

B-36B, 44-92033, on a test flight piloted by Major Stephen P. Dillon, AMC Flight Acceptance Officer. Bomber resplendent with red tail and wing tips was extensively photographed by accompanying photo plane during flight. (General Dynamics, Fort Worth)



THE RED-TAILED BEAUTIES OF THE 7th BOMB WING

by Meyers K. Jacobsen

FOREWORD

The years 1948-1950 were crucial years for Convair's B-36 intercontinental bomber. Although the B-36 Peacemaker was never used in combat, it did have to fight a fierce war of its own on two fronts in the late 1940s.

There was the "Battle of Washington" with bitter debate and severe criticism of the B-36 procurement program and the

bomber's capabilities and effectiveness. And there was the "Battle of Texas" with horrendous maintenance problems involved in bringing the first B-36 wing up to full operational status at Carswell AFB.

The B-36 was the ultimate development of the piston-engine, long-range heavy bomber. It represented Strategic Air Command's intercontinental striking power during the postwar Cold War period. The TRIAD concept, in effect today, had not been developed and nuclear deterrence primarily meant the strategic bombers of the U.S. Air Force.

This article deals not only with the huge multi-system machine that was the world's largest bomber, but also relates contributions made by some of the many SAC airmen whose job it was to get the B-36 "flying" for the Air Force.

The 1949 B-36 controversy, sometimes called "The Revolt of the Admirals," was an important part of the story, but in order to be explored in depth and fully evaluated, a separate JOURNAL article, exclusively devoted to the B-36 controversy, will be presented in the future.



7th Bomb Group insignia on the nose of B-36A, 44-92015, "City of Fort Worth." The Latin banner "MORS AB ALTO" translates "Death from Above." August 1948. (USAF)

Ground crew personnel pose in front of B-36 with 7th Bomb Group insignia. Three crosses on the Shield represent battles of WWI squadrons. (USAF)

THE BASE

Mechanics busy on the B-29 flightline at Fort Worth Army Air Field during 1947 stopped their maintenance work on occasion just to watch and marvel at the giant cigar-shaped XB-36 lumber down the runway on another test flight.

By the spring of 1948, they would be quite accustomed to the distinctive heavy-throated drone of a B-36 taking off, for several B-36A production models were undergoing flight testing across the runway over at the sprawling Convair plant.

But the mechanics would have more—much more—to do than just listen to B-36s when summer rolled around. Many of them would be assigned the challenging task of servicing the most complex Air Force bomber ever built.

Fort Worth Army Air Field was to become Carswell AFB and the first home of the B-36 Peacemakers. The base received its official designation on January 30, 1948, in honor of Horace S. Carswell, Jr., of Fort Worth.

A 1939 graduate of Texas Christian University, Major Carswell was a B-24 pilot during World War II. He sank a Japanese cruiser and destroyer on October 16, 1944. While attacking the Japanese convoy from low level, his plane was hit by antiaircraft fire and was severely damaged, causing the loss of two engines. The remaining two engines later failed and the plane crashed into a mountain and burst into flames. For his heroic action, he received the Congressional Medal of Honor, Distinguished Flying Cross, Air Medal and the Purple Heart.

THE UNIT

The initial operational unit at Carswell AFB to be assigned B-36s was the 7th Bomb Group. The 7th's history originated from two squadrons activated in 1917 during World War I, the 9th and 436th Bomb Squadrons. (The battles of these WWI squadrons appear as three iron crosses in the center of the unit's insignia.)



The 7th Bomb Group was one of the first U.S. Army Air Corps units to see combat in the Second World War.

On December 7, 1941, six of its B-17 Flying Fortresses landed in Hawaii during the peak of the Japanese attack. Later in 1943 the Group, joined by the 492nd Bomb Squadron, received B-24s and conducted bombardment operations in the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater. For its actions against the Japanese the Group earned two Distinguished Unit Citations.

After the war, the 7th was inactivated in 1946.

THE PROJECT OFFICER

There would be many pilots stationed at Carswell AFB to eventually fly the B-36 over the 10-year period, 1948-1958. The Peacemakers operated out of that Texas base, but one man should be singled out for playing an important role in making the B-36 combat ready.

That man, a pilot, an outstanding pilot, was John D. Bartlett. Lt. Colonel Bartlett was the 8th Air Force's original B-36 Project Officer and the 7th Bomb Wing's chief pilot for transition training from B-29s to B-36s.

Big John, or simply Bart, as he was also known, would take early model B-36s on some of their longest and most spectacular flights.

Bartlett, born in 1909, was raised in Helena, Montana. In 1941 he was very irritated by the tardiness of the U.S. getting into battle against Hitler's conquest scheme, and enlisted in the RCAF, going through boot camp in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Later training took him to Ottawa and he had his final checkout flight as a pilot on Sunday, December 7, 1941. A few weeks later, after Pearl Harbor, he received his RCAF wings and a commission as Pilot Officer. Bartlett and other Americans in the RCAF were repatriated in May 1942. He was assigned to Mather Field, Sacramento, California, and served as a pilot and navigation instructor for rookie American fliers until January 1943 when he

was shipped to the AAF navigators training school at San Marcos, Texas. There he finally “blew his top” and wrote a letter to higher HQs demanding overseas duty, brazenly sending a copy to his Commanding Officer at San Marcos. Instead of punishing the unorthodox lieutenant, his CO called him into his office, talked the matter over, and promised him that at the first opportunity he would give him a “break” to get out of training work and head for the combat zones. The opportunity came a few weeks later. Bartlett went to Sebring, Florida, for B-17 transition school.

From there he was transferred to Clovis, New Mexico, and assigned to the newly activated 73rd Bomb Group which had been placed under the command of a young West Pointer and football coach, Emmett (Rosie) O'Donnell, then a major (later to command the 15th Air Force). Rumors were that the 73rd was destined for “bigger things”—the men surmising that their daily flying stints in B-17s were preparing them for the last word in bombers at the moment—the B-29 Superfortress. The 73rd was ordered to Pratt, Kansas, in February 1944 and B-29 transition training began. The 73rd knew it was to be one of the first B-29 groups in the Pacific to attempt long-range bombing of the Japanese homeland. Big John's B-29, christened AMERICAN MAID, was the second B-29 to set down at the new base on Saipan. It would faithfully carry him and his crew safely through 28 combat missions.

M/Gen. Curtis E. LeMay was chief of B-29 operations in the Pacific and decided early in 1945 that it was a wise idea to select especially good plane commanders and send them back to the U.S. to train new crews coming into combat. In May 1945, Bartlett, now a captain, and having acquired several decorations including the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal, was one of the first pilots chosen to go home to be an instructor in the “lead crew” training school at Muroc Dry Lake (now Edwards AFB), California.

After the war in January 1946, Bartlett was ordered to join the homecoming of the 58th Bomb Wing and arrived in Fort Worth the following month as the great demobilization of the USAF began. He took a stroll along the flightline at Fort Worth Army Air Field (the base had originally been built for B-25s, but had become a B-24 base during the war). Inspecting the war-weary



Curtis E. LeMay, Commanding General, Strategic Air Command, 1954. (USAF)

B-29s just flown back from the Pacific, Bartlett voiced firmly to the operations officer in charge that he “wouldn't risk his neck in one of the miserable beasts on a million-dollar bet.” Before the day was over all B-29s on the field were grounded for thorough overhaul and repair.

In two months of intensive work, Bart and his fellow plane commanders were able to get their ships into flyable condition. Demobilization had left them pitifully short of maintenance mechanics and “checked out” personnel who knew the business.

By November 1946, the 58th BW had become the nucleus for reactivation of the 8th AF by M/Gen. Roger M. Ramey. The old 58th was reduced to “standby” status with only one officer and one sergeant, merely to keep it alive on the books. Its personnel were transferred to the newly activated 7th Bomb Group of the 8th AF, moved from McDill AFB, Florida.

The group consisted of the old 9th, 436th and 492nd Bomb Squadrons together with support units; Bartlett found himself a B-29 commander in the 492nd Squadron.

Lt. Col. Howard Hugos, Commander of the 492nd Squadron, took the squadron to Japan in May 1947 for a month of training and Bartlett saw for the first time on the ground the country he had successfully plastered from the air with fire bombs two years earlier. A few weeks after returning from Japan, the 492nd made one of the first postwar B-29 training flights to Europe.

Returning from this mission to Germany in September, Bartlett took off in an early morning rainstorm, from Lagens, in the Azores, a refueling stop. An engine failed soon after the ship was off the runway and while circling the field, another failed as the plane lost altitude rapidly. He retracted the landing gear to

Lt. Colonel John D. Bartlett, 8th Air Force B-36 Project Officer. (USAF via John D. Bartlett, M.D.)





B/Gen. Roger M. Ramey (left), and his staff pulling down the old 58th Bomb Wing sign in preparation for putting up the new 8th Air Force designation over their headquarters at Fort Worth Army Air Field. November 5, 1946. (Carswell AFB)

M/Gen. Roger M. Ramey, Commanding General, 8th Air Force, 1949. (USAF)



gain more lift and continued to circle the field to lessen the fuel load. Then he brought the B-29 in on a belly landing with gear up. The 20-man crew and two mascot dogs escaped through hatches within a few seconds and sprinted away from the plane, fearing a fire or explosion, but none occurred. Big John received an AF commendation for his calmness and skill.

There was a lull of several months for Bartlett during the winter of 1947-1948 when he was called in for planning work in the operations offices of the squadron and group.

THE COMMAND

The 7th Bomb Group had been reactivated on October 1, 1947, in Fort Worth as a Very Heavy Bomb Group and assigned B-29 aircraft.

At that time, units equipped with B-29s were designated "Very Heavy," however, this nomenclature was dropped and B-36 units were designated as "Heavy" while those still possessing B-29s were reclassified as "Medium."

