

Washington Times



Newsletter

Issue 6

Winter 2004



Cover Photos

Top WF512 (44 Squadron) at dispersal, RAF Coningsby (*Ernest Howlett*)

Centre WF498 (149 Squadron) at dispersal, RAF Coningsby. (*Bob Cole*)

Bottom A fine photo showing an unidentified group of ground crew in front of 44-69680, City of Bakersfield, (WF437), almost certainly taken just after the end of WWII as there is evidence of the words 'P.W. SUPPLIES' painted under the wing. P.W. SUPPLIES was painted on those aircraft that took part in the supply drops to PoW camps that started on 27 August. Before the supply drops stopped on 20 September, the 20th AF had flown some 900 effective sorties to drop 4,470 tons of supplies to some 63,500 PoWs in 154 camps. However, eight of the B-29s were lost along with 77 crewmembers – flying B-29s over the vast Pacific was not trouble free even when no one was shooting at you! Note also the black undersides and an impressive 35 mission symbols as well as the typically dirty overalls of the ground crew! A description of one of those missions appeared in Issue Number two (*Tom Adams*)



In keeping with the PoW supply drop theme from the front cover, an aerial view of Isley Field on Saipan showing the B-29s massed on Isley Field, Saipan in preparation for the start of the PoW supply drops. Over 100 B-29s, from every bomb group, are parked on Isley Field's 'Baker' runway. Others, probably from the resident 73rd Bomb Wing, rest on their hardstands.

For the supply drops food, medicines and clothing were packed into 40-gallon oil drums fitted with parachutes. Sometimes the jury-rigged parachutes failed leaving the packed oil drums to plummet to the ground, often smashing their way through roofs or narrowly missing prisoners. Despite the danger though the drops were unanimously welcomed and undoubtedly saved the lives of many allied prisoners in the weeks between the cease-fire and when allied troops could arrive to liberate the prisoners.

(*Hap Halloran*)

Letters

Paul Hunter, Flight Engineer on Bad Penny, wrote to correct some points in the article on #274 in the last issue:

Two things in your write up I believe were inaccurate. Firstly, I'm sure the plane we flew on the Singapore mission was not #274. Secondly, on page 10 you refer to a mission on July 29-30 to Tsu and say the plane was flown by Lt Ray Elliott. Captain Ray Elliott flew his last mission on July 12 and left for home on or about July 20. The pilot on July 29-30 would have been Lt. John R. Elliott.

Gerry Beauvoisin made several comments on the articles in the last issue:

Stiffkey, like Mike I went to Stiffkey a couple of times and really enjoyed it. Although we tried our damndest – making all kinds of allowances and adjustments I didn't see a drone shot down. As Mike says the bonus was the superb food – the only problem was that one had to get used to the main course and sweet being in the one compartmentalised tray. One trip and you had gravy and custard mixed up!

One thing that surprised us was that the USAF gunners in attendance serviced and armed their own turrets. Whilst we were trained how to arm up on the conversion course I can only remember loading the guns once during my time.

Waddington, I was on 57 Squadron for 1 month at Waddington in 1952 and I can confirm that the Washingtons were based on the far side of the airfield as you said. We couldn't walk to the squadron offices/crew rooms and every morning a couple of trucks were laid on to take 57 Squadron personnel to the far side. Each trade had its own crew room – which didn't make much sense to me. When we were at Coningsby that was changed and we just had the one large communal crew room for the NCOs. We used to light coke fires in the AG's crew room and the favourite trick was to pour some aviation fuel over the coke – throw in a lighted match and slam a blazer in front of the fire. Normally it worked but on one occasion we poured on too much fuel and damn near set fire to the crew room. There was a muffled explosion – flames shot out across the floor and, fortunately for us, they all went out. It was a Saturday morning – not many people about and we got away with it!

John Francis, supplied some information on 192 Squadron at RAF Watton:

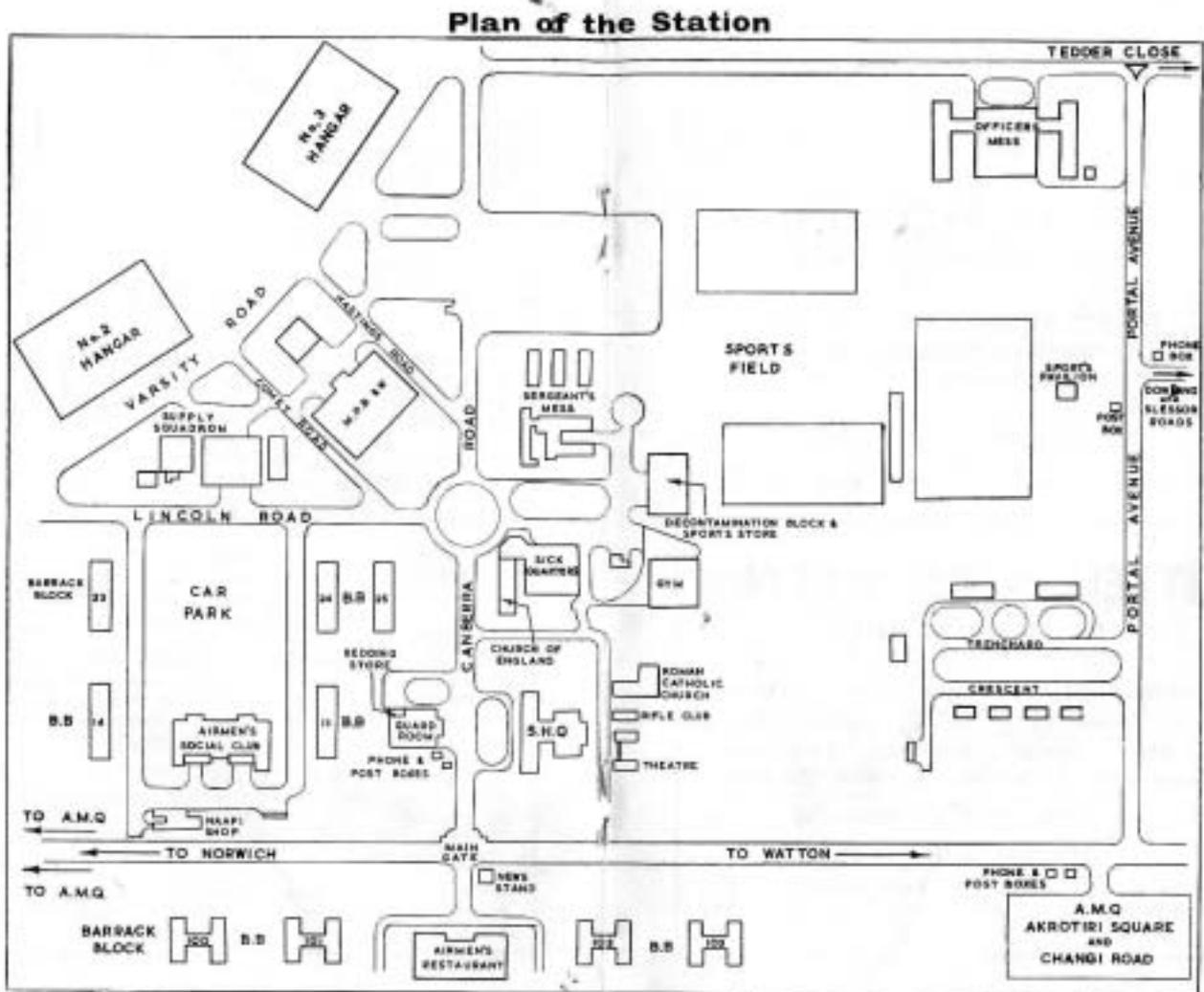
On completion of my engine mechanic's training at RAF Henlow, my first posting was to RAF Watton, where CSE – Central Signals Establishment was located. A small group of us arrived at Watton railway station and I believe we had to walk to the RAF station, as there was no transport for us. We were housed in some old billets outside the main station and on the road back towards the town. Later we were moved into permanent billets next to the mess.

