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**A film by
Hartmut Bitomsky**

B-52

PRESS KIT

Specifications

Primary Function: Heavy bomber - Contractor: Boeing Military Airplane Co. - Power Plant: Eight Pratt & Whitney engines TF33-P-3/103 turbofan - Thrust: Each engine up to 17,000 pounds (7,650 kilograms) - Length: 159 feet, 4 inches (48.5 meters) - Height: 40 feet, 8 inches (12.4 meters) - Wingspan: 185 feet (56.4 meters) - Speed: 650 miles per hour (Mach 0.86) - Ceiling: 50,000 feet (15,151.5 meters) - Weight: Approximately 185,000 pounds empty (83,250 kilograms) - Maximum Takeoff Weight: 488,000 pounds (219,600 kilograms) - Range: Unrefueled 8,800 miles (7,652 nautical miles) - Armament: Approximately 70,000 pounds (31,500 kilograms) mixed ordnance -- bombs, mines and missiles (modified to carry air-launched cruise missiles ALCM, Harpoon anti-ship and Have Nap missiles) - Crew: Five (aircraft commander, pilot, radar navigator, navigator and electronic warfare officer) - Accommodations: Six ejection seats - Unit Cost: \$30 million - Date Deployed: February 1955

Point of Contact: Air Combat Command, Office of Public Affairs; 115 Thompson Street, Suite 211; Langley AFB, VA 23665-1987; DSN 574-5014 or (804) 764-5014;
e-mail: accpai@hqaccpa.langley.af.mil.

BRIEF NARRATIVE

The past 50 years have been historically determined by geopolitical strategies to achieve and secure global hegemony. The B-52 long distance bomber is and was the one, though not the only tool to carry out this strategy.

The aircraft has been designed in 1947 to act out the Cold War as a carrier of nuclear bombs. And it is still in service nowadays, almost fifty years after its first inception, and there are plans to remodel it (like it has happened in the past) so it might serve another 30 years as a powerful weapon of national security. No other aircraft ever was in service and use for a longer period of time, although with the SALT and START treaties with the former Soviet Union during the Reagan administration the demolition of the strategic (i.e. nuclear bomb carrying) B-52s had been determined.

Most of the armada of the "Stratofortresses" (as the B-52s are called) is deposited on an airbase in the Arizona desert waiting to be scrapped. A kind of guillotine is cutting the body into five parts: both wings and the fuselage into three segments. This happens under the attentive eyes of a Russian military delegation, two or three times a year.

The aircraft is a device of extreme purpose, everything that surrounds it is executed at the edge of capacity but within the bounds of perfection. Though, it is not only an instrument of strategy and warfare. It is, in fact, a sound parable for American contemporary culture that embraces the past half centennium. A culture of immense power and wealth, technology and engineering, threatening and safeguarding.

And it is an almost exemplary metaphor for the productivity of a nation that puts most of the surplus yielded by its labor, intelligence and latest findings into military machinery.

B-52 Mission

Air Combat Command's B-52 is a long-range, heavy bomber that can perform a variety of missions. The bomber is capable of flying at high subsonic speeds at altitudes up to 50,000 feet (15,166.6 meters). It can carry nuclear or conventional ordnance with worldwide precision navigation capability.

EXTENDED NARRATIVE

In the political zenith of the past 50 years circles high up a B-52 aircraft carrying nuclear bombs and strategic missiles - flying distant enough to be almost unrecognizable and therefore not to be reached, yet close enough to cast a threatening shadow of real lethal danger down on everything and everyone that was and is living through this age - in a situation somewhat indecisive or indetermined between warmongering and peacemaking, between deterrent and aggressive desires.

The aircraft has been designed in 1947, after all the experiences made during WWII, to act out the Cold War as its most powerful tool as a carrier of nuclear bombs. And it is still in service nowadays, 50 years after its first inception, and plans are being made to remodel it for another 30 years servicing as a powerful weapon of international security. No other aircraft ever has been in service and use for a longer period of time.

The first idea for the long distance bomber was developed in 1947 in a hotel room when a couple of men met to imagine the most powerful instrument that could be used in the Cold War. The very first crude model that resulted from this meeting resembles in fact pretty much the final solution: with high to the shoulders attached wings that hang down somewhat tired almost to the ground but rising up when flying by thirty degrees.

In the past the aircraft has been remodeled more than once. Originally constructed for flights in high altitude the aircraft had been redesigned for the Vietnam War in order to enable it to operate just 300 feet above ground. There are many reports of the frightening terror this huge monster in low-level flight triggered off.

Whenever new strategic concepts of defense, deterrence and offensive were developed this aircraft was situated in the center of considerations. It saw quite a number of remodeling updates in order to adjust the plane to the new tasks. Therefore a rather sarcastic remark says that the B- 52 is the only aircraft so far that the manufacturer did sell actually three times to the customer - the U.S. Airforce.

The development of the B-52 has been of a trail-blazing consequence for the entire aviation, and the modern air services by wide-bodied jet airplanes has been initiated by it. Without the B-52 the modern civil aviation would in fact look quite differently.

The film is structured as a triptych of three parts. The first part deals with the development and construction of the aircraft and its military role and use during the fifties and early sixties as one of the main weapons of nuclear deterrence.

The B-52 was the first large-bodied aircraft propelled by jet engines, and in so far the aircraft is an archetype of modern civil aviation, too. We have found in the Boeing Archive the very first balsa wood model of the B-52 and the related legendary documents of the legendary designs and Berechnungen made by Boeing engineers over the weekend at a hotel in Dayton, Ohio.

The other sites we visited for the first part of the film are Minot AFB in North Dakota (one of the bases where B-52s are stationed), the SAC Museum (Strategic Air Command) in Omaha, Nebraska, and Kirtland AFB (where almost all nuclear bombs ever produced are on display).