A month later, in November, the 7th Bomb Group (VH) became the 7th Bomb Wing (H).

Commanding both the 7th BW and Carswell AFB during the latter half of 1947 and 1948 was Col. Alan D. Clark.

The 8th AF, headquartered at the base, was under the able direction of M/Gen. Ramey who reported to Gen. George C. Kenney at Headquarters, Strategic Air Command, Andrews AFB, Maryland.

As SAC's first commander, Gen. Kenney was charged with the task of reorganizing and rebuilding the postwar Air Force's global bombing force. SAC itself was a new command only having been established on March 21, 1946.

Assigned resources, as of December 1947, indicated only 713 tactical aircraft, including: 319 B-29s, 230 P-51s and 120 P-80s. More fighters than bombers.

However, SAC did fly its first Maximum Effort mission over

New York on May 16, 1947. One hundred and one B-29s theoretically dropped their bombs on the nation's largest city. But, another 30 B-29s remained at their home bases unable to take off because of maintenance and supply problems.

THE GENERAL

M/Gen. Roger M. Ramey, born in 1903, was a native Texan, and came from a small town called Denton which was north of the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

As Commanding General of the 8th AF, he was honored by the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce in late 1949 as "Man of the Year" for his services in rescue work during the heavy Trinity River flood that year. For those who knew Gen. Ramey, it was a well-deserved honor.

Ramey attended North Texas State Teachers College in Denton before entering the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, from which he graduated in 1923.

He finished the Air Corps Advanced Flying School at Kelly Field, San Antonio, Texas, in 1929. Ten years later he served as the Commanding Officer of the 19th Pursuit Squadron at Wheeler Field, Hawaii. In January 1945, Ramey assumed command of the 58th Bomb Wing, a B-29 unit, which participated in the fire bomb raids against Japan in the closing months of WWII.

During June and July 1946, he commanded Task Force 1.5, the Army Air Force portion of the combined Army-Navy operations at Bikini Atoll.

Ramey was noted for his ability to express decisions in a few simple words embellishing them with a great sense of humor. Officers who served with him still remember his classic, usually wise, but often unprintable comments on unit problems.

He was an excellent public relations man for the Air Force and used those skills to advantage in explaining the 8th AF's newest bomber, the B-36, to the civilian communities.

Carl D. Camp, a sergeant/electrician-gunner at Carswell, remembers 1947 and the General: "In 1947, we of the 7th Group at Carswell were being welded into one hell of a fine piece of fighting machinery. We went TDY all that year on our old B-29s, and were even urged to take them out on the weekend to go anyplace we chose—just build up our time and experience.

"I remember General Ramey. He flew with my crew at least three times when the whole mob sallied forth on some max effort or other. He used to bring a canvas lawn chair and spread it out on the forward entrance hatch of our old bird, #749. After opening his tie and laying back, he would leave the first hours of flying to us, and only later in the day taking over the controls for a short time. He looked then a bit tired and worn, but we loved him. He was a real airman's airman. We were all still very young and he was old, but we had all just lately finished a hell of a war, and we were all men together, be we sergeant, lieutenant or general, and we were all flyers.

"When I think about that lawn chair and compare it to later B-52 days, I remember now what a route-step outfit we were in 1947. We were still wearing 50-mission crushes and pulling our headsets over them. But, we flew those weary old B-29s and looked forward to our B-36s that sat in the sun just across the ramp at the Consolidated plant."¹

THE B-36A

B-36As started rolling off the factory assembly line and began to fill up the field operations area where they were being readied for delivery.

Busy flight testing these first planes was XB-36 pilot Beryl Erickson, now Convair's Chief of Flight, and test pilots G.S. "Gus" Green, A.S. Witchell, and Major Stephen P. Dillon, AMC Flight Acceptance Officer.

Even while flight testing of the new production models was underway, the "rumor factory" was at work and attacks against the B-36 began within the national military establishment in Washington, D.C.

The first 13 B-36As were once to be designated YB-36A, but had been changed to B-36As in September 1946. The 22 B-36As eventually built would have a gross weight of 310,380 pounds when loaded with 24,121 gallons of fuel and 10,000-pound bomb load.

Two B-36As undergoing testing and preparation for delivery in the Field Operations area at Convair. July 1948. (General Dynamics, FW)



Aerial view of Fort Worth Army Air Field (left) and center runway shared with Convair's near mile-long aircraft factory. Lake Worth forms northern border at bottom of photo, 1944. (General Dynamics, Fort Worth)

They required a take-off run of 8,000 feet, and had a tactical radius of 3,880 miles.

At "combat weight," the point at which the bomber was approaching the target with most of its fuel consumed, B-36As had a top speed of 345 mph at 31,600 feet and a service ceiling of 39,100 feet.

Although B-36A models had an AN/APQ-23 Bombing-Navigation Radar, no armament was installed and they were utilized for training and type familiarization.

Convair's flight testing involved shakedown flights, usually three or four, and a final acceptance flight with Air Force officers aboard to sign off the aircraft.

The shakedown flight of B-36A, BM-016, the thirteenth plane off the line, took place on a Friday the 13th. The crew must have had more of a sense of humor than superstitious nature, for after the four-hour uneventful flight, everyone posed for a picture with a black cat called "Cissie."

First B-36A was sent to Tinker AFB Modification Center, Oklahoma, on April 1, 1948. Tinker was to become a future B-36 supply and maintenance center.

THE TRANSITION TRAINING

A phone call came in January 1948 from Col. William "Butch" H. Blanchard, 8th AF Operations Officer (later Vice-Chief of Staff of Air Force), who told John Bartlett matter-of-factly, "Bart, I want you to go across the field to Convair tomorrow and start learning how to fly that big 'so-and-so'." Bartlett was to recommend seven other pilots to be the first class given instruction by Erickson, Green, Witchell, Dillon and other Convair technicians in ground school in preparation for handling the B-36.

Bartlett and this class, including Captains George J. Benedict of Great Falls, Montana, John Harrington of Fort Worth, Frank R. Sander of Sacramento, California, Charles E. Crecelius of Corydon, Indiana, Raymond J. Sealey of Chicago, George E. Burch of San Antonio, and Lt. Carl E. Waldrep of Tunica,



Looking north from 7th Bomb Group ramp area. Six red-tailed aircraft are visible. Appears that BM-013 has rudder from BM-025. (USAF)



Three new "red-tailed beauties" recently delivered to the 7th Bomb Group. (USAF)

Mississippi, went through six weeks of this preparatory instruction.

As vital to the task of pilots, the 8th had to have flight engineers to control the giant planes at the instrument panels—larger and more complicated than anything used heretofore in any aircraft—and crew chiefs to watch over the many thousands of mechanical parts of the B-36. The first four flight engineers sent to Convair for training were M/Sgts. Russell L. Stokum, John L. Corley, Ernest O. Benefield and Carl T. Moden. In a companion class were five crew chiefs: M/Sgts. Orville C. Simmonds, E.A. Moore, John T. Travis, Golden M. Joyner and Lavell E. Quilling.

These men completed their training then sat back and waited.

To assist in classroom training a B-36 Mobile Training Unit had been formed in March 1947 by Air Training Command, Chanute Field.

Twenty-five training aid exhibits, prepared for the AF by Convair, were used to demonstrate important features of B-36 operation and maintenance.

These "trainers" included mock-ups, scale models and cutaways; but wherever possible, actual parts from the B-36 were used. Additionally, numerous other classroom training aids were utilized such as charts, schematic drawings and cutaway sketches. Two officers and 18 enlisted technicians manned the one-million-dollar unit.

Personnel who conducted the course were trained in the factories which produced parts for the B-36.

During the first year, April 1948-1949, 1,500 officers and airmen completed the Mobile Training Unit course located at Carswell AFB.

On the morning of May 12, 1948, Bartlett's phone rang and A.S. "Doc" Witchell, calling from the Convair plant, queried casually, "How's your flying time this month?" Big John answered, "Not too good, dammit!" Witchell asked, "How would you like to get in about four hours in a B-36 this afternoon? If you would, come on over."

The transition flight training began. Bartlett, with his class of highly skilled young scholars, for weeks thereafter put in time

with the Convair pilots and crews every day that a B-36 would fly. They had some difficulty at first conditioning themselves to the take-off "altitude" of the B-36. Its 230-foot wing is set just forward of the mid-point of the 162-foot fuselage. As the bomber's six pusher-type engines drove it forward in a rush of enormous power along the runway, the long, slender nose of the plane would rotate upward and the pilot found himself 30 feet above the runway pavement before the landing gear finally left the ground and the bomber was airborne.

But the pilots found the B-36 easier to fly than the old B-29s they eventually gave up and crews had no difficulty checking out.

THE FIRST DELIVERY

The first B-36A (BM-015) was delivered to the 7th Bomb Wing in an impressive ceremony on June 26, 1948. Several hundred people from Fort Worth, headed by Amon G. Carter, gathered on the Carswell flight line along with most of the base population to see the plane taxi over from Convair for delivery to the Air Force.

Amon Carter, a Fort Worth newspaper publisher, was the man primarily responsible in influencing the government in the early 1940s to locate a major aircraft plant in Fort Worth.

He presented to M/Gen. Ramey a small gold plaque which was fastened to the plane's nose, christening it CITY OF FORT WORTH.

Carter, a well-known civic leader and supporter of the Air Force, was a passenger on the plane for the short trip along with Convair Fort Worth Division Manager, Roland G. Mayer.

While the 15-man air crew and 25-man ground crew stood in formation in front of BM-015, another B-36A (BM-023), dipped its wings in an overhead salute.

BM-015 was accepted by Col. Clark, 7th BW CO, and M/Gen. Ramey. The plane was assigned to the 492nd Bomb Squadron. After the ceremony, and after the crowd had walked around the B-36 for a close-up look, the ground crew took over.

