

“A MAN AND HIS DREAM”

Part 1: In The Beginning

By Wayne M. Gomes

Many dream of finding a treasure, Tony Mazzolini's dream was of finding and recovering a WWII, B-29 Boeing Super-fortress. After 12 years of grinding research, Tony found what he was looking for, and then the struggle to obtain this aircraft started. The aircraft is probably the last known B-29 airframe in the world that is capable of being restored to an air worthy condition.

Back in March 1945, the Wichita built Boeing B-29-70-BW Super-fortress, was delivered and accepted by the U.S. Army Air force, and assigned serial number 44-69972. In late March 1945, the Super-fortress was sent to a modification center at Birmingham, Alabama. Records indicate that on April 16, 1945 the B-29 was sent to Barksdale Field, Louisiana. Later that same month it was transferred to the Air Force Ferry Command at Cincinnati, Ohio. After this entry there was then a seven-month gap in the aircraft's records and it is thought the aircraft was being operated overseas, but no records to substantiate this has been found.

On November 11, 1945, the aircraft was sent to Peyote Field, Texas, for storage with the 4141st Base Unit. In October 1950, the aircraft was transferred to the 2753rd Aircraft Storage Squadron (Air Material Command).

After this rest, the Air Force found a need for the B-29 and it was brought out of storage and sent to Kelly Field, San Antonio, Texas, for additional modifications and was designated a TB-29. In July 1951, it was assigned to the 7th Radar Calibration Squadron (Air Defense Command) at Griffiss, Air Force Base, Rome, New York. In November 1951, the TB-29 went to Robins, Air Force Base (Air Material Command), Georgia, for minor modifications and then returned to Griffiss AFB. In late 1952, the aircraft was reassigned two other times, first to 109th and then to 1st Radar Calibration Squadron both at Griffiss AFB.

Early in 1953, the TB-29 was sent to Tinker Air Force Base, in Oklahoma (Air Material Command) for minor modifications. A short time later, the aircraft returned to Griffiss, and in March 1954 the TB-29 was assigned to 4713th Radar Evaluation Flight (Air Defense Command), and the 1st Radar Calibration Squadron. It was at this time that the squadron of eight B-29's was named "Snow White and Seven Dwarfs" and

the Disney characters were painted on the nose of each fuselage. TB-29 44-69972 was named Doc. It was recently discovered that there were actually nine B-29's in the squadron and that the ninth aircraft was named the "WICKED WITCH" and the Disney character also appeared on its fuselage. (More history has recently been uncovered, along with the discovery of five men that at one time or another served as crewmen on "DOC". Their stories and additional history will be in a future update to this story.)

In March 1955, "Doc" was sent to Arco Manufacturing Company, Berry Field, Tennessee, for still more modification. In May 1955, "Doc" was assigned to target tow duty with the 17th, and later the 4750th Tow Target Squadron (Air Defense Command) at the Yuma County Airport, Arizona, and soon there after went back into storage.

In March 1956, "Doc" was dropped from the U.S. Air Force inventory and was transferred to the U.S. Navy. "Doc" made its last flight on March 14, 1956, when it was flown to the U.S. Naval Weapons Test Center at China Lake, California. It was there on the Mojave Desert that this obsolete warrior was to be used as a target for weapons testing.

After several weeks of waiting the once proud Super-fortress' number was up and was to be the next target. "Doc" was taken to a revetment where it would meet its end, but fate took a turn, as the first shot missed its target. It was several days before a second attempt was made. These shots also missed the target and shortly thereafter a directive was issued that aircraft such as this would no longer be used as targets for missile and rocket testing. (It has been rumored that an order had been issued to miss the target). "Doc" was later removed from the revetment and towed several miles onto one of the base's remote test ranges, where for some 42 years it would become a sun-baked sanctuary for birds and many other desert creatures. But one could still see the shine from its bright aluminum hulk for many miles. It proudly stood with wings still attached and the faded but unmistakable outline of "Doc" still visible on the side of the fuselage.

