

**INDIVIDUAL HISTORY**

**BOEING B-17G-95-DL 44-83868/77233/N5237V**  
**MUSEUM ACCESSION NUMBER 83/A/1374**

- Jul 45 Built by Douglas Aircraft Corporation at Long Beach, California with manufacturers' serial 32509, as part of the last block of 20 B-17Gs built by Douglas, `868 being the 17th from last of the block, part of contract No.AC-1862. One of 2,395 B-17Gs built by Douglas.
- 04 Jul 45 First Flight - 1¼-hour test flight by Douglas test pilot Wally Tower.
- 05 Jul 45 50-minute test flight by Tower since the previous flight had been less than the statutory 1½ hours.
- 06 Jul 45 Accepted at factory by USAAF as 44-83868.
- 08 Jul 45 Departed Long Beach en route to Syracuse Army Air Base, NY, via Chanute Field IL - arrived 09 Jul.
- 14 Jul 45 Transferred from USAAF supply pool to US Navy as Bu No.77233. With the advent of the Cadillac II programme (land-based long-range Airborne Early Warning, command and control system) the USAAF set aside 20 brand new Douglas built B-17Gs serialled between 44-83855 and 44-83884, including 44-83868, forming the nucleus of the US Navy radar equipped PB-IW programme as US Navy serials 77225 to 77244. The aircraft were transferred to the US Navy at Johnsville, Pennsylvania. See Article - `The Navy and Coast Guard PB-1; A Summation. S A Thompson, AAHS Journal Spring 1995. The US Navy obtained a total of 79 B-17s from various sources 1945-50, 21 as PB-IWs and 28 purely for spares. On this date the aircraft left Syracuse Air Base for NAS Johnsonville, a crew having been requested three days earlier.
- Upon transfer 44-83868 and the other aircraft were ferried to the Naval Aircraft Modification Unit (NAMU) at NAS Johnsville for conversion, the major change being the installation of AN/APS-20 search radar in a radome fitted below the bomb bay. Antennae were added to the fuselage. Armament was usually deleted and the bomb-bay doors sealed, and additional fuel tankage, rear fuselage observer stations, latrine and galley were added. Early PB-IWs flew in natural metal, later changed to overall gloss sea blue with white codes and lettering. PB-IWs entered Navy service for anti-submarine patrol and maritime reconnaissance duties in Spring 1946.
- 26 Jul 45 Struck off charge by USAAF?

Aug 45- Mar 47      44-83868 assigned to Naval Air Material Center Naval Aircraft Modification Unit (NAMU) at Johnsville, Pennsylvania.

Apr 47-Mar 48      Air Test and Evaluation Squadron No.4 (VX-4), at NAS Quonset Point, Rhode Island on the eastern coast of the USA. Tested equipment and tactics for anti-submarine warfare.

Apr 48              Assigned to Air Early Warning Squadron No.1 (VPW-1), Ream Field, San Ysidro, near San Diego, California, as one of four VX4 Pb1-Ws assigned to the unit. VPW-1 was the Navy's first dedicated land based AEW Squadron, with an authorised strength of six aircraft. Operated in support of the Pacific Fleet. Due to limited facilities and short runways at Ream Field, the Squadron moved to nearby NAAS Miramar for operations, although Ream Field remained its assigned home base.

08 Sep 49-  
18 Jul 50          Under overhaul at Naval Air Material Centre (NAMC) Norfolk, Virginia.

21 Jul 50          To VX-4, Patuxent River, Maryland as one of three PB-1W aircraft inherited from the disbanded VPW-1. Carried squadron code 'XD -5' on tail. Generally operated in support of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet. Photo, August 1950 at NAS Glenview, Illinois; The Aviation Historian Issue 4 2016 p.72.

May-Oct 52        Assigned to Airborne Early Warning Squadron 2 (VW-2) at NAS Patuxent River, including 30 August- 30 Sept 52 detachment to VW-2 Detachment 1 at Gardermoen, Norway. The former VX-4 had disbanded in June 1952 and reformed at the same base as VW-2 on 18 Jul 52, still operating in support of the Atlantic fleet. It provided Airborne Early Warning, scouting, weather reconnaissance and electronic countermeasures support.

14 Oct 52-  
19 May 53        Under overhaul at NAMC Norfolk, Virginia.

03 Jun 53-  
Nov 54            To VW-2, Patuxent River. The unit retired its last PB1-W in March 1955, replacing them with PO1-W Constellations.

08 Dec 54-        Under overhaul at NAS Norfolk. During US Navy service carried codes XD-2 and XD-24. Overhaul period ended May 1955.

