

# Eight Years Required To Put First B52 Warplane To Actual Flight

## Needless Time Lost By Acts of Pentagon,

Editor's note: This is the second of a series of articles documenting a serious situation in military aircraft production which imperils our national security.

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New York Herald Tribune News Service

Washington — A new airplane begins as an idea. The design comes later. In the beginning the plane exists as a rather shapeless concept pegged on the demands for speed, altitude and range for projected possible missions.

Today's B52, a 200-ton, twenty-eight jet monster that averages along 10 miles above continents and soars at 650 miles an hour, began in such a way back in 1945.

By January, 1946, this shadow concept had crystallized in the military minds, and a month later the (then) Army Air Force authorized several airplane manufacturers to submit proposals for such an intercontinental bomber capable of carrying the new atomic bomb 6,000 miles or so to an enemy target. At that date, the airplane was not planned as jet-powered.

**Build Eight Years Later**

On March 18, 1954 — eight years and three months, or 12,000,000 engineering man-hours later — the first production model of the Stratofortress, now a jet aircraft, was rolled out of the Boeing Airplane Co. plant in Seattle, Wash.

Gen. Nathan F. Twining, Air Force chief of staff, was the main speaker at the gala roll-out ceremonies at the big Boeing factory.

"To say that this is the greatest bomber in the world today is putting it very, very mildly," he said proudly. "And the progress that this airplane has made since the prototype was put on the line is something that has never been equaled."

But 44 days after — on May 1, 1954 — the U.S.S.R. delivered a painful blow to American military pride and complacency. At the annual air show in Moscow on that day, Soviet officials stood by, faces dead-panned, as their own intercontinental bomber, the Bison, flew overhead.

"Two years ahead of our estimate of their schedule!" Pentagon officials exclaimed. Some tried to justify this grave miscalculation by calling the lone Bison "a prototype — an experimental model."

Perhaps, out Air Force is not certain even now if that Bison was a prototype or a production model.

**Capable of Carrying Bombs**

The fact is — the Soviets had turned out an intercontinental jet bomber capable of carrying the nuclear bombs to our target cities, 25,000 had done it two years ahead of the date we had anticipated.

It is now believed that the U.S.S.R. designed, developed and flew their strategic bomber within a five-year lead time period, as compared to our lead time of eight years for the first production model of the B52.

This long lead time for the B52, future backbone of the Strategic Air Command, imperils the now questionable air superiority of the United States, as military leaders have admitted. Even now, according to some estimates, the Soviets have more intercontinental jet bombers than this country. The exact number of B52s is secret, but some sources put the total at 110. The Soviets are estimated to have possibly 200 Bisons.

How much unnecessary lead time could have been saved on the B52?

Boeing officials would not estimate specifically how many months or years might have been shaved from lead time on this bomber, but aircraft executives, talking with reporters, all said that Pentagon and Air Force indecision, red tape, inept programming and too-close supervision of manufacturing details caused needless stretch-out of lead time.

**Underscores Accusations**

An examination of the "life history" of the B52 illustrates and underscores many of the industry's accusations. The bomber development cycle, expressed in time spans chosen by these reporters only for the purpose of illustrating various phases of the B52 program, went as follows:

**First Time Span (32 to 36 months)** — After thinking about a big bomber during 1945, the (then) Army Air Force in February, 1946, invited aircraft companies to submit proposals for "preliminary studies" on such a plane. Boeing's proposal was accepted and the company was told in June, 1946, to go ahead with further study and design work. The Army Air Force order, however, was down the wrong track — for which, perhaps, it cannot be wholly blamed.

The mistake was in thinking of the future bomber as a turbo-prop airplane, one powered by jet engines hooked to propellers. At that time, the pure jet engine as we know it today was not regarded as a long-range power plant.

During this time span, however, both Boeing and the Air Force (which became a separate service in 1947) were studying the existing new jets — studying them in a quiet sort of way, apparently without telling each other. Boeing even made some tentative designs of a big bomber powered by jets.

**Second Time Span (approximately one week)** — One day in October, 1948 — two years and four months after telling Boeing to study and design a turbo-prop bomber — the Air Force had a surprise for the company. And Boeing had a surprise for the Air Force.

**Privately Favored Jets**

On that day, according to official Boeing accounts, company executives went to the Air Force's Air Materiel Command in Dayton, Ohio, to report on the turbo-prop bomber. They now were privately favoring the use of jet engines. Then came the Air Force surprise.

"In spite of previous indications," an Air Force colonel told the Boeing officials, "we no longer believe this (turbo-prop) type of airplane can be counted on to do the job we now have in mind."

"What we're interested in as of now," he said, breaking the news gently, "is a look at what can be done in the way of a long-range bomber powered by pure jets."

Though the Air Force had said nothing previously to Boeing about its change of mind on power plants, and had let the company proceed with work on the turbo-prop airplane, the colonel now went on to tell Boeing officials about a hot new jet engine being developed by Pratt & Whitney, the J57.

