

# B-52 Stratofortress: First Operational Delivery

by: Tony R. Landis



Paths to the Present  
**FLASHBACK**



(Boeing Historical Archives)

Standing on the Air Force parking ramp on a sunny California, Wednesday afternoon, 29 June 1955, a small crowd of VIP's and invited guests awaited the delivery of the latest piece of advanced technology hardware that would become a part of Air Force culture and history for the next 70 years and beyond. Off in the distance, the crowd spotted the now-familiar smoke trail from the eight Pratt & Whitney J57-P-29 engines as the new aircraft slowly came into view. After making several low



The first operational B-52 delivery crew synchronize their watches prior to departing Boeing's Moses Lake, WA, facility. (Boeing Historical Archives)

passes over Castle AFB, CA, the first operational Boeing B-52 Stratofortress touched down at 1:55 pm, becoming the latest mainstay of the Strategic Air Command (SAC) bomber force.

The aircraft, RB-52B (52-8711), departed from the new Boeing Moses Lake testing facility at Larson AFB, WA, and performed 7-hour training mission prior to the delivery to the 93rd Bombardment Wing (Heavy) at Castle AFB.

RB-52B (52-8711) departs Boeing's Moses Lake facility at Larson AFB, WA, beginning the 7-hour training mission prior to delivery of the first operational Stratofortress to the 93rd Bombardment Wing at Castle AFB, CA. (Boeing Historical Archives)



RB-52B (52-8711) comes in for a landing at Castle AFB, CA, becoming the first Stratofortress delivered to the Strategic Air Command. (Air Force Historical Research Agency archives)



Aboard the aircraft were Brig. Gen. William E. Eubank, Jr, 93rd Bombardment Wing Commander; Col. William R. Smith, 4017<sup>th</sup> Combat Crew Training Squadron (CCTS) commander, and a six-person flight crew consisting of Maj. Pat N. Howard, aircraft commander; Capt. Marvin M. Watkins, pilot; Maj. Arthur T. Brent, observer; Capt. Edward A. Schickling, observer, T/Sgt. Jimmy G. Rounds, ECM operator and T/Sgt. Jack F. Thompson, tail gunner. All flight crewman were assigned to the 4017<sup>th</sup> CCTS.

Prior to this, all B-52's delivered to the Air Force had been assigned to testing squadrons at Edwards AFB, CA; Eglin AFB, FL; Kirtland AFB, NM, and Wright Air Development Center, OH (now Wright-Patterson AFB). With this delivery, the Air Force could finalize the retirement of their aging Convair B-36 Peacemakers.

After the 175-ton, 8-engine bomber taxied to a stop in front of the Base Operations facility, the pilot shut down the engines and opened the crew hatch. Brig. Gen. Eubank was the first to disembark, being met at the egress door by Col. Patrick Fleming, deputy wing commander. After some hands were shaken, photographs taken, and a few short speeches given, it was time to get to work de-



Crew members of the first B-52 delivery: Col. W. R. Smith, Commander, 4017<sup>th</sup> CCTS; Brig. Gen. W. E. Eubank, 93rd Bomb Wing Commander; Maj. P. N. Howard, IP, 4017<sup>th</sup> CCTS; Capt. M. M. Watkins, pilot, 4017<sup>th</sup> CCTS; Maj. A. T. Brent, Observer, 4017<sup>th</sup> CCTS; Capt. E. A. Schickling, Observer, 4017<sup>th</sup> CCTS; T/Sgt J. G. Rounds, ECM Operator, 4017<sup>th</sup> CCTS and T/Sgt J. F. Thompson, Gunner, 4017<sup>th</sup> CCTS. (Air Force Historical Research Agency archives)



fending the United States of America. The second Stratofortress arrived a short time later followed quickly by more. The 93<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Wing became operational less than a year later on 12 March 1956.