For this part we have conducted interviews with a number of people, among them pilots and crew members (who are actually flying the B-52 these days), the former Navigator Ferguson (who actually was during the Cuban Crisis on a nuclear mission towards Russia), and the airplane painter Mike Hagel (his works are to be found in many Museums, Military Bases and in the Pentagon, too).

The middle part of the film situates the B-52 chronologically in the sixties and early seventies. A couple of "Broken Arrows" happened - incidents where B-52 aircrafts

crashed while deploying nuclear bombs that contaminated areas in Goldboro, North Carolina (1961), in Palomares, Spain (1966), and in Thule, Greenland (1968). We shot interviews with people who were back then witnessing or were involved with those events.

And then there was the Vietnam War in which the B-52 played an eminent role. We have talked to pilots who flew missions back then, and we have been visiting Vietnam. There are interviews with ex-General Giap (the Minister of Defense back then), with a pilot and Vietnamese war hero (who shot down a B-52 from a MIG jet fighter), with veterans (who were launching SAM missiles) and victims of the bombing raids (especially during the December War of 1972).

Final part is centered around the demolition of the aircraft. What will its future be? According to the START treaty of the eighties the strategic part of the B-52 armada (i.e. bombers carrying nuclear weapons) has to be demilitarized and destroyed. The film is watching this process. Out there in the desert of Arizona are hundreds of B-52s waiting to be demolished. A giant guillotine is cutting them up.

There are people who make use of the leftovers, one way or another. People who collect memorabilia like the nose art (paintings on the aircrafts), dealers who simply resell instruments and parts that can be used again, and artists who use the scrap and turn it into art. And, of course, the aluminum is also recycled into aircrafts to come. The B-52 will continue to be in service, maybe for another 30 or 40 years. No other military aircraft has served longer than that. There is a secret about the plane, its capability, its functioning, its life.

The airplane completely and almost brutally torn apart, but still in the state of its demolition it remains visible that the object is a sample and a model of absolute perfection and functionality. Everything has been executed at the scale of utmost precision and exactness, and every detail shows its being manufactured on the highest possible level of technological capacity. There is no sign of improvisation, chance or even mistake to be detected - nothing is provisional, make-do or halfway solved. The aircraft hits the mark of the outer limits of contemporary technological engineering. This is the object on that highest level of perfection which can be achieved by human ingenuity in combination with technical instruments, machinery and money in our days - which is something that could definitely not be said of any other object that has been manufactured in the past fifty years.

For this reason we don't look at the B-52 not only as a tool of strategy and warfare. It is in fact a straight parable, not only for the present and past American civilization informing and impregnating the last half century all over the world. It is the summit of potency of the Western culture embracing the expansion of security/safety and terror at the same time, of powerful welfare and discouraging misery, of fearful hegemony and thoughtless waste.

And it is an exemplary metaphor for the productivity of modern technology that invests all its the surplus worked out by labor, intelligence and the latest findings into a military machinery that has its end in either causing or suffering destruction.

THE AIRCRAFT PAINTER

Painter Hagel: That was a very common sight, and I picked that, because of (the) B52 in those days, that represented to our country, the strength of our country. The B52. I mean, if you took one piece of military machinery, that was it. And to this day, it's still being used. But it represented the strength of our country, the protection of our country. You talk to crews, who were on the B52, they always tear up. I mean it is, it was a very endearing aircraft to those people, because they knew what it meant.

I put part of the SAC logo in the cloud. People will look at that painting and they'll do a double take. No, they don't see it immediately, and I wanted to do that. I wanted to give that impression, because that aircraft really represented SAC of all the aircraft they flew, and they flew quite a few, but if you really pinpoint one aircraft that meant so much to the Strategic Air Command, it would be, it would have to be the B52.

What about this one?

Well, this painting I did, that represents the most significant aircraft that SAC flew in its entire history. Starting with the B29, which was a carryover from World War II, that was our main bomber at that point, when SAC was formed.

Then it jumped to the B36, and then the B47, and then came, and that's why in particular I painted the B52 so big, because it was really the backbone.

But a lot of people don't realize that SAC had fighter squadrons B 51 directly after the war, that had that job of escorting the bombers.

Where's the vanishing point?

There's two types of perspective, mechanical and artistic. So artists can take a little bit of a licence. But your vanishing point would have to be somewhere back in here.

But my mission here was to show as realistically as possible - because this could never happen, flying all these in particularly that type of formation - all aircraft as realistically as I could. So, in doing as many aircraft paintings ... That's why I put the clouds in here, because I want to highlight the missiles in the background. So hopefully these aircraft have gone by before they shoot the missiles behind them.

And that's the point here. This is not glorifying war, in fact if anything, this is glorifying peace. The fact that we have come up with these weapons of mass destruction, in a time in our world's history we needed to do, but thank god we have not had to use them. You see what I mean?

The aircraft ... to me the aircraft is a piece of beauty. But it represents to me the strength of our country, the strength of peace, the strength of determination. It's not glorifying the idea: yeah, let's go out and bomb somebody. No, the fact that if we have to, we can...

But I wonder, who is the enemy here? What's the target? Where do they go to?

You know, their motto was: peace is our profession. Deterrent was the main thing. There was only one, well, actually two, atomic bombs dropped, in anger, ever. And those were the first two. That deterrent guaranteed, that really those missiles were never used in anger. Because of the absolute devastating power it had. So, to me, that's why I put these in the background, because we knew, and the world knew, they were there. We had that capability. And thank god that we never had to use it. But maybe because of the fact that we had it, we didn't have to use it. Somebody walking into the SAC Museum ... I wanted them to look at my painting and really have the entire story of SAC right there, as far as the mechanics of it. And that was my goal.

