



# BUFF

## Metamorphosis

Photography from the collection of Warren E. Thompson



**USAF's B-52 force has continuously adapted with the times.**

*A B-52H Stratofortress—a name long ignored in favor of the simple, affectionate “BUFF”—of the 2nd Bomb Wing returns to Diego Garcia after a successful low-level attack in Afghanistan.*

Operational for nearly 61 years, the B-52's range and versatility have given it an essential role in nearly all of America's modern wars. [1] B-52s perform a carpet-bombing mission over North Vietnam. The tactic was used to expose and destroy enemies hiding in the dense jungle. [2] B-52A-1, first flown in 1954, was one of three prototypes of what would become the definitive B-52 shape. It was later modified for research work as the NB-52A. Here, it is carrying an X-15 rocket plane under its right wing. After many years of development service, it was retired to the Pima Air & Space Museum in Tucson, Ariz. [3] A B-52F in Strategic Air Command markings deploys a drag chute at Andersen AFB, Guam. This particular jet was scrapped in 1971 after an accident.



Photo by Robert Andrews



Photo by Robert Dorr



Photo by Bob Amos

Photo from Larry Davis Collection via Warren Thompson



USAF photo



Photo by Dewayne Norville



Photo by Warren Bodie



[1] These B-52Fs at Castle AFB, Calif., in the late 1950s are carrying AGM-28 Hound Dog missiles. The ultimate defense suppression weapon, Hound Dogs were air-breathing, nuclear-armed missiles with a range of 700 miles, meant to destroy anti-aircraft systems long before the B-52s reached a target area. [2] An XB-52—one of two built—during 1952 flight tests at Edwards AFB, Calif. These prototypes had a tandem cockpit similar to that of the B-47, before designers adopted the side-by-side configuration. [3] Recently declassified, this photo of a B-52G named Avenger shows off the type's radar. [4] A B-52D lands at U Tapao RTAB, Thailand, after a 1973 mission. This shot illustrates the B-52's distinctive nose-down flying attitude, even when flaring for landing.



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[1] A B-52H in high-visibility international orange photographed at Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz., in May 1974. It served with the 17th Bomb Wing at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio, did a lot of test work, and was also referred to as the JB-52H. [2] The crew of B-52G Loaded Dice of the 97th Bomb Wing poses in 1989. They had won SAC's 1988 Mighty Warrior competition. [3] An enemy lining up behind the B-52G was unwise, as he would face these four .50-caliber machine guns, under the MD-9 rear-facing search radar. The guns were later removed from all B-52s. This one served with 340th Bomb Wing at Eaker AFB, Ark.

Photo by Andy Bloom



**[1]** A B-52H flying over the mountains of Afghanistan. It's a 2nd Bomb Wing jet from Barksdale AFB, La. In Afghanistan, BUFFs added close air support to their lengthy résumé, aided by satellite guided weapons. **[2]** A B-52 wearing Southeast Asia camouflage, with a Hound Dog. **[3]** A heavily loaded B-52D deployed to Vietnam in 1969 readying for an Arc Light bombing mission. The aircraft were painted in Southeast Asia camo on top, black underneath, because they flew mainly at night. **[4]** A close-up of a Hound Dog slung under the wing of a B-52G at Loring AFB, Maine, in 1972. In 1975, the Hound Dogs were withdrawn from alert, freeing up weight that could be used for more fuel and electronic countermeasures gear.

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Photo by Dave McLaren



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Photo by Noel Widdifield

Photo by Hank Marois



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[1] Nose detail of one of the XB-52s, one of which was later converted into a YB-52. Huge as it was, the B-52 was significantly smaller than its predecessor, the "Aluminum Overcast" prop-jet B-36. The B-52's swept wings were pioneered on the B-47 Stratojet. [2] An iconic image of a B-52D unleashing its immense bomb load. [3] En route to Boeing's Seattle facilities in 1985 to help celebrate the 50th anniversary of the B-17 Flying Fortress' first flight, this B-52G lines up behind a tanker for refueling. In 2002, the B-52 matched the B-17's mark when it celebrated its own 50th anniversary of first flight, but kept right on flying.



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[1] A B-52G launches from RAF Fairford, UK, in 1991 carrying a load of bombs to drop on Iraq. The eight TF33 engines have always produced a lot of smoke; USAF is thinking about replacing them with modern motors to increase range, speed, and altitude. [2] This NB-52E is being tested with a General Electric engine during one of USAF's previous flirtations with replacing the BUFF's powerplants. It was decommissioned in 1980 and cut into pieces to comply with arms treaties. [3] B-52s at the "Boneyard" at Davis-Monthan. These aircraft were scrapped to comply with the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. [4] This B-52 leads a formation back to Guam after a mission over North Vietnam. The last B-52H was delivered in 1963, but Air Force plans call for the adaptable BUFF to serve beyond 2040. ☺