

The Saga of B-47E 53-6244

In February 1965, 307th Bomb Wing B-47 number 53-6244, the last B-47 produced, was flown from Lincoln AFB to Wright-Patterson AFB, where it was to be entered into the Air Force Museum. Unfortunately, in the long run, it didn't quite work out that way!

In 1992 and 1993, articles published in the 307th Bomb Wing newsletter described the eventual fate of 6244. Since then, the 307th Bomb Wing Association has gained many new members who never got to read about 6244, and who have asked many questions concerning her fate. Also, in the years following these newsletter articles, we have come into additional material, some photos, and another historical account, written by a student as a junior high school research project.

In order to update the record, the original 1990s articles are reprinted below, along with other material including the student's account and photos that were not available earlier.

According to the aircraft data records from the Air Force Historical Research Agency at Maxwell AFB, Alabama:

"The B-47E, s/n 53-6244, was manufactured by Boeing Aircraft, Wichita KS and delivered to the USAF on 24 Oct 1956. Its assignments were:

Oct 1956 To 40th Bombardment (M) Wing (SAC), Smokey Hill AFB KS."...

Lt Col Ray J Notley, USAF Ret, a member of the crew who picked up 6244 at the Boeing plant, writes of the event:

B-47E SN 53-6244 Built at the Boeing Wichita Plant, SN 53-6244: Crew S-36 took possession in mid 1956: Crew members were Captain David W Clark (A/C), 1/Lt Ray J Notley (CP), Captain Rodney Collier (Nav). Interesting story surrounds the delivery of this aircraft, since it was the last one built at Wichita, the plant workers organized a charity drive to raise money for a good cause somewhere, the workers taped or glued coins and paper money to every surface of the aircraft. The crew could not preflight or fly the bird until all the loot was cleared from the entire aircraft. It took nearly two days to do so... Needless to say we looked at every nook and cranny in preflight to insure that the entire aircraft had been cleared (literally thousands of dollars of money had to be removed before we could fly it). The flight home to Smokey Hill AFB was uneventful. Upon landing the maintenance crews received the bird to do their thing. When they removed the side panel from the C/P ejection seat, they found it was still chained and locked to the floor boards! Oh boy, so much for meticulous preflights!

The remainder of the aircraft data record shows:

Jan 1957	To 307th Bombardment (M) Wing (SAC), Lincoln AFB NE.
Jul 1958	To Oklahoma Air Materiel Center, Tinker AFB OK.
Aug 1958	Return to Lincoln AFB
Jun 1959	To Lockheed Aircraft, Marietta GA.
Oct 1959	Return to Lincoln AFB.
Jun 1963	To Douglas Aircraft, Tulsa OK.
Jul 1963	Return to Lincoln AFB.
Jan 1965	Dropped from USAF inventory by transfer.

Although it was “dropped” from the operational inventory, custody was transferred to the Air Force Museum, which at the time was part of Air Force Logistics Command.

Over it's time in the 307th Bomb Wing at Lincoln AFB, 6244 was tended to by several crew chiefs, those we know of being Charlie Baker, Donn Kimmel, Bruce Stufflebeam, and Steve Vensky.

The transfer to the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB was a big deal for those remaining at Lincoln as the 307th BW prepared to deactivate in 1965. Many of the 307th troops participated in the cleaning, waxing, shining and buffing of the bird to prepare it for its debut at Wright-Patt. Bill Evans, Darryl Haag, Don Kimmel, Jim Sine, Bruce Stufflebeam, and Jim Villa, and others, all spent many hours in the big hanger making her pretty. This was important because 6244 was one of the better flying and maintained aircraft in the wing, she was the last B-47 made, and she was also the cover girl photo on the front page of the B-47E Tech Order. Meanwhile, the wing went about selecting a crew and picked Capt Gene Hickman (A/C), Capt Pete Todd (CP), and Capt Al Ottaviano (Nav) and A1C Jim Sine, crew chief, to deliver 6244 to the Museum. This privilege was a reward for the crew's performance in a 2nd Air Force competition. However, for some reason, the crew names painted on the side of the aircraft were Mitchell, Gerber, and Evans.