Features

The use of aerial refueling gives the B-52 a range limited only by crew endurance. It has an unrefueled combat range in excess of 8,800 miles. The use of aerial refueling gives the B-52 a range limited only by crew endurance. It has an unrefueled combat range in excess of 8,800 miles.

For more than 35 years B-52 Stratofortresses have been the primary manned strategic bomber force for the United States. The B-52 is capable of dropping or launching a significant array of weapons in the U.S. inventory. This includes gravity bombs, cluster bombs and precision guided missiles. Updated with modern technology, the B-52 will continue into the 21st century as an important element of our nation's defenses. Current engineering analysis show the B-52's life span to extend beyond the year 2045.

The B-52A first flew in 1954, and the B model entered service in 1955. A total of 744 B-52s were built with the last, a B-52H, delivered in October 1962. Only the H model is still in the Air Force inventory and all are assigned to Air Combat Command.

The first of 102 B-52H's was delivered to Strategic Air Command in May 1961. The H model can carry up to 20 air launched cruise missiles. In addition, it can carry the conventional cruise missile which was launched from B-52G models during Desert Storm.

The B-52's electronic countermeasures suite is capable of protecting itself against a full range of air defense threat systems by using a combination of electronic detection, jamming and infrared countermeasures. The B-52 can also detect and counter missiles engaging the aircraft from the rear. These systems are undergoing continuous improvement in order to enable them to continue to counter emerging threat systems.

MISSION TO RUSSIA 1962

Navigator Ferguson: We stayed up practically the whole night, being questioned about our route and our target and where the defenses were, and it was ...everybody was alert ... There was no sleeping. And then, when Kennedy came finally on television on monday morning, we were released. And we had a heck of a time getting off that runway, it ... The plane was so fully loaded that it took us forever.

When I came back , one guy said ... the other navigator said to me: We didn't think you were gonna make it, because ... The mathematics works out , I mean, mathematically you can - but we've never taken so much runway before. And we flew our airborne alert around Russia, and they said, at that time, past any given point on that route there was an airplane every 12 minutes. When you stop and think about that: that's a lot of B52 s, putting up a nuclear fence right there.

Usually the Russians would come up and challenge us, and they didn't send up the fighters, but they were silent, and along the whole route that night there was very little chatter. It was a very tense situation.

While you were airborne, did you think that the situation had the potential of an actual strike?

Yes. Because once they took us off alert, that's the serious situation. That's the war situation. Had never been done before to my knowledge. And we're holding down an important target. They took us off alert and assigned us that target airborne. It had never happened to me before, or the other members of the crew neither. So to us it was a situation that this is what's going to turn into reality of a war. And throughout the entire flight there was no communication to us that it was otherwise. That we are in a war situation right now and be prepared .And we frankly did a lot of planning along the route while we were airborne, to see if we had to turn. All I had to do was to turn right, at any given time, and you're headed towards Russia.

And at various points we had flight plans prepared in a locked box, and so what we've had to do if we got the code, we simply open the box, pull out the proper plan and then fly the route with the maps they provided us there. We already knew the target, because we had new U2 pictures, no, not U2 pictures, but information that, you know, what was going on there, where the target was and what we were looking for.

Of course for me it's hard to imagine how one would feel to be potentially in a situation to initiate a nuclear war. To have all the means for that at hand ...

I don't think we were thinking about that we would initiate though. I don't think ... it was my thought at that time, we would never do a preemptive strike, that the Russians had to commit first, and then we would retaliate.

In my own personal thought, I thought I would never see my home base again. Not that I would die, but I knew that would be gone. And I just, in thinking on it, during that flight I just was happy that I wasn't married and had a family, like so many of the other crew members did, the older members. Because I don't think they would be there.

They did not pull any punches on us. They said, that quite frankly, we're a target, we can generate other nuclear bombers. So don't expect to come back here.

That clock ticked very close to midnight.

B-52 Attrition

Hundreds of B-52s crashed, mostly shortly after take-off or while approaching the runway. Many of those accidents actually happened in California, at the Castle Airforce Base and Beale Airforce Base, both located in the Great Valley. Sometimes members of the crews were saved by their ejections seats. Yet most of the time they died. Other crashes happened all of a sudden out over the oceans; and sometimes aircrafts literally vanished from the radar screens for no obvious reason at all. And there are a couple of missing B-52s that simply ceased to exist, though a crash never was confirmed in public.

Among all the crashes there are two that received a somewhat higher attention because they occurred in foreign countries. 17/1/1966 Near Palomares, Spain. No. 58-0256, Model G, from Unit 68 BW, collided with KC-135A during air-to-air refuelling. A total of four nuclear weapons fell from wreckage. Also reported as having occurred on 19/1/1966.

A small village was polluted and radiated. A couple of days later a Secretary of the Franco government visited the village in order to assure the people that nothing dangerous had happened and took a swim in the public pool. I don't know if he is still alive.

The village was evacuated, and the whole area was later on bought by the American government who had a huge fence built around it. The surface soil of that area had to be scrapped and transported to the U.S. Where the waste is dumped, is unknown to this day.

21/1/68 Seven miles south-west of Thule AB, Greenland. Cabin fire caused the crash of No. 58-0188, Model G, from Unit 380 SAW on the frozen North Star Bay. The wreck glided half a mile on the ice until it exploded. The aircraft was engaged on airborne alert duty. Also reported as having occurred on 22/1/1968 and 24/1/1968.

