

MYSTERY OF THE MISSING DOMINATORS

THE CONSOLIDATED B-32 IS THE LEAST-KNOWN AMERICAN WWII HEAVY BOMBER. OVER ONE HUNDRED WERE BUILT BUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THE B-32 FLEET?

BY NICHOLAS A. VERONICO

The US military always likes to have a back-up plan when it comes to procurement. "If one doesn't work, the other will" was their philosophy, and a good one at that. When the Army Air Corps was looking for a bomber that could take the war to the Axis and do it with greater speed and a heavier payload than existing B-17s and B-24s, they, too, had a back-up plan. The Boeing B-29 was the aircraft of choice and Consolidated's B-32 was chosen just in case things fell through with the Superfortress. Today, more than 24 B-29s have been preserved in various museums throughout the world, and two others, *Doc* and *FiFi*, are currently flying. Yet not a single, intact B-32 Dominator exists

anywhere. This begs the question: "Where did all the B-32 Dominators go?"

The Consolidated B-32 Dominator was the company's entry into the Army Air Corps' R-40B competition to develop a four-engine, "Very Long-Range" strategic bomber capable of carrying a 2000-pound bomb load with a range of 5333 miles at a speed of 400-mph. Boeing, Consolidated Aircraft, Douglas, and Lockheed all submitted proposals, however, Douglas and Lockheed soon dropped out of the bidding. Boeing proposed what would eventually become the XB-29 while Consolidated pinned its hopes of winning the competition on the XB-32.

Both the Boeing and

Consolidated designs were advanced to the prototype stage with two prototype examples of each ordered on 6 September 1940, followed closely by the order of a third prototype XB-29 and an XB-32. Pressurization for a combat aircraft was, at the time, an unknown and both Boeing and Consolidated were soon behind schedule as they tried to design a combat aircraft that enabled the crew to fight in shirt sleeve environment. The first XB-32 was six months behind schedule when it was rolled out at Consolidated's San Diego factory on 1 September 1942. By this time,

The first two B-32 prototypes featured large twin tails, much like its B-24 Liberator predecessor. The Dominator was more than 20% larger than the B-24, with the B-32 having a wing span of 135-ft and a fuselage length of 83-ft 1-in compared to the Liberator's 110-ft wing span and 67-ft 2-in length. The B-32's Wright R-3350-23 radials gave the bomber a maximum speed of 358 mph and it could haul a 20,000-pound bomb load. (Dennis Jenkins Collection)

the Army Air Forces were in desperate need of the Dominator's capabilities and they requested Consolidated fly the aircraft as soon as possible.

The prototype XB-32, serial 41-0141, flew the type's maiden flight on 7 September 1942, flying from the Consolidated factory at Lindbergh Field in San Diego. During testing, on 10 May 1943, 41-0141 crashed, killing pilot Richard McMakin and severely injuring six others. Lost in the crash was the majority of the Dominator's test data. The loss of data required many tests to be reflown, putting the B-32 program behind schedule. The



This view of the prototype illustrates the Davis high-aspect ratio wing to advantage. (Convair)

second XB-32, serial 41-0142, flew two months later on 2 July. Because of the crash, the AAF insisted on a redesign of the XB-32, changing from a twin-tail configuration like the B-24, to a more traditional single vertical tail. This change, and many others, delayed the first

flight of the initial production B-32 to 1 August 1944.

The XB-29 flew its first flight on 21 September 1942, two weeks after the XB-32's maiden flight. Fourteen pre-production YB-29s were ordered and flight testing began simultaneously of Boeing's new



More than 5400 aircraft were stored at the Reconstruction Finance Corporation's Storage Depot No. 41 outside Kingman, Arizona, in the summer of 1946. Among the rows of aircraft were 38 Consolidated Vultee B-32 Dominators, some veterans of combat in the Pacific Theater. The aircraft in the foreground, serial 42-108500, had its engine mount melt when it was overheated as crews removed fluids from the aircraft and preserved the engines. This Dominator was special. As it rolled down the Fort Worth assembly line, workers decorated the fuselage with \$1000, which would be given to the first combat squadron to see action against the Japanese. (William T. Larkins)