572 FLIGHT

STRATOJET

AT WORK

By JAC K WECKE R

Sitting on dummy thousand-pounders
are (left to right) Gerald Simons,
Ed Bracher and Ed Hartz. They were
the Boeing crew of B-47B No. 1-2137
seen in the background during the
tatter's intensive flying described be-
low. The engines, it will be noted, are
Studebaker-built J47-ST-2Ss in the
new, flat-fronted pods.

I

N the category of targets for strategic bombing, Crescent City, California, is so far down the list that a bombardier with good sense of direction wouldn't touch it in a hundred years. Its only claims to fame lie in its fishing fleet, redwood forests and a prosperous dairy industry. Thus, it may come as a shock to Crescent City's 1,706 residents to learn that their town is among the most thoroughly bombed spots in the United States.
The citizens of nearby Ukiah, on the other hand, already have had their shock. They had it the day they saw a column of round white objects parading majestically across the sky
Fortunately, neither Russians nor spacemen are responsible for these happenings on the north coast of California. The blame, or more properly the credit, rests primarily with a handful of residents of Wichita, Kansas.
The complacent community of Crescent City was obliterated— theoretically, of course—by fourteen bombing attacks, all carried out by a single, civilian-manned Boeing B-47 Stratojet. The town was given such dubious distinction because, in an unstrategic sense, it is an ideal target. It is situated on a peninsula which stands out like Marilyn Monroe on a bomber's radar scope. The bombings of Crescent City took place as part of one of the toughest shakedowns ever given a new airplane. A B-47B, tactically equipped, was taken off the Boeing production lines at Wichita and pushed through a rugged series of 121 flights, totalling 1,000 hours in the air. Technically, this sort of program is known as an "accelerated service test."

"The purpose," explains N. D. Showalter, chief engineer of Boeing's Wichita division, "was to put 1,000 hours' flying time on a single B-47 as rapidly as possible. We wanted to duplicate as far as possible certain types of combat conditions, on a day and night basis, and record fully all performance data on the airplane." The test program was requested by Maj. Gen. Clarence S. "Bill" Irvine, deputy commander for production at Air Materiel Command headquarters. Elliott Merrill, chief of flight test at Wichita, selected both the airplane and the project pilot, Ed Bracher, 39-year-old veteran of 356 North Atlantic crossings and 92 Stratojet flights.
To some extent, crew members were alternated, but Bracher and Ed Hartz, supervisor of production flight test activities, did most of the piloting. In the course of it, they became the first flyers in the country to log 1,000 hours on the B-47S. Gerald Simons, serving as chief navigator-bombardier-radar operator for the program, ran his total to 550 hours.

Simons, as though his three-headed flight duties were not sufficient, had also to master the art of cuisine. His galley, located in the nose of the airplane, was somewhat less complex than the nearby "pickle-barrel" bombing system and the maze of not-to-be-talked-about equipment. It consisted of an electric oven and a hot cup for warming soup, coffee or chocolate.
At chow time, established less by the clock than by the appetites of those aboard, the navigator would warm the food and pass it to the pilot's and co-pilot's stations. The meals generally con-sisted of sandwiches, coffee, cup cakes, fruit juice and candy, but even this menu at times gave the chef trouble.
On one occasion when Rod Randall had been flying co-pilot, he complained after landing that the B-47's oven wasn't working properly. To make his point clear, he told the night-line foreman, "We crossed three midwestern states and were well into the fourth before this thing turned out a toasted cheese sandwich." A new oven was supplied.

AMERICA'S biggest single aircraft-procurement programme concerns the Boeing B- 77B Stratojet, which is being built by the hundred at three plants—Boeing at Wichita, Douglas at Tulsa and Lockheed at Marietta (Georgia). Production Stratojets have been flying many months and no longer suffer from the numerous troubles which once were characteristic of the type. They are now gradually being placed on a fully operational basis, able to drop real bombs at representative heights and speeds. One aircraft, in particular, was subjected to an unusually intensive work-out; and this is described in the story that follows. The colloquial style is explained by the fact that the original narrative was written for the Boeing company's house magazine. We are indebted to that publication for permission to reproduce the account in slightly abridged form.

In all, the 121 missions took the Stratojet over 39 states. Flights averaged more than 3,000 miles apiece, but with aerial refueling, jaunts well in excess of this were not uncommon. Altogether, the B-47 was flown 432,066 statute miles, equal to nearly seventeen times around the globe. Half of the time was logged at night.
Closest thing to real combat—apart perhaps from frequent "attacks" by jet fighters protecting various sections of U.S. terrain—were 92 bombing runs. On an even dozen, real bombs were dropped; die rest were simulated bombings. On all of them, though, the bombardier took command of the plane, opened its bomb-bay doors, and whisked across the target.
It was on one of the fourteen Crescent City runs that the Ukiah switchboard was flooded with reports of the disk-shaped objects in the sky. The mystery was solved by an excited radio-tower operator, who learned from the B-47 crewmen that their airplane was, in effect, blowing smoke rings. The rings were contrails, puffed out by the bomber's six jet engines. Vapor trails of this doughnut variety, while not the standard thing, do occur some-times at high altitudes when the air has low moisture content. A number of things occurred at high altitude to enliven the monotony of 1,000 hours in the air. The shakedown plane— known formally and otherwise only as No. 2137—often thumbed rides on swift jet streams, with startling results in terms of speed. On one occasion, streaking eastward over Chicago, the pilot told a woman control-tower operator below that he expected to arrive over New York City in an hour and five minutes. "You mean two hours, don't you?" asked the operator. The Stratojet pilot repeated his original ETA for New York, and heard the astonished woman whistle into her microphone. He wasn't kidding either, for his B-47 covered the 725 statute miles in only 65 minutes.
Even more remarkable was a stretch between Albuquerque and Wichita, during which the Boeing B-47 held a ground speed of 794 m.p.h. for thirty minutes. At 40,000 feet the plane had found a pip of a jet stream.
Ground radar screens picked up the high-flying bomber in a number of sections of the country. Fast-moving interceptors raced up to investigate.
Excitement of a different nature came last summer when No. 2137 ran into a thunderstorm 36,000 feet above Florida. The crewmen saw their plane strafed by lightning and felt it buffeted by violent gusts. Its flexible wings absorbed the shock, however, and made possible a ride so smooth that Co-Pilot Jim Goodell declared, "If I wasn't along, I wouldn't believe it."
The 121 missions took the Stratojet over the edge of two oceans and the Gulf of Mexico. It was over the Gulf that the twelve loads of actual bombs were dropped. Each load, comprising eight 1,000-pound bombs filled with sand, went whistling down onto