

(U) The Emblem of the 39th Bombardment Group (Very Heavy)

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*Figure A <sup>i</sup>*

It all started in September 1944 as the 39th Bombardment Group Very Heavy (VH) made preparation to move overseas and take their new bomber into battle with the last undefeated member of the Axis powers. The air echelon called Dalhart Field Texas home while the ground component and headquarters remained at Smoky Hill Army Airfield in Salina Kansas.<sup>ii</sup>

Like many young Airmen, the men dreamed of designs to symbolize their contribution to the war effort or images to remind them of home. This desire led the group to hold a contest to select an emblem. As is often the case, it took a great deal of time to receive 36 submissions, review those works, then narrow the field and select one, especially at a time when the unit focused on training for war! Time passed and the ground echelon of the group departed its home station by train on 8 January 1945. From Seattle Washington, the group boarded the United States Army Transport Ship Howell Lykes and began the long journey to Guam on 18 January 1945. The Group arrived at their new home in waves between 18 February and March 1945. Once fully settled in and adjusted to the rhythm of battle a package went forward by mail from the island of Guam to Washington DC on the fourth of July, 1945.<sup>iii</sup>

On 19 October 1945, the Headquarters of the Army Air Force responded with a minute revision to the original design. Thus, a letter advising that all metal used to physically produce the official badges had been reallocated to the casting of World War II Victory Medals authorized by Congress July 6, 1945 departed the national capitol. The decision and transportation of the letter proved to be the emblems undoing.<sup>iv</sup>

Sadly, the time spent deciding, waiting, or conducting the war effort effectively denied the package, as the unit departed North Field, Guam, on 17 Nov 1945 and returned to Camp Anza, California, 15 December 1945 and inactivated on 27 Dec 1945. No further correspondence related to the insignia received entry into the unit histories, however the 314th Bombardment Wing displayed the emblem associated with the 39th Bombardment Group on a B-29 Superfortress as confirmed by a photograph. Although the photograph shows the emblem heavily modified without wrench or scroll and using the shield design before revision it clearly represents the 39th Bombardment Group (VH). The Headquarters Army Air Force in Washington DC may or may not have received a reply from the group regarding the change, this data is unknown and most of the group's personnel returned to civilian life.<sup>v</sup>



Figure B

The emblem as originally designed is featured upper right in figure B.<sup>vi</sup>

The bombardment group chose the shape of the shield to reflect those carried by Medieval knights and activities in war. In a clever use of design, the top of the shield resembles a numeral 3. Directly below the top is a bar of blue with 9 mullets (stars) indicative of the number nine. Directly impaled below the field of blue is a bomb with wings indicating the strategic mission of the group on a field of brilliant red. The red symbolizes American heritage and blood. The wings of the bomb represent the flying mission while the crossed screwdriver and wrench reflect maintenance and the parchment symbolizes the administrative functions. The group chose a Latin motto "Semper Victor" or "Always Victorious."<sup>vii</sup>

The Headquarters Army Air Force revised the emblem as seen in figure C. and translated the description into a standard heraldic language as follows.<sup>viii</sup>



Figure C

Gules (Red), an aerial bomb palewise (centered linear) or (gold), between two wings displayed horizontally in fess (takes the form of a band running horizontally across the center of the shield) argent (white), and a screwdriver and an open-end wrench in saltire (crossed) in dexter (right) base, and two quill pens in saltire in sinister (left) base, all of the second; on a chief (honorary top bar of emblem) azure (blue) nine mullets (stars) argent, all within a border of the second. Motto: Semper Victor.<sup>ix</sup>

The 39th Bombardment Group (VH) possessed three Squadrons and of those, only one obtained an approved emblem. The 61st Bombardment Squadron (VH) trained at various locations in State of Washington. An unspecified shade of green filled the circular field to represent the Pacific Northwest of the United States of America and the unit mascot, an anthropomorphized pilot horse named Esmeralda who carried a bomb symbolizing the unit's combat mission. Esmeralda, with her gritting teeth and implied motion, denoted determination.<sup>x</sup>