The aircraft carried four H-bombs. Fragments of the bombs were found later, but all the nuclear components vanished under the ice. Their explosive force: one million tons TNT - a destructive power bigger than all the bombs together that were dropped in both World Wars, in Korea and Vietnam, reported the news back then. Again, the plutonium from the ignition detonator contaminated the area around the site of the crash which was a hunting ground for the eskimo. One of them actually witnessed the crash and lead the rescue team to the site. Four members of the crew were, severely injured, found.

The explosive nuclear charge was never located on the bottom of the sea under the pack ice. But this doesn't mean it is not existing anymore.

NATIONAL ATOMIC MUSEUM

Museum guide Waddell: Yes, over a city in the south of Spain called Palomares ... It was located on the coast of Spain, and at that point and time the United States had an airborne alert system called Chrome Dome, which involved having bombers flying different flight profiles around the then-Soviet Union as a part of our nuclear deterrence. And in order to do that, air to air refueling was required, and during one of those missions, a B52 aircraft and a KC135 tanker collided.

You see they're in a refueling link-up at this point and time, and when they collided and during the break of the aircraft, the four B28 weapons that were on board the B52 fell free from the aircraft, three of them fell to the land, here in Spain, and two of the three detonated, that is to say, the conventional high explosives in the bombs detonated and scattering radioactive materials and plutonium dust and alike around the countryside.

The first bomb was slowed by its parachute, did not impact with the earth and at as high a speed as the other two weapons did. So it was found and recovered very quickly, and this is the remnants of bomb number one. That's one.

Bomb number four however, again, as can be seen in this picture, did not fall on the land, but it went out into the Mediterranean Sea. And it was a real difficult problem in the recovery effort, because trying to locate it, first of all, and then bring it back from the seabed was a very difficult task. It took some 80 days to actually recover the weapon to get it back into US possession and on board an American vessel.

I actually heard that it was never recovered. That it is still today ...

No, that's not quite so, because we have the remnants of bomb number 4.

Okay, let's take a look at it ...

As can be noted, the damage to this was less severe than was seen on the other bomb, but we were fortunate in the respect, that had it not been for a Spanish fisherman, who saw this bomb descending, we might not ever have found it. He was a gentleman by the name of Zemo Orteiz, his photo is on this wall. He looks something like the American singer Dean Martin.

That's right, yeah, that's right.

... And he saw this bomb coming down. This weapon's parachute had fully deployed and slowing it, but he was at a distance, so what he saw coming down he thought was one of the aircrew members coming down in a parachute.

I see....What happened actually to the air crew?

Well, several were killed. I believe four of the seven on the B52 survived, all members, the four members in the tanker perished in the accident. But Orteiz drew us this diagram and gave it to the authorities and said, here is where the dead man entered the sea, and with this diagram the search area was made smaller to the point where it could be intensified. The weapon was found, and then, after some difficulty, was raised back to the surface and was brought back into American custody.

It was an interesting exercise, because not only were we looking for it to try to recover it, but also our friends, the Russians were looking for it at the time, and it wasn't a form of technology transfer: we were really interested in pursuing with them at that time.

Was that the reason for the cleanup that was done in the radiated or polluted areas?

The cleanup was the result of bombs two and three detonating when they hit the ground. And when they did, they scattered contamination around the Spanish countryside and there was some... There was nearly 5 000 of the 55gallon drums that are seen in this photo over here, that were filled with that Spanish topsoil, removed, and it was, you know, subsequently replaced, so that the people in the area could resume their farming and their normal activities.

SAC OPERATIONS PLAN 52-66

Colonel Stocker: But we'd carry 24 750 s external. So we'd have 24 750 s external and 84 500 s internal. That's the largest load. Though for going to Hanoi, we couldn't carry that much fuel, we lost some fuel that way. Carrying max gross weight was 450 000 pounds, and if you got a lot of fuel and a lot of bombs, something's gotta give if you go over the 450 mark. So we reduced that bomb load a little bit.

And we'd carry some 60 750 s internal and 24 500 s external. And also the 500 pound bomb, it's a new bomb, Mark 82, was more streamlined, it was for the modern jetfighters and it didn't have the drag on the airplane as the 750 pound bomb did.

But they found out, that, when you carry 108 500 pound bombs, you can train those, drop them in a train 6 000 feet long and 3 000 feet wide - one airplane. And so you could take three bombers, which were a normal cell, you could expand that to the width, make that 9 000 feet across 6 000 long, or you could make it 18 000 long, or you could put it all in the same 6000 by 3000. And we used it as area bombing and in support of the troops.

I ran over and talked to Wing Commander and he said, he'd selected me and nominated me to the General Officer over there to lead the first raid against Hanoi. And that was to be on the 18th of december. We hit very hard industrial targets in the perimeter right downtown Ha Noi. Kin No storage complex, SAM sites, SAM locations, SAM fabrication center where they put the SAM missiles and everything together, and storage centers for that. And rail ... major rail centers. And we got shot at pretty heavily by surface-to-air missiles, some were successful.

I led that group out of Guam, and the mission time on that was almost 20 hours in the air, and we landed in 13 hours crew rest, and we flew on the 20th, the 18th, 19th and 20th. That was a deputy lead on the 20th out of Guam, and we had a bad night that night, we lost 6 B52s ... were shot down total, of the total force, and it was a pretty rough night.

Then I came back out of that mission and didn't fly again, there was a stand-down at christmas time and apparently it was another attempt to try to get the peace thing started, which failed, and then I was told that the 26th we're gonna resume bombing, and I would lead that one. Turned out to be 120 B52s, out of included Guam and U-Tapao. A major force.

Targets Ha Noi railroad yards, Kin NoKomplex, the Kin No complex is a big storage area, supplies, that was quite huge. We went after Radio Ha Noi, we went after communication, commander control communication areas, airfields, the whole basket of strategic targets.