53-6244 Departing Lincoln AFB

Upon arrival at Wright-Patterson, 6244 was displayed in the Museum's unpaved outdoor exhibition area for a while. For those unfamiliar with Wright-Patterson, the Museum then occupied a rather ramshackle hanger just east of base ops and the outdoor exhibition area later became a parking lot after the Museum moved to its present site in 1971. At this time in the 1960s, there was an operational SAC B-52 wing at Wright-Patterson, the 17th Bomb Wing, located on the opposite side of the runway from base ops. The powers that be in the 17th decided to have a display of SAC aircraft in front of their wing headquarters, and among others, 6244 was appropriated to stand vigil there. The 307th Bomb Wing insignia on 6244's nose was removed and replaced with that of the 17th BW.

Then in 1971, it became time for the Air Force Museum to move to their new facility, located several miles distant. The challenge was the movement of the larger aircraft located in the outdoor “parking lot”. The only accessible route between the old and new facility was along a busy four lane divided highway. The highway was shut down for a weekend, traffic lights, signs and other obstructions were removed, and the larger birds were then convoyed nose-to-tail to the new facility. The highway shut down and preparation was a one time occurrence, not to be repeated. For some reason, not adequately explained to this day, 6244 and the other birds in front of 17th BW headquarters did not make it into the convoy (three or four conflicting stories or hypotheses abound in explanation of this failure).

Apparently folks at the AF Museum at that time were not overly concerned because they had another B-47 in their possession. Their B-47 had started life as an early B-47 in possession of Air Force Systems Command, and in fact had done yeoman work as a test bed for the first fly-by-wire electronic control system, such as now found on all modern aircraft.

Then, in 1976, the 17th Bomb wing was deactivated, and the aircraft lawn ornaments in front of their headquarters were cast adrift and turned over to salvage. 6244 was towed to an isolated spot along a back road next to the Mad River where she deteriorated, occasionally donating a part for other B-47s in need at other museums. She then was turned over to the Wright-Patt fire department where she was set afire numerous times for fire crew training. What happened to her residual carcass is not exactly known.

What follows below are personal observations, memories, and research of 6244 by Mike Gingrich, Jim Villa and Christopher Bright.

Last of the Line By Mike Gingrich

November 1992

It was a beautiful autumn morning in October 1975; my six year old son's first soccer game had just begun on the field adjacent to the SAC Bomb Wing Headquarters at Wright-Patterson AFB. Because the action on the field lacked World Cup intensity, my gaze soon wandered to the aircraft parked a hundred feet away, where the SAC wing had a mini-museum. I could see a KC-97, KC-135, B-52, and a B-29, but it was the B-47 that drew my attention.

On the tail I saw the familiar green stripe of the 307th Bomb Wing, and below the stripe were the numbers 6244. Closer inspection revealed the names of the crew painted on the side near the nose. I knew all the names, and memories took over my thoughts. I recalled that 53-6244 was one of the aircraft that crews liked to fly, and that I had flown it several times. A later check of my log book showed that on 9 April 59, Solomon and I returned it to the crew chief slightly bent, as we had shut down number six following its flame out on final approach. But that did not diminish our esteem for the bird. A nearby plaque noted that 53-6244 was the last B-47 produced, and that she had been brought to Wright-Patterson in 1965 from Lincoln.

My intention was to return with my camera to take pictures; however, procrastination and events displaced my intentions. Shortly thereafter, the SAC Wing was deactivated, and when I returned with the camera, all the aircraft were gone. No pictures! Sometime later, while visiting the Air Force Museum, I engaged the Curator, Royal D. Frey, in a conversation about the aircraft. Mr. Frey told me that the Museum had hoped to put 6244 on display at the Museum, but that there had been no way to move her from the location on the Patterson Field side of Wright-Patt, down the highway to the Museum located on the Wright Field side. Frey explained that when the new Museum site opened in the early 1970s, special provisions were made to move the large aircraft from Patterson to Wright Field. Utility poles and other obstructions along the highway were removed, and the highway was entirely closed for one weekend while the aircraft were moved in convoy fashion. It was, however, a one-time deal. He regarded 6244's situation as a loss to Air Force history, as the B-47 wearing SAC colors at the Museum was not a SAC airplane, but an Air Force Systems Command research configured bird, now painted in the SAC scheme (*referred to by some as an "Imposter"*). The actual SAC aircraft, 6244, had been consigned to the base fire department for drills.

