

They said it was too “hot” to fly!

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Few aircraft in the history of the U.S. Army Air Force were as controversial as the Martin B-26 Marauder (not to be confused with Douglas A-26 Invader). Accepted for production without the benefit of a prototype the Marauder gained an early reputation as a dangerous and difficult aircraft to fly. Some said the plane was too “hot” to fly. The primary area of concern was the plane’s relatively high landing speed. Many modifications including lengthening the wings never really fixed the problem. On at least four separate occasions Congressional or military investigations were launched into whether or not production should be stopped. Despite its problems experienced crews loved the Marauder and by the end of the war it had proven itself with the lowest loss ratio of any American medium bomber.



The Martin B-26 Marauder was a World War II twin-engine medium bomber built by the Glenn L. Martin Company. First used in the Pacific Theater in early 1942, it was also used in the Mediterranean Theater and in Western Europe.

After entering service with the U.S. Army, the aircraft received the reputation of a “Widowmaker” due to the early models’ high rate of accidents during takeoff and landings. The Marauder had to be flown at exact airspeeds, particularly on final runway approach also when one engine was out. The 150 mph speed on short final runway approach was intimidating to pilots who were used to much slower speeds, and whenever they slowed down below what the manual stated, the aircraft would stall and crash. B-26 crews gave the aircraft the nickname “Widowmaker,” “Flying Coffin,” and “B-Dash-Crash.”

The B-26 became a safer aircraft once crews were re-trained, and after aerodynamics modifications (an increase of wingspan and wing angle-of-incidence to give better takeoff performance, and a larger vertical stabilizer and rudder). After aerodynamic and design changes, the



aircraft distinguished itself as “the chief bombardment weapon on the Western Front” according to a United States Army Air Forces dispatch from 1946. The Marauder ended World War II with the lowest loss rate of any USAAF bomber.

A total of 5,288 were produced between February 1941 and March 1945; 522 of these were flown by the Royal Air Force and the South African Air Force. By the time the United States Air Force was created as an independent service separate from the Army in 1947, all Martin B-26s had been retired from US service. The Douglas A-26 Invader then assumed the B-26 designation — before officially returning to the earlier “A for Attack” designation in May 1966.

Article and Photo Source: PIMA Air and Space Museum, Wikipedia.

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