One day in 1987, more than 30 years after leaving the revetment, a man approached the aircraft, but this time the aircraft was being evaluated as a possible restoration candidate. The

man was Tony Mazzolini an Air Force veteran who trained as an aircraft mechanic, crew chief and finally a flight engineer on several multi-engine aircraft during his tour of duty.

Mazzolini was born and raised in the Cleveland, Ohio area, and returned there following his years in the Air Force. He had worked as a draftsman and lab technician for Thompson Products, now known as TRW, and later went into the graphic arts industry and retired from the position as a Division General Manager for General Electric after 25 years of service. Too young to stay retired, he found employment with Continental Airlines knowing this would keep him working closely with aircraft. He is now the Regional Manager of Material Services (aircraft parts).

In the early 1980s, Mazzolini became involved in the Confederate Air Force (CAF). (Now known as the Commemorative Air Force) A friend and acquaintance Tennessee Ernie Ford, who was a B-29 navigator/bombardier, told Mazzolini that his talents could be better utilized as an engineer on the CAF's B-29 "Fifi". Mazzolini became deeply involved, devoting vacation time to work on, as well as fly on "Fifi". Having a strong desire to make a contribution to the CAF, he sought out another B-29 to add to the organization's fleet. He started his search for a B-29 in 1984. He contacted every air base where the big bomber had operated from and found nothing. He made many phone calls and wrote letters, but there was not another B-29 to be found. Mazzolini contacted the Disney Studios in Southern California in search for information on the B-29s used in the making of the movie *The Last Flight of Noah's Ark*. This also led to a dead end as all of the B-29s they used were scrapped or dumped into waters off the coast of Hawaii.

In the early 1980s, Mazzolini was President of the Air Force Association in Cleveland, and it was at one of their functions he had the opportunity to meet and become good friends with General Paul Tibbets (famed pilot of the *Enola Gay*). Additionally, Mazzolini later started the United States Aviation Museum, of which he is currently the Chief Executive Officer. In 1987, Mazzolini contacted the U.S. Navy's China Lake Naval Weapons Center in Ridgecrest, California, where in the past, a few B-29s had been salvaged for static displays for a number of museums across the country. He was told every thing had been blown apart during weapons testing. He then desperately begged for any parts that may still be left out on the ranges, but was told that there were none. Later during a conversation with one of the base contacts it was mentioned that there was one B-29 still intact out on one of the ranges that someone was keeping for future museum purposes. After much correspondence, the U.S. Navy agreed to allow Mazzolini to inspect this aircraft.

Unable to gain support from CAF officials after the death of Lloyd Nolan, the founder of the CAF, as well as the feeling of a competitive limited tour market for two B-29s, it was suggested not to include another flying B-29 into the CAF's fleet. The feeling of having the world's one and only flying B-29 without competition prevailed. After this lack of support and constant end-runs the consideration to go it alone was the decision of choice.

There were many more obstacles thrown into Mazzolini's

path. People with political and financial clout made a number of attempted end-runs to sabotage the project, government agencies, continual delays and approvals for action, paperwork was lost and the decision to demilitarize (cut into scrap) the aircraft—later reversed by special waiver of the Secretary of the Navy, were only a few of the road blocks in Mazzolini's quest. There were many other hair-raising tales, which happened about every other week during the long arduous negotiation and barter fulfillment process.

Mazzolini was about to give up trying to acquire this aircraft for after many unanswered letters and telephone calls, fruitless frustration was setting in. But with continuing help and encouragement from many close friends such as Gen. Paul Tibbets, he did continue his efforts. With much help from some of his many contacts Mazzolini finally succeeded in having the title of the B-29 transferred to the National Naval Aviation Museum, Pensacola, Florida.

In later negotiations with the Naval Museum, Mazzolini learned they would trade the title of the B-29 for a B-25 restored to their specifications and configuration. The Naval Museum at Pensacola wanted a B-25 for static display. The U.S. Marines and the U.S. Navy designated them PBJ's and they represent a part of Naval aviation history. The U.S. Air Force "Doolittle Raiders" flew several B-25's off the deck of the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Hornet* on the first air raid on mainland Japan.