Captain Chase: The mission on the 24th went to Kep airfield. The second mission after I flew was on the 26th, the day after christmas. That was the biggest mission of the 11 day war. 120 aircraft were involved with that. 45 of us from U-Tapao, and the remainder of 75 were from Guam.

There was a big scramble and there was some delays and I was the last flight to take off, the last crew, excuse me, the last cell to take off from U-Tapao. And because of the delays, we were about 30 minutes late in getting off the ground. Once we headed off to the north from U-Tapao, I was to connect up with a flight of G-models from Guam, because they felt that a D-model cell at the back end of a G-model wave would protect them from fighters sneaking up and things of that sort.

So when I found out that they were about 150 miles straight north of me, 'cause I was late, then we brought up our power and we were able to cut our distance down to about 15 minutes, but we were still 15 minutes late coming in on the target. Mind you, everybody else had already dropped their weapons, they were gone, and we're coming in 15 minutes late, so I called Red Crown in the Tonkin Gulf, the picket ship,

and said don't let the fighter cap above us leave until I finish, you know, because we don't want to be up there by ourselves.

So when we came in on the target, it seems like there was a lot more concentration towards us, and the SAMs were coming up in large numbers and they would just come up and level off at your altitude and come back, like they're right coming at you. You have to kind of stare them down a little bit, because until it gets close enough for you to make a manoeuvre it's not going to waste your time.

That's when the gunner was very important to me, because he was able to tell me from the rear, where the SAMs were coming from and which way to manoeuvre the aircraft to avoid them. So we were doing a lot of manoeuvring and on our bomb run, you know we were bombing the Thai Nguyen steel factory north-west of Hanoi at that time, and then we broke and turned back towards the Chinese border on our exit out of North Vietnam.

Did you hit these targets? Or the steel factory?

Yes, yes, we sure did.

Do you have any idea how much of a payload you dropped over Vietnam? Overall?

Oh you mean myself?

Yes.

I had probably close to 100 missions. I would guess I was carrying 48 000 pounds roughly, 48 to 50 000 pounds.

HA NOI

General Giap: I think that the objective was to destroy totally the military system and anti-aircraft system of Viet Nam ... And conducting the most terrible killing of the people ...destroying factories, roads, schools and hospitals ... Making the Vietnamese people to be frightened ... and accepting all the conditions from the U.S. side ... They wanted to defeat the sense of fighting from the Vietnamese side....

In making the preparation for the defending of our country at that time, I put the questions up how many percentage of the number of the B52 bombers will (have to) be shot down in order to make the U.S. stop the war in Viet Nam ... And the Researching Institute in Viet Nam gave me the answer that around 7%But after the 27th of December 1972 we (had) shot down 17 %.

VOICE-OVER

In America they call it <the Viet Nam war>.

In Viet Nam they call it <the American war>.

In America they call it <the Linebacker mission>.

In Viet Nam they call it <Dien Bien Phu in the air>.

In America they call it <the Eleven Day War>.

In Viet Nam they call it <the Twelve Day War>.

This one day difference lasts on in Viet Nam, still today.

AMARC

The Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Centre in Tucson founded in 1985 employs a workforce of about 620 men. They take out of the aircrafts all explosives, such as ejection seat charges, and remove all valuable instruments, the engines and the radar system and parts that are declared military secrets. Functioning spare parts are returned to military warehouses for re-utilisation. In 1985 AMARC was able to return \$0.5 billion to the Department of Defense Inventories.

On the Preservation Farm mechanics drain the engines and hydraulic lines of oil, and any remaining oil from tanks and pipes. Engine intakes and exhausts are covered with paper. Any hatches, openings and seams are sprayed with a heavy plastic-like material in order to seal the bodies off and to protect the interior from sand, dust and rain. Then the aircrafts are moved into the desert where they are stored either to be scrapped later on or to be put back into use. There are around 2,500 planes stored on an area of 3,000 acres. It is an impressive picture of power and abundance, of squandering and aimless productivity.

Today the majority of the armada of Stratofortresses (as the B-52 have been called) is left in the desert near Tucson Arizona waiting to be scrapped. The desert air is dry and arid, and metal doesn't rust.

Almost a hundred B-52 s have been sold for scrap, and there are still around 250 others still in storage. As a result of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) the B-52 aircraft were previously chopped up in the presence of a Russian Military delegation on the site in order to witness the actual demolition. This has changed now to leaving the carcasses on the ground for 120 days so that the Soviet satellites could verify their destruction.

The splendour of the past era of 50 years of a gigantic military production ends in a glorious misery giving evidence of craftsmanship, skills and power and through that talking about the vanity of the supreme efforts of a nation that believed in the military necessities and in the political sense of their cause that right now in silence and despondency is drawing toward a close.

Yet, they are executed in a fashion of idiotic direct brutality. Too much of the destructive power of the bomber is in its own destruction present and at work.

B-52 Cut-up

The destruction of the B-52 at Monahan-Davis AFB gave me instantly the notion of a tragic epiphany. The tragedy that is our recent history. An incredibly abundant wealth, embodied in the Cold War, by all its means, devices and strategies, all of a sudden in the state of absolute uselessness and devaluation.

However you look at: a military system like the B-52 concentrates the enormous surplus that the American nation was capable to produce beyond mere necessities and immediate needs. By this, the development, construction and deployment of the B-52 is definitely comparable to the design and construction of a cathedral - as a vast social expense.

In this grim moment of (one might say: self-) destruction this surplus is declared a waste, refuse, scrap. Everything that extended necessities and needs becomes in this second when the steel blade of five tons guillotines a B-52 null and nihil.