(Ed note: In more modern times, the Air Force Museum has removed the wings of larger airplanes, in order to get them to museum premises for restoration. A RB-47 was recently acquired thusly).

Shortly after my conversation with Frey, an article in *The Skywriter* (Wright Patt's newspaper), entitled "Stratojet Silently Serving," confirmed Mr. Frey's information. According to *The SkyWriter*, 6244 had been used for battle damage training before being assigned to the fire department. Described as a nesting place for wasps and birds, she had also donated an engine and a strut to repair a tornado damaged Stratojet at the Bradley Museum in Windsor Locks, Connecticut.

In June 1979, the Property Disposal Office evaluated her value at one million dollars. Considering her flyaway cost when new of about 2.5 million, she held up pretty well for twenty-five years. Let's see ... that's only \$60,000 depreciation per year.

It seems fitting that as the last of her line, she managed to avoid the metal slashing guillotine at the boneyard, and continued to serve the Air Force for so long before fading away.

Last of the Line, Part II

The November 1992 article, *The Last of the Line*, about B-47E number 53-6244, the last B-47 produced, evoked a great deal of interest and response from readers. Numerous letters and phone calls were received from people offering additional information. Also, I did a little more digging at the Air Force Museum and the Air Force Historical Research Agency, so it's time to let everyone know what was found out about the bird.

We heard from or talked with Darryl Haag, Bill Evans, Donn Kimmell, Sandor Babos, Mary K (Mrs Robert Collins), Pete Todd, Glenn Lally, Dave Roebuck, and Dave Menard of the AF Museum's Research Division. To all these folks, thanks for your interest and help.

Here's what was learned:

The crew that flew the plane to Wright Patterson on 22 January 1965 was Capt Eugene T Hickman -- Aircraft Commander, Capt Harold W "Pete" Todd -- Copilot, Capt Alfred F Ottaviano - Navigator, and A1C James R Sine -- Crew Chief. This was determined from *Jet Scoop* photos furnished by Darryl Haag, which show 6244 on the ground at WPAFB, with the crew and the Director of the AF Museum, Col William F Curry. The photos also clearly show the 307th Wing Crest to be on the right side of the plane at that time. In an AF Museum press release that day, Gene Hickman states that the plane was "polished so slick, it flew 15 knots faster than it normally does." Gene is also on record as saying his crew was selected for the mission as reward for being the top crew in 2nd Air Force.

According to Glenn Lally, of Enon Ohio, who was director of the SAC Liaison Office at WPAFB at the time, the crew names painted on the side of the plane were Mitchell, Gerber and Evans.

For display at the Bomb Wing at WPAFB, the 307th crest was removed, and replaced with the crest of the 17th Bomb Wing. After all, no self respecting SAC Wing could have another wing's crest on a bird parked next to their headquarters. (*Perhaps one of our former crewmembers turned lawyer, could sue for defacement of 307th property?*).

According to the Air Force Historical Agency's aircraft data records, 53-6244 was manufactured by Boeing in Wichita, and was delivered to the AF on 24 October 1956, at which time it was assigned to the 40th BW at Smoky Hill AFB, Kansas. Capt. Dave Clark, A/C, Roy Notley, C/P, Capt. Rodney Collier NAV flew the last B-47E bomber built at Boeing Wichita, Kansas and it was assigned to the 44th BS for a short time until transferred to Lincoln AFB NE In January 57. It was assigned to the 307th BW until it went to the depot at Tinker for Milk Bottle mod in July 58. It returned to Lincoln in August 58, but went to the Lockheed plant in Marietta GA in June 59, returning to Lincoln in October. To balance things among the various companies that produced B-47s, it went to the Douglas plant at Tulsa in June 63, and returned in July to the 307th, where it served the remainder of its active life.

Donn Kimmell of La Vista NE, 6244's last Crew Chief, says that a picture of 6244 was used on the title page of all the later tech orders. Donn also described the intense preparation and polishing of the plane prior to the trip to the Museum. He sent a copy of a letter of appreciation he received from the Wing Commander for his part in the effort. Donn had also heard from an acquaintance that 6244 had been seen in Hawaii in the late 1960s as a WB-47. The AF aircraft data records seem to contradict that rumor.

