



B-1 receives makeover, nose job

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Warner Robins Air Logistics Center Public Affairs

ROBINS AIR FORCE BASE, Ga. (AFPN) -- America's premier aviation artist Dru Blair last week recreated a historic icon of World War II air power on the nose of a B-1 bomber for the 116th Bomb Wing.

Working from a raised platform in a hangar, he used his renowned airbrush technique to faithfully render the pinup girl in a blue bathing suit that graces the nose of the Memphis Belle, the most famous B-17 Flying Fortress of World War II.

"It was a nostalgic type of feeling, making a connection with the past," Blair said. "I felt proud to make an image that is ... connected to such a beautiful airplane."

The Belle gained fame as the first bomber to complete 25 missions and was declared a national historic treasure. It is now on static display in Memphis, Tenn.

Blair and his assistant, Mickey Harris, have developed a special connection to the 116th Bomb Wing. Blair's first airbrush aviation painting, titled "Power," depicts a B-1 armed with cruise missiles flying low over a mountain lake, raising plumes of water in its wake. It became the first of three Air Force Magazine covers and remains the best-selling aviation print in the world.

Blair sells other aviation paintings through his publishing company, Blair Art Studios Inc., which he runs along with the Blair School of Art in Raleigh, N.C., where he lives. He was also the official artist for the "Star Trek: Voyager" book covers, as well as several other Star Trek licensees.

Blair explained that in 1990, while living in Atlanta, he was invited for a tour of Robins Air Force Base, Ga., and given a ride in a B-1. Crew chief Randal Money asked him to do the first nose art. He eventually painted six, donating his time for each one.

"My reward comes from seeing the enthusiasm of the men and women and the morale boost it gives. That's inspiring to me, in my work, and I take that back with me," he said.

Harris, founder and past publisher of Airbrush Magazine, also paints automotive art and murals. His love of aviation comes from his father, who was a fighter pilot flying the F-105 Thunder Chief. He has painted a lot of aircraft nose art, including two B-1s for the National Guard at Robins and two for the Air Force at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.

"We've done almost every plane in this squadron, seven of eight planes. We've sort of been adopted by the squadron," Harris said.

Pinup art, like that on the Memphis Belle, was popular during World War II, but was later banned by the Air Force as sexist. They decided to make an exception in this case, because of its historic significance, Harris said.

"It's a national symbol. It's a part of our folklore. At some point, history has to supercede vulgarity. Anyway, it's tastefully done and there's nothing vulgar about it," he said.

The Belle's pilot, Bob Morgan, recently visited Robins and took a ride in a B-1. He helped push the nose art project through, Harris said.

The crew of the Memphis Belle chose the original pinup from a drawing by Esquire magazine artist George Petty. One of many "Petty girls," the one they chose was called "The Telephone Girl."

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