

Martin B-26 Marauder 60" Wing Span Plan.

Not to be confused with [Douglas A-26 Invader](#).

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 by exact airspeeds, particularly on final approach and when one engine was out. The 150 mph (241 km/h) speed on short final 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.^[3]

The B-26 became a safer aircraft once crews were re-trained and after aerodynamics modifications (increase of wing span and incidence, to give better take off performance, and a larger fin and rudder).^[4] 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.^[citation needed] The Marauder ended World War II with the lowest loss rate of any USAAF bomber.^[5]

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.



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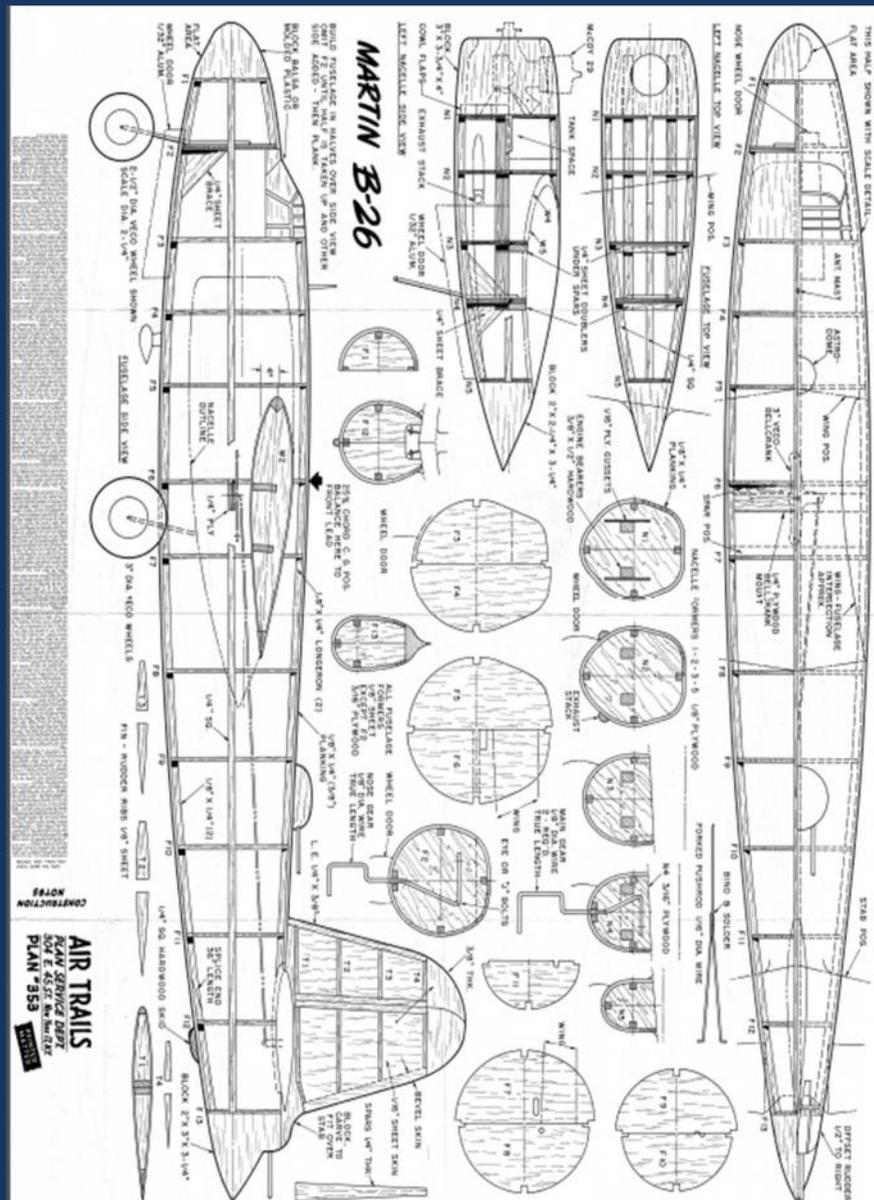
Design and development

