

successfully completed its first test flight, when the Northrop XB-35 Flying Wing landed at Muroc Army Air Base after a flight of approximately 30 minutes. The XB-35 was constructed in the manner that the name implies, a wing and nothing more. The plane had no fuselage, and the entire operating mechanism was within the wing itself. The giant "Wing" had a wingspan of 172 feet, much longer than that of the war-famous B-29.

Shortly thereafter, on August 8, the second and largest of the superbombers, the Consolidated Vultee B-36, completed its maiden flight at Fort Worth, Texas. The B-36, the world's largest land based bomber was capable of carrying 10,000 pounds of bomb load 10,000 miles. Powered by six 3000 horsepower engines, the B-36 had a wingspan of 230 feet and a length of 163 feet. Its top speed was over 300 miles per hour.

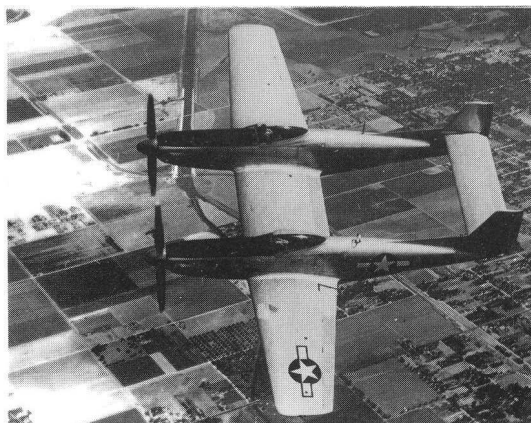
New steps in power plant development were taken during 1946. One of the most important was the General Electric J-35 jet engine, which powered the speedy XP-84. The J-35, capable of 4000 pounds of thrust, marked a definite step in the development of jet propulsion, permitting greater range and more economical operation than had been previously possible. In October of 1946, another engine was unveiled, this time a reciprocating engine, the world's most powerful, the Lycoming XR-7755. Developed to answer the need for powering long range bombers and transports, this liquid cooled engine combined high power output with low rate of fuel consumption. The XR-7755 developed 5,000 horsepower, equivalent to that produced by a modern railway locomotive.

On October 4, 1946, the AAF made one of the most significant flights in aeronautical history - a 10,000 mile non-stop trip from Hawaii to Cairo via the North Pole. The plane a Boeing B-29, the "Pacusan Dreamboat," was piloted by Col Clarence S Irvine, assisted by a crew of nine. The plane carried 13,000 gallons of gasoline, and took off with a gross weight of 147,000 pounds, 27,000 pounds over the maximum allowable weight of a standard B-29. Purpose of the flight was to test equipment over the polar regions. The "Dreamboat" flew a great circle route from Hawaii to Alaska, then to Iceland, and finally to Cairo, passing over London, Paris, and Foggia, Italy. Total flight time was 39 hour and 36 minutes.

December brought the most sensational of the year's aeronautical developments. On December 8, the AAF's first rocket propelled airplane, the Bell XS-1, successfully completed its first test flight at Muroc Army Air Base, California, staying aloft for almost 20 minutes. Designed to fly at a top speed of 1,700 miles per hour at an altitude of 80,000 feet, the XS-1 was never intended to become a military airplane, but was rather to be a flying research laboratory, the sole function of which would be to record the effect of supersonic flight on an aircraft. Power for the XS-1 was supplied by a small rocket motor known as the Model 60000 produced by Reaction Motors, Inc. of Dover New Jersey. Burning a combination of alcohol and liquid oxygen, the XS-1 power plant could produce 6,000 pounds of thrust.

On February 28, 1947, the AAF made another record flight. Two pilots flew a North American P-82 twin fuselage fighter

5000 miles from Honolulu to New York City. The pilots Lt/Col Robert E Thacker, and 1st/Lt John M Ard, made the trip in 14 hours and 33 minutes, setting a record for the route and completing the longest fighter plane flight on record.

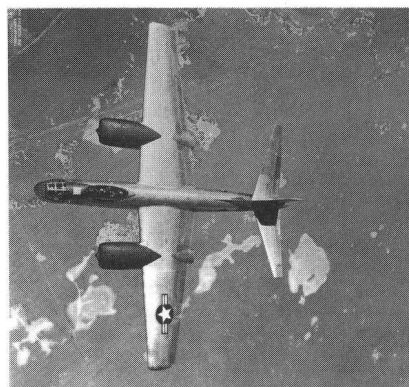


North American P- 82

The work in research and development continued and the early months of 1947 saw a group of new bombers join the AAF's post war fleet. On March 17, the North American B-45, a four-jet bomber made its first test flight and on April 2, another four- engine bomber, the Consolidated Vultee XB-46 also flew successfully. In May the Martin XB-48 , the first six jet bomber joined the ranks, as did the B-50, a new and greatly improved version of the B-29. Many other new planes were under construction in the various aircraft plants.

The AAF had come a long way in 40 years. Although it had undergone considerable demobilization since the end of WW II, the AAF still had over 300,000 officers and men, almost double its peak strength in WW I. Its inventory of 25,000 planes (only 10,000 of which, however, were considered first line aircraft) almost doubled its WW I strength. The AAF, though small by comparison with its World War Two might, was still a good sized aerial force.

It is said that life begins at 40. This could also apply to the Army Air Forces, for after 40 years of existence, after two great wars. the AAF is on the threshold of its greatest aeronautical advancement. Further an autonomous Air Force, on a level with the Army and Navy, appears to be a strong possibility. The AAF looks to the future, confident that the years to come will be as full and as glorious as the 40 gone by. **The end.**



North American B-45