Others working and crewing 6244 were Bill Evans of Mankato MN, and Darryl Haag, of Norwood MN. Bill says he made a trip to WPAFB in 1972 specifically to see the bird, but was disappointed to find he could not see it up close -- only from across the field. SAC security you know. Darryl also remarked about the month he spent polishing on the bird...the polish was driven out of the rivet holes by moisture encountered during the flight, and turned into black tarnish.

Finally, just what was the final demise of good old 6244? I called the WPAFB Fire Department and spoke with Chief Jackson. According to the Chief, 6244 was set afire repeatedly to provide fire suppression and rescue training; after six or seven burns there was not enough remaining to provide further training. So, sometime in the 1979 time frame, her remains were gathered up and sent to the scrap yard. Her demise and failure to get into the Air Force Museum is regarded as a historical tragedy by the Museum staff. The Museum's AFSC impersonator (as Pete Todd describes the B-47 on display) doesn't even have wing tanks, so it will never qualify to become "combat ready". Still, 6244 served her nation well.

It would appear that what began as a trip to a six-year old's soccer game in 1975, has become not only a research project, but a significant generator of nostalgia as well. Of the letters and phone calls remembered not only 6244, but other vivid recollections of the 307th Bomb Wing, B-47s and Lincoln Air Patch, as well. In short, it has been educational and fun!

The author of the following account is Christopher J Bright, who at the time in 1978 was twelve years old, and whose father was assigned to Wright-Patt. Chris is now, in 2003, a PhD candidate in American Diplomatic History at George Washington University, where his dissertation topic is nuclear strategy in the Eisenhower era. He writes here for a school research project.

B-47E, tail number 53-6244 sits quietly amongst sister aircraft of her era. The other aircraft surrounding her are charred, twisted and mangled, some even beyond recognition. But amazingly, 6244 has not yet met such a terrible, fiery fate. There she sits, at the Aircraft Fire Training Center, her dulled fuselage and wings far from the way they gleamed that day in January of 1965.

I first saw 6244 when driving with my family along a back road on Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. We came upon a clearing, we saw, as described above, the remains of many different aircraft. Ahead loomed this magnificent aircraft. Curiosity was aroused. I knew this aircraft was at least fourteen years old. I wondered where did she serve? What missions did she fly? Why is she now resting here? What about her crewmembers? What is their fate fourteen years later?

I quickly jotted down the aircraft number from the tail section of the aircraft. I thought that I would be able to send this information to the headquarters of the Strategic Air Command for the answers to these questions.

The return letter from SAC was quite disappointing. The letter said that they were unable to answer my questions because they do not keep the records of out of service aircraft. However, they went on to say that they had forwarded my letter to the office of information at Wright-Patterson.

A few weeks later I received a form letter from Sgt. Oscar Seara from this office. Sgt. Seara said, that again my letter had been forwarded, this time to the Albert H. Simpson Historical Center, at Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery Alabama. My morale hit an all time low, I thought I would have gotten some sort of information. However, I held out that maybe the historical center could help me.

The response from the historical center came two weeks later. The letter read in part, "We believe the aircraft in your letter, partial serial number 6244 to be the B-47E 53-6244. Manufactured by the Boeing Aircraft Corporation, Wichita, Kansas, it was delivered to the USAF October 24, 1956. For a short time (Oct. 1956-Jan. 1957) it was assigned to the 40th Bombardment Wing (SAC), Smoky Hill AFB Kansas. It was assigned to the 307th Bombardment Wing (SAC), Lincoln AFB Nebraska from January 1957 to January 1965, when it was dropped from the USAF inventory." This letter raised my morale greatly. However, this wasn't enough information to satisfy me, because the historical center had not answered all my questions.

I then decided to send two duplicate letters, one to the Air Force Times, the other to the Air Force Magazine, asking to hear from any former crew members or other people associated with this aircraft while it was stationed at either Air Force Base.

