B52 Global Bomber Said Too Big For Britches When on the Ground

Editor's note: This is the last in a series of dispatches by a veteran United Press correspondent who recently visited the Strategic Air Command's security-tight B52 base in California. In it he describes the unique problems which have faced the Air Force in transition to the world's largest intercontinental bomber.

By GLENN STACKHOUSE
United Press Correspondent

Castle Air Force Base, Calif.—(UP)—When the Strategic Air Command switched over to the big B52 globel bomber last year it adopted a hell-raising baby.

She's an angel in the air—a bomber pilot's dream girl. But she's an overweight, squalling brat on the ground.

The trouble is, she's just too big for her britches. The Air Force never handled anything like this droop-winged, shark-tailed monster.

Temperature Rises

When all eight of her 11,000 horsepower jet engines are revving up she sends out such a tornado of heat and wind that a man can't stand up within 600 feet of her tail. At that distance, a ground crewman can be sent tumbling tail over teakettle. At the distance of three football fields the temperature suddenly rises 30 degrees.

This Central California SAC base now has a $369,000 fund in the mill design and build blast deflectors behind each plane on the apron. Until these are ready, the ground crews have to tow them to the end of the runway before takeoff so that the blast can blow out across the countryside instead of tearing up the air base.

Another factor is noise. They put up such a racket that they literally can make a man nauseated. Maintenance men are continually reporting to the base hospital with ear trouble—sometimes serious trouble.

Restricted Hours

At present, the orders at Castle are that the B52s will not take off or land at the base between the hours of midnight and 6 a.m. so that the residents in Merced, five miles away, can get some sleep.

The Air Force has found that the big babies need an 11,800 foot runway, as thick as five super-highways piled up and as flat as a pool table.

When Castle's runway was laid out for the B52's predecessors, the B47s and B50s, it was considered just dandy. No so for the B52s. Pilots immediately began complaining that the strip was "wavy." As the big birds roared down the runway at about 150 miles per hour, they began "porpoising" with a rocking chair motion that threatened to send them out of control. They were bounding into the air and back to the ground as they got up flying speed.

A checkup found that at several places along the runway there was a six-inch rise spread over several hundred feet. They are now planing it off with a scraper to get that billiard table smoothness.

Open to Newsmen

Surprisingly enough, in view of all the super-tight security, newsmen visiting this base were allowed to scramble freely through the big ships, from the pilot's deck to the tail-gunner's lonely seat half a city block to the rear. The B52s carry a six-man crew including two pilots, a navigator, a bombardier, radioman and tail gunner.

It has a range of more than 6,000 miles and can easily fly around the world with its perfected technique of in-flight refueling. It can fly well over 50,000 feet at a speed in excess of 650 miles an hour.

It can literally flap its 185-foot wings. The wings droop like a tired seagull's when it's on the ground with the wingtips 10 feet below center. In flight, they may bend upward 21 feet above center as the plane pulls out of a descent.

Its eight-wheeled undercarriage can be steered from the pilot's seat like an automobile, allowing the plane to nose into a cross-wind in take-off and landing. This gives it a crab-like appearance as it swishes along the runway. The pilots call such a maneuver an "tyes-right take-off."

Staggering Statistics

The plane's statistics are staggering when reduced to common terms.

It weighs about half a million pounds loaded. It carries enough fuel to fill three railroad tank cars. Its engines suck in 8,450,000 cubic feet of air an hour—enough to fill a warehouse 1,000 feet long. Its electronic equipment contains 2,140 radio tubes—enough to buid 144 TV sets. Its de-icers require enough heat in an hour to warm up 56 five-room homes. Its electrical system could provide all the power needed for 70 average American dwellings. Its wheel brakes can absorb enough energy to stop 1,050 automobiles traveling 50 miles an hour.

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Chin Up Sale Scene of Activity

The Eagles Hall, at 217 West Main st. was a scene of much activity this morning as the Chin Up club opened its fifth annual hobby sale. Merchandise, made by valley people as a hobby, made up the largest portion of the sale.

The largest cooked food sale ever held in conjunction with the annual event also was a popular feature. Twenty dozen doughnuts were donated to the sale this morning by Jim Allen of the Big Y Bakery. Cakes, pies, cookies and candies also were featured.

Three commerical displays, by Singer Sewing Machine company, Sims Cycle and Hobby Shop and Mann's Department store, added to the show.

The sale will continue until 9 o'clock tonight and will be open from 10 a.m. until 9 p.m. tomorrow. The sponsoring club, an organization of physically handicapped persons, uses its share of the proceeds to carry on its projects throughout the year.

SALVAGED

Waterbury, Conn. — (UP) — Several weeks after Douglas Black reported this wallet stolen it was found in a bus, minus $10 but still containing $40 in a secret compartment.

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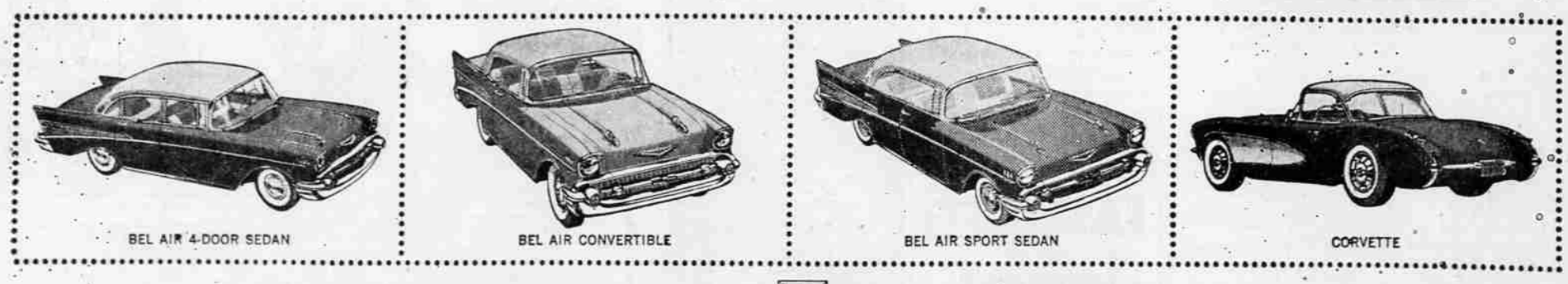

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