Then it was discovered that the ground power unit was still stowed in the bomb bay, and without the power unit, there was



"Press party" demonstration plane B-36A, 44-92019 taking off with load of journalists, October 8, 1948. (General Dynamics, Fort Worth)

no way to generate the power required to open the bomb bay doors. So the Air Force had a brand new aircraft, but couldn't start or operate it! Convair soon came back to the rescue as they would many times in the following weeks.

Other deliveries followed slowly but steadily at the rate of one per week. The 7th BW built up its squadrons and B-29s gradually began to disappear from the flight line to make room for the larger bomber which dwarfed the Superfortress into insignificance.

The following months were long and exasperating because parts were scarce, mechanical troubles frequent, and both Convair technicians and Bartlett's hard-working crews were kept busy trying to work the "bugs" out of the B-36.

THE PROBLEMS OF SUPPLY AND MAINTENANCE

Making the B-36 into a powerful instrument for combat involved something new in Air Force procedure—flight testing a plane in actual crew training operations, work that had been done heretofore with other planes by factory technicians and test crews before the aircraft were turned over to the Air Force.

Bartlett had to resort to various sorts of piracy and "midnight-requisitioning," cannibalizing parts from other planes just to

keep even one B-36 flying until official red tape untangled and the parts shortage could be solved.

"It was a pliers and baling wire operation, sort of like the way a farmer fixes his threshing machine," Bart said.

Under a curious setup of Air Force economy and red tape, replacement parts for the new bombers were required to be sent to a distant AMC depot—when they were available from the factory right across the field—and reshipped by AMC back to Carswell!

M/Gen. Ramey protested impatiently over the arrangement. Higher echelons of the command sent some of their top-ranking men to Carswell. Finally, they called in M/Gen. Clements McMullen, veteran materiel officer of the wartime 5th Air Force in New Guinea, who had worked virtual miracles keeping planes flying for General Kenney and General MacArthur. He had come from the Pacific to Fort Worth in November 1946, to be the first reactivated 8th AF postwar commander, for a few weeks. Then he went to Andrews Field to be deputy to General Kenney, Commander of SAC.

McMullen was placed in charge of AMC San Antonio depot, and arrangements were worked out quickly to simply requisition parts and arrange their transfer from Convair directly across the field to the 7th BW.

A much-needed improvement that came out of this requisitioning reorganization was the capability of engine "buildup" at Carswell, a setup similar to the factory at Convair. This gave the 7th BW a limited number of quick-engine change units (QEDs) which cut engine-changing installation time considerably.

The Pratt and Whitney R-4360 Wasp Major engines of the B-36 were so big that this new "buildup" system had to allow working on the engines vertically.

Engines arrived at the base without any fittings except cylinders and shaft; the mount, exhaust blowers and other equipment were added by the AF mechanics after delivery from the manufacturer. The "merry-go-round" assembly line, built at Carswell, consequently cut down build-up time on the 18-foot engines in half.

That first summer of the B-36 program in 1948, crew chiefs

"City of Fort Worth," B-36A, 44-92015, being delivered to 8th Air Force at Carswell AFB, June 26, 1948. Overhead another B-36A, 44-92023, gives a salute during the ceremonies. (USAF)





Three B-36s fly in formation near the south end of Carswell AFB. Two of the planes carry large "buzz numbers," BM-024 and BM-037, BM

being the B-36 designator type followed by the last three digits of the serial number. (USAF)

and mechanics toiled in the intense Texas heat and frequently fell out from heat prostration as the temperature would sizzle to 130 degrees inside the plexiglas-enclosed flight deck.

The few available portable air-conditioner units were kept busy moving along the ramp, pumping cool air into the planes so men could keep working.

At the other extreme, the cold during the ensuing winter was just as bad, while the AF still lacked adequate work-stand shelters to put over the B-36 engines where mechanics worked with numb fingers.

Keith Lofftus, sergeant/engine mechanic, remembers working 36-hour stretches many times to check out problems and correct them, especially electrical problems.

He remembers changing a complete engine in 3 1/2 hours. And he'll never forget the heat—it got so hot on the wings you could fry an egg on them—he knows for sure, he tried it.²

Mechanic Robert J. Christian was assigned to a ground crew on A/C 075. He remembers falling into ranks every morning in front of the squadron orderly room with the flight crew, and then marching off to their aircraft to be assigned to the work duty of the day. He recalls that it took nearly one month to get ready for a major mission. However, several years later during the Korean War, B-36s flew three missions a week.

Christian remembers they were using the dock maintenance method in the early 1950s instead of the crew chief method.

Previously a five-man ground crew maintained an individual aircraft. "I liked the crew chief method much better because there was *esprit de corps* then; those assigned to dock maintenance just worked at a job. At least we had a plane to be proud of," Christian reflected.³

Mechanics had their hands full—hydraulic leaks, exhaust system failures, fuel leaks, electrical system failures. No question, there was difficulty in keeping B-36s in commission. However, all aircraft which are new and unique pose problems in the initial phase until a complete range of spares are provisioned and

the maintenance crews gain experience.

The B-36 posed a larger problem than normal mainly because it was a bigger aircraft than normal.

THE CONTROVERSY

The big controversial bombers of the 7th Bomb Wing roared into the air almost every day from the Carswell runway. They remained untouched by the turbulent battle of the B-36 that was going on in Washington, D.C. Secretary of the Air Force W. Stuart Symington called in General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, AF Chief of Staff, and his top generals in June 1948 to review the capabilities of the B-36 program.⁴

Comparative charts of the B-36's performance matched against those of other bombers in service or under development were studied. A series of meetings resulted in the Air Force deciding to stand by the B-36, satisfied by Convair's own test flights and by the initial training missions being made by Bartlett and his crews.

One of the fundamentals of disagreement among high-ranking military men in Washington, as well as elsewhere, was the basic theory of strategic air power and whether it had been truly effective in the strategic bombardment of industry and war-making potentials of Germany and Japan.

This cleavage of opinion had a direct bearing on the debate in which the B-36 became a whipping-boy.

Gen. Vandenberg, in the late summer of 1948, brought back from Europe iron-jawed Lt./Gen. Curtis E. LeMay, who had just built up the phenomenal Berlin airlift. LeMay took over the Strategic Air Command in October as it shifted to Omaha, Nebraska, closer to the heart of the nation, from Andrews AFB, near Washington. One of his first tasks was to take stock of the B-36 Operational Training Program, just beginning. Being a man of action and few words, LeMay laid down a schedule of training missions to put planes and crews through their paces, so he might evaluate what they could do. The Navy's admirals,

watching this postwar Air Force program jell into a definite policy, burst into open and bitter opposition. President Truman had called the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the leaders of both sides in this controversy for a conference at Key West, Florida. The conference was held March 12-14, 1948. There the admirals stated their thesis: that strategic air defense and offense should be the function of the Navy's air arm with its far-ranging carriers. In particular, they wanted to build a \$188-million super-carrier, USS UNITED STATES, to prove their point. They called the B-36 "a sitting duck as a target," privately, then publicly. They insisted it was too slow to evade the postwar jet fighters which a potential enemy could be expected to muster against it. The Air Force generals retorted that supercarriers also would be "sitting ducks" as targets for fast enemy snorkel submarines, land-based bombers and jet fighters.

The Key West conference ended with an agreement that strategic air defense and offense should be the responsibility of the Air Force. But this paper agreement didn't end the matter. The barrage of criticism against the B-36 in the late fall of 1948 and spring of 1949 became terrific. Lt./Gen. LeMay kept the training missions of Bartlett and his crews strictly under wraps.

Bartlett and the little coterie of 8th AF pilots who ruggedly pioneered the B-36 training flights kept their own counsel in the face of mounting criticism over the B-36's effectiveness. They did the same when subsequent blasts came from certain high-ranking officers of the Navy which finally culminated in the Congressional investigation examining the entire B-36 program.

Between flights, Big John boned up on his technical knowledge of the B-36's complex systems and carefully made notes on its known flight characteristics as he and his first class of B-36 pilots had observed them. More and more frequently he found himself standing before a blackboard diagramming, explaining, putting down equations, briefing classes of officers and airmen. Backing up Bartlett solidly in these trying months was M/Gen. Ramey who sent him to Omaha (Offutt AFB) SAC Headquarters. Lt./Gen. LeMay requested a briefing for officers there on B-36 fundamentals. The formal presentation with huge charts and diagrams illustrated the straightforward story which Major Bartlett, B-36 pilot, had to tell. Brig./Gen. John B. Montgomery, SAC Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, supervised the presentation acting as a "stage carpenter," running the pointer, changing charts, standing by to answer questions. "Some of us had faith in the SOB—and it could have made us or broken us," Bart remembered.

Shortly afterwards, the burly flyer from Montana found himself in the Pentagon confronted by the assembled high brass of the Air Force listening to his story. Later presentations were made before the Secretaries of the Air Force, Army, Navy, Defense Department, as well as the Joint Chiefs of Staff. By this time, Bartlett had acquired the enthusiasm of a zealot for the largest bomber in the world, which had been his job to get into operation for the 8th Air Force.

"It's a great ship and if some of these guys who were criticizing it would come for a ride in it with me, I'd prove it to them beyond any doubt," he would say. In a few weeks the B-36 was the subject of Congressional hearings.

THE PUBLICITY FLIGHTS

Bartlett's first B-36 flight with an all-Air Force crew wasn't exactly uneventful, as recalled by Charles Johnson, Jr., Engineer-



7th Bomb Group B-36s on the ramp at Carswell AFB in Spring 1949. Notice only simple work scaffolding in use at the time. (General Dynamics, Fort Worth)



Few B-29s were left by the Fall of 1949 at Carswell AFB. New triangle symbol on B-36 tails denoted 8th Air Force. (General Dynamics)



Ground crew mechanics working on R-4360 engine. (Acme)

Eleven crew members with full equipment walking toward a red-tailed beauty, B-36B, 44-92041 in preparation for pre-flight checkout. (USAF)





President Truman personally inspected a Carswell B-36 while on display at Andrews AFB, February 15, 1949. B-36A,44-92010. (USAF)

ing Officer, 492nd Bomb Squadron. Johnson was third pilot on that flight.