The response was terrific. Within two days after my letter was published in the Air Force Times, I had calls pouring in. The first call that I received was from Dan Friedlander, who lives in Columbus. He used to be a mechanic stationed at Moron, Spain. He said 6244 used to, along with the other planes, of the 307th Bombardment Wing, fly Reflex missions to Moron from Lincoln. This meant the planes stayed at Moron for a few weeks on a "special alert". Then they would fly back to Lincoln.

Mr. Friedlander said the reason he remembers 6244 so well is because it rarely needed repair and all the other mechanics looked upon 6244 with great admiration.

Mr. Friedlander recalled one time, after he "launched" the aircraft the landing gear would not retract. Steve Vensky, a crewmember at that time, had to crawl down a special passage way running through the center of the fuselage to check the landing gear system. All this while flying! Mr. Friedlander assured me this was not an easy task. The bomber could not land because of the amount of fuel at this time. The problem was finally corrected, and after a short period of time, the bomber landed.

The second telephone call I received was from Lt. Col. Mike Gingrich, who at the time was a 1st Lt. Although Lt. Col. Gingrich never flew the plane on Reflex missions to Spain, he flew the plane a total of twenty-two hours on simulated bomb runs over the northeast of the United States. He recalls one such flight, April 9, 1959, the day Queen Elizabeth was visiting Chicago they had a "flameout" on number 6 engine over Chicago, - In other words, the engine became inoperative. Lt. Col. Gingrich also told me that he believed the names stenciled on the aircraft under the cockpit are the names of those that won the wing bomb championship. One thing Mr. Friedlander told me in his previous telephone call is the fact that the bomber used to be at the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson. Mr. Gingrich confirmed this and said that the names on the airplane are those that were on it when it was at the museum. Mr. Gingrich gave me additional names of crewmembers (I was compiling quite a list).

Things then lulled, just as I was completing my research, I received a very interesting letter from, a Col. Harold W. Todd, who at the time he flew 6244 was also a 1st Lt. who was fresh from B-47 combat crew training. Col. Todd said that the last B-47 built was "none other than 6244", which was why it was at the museum. Col. Todd and his co-crew members had won a Second Air Force wide "crew knowledge" championship. Because of this, they were chosen to fly the aircraft to Wright Patterson. The weekend before 6244 was to be flown to Wright-Patterson "dozens of young airman, using 500 lbs. of polishing compound" shined 6244 until it looked new. Col. Todd swears that because of the polishing, the aircraft got ten knots more per hour on its flight to Wright -Patterson. Col. Todd said that this day in January of 1965 (ironically the day that Winston Churchill died) was slated to be the "media event of the season at Lincoln, cameramen, local TV folks, and the whole wing staff was present. However, Col. Todd reports, "Only one Problem. Ever been in Nebraska in January? Well, on this particular day, the fog would have made Londoners green with envy. The bright, sleek machine was dulled by the weather into a barely discernible hulk looming in the murk. The media people were disappointed; the wing commander was apoplectic; the flight crew was just happy the weather lifted enough to let us get off the ground with our treasure".

Col. Todd continues: "Arrival at Wright-Pat was considerably more festive. The airplane was met with all appropriate pomp. We were told very solemnly that our names would be stenciled on the aircraft". (the names on the aircraft are those that won the wing bomb championship, unfortunately, Col. Todd and his other crew members' names are not on the aircraft as Col. Todd believes) "so all the many thousands of visitors to the museum could marvel at the legendary, intrepid airmen who had harnessed and delivered such a noble steed! We emptied her of checklists and parachutes for the last time and were driven away to town secure in our knowledge that "our" airplane would always stand proudly among the other mint condition examples of American aviation prowess."

If Col. Todd had only known this not to be true; however, rusting at Wright-Patterson she still serves a valuable purpose - to teach some young firemen how to put out an aircraft fire in this era of aircraft. Possibly she will still save some lives in this duty of hers.

Ed: In addition to those mentioned above, Chris Bright also heard from Al Kulikowski and Cornelius Cosentino during the course of his research.