I was sent to 'Anson' Flight on the opposite side of the main station. The few fabric-covered Ansons were used on Ground Control Landing 'circuits and bumps' exercises. I was given some joy rides by the pilots. After some time I was transferred to 'Washington' Flight who had just received their first B-29, which was very impressive. Soon I was sent to nearby RAF Marham on conversion training on the 18 cylinder Wright Double Cyclone engine and its propellers. I made one mission to West Germany as engine ground crew. I occupied the bomb aimer's position in the nose for take off and landing.

I recall these planes, when fully loaded with fuel, starting their long take off run on the end of the perimeter and then swinging onto the runway to gather maximum speed. The heavy plane would tilt going round the corner. The other three aircraft arrived later. They were parked outside at dispersal points. First line servicing was carried out outside but, scheduled maintenance was done in the hanger. They entered with wingtips just clearing the walls. The tow tractor driver had a very hard time to avoid hitting something and the anxious airman in the pilot's seat just waited to jam on the brakes and the NCO in charge running back and forth with a whistle in his mouth!

192 Squadron was a mystery to me; the B-29s were very heavily loaded with radio and electrical equipment, but we never knew their exact missions. The two bomb bays were fitted with long-range fuel tanks that allowed

very long flight missions. On one occasion a plane returned with an engine failure, a valve had fractured and the broken head dropped into the cylinder. Immediate engine shutdown avoided a serious threat to the aircraft but the broken head was reduced to the size of a golf ball.

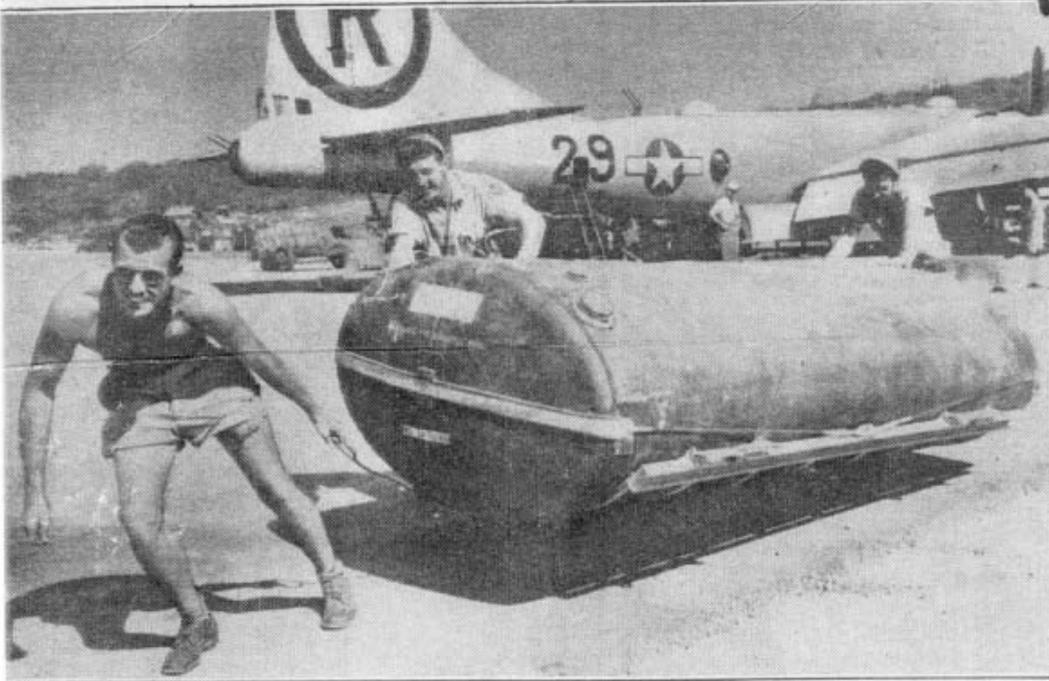


A plan of RAF Watton circa 1964. Although a bit after the Washington era most buildings are likely to have kept the same use. Hanger No 1 (just off the plan to the right) was used for Washington maintenance while hanger No 2 housed Lincolns. John Francis was billeted in Barrack Block 103 (lower centre of plan). This plan formed a part of a booklet supplied to new arrivals at RAF Watton and the whole booklet can be viewed on the RAF Watton web site (<http://www.rafwatton.info>) maintained by Julian Horn. (*Julian Horn*)