For starters, the B-10 ground starter malfunctioned and Convair had to bring one over from the factory. On take-off, the left landing gear wouldn't retract and Bart had to send a man out in a parachute to manually solve the problem. Before the 2 ½-hour flight was over, it was necessary to feather the number 2 engine.

Bartlett would make many flights, most without major in-flight problems including an important public relations flight.

He flew the CITY OF FORT WORTH to New York for static display during the opening celebration of New York's Idlewild International Airport. The new airport was dedicated on Air Force Day, August 1, 1948, by President Harry S. Truman.

A spectacular 700-plane fly-by was led by Big John's B-36 "Flagship" in its national debut. Actually, three bombers from the 7th BW participated in what was the first public B-36 formation flight.

The B-36 was the center of attraction to more than one million persons to view it on the Idlewild ramp during its week's stay. Bartlett joked to newspaper reporters that he was "scared to ride in a little plane like a Cub."

On October 8, an introductory "Press Party" was given at Carswell, and some 100 writers from all parts of the nation were invited to Fort Worth to see and ride in a B-36.

Amon Carter gave a big western-style barbeque for the writers at his Shady Oak Farm on the shore of Lake Worth, directly under the glide path of the bombers taking off and landing on their training flights.

Some of the newspapers represented were the *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, *San Diego Union*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *New York Times*.

Carter startled his guests, especially the easterners, by firing the two Colt .45s strapped to his hips into the air in typical exuberant Texan style.

The writers were almost unanimous in their praise of the B-36, many being impressed with the size, complexity and maneuverability of the bomber, as the demonstration plane, BM-019, cruised over the Texas countryside.

The press would come to know the B-36 better in the months to come and it would frequently refer to the B-36 rather dramatically as "Superbomber" or "Atomic Bomber."

THE B-36B

The first fully combat-equipped B-36 model was B-36B, BM-026, which was flown by Convair on July 8, 1948. It was later delivered on Thanksgiving Day.

Powerplants on the B-36B were improved R-4360-41 Wasp Majors with water injection. They developed 3,500 hp each compared to 3,000 hp of the -25s used on prototypes and B-36A models. At "combat weight" the B-36B had a top speed of 381 mph and a 42,500-foot service ceiling.

An AN/ANQ-24 Bombing-Navigation Radar and AN/APQ-3 Gun-Laying Radar in the tail was carried. Armament consisted of 16 20mm cannons in eight remote-controlled turrets. All the turrets were retractable except the nose and tail turrets.

Convair accelerated production from six bombers delivered in November 1948 to 12 B-36Bs in December. By year's end, SAC had 35 B-36s at Carswell.

Bartlett had become a major when he made his record-setting simulated night "attack" on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1948. He flew his new combat-ready B-36 from Carswell to a point just off Oahu and dropped a dummy 10,000-pound bomb without its presence ever being detected by the Hawaiian Islands defense network. Needless to say, the 8,100-mile non-stop, non-refueled flight caused much concern and confusion over responsibility in the Islands afterwards, but it did demonstrate the B-36's future potential.⁹

Strategic Air Command Headquarters stated that this mission, the first away from the U.S. mainland, was part of SAC's program to "improve the proficiency of the bomber crews and achieve maximum performance out of the plane and equipment." Gen. LeMay said his command would "continue training of B-36 crews on such flights."

Another B-36B made a successful record bomb drop on January 29, 1949. BM-043, flown by Major Dillon, released two dummy "Grand Slams" weighing 42,000 pounds each over Muroc Dry Lake (Edwards AFB) from 30,000 feet and 40,000

feet respectively.

Upon touching down back at Fort Worth, the right landing gear collapsed and investigation revealed that a subcontractor had made an unauthorized weld in the gear column. BM-043, however, was in the experimental shop for only 15 days, record time for repairs under Convair superintendent Ray Snow.

In March, Bartlett brought home to Fort Worth a B-36 which had just completed a spectacular 9,600-mile non-stop flight, without refueling, carrying another 10,000-pound bomb load for 5,000 miles of its course before dropping it into the Gulf of Mexico. Big John had gone on this flight as Flight Director, with Capt. Roy R. Showalter of Mobile, Alabama, as pilot and aircraft commander, Lt. Clarence E. Horton of San Antonio as copilot, and M/Sgts. John L. Corley of Fort Worth and Carl W. Arey of Susquehanna, Pennsylvania, as flight engineers.

Point-to-point on a map, the bomber's route measured 9,100 statute miles, but the navigator's log showed it had traveled 9,600 miles in the air when it landed in the morning of March 12, 1949. It had been in the air for a record of 43 hours, 37 minutes.

When the 139-ton B-36B came in for a landing, it still carried fuel for two more hours of flying, but it had two engines dead and had bucked terrific headwinds over the Rocky Mountains for several hours. Bartlett was confident that without engine trouble and this unfavorable weather, the plane could have exceeded 10,000 miles, the range Convair originally designed it to accomplish.

It had flown a course across the U.S. from Fort Worth to Minneapolis and Great Falls, Montana, then turned diagonally across the nation southeastward to Key West, Florida, where President Truman was vacationing. After releasing its bomb load in the Gulf, it headed northwestward again back to Great Falls

Informational sign for the "City of Fort Worth" while on display at New York Idlewild International Airport opening celebration, August 1, 1948. (USAF)



Air Force Secretary W. Stuart Symington, Senator Lyndon B. Johnson meeting pilot John D. Bartlett in front of B-36B 44-92078. Maj/General Roger M. Ramey appears to also be enjoying the occasion with the rest of the group. (USAF via John D. Bartlett, M.D.)

and Spokane, Washington, before finally returning to Fort Worth.

Air Force officers now were quick to point out that this latest performance of the B-36 proved clearly that it could be used from bases in Alaska, Labrador or Maine to strike any potential enemy in Europe and return safely to a base in Greenland, the Azores, or Okinawa.

Bartlett was particular that on this trip, as on the Pearl Harbor day flight to Hawaii, there should be "no cheating"—the plane was not "stripped," but carried its normal load of fuel, tons of equipment, and three six-man life rafts.

THE 11th BOMB GROUP

On December 1, 1948, the 11th Bomb Group was reactivated and assigned to the 7th Bomb Wing. It was to become the second B-36 operational unit.

The 7th Bomb Wing reorganized to consist of the 7th Bomb Group and 11th Bomb Group together with support units.

AF planning originally was to have a B-36 group assigned 18 aircraft: three operational squadrons of six bombers. However, by late 1948 it had been decided to increase the number assigned to a group to 30 bombers: 10 B-36s per squadron.

Lt./Col. Harry E. Goldsworthy was in command of the 436th Bomb Squadron, 7th BW, when the second B-36 to be delivered to the Air Force was assigned to that squadron. Later he commanded the 11th Bomb Group as it was equipping with B-36s.

The 11th Bomb Group was to consist of the 26th, 42nd, and 98th Bomb Squadrons. The 11th had the earlier B-36As assigned to it, while the squadrons of the 7th Bomb Group received the newer B-36Bs.

Since the base had been designed for B-25s, not the huge B-36, there was a certain amount of crowding on the Carswell ramp.

The 7th BG's aircraft filled up the southern end of the flight line and the newly organized 11th BG's planes began to fill in the northern area overlooking Lake Worth.

Lt./Gen. Goldsworthy recalls, "The flight crews that tran-



Red-tailed B-36B, 44-92043, being rolled out of the factory. Notice dull magnesium center fuselage compared to nose and rear fuselage sections. (General Dynamics, Fort Worth)

sitioned into the B-36 were highly qualified. Most of them had completed combat tours in the B-29. Others had come from the Training Command and had much flying experience behind them. The maintenance crews were also well qualified, based on several years of experience. Many of them had gone through the difficult early days of the B-29. So our personnel were experienced, dedicated, and hard working.

"We had problems with the engines and the alternators. The sparkplugs tended to develop lead deposits which caused back-firing at altitude and this prevented achievement of the performance inherent in the airplane. The alternator was a good system but had some reliability problems as it was put into production.

"The air crews termed each flight in those early days as an adventure because of the unique problems encountered. Engine fires were not infrequent, but since the engines were on the rear of the wing and aft of any primary structure, engine fires were not catastrophic.

"We soon found that the pilot's compartment at the front end of the extended fuselage could generate a severe whipping action in turbulence, so it was prudent to keep well strapped-in at all times, particularly during landing."

Goldsworthy remembers the early publicity flights such as the Idlewild International Airport dedication: "It was to be the nation's first look at the B-36 and it was a monumental failure as far as the B-36 was concerned. Few airplanes were in commission and most of those got aborted. I don't recall how many airplanes reached the east coast or if any got there at all. The 8th Air Force and the 7th Bomb Wing suffered considerable embarrassment, therefore, a few months later when another fly-by for another major event was scheduled for Washington, D.C., B-36 participation became a priority task." Goldsworthy refers to the B-36 flyover participation during the presidential inauguration on February 15, 1949. The 7th and 11th Bomb Groups dispatched five B-36s for a flyover over the Capitol for the inauguration and 11 more for an aerial demonstration at Andrews AFB and a static display there. President Truman personally inspected the aircraft on display.

"Ground crews worked around the clock and instructors took

advantage of every available flight hour to check out air crews. When the day came, we had airplanes in commission, but the heavy maintenance schedule had robbed us of training time and we had not completed the full check-out of the required number of crews.

"To meet the commitments, we launched crews that had never made a night landing in the B-36 or done much more than conduct local transition flights, that had never flown the airplane under actual instrument conditions. This was a source of concern because the crews had to recover at night and there was bad weather en route.