26 May 55        Withdrawn and stored at Naval Air Facility (NAF) Litchfield Park, 20 miles west of Phoenix, Arizona (where RAFM PBY-6A 'L866' was also stored 1953-1957) US Navy PB-IWs were the last front line US Military B-17s and were replaced in 1955 by Lockheed WV-2 Constellation Warning Star aircraft.

10 Jul 56        Struck off US Navy charge along with the other remaining 15 US Navy B-17s at Litchfield Park. (of these 16 aircraft, three survive today, including the well-known 'Texas Raiders'44-83872 –see Flypast April 2012 pp.30-37 ). The 16 PB-IWs were sold in three groups. At this time 77233 had logged 3,484 flying hours.

- 02 Dec 57 77233 was part of the third and final batch of thirteen PB-IWs sold, in this case to the American Pressed Steel Corporation of Dallas, Texas for \$8,333.33 and given a registration block between N6460D and N6471D, 77233 being allotted N6466D, but this was not taken up - the company also had a block of registrations between N5225V and N5237V, and 77233 became N5237V on 08 March 1958 when this block was used in preference.
- 1958 Twelve of the 13 PB-IW aircraft were ferried from NAF Litchfield Park to Dallas - Love Field and parked near the Dallas Aero Service ramp on the north side of the airport and were gradually sold off as civil transports in South America (6 aircraft) and a US fire bombers (3 aircraft). Photo during ferry flight with XD code on fin and N5237V registration painted over military scheme - Photo – Flypast Flying Fortress supplement June 2010 p. 49.
- See article and photo of 77233 at Love Field c.1960 carrying basic US Navy colours with white `2' and `Hell Wagon' Nose Art on starboard nose, and crude white painted civil registration - AAHS Journal Summer 1964 p.141; Flypast September 2004 p.44 and 46. Around this time local rumours had it that these aircraft were earmarked for Cuban revolutionary Fidel Castro in his attempt to overthrow the Batista regime, but when crews arrived to fly them to Cuba they were prevented by Federal agents. American Compressed Steel Corporation was later linked with CIA efforts to smuggle surplus military aircraft to African and South American countries so perhaps the rumour is not that farfetched. Most of the Love Field PB-IWs quickly became derelict until rescued by civil operators in the 1960s. Two flew to England in 1961 of the filming of `The War Lover' and were scrapped there in 1962 after filming was completed.
- 26 Feb 60 Sold to Ashland Corporation of Tucson, Arizona.
- 07 Jul 60 Sold to Marson Equipment and Salvage Company, also of Tucson, but remained at Love Field.
- 27 Sep 61 Sold to Aero Union of Anderson, California along with seven other B-17s and restored to airworthy condition, despite being sunk up to the axles in the ground.
- c. Nov 61 Ferried to California, still in basic USN markings and colour scheme, with `XD' code on fin.
- 28 Dec 61 Sold to Calvin Butler of Butler Aircraft Co, Redmond Oregon as Tanker E15 in United States Forestry Service region 6 (Oregon and Washington states). Fitted with a 2,200-gallon four-door tank installed for fire bombing work to drop retardant 24 May 1962. See log books - airframes, engines and propellers for 1962-83 period. DoRIS Ref.B3249. See also article by Cpl Butler in Correspondence Files, entry 82.

- 21 Aug 62 Spray booms installed for aerial spraying.
- Transferred through several of Butler's companies, including the Butler Rental Company (01 Mar 63); Butler Aircraft Company (29 Dec 1965); Calvin Butler (29 Dec 1966); Butler Aircraft 06 May 1970, still tail-marked as tanker 15 in May 1971.
- 27 Jul 67 Accident at Carson, Washington – at 16.30hrs collided with trees whilst pulling up from run during fire control flight, due to restricted vision causing substantial damage.  
This was a fire retardant drop on Gifford Pinchot National Forest, and visibility was greatly reduced by smoke.
- 27 Sep 75 Photographed operating from U.S. Forest Service Goleta Air Tanker Base, Santa Barbara, California whilst being used to fight the Rattlesnake Canyon fire in Los Padres National Forest. Colour scheme was overall natural metal; chin turret removed and faired over; nose Plexiglass and tail gunner's windows overpainted silver; borate tank fitted into bomb bay and extending slightly below it. Tail number '65', horizontal tail surface, rear fuselage band and nacelle bands all faded Dayglo. See IPMS/USA Update Vol.12 No.3 P.62.
- For the 1976 fall season she was operating as part of a fleet of tankers fighting fires in northern Minnesota such as smouldering peat fires.
- N5237V operated regularly until 1981, as tanker 65 from Visalia, California when DC-7s replaced the two B-17s in the Butler Aviation Fleet. Usually dropped a phos-chek or fire-trol water mix fire retardant, dyed for visibility on the ground. Colour photos as Tanker 65; Flypast September 2004 p.49 and Flypast May 2009 p.70 (at Hemet, 1980), also Photos – Flypast Flying Fortress supplement June 2010 p. 49.
- 1982-3 Retired, traded to TBM inc, and restored to military configuration by TBM Inc. team led by engineer Ken Stubbs at Sequoia Field, nr Visalia in the California Great Valley. Given markings of 332nd Bombardment Squadron, 94th BG (H), 3rd Air Division, USAAF 8th Air Force, England, 1945. Received bomb bay doors, a new Plexiglas nose, and fibreglass replica turrets.
- Aircraft donated to RAFM by US Air Force Museum who had acquired the aircraft, in appreciation of a Vulcan donated by the RAF. Actual restoration costs funded by RAFM. Ferry Flight arranged from California to UK, piloted by Air Cdr Ron Dick, then Air Attache at the British Embassy, Washington, Ken Stubbs of TBM Inc. as 2nd Pilot/Engineer and Flt Lt Dave Fox of No.10 Squadron RAF as navigator. Photo of crew: Aircraft Illustrated Dec 83 p.570.
- Sep 83 At Sequoia Field, San Joaquin Valley, California, thence to Castle AFB for repainting.