An unidentified ELINT B-29 of 192 Squadron undergoing maintenance at dispersal, probably at RAF Watton. Unfortunately no serial can be discerned although it will be either WZ966, WZ967 or WZ968. (*John Francis*)

TOKYO FELT ITS WEIGHT, TOO



(Official AAF photo via Associated Press)

TANKFUL OF INSURANCE. Three Yanks wheel a huge gas tank toward a B-29 Superfortress at a base somewhere in the Pacific. Tank will supplement plane's usual fuel supply to enable it to make run to Tokyo.

A good newspaper photo of an Auxiliary fuel tank similar to those carried by the 192 Squadron planes. Inexperienced crews within the 20th AF carried one or two of these to ensure that they had adequate fuel on their first few missions. As they became more proficient at fuel management the tanks were removed and replaced by more bombs! For reconnaissance or weather missions two such tanks could be carried in each bomb bay giving a total of 2,560 gallons (US) extra fuel. The B-29 in the background is 'Look Homeward Angel' of the 6th BG. Not a Washington but serving with the same unit as did WF498.
(William Santavicca)



192 SQUADRON 24th AIR FORCE 7324

192 ground crew pose in front of one of their ELINT B-29s.
 Back row L-R: ?, ?, ?, Mike Polson, Joe Binks
 Front row L-R: John Francis, ?, ?, ?
(John Francis)

Alan Gamble, a former radio operator with 90 Squadron also supplied some interesting information on the work of the Washington radio operator and, in the absence of a roster yet, some names of former 90 Squadron personnel that may jog some memories:

I was a commissioned Radio Operator/Gunner and Squadron Adjutant with 138 Squadron on Lincolns at Wyton. I was transferred to 90 Squadron when the two Squadrons were merged to become 90 Squadron at Marham to re-train and re-fit with the Washington.

As far as the Radio Operator's job on the Washington goes I found it fairly boring! My previous Bomber Command experience as Radio Operator/Gunner at least had some variation. Helping the navigator with the direction finder for instance and attending to various other minor matters as well as being a spare gunner. The layout in the Washington put the D/F loop and direction finder in the navigator's position. The most I could do other than long range W/T communications was to obtain bearings and fixes from ground facilities. The navigator even had control of the Very pistol. With the four main gunners, including the CFC, at the back-end beyond the tunnel and bomb bays, the only gun position that I was likely to have to use was the bomb aimer's position, and even then not when on a bomb run or when the CFC had switched control to another position. My position was tucked around the back of the forward upper four-gun turret and a fair old racket they made when fired! That was about the only exciting thing that ever happened apart from having to go into the forward bomb bay to check for and, if necessary, clear hang-ups.

Names from my logbook for 90 squadron follow:

M/P Hole,
Flt Lt (Ben) Porterfield (my pilot on 90 Squadron)
Flt Lt Shuster
Flt Lt Whitehead
Flt Lt Brand
Sgt Green (my first co-pilot)
Sgt Vickers (another co-pilot)
P/O Hedges (co-pilot)
Sgt Croot (co-pilot)
Capt Wood (USAF exchange officer)
S/Ldr Sloane (CO of 90 Squadron)
Flt Lt Bristow
F/O Stirrup (our new co-pilot)
F/O Clements
S/Ldr Cairns (signals leader on both 138 and 90 Squadrons – replaced me as Squadron Adjutant)
F/O Gibbs (our navigator)

Questions?

The articles in this issue raise a few questions from me that I hope you can answer!

First, I have just finished reading the book 'The Final Mission' that deals with a B-29 crew on one of the last bombing missions of WWII. The co-author of the book, a radio operator, had a combat position of looking out of the navigator's astrodome in the tunnel to act as an extra scanner for fighters etc. Did RAF radio operators have a similar combat position?

Secondly, as most people know, the USAAF flew daytime bombing missions in large formations. Although there are some photos of RAF B-29 formations these are normally associated with ceremonial events or air shows. Did any of you practice daytime formation-bombing attacks with B-29s? If so, how large were the formations and, in the absence of the large and vivid unit markings as carried by the USAF B-29s, how did you find your place in the formation?

Thirdly, 192 Squadron used auxiliary fuel tanks to increase their range. John King has confirmed that 44 squadron never used these but can anyone from other squadrons ever remember carrying them?

Leconfield Air Gunner's Society

The photos from Roy Arnold on gunner training at Leconfield caused much interest from the other Leconfield gunners not least because there is a Leconfield Air Gunner's Society (LAGS) that meets every year and both Peter Morrey and Mow Mowbrey requested that I mention the society here. If any Leconfield trained gunners would like to join the society – or simply find out more then please contact Peter Morrey:

Tel: 01429 282527

or write to:

Peter Morrey,
17 Pikeston Close,
Hartlepool,
TS26 OLG



LAGS re-union July 2002

Second from left in back row, Keith Dutton (90 Sqdn).
Second from left in front row Mow Mowbrey (57 Sqdn).
Third from left in front row is Iain Robertson 50 years on from Roy's photo. (*Peter Morrey*)



LAGS re-union July 2001

L-R Peter Morrey (57 and 115 Sqdns), Mike Davies (90 Sqdn), Peter Kilminster (never served on a squadron!). (*Peter Morrey*)

Aircraft in Detail – WF498 (44-61688)

Like most Washingtons, WF498 was a B-29A and had therefore been built at Boeing's Renton plant (all B-29As were built at Renton). She was accepted by the USAAF on 11 May 1945 before moving to the modification centre at Birmingham, Alabama. After a month there she was assigned to the 2nd Air Force at Topeka AAF before moving to San Francisco on 15 July 1945 at the start of her deployment to the Pacific Theatre of Operations and the 20th Air Force. What date she arrived in the Marianas is not recorded although she was assigned to the 24th Bomb Squadron, 6th Bomb Group, 313th Bomb Wing at North Field, Tinian. Little is known of her operational service except that she took part in the final bombing mission flown by the 6th BG. This was a daylight maximum effort to the marshalling yard at Marifu on 14 August 1945. The 6th BG planes took off from Tinian in the early morning and bombed their target between 1225 and 1319, dropping 710 tons of bombs. Although 40 of the attacking B-29s diverted to Iwo Jima none was lost.