In March 1939, the [United States Army Air Corps](#) issued Circular Proposal 39-640, a specification for a twin-engined medium bomber, demanding a maximum speed of 350 mph (560 km/h), a range of 3,000 mi (4,800 km) and a bomb load of 2,000 lb (910 kg). On 5 July 1939, the [Glenn L. Martin Company](#) submitted its design, produced by a team led by [Peyton M. Magruder](#), to meet the requirement, the Martin Model 179. Martin's design was evaluated as superior to the other proposals and was awarded a [contract](#) for 201 aircraft, to be designated B-26.^[6] The B-26 went from paper concept to an operational bomber in approximately two years.^[7] Additional orders for a further 930 B-26s followed in September 1940, still prior to the first flight of the type.^[8]

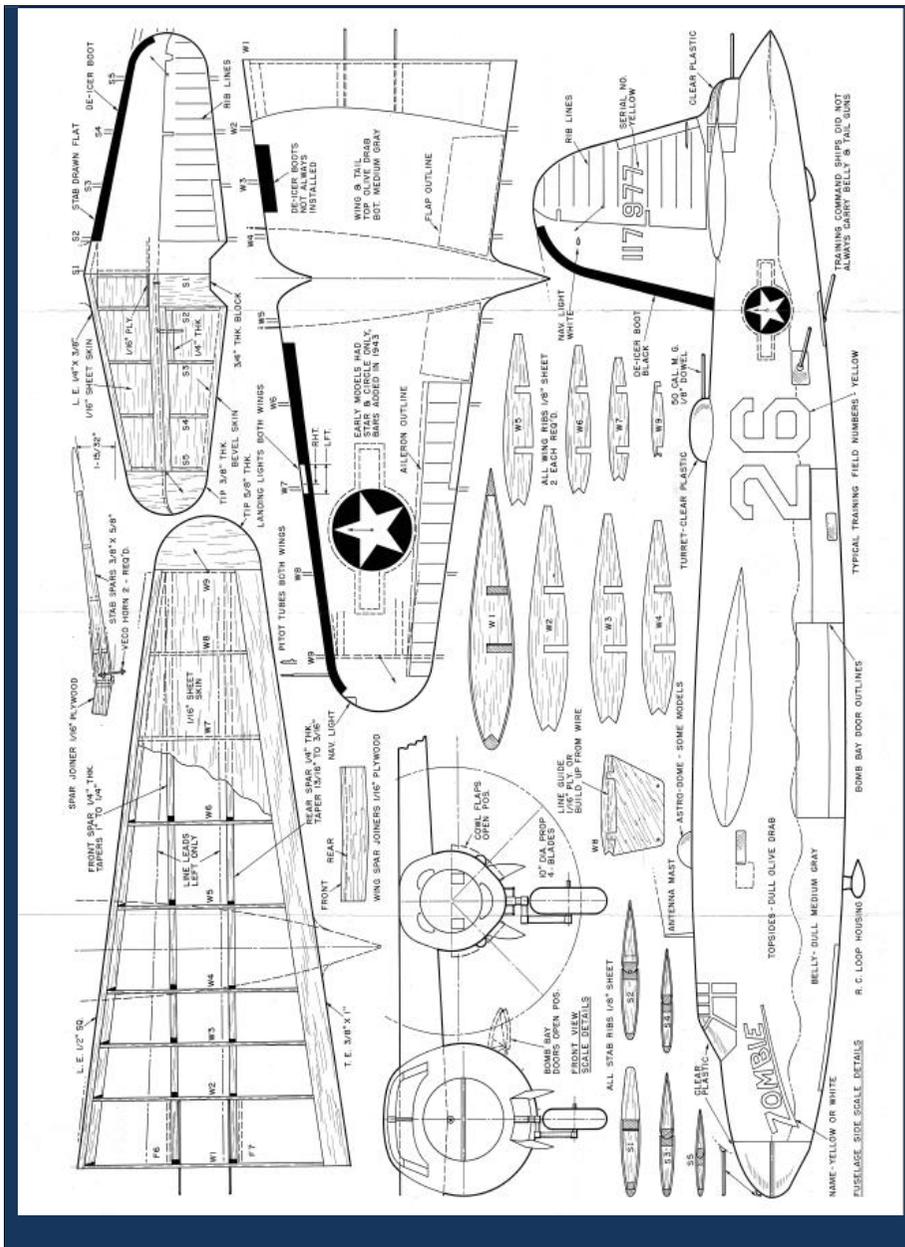
The B-26 was a shoulder-winged [monoplane](#) of all metal construction, fitted with a [tricycle undercarriage](#). It had a streamlined, circular section [fuselage](#), housing the crew, consisting of a [bombardier](#) in the nose, which was armed with a .30 in (7.62 mm) [machine gun](#), a pilot and co-pilot sitting side by side, with positions for radio operator and navigator behind the pilots. A gunner manned a dorsal turret armed with two .50 in (12.7 mm) machine guns (the first powered dorsal turret to be fitted to a US bomber), while an additional .30 in (7.62 mm) machine gun was fitted in the tail.^[2]