In order to understand what happened in front of my eyes I looked for comparisons. I thought of the Mathew Passion by Bach: "We sit down in tears..." And I thought of the Isenheim altar by Gruenewald - a "sensing anatomy of pain" (John Berger). I thought of those inconceivable descriptions of human misery. Misery and defeat always stay on our side: they do not transcend, they belong to the material world and the real life.

I thought, that even in the least reified and prosthetic products of human labor and existence there remains an animalist power: hence it collapses.

HVF, West

The big corporation Huron Valley Steel Fritz got some years ago the contract of scrapping the B-52 fleet. Immediately after that its subsidiary HVF West was founded in Tucson, Arizona. On its lot adjacent to the airbase, just behind the barbed wire fence, you see the fuselages and wings of the dismembered planes stacked upon each other four storeys high.

Everything of any value is taken out of the planes before they are torn apart and ground in the shredder. The rubber of the tires and the tubes of the fuel tanks is chopped up and sold to contractors who mix it to the asphalt for road construction. The cable beams run 36 miles through a single airplane. The plastic coat is taken off, and the copper is recovered.

Every pin of every plug is made of either silver or gold because of their excellent conductivity. A foundry smelting the silver and gold of the planes has been established on the same block. Whatever can be recovered to make money will be recovered.

Sometimes Amarc overlook parts of military secrecy - here they are discovered and sold. There are always buyers for items like that. Specimens of nose art are detached and sold to collectors.

When nothing of value is left that needs to remain intact the Tomatsu caterpillar takes action. It approaches the wrecks and its claws made from titanium thrust into the fuselage making a dreadful noise. The airplanes are literally torn into pieces. Only the construction of the boxes that connect the wings to the fuselage are so resistant that they can't be destroyed.

GRAFFITI

The cabin of the tailgunner is at the rear end of the aircraft, not much bigger than the extension of his body. There he sat confined in the loneliness and frustration of his mission and wrote down what pestered him, as stupid or funny graffiti that cover this tiny space like rash. Messages of a one-sided communication stemming from silence and boredom. "Lindsay was here many times", "Sgt. Midnight and the Blacklight Bombers 75".

Opening a shutter I read: "Sky Speed, Guam April 1967"; "Jast Ben Carswell 75"; "RBenjamin Carswell 76"; "Manseel EP Gilmore"; "73 DAYS ON GUAM USA"; "Roy"; "Guam 68 Okonawa 68 Thailand 69-70"; "AIC BILL FREEMAN Sucks V.H."; "Tom Terrific"; "SCROTUM"; "LAST FLIGHT 9/11/72 58 AVC LITE SOKS FLIP CARTERS"; and on the right side to that "Hello WEB "; "Soe INDIAN"; "EVEN Tho WE BOMB + Kill WE Are Still The good guys IN The white hats"; "BARFO the FROG WAZ HERE `75".

And "Sucks" and "CASTLE AFB". On the left "THE Only Reason YOU'RE a Gun ...", the rest is illegible. Beyond some kind of cross. "LINDSAY WAS Here MANY TIMES". Words like dark, opaque mirrors addressed to nobody but to their writer who was confronted with nothing but the echos of the emptiness of his mind, 46,000 feet high and the most deadly freight in his back.

page

NOSE ART

In the course of the years the B-52 has been remodelled from time to time. You can hardly tell the difference, though. The airplanes look alike, and it is never visible what the missions were they took part in. Their appearance doesn't tell the story. Each airplane has its own number and code, and by them the model, the make and the year of manufacture can be determined - which is useful for the military accounting but doesn't provide any visual significance.

As if taking care of this lack the airmen applied at the nose and at the tail allegorical and emblematic icons. Very often they maintain - sometimes with an ironic undertone - the martial objective of the crew and the plane. The technical object is reinforced by some mythic meaning.

What signifies the military mythology ? - the use of weapons and the possession of women. At the nose of one of the airplanes (baptized <Night Hawk VI>) we can see the image of a dark woman in a bikini, a big bird cuddling up to her lap: not a swan, but the American eagle.

Some allegories remind distantly of biblical myths - the Fall of Man, in fact: a serpent winds around the trunk of a tree that turns into date palm. A date palm on another B-52 is carrying the fruit of a bunch of bombs. These were B-52 that flew the first wave of attacks over Bagdad during the Gulf War. No joke is so gross that it won't take a turn of inversion against itself.

On another B-52 we see over the caption <The Big Stick> a Neanderthal man swinging a club. Other airplanes show the back of a woman in a swimming suit, and the plane or the woman is called <Miss Fit>. But it is hard to tell what the ambivalence of word and image is referring to.

A B-52 INSTALLATION

Artist Nicholson: This is the first of 4 installations, and I was kind of getting a feel for them, and at this point I was especially interested in making it a sort of encyclopedia of everything about the aircraft. So that there are kind of components, you know, the black painted pieces, which is of Vietnam D's, mostly D's, not only D's but other ones, so that anyone looking at it would be able to see various camouflage colors in here, and so the sculpture comes together in that light.

And part of the beauty of this project is, that you can have in your hand an object like that, and for those people who were part of it, and for those people who know the story, it becomes an icon and it becomes an instrument through which you can relive the whole experience, even as a spectator or as an observer or as a participant. And it has been, you know, very good fun to watch the different sorts of objects that we've all collected out from the desert.

And I've always been interested in pieces that, how should I say, come alive when they are broken, that metal is tame and then suddenly it bursts into life when it is stressed out by these incredible forces.

This is ... key for me is not only to have these forms and little stories, but also to find a sort of opiate beauty of metal and to have within the kind of 20th century technology this flip side, that you have tamed, rolled metal and then all of a sudden the other, the thing that is left out, that shouldn't be ...

