

Four-Engine Fighter



USAF photo

The XB-40, a modified B-17F, was developed to test whether a bomber with additional defensive armament could provide bomber escort, since early World War II fighters did not have the necessary range. The prototype XB-40, which first flew in November 1942, had 14 .50-caliber machine guns in seven gun positions: chin turret, two dorsal turrets, ball turret, two waist positions, and the tail. The Army Air Forces ordered 20 test aircraft, designated YB-40s. The 92nd Bomb Group at RAF Alconbury, UK, received 12 in spring 1943 for operational tests. The first mission came on May 29, 1943. After less than 10 missions, the project was scrapped. The YB-40s were too heavily laden with guns, additional armor, and ammunition to keep up with the other bombers. Most were converted back to B-17F configuration. The chin turret gun position was later adopted for late model B-17Fs and was standard on the B-17G.



Photo via Robert F. Dorr