applying dark over light and not the reverse).



Invasion stripes have been the subject of decal companies, kit manufacturers and countless models over the years; some accurate, some very wrong, and most to precisely applied. In the early days we “eyeballed” the approximate area of the stripes and divided by five to provide the painting guide, unaware of any exact standards issued to cover these special markings.



As with all things military, invasion stripes were covered by an exacting technical description (in this case an Operational Memorandum) describing who, what aircraft, when, where and why the stripes were applied. Here is the rest of the story...

Operation Memorandum Number 23 was issued by Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force on 18 April 1944, and “Suspended by Suppression of Ops Memo 23, 6 Dec” according to the copy I have courtesy of the Naval Aviation History Office. In practice, the stripes were applied quickly, in not too exacting manner, to many thousands of aircraft taking part in the invasion. Rather than discuss all the nuances, I will provide the words of the original memorandum in the following four pages for your use, and photographs to illustrate the old saying “Good enough for government work.”

Editors Note: Bill Standberg is a retired Air Force Major and original founding member of Fort Crook IPMS/USA.

SUPREME HEADQUARTERS
ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

OPERATION MEMORANDUM

NUMBER 23

18 April 1944

DISTINCTIVE MARKING –AIRCRAFT

1. OBJECT

The object of this memorandum is to prescribe the distinctive markings which will be applied to U.S. and BRITISH aircraft in order to make them more easily identified as friendly by ground and naval forces and by other friendly aircraft.

2. SCOPE

a. the instructions contained herein will apply to the following types of U.S. and BRITISH aircraft:

- (1) Fighters and fighter-bombers.
- (2) Tactical and photographic reconnaissance aircraft.
- (3) Aircraft employed in spotting for naval gunfire and field artillery.
- (4) Light bombers.
- (5) Medium bombers.
- (6) Troop carrier aircraft, including four engine types.
- (7) Glider tugs, including four engine types.
- (8) Liaison aircraft and Air OP's employed in forward areas for fire spotting and adjustment or for advanced aircraft control.
- (9) Coastal Command, Air Sea Rescue and disembarked Fleet Air Arm Aircraft except seaplanes and four engine aircraft which need not be marked.

b. These instructions will not apply to the following classes of aircraft:

- (1) Four engine bombers.
- (2) Air transports.
- (3) Gliders.
- (4) Night fighters.
- (5) Seaplanes.
- (6) All aircraft of RAF Bomber Command, which will continue to carry their standard night camouflage.
(SHEAF/17450/39/Ops 4 May '44)

3. GENERAL

a. The instructions contained herein will be effective on the day of the assault and thereafter until it is deemed advisable to change. Aircraft will be given distinctive markings as shortly before the day of the assault as is possible in order to protect the effectiveness of their use.

b. These instructions are in no way intended to change the present U.S. and BRITISH national markings now in use, namely, the USAAF white star on a white horizontal bar; and the RAF red, white and blue roundel.

4. DISTINCTIVE MARKINGS

a. Single engine aircraft

- (1) Upper and lower wing surfaces of the aircraft listed in paragraph 2 above, will be painted with 5 white and black stripes, each eighteen inches wide, parallel to the longitudinal axis of the airplane, arranged in order from center outward: white, black, white, black, white. Stripes will end six inches in board of the national markings.
- (2) Fuselages will be painted with five parallel white and black stripes, each eighteen inches wide, completely around the fuselage, with the outside edge of the rearmost band eighteen inches from the leading edge of the tailplane.

b. Twin engine aircraft

- (1) Upper and lower wing surfaces of the aircraft listed in paragraph 2 above, will be painted from the engine nacelles outward with

five white and black stripes, each twenty-four inches wide, arranged in order from center outward: white, black, white, black, white.

- (2) Fuselages will be painted with five parallel white and black stripes, each twenty-four inches wide, completely around the fuselage, with the outside edge of the rearmost band eighteen inches from the leading edge of the tailplane.

c. Four engine troop carrier aircraft and glider tugs

- (1) Same as for twin-engine aircraft, wing stripes to be outboard of the outer engine nacelles.

d. Stripes will in no case be painted over national markings, which take precedence. Wing stripes will extend from the leading edge to the trailing edge of the wings. Special equipment, such as deicer boots, will not be painted over.

e. Types of paint to be employed

- (1) USAAF Units – as directed by the Commanding General of the Air Force concerned.
- (2) RAF Units – as directed by the appropriate British agency.

f. At Appendix “A” are sample sketches of aircraft painted according to these instructions field artillery.