Now that Mazzolini had located a B-29, he needed to start a search for a B-25. This search was as frustrating as locating a B-29, and pricing started at \$300,000. One was finally located and acquired from the Venezuela Air Force. It was a B-25J, serial number 44-29035. Mazzolini had it dismantled, packed into two sea containers and shipped to Florida, through hurricane Andrew, where it was reloaded on a train and finally shipped to Cleveland. The eventual loss of the restoration building in Wickliffe, Ohio forced the project to be delivered to the Air Heritage Museum in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, to complete the final modifications.

It was finished and delivered to the Naval Museum at Pensacola in March 1998. The aircraft is displayed as a PBJ-1, Bureau number 35087. Upon delivery of the B-25, Mazzolini received clear title to the B-29.

It took a lot of negotiating and help from many volunteers to move the B-29 from its resting place of forty-two years in the California Mojave Desert to a location at the then "Bud McGee Air Park" at the Inyokern, California Airport. It took five days for volunteers and major contributors such as U.S. Rentals, other local companies and a multitude of community volunteers to tow "DOC" the 38 miles. U.S. Rentals, a major contributor and other local companies, as well as a multitude of community volunteers helped tow the aircraft across the hot dusty desert floor and down a major highway. An Environmental Impact Study (which took six months) had to be made, Cal Trans had to be on hand to give guidance in moving around power poles and cable systems, and the California Highway Patrol was brought in to direct traffic.

There were many obstacles to overcome and without such dedication from people from all walks of life and all of the vol-

unteers, this B-29 would still be setting out on the desert. People from the neighboring towns of Ridgecrest and Inyokern, along with many military personnel; have given great support to this project.

Tony Mazzolini's dream is becoming a reality. He has given so much of himself to make this happen. He owes a debt of gratitude to many, especially his wife Mary Ann, his children Lisa, Anthony and Claudine, whom have made many sacrifices so that he could pursue his dream.

Tony Mazzolini's dream and the goal of The United States Aviation Museum is to help preserve the great aviation rich heritage and accomplishments of this country, to provide a tool in which our children can learn and see an example of what their fathers and grandfathers had to use in facing this country's enemies at that time in our history. Also to preserve this B-29 for the many veterans that served on aircraft like this and many others. We are losing our veterans at an alarming rate; we want to honor those that are still with us, and those that have passed.

The dream became an obsession, and the obsession a reality, and the rest is becoming history.

FOOT NOTE

The author would like to advise that as this restoration unfolds, we are constantly learning of previously unknown information and material, and that it will be told and documented in future updates to this story.

In this segment, The Boeing Airplane Company of Wichita Kansas is not mentioned, as they were not yet involved with the project in the time period this story covers, but without them, there would be no project.

In a future update we will tell of the Boeing Airplane Company's Wichita, Kansas facility's involvement with the restoration, and of when and how it started. Also we will give some information on "DOC'S" crewmen that have recently been discovered. We will tell you how "DOC" hit the road to Boeing Wichita, and of the people that got him there. There will be photographs of the new nose art recently applied on "DOC'S" nose and of the artist that painted it. There is much, much more to come.

Wayne M. Gomes. U.S.A.M.

The next segment of "A MAN AND HIS DREAM" will be titled: "Who said, You Can't Go Home"

Far more information, please contact the A.A.H.S. or Wayne N. Gomes 970-245-6860, to send a contribution make checks payable to The United States Aviation Museum P.O. BOX 2417 Grand Junction, CO. 81502

The Principals



Above: Tony Mazzolini, CEO for the United States Aviation Museum, and the guy whose dream it was to save "DOC". He is photographed as he approached the derelict aircraft on one of his many trips to the site prior to gaining the aircraft's release from its desert tomb. On each occasion, tears would well up in his eyes at the possibility of acquiring "Doc". Photo by, Wayne M. Gomes. Author, A.A.H.S. February 1998



Above: The Author, Wayne M. Gomes, on the right with good friend "HAP" Halloran photographed at the entrance of the Boeing Company's Experimental Hangar, where the restoration of the B-29 "DOC" has commenced. "HAP" was a B-29 Navigator and Bombardier during WWII. HAP's B-29, "Rover Boy's Express" was shot down on their 4th Mission over Tokyo, and Hap survived being a POW for the duration. Photo by, Lora Boys, Boeing Project Coordinator. September 2001