After the Japanese formally surrendered, on 2 September 1945, the US rapidly reduced its forces and the 20th AF was no exception. The older B-29s returned to the US in what was known as the Sunset Project. Late arrivals, like 44-61688 however, remained in the Pacific to form what was by then known as the Far East Air Force (FEAF). The only heavy bomber unit in the FEAF was the 19th BG based at North Field on Guam and it was to this unit that 44-61688 was assigned.

On 17 May 1948 44-61688 was transferred from the FEAF to Strategic Air Command (the 19th BG was the only US heavy bomber unit not in SAC) and the 22nd BG based at Smoky Hill AFB in Kansas. She did not however remain with the 22nd BG for long being assigned to Air Material Command for storage at Kelly AFB on 19 November 1948. Here she stayed until being reactivated on 21 November 1950 in preparation for delivery to the RAF under what was known as the Military Assistance Program.

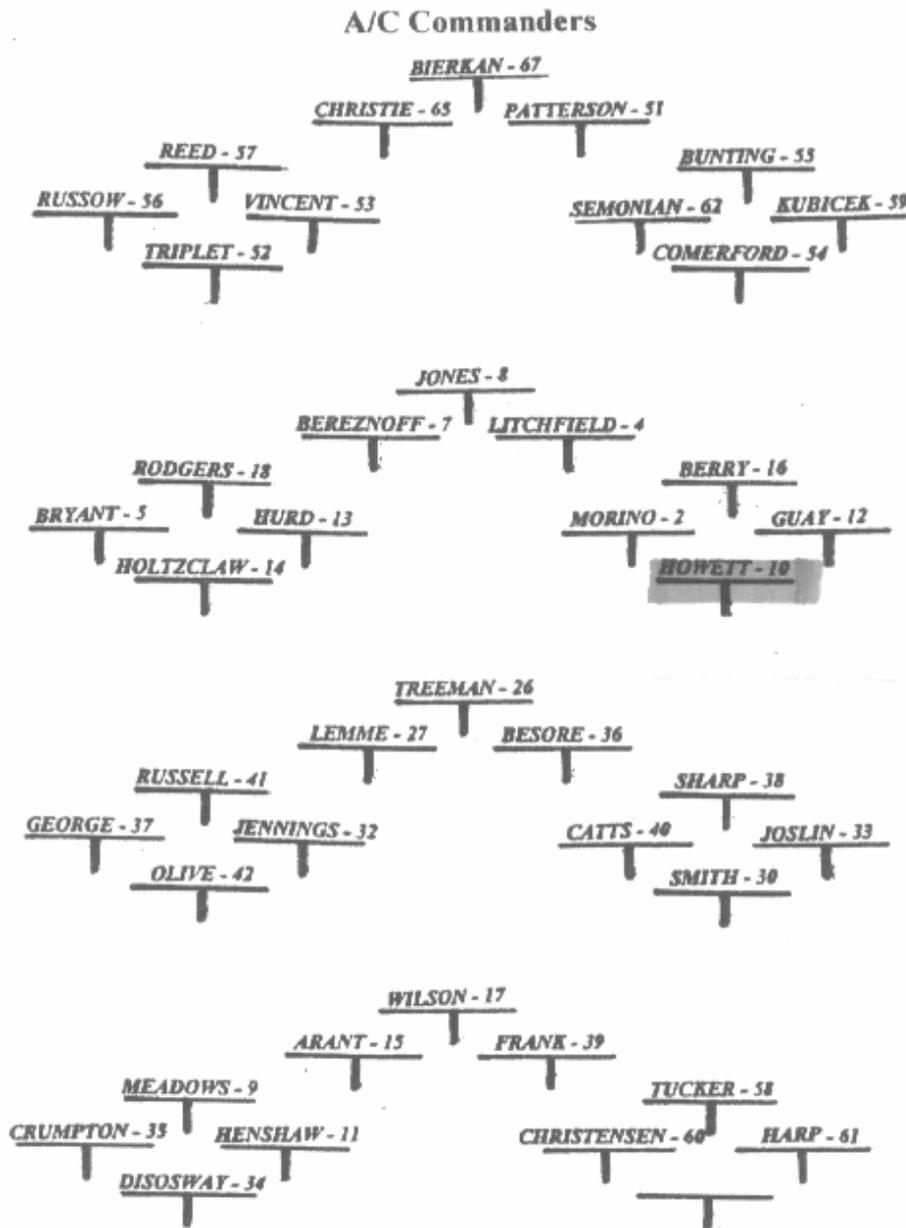
44-61688 was accepted by the RAF as WF498 on 8 December 1950 and allocated to 149 Squadron at RAF Marham. Here, Bob Cole was one of her ground crew and some details of the use made of her by the RAF were included in Issue 1. On 26 March 1953 WF498 was transferred to 35 Squadron before moving to the disposal flight on 24 April 1953 from where she returned to the US on 22 July 1953. What befell her in the USA upon her return is not known although it is likely that she was stored at Davis Monthan before being reclaimed (or scrapped).



