â€œBUFFâ€• Takes to the Skies This Day in 1954

Description

I grew up not far from the Boeing Plant in Renton, WA. My parents worked and met there. My uncle worked there. He once took me on a tour of a 707 being built for the King of Saudi Arabiaâ€¦(a â€œdual seatâ€• side by side gold plated set of â€œthronesâ€• were present in the head)â€¦He also showed me the very simple â€œDB Cooperâ€• lock installed on B-727s to keep jumpers from leaving before arriving at the jet way at the planned destination.

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B-52Ds in Action over Vietnam
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Butâ€¦the big news is the B-52A made itâ€™s first flight 53 years ago today. 3 were made, and Boeing used them for flight testing.The story of the genesis of this aircraft, from the initial design with propellers, to a radical new idea, hatched out of the requirements placed by the USAF, overnight, in a hotel room by the Boeing design team, to install 8 jet engines instead, brought this country a flexible, solid aircraft that will serve almost a full century in the military.Over the years, my path in life crossed that of the B-52. Living on Guam from â€™67 to â€™71, I watched the D models, bellies painted shiny black, take off and land at Anderson AFB, wing tips flapping up and down. One time, while on that base for a swim meet, a B-52 lost a wing just after lifting off the very long runway. It barrel rolled to itâ€™s death on the reef at the north end of the island, taking itâ€™s crew to a watery grave.

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My uncle was a navigator in the C-5A Galaxy. One of his friend was a B-52 Bombardier. Jim bombed out of Thailand, and later Guam. One night, we had dinner with him at the Anderson O Club and he told me the last B-52 rolled off the line in 1962 and all of them had been reskinned twice and had flown over the originally planned lifespan for the large strategic bomber. The white paint on the bottoms of the Strategic Air Command (SAC) bombers cost $75/gallon (weâ€™re talking late 60â€™s dollars here) and was designed to reflect the heat of a nuclear explosion the aircraft would be speeding to escape, with no hope of outrunning all of the blast effects. Later, Jim took us on a flight line tour of his planes, which included a trip to the bomb farm. The ordnance guys handed us yellow grease pencils and let us write on the built up dumb bombs on the trailers getting ready to head out to the revetments to be loaded. I used to see the vertical contrails on the western horizon in the early afternoon, then hear them in the landing pattern an hour or so later. It was a puzzle piece in the daily life of that small Pacific island.

The parent of one of the swimmers from the Anderson team was an Air Force photographer. He got me a 1/2â€³ high stack of 8â€³x11â€³ pictures of B-52s, covering a full mission from bombing up, through the attack, refueling on the return leg and landing. Not sure where they went, but he took most all of them. Official stuff weâ€™re talking here.

The evolution of this fine airframe is remarkable and in the last few years I read we will keep the B-52 in service until about 2050. As a Surface Warrior Officer, the B-52s found a maritime mission by being outfitted to carry the AGM-84 Harpoon Anti-Ship Missiles. Yes, we had the P-3s, the S-3Bs and the A-6Es to do that, but nothing says Doom like many more than 4 sea skimmers (I think they could bring 12 to the party) headed to you on a multi-axis, coordinated time-on-top attack, all from one platform with some serious â€œon stationâ€• time.

As a student at the Naval War College, I read and read and read, then read some more. One of the books I came across, which is excellent reading from the â€œother sideâ€• was â€œA Vietcong Memoirâ€• by Truong Nhu Tang, the VC Minister of Justice. He described being on the receiving end of the carpet bombing of B-52 raid. It made strong men go insane.

My uncle spent a tour on Vietnam on logistics missions. He said when a B-52 raid was going on, the vibration, even from many, many miles away, would cause your chair to basically in the stay about an inch off the floor because of the severe vibrationsâ€¦.

There is so much to the history of this plane that served in Vietnam, Desert Storm, the GWOT and will be flying long after us old reader may be gone. It is a testament to the genius of those men and women of Boeing, who gave the American taxpayer a lot of return on our investment and the enemy, lots of bang for our bucks:

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Date Created
July 5, 2007
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