- 28 Sep 83 Post restoration test flight from Sequoia Field. Photo in USA as newly restored; The Flying M February 1984 p.12 and also Gateway January 1984.
- 03 Oct 83 Departed Fresno, California having previously been ferried from Sequoia. Callsign 'RAFAIR B17' For account of delivery flight see Ron Dick's articles in Air Clues May 1984 and Jan/Feb 1985.
- 04 Oct 83 To Peterson AFB, Colorado Springs (including flypast at the nearby USAF Academy).
- 05 Oct 83 To England AFB, Louisiana for refuelling.
- 06 Oct 83 To 8<sup>th</sup> AF HQ, Barksdale AFB, Louisiana.
- 07 Oct 83 To USAF Museum, Wright Patterson AFB, Ohio.
- 08 Oct 83 To Andrews AFB, Washington DC
- 11 Oct 83 To Gander, Newfoundland. – flying time seven hours.
- 12 Oct 83 To Lajes, Azores – southerly route influenced by deteriorating weather and the lack of de-icing equipment.
- 13 Oct 83 Arrived at RAF Brize Norton, Oxon, making a couple of flypasts for waiting photographers. Touched down at 5.30pm at the end of the final 1120 nautical miles leg from Lajes, completed in 7 hours 20 minutes having flown some 7000 miles (11,265km) in 50 flying hours since leaving California. Photos: Aviation News 18 Nov-1 Dec 83 p.586; FlyPast Dec 83 p.3; Air Pictorial Dec 83 p.446; Aviation News December 2002 p.952; Gateway (RAF Brize Norton) January 1984 pp.14-17.
- 25 Oct 83 Made flypast (two passes) at RAFM Hendon whilst temporarily based at RAF Honington.
- 27 Oct 83 Flypast over former East Anglia USAAF bases in company with Duxford-based B-17 'Sally B'
- Article and photos: FlyPast Jan 84 p.16-67; Aviation News 30 Dec 83 - 12 Jan 84 p.681; Sally B News Issue 37 Summer 2000. Colour photo at Duxford; 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force (Flypast Special 2002) p.71
- 06 Nov 83 Photographed at RAF Honington. See RAFM P017912-P017916. Flown to Duxford, Cambs that day. See RAFM P017921
- 07 Nov 83 Final flight from Duxford to Stansted Airport, Essex for dismantling by Civilian contractor, J R Consultants. Again accompanied by Sally B. Photos: RAFM P017925 – P017928. Flypast Jan 84 p.17; Flypast May 2001 p.91. Engines exchanged with higher hour examples from Sally B. Total flying hours 5,724.
- 08-9 Dec 83 Moved by road to RAFM Hendon and reassembled for display in the

Bomber Command Hall, the engines being fitted 21 Dec 83.

- Jan 84 Placed on public display. Remains displayed in Bomber Command Hall at present. Photos – Flypast Flying Fortress supplement June 2010 pp.46 – 49.
- 17 Apr 84 Official handover ceremony at RAFM - General William P Acker, Cdr of US 3rd Air Force, handed the B-17 over to MRAF Sir Michael Beetham, Chairman of the RAFM's board of Trustees, and received a cheque for £35,000 from the Boeing Company to pay for restoration costs. Photo: Air Pictorial Jul 84 p.272.
- 23 Nov 93 Registration N5237V cancelled by FAA-recorded in error as 'destroyed'

**Sources:** USAAF/USAF -Individual Aircraft Record Cards, USAF Historical Research Agency; Army Air Force Installations Directory = Continental United States, Headquarters, Army Air Forces, Washington DC, 1 August 1945.

**TEXT; ANDREW SIMPSON**

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