Some quizzical glances must have been exchanged by the Boeing men. For they already had talked with Pratt & Whitney about the J57 and had even made certain suggestions which had been incorporated into the new engine.

"What can you do with this new engine in the way of a specific design?" the colonel asked.

"We'll come in Monday morning with a new airplane," a Boeing official said with a straight face.

**Not Radically Different**

On Monday morning, after a week end of overhauling their tentative designs of a jet-powered bomber and after some happy but furious recalculation of weight factors, the Boeing men were back in the colonel's office with a 33-page loose-leaf volume of drawings of a bomber, not radically different from today's B52. They had worked out not only the basic mathematical elements of the design, but engineering Vice-President Ed Wells had whittled out a balsawood model, which is displayed proudly today in the Boeing office in Seattle, Wash.

"This is it," exclaimed the colonel.

It may seem surprising that officials of a big aircraft company should be dealing with an officer of colonel's rank on a project of this importance. But the fact is that officers of even lesser rank — majors, captains, even lieutenants — are vested with liaison authority over multi-million-dollar aircraft projects. Under, of course, the higher brass in the Pentagon. That's one reason for the delays.

**Third Time Span (11 months)** — One full year later the Air Force formally authorized Boeing to go ahead with engineering work on two prototypes of the jet bomber. The formal authorization had been preceded by informal approval from the Air Force.

**Design Switch Processed**

During this period, the design switch from turbo-prop to jet engines was being processed through the Pentagon mill which grinds out its decisions in its own fashion. But Boeing, sensing that the matter probably was clinched, went ahead with a start on the wooden "mock-up" which precedes construction of a flyable prototype, and with the first of an innumerable diversity of engineering investigations.

And a good thing, too. The Truman Administration was cracking down on defense expenditures and the military establishment was being pared to the bone. Boeing was forced to lay off 7,000 of its 30,000 employees in Seattle.

In September, 1949, the Soviets exploded their first atomic bomb.

**Fourth Time Span (24-25 months)** — In the closing months of 1949, Washington tensely reviewed the nation's long-range bomber capability. But with the big B36 propeller-driven bomber at that time in full production, a government-retained consulting agency said this country could not stand the cost of an inventory of bombers as expensive as the B52. Boeing had estimated for the government that a tentatively considered first production order of the bombers would cost a total of \$100,000,000. Production models delivered at the factory now cost about \$6,000,000 each.

By this time, the U.S.S.R. now with an atomic bomb, probably was starting production of a jet intercontinental bomber capable of carrying the nuclear weapon to the United States.

While the first prototype of the new bomber, the XB52, was being built under great difficulties and delays, especially with jet engines, more direful news hit Washington. The Korean war started in June, 1950. By November, the Chinese Communists had entered the war, and the long-range bomber issue became urgent — all the more so because the United States was embarked on the hydrogen bomb project.

**Secretary Convinced**

The then-Secretary of the Air Force Thomas K. Finletter was convinced, moreover, that the Soviets were racing to make the hydrogen bomb. He called for haste in pushing the B52 into production, even before the flight of the prototype. But budget officers cried "impossible!" They still deemed the cost of \$15,000,000 per plane to be too expensive for the United States.

In February, 1952, Secretary Finletter ordered 13 production model B52s.

The stark fact, however, is that the United States is estimated to have turned out only a few more than 100 B52s since inception of the plan 11 years ago. And the Soviets are estimated to have produced possibly 200 intercontinental Bisons in the seven years since they are believed to have launched their long-range jet bomber program.

Tomorrow: Decisions on the making of modern warplanes.

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Whatever today's B52 production, output is temporarily — but seriously — off schedule at the moment because of a fuel system defect. This developed during flight operations on models delivered earlier. Boeing is making adjustments on B52s on the production line to preclude defects in their fuel systems.

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**Columbia Pact Would Give Oregon Stronger Voice**

Salem — (UP) — Approval by the Columbia Interstate Compact commission of a pact prohibiting diversion of any Columbia river basin waters, if ratified by the 1957 Legislature, will give Oregon a stronger voice in planning comprehensive basin development, according to word received here today.

Charles H. Heltzel, Oregon public utilities commissioner, said from Spokane that approval of the pact culminates five years of work on the part of the Oregon commission.

The pact was signed yesterday afternoon following a two-day meeting in Spokane.

**Fair, Equitable Share**

"The final draft of the compact provides that Oregon shall have a fair and equitable share of power produced in the Columbia river basin," Heltzel said.

"A previous objectionable allocation formula was stricken from the draft at the insistence of the Oregon delegation" he added.

State Sen. Paul Geddes, Roseburg, vice-chairman of the compact commission, said approval guarantees an adequate stream flow for operation of Bonneville and other downstream power facilities.

No appropriation for upstream irrigation will be permitted that would interfere with the power capacity of the downstream plants, Geddes explained.

Heltzel said the Oregon delegation was enthused over the new pact.

**CHARRED POPCORN**

Evansville, Ind. — (UP) — The owner of a grain elevator which caught fire was looking today for someone to take 70,000 bushels of charred popcorn off his hands.