Left: Dick Ziegler is The Boeing Aircraft Company Customer Service, and Public Relations Representative. He is also the Restoration Project Director for the B-29 "DOC". Without Mr. Ziegler it is very doubtful this restoration would have ever come to be. Photo by Wayne M. Gomes, Author, A.A.H.S. September 2001

The Location



Above: The sign just outside of the U.S. Naval Test Base, near Ridgecrest, California, where the B-29 "DOC" had been since it was flown onto the base in 1956. The U.S. Air Force turned over to the U.S. Navy nearly two hundred other B-29s that were used as targets for various types of testing. Doc" was but one of only a few that were saved. "DOC" is the last complete air frame that can be restored to flying condition. Photo by, Wayne M. Gomes. Author. A.A.H.S. February 1998



Above: The nose wheel is seen half submerged in the desert sand, where it had not moved for over 43 years. It took two tractor haulers and 9 shear pins, 4 days to pull the B-29 from its hole in the sand and tow it 38 miles to safety. Photo by, Wayne M. Gomes. Author. A.A.H.S. February 1998



Above: If you look closely you can see the mark of the Rams Head on the engines main stack depicting that the R 3350-57 radial engines on "DOC" were built by the Dodge Truck Division, of Chrysler Motors Corporation. Photo by, Wayne M. Gomes. Author, A.A.H.S. February 1998



Above: A photo of the B-29 "Doc's" 41 section (nose section) as it looked after the 43 years old derelict sat on the Mojave Desert in California. (Note the Flight Engineer's station on the left). This photo was taken in May of 2000 when the B-29 first entered the Boeing Aircraft Company facility in

Wichita Kansas to begin its restoration. Photo courtesy Boeing archives Wichita, Kansas May 18th 2000



Above and right: The broken out and crazed glass over the pilot and copilots position gives testimony to the ravages of 43 three years of harsh desert dwelling that the aircraft was subjected to. It became a sanctuary for lizards, birds, and many other desert creatures. Photo by Wayne M. Gomes, Author. A.A.H.S. February 1998



Riddle: How do you eat an elephant?

Answer: One piece at a time.



Above: The late Scott Livingston, a dedicated member of the United States Aviation Museum is photographed as he and other volunteers begin the task of dismantling the B-29 for its trip to the Boeing Aircraft Plant in Wichita Kansas. The major part of the dismantling and the trucking of the large aircraft was managed by Ben Nattrass, owner of World Wide Aircraft Recovery LTD. Photo by, Wayne M. Gomes, Author, A.A.H.S. February 2000



Above and below: The wing center cap is carefully lifted from the fuselage. This will allow the separation of the two forward sections and the center wing section. It took Worldwide Aircraft Recovery about 6 weeks to totally dismantle the B-29. It took 4 trucks and trailers three trips to deliver the aircraft to Wichita, and with out a scratch I might add. Photo by Cliff Gaston. U.S.A.M. March, 2000



Above: After the Wing-center-cap was removed the wing assembly minus the engines, ailerons and flaps removed the wing can be lifted complete. Photo by, Wayne M. Gomes, Author, A.A.H.S. February 2000

Below two photos: The Horizontal tail is removed from the aft section of "DOC" and put onto a support Cradle, that was designed to protect it in transit. The tail gunners compartment is in plain view. Note the fabric covering of the control surface has been rotted away. Photo by Cliff Gaston. U.S.A.M. March 2000





Above: After its journey to safety from the desert, "DOC" sat in a yard in Inyokern, California for nearly two years prior to being dismantled. This was the site that was to become a western location for the United States Aviation Museum, due to the lack of support and funding, this never materialized. Photo by Wayne M. Gomes, Author. A.A.H.S. October 1999.



Wayne M. Gomes Public Relations for the United States Aviation Museum greets, General Paul Tibbets at a dinner in the Generals honor. The dinner was held at the Marriott hotel in Wichita, Kansas, September 2001. and was hosted by Boeing Aircraft Company, in Wichita, Kansas.