"But the crews were all experienced in the B-29. The B-36 put on a real show, but the tales that were recounted the next morning were a little frightening. Some airplanes flew with a single alternator. If they had lost the remaining alternator, they would have been without all electrical power and the B-36 was singularly dependent on electrical power. Loss of electrical power most probably meant loss of the airplane. One airplane was hit by lightning and lost all the alternators momentarily, but got them back on the line, a feat that was hard to duplicate under ideal conditions. One crew inadvertently pumped thousands of gallons of fuel overboard and had to make a night emergency landing on a field north of Fort Worth that was used for primary flight training, a field far too short for a six-engine bomber. It is a credit to the highly skilled flight crews and the basically sound airplane that there weren't more serious incidents.

"The crew that remained overnight at the primary training field timed their take-off the next morning for the time all the cadets were marching to class. They put full power on the lightly loaded B-36 and became airborne with about the same take-off roll as that required by the trainers based there. Quite a topic of conversation for those future Air Force pilots."

On the 7th Bomb Group . . . "When I commanded the 11th Bomb Group there was always a great amount of competition with the 7th Group. The 7th Group was the primary B-36 wing with first priority and we delighted at beating them in flying performance. For example, there was a bit of pressure for Air Force crews to complete a combat profile of over 7,500 miles. That an 11th crew was the first to accomplish this was a great

deal of satisfaction. The B-36, as delivered, did not have a mechanical rudder lock. Instead they had a hydraulic bleed valve that was supposed to allow the rudder of parked airplanes to slowly weather vane with the wind thus preventing any structural damage. A fine idea, but one that neglected the force of Texas winds. One day a thunderstorm skirted the airfield and damaged the rudders of every plane on the line—except one. An 11th Group plane was undergoing maintenance work on the rudder, and the huge maintenance stand which surrounded the tail protected the rudder from the force of the wind. So the 11th Group had the only B-36 in the world that was flyable. We couldn't wait to get it into the air so we cranked up and taxied by the 7th flight line with great satisfaction, prepared to establish another 11th Group first. But when the airplane was in take-off position, a freak Texas wind tore the rudder off. A more severe storm hit the field in 1952 and did considerable damage to the B-36 inventory.

All-in-all the crews grew to like the airplane if not the long and boring missions. The B-36 was an honest airplane, simple to fly, and the six engines provided a good safety factor."⁶

THE RED-TAILED BEAUTIES

While training continued, qualifying 7th BW air crews on the B-36A models, some B-36Bs appeared on the Convair ramp in fall 1948 sporting bright red tails and wingtips.

These selected aircraft were the "red-tailed beauties." They were to be part of the polarization test program, consequently were painted as such for Arctic identification.

Air Force planning evidently called for a number of B-36s to be able to strike from northern advance bases. These bases were to be at Goose Bay, Labrador, Limestone, Maine and Fairbanks, Alaska. They were to be airworthy and ready to take off in less than six hours upon alert.

It was planned to have 18 aircraft participate in this "GEM Program," evaluating the B-36's operational capabilities in extreme cold weather areas.

The red-tailed B-36s were the most colorful operational B-36s and certainly drew attention, being very visible in flight or on ground.

John Bartlett, at this time, also had his own personal machine painted bright red—a sporty MG convertible.

B-36B, BM-033, 30th bomber off the production line, was flown by Maj. Dillon on a test flight and was the subject of some excellent photography.

The red-tailed aircraft were sort of a symbol in a way, because they were a real, tangible expression of SAC's growing intercontinental power to reach a potential enemy over polar corridors.

It was likely the high visibility of the "red-tailed beauties" led to eventual elimination of their special identification.

Undoubtedly, they also made excellent targets with large 47-foot-tall tails. These B-36s were the only operational models to ever feature such a dramatic paint job. Only the NB-36H nuclear test vehicle, not to fly until 1955, was as colorful an aircraft.

The first B-36 to undergo cold weather testing was B-36A, BM-007, the fourth B-36A off the production line. It was flown on June 18, 1948, to Eglin AFB, Florida, to be tested in the climatic hangar where temperatures were lowered 10° every three hours down to -72° below zero.

Other aircraft being tested at that time included a B-17, B-29 and a new B-45 "Tornado" jet bomber.



Coming in low off the Gulf of Mexico bombing range, B-36B, 44-92042 displays the graceful planform wing of the big bomber. (General Dynamics, Fort Worth)

Purpose of this program at the Eglin Air Proving Grounds was to evaluate the effect of extreme temperatures on bomb bay doors, turrets, landing gear and other functioning components.

Red-tailed B-36Bs also underwent cold weather tests for two months in early 1949 at Ladd AFB, Alaska.

On August 4, 1949, two B-36s completed initial training missions to Alaska with Bartlett bringing his plane back to Carswell first, making the flight from Eielson AFB, near Fairbanks, to Fort Worth in 11 hours and 30 minutes. The second plane was flown by M/Gen. Ramey and carried M/Gen. Orville A. Anderson, Commandant of the Air War College.

By this time, the 7th Bomb Wing was putting more than 900 hours a month in B-36 operations.

THE OTHER BASES

M/Gen. Thomas S. Power, Deputy Chief of SAC (later Commander of SAC) put a B-36 through its paces on August 6th, flying a wide circle around Texas including a mock interception, and bounced through a thunderhead at 40,000 feet en route back to Carswell.

After bringing the bomber in for a smooth landing, he said, "It's a great ship, and handles very easily." The General's flight saw the mock interception attempt by F-82 Twin Mustangs occur over Austin. The fighters were from the 27th Fighter Group from Bergstrom AFB near there.

Gen. Power confirmed to the press that the dispersal of B-36s, now clustered closely around the ramp at Carswell, to other bases in North America was under study.

Col. William P. Fisher succeeded Col. Alan Clark as the 7th BW and Carswell's Commanding Officer, and he indicated new B-36 groups were to be established at Rapid City, South Dakota, and Riverside, California.

Men from the 15th AF, 28th Bomb Wing, had been training at Carswell for several months receiving intensive OJT B-36 training working on the flightline with 11th Bomb Group airmen. The cadre of 54 men included squadron commanders from the 72nd, 717th and 718th Bomb Squadrons headed by Lt. Col. Stanley E. Scarborough. Lt. Col. Goldsworthy of the 11th



First B-36B, 44-92026, the 23rd production aircraft off the assembly line. Although 73 B models were originally ordered, only 62 were

eventually delivered, the remaining 11 were converted to B-36Ds on the assembly line. (General Dynamics, Fort Worth, via John W. Caler)

BG was assigned as Project Officer to work with the 15th AF men.

The first B-36 arrived at Rapid City AFB, home of the 28th Bomb Wing, on July 13, 1949. Training had paid off, for a 28th crew won the individual crew bombing proficiency award in the October 1949 SAC Bombing Competition.

However, the 28th BW changed on April 1, 1950, from a bombardment to reconnaissance mission. It became the 28th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing (H) and assigned to the 8th Air Force.

The base at Riverside (March AFB) never received B-36s and Fairfield-Suisun Army Air Field's 5th Bomb Group began conversion of RB-29s to B-36s with the arrival of its first two RB-36s on January 9, 1951. Eventually, another 43 aircraft were assigned over the next 22 months. The 5th BG became the 5th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing (H) assigned to the 15th Air Force. The 5th consisted of the 23rd, 31st, and 72nd Bomb Squadrons. Fairfield-Suisun later became Travis AFB.

THE IN-FLIGHT PROBLEMS

During a luncheon talk in Fort Worth, February 22, 1949, General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, AF Chief of Staff, said the development of the B-36 as an intercontinental bomber had changed the entire concept of strategic air warfare, and that the Air Force was not disturbed by clever, underhanded cracks that continued to be made at the B-36, mostly by anonymous writers of published stories who didn't quote anyone but tried to make their comments appear to be official.

His advice to the 8th AF B-36 squadron commanders was: "The whole Air Force is good, but we've got to make it better. Look sharply at your training and let's keep pushing the standard upward."

B-36 training missions usually averaged about 24 hours, one entire day and night. Few were for less than 10 hours, and 30-hour missions were fairly common.

The longest B-36 flight ever flown, however, was made by a Convair crew. This record 1951 endurance flight lasted from 0905 hours January 14, to 1225 hours, January 16. The aircraft was an RB-36 A/C 2090, and was in the air for a staggering 51

hours and 20 minutes—two whole days and nights!

As the 7th and 11th Bomb Groups accelerated training, received additional aircraft, and flew more and more simulated combat missions, in-flight difficulties became more frequent.

Nineteen forty-nine, the first full year of B-36 operations at Carswell, did see a number of flying incidents and a major tragedy. It was Capt. George Benedict's B-36 that was struck by lightning in February 1949 on the way to participate in the B-36 flyover during the Presidential Inauguration. The rare occurrence burned a 10" hole through the fuselage and a larger area was scorched. The 15-man crew considered themselves lucky, but the damage suffered was only minor.

Benedict was cruising eastward at 17,000 feet over Texarkana, and had just nosed into a towering cumulus cloud formation, when there was a brilliant flash and bolt which shook the plane. He left the formation of 15 other B-36s which continued on to Washington, and returned to Carswell.

In March, a B-36 piloted by Capt. James R. Cooper of the 9th Bomb Squadron made a forced landing at Westover AFB, Massachusetts. None of the crew members was hurt, but it was quite an experience. Lt./Gen. Goldsworthy recalls the incident: "The crew had taken off on a long-range flight and the airplane was heavily loaded with fuel. They were flying over New England and had just flown out of a bad weather area and were about to penetrate more weather when they lost all alternators. This took place during darkness. Suddenly and without warning, they lost all their electrical power which meant the cockpit was plunged into darkness, and all the instruments were gone. All efforts to get an alternator on the line were fruitless. So there they were without any lights, instruments or navigation aids. They had radios only as long as the batteries held out, and they had to use them with great care. It also meant that they had no brakes, no prop reverse, and no nose wheel steering. Further, they could not change the prop pitch or the carburetor mixture controls.