MY JOURNEY TO THE LAST B-47E, 6244

By James Villa

When did I get interested in airplanes? I don't remember but I do remember my first toy airplane. It was a small red plastic P-40 War Hawk that my grandmother bought for me while in a department store in Houston. Over my grade school years I would see airplanes in movies and build model airplanes. I would read anything about airplanes and I spent a lot on comic books with airplanes. Whenever we were traveling at night, I would look at airport beacon lights and imagine what was there at the airports. I would watch as distance came between us and their locations.

As I got older, there came several opportunities to go for rides in small civilian airplanes. I couldn't ever get to go to an airshow; the only airshows that I knew of were held at Ellington Field between Houston and Galveston. In those days (early 1950s), that would be an all day trip. During my high school years, I would do reports or essays whenever the reports would be acceptable for the subject requirements. The Wright brothers were my idols then, but now I know that they were not the first to do powered flight. What I do know to be true, is they were the first to photograph powered flight.

In the early 50s, the B-36s would be flying a lot over where I lived. The heavy drone of their engines could be heard almost before a person would see the monsters. When the airplanes would pass over our old house, the windows would vibrate. When I would be working in the fields, I would watch the big airplanes until I could not see them anymore. Along about 1955 or 1956, the movie "Strategic Air Command" with Jimmy Stewart and June Allyson came out. It was a must see film. I soaked up every second of the B-36 scenes. I didn't pay a lot of attention to the B-47 part. I never would have dreamed that one day I would serve in the Strategic Air Command and be a B-47 crew chief.

When I graduated from Bellville High School in 1957, I really didn't know what I wanted to do. I worked construction during the summer months. That fall I fell in with some of my friends and we went to college. I graduated from Blinn and transferred to Texas A&M as a junior. Airplanes had drifted far from my mind.

It didn't work out at A&M. I realized the playing field was more complex. I didn't have it – I failed chemistry (a C- was rated as a 76). What was worse, I was paying my own way and I was out of money. I was in debt.

I decided to drop out and go back the next fall. I got a job and was doing fairly well. Then I did what many had done. I bought another car and a large amount of what I was making went into it. Time passed. Before I knew it, the fall semester was there. I decided to further delay going back to college until the spring semester.

Lo, and behold, I lost my college deferment. In those days, all young men were required to register for the draft. There wasn't any lottery system. When a person's number came up, he was inducted unless he was declared unfit. The draft board had reclassified me 1A and sure was interested in me.

I had no desire to go to the Army. I never considered myself a very strong person. The Navy was out. I don't like water deeper than what is in a bath tub. The Marines was not a good choice. It was then I decided to volunteer for a four year enlistment in the Air Force. I was back on track thinking about airplanes.

I wanted to be a turret gunner, mainly because of an old war movie. One of the turret gunners always carried a camera, taking photos. Without a college degree, I didn't think I could be a pilot.

When I reported for enlistment, I was told that there wasn't any need for gunners anymore. So I chose aircraft or missile maintenance. Later, at Lackland, I narrowed my choice to aircraft maintenance. If I couldn't fly on them – I could work on them.

I sweated passing the physical examination. I had injured both knees during my teens and thought they would not pass. I wanted desperately to go into the service since my Uncle Joe Villa and Uncle Jessie Villa had served in WWII in extreme combat conditions. It was my time to serve.

I passed all the induction requirements and away to basic at Lackland. I'm sure anyone who has been in the military will agree with me that basic training is a rude awakening. I would do only five weeks of basic at Lackland and finish the other three weeks at Amarillo AFB, Texas.

At the aircraft mechanic school at Amarillo, we were given a choice – fighters or bombers. I thought – bigger the better –and went into bomber mechanic school. I was right where I wanted to be! The school had two B-47s. Before the thirteen weeks were over, we had thoroughly gone over the airplanes. We learned all of the systems. Some of us were trained as system's specialists. I was rated for general aircraft maintenance. At the time I had no idea what I would be doing.

When I thought about joining, I wanted to be stationed overseas. I wanted to be stationed on some Pacific island. You know; sandy beaches and blue water lagoons. When I got my orders (after graduating from bomber school) assigning me to Lincoln AFB, Nebraska, I had to get a map to see where in the heck the place was. Right in the center of the United States!

