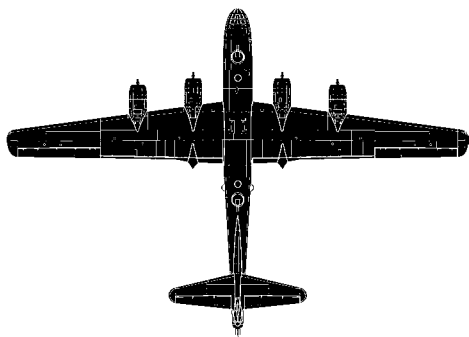


Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

B-29 Superfortress



World War II bomber development reached its zenith in the B-29 Superfortress, a sophisticated heavyweight famed for carrying out the only wartime use of atomic weapons. Its cost was high, but the sleek bomber was unquestionably a war winner.

This Boeing giant emerged from the 1937 XB-15 design, though it underwent much change. The Army Air Corps in early 1940 specified a requirement for a "Hemisphere Defense Weapon" able to fly at 400 mph, travel 5,000 miles, and carry 2,200 pounds of bombs. AAC chose Boeing's Model 345, combining a high aspect ratio wing with Fowler flaps, new engines and avionics, and remotely controlled gun turrets. It was the first bomber with pressurized crew areas.

Gen. H.H. Arnold believed in the B-29, and the service ordered 1,500 even before first flight. Despite

a troubled development, the B-29 was lethal and versatile. In December 1943, US leaders decided not to use the B-29 in Europe but to use its great range in the vast Pacific. The first B-29 raids on Japan came on June 15, 1944 and built up steadily. In March 1945, Maj. Gen. Curtis E. LeMay ordered night low-altitude use of incendiary bombs, and these raids, by hundreds of B-29s, devastated Japan. On Aug. 6, *Enola Gay* dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. On Aug. 9, *Bockscar* dropped another on Nagasaki. Tokyo surrendered.

Five years later, B-29s, though past their prime, returned as workhorses of the Korean War. They flew 20,000 sorties, dropped 200,000 tons of bombs, and shot down 27 enemy aircraft. It was the end of the combat career for what might have been the most significant bomber in history.

—Walter J. Boyne

This aircraft: B-29A Superfortress #44-61835—*Dragon Lady*—as it looked in 1951 when assigned to SAC's 19th Bomb Group in Japan for Korean War duty. A World War II veteran, it bombed North Korea and shot down five MiGs, but crashed in the Pacific in late 1951.



B-29s unload incendiary bombs on Japan in 1945.

In Brief

Designed by Boeing ★ built by Boeing, Bell, and Martin ★ first flight Sept. 21, 1942 ★ crew 10 ★ number built 3,970 ★ bomb load 20,000 lb ★ **Specific to B-29A:** four Curtiss-Wright R-3350 engines ★ armament eight or 10 .50-cal guns (turrets), one 20 mm gun, two .50-cal guns ★ max speed 358 mph ★ cruise speed 230 mph ★ max range 4,100 mi ★ weight (loaded) 141,100 lb ★ span 141 ft 3 in ★ length 99 ft ★ height 29 ft 7 in.

Famous Fliers

Medal of Honor recipient—SSgt. (later MSgt. Henry E. "Red" Erwin. **Three SAC commanders**—Maj. Gen. (later Gen. and CSAF) Curtis E. LeMay; Col. (later Gen.) Thomas S. Power; 1st Lt. (later Gen.) Russell E. Dougherty. **Atomic bombing pilots**—Col. (later Brig. Gen.) Paul W. Tibbets Jr., Hiroshima raid, and Maj. (later Brig. Gen.) Charles W. Sweeney, Nagasaki raid.

Interesting Facts

Flown by USAAF, USAF, US Navy, RAF, RAAF ★ used in bombing, reconnaissance, refueling, transport, rescue, weather, special operations ★ led to B-50 bomber, KC-97 tanker ★ drop aircraft for X-series aircraft ★ Soviet Tupolev Tu-4 was a "Chinese copy."