For me this is the fascination about the B52 in that it's capable of touching on all facets of contemporary american culture. And, you know, we can talk about art and war, we can also talk about food and war, we can talk about, you know, cornflakes: people buying ... having the right to buy 40 different boxes of cornflakes, and if they cannot see, that a military presence makes it possible to have that choice, then it's a problem.

That for me in the end, if you separate anything, if you put art and war into different boxes, that's a problem. If you put art, war and domesticity in separate boxes, it's even a greater problem.

The B52 touches on all of these sentiments: internationally, nationally, popular culture, graffiti, sexuality, you know, technology, I mean there is nothing left out, and it's one object. That's what I like about it so much. It's an object. It's a thing. It is a palimpsest in three dimensions. Not only textural, but it is a palimpsest that touches every facet of what we're up to.

Do you consider this work, your work, with the B52 also as a form of recycling?

You have to go into the history of metals before answering that. And you know there is this wonderful story, that the bronze tiles from Hadrian's pantheon were melted down to make canons for a pope, who was holding out in Hadrian's tomb Castello d'Angelo, and then that bronze moved over to make Bernini's Baldachino in the Vatican.

Now the guys who made that Baldachino they probably knew - in fact they would have known - where that metal came from. That it was pagan metal from a pagan temple, processed to make a military canon for a pope who then took it off to make Bernini's masterpiece, or one of his masterpieces.

FORMER NAVIGATOR

Colonel Pittman: Clearly the best weapons system ever built...

Why is that?

It's flexibility and versatility ... The airplane has been a high altitude nuclear bomber, a low altitude nuclear bomber, conventional bombs, stand-off missiles, from the very earliest hounddogs right on up to the advanced cruise missiles today. Missiles today are both conventional and nuclear. The conventional bombs today can be either smart or dumb.

It carries the harpoone missile in a ship, there is deep sea mining. There is no other airplane that is build for these jobs to do.

There were some design problems early on, as there are with most airplanes. There was a period when they were having problems with the tail. They solved that problem.

What about, what do you think the future of the B52 will be? Of course , originally it was a device in the defense system during the Cold War.

I tell you what the current position of the Air Force is. The airplane will be flying till 2037. It will outlast the B1 and the B2 . They will go into retirement before the B52. That's what the current plan is. Plans change virtually every year depending on different situations, and more important depending on political considerations. There is some unhappiness with that, because what that means is, they aren't going to start looking at a replacement. The bombers we have now would be the bombers we fly for the next 20 years or so. And there is arguments for and against that.

The point is, that the airplane can still do probably twice as much as any other aircraft we have. It has the capability. We can't replace the missions that it can do. B1 and B2 can't do all the things that the B52 can do.

How long it'll stay? I don't think it will be around till 2037. I think economically we'll decide ... I think they'll decide to replace the airplane sooner.

The airplanes we fly today are 37 years old, but airframewise they're fairly young airplanes. The H-model did not fly in South- East Asia. So it didn't build up all those hours on the airplanes that the D-model ... We've worn the D-models out ... H-models, most of them have something near to 14 000 hours, which isn't a lot of hours on a big airplane. So the airplane physically can last for a lot longer.

Whether they'll decide to keep upgrading the avionics and so forth... They have announced recently that they're gonna upgrade the avionics inside, so it would be a modern airplane again.

It gives us an ability to have a heavy presence overseas very quickly, that nothing else can give us. Also it's, again, a political symbol. And if a base ... we forward deploy B52s, the other side knows you're serious. As you know, the first strike launched against Iraq was B52. The first attack against Kosovo was B52, out of Fairfield.

B-52 SQUADRON COMMANDER

Colonel Gilbert: We never lost our nuclear capability in that function of the airplane. Part of our Global Reach, Global Power Mission that we have is it's ability to strike anywhere in the world, from homestation, without having forward deploy, and be ready on a drop of a dime ...

What's, what's the Global Power Mission? How can one define that?
Global Power essentially is our ability to generate an airplane here, load it with weapons and strike anywhere in the world. And Global Reach ... Global Power ... Force Projection, if you will, without having to open up another base somewhere and deploy in there and all the assets and support equipment and all that. We can do it from here, from Minot.

VOICE-OVER

Some problems are solved with a bang, somebody said working on the atom bomb. The B-52 bomber has been charged with solving those problems. It is an aggregate of extreme power and technical intelligence, with a long-range potential for destruction.

The projected life of the B-52 extends 70 years. The aircraft will outlast all the new bombers currently in service. No other aircraft has its range, or its diversity of weapons, or its readiness. It will live on, and it is history.

Up to now, the B-52 has been used below its capacities. This could mean: the worst is behind us. But it might also mean: it is still ahead.

The Cold War is over - the weapons still remain.

An aircraft unparalleled. A lethal machine, nothing superficial. No ornament, no fancy scroll, no flaw, no blemish. An oldfashioned, exalted perfection.

If some problems can be solved only by an enormous bang: the B-52 as a machine proves the opposite.

CREW:

Camera	VOLKER LANGHOFF
Second Camera	HUGO KROISS
Camera Assistance	CHRIS N. LAINE
Sound Recording	GERHARD METZ
	JAMES R. BENNING
Videography	REBECCA BARON
Regie Assistance	MIKE JARMON
	REBECCA BARON
Editing	THEO BROMIN
AVID Administration	LISA SCHOENBERG
Split Screen on-line	BILL PETTY
Video-to-film	DAVE HAYS
Narration	MAUREEN SELWOOD
	JON WAGNER
Title Design	THEO BROMIN
Oxberry	LARRY FAGAN
Studio Sound	CRAIG SMITH
Recording	NATHAN CROW
On-line Sound	ERIN SCOTT
Assistance	
On-line Sound	CRAIG SMITH
Editing and Mixing	
Written and	HARTMUT BITOMSKY
directed by	
Idea	BEN NICHOLSON