Although not directly related to any Washington, I think this photo symbolises the end of the War in the Pacific very well. It shows a 330th BG B-29 (K-29 captained by Lt Ray Smisek) turning off the runway having landed after this group's final mission. Unlike 44-61688 and the 6th BG, the 330th BG flew a night bombing mission over the night of 14-15 August 1945. While still several hours away from Guam on the return journey the news arrived that the war had ended and the crews set themselves up for their first peacetime landing in a B-29. Capt Paul Schade (pictured), the 330th BG chaplain, waited at the end of the runway to welcome each returning aircraft with a victory wave. (*S Smisek*)

6th Bomb Group MISSION PLANNING

FIELD ORDER No. 120
Flight positions for the last raid, Night of
14 August 1945... 0619



Acft.
S/N's No.

44-69980 - 67
44-69855 - 65
42-24866 - 51
42-24776 - 57
44-24872 - 56
42-24878 - 53
44-69831 - 52
44-61803 - 55
42-24880 - 62
44-70069 - 59
44-69847 - 54
44-61635 - 8
44-61784 - 7
42-24874 - 4
44-61905 - 18
42-24885 - 5
44-61558 - 13
42-24825 - 14
44-69865 - 16
44-61549 - 2
42-94063 - 12
44-61688 - 10
44-70150 - 26
42-63552 - 27
42-24884 - 36
44-61836 - 41
44-87650 - 37
44-69667 - 32
44-69757 - 42
44-61686 - 38
42-94042 - 40
44-69672 - 33
42-24868 - 30
42-24835 - 17
44-87734 - 15
44-69744 - 39
44-69864 - 9
42-24901 - 35
42-65281 - 11
42-93901 - 34
44-70006 - 58
44-70124 - 60
42-24783 - 61

Formation chart for the 6th BG's final bombing mission of WWII. This was indeed a maximum effort mission as it included four formations. Most missions used three of the eleven plane formations, one for each squadron in the group, giving 33 planes per group (out of a possible 45). To put up 43 of the group's 45 planes at this stage in the war was quite a feat and reflected well on the hard work done by the group's ground crews. 44-61688 is the highlighted plane captained by Lt Howett. (*Bill Santavicca*)

Black Bottoms

There has been some debate as to when, or even if, USAAF B-29s received black bottoms during WWII. As can be seen in the photo on the cover, some B-29s did receive black bottoms in a field paint job while others were finished with black bottoms by the factories. However, the modification was not ordered until late in the war and so most B-29s remained silver. As it happened, one of the Washingtons was involved in the test of black bottoms carried out by the 20th AF. This was 44-69680 (WF437 – see photo on front cover) being one of the B-29s allocated to the 28th BS of the 19th BG that was assigned for the test. The test and its results were described by Vern Chandler, 44-69680's commander:

The March 1945 series of large scale, low altitude incendiary raids on Japan's major cities initiated by Gen. LeMay resulted in many airplanes shot down by anti-aircraft guns. The Tokyo area alone had about 300 heavy AA guns with some guided by searchlights and others by radar plus many smaller caliber guns. As Pathfinders, we were "coned" by searchlights for 3 1/2 minutes at 5,000 feet on our bomb run up the inlet to Nagoya. Our tail gunner, Andy Kerzner, was reporting "Flak exploding behind us at our level", then "Getting closer!" We were using maximum continuous power to indicate 250 mph. When the bomb bay doors opened, our speed slowed, but we were on the final bomb run and trained to maintain our heading and level altitude so took no evasive action. Fortunately, the AA gunners failed to hit us and we bombed accurately before escaping to higher altitude in the darkness around the city. Our copilot, John Stevens, had previously completed a tour with the Royal Air Force over Europe in Lancaster night bombers and said that over Germany we would have been dead!

As a result of the numerous losses, our commanders obtained Gen. LeMay's approval to try painting the bottoms of the airplanes black to make them less visible to searchlights. Our 28th Squadron was chosen to test the effectiveness and several of our airplanes were painted lamp-black on the bottom in May 1945. We flew several low level night missions and found that searchlights passed over the black airplanes to center on the more visible silver ships.

A day after returning from one of these missions, I was summoned to the office of Col. John Money, the Group Operations Officer. He said "Capt. Chandler, you are to brief Gen. LeMay tomorrow on the results of the black paint project."

I said "Who, me?" I had never been before a command level staff meeting and definitely not before the mighty Gen. LeMay! Nevertheless, I went to the 20th Air Force staff meeting and spent just 2 or 3 minutes telling them that black was very effective to ward off searchlights. When I finished, Gen. LeMay asked his staff officers "Any questions?" There were none and he turned to the Director of Maintenance saying "Paint 'em." Thereafter, all B-29s of the 20th Air Force had their bottoms painted a glossy black!

The following is an additional note by Darrell Landau, an engineering officer who arrived on Guam just before the end of the war. He served with the 19th BG and is now the 19th BG Historian:

When I arrived, most of the 28th Sqd planes bellies were painted the dull lamp black, the test case aircraft, and only the new ones sported a glossy black. I was told this was for evading searchlights. Though those with the dull black always had a kind of dirty look, it seemed they could more readily avoid detection than those with glossy black. I have no idea why LeMay's order "paint em" resulted in the glossy black. Someone probably thought it would be smoother and they would fly faster, or thought they would look cleaner, or they may have just run out of dull lamp black paint.

Generally a large order paint job was done at the service center but not always. Often the numbers on the side of engine cowling was done at the Squadron level. When it came time to paint "PW SUPPLIES" under the wings after the war ended, it was done by the Squadron in dull yellow paint. The fellows had trouble with the spray gun nozzle clogging. Thus I believe this is the reason they changed to the use of glossy black.

It seems that those plane given the field paint job (or perhaps only those that received the dull black paint) had the paint removed after the war. This can be seen on 44-69680 because when she arrived in the UK at the start of her RAF career she was once more in overall silver finish. WF498 on the other hand served in the RAF with

black undersides and, although I have not managed to track down any photo of WF498 (44-61688) during WWII, I assume that the black bottom was a factory applied one that was kept after the war! If anyone has any information on this please let me know!