"The crew was able to identify an airfield as they flew around in threatening weather. As I recall it was Westover. But because of the heavily loaded airplane, poor runway conditions and darkness, they elected to remain at altitude and burn off fuel before

attempting to land. Flying that big airplane with no instruments beyond a magnetic compass and on a black night, was a demanding job. Further, they had to worry about how the engines would react at landing altitude when they couldn't change from the long-range cruise RPM and mixture setting. They knew that at best, they would suffer a severe reduction in available power. The most experienced B-36 pilots and a factory representative gave the best technical advice, but it remained up to the crew.

"After a long and tense night, the crew made a successful landing with only minor damage as they left the runway and hit an instrument landing shack. As the plane came to a stop they couldn't shut down the engines because it required electrical power to activate the switches. They had to pump foam from a fire truck into the intakes to smother the engines."

July saw two incidents: Capt. Milton C. Green, 436th Bomb Squadron, was making a short training hop when two engines quit and he headed back for the Carswell runway. He landed safely with number 1 and number 3 engines dead. Damage was minor and no one was injured.

Another 436th Squadron B-36 reported number 3 engine caught fire at an altitude of 40,000 feet. The engine burned completely out of the wing trailing edge and fell in a farm field.

Electrical controls of the other two adjacent engines were disrupted and they were shut off.

Capt. Harold L. Barry turned the plane for Carswell only 20 miles away and made a safe, smooth landing with only three engines, all on the same wing.

A humorous side note: the engine dropped off, strangely enough, near a small Texas town called Drop.

August saw Lt. Wesley L. Pendergraft's B-36 crew "sweat it out" for three hours over Fort Worth with a faulty hydraulic landing gear that had to be lowered manually. The plane made a good landing with a feathered propeller on number 2 engine.

Col. William P. Fisher, 7th BW CO, stated that month, "The B-36 has its troubles and 'bugs', but is rapidly approaching operational status with excellent characteristics."

In December, Capt. Deane Curry feathered one of the engines on his B-36 during a routine navigation training flight. He made a successful emergency landing at Barksdale AFB, near Shreveport, Louisiana. He had alerted the crew for possible



11th Bomb Group ramp area at Carswell AFB in late 1949. Aircraft in rear displays new yellow and black striped markings on front doors and top of tail. (Acme)

ditching and advised several bases he was flying under emergency conditions when instruments began to function improperly.

Less than 24 hours later after Curry set his B-36 down at Barksdale, another B-36 from Carswell, piloted by Capt. Robert V. Green, came in for an emergency landing as a precautionary measure after developing engine trouble. The 16-man crew was on a practice bombing mission and carried a load of dummy sand-filled bombs.

THE CRASHES

On the night of September 15, 1949, the first major B-36 tragedy occurred. There was a Maximum Effort mission underway at Carswell and as the second plane roared down the runway at 7:45 P.M. for take-off, it failed to pick up the speed necessary to become airborne. It ran off the end of the runway, crashing into Lake Worth.

It was the first fatal crash of a B-36 after more than 5,000 hours of successful flights. The plane, a/c 079, was from the 9th Bomb Squadron, 7th Bomb Group and piloting was Major Toy B. Husband, starting a routine training flight. Eight men were rescued, but five men were lost, and the bomber was completely destroyed.

Major Husband described the take-off during an interview the next morning: "Everything was ship-shape at the far end of the runway and we started into what appeared to be a routine take-off. She came up and was airborne for a few seconds, five or ten feet off the ground, when all at once she settled back in. We tried to throw the propellers into reverse and brake, but it was too late. The only thing to do was hold the nose up and try to ditch in the lake."

Copilot Major John H. Keene continued: "We felt the jar when the tail hit and then the nose came down with a real smash. We all knew it was coming, and started getting out." . . . "Great splashes of water shot back from the nose when it hit," Flight Engineer 1st Lt. Richard L. English said, and added: "I was wet before we even got out of an escape hatch, and when I got out I was washed several hundred feet from the plane and

Three Carswell B-36s overfly the Capitol during President Truman's Inauguration, February 15, 1949. (General Dynamics, Fort Worth)





Hulk of B-36B, 44-92079 lies in Lake Worth after crashing the night of September 15, 1949. (Fort Worth Star-Telegram)

was swimming hard when a rescue boat arrived."

English repeated what seemed to bother them all the most: "Every panel, every instrument checked perfectly before we moved out. Everything was normal."

Of the five crew members that were killed, one died from impact injuries and four from drowning.

A Navy diver, M.R. Best, from nearby Arlington, probed the lake to locate the pilot's compartment which broke from the fuselage and sank after the plane crashed. It had settled 25 feet below the surface. Best found two of the fliers on the navigator's deck still strapped to their seats by safety belts and parachute straps, indicating the crash impact knocked them unconscious.

Salvage operations by the 7th Maintenance Squadron began after the missing airmen were recovered. By Sunday, two days later, the 100,000-lb. hulk of the B-36 had been towed to the shore and beached. The broken left wing had already been reclaimed.

M./Gen. Ramey termed the crash as a very regrettable accident, and declared that "no guesses, but a careful and thorough investigation" would be made. He said the crew would be questioned in detail and that the wreckage would be studied painstakingly.

He pointed out that the mishap was the first in two years of 8th AF B-36 flying and that "accidents will happen as long as we operate machinery, whether it be roller skates or aircraft."

Subsequent inquiry revealed that two propellers had inexplicably reversed, serving as a brake on the B-36's take-off speed. To prevent such an accident from occurring again in the future, a procedure of releasing the brakes slightly while checking out each propeller, from the outboard to inboard, was instituted and was referred to as the "LeMay shuffle."

Robert Christian remembers the problem: "The only way to know a propeller was in reverse was to stand in front of it and feel the air movement. One ground crew run check was to reverse numbers 1 and 6 (outer), 2 and 5, and 3 and 4 (inboard) engines running up in front of each engine to feel the wind. Before a B-36 take-off on the end of the runway, one of the crew members up in the forward compartment would jump out and see if all engines were blowing in the same direction toward the

tail. If all right, he would hop back in and off they'd go. This was in the early B-36 models and later propeller reverse lights were installed to give pilots an indication."

To encourage observation of take-offs for additional safety and keep pilots "on their toes," a little incentive was offered the ground crews. If a pilot dragged his tail on take-off, he had to buy the maintenance crew a case of beer. This way every air crew knew that they were being watched on take-off, and if any problems were observed that could not be seen from inside, the ground crew would notify the pilot.

The question of whether the pilot actually dragged his tail was easily settled. The B-36 had a hydraulic tail skid with a pressure gauge on it, so if the insides of the gauge were blown out, that was a case of beer!

More training missions to Alaska were scheduled in February 1950 to test operational characteristics under severe winter conditions.

Bartlett, now a Lt. Colonel and Commander of the 436th Bomb Squadron, piloted one of the B-36s to Eielson AFB. The crews found the weather at Eielson 45° below zero. Bart remained for a conference of squadron commanders with their Group CO, Col. John A. Roberts.

One of Bartlett's pilots was Capt. Harold L. Barry, who had earlier successfully brought the B-36 into Carswell with only three engines, after dropping a burning engine off the aircraft.

Capt. Barry left Eielson and started homeward with his B-36, A/C 075, assigned to the 436th. As the plane approached the coast of British Columbia in the early morning hours of February 14, it radioed: "One engine is feathered, two others are losing power. We are descending." Ten minutes later another message was received by a sister plane: "At 17,000 feet in severe icing. Instrument and engine trouble. Severe emergency. Going to let down through overcast to lose ice. Letting down due to icing and an engine fire. Alerted crew to bail out but may ditch."

No further messages were received. The plane's position was approximately 460 miles northwest of Seattle over the Queen Charlotte Sound.

Barry's radio operator spotted a small island, Princess Royal Island. In the darkness and howling Pacific gale, the 17 men aboard parachuted out of the disabled bomber.

A large-scale air and sea search was launched, with 12 planes scanning the island for signs of the airmen. Searchlights from a Canadian destroyer played along the shoreline throughout the night as flares from low-flying aircraft penetrated the darkness of the island's interior. Four parachutes were sighted dangling from trees.

Lt. Ernest O. Cox told of snagging a tree and watching the burning B-36, set on automatic pilot, veering around after all the crew had abandoned it. "It suddenly appeared in the distance coming toward me; it was making a gradual left turn. I thought it was coming right at me. Then it turned and went right by. It went inland, then out to sea." He didn't see where it finally went down.

Twelve survivors were eventually found. They all had endured miserable cold and hunger for more than 30 hours before rescue teams brought them off the rocky wooded island. Five men were still missing and the search continued for several days.

John Bartlett flew from Alaska to Seattle, then to Fort Worth, obtained permission from his CO and returned to Vancouver, B.C., to confer with Canadian officials to see if he could find his

lost men.

The exhaustive search proved hopeless and the five men were never found. The RCAF did find a life raft floating off Princess Royal Island in stormy Hecate Strait, pretty well establishing they perished at sea.

Findings as to the cause of the crash indicated severe carburetor chamber icing that resulted in backfiring and fire in two engines.

Two relatives, who refused to accept as final the Air Force's notice that their loved ones died in the crash, flew to Vancouver and searched a nearby island to Princess Royal. Mrs. Neal A. Straley, whose husband was a sergeant/gunner, returned to Fort Worth after a grim 24-day search. Her comment after arriving back in Fort Worth was, "What I was searching for was peace and contentment in my own mind. I feel better now."

Mrs. Straley made the search with Mack F. Phillips whose son, Capt. William M. Phillips, the plane's navigator, also was reported dead.