I arrived at Lincoln AFB, I was assigned to the 307th Maintenance Squadron. While processing in, I was selected to stay in the orderly room and work under T/Sgt Maynard Reece. I was only supposed to work in the records section for two weeks and then go out onto the flight line. Another man had been selected (he volunteered) to stay in the orderly room for six weeks but he had a medical problem and was discharged. I would assume his position and still be under Sergeant Reese's supervision.

I continued duty in the orderly room after the six weeks passed. The work wasn't that difficult, and I could always stay neat. I revised all of the technical orders we operated by. Plus I handled the aircraft forms that had to be processed. But finally I asked Sgt. Reece when I would be going to the flight line. He said if I wanted to stay in the orderly room, he would see to it. I told him no. I trained as an aircraft mechanic and I wanted to be with the airplane.

Sergeant Reece was a fine person and sometimes I regretted asking to leave. Worse yet, some forty one years later I learned that Sgt. Reece had been murdered by an estranged son-in-law.

I was assigned to "A" section, C flight when I arrived on the flight line. Since I was semi-skilled with a three level rating, I worked with assigned crew chiefs. Here I found that a person better learn real fast. We were in real business where people's lives depended upon our work. SAC demanded rigid scheduling. The mission was to always be ready to launch the nuclear uploaded aircraft to retaliate against any aggressor. The crew chiefs were responsible for training the new men and at the same time responsible for 2.5 million dollar airplanes.

Everyone, Airman First Class, on down had to do a tour of three months in the servicing section. I worked the midnight to eight shift refueling, defueling, towing and positioning B-47s. We were a crew of five men. During these three months, November, December and January; I would experience my first winter in Nebraska. (I had always wanted to see snow and I sure did!)

When I returned from the servicing branch, I worked with different crew chiefs. It wasn't long before the "A" section NCOIC, CMSgt. Matthew Pelikan decided to pull me in to take care of the "A" section records. I had choice duty again. But now I could see our B-47s sitting right out there in front of our section trailer. I had to ask again to go out on the flight line. This time it wasn't hard to get a replacement for me (another man was eager to have my job).

I was assigned to S/Sgt. Steven Vensky to continue training for the five level upgrade. Steve was the assigned crew chief on 6244, which is where I first crossed paths with the airplane. Steve would be promoted to T/Sgt, and moved out of "A" section. S/Sgt. Pressley (we called him Elvis, of course) became the assigned crew chief. I helped him on 6244. Before long the AICs were doing a lot of the launches. A staff sergeant could have two or more airplanes assigned to his name even if someone else would maintain and launch the airplanes.

6244 was the newest B-47E at Lincoln AFB. The airplane went first to the 40th Bomb Wing at Smoky Hill AFB (later named Schilling AFB), Salina, Kansas. Why the B-47 was transferred to the 307th, we never knew.. I would meet a crew chief many years after I was out of the Air Force who knew why she was transferred to Lincoln AFB. He said that the Air Division Commander stationed at Lincoln AFB requested 6244 for his personal airplane for when he would fly. "She" (many crew chiefs referred to the airplanes as "shes"; we assumed that we just fell in love with them) was a fully equipped B-47 with the latest ECM (electronic counter measures) units.

After gaining my five level and promoted to A2C, off to alert I went. I worked on 6244 every once in a while (maybe a regular launch or a tour on alert with the airplane). I don't recall ever doing Reflex TDY with 6244 in England or Spain. When I was required to get my flying time in, I flew as the "fourth man" on any of the bomb wing's assigned aircraft.

I was on alert duty (December 64) when I heard 6244 was being sent to the USAF museum in Dayton Ohio. I went down to the regular flight line in an alert vehicle by myself. It was early on a Sunday morning just as the sun was coming up when I took the photos of 6244 that I have in my web site.

The following January, we cleaned and polished 6244 into immaculate condition. All the squadrons were involved in preparing the "bird". New paint and stenciling were applied

6244 was kept in the southeast quarter of the giant hanger. The airplane was taken out only to be refueled and for running the engines. A2C Bruce Stufflebeam and I did some of the maintenance ground preflight in the hanger on the morning of museum flight launch. Before daylight, the airplane was towed and parked in front of Base Operations. Once there, Bruce and I continued the ground preflight with external power connected.

