

THE CANBERRA

By Steven Beeny

It began as an RAF aircraft, but USAF knew it as the B-57.



Laos, March 1966: Piloting their US Air Force B-57B on a ground attack mission during the Vietnam War, Capt. Larry Mason and Capt. Jere Joyner were about to learn the meaning of the word “rugged”—both in terms of machine and man.

On their second attack run of the day, they were pounded by ground fire. Cannon shells punched into the cockpit area and blew away large sections of wing and flap surface.

With an engine on fire and back-seater Joyner critically injured and losing blood, Mason nursed the B-57 home and brought it in for a landing with severe damage. Both crew and machine survived.

Middle Child

The Canberra, or Martin B-57 as it was known within USAF, began as a design by the English Electric Co. in the UK. In the US, the Glenn L. Martin Co. license-built it, and it first entered Air Force service in 1953.

The B-57 met the Air Force requirement for a medium-range tactical



bomber. It went on to fill the gap in the post-Korean War period as a nuclear-armed intruder, serve as a highly adaptable test bed for many development programs, and deliver an impressive performance during the Vietnam War.

Despite decades of solid and varied service, the B-57 is an often-overlooked USAF aircraft.

I Was Smitten

But I knew it well. I grew up in England, near RAF Wyton, home of the Royal Air Force’s last Canberra squadrons.

My grandfather had worked on the bombers during his RAF career, and I was smitten with the plane as a child.

In my 20s, I began a series of email conversations with former crews that

Ferry crews pick up a new B-57B at Glenn Martin Arpt., Md., in 1955. This B model clearly shows early night intruder paint work and the hinged canopy.

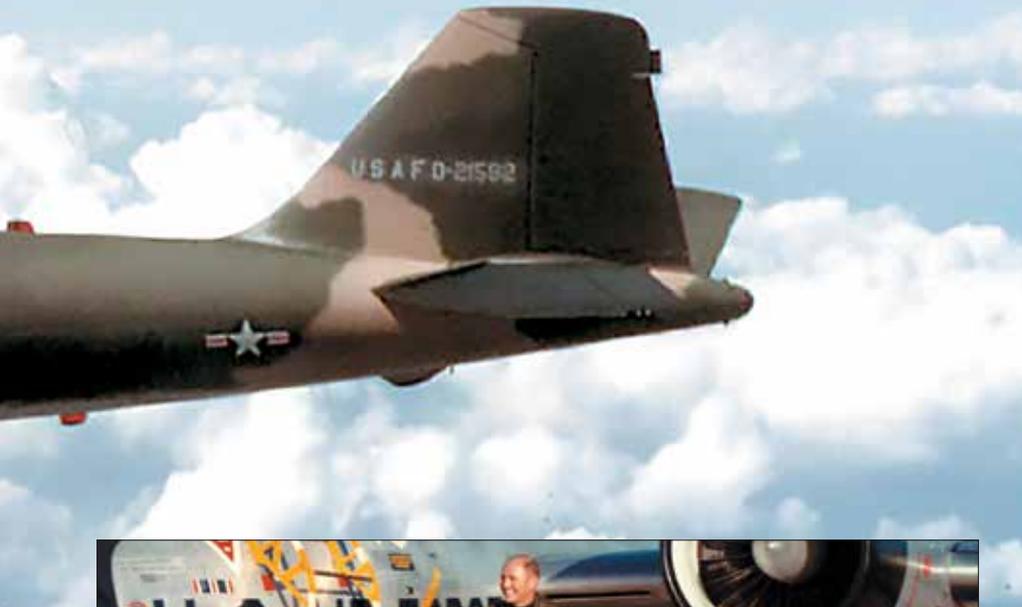
had maintained and flown the Canberra. This gradually snowballed into a much larger oral history project.

Ten years later—last fall—I completed a book, *The Canberra Experience*, compiling recollections and photos of airmen from 11 of the many countries that flew this aircraft.

On these pages are some of the photos I collected while working on the book. ✪

Graphic designer Steven Beeny lives in Irvine, Calif., and is a member of the Orange County/Gen. Curtis E. LeMay Chapter.

A B-57B Canberra on the prowl over South Vietnam. The type was used heavily during the war. Although they were effective in ground attack, many were destroyed in combat or because of guerilla attacks.



Air Force Lt. Col. Charles Leonard exits his WB-57F at a run. He had just completed more than 1,000 flight hours in the type. Leonard was one of the few to have flown in all models, amassing over 5,000 hours total.

B-57 FACTS

Number built (USAF):

403

First Flight:

07.20.1953

(US-built aircraft)

First Flight Location:

Middle River, Md.

Models/Variants:

B-57, EB-57, RB-57, WB-57

Retired:

1974 (RB-57). 1982 (ANG EB-57)

USAF Nickname: Cranberry

In Service With:

Argentina, Australia, Chile, Ecuador, Ethiopia, France, India, New Zealand, Peru, Rhodesia, South Africa, Sweden, UK, Venezuela, West Germany (English Electric version). Pakistan, Republic of China, US (Martin version).

He Asked. AFA Answered.

In 2014, Steven Beeny contacted the Air Force Association, looking for members willing to tell their personal B-57 stories for the US Air Force section of his book, *The Canberra Experience*. AFA obliged Beeny by sending out a blast email seeking Canberra reminiscences, and the association's marketing director went on to ask him if he was a member—hint, hint. Beeny joined.

By the way, he reported that AFA's call for B-57 veterans generated six replies in less than an hour. The members at right are included in Beeny's book. —The Editors



/1/ Now a retired USAF major general and an Alamo Chapter (Texas) member, Gerry Cooke poses in 1955 at Rhein Main AB, West Germany, in high-altitude gear. /2/ Bertrand Buckhout, now a retired USAF colonel and a member of Michigan's Mount Clemens Chapter, stands next to an RB-57A at Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, in 1957. He was assigned to the 172nd Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, Battle Creek, Mich.