

Project Tip-Tow

Photo via Brian Lockett, air-and-space.com



In 1950, Strategic Air Command had a problem: Its jet fighters gulped fuel and lacked the range to escort bombers. SAC launched an odd range-extension effort called Project MX-1016, code-named "Tip-Tow." A fighter—in flight—would lock on a bomber wingtip, shut down its engine, and ride along to a release point. Tip-Tow had a dedicated B-29 "mother ship" and two F-84 fighters (above). The F-84 and B-29 tips fit together (right, in a coupling ground test). The first hook-on flight took place in July 1950. The first coupling came later in 1950. Initially, F-84 pilots kept manual control when attached. On April 24, 1953, however, the left-hand F-84 locked on and activated an automatic flight control. The F-84 rolled onto the bomber's wing and both aircraft crashed into Peconic Bay off Long Island, killing all involved. Similar work with a B-36 continued, but advances in air refueling soon made "towing" a thing of the past.