44-69680 (WF437) landing at RAF Marham at the end of her delivery flight on 22 March 1950. WF437 was the first Washington to arrive and landed on three engines after a severe oil leak forced the number 3 engine to be feathered while still over the Atlantic. (*Jeff Brown*)



A large formation of B-29s, reported to be Washingtons but possibly a USAF Bomb Group. Can anyone remember flying in such a large formation? (*Clive Clarke*)

The B-32 Dominator. An Alternative Washington?

Most people who have an interest in aircraft will be able to identify the US heavy bombers of WWII as the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress and Consolidated B-24 Liberator. Fewer, but still many, will add the Boeing B-29 Superfortress to the list. However, there is a fourth US heavy bomber that few seem to know about. This is the Consolidated B-32 Dominator, a plane that entered service only in the closing months of WWII and disappeared completely very shortly afterwards. Why then write about it here in the 'Washington Times'? The answer to this lies in the fact the B-32 was built in response to the same requirement as the B-29 and, in the early development days at least, could well have entered production ahead of its more famous cousin. Had that happened, the 20th Air Force could have been equipped with B-32s, the atomic bomb dropped by a B-32 and, in the 1950s, the RAF equipped with them. What follows is a brief history of the development and operational use of the B-32.

In 1937, President Roosevelt was concerned about the apparent paralysis of Britain and France in their dealings with the Nazi regime. Realising that this was largely due to fear of possible Luftwaffe bombing raids on their cities he became intent on preventing a similar situation arising in America. He therefore asked Congress for some \$300 million to allow the Army Air Corps (AAC) to build its strength. This was granted and, on 3 April 1937, the AAC planners were given the go ahead and so the acting chief of the Army Air Corps, General Henry H. 'Hap' Arnold, formed a study board, under the direction of General Walter G. Kilner, to determine the Air Corps' needs.

General Kilner's board reported, in June 1939, and recommended the development of several medium and heavy long-range bombers. Following the submission of this report, General Arnold requested authorisation on 10th November to study a Very Long Range bomber. This was granted on December 2, 1939 and a team of AAC engineers under Capt. Donald L. Putt of Air Material Command at Wright Field began to prepare the specification. Once complete, the specification called for a 'super-bomber' could fly at 400 mph with a 5,333 mile range and able to deliver a 1 ton (2,000 lb) bomb load to a target at the half way point. Suitable companies were given the requirement on January 29, 1940 as Request for Data R-40B and Specification XC-218 with responses to be submitted within 30 days. Despite the advanced requirements and almost impossible timescales, all four companies, Boeing, Consolidated, Douglas and Lockheed, responded to the challenge and submitted bids by the end of February 1940.

In April however, following early feedback from the European war, the Army revised the specification to incorporate several modifications, including increased defensive armament, armour plating and self-sealing fuel tanks and all companies asked to re-submit.

In May 1940, the Army Air Corps set up a special Board at the Air Corps' technical centre at Wright Field in Dayton, Ohio under Colonel Oliver P. Echols of Material Command to assess the designs submitted by the four competing companies. This board ranked the submissions and assigned designations in order of preference. Boeing's design (model 345) was the favourite so got the lowest designation, XB-29. Next came Lockheed's (model 51-81-01) as XB-30 then Douglas' (model 332F) as XB-31 and lastly Consolidated's (model 33) was given XB-32.

Because of the Air Corps' policy of having two sources for a new design in case the first choice proved to be unworkable, on June 4, 1940, General Arnold authorised \$85,000 each for the top two companies to allow them to continue refining the design and to produce mock-ups of their designs for wind tunnel testing.

In August however, both Lockheed and Douglas, realising that they were at a commercial disadvantage, withdrew from the competition, leaving just Boeing and Consolidated in the running.

Of the two withdrawn designs, Douglas' disappeared while Lockheed's, which was already based on an armed version of its existing airliner design, reverted to the airliner and eventually became the highly successful Constellation.

Although ranked fourth out of the four, once Lockheed and Douglas had withdrawn, the Army approved the Consolidated design and on September 6, 1940, in parallel with the B-29, placed a contract for 2 prototypes and required the first of these to fly in 18 months time. This was modified in November to include a third aircraft.

Consolidated completed the B-32 mock-ups by late December 1940 although these were later modified to incorporate changes suggested by the Air Corps' evaluation team at Wright Field. The modified mock-ups were finally approved on January 6, 1941. Following this, in June, the Air Corps ordered thirteen YB-32s (service test aircraft).

Consolidated completed the first XB-32 on September 1, 1942, nearly 6 months behind the original date. At this time, the B-32 was still central to the Air Corps' plans that, in the guise of plan Air War Plans Division (AWPD)-1, envisaged a force of some 20 heavy bomber groups (1,700 B-17/B-24s), 24 very heavy bomber groups (2,040 B-29/B-32s) and, somewhat remarkably, 44 groups of very long range bombers (3,740 of the mighty B-36s) to pummel Germany into submission. The heavy bomber groups would fly from England (as indeed they did), the very heavy bomber groups from Northern Ireland while the very long range bombers would fly direct from the US. With pressure mounting to get the very heavy bombers into action, when problems arose with the pressurisation and gun turrets on the B-32, these were removed so that flight-testing could begin immediately. Consequently, the first flight took place on the September 7, 1942 (some two weeks ahead of the rival XB-29).



The second XB-32 (41-142). Note the twin tails and fully glazed nose – both of which would disappear before the B-32 got into production. (USAF Museum)

Unfortunately, development problems persisted and, despite the continuation of testing, opposition to the B-32 within the US Army Air Force (USAAF as the AAC had by now been named) was mounting with many officers recommending that the entire programme be cancelled since the B-29 programme was now progressing well. It was not although disaster struck on May 10, 1943 when, after only 30 test flights the prototype crashed just after take off due to a flap malfunction. Although six of the seven-man crew escaped, the pilot, Richard McMakin, was killed and the aircraft along with many vital test records was totally destroyed. This was a terrible set back for the B-32 for not only did testing have to wait until the second XB-32 was ready in July but also several tests would have to be repeated to replace the lost records.