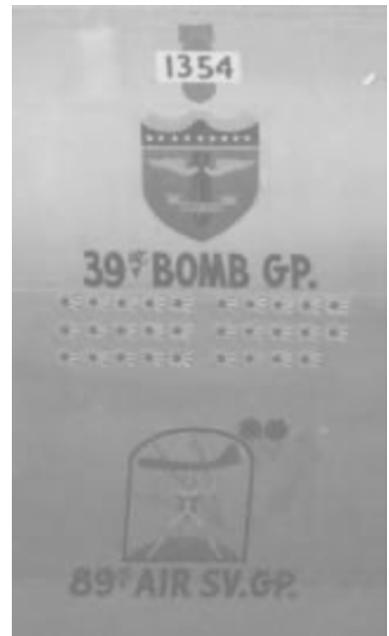




Figure D <sup>xi</sup>

The lack of approval does not dismiss the fact that the 39th Bombardment Group (VH), utilized and took pride in this emblem, nor does it diminish or tarnish the emblem in any way. A non-combat related, administrative oversight caused by a lack of metals and movements to and from overseas during a time of war brings no discredit upon the unit or its members. As demonstrated by the photographic evidence, the emblem did adorn a B-29 Superfortress that flew during the Second World War in the Pacific Theatre. Holding a contest certainly did play a major role in the length of time necessary to create and seek approval for the emblem, but the group had no way of knowing when the end of the war would come. Therefore, while the emblem may not have been deemed “official,” by authorized sources, it can still be incorporated into the heritage of the unit in an unofficial capacity provided that it is marked as such.

Figure E <sup>xii</sup>



A unit's emblem is only as significant as the deeds of the group that bore it. To quantify the significance of the 39th Bombardment Groups deeds, let us look to their own words as they recounted a specific mission, "With a fury and devastation doubtless undreamed of by Mythology's Jove [Jupiter], God of the Storms, bombs were rained on Japanese cities by the 39th Group Superforts, along with hundreds of others..."<sup>xiii</sup>

To you, those brave men and women still serving in a unit that traces its lineage and honors to the 39th Bombardment Group, to all Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, Marines or Guardsmen, or to you the patriotic Citizen, be proud of this historic emblem and your current emblem. The Airmen of yesterday brought great credit to themselves and their unit, just as each of you are called to do. Aim High.

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## Source Documents

<sup>i</sup> Web Page (U) 39 Bombardment Group Association, “B-29 Formation,” ca. 1945.

<sup>ii</sup> Memo (U), Gen Henry H. Arnold, USAAF/CC, et al., to 2 AF/CC, “Warning Orders – 39th Bomb Group, Very Heavy, and Other Units,” 16 Aug 44; Memo (U), 2 AF to 39 BG/CC, “Warning Orders – 39th Bomb Group, Very Heavy, and Other Units,” 21 Aug 44; Memo (U) Gen Henry H. Arnold, USAAF/CC, et al., to 2 AF/CC, “Amendment No. 2 to Warning Orders – 39th Bomb Group, Very Heavy, and Other Units,” 15 Sep 44; History (U), 39 BG, “September 1944,” Sep 44, AFHRA Reel B0128.

<sup>iii</sup> Memo w/1 Atch (U), Capt Daniel B. Foxwell, 39 Bombardment Group (VH), USAAF, Adjutant to HQ USAAF/CC, “Distinctive Insignia for AAF Organizations,” 4 Jul 1945, AFHRA Reel B0129, Frame 0646; Drawing (U), 39 BG, “Emblem Proposal,” ca. 1945, AFHRA Reel B0129; History (U), 39 BG, “March 1944,” Mar 44, AFHRA Reel B0128; History (U), 39 BG, “January 1945,” Jan 45, AFHRA Reel B0128.

<sup>iv</sup> Memo w/3 Atchs (U), Col Harold D. Krafft, USAAF, Awards Branch Chief, Personnel Services Division, AC/AS-1, to 39 BG/CC, “Distinctive Unit Insignia for AAF Organizations,” 19 Oct 45.

<sup>v</sup> Doc (U), Maj Tonia Stephens, Carl E. Bailey, “39 Air Base Wing (USAFE,” 8 Jun 17; History (U), 39 BG, “September 1944,” Sep 44, AFHRA Reel B0128; Photo (U), World War Photos, “B-29 Superfortress 314th Bomb Wing at Guam,” ca. 1945, Accessed 11 Mar 18.

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<<https://www.worldwarphotos.info/gallery/usa/aircrafts-2-3/b-29/b-29-superfortress-314-bomb-wing-at-guam/>>

<sup>vi</sup> Drawing (U), 39 BG, “Emblem Proposal,” ca. 1945, AFHRA Reel B0129.

<sup>vii</sup> (U), Ibid.

<sup>viii</sup> (U), Ibid.

<sup>ix</sup> (U), Ibid; Note, (U), The emblem is described as if told by a right handed person bearing the shield in battle.

<sup>x</sup> History (U), 39 BG, “7 Dec 1941 to December 31, 1942,” ca. 1943, AFHRA Reel B0127.

<sup>xi</sup> Photo (U), World War Photos, “B-29 Superfortress 314th Bomb Wing at Guam,” ca. 1945, Accessed 11 Mar 18. <<https://www.worldwarphotos.info/gallery/usa/aircrafts-2-3/b-29/b-29-superfortress-314-bomb-wing-at-guam/>>

<sup>xii</sup> (U), Ibid.

<sup>xiii</sup> History (U), 39th Bomb Group, “Jun 1945,” 15 Jul 45, AFHRA Reel B0129, p 2.