



Where did 'One a day in Tampa Bay' come from?

by Maj. (Ret.) Bob Radlein
Special to the *Thunderbolt*

I suppose that anyone who has been stationed at MacDill AFB for any length of time has heard the phrase, "One a day in Tampa Bay." But aircraft accidents at MacDill are few and far between now, so how many people here really know the true origin of the saying? To find out, let's take a trip back in time, over 60 years ago, to the World War II US Army base, MacDill Field.

MacDill in 1940-1942 bears small resemblance to the modern base of today. Only a handful of today's buildings existed back then. A typical WWII base, it had hundreds of wooden two-story open-bay barracks and wooden one-story administrative buildings. The base hospital, consisting of a bunch of individual one-story wooden buildings connected by wooden walkways, was located at the site of the present Famcamp and beach.

The few permanent concrete buildings included the present hangars and a few other flightline buildings, the Security Police/fire station (it was also the guardhouse back then), the Officers' Club as well as the Senior Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers and quarters.

The flight line was graced by Douglas B-18 "Bolo" medium bombers and Boeing B-17 "Flying Fortress" navy bombers. When the war started in Europe, the US Army realized it had no reliable, modern medium bomber and solicited the aircraft companies for a new twin-engine bomber that could do 300 miles per hour and carry a bomb load of 4,000 pounds, the same as that carried in the B-17. The requested speed, at the time, exceeded that of many fighters.

The Glen L. Martin Aircraft Company, along with others, submitted their proposed plans along with their bid, and the Army, making an unheard of decision, accepted the Martin proposal, ordering 201 bombers

based on the proposal without a prototype being built. In fact, the initial bombers were picked up by Army Air Force pilots of Langley Field's 22nd Bomb Group at the end of the assembly line.

Without a doubt, this was just about the hottest thing flying at the time. Unfortunately, with short wingspan, two 2,000 horsepower engines and a take-off and landing speed of about 140 MPH, in the hands of inexperienced pilots plus maintenance by mechanics straight out of tech school, accidents happened with alarming frequency.

With talk of stopping production, the AAF assigned a B-26 to Brig. Gen. Jimmy Doolittle, just back from his Tokyo raid, with instructions that he demonstrate just what a Marauder was capable of doing. The B-26 was retained.

Late in 1942, Marauders started arriving at MacDill for training the Bomb Groups that would fly them in combat. Unfortunately, this was during the huge accident period and many crashes occurred at MacDill, Avon Park, etc. Many occurred when the crews would experience engine failure right after take-off which would result in a quick trip into Tampa Bay, hence the saying "One a day in Tampa Bay."

Oh, it wasn't quite that bad, but over 15 did go in during one 30-day period. But, then, 'Half a day in Tampa Bay' wouldn't sound right, would it? Of the 12 B-26 Groups in Europe during WWII, nine trained at MacDill. All eight of the Marauder Groups in the 9th Air Force trained here.

By April 18, 1945, 5,266 Martin B-26

Marauders had been built.

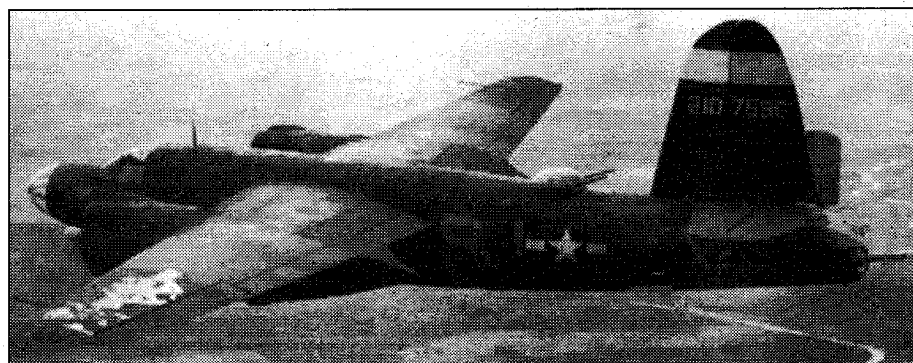
Was it a good, successful plane? You bet! In fact, it ended up with the lowest combat loss ratio of any plane in Europe. Sadly, only about eight Marauders remain, including "Flak Bait", which flew 202 missions in Europe, which is in the Smithsonian Air Museum in Washington, DC.

It was my pleasure to make a routine flight aboard that plane several days after the end of the war in Europe as a technical sergeant radio operator-gunner. The only flying Marauder can be seen at the local Fantasy of Flight Air Museum in Lakeland.

So what happened to all those men who flew and maintained those planes? Remember, WWII vets are passing away at a rate of 1,500 each day. Like returning to your birthplace, many have come back to visit MacDill.

Between October 8-11, members of the 454th Bomb Squadron, 323rd Bomb Group will return for their second visit to Tampa with a tour and briefing on MacDill being one of the treats promised them.

How old are they? From about 78 and up. So if you happen to see some older men gazing dreamily toward the south end of the runway, you just might be seeing some of the same people who originated the saying, "One a day in Tampa Bay!"



A B-26 Marauder flies over Tampa Bay in the early 1940s.