Men of the B-36 squadrons had it brought home to them sharply that training in this global plane, transporting them within a few hours to extremes of climate and the earth's remotest areas of wilderness, was deadly serious business indeed. They must be prepared for anything. These training flights had revealed a lot of unknowns. Cold weather operations had bared tricky metal shrinkages, unexpected behavior of fuel and lubrication, difficulties of clothing and the crews' health which would need correcting.

Flight surgeons began studying the effects of fatigue on long missions of 24 to 40 hours, of in-flight feeding, of proper clothing for the transition from temperate zone bases to extreme high altitudes over 40,000 feet, and also, survival in the Alaskan environment.

THE TROUBLE-SHOOTER

Bringing the B-36 up to full operational status and combat effectiveness was a team effort. However, if one individual were to be credited with being primarily responsible for that accomplishment, it might be the late Clarence S. "Bill" Irvine.

This author had the pleasure and privilege of interviewing Lt./Gen. Irvine (then retired) August 15, 1973, in Los Angeles while he was acting as a consultant for Rockwell International on the B-1 bomber program.

It became apparent why he was spoken of by others so highly, respected and well liked by both officers and enlisted men.

Reflecting later on his colorful recollections, occasionally punctuated by "expletive deleted," he seemed as adventurous, enthusiastic, capable and as thoroughly charming and likeable as ever. He was approaching his 76th birthday.

Clarence S. "Bill" Irvine was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, December 16, 1898. He attended St. Paul College and the University of Nebraska, enlisting in the Air Service in 1918. He flew as an enlisted man before taking flying training at March Field, California, and Kelly Field, Texas, receiving his wings and reserve commission in 1921.

That year he flew in the bombardment tests conducted by General Billy Mitchell against old German battleships off the Virginia capes. Irvine was commissioned in the regular Air Corps in 1926 and spent the next four years as a gunnery and engineering officer at Selfridge Field, Michigan, and Clark Field in the Philippines.



Clarence S. "Bill" Irvine, M/Gen., Commanding General 7th Bomb Wing and Carswell AFB, 1951. (USAF)

For three years he was the top aerial gunner in the Air Corps and, during this period, he flew part-time for Hollywood in early aviation pictures.

William Wellman, director of *Wings*, which was being filmed near San Antonio, asked for some assistance and young Lieutenant Irvine was sent from Selfridge Field.

There were problems with this first major aviation film, and Irvine with his engineering background came up with solutions, such as how to mount the camera in back of the pilot's head and how to simulate an airplane on fire, trailing smoke behind it (lampblack and flour mixture). He got to play the infamous Red Baron, Von Richtofen, and actually used catsup as blood.

Of course, the tall, blond, handsome lieutenant availed himself of female attention whenever possible. Later, he flew in the Howard Hughes aviation epic, *Hell's Angels*.

In 1930, he began the first of many assignments to Wright Field as an engineer. He was promoted to captain in 1936 after attending the Air Corps Engineering School. He went to the Army Industrial College in 1938 and returned to Wright Field as a key man in aero-engineering, inspection, industrial planning and production control.

Still loving to fly, he helped set an international altitude record in 1939 in an experimental model of the B-17. During this period, he was instrumental in developing the four-engine bomber production program. He also was familiar with the XB-15 and XB-19.

In early 1943, Irvine, then a Colonel, went to Headquarters Army Air Forces as Special Assistant for Aircraft Production and later, in April 1944, as Chief of the Very Heavy Bomber Program, being personally involved in the production and modification of the B-29.



B/Gen. Clarence S. "Bill" Irvine, Commanding General 7th Bomb Wing and Carswell AFB, 1950. (USAF)

He went to England and North Africa to conduct bombing tests under combat conditions, and moved to China to help plan bases for B-29 strikes and the airlift support over the hump.

In late 1944, he was transferred to the Pacific as Deputy Chief of Staff for the 21st Bomber Command, with specialties in supply and maintenance for combat B-29s.

After the war Irvine remained in the Far East as Chief of Staff of the Pacific Air Command, with Headquarters in Tokyo.

During 1945 and 1946 he planned and flew several record long-range flights in B-29s, including the spectacular non-stop 9,422-mile Honolulu-to-Cairo flight in 39½ hours in a plane named PACUSAN DREAMBOAT.

In 1947 he was assigned to Headquarters SAC at Andrews AFB, and in late 1948 became CO of SAC's 509th Bomb Wing at Walker AFB, New Mexico, where he was promoted in September 1949 to Brigadier General.

The 509th was the original Air Force unit trained expressly for atomic bombing.

Irvine had been a frequent visitor to Carswell during 1948 for conferences with M/Gen. Ramey and 8th AF staff officers working out details of the "cruise control" efficiency technique which he originated. The technique enabled B-29s to stretch their normal operational range upward from 2,500 to more than 4,000 miles.

On January 3, 1950, Carswell AFB received a new commander, as did the 7th Bomb Wing. B/Gen. Irvine assumed authority relinquished by Col. William P. Fisher and a new era began at Carswell for the B-36.

Irvine's arrival had no less impact on the base than if a tornado had touched down! Earlier in the fall, General LeMay had called Irvine and asked him to take over the B-36 groups at Carswell.

Many of the planes were grounded for maintenance and mechanical difficulties and LeMay said Secretary Symington had given him six months to, in effect, shape up the B-36 Wing or he'd be fired. LeMay told Irvine he now had six months.

Actually "Bill" Irvine was probably the most qualified man to do the job—he had extensive engineering experience, aircraft development background and operational combat experience.

To make the B-36 into an effective combat aircraft truly required more than average effort—it would require initiative and imagination—two qualities that B/Gen. Irvine brought to the program.

Originally, Irvine was to also have command of the B-36 units equipping at Rapid City and Fairfield-Suisun AFB. But he decided it was better to concentrate his efforts on the two groups at Carswell.

One of his first actions was to relieve the 11th Bomb Group CO, who he believed was resting on his World War II medals. Col. Richard H. Carmichael (he later became a major general) was succeeded by Col. Thomas P. Gerrity in March 1950.

Col. John A. Roberts continued commanding the 7th Bomb Group. Roberts was a fair, firm and well-organized officer—a good group commander—but he wasn't quite a "problem-solver" type like B/Gen. Irvine and Col. Gerrity.

Gerrity, at the time, was Chief of the Bomber Branch in the Aircraft and Missile Development Section Air Materiel Command, Wright-Patterson AFB. Like Irvine, he also had an engineering background and was familiar with the B-36, having been Project Officer at Wright for the B-36.

Irvine was having breakfast one morning, wondering why Gerrity wouldn't assist more than he had with Irvine's huge problem, the B-36, and decided his friend, Gerrity, ought to know more about the problems being encountered first-hand down at the operational level.

Irvine called General Cook, CO at Wright, and checked with General K.B. Wolfe, AMC.

He joyfully called Gerrity in Dayton to start packing his bags and said he'd see him soon at Carswell. There was a B-36 on the ramp that hadn't flown in seven months and he wanted to see it in operation.

Irvine made an agreement with General LeMay that any crews that he could get into the top 10% of SAC would be promoted one grade—a "spot" promotion. Officers that did not live up to standards would receive a "free ride" to Omaha and personally explain their substandard performance. Realizing that one of the things that was needed at Carswell was improved discipline, B/Gen. Irvine instituted a number of policies.

Prior to his arrival, pilots would have a couple of beers at the Officers Club in the morning, have a leisurely lunch and perhaps take off at 2 o'clock coming back from a four-hour training flight at 6 P.M. They might return at 2 A.M. for another four-hour night operation. This not only was an inefficient schedule but raised hell with maintenance procedures.

Irvine called the wives of the officers together for a meeting and asked them to help by getting their husbands to bed, retiring at a decent hour, so they could be fresh to produce a good day's work. He wanted them out of the Officers' Club.

An order was issued that every B-36 flight would be scheduled for 24 hours. Take-off was 10 A.M., returning the same time the next day. Failure to properly accomplish the training mission would result in being "on the carpet" in B/Gen. Irvine's office. The second time an officer appeared, he was transferred. It was rough and that's the way "Bill" Irvine wanted it.

Previously, only the ground maintenance crew worked on the aircraft, but Irvine decided the air crew should be present during duty hours even if it was only to hand wrenches to the mechanics. He wanted an officer present at all times during a 24-hour period. Irvine was present too—he frequently ran up and down

the ramp in his staff car questioning the A/C duty officer about how the plane was progressing. He knew the status of every B-36 at Carswell.

He made much comment circulate in the Inspector General's office, but Irvine knew the 7th Bomb Wing needed discipline and proper motivation. By this time, Irvine had earned a nickname—"Turbine" Irvine, for being such a driver.

However, he did relax occasionally and took his golf seriously, shooting in the low 80s with intent.

Respect was growing for him, even with his harsh measures. He associated on all levels and the enlisted men began to appreciate old "Turbine."

The B-36 was a magnificent piece of machinery, but demanded systematic maintenance, strict operational procedures, and a well-organized supply program. Irvine worked hard pushing AF Procurement for funds for necessary support equipment and parts to improve the B-36. He had to, on occasion, secure needed parts right off aircraft moving down the Convair production line.

While having mess one day in the Pentagon, Secretary Symington came in and put a hand on Irvine's shoulder and told the two Air Force Materiel officers with him to "give Bill whatever he needs." Irvine just happened to have a six-million-dollar list of requirements available in this briefcase, including desperately needed workstands.

There had been no money set aside for the workstands, but Irvine was determined to get it. \$500,000 was soon appropriated for the workstands. Now the problem was time, for it would take many months for the Corps of Engineers to do the job. Consequently Irvine decided the stands should be portable and therefore a local contractor in Dallas could build them.

He called the non-coms together who would actually work on them, and asked them what they wanted from a design viewpoint. They were to work with the contractor. The stands were to have four large wheels to qualify them as "portable," but they would be immediately bolted to metal plates placed around the wing of the aircraft. Each one of the 16 sets of stands was large enough to envelop a major section of the B-36's wing.