When the flight crew arrived there were a few photos taken with the Wing Commander, Colonel A.W. Holderness. The weather wasn't very cooperative that morning. It was overcast and a light drizzle falling. I heard there were supposed to be some people out from the city of Lincoln, but they didn't show, for some reason.

The aircrew climbed aboard and commenced engine start. When Captain Hickman was ready to taxi, he told me to disconnect and I wished the crew a good flight. That was the last time I said anything over ground headsets. Bruce and I

closed 6244 up for the last time. Bruce and I rode with the maintenance officer, Lt. Colonel John Crook, out to the edge of the main runway and watched 6244 takeoff and disappear in the low overcast.

This was my last launch of a B-47; also my last work day on the flight line. I was getting out of the Air Force and would start clearing base. It still is amazing to me that I would be involved in sending the last tail numbered B-47 on its last flight and to a museum. Base politics at the USAF museum would change this historical event.

Almost six years passed before I had the opportunity to travel to the USAF museum in Dayton, Oh. I can't explain the excitement. I walked out to the open display area where 6244 sat. At first glance, I saw the airplane wasn't being cared for. I noticed the rudder was unlocked and the right outrigger tire was flat. What really set me back; our crew member's names had been replaced. I walked around 6244 the same way we did the ground preflight inspections. I saw the 307th crest had been replaced with another (17th Bomb Wing). I couldn't help wondering what had taken place. But it was great to see 6244. I walked around with a young couple showing them a lot about the airplane. Then I sat on a bench under the B-36's right wing for a long time remembering. I had no thought that this was the last time that I would set eyes on 6244.

In 1997, I had planned a stop in Dayton to see 6244. The airplane was not on display. Instead, Wright-Patterson's test bed B-47 was sitting in the museum. I asked a few of the museum people what had happened to 6244, but I could have asked the museum walls and gotten the same answer.

We came away from the museum theorizing that the airplane had been moved to another museum. I had heard a SAC museum was being built in Nebraska. Maybe 6244 had been moved there. Or maybe the airplane had been taken back into service and ended up being stored somewhere. I hadn't heard at the time, all but two of the I400 plus B-47s sent to Davis Monthan AFB at Tucson had been scrapped. It had been stated that the airplanes would be useful if needed until year 2000,

In 2002, I found the B-47 Association. Immediately I sent an application for membership. The president of the association sent me the latest newsletter. I opened the newsletter, The photos of 6244, taken on January 22, 1965, caught my eye. I was thrilled! There were the three photos taken that morning; but there was a fourth photo. The fire training school at Wright-Patterson had used 6244 for training. The airplane was eventually destroyed. I must admit I uttered some very choice, unprintable words.

Over the past years, I have been searching out details about 6244's removal from the museum. There have been several different reasons for replacing 6244. None of them hold much water. The most recent version is that 6244's wings drooped too low and would not clear sign posts and fences when all of the museum's aircraft were moved to a new museum site. What is most apparent, Wright-Patterson AFB wanted their B-47 in the museum and coveted 6244's display slot.

The removal of 6244 from the museum was quite a blow to me. Many of the other 307th Bomb Wing people have indicated their feelings of resentment toward the USAF Museum. One ex-307th person, instrumental in placing the B-47 Association's B-47 Memorial in the museum's memorial park, made sure 6244's tail number is on the B-47 image displayed on the monument. So, in a sense, 6244 is finally in the AF Museum.

Epilog

I think how blessed and privileged I am to have experienced this story. I remember the mission of the Strategic Air Command down to the smallest detail. I can still smell the exhaust of the engines. I remember the weather conditions under which we maintained the airplanes. I remember how all of us (aircrews and maintenance people) worked together to operate one of the most powerful deterrence force that ever existed. I could go on and on. If I could do it over again, I would do it in a heartbeat.

But what I remember with a sad heart is, we lost some of our people in crashes and accidents. During the ten plus years, while the B-47s were operating out of Lincoln AFB, Nebraska; more than 35 crew members were killed in B-47 crashes. Lincoln AFB would experience a loss of 50 officers and enlisted, returning from England by the way of the Azores, fifty one years ago this past October (2007). They went down in the Atlantic and no trace of them was ever found. They were on the first airplane returning to Lincoln AFB after a 90 day TDY in England. They were all married and some had families.