PRODUCTION:

Executive Producer	ALBERT SCHWINGES
Production Assistance	MIKE JARMON
Line Producer	AKHYM ST. UMBROTTI
Producer	ALBERT SCHWINGES
	HARTMUT BITOMSKY
Coproducer	WERNER DÜTSCH
	WERNER SCHWEIZER
	SUSA KATZ
in Cooperation with	JÜRGEN TOMM
	PAUL RINIKER
produced by	COFILM
	BIG SKY FILM
	Berlin/Hamburg/Los Angeles
in Coproduction with	WESTDEUTSCHER RUNDFUNK WDR
	SRG SCHWEIZER FERNSEHEN
	SENDER FREIES BERLIN SFB
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made at	CALARTS

HB CV

HARTMUT BITOMSKY is a writer and essayist, film director and producer. He received his education at the Free University Berlin where he studied from 1962 to 1966 German Philology and Theater, and also worked at the University Theater both actor and director. He finished his studies at the Berlin Film Academy in 1968.

From 1973 on he has been co-publisher and chief co-editor of the renown German magazine "Filmkritik" for more than ten years . He has written books and articles on film theory and film history and was also the editor of the German translation of André Bazin's "What Is Cinema?" in 1975.

From on 1975 taught at the Hochschule für Fernsehen und Film, München, at the Free University, Berlin and at the Film Academy, Berlin.

In 1975 he founded his own film production company Big Sky which produced since then most of his projects. Up to now he has directed and to some extend also produced more than 40 (mostly documentary) films, and his work has been shown at the Festivals of Berlin, Edinburgh, Hongkong, Leningrad, London, Marseille, Melbourne, Montreal, Los Angeles, New Delhi, Rotterdam and Venice and many other places. Among the awards he has won is the "Grimme Award in Gold" for the film "Reichsautobahn" in 1987.

In 1993 he moved to the U.S. and since then serves as Dean of the School of Film/Video the California Institute of the Arts where he is also teaching Documentary Film Production, Film Analysis and related courses.

In 1997 he was awarded a Rockefeller Fellowship.

Last Fall 2000 a retrospective of his oeuvre as <Tribute to Hartmut Bitomsky> was shown at the Vienna Film Festival.

His new feature length film on the B-52 bomber - shot in 1999 in the USA, Germany and Viet Nam - premiered this February at the Berlin Film Festival.

Films (selection):

1970

DIE TEILUNG ALLER TAGE (THE DIVISION OF EVERY DAY)

Instructional film on economy.

Written, directed and produced with Harun Farocki.

16 mm, b&w, 33 min.

1971

EINE SACHE, DIE SICH VERSTEHT (A MATTER THAT'S UNDERSTOOD)

Instructional film on economy.

Written, directed and produced with Harun Farocki.

16 mm, b&w, 64 min.

1975

AUF BIEGEN ODER BRECHEN (BY HOOK OR CROOK).

Feature film.

Written, directed and produced.

35 mm, col., 94 min.

1976

HUMPHREY JENNINGS (REPORT ON AN ENGLISH FILMMAKER)

Documentary film.

Written and directed with Angelika Wittlich.

16 mm, col., 67 min.

1976

DER SCHAUPLATZ DES KRIEGES - DAS KINO VON JOHN FORD

(THE THEATRE OF WAR - THE CINEMA OF JOHN FORD)

TV documentary.

Written and directed.

Video tape, col., 91 min.

1977

DIE KARAWANE DER WÖRTER (A CARAVAN OF WORDS)

Feature film

Written, directed and produced.

16 mm, col., 180 min.

1978

DIE KULTUR REVUE (A CULTURAL REVUE)

TV documentary film in 4 parts.

Written, directed and coproduced.

Video tape, col., 175 min.

1980/81

HIGHWAY 40 WEST - REISE IN AMERIKA

(HIGHWAY 40 WEST - VOYAGE IN AMERICA)

Documentary film.

Written, directed and produced.

35 mm, col., 180 min.

1983

DEUTSCHLANDBILDER (GERMAN PICTURES)

Documentary film.

Written, directed and produced with Heiner Mühlenbrock.

35 mm, b&w, 58 min.

1985

REICHSAUTOBAHN (HIGHWAYS OF THE 3rd REICH)

Documentary film.

Written, directed and produced.

35 mm, b&w, 91 min.

1988

DAS KINO UND DER TOD (CINEMA AND DEATH)

Documentary film.

Written, directed and produced.

Video tApe, col., 46 min

1989

DER VW KOMPLEX (THE VW COMPLEX)

DocumentarY film.

Written, directed and coproduced.

35 mm, col., 91 min.

1991

DAS KINO UND DER WIND UND DIE PHOTOGRAPHIE

(CINEMA AND WIND AND PHOTOGRAPHY - 7 Chapters on Documentary Films)

Documentary film.

Written, directed and coproduced.

Video tape, color and b&w, 59 min.

1991

KINO FLÄCHEN BUNKER (CINEMA, SURFACE, SHELTER)

Documentary film.

Written, directed and coproduced.

Video tape, color, 53 min.

1992

DIE UFA (UFA - A German Film Studio)

Documentary film.

Written, directed and produced.

Documentary film.

Video tape, color, 88 min.

1993

IMAGINÄRE ARCHITEKTUR - Der Baumeister Hans Scharoun

(IMAGINARY ARCHITAECTURE - The Masterbuilder Hans Scharoun)

Documentary film.

Written, directed and produced

Video tape, color, 65 min.

1995

PLAYBACK

Documentary film.

Written, directed and coproduced

Video tape, color, 65 min.

2001

B-52

Documentary film

Written, directed and coproduced

35mm widescreen, color 108 min