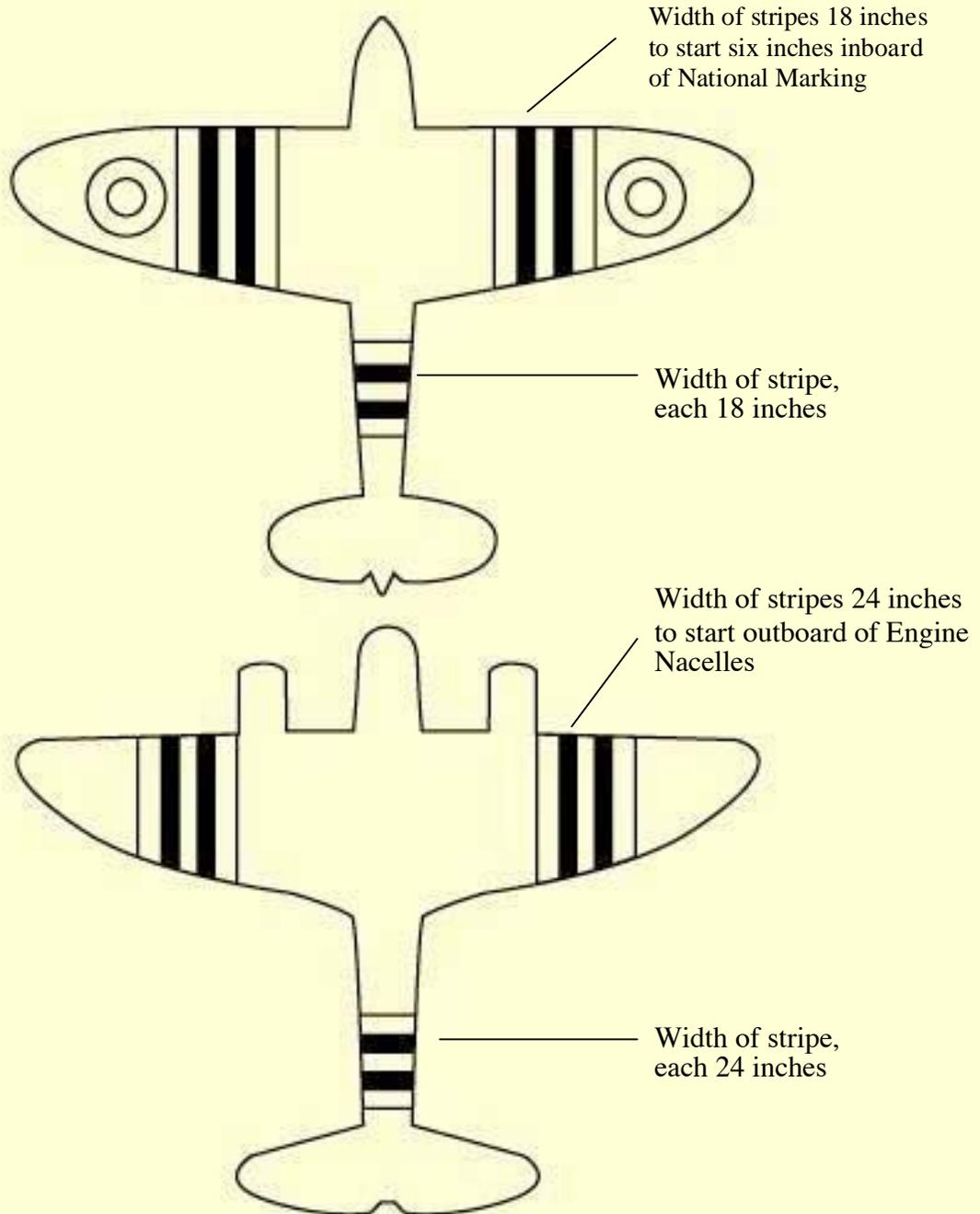
5. BRIEFING

Army, Navy and Air Commanders will disseminate complete information concerning these distinctive markings to all troops under their commands no earlier before the day of the assault than will insure the complete distribution of the information.

By Command of General EISENHOWER:

W.B. SMITH
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army
Chief of Staff.

SAMPLE SKETCHES
OF DISTINCTIVE MARKINGS



NOTE: National Markings are not to be painted-over by the black and white stripes.