Two bomb bays were fitted mid-fuselage, capable of carrying 5,800 lb (2,600 kg) of bombs, although in practice such a bombload reduced range too much, and the aft bomb bay was usually fitted with additional fuel tanks instead of bombs. It was powered by two [Pratt & Whitney R-2800 Double Wasp radial engines](#) in nacelles slung under the wing, driving four-bladed propellers. The engines were manufactured at the Ford Dearborn Engine plant in Dearborn, MI, USA. The wings were of low [aspect ratio](#) and relatively small area for an aircraft of its weight, giving the required high performance, but also resulting in a [wing loading](#) of 53 lb/sq ft (259 kg/m²) for the initial versions, which at the time was the highest of any aircraft accepted for service by the Army Air Force.^[10]

The first B-26, with Martin test pilot William K. "Ken" Ebel at the controls, flew on 25 November 1940 and was effectively the prototype. Deliveries to the U.S. Army Air Corps began in February 1941 with the second aircraft, 40-1362.^[8] In March 1941, the Army Air Corps started Accelerated Service Testing of the B-26 at [Patterson Field](#), Ohio.



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Operational history

The B-26 Marauder was used mostly in Europe but also saw action in the Mediterranean and the Pacific. In early combat the aircraft took heavy losses but was still one of the most successful medium-range bombers used by the U.S. Army Air Forces.^[15] The B-26 was initially deployed on combat missions in the [South West Pacific](#) in the spring of 1942, but most of the B-26s subsequently sent to England and the Mediterranean area.

By the end of World War II, it had flown more than 110,000 sorties and had dropped 150,000 tons (136,078 tonnes) of bombs, and had been used in combat by British, Free French and South African forces in addition to U.S. units. In 1945, when B-26 production was halted, 5,266 had been built.^[16]

Pacific theatre

The B-26 began to equip the [22d Bombardment Group](#) at [Langley Field, Virginia](#) in February 1941, replacing the [B-18 Bolo](#), with a further two Bombardment groups equipping with the B-26 by December.^{[8][17]} Immediately following the Japanese [Attack on Pearl Harbor](#), the 22d was deployed to the [South West Pacific](#),^{[18][19]} being sent by ship to [Hawaii](#) and then flown to [Australia](#). The 22d flew its first combat mission, an attack on [Rabaul](#) which required an intermediate stop at [Port Moresby, New Guinea](#), on 5 April 1942.^[17]

A second Group, the [38th Bombardment Group](#), received B-26s in November 1941. Immediately after the entry of the United States into World War II, plans to be send the 38th BG to the South West Pacific, to be equipped with B-26Bs fitted with more auxiliary fuel tanks and provisions for carrying [aerial torpedos](#), were tentatively developed.^[17] Four of these aircraft were deployed to [Midway Island](#) in the build-up to the [Battle of Midway](#), and carried out torpedo attacks against the Japanese Fleet on 4 June 1942. Two B-26s were shot down with the remaining two badly damaged, while their torpedoes failed to hit any Japanese ships, although they did shoot down one [A6M Zero](#) fighter, and killed two seamen aboard the aircraft carrier [Akagi](#) with machine gun fire.^{[17][20]}

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Two squadrons were detached from the 38th BG (which was converting to the B-25) in May 1942 and deployed to Australia to join the 22d, but it was decided to standardize on the [B-25 Mitchell](#) in the South West Pacific theatre. The B-26 flew its last combat missions in the theatre on 9 January 1944.^[17] Two more squadrons of torpedo armed Marauders were used for anti-shipping operations in the [Aleutian Islands Campaign](#), but there are no records of any successful torpedo attack by a USAAF B-26.^[17]