The second prototype, which flew for the first time on July 2, 1943, included the full specifications with pressurisation and the remotely controlled retractable turrets (similar to what was to be installed on the B-29s). Also, by now, the aircraft had become known by the popular, but unofficial, name of 'Terminator'.

The third XB-32 was also delayed by technical problems and was not ready until November. By now the USAAF considered the B-32 to be unsatisfactory and in December declared it as being obsolete by contemporary world standards. To save the programme, Consolidated adopted an enormous number of changes.

These included the replacement of the remote control gun turrets with manned versions, the deletion of pressurisation, improvements made to the fuel, oil, bomb systems, emergency exits, engine nacelles and the bombardier's view. Also, an automatic flight control system was added and the twin rudders replaced, initially by a B-29 fin but later by an even larger single fin. The third XB-32 became the test bed for these changes that were also included on all production models. In fact, the changes were so extensive they represented a virtual redesign of the entire aircraft and resulted in the Consolidated designation Model 34. With these changes, the USAAF increased the orders for B-32s to over 1,500 with aircraft and components to be made at San Diego, Fort Worth, Downey and Chicago.

The production B-32s, by now known as Dominators, were made in two types, Bombers and Trainers (designated B-32 and TB-32 respectively). Forty TB-32s had been ordered in 1942 to allow transition training to start. At that time, the US Army Air Forces wanted B-32s to replace all B-17s and B-24s in Europe in 1944. However, due to the delays not a single B-32 ever made it to Europe and only a handful made it to the Pacific.



B-32 42-108471, the first production aircraft, seen fitted with a single B-29 fin. Note also the revised cockpit and nose layout. (USAF Museum)

The first B-32 was delivered on September 19, 1944 although the second was not available until November due to production delays. By mid-December the USAAF had all but given up on the B-32. The few B-32s already delivered were experiencing many mechanical faults and there were also complaints about the quality of workmanship. Many in the USAAF were still recommending that the programme be cancelled and crews transferred to B-29 units. In fact, by the end of December 1944 only five aircraft had been delivered whereas the B-29 had been in combat for nearly six months!

Fortunately for the B-32, Brigadier General Donald Wilson's report on the status of the B-32 in December recommended that despite the difficulties the programme should continue at least until the service tests had ended and that the crew training programme should also keep going. Consequently, January 27, 1945 saw the delivery of the first of the 40 TB-32s.

The service tests showed that the B-32 had many defects; the cockpit had high noise levels and poor instrument layout, the bombardier still had a poor view, the mechanical systems were inadequate and there were numerous undercarriage failures. In fact, undercarriage problems would result in the entire fleet being grounded briefly in May 1945. In addition to these, problems, the B-32 also suffered from the same engine difficulties that beset the B-29 with numerous fires being started. In its favour, the B-32 was a stable bombing platform, had good landing and low speed handling characteristics, was afforded good protection by its manned turrets and was relatively easy to maintain. Also, many of the identified defects were eliminated in the production aircraft either by design changes or better quality control.

In March 1945, General George Kenney, Commander of 5th Air Force travelled to Washington to ask for increased strategic aircraft for his air force. He wanted B-29s, but due to higher priorities elsewhere, settled for B-32s and after demonstrations in Washington, it was agreed that a combat evaluation of the Dominator would be carried out. The evaluation called for 11 combat missions and if successful, the B-32 would re-equip all B-24

groups in the Pacific Theatre of Operations. For the evaluation, three Dominators were assigned to the 386th Bomb Squadron (an A-20 unit), 312th Bomb Group, 5th Air Force at Clark field Luzon, Philippines. The B-32s moved to the Philippines during May, with the first bombing mission being flown on the 29th. Two B-32s, the "Hobo Queen II" and "The Lady is Fresh", carried out this mission against a Japanese supply depot in Luzon's Cayagan Valley. Each B-32 was loaded with 1,000 lb bombs and bombed from an altitude of 10,000 feet. On June 12, 1945 two B-32s bombed targets against Bataan's Basco airfield, June 13 saw the B-32s bombing Koshun airfield and June 16 saw all three B-32s bombing Taito. The remaining missions of the evaluation were flown against targets in the Philippines, Formosa and against Hainan Island in the Tonkin Gulf also during June.

The test was generally successful so the 386th Bomb Squadron began to convert to B-32s although the unit moved to Okinawa on August 13, 1945 before the conversion could be completed. Six more B-32s joined the unit a few days later. Following this move the unit flew photoreconnaissance missions during the uneasy cease-fire period that existed from early on the August 15 until the formal surrender as signed on September 2, 1945.



TB-32s being built at Consolidated's huge Fort Worth plant. Note the faired over nose gun position and lack of upper gun turrets representative of the TB-32s. Note also the final shape fin. (USAF Museum)

Despite its brief operational history, the B-32 did gain the, perhaps dubious, distinction of being involved in what was probably the last aerial combat of WWII, despite the fact that this occurred some 3 days into the cease-fire! While undertaking photoreconnaissance missions the B-32s of the 386th were attacked by anti aircraft guns and fighters on both August 17 and 18. On the latter mission, Japanese fighters jumped "Hobo Queen II" and another B-32 (42-108578). "Hobo Queen II" and '578' claimed two fighters and "Hobo Queen II" escaped without damage or casualties. However '578' was badly shot up with one photographer and a gunner badly wounded while another photographer Sgt. Anthony J. Marchione was killed.

Following this, other missions passed without incident until tragedy again struck on last B-32 combat mission. This was flown on August 28, 1945 by 4 B-32s. Three took off with no problems but the fourth lost power in No 1 engine during the take off run and skidded off the end of the runway into a coral pit. All thirteen men on board died. The remaining three B-32s completed their mission without interference but, when returning to Okinawa, 42-108528 lost power on two engines. The pilot nursed the B-32 near to a US Navy destroyer where all crew left the stricken plane. Tragically, despite being so close to a destroyer, only 11 of the 13 survived. One man was never found while one died of injuries a short while later – a sad end to the combat career of the plane. Two days later the 386th Bomber Squadron was ordered to cease combat operations. Cancellation of the B-32 programme came shortly after on the September 8, 1945 with production being halted on October 12, 1945.