Convair Plant Foreman Bob McGuffee remembers B/Gen. Irvine: "He had called over to Convair to send a crew over to assist with several B-36 problems. While the group discussed the problems of a nearby aircraft, a portable stand was noticed having rolled off the pavement into the mud. As the airmen struggled with the large stand, General Irvine pitched in to help."

Beryl Erickson remembers Irvine frequently calling him at two or three o'clock in the morning needing some advice or assistance.

The B-36 used vacuum tubes, over 3,000 of them. Reliability was not up to desired levels to say the least. Irvine had every tube in every B-36 tagged with a date to help determine useful hours. He found that the 6T6 tube used in the radar bombing system failed easily. It was the same tube costing 41¢ used in army jeep radios. However, this tube needed higher requirements for the B-36. Irvine called in GE, Motorola, Raytheon and other firm's representatives. He took them for a ride in a B-36, running the radar and other systems at full power with many tubes failing as a dramatic demonstration. New tubes were developed and reliability improved.

Another area where Irvine's expertise was of great value was in creating the machine tools required for the B-36. Being a



Running up engines is 11th Bomb Group B-36A, 44-92010, considered the most reliable aircraft during the command of Lt. Col. Harry S. Goldsworthy. This B-36 was selected for President Truman's personal inspection at Andrews AFB, Maryland, February 15, 1949. (Lt/Gen. Harry S. Goldsworthy)



Munitions personnel load the tail stinger of a B-36. Each gun carried 600 rounds of ammo with the exception of the nose turret guns which had only 400 rounds each. (USAF via David A. Anderton)

B-36B, 44-92077, framed by another 7th Bomb Wing B-36. Notice sliding panel roll-type bomb bay doors, later to be modified to quicker snap-action hydraulic doors. (RKO Radio Pictures via Walter Jefferies)





Four B-36Bs of the 7th Bomb Group cruise over the Texas countryside. (USAF)

problem-solver by nature, he instrumented several aircraft with monitoring equipment, such as cameras focused on instrument panels to help determine what had occurred during a malfunction.

Of course, not all his time was spent on the ground; he still flew, too. Once, while over Albuquerque, Irvine was at 40,000-plus feet with another 7th BW B-36 and called on his radio to a nearby base to send up a fighter to try and intercept them. An F-86 Sabre Jet scrambled, but was unable to successfully reach and zero in on the planes. On another flight, Irvine had to make an emergency landing at Palm Springs with three engines out.

Gen. LeMay and Secretary Symington made an unannounced visit to Carswell to inspect the base and see how Irvine was progressing. They chose a time unaware that Irvine was launching a Maximum Effort mission and had closed the field. B-36s were rapidly taking off at intervals, but would take over a half hour to complete.

As LeMay and Symington approached the base, their plane radioed in for permission to land. Irvine, informed of this by the tower in his aircraft, told the tower it was to inform anyone that the field was closed until the last aircraft took off. LeMay and Symington, who happened to be on the same frequency overhearing Irvine's orders, complied and had to circle the field for a time.

On May 24, 1950, five months after he assumed command of the 7th BW, four B-36s made the first landing outside the continental United States. "Bill" Irvine, all smiles upon landing at Ramey AFB, Puerto Rico, was in the lead plane. Captains W.L. Pendergraft, George L. Benedict, A.H. Pritchard, Jr., and 1st Lt. Edward C. Barrett were pilots for the flight.

Morale was improving greatly at Carswell. Maintenance and supply problems were starting to diminish. Solutions were being explored to correct or minimize operational difficulties. Reliability of the B-36's systems was a goal aggressively pursued. Flying hours were mounting with valuable crew training experience being gained.

Carswell, the home of the B-36, was beginning to really take pride in itself and the big bombers. The Officers' Club featured large murals of the Peacemaker in flight. Even the street signs toted the B-36—the name boards were shaped cut-outs of the plane.

B/Gen. Irvine and HQ Strategic Air Command began planning another mission to another part of the world.

THE HONOLULU TRIUMPH

The Congressional hearings held in August and October 1949 were over. The B-36 had been exonerated and the 7th BW was in high spirits. B/Gen. Irvine had been pushing maintenance crews along the flight line extra hard since the flight to Puerto Rico the previous month.

Ten planes were being prepared for a "long mission." Strict security was imposed on the squadrons. Picked crews, which had shown the greatest proficiency in training, were chosen to man the planes.

On the morning of June 19, 1950, 10 B-36s thundered down the runway at 15-minute intervals. Four hours after the last plane was away, Headquarters 8th AF announced they would land that evening at Fairfield-Suisun in California. Four days later, eight of the B-36s put out from that field on a westward flight. Two returned to Fort Worth because of mechanical problems.

Headquarters SAC revealed that seven of the westbound planes were on orders to fly a 38-hour mission to somewhere in the mid-Pacific. The eighth, that flown by Lt. Col. Bartlett, carried spare engines and parts and was proceeding direct to Honolulu.

Honoluluans crowded vantage points to watch Big John's B-36 land at that city's international airport and taxi across the Hickam AFB. Many recalled he was the pilot who mysteriously visited Hawaii the night of December 7, 1948, dropped a simulated bomb load offshore from Oahu, and returned to Fort Worth without radar defenses in the Islands ever detecting him.

The big airman grinned to the Honolulu reporters who met

Twin 20mm cannons paired in upper gun turrets on the B-36. All turrets were retractable except those in the nose and tail. The B-36 had the heaviest defensive armament ever installed on a bomber. (USAF)





Publicity photograph taken at Eglin AFB, Florida, showing size comparison of the Air Force's newest bomber with famous WWII aircraft. B-36B, 44-92029 leads formation flight of a B-29, B-17, B-26 and F-51. (USAF)



Six-engine B-36B undergoing weather tests at Ladd AFB near Fairbanks, Alaska, winter 1948-1949. (USAF)



Special engine-carrying "pods" installed on test plane 44-92026. These were the type of pods used on Lt. Col. John D. Bartlett's B-36 to carry spare engines on the June 19, 1950, long-distance flight. (General Dynamics, Fort Worth)



him and stated, "I reluctantly turned my back on Hawaii that night, but it's a thrill to set down here now."

A few hours later, Lt. George Cameron left the main flight and also brought his B-36 into Hickam because of engine trouble. The other six planes held a rendezvous 100 miles from Hawaii and proceeded in a box-shaped formation over Diamond Head, circling low over Honolulu before landing. It was a spectacular sight.

Irvine, chewing on a cigar and smiling broadly, said at a news conference, "B-36s can now be treated like any other planes and are out of test class." They had flown 10,000 miles from California to the other side of the world and returned safely, on schedule, to an American base.

Whether the mission had included a real or simulated bomb load for all or one of the planes was not disclosed. The planes held aerial rendezvous four times to test the navigational skill of their crews.

After leaving Honolulu, the planes rendezvoused over San Francisco and followed separate courses across the United States. The six B-36s went no further west than Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands, 2,400 miles southwest of Honolulu. Each plane followed its own flight plan; sometimes they were 1,000 miles apart. Irvine described the final rendezvous 100 miles from Hawaii as "a beauty—they met within 20 minutes after flying 3,000 miles by different courses." It was easy to see the general from Fort Worth was pleased.

J.W. Larson, Convair's chief engineer and one of the men instrumental in making the B-36 a reality, had landed with Irvine from the flight over Kwajalein Atoll and Midway Island. Larson and Bartlett greeted each other on the airport ramp and watched the other Carswell B-36s coming in over the city.

"This is a big moment for me," Bartlett told the engineer, his voice tense. "It is for me too," Larson replied, his own speech gruff to hide his emotion.

A few days later they both returned to Fort Worth. Larson was in time for his 20th wedding anniversary, his arms loaded with boxes of Hawaiian flower leis for his wife.

Big John just relaxed at home with his wife, Clara, and their children. He enjoyed doing a little garden work. Bart wore a colorful Hawaiian sport shirt remembering the triumphant Hawaiian arrival of 7th Bomb Wing B-36s from their biggest and longest mission. He also remembered the glittering carpet of lights around San Francisco Bay as his plane reached the mainland, homeward bound.

In a few weeks Bartlett would have a different assignment—that of technical advisor for a future motion picture epic about the B-36, *High Frontier*.

There would be many more long-distance flights in the future. In March 1952 "Bill" Irvine assumed command of the 8th Air Force and eventually became Deputy Chief of Staff for Material at Headquarters USAF. He retired as a Lt. General on May 15, 1959.

Reflecting back on the B-36 program, he spoke at the retirement ceremony on February 12, 1959, for the last SAC B-36 to be dedicated as a memorial at Amon Carter Field (Greater Southwest Airport, now closed).

As for the 7th Bomb Wing, it had been a long hard task, but in the two years since SAC received its first B-36, the big bomber was practically combat-ready at last, thanks to outstanding air- men like John D. Bartlett and Clarence S. Irvine.

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"Red-Tailed Beauties of the 7th Wing" is respectfully dedicated to the memory of Lt/Gen. Clarence S. "Bill" Irvine.

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Meyers Jacobsen with the late Frank Tallman at a press conference, Montgomery Field, San Diego, CA, April 11, 1978.

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Meyers K. Jacobsen has been working his Research Project #6911 on his favorite aircraft, the Convair B-36, since 1969.

Previous articles written for the AAHS, covering the development of the XB-36 and the early production program, were published in 1970 through 1974 *Journals*.

Jacobsen is employed as an interior designer and presently resides in San Diego, California. He also is an avid aviation enthusiast, and is currently project designer for the proposed Aero World aviation theme parks being planned for San Diego, California, and Orlando, Florida.

Jacobsen is in the process of completing a major book on the B-36, scheduled to be published in 1980. A previously completed "PROFILE" on the B-36, co-authored by AAHS member Ray Wagner, may be available next year.