Mediterranean theatre

Three Bombardment Groups were allocated to support the [Allied invasion of French North Africa](#) in November 1942. They were initially used to carry out low-level attacks against heavily defended targets, receiving heavy losses with poor results, before switching to medium level attacks. By the end of the North Africa campaign, the three B-26 groups had flown 1,587 sorties, losing 80 aircraft. This was double the loss rate of the B-25, which also flew 70% more sorties with fewer aircraft.^[21] Despite this, the B-26 continued in service with the [Twelfth Air Force](#), supporting the Allied advance through [Sicily](#), [Italy](#) and [Southern France](#).^{[22][23]} Air Marshall Slessor considered the 42nd Bombardment Group (Marauders) to be the "best day-bomber unit in the world."^[24]

North West Europe

The B-26 entered service with the [Eighth Air Force](#) in [England](#) in early 1943, with the [322d Bombardment Group](#) flying its first missions in May 1943. Missions were similar to those flown in North Africa with B-26s flying at low level and were unsuccessful. The second mission, an unescorted attack on a power station at [IJmuiden, Netherlands](#) resulted in the loss of the entire attacking force of 11 B-26s to [anti-aircraft fire](#) and [Luftwaffe Focke-Wulf Fw 190](#) fighters.^[25] Following this disaster, the UK-based B-26 force was switched to medium altitude operations, and transferred to the [Ninth Air Force](#), set up to support the planned Invasion of France.^[25]

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Bombing from medium altitudes of 10,000 to 15,000 feet (3,000 to 4,600 m) and with appropriate fighter escort, the Marauder proved far more successful, striking against a variety of targets, including bridges and [V-1 launching sites](#) in the build-up to D-Day, and moving to bases in France as they became available. The Marauder operating from medium altitude proved to be a highly accurate bomber, with the 9th Air Force rating it the most accurate bomber available in the final month of the war in Europe.^[26] Loss rates were far lower than in the early, low-level days, with the B-26 stated by the 9th Air Force as having the lowest loss rate in the European Theatre of Operations at less than 0.5 %.^[8]

The B-26 flew its last combat missions against the German garrison at the [Île d'Oléron](#) on 1 May 1945, with the last units disbanding in early 1946.^[27]

British Commonwealth

In 1942, a batch of 52 B-26A Marauders (designated Marauder I by the RAF) were offered to the [United Kingdom](#) under [Lend-Lease](#). Like the earlier [Martin Maryland](#) and [Baltimore](#) bombers, these were sent to the Mediterranean, replacing the [Bristol Blenheims](#) of [No. 14 Squadron](#) in [Egypt](#). No. 14 Squadron flew its first operational mission on 6 November 1942, being used for long range reconnaissance, [mine-laying](#) and anti-shipping strikes.^[28] Unlike the USAAF, 14 Squadron made productive use of the option for carrying torpedoes, sinking several merchant ships with this weapon. The Marauder also proved useful in disrupting enemy air transport, shooting down considerable numbers of German and Italian transport aircraft flying between Italy and North Africa.^[29]

In 1943, deliveries of 100 long wingspan B-26C-30s (Marauder II), allowed two squadrons of the [South African Air Force](#), [12](#) and [24 Squadron](#) to be equipped, these being used for bombing missions over the [Aegean](#), [Crete](#) and Italy. A further 350 B-26F and Gs were supplied in 1944, with two more South African Squadrons ([24](#) and [30](#)) joining No 12 and 24 in Italy to form an all-Marauder equipped wing, while one further SAAF squadron ([25](#)) and a new RAF Squadron ([39 Squadron](#)) re-equipped with Marauders as part of the [Balkan Air Force](#) supporting [Tito's Partisans](#) in [Yugoslavia](#). A Marauder of 25 Squadron SAAF, lost on the unit's last mission of the Second World War on 4 May 1945, was the last Marauder to be lost in combat by any user.^[30] The British and

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South African aircraft were quickly scrapped following the end of the war, the United States not wanting the return of the Lend-Lease aircraft.^[28]

France

Following [Operation Torch](#), the [Free French Air Force](#) re-equipped three bomber squadrons with Marauders for medium bombing operations in Italy and the [Allied invasion of southern France](#).^[31] These B-26s replaced [Lioré et Olivier LeO 451s](#) and [Douglas DB-7s](#).^[32] Toward the end of the war, seven of the nine French *Groupes de Bombardement* used the Marauder, taking part in 270 missions with 4,884 aircraft sorties in combat.^[32] Free French B-26 groups were disbanded in June 1945.^[33] Replaced in squadron service by 1947, two lingered on as [testbeds](#) for the [SNECMA Atar jet engine](#), one of these remaining in use until 1958.^[31]