Following this, all flyable aircraft at the Consolidated factory were flown directly to the scrap yard with all partially built B-32s being scrapped in situ. All operational B-32s and TB-32s were scrapped in the years following the war. No B-32 survives today.

In total, 118 B-32s were completed, 3 XB-32s, 75 B-32s and 40 TB-32s, all but one were made at Consolidated's Fort Worth, Texas, factory with one being built at their San Diego, California plant.

So ends the story of the Consolidated B-32. As it happened, it never rivalled the B-29 although this was by no means clear at the start of their development. Had development problems persisted for the B-29 it is quite possible that the B-32 would have eventually been loaned to the RAF to become Washingtons (although given that the Washington was built in Washington State, maybe the B-32 in RAF service would have been called a Texan!).

B-32 SPECIFICATIONS

Span: 135 ft. 0 in.
Length: 82 ft. 1 in.
Height: 32 ft. 2 in.
Weight: 100,000 lbs. (design gross weight)
Armament: Ten .50-cal. machine guns plus 20,000 lbs. of bombs (max.)
Engines: Four Wright R-3350-23 Cyclone radials of 2,200 hp. each (takeoff power)
Crew: 10

PERFORMANCE

Maximum speed: 357 mph. at 30,000 ft.
Cruising speed: 290 mph.
Range: 3,000 miles with 10,000 lbs. bomb load
Service Ceiling: 30,700 ft.



B-32 42-108532, 'Hobo Queen II' photographed on Okinawa circa September 1945. This was one of the two B-32s that took part in what was probably the last aerial encounter of WWII. Note the 5th AF badge applied to the fin, this was added after the cease-fire in preparation for the plane's return to the US. Hobo Queen II never did return. She was seriously damaged when her nose wheel collapsed on October 10, 1945, finally being broken up on Okinawa in May 1946.
(Ken Beyer)

Contacts

New Contacts:

John Care 149 Squadron Pilot

A list of those people who have made contact with me – if you wish to contact any of them, let me know and I will pass on your request:

David Roy	Alexander Arnold	ASF Marham 44 Squadron Air Gunner
Phil Gerry Ray Joe Jeff William	Batty Beauvoisin Belsham Bridge Brown Butt	44 Squadron Signaller 57 Squadron Air Gunner ASF Engine Fitter Marham Webmaster, RAF Marham Website 149 Squadron Air Gunner 115 Squadron Crew Chief
Katie Pat Brian Bob Terry Doug John (Buster) Don	Chandler Chandler Channing Cole Collins Cook OBE Crabbe Crossley	Widow of Vern Chandler, A/C 44-69680 (WF437) Daughter of Vern Chandler, A/C 44-69680 (WF437) 149 Squadron Navigator 149 Squadron Electrical Fitter (WF498) XV Squadron Engine Fitter 44 Squadron Co-Pilot (WF508) 207 Squadron Crew Chief 90 Squadron Signaller
Bernard Mike Keith	Davenport Davies Dutton	90 Squadron Air Gunner 90 Squadron Air Gunner 90 Squadron Air Gunner
Ken Charles Dave John John Ray	Firth Fox Forster Forster Francis Francis	44 Squadron Air Gunner Bombardier 42-94052 (WF444) Researching RAF ELINT Squadrons 207 Squadron / WCU Air Gunner 192 Squadron Engine Fitter 57 Squadron Association
Gordon Norman Alan Brian Bob Tony	Galletly Galvin Gamble Gennings Goater Goodsall	44 Squadron Navigator / Bombardier XV Squadron Engine Fitter 90 Squadron Radio Operator Ground Maintenance Hanger XV Squadron Instrument NCO 90 Squadron Air Gunner
Ken Roy Tony Julian Henry Brian John Ernest Paul	Harding Hild Hill Horn Horscroft Howes Howett Howlett Hunt	44 Squadron Signaller Pilot 42-94052 (WF444) Archivist P&EEE Shoeburyness RAF Watton Website 44 Squadron Association 115 Squadron A/C 44-61688 (WF498) 44 Squadron Engine Fitter (WF512) Flight Engineer 42-65274 with 40 th BG (WF442)

Jimmy	James	Engine Fitter
David	Karr	Nephew of William Karr, XV Squadron Air Gunner
J.	Kendal (Ken)	90 Squadron ??
Andrew	Kerzner	Tail Gunner 44-69680 (WF437)
John	King	44 Squadron Flight Engineer
John	Laing	207 Squadron Air Gunner
George	Lane	Navigator 44-69680 (WF437)
Peter	Large	Brother of Edward Large, Pilot 44 Squadron
Pete	Lewis	149 Squadron Engine Fitter
Gerry	Maloney	44 Squadron Navigator/Bomb Aimer (WF508)
Patrick	McGrath	115 Squadron Pilot
P.	McLaughlin	Engineering Officer, Pyote Texas
Peter	Morrey	57 / 115 Squadron Air Gunner
Mo	Mowbrey	57 Squadron Air Gunner
Ralph	Painting	57 / 192 Squadron Flight Engineer
Tom	Pawson	35 Squadron Signaller
Harry	Rickwood	149 Squadron Electrical Fitter
Harold	Roberts	Witness to crash of WF502
Ivor	Samuel	207 Squadron Air Gunner
William	Santavicca	Gunner 'Look Homeward Angel', 6 th Bomb Group Association
S	Smisek	Son of A/C of City of San Francisco (K-29, 330 th Bomb Group)
Joe	Somerville	Engine Fitter Marham
Derek	Stanley	57 Squadron radio Engineer
Jim	Stanley	
Bill	Stevenson	35 / 635 Squadron Association
Albert	Urquhart	Left Gunner K-39, 330 th Bomb Group
Colin	Williams	XV Squadron Navigator / Bombardier
Robert	Willman	A/C 42-93976 (WF440)
Charlie	Woolford	90 Squadron