RB-52B 52-8711 remained at the 93<sup>rd</sup> Bomb Wing (and redesignated as B-52B) until it was transferred to the 22<sup>nd</sup> Bombardment Wing (Heavy) at March AFB, CA,

Greeting Brig. Gen. Eubank upon arrival to Castle AFB, CA, are: Col. William A. Campbell, Col. Sam J. Byerley, Col. Patrick D. Fleming and Maj. Pat N. Howard, B-52 Aircraft Commander. (Air Force Historical Research Agency archives)



*Brig. Gen. Eubank and Maj. Howard shake hands after delivering the first B-52 Stratofortress to the Strategic Air Command. (Air Force Historical Research Agency archives)*

in December 1963 where it served for less than two years before being removed from the USAF inventory and flown to Offut AFB, NE where it became part of the Strategic Air Command & Aerospace Museum on 29 September 1965 where it resides today.

Technological advances came quickly in these years, and Boeing did their best to keep B-52 production updated to the latest developments. Only 50 B-model B-52's were built, and they were quickly replaced with more advanced versions. D-model B-52's became the standard until they were replaced by the B-52G, and the TF33 Turbofan-equipped B-52H. From that first SAC delivery in 1955, to the final H-model delivery in October 1962, only 7 years had elapsed. In total, Boeing produced 744 B-52's before production ceased (total includes the two prototypes). The Stratofortress has seen use in every major air campaign since it became operational. Continuous upgrades have kept the aircraft on America's front line bomber force for 70 years, and there's no sign of stopping.

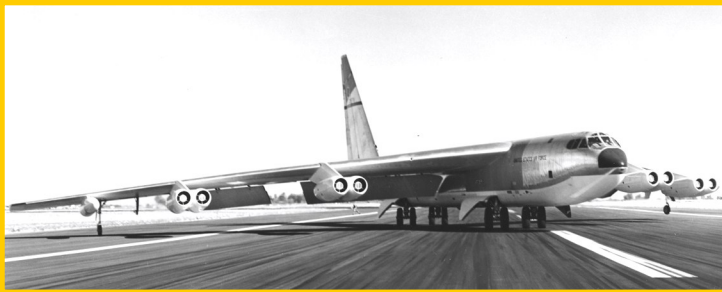
Under the B-52 Commercial Engine Reengining Program (CERP) the USAF selected the Roll-Royce BR725 engine (military designation F130) to be the future powerplant of choice for the venerable old workhorse on 24 September 2021. With this and other upgrades, the new B-52J is expected to become operational in 2033 and remain in service until 2060. During a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration at Barksdale AFB, LA, on 29 June 2005, Maj. Gen. (ret) William Eubank remarked "I'm real proud of the jet and that I had the first operational wing, but I had no idea that the bomber would have so long of an operational life span."

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*The second B-52 arrived at Castle AFB the following day, 30 June 1955 (right). Crew members of that flight were: Maj. W.E. Moore, IP, Capt. E. E. Campbell, Pilot; Maj. L. W. Gwinn, Jr., Observer; Capt. L. M. Campbell, Observer; M/ Sgt J. H. Hunter, ECM Operator and T/Sgt M. J. Lee, Gunner. (Air Force Historical Research Agency archives)*



New B-52 Stratofortress aircraft deliveries came on a regular basis, replacing retired B-36 Peacemakers on a nearly 1 for 1 basis. (Dennis Jenkins Collection)



RB-52B, 52-8711, shows off the crosswind crab capability of the B-52 after landing at Castle AFB, CA (above, left). The ramp at Castle AFB, CA, filled quickly with new arrivals from Boeing. Note the difference in markings amongst the early B-52 aircraft (above, right). (USAF Photos)



JB-52C, 54-2676, leads a formation of B-29, 44-62022 and B-47E, 52-165 on 30 July 1956. (Boeing Historical Archives)

B-52B, 52-8711, spent just over 8 years with the 93rd Bomb Wing at Castle AFB, CA, before reassignment to the 22nd Bomb Wing at March AFB, CA, in December 1963 (right). (USAF)



B-52B, 52-8711, was delivered to the Strategic Air Command Museum in Ashland, NE, on 29 September 1965, where it remains today. (Strategic Air Command & Aerospace Museum)



*The sun is far from setting on the B-52 Stratofortress as the USAF expects to keep the newest variant in service until 2060. (USAF)*



## **AFMC History & Museums Program**

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