



# B29 Flight

Aboard "FIFI"

July 23, 2014

On the tarmac at Walker Field 8 AM.

My dad Dr. Schmidt was an instructor for this plane during WWII and so it has great meaning for me.



2 of the 4 (modified) Wright R-3350-23 Cyclone 18 cylinder engines. The 3350 was the displacement in cubic inches, not too shabby. They produce 2,200 HP each. Each has a pair of GE B-11 supercharger/turbocharger combinations (one for each bank).

So the aircraft has 8,800 HP which sets a personal record for me if you don't count piddly 747s and other jets.



The obligatory oil puddle under each engine. These engines ALWAYS leak oil, but this puddle is small compared to some of the B-17s I've seen. To counter this, each engine had an 85 gallon oil tank. That is **over 2 BARRELS of oil!** Considering some sorties lasted 15 hours, this was wise.



CAF logo on the tail. Normally this spot held the aircraft's numeric designation. For example, the Enola Gay was 82.

The name was changed from the less P.C. Confederate Air Force a while back. Initials conveniently did not change.



The “N” numbers for Fifi. This aircraft has an experimental rating. I did see one EXPERIMENTAL placard in the plane.

Shown at the bottom is part of the tail skid. This protected the tail during takeoff and landings. If you hit the tail, the rear gunner section became uninhabitable as it could no longer be pressurized. The skid prevented that.



This is called the “Barber’s Chair” and is where the Central Fire Control (CFC) operator sat. He could control any of the aft guns with the exception of the individually-manned tail gun. It had a really cool steamed plywood base which I didn’t get a picture of. I did sit in it for a fair portion of the flight. It had a clear blister where you could get great visibility.

The B29 was the first pressurized bomber. This was in the mid crew cabin and you can see the ship-like pressure bulkhead open at the bottom. This led to the bomb bays. Behind the chair is the crew tunnel which linked the front and middle of the aircraft. It was small enough that airmen could not go through it with their parachutes on. I was relegated to the mid section and tail of the bomber for the flight. Seats in the front ranged from about \$1,000 up to \$2,000 to sit in the bombardier’s seat, a bit too rich for my means.



A view of Mt Garfield from the port side. This is located behind the mid crew quarters in an unpressurized part of the plane. THERE IS NO WINDOW ON THIS PORT, it is just a gaping hole. The hand you see is the crewmember's that keeps people from getting too close. We were also warned about the vacuum at this port, I guess it has sucked out a number of sunglasses, hats and cameras. It was a 100° day and the breeze made this part of the plane comfortable. We were going about 240 MPH at this part of the flight (guess on my part, not GPS verified). We never got above ~1,500' AGL I'd say.



I'm crawling back to the tail gunner area now. You can see another pressure bulkhead as his area was individually pressurized.

Passage looks pretty roomy, right? That is because the two huge magazines on each side that held 50 caliber rounds for the tail gun have been removed. And see the cables/pulleys on each side? Those are actual rudder/elevator control cables. No hydraulics here. I guess it made flying the SuperFortress very tiring if you weren't on the autopilot.

More trivia. Most bomber aircraft gun installations were stocked with 27' of machine gun rounds. That is where the phrase "The whole 9 yards" comes from. "I gave them the whole 9 yards!"



Tail gunner gunsight. The '29 had an amazing mass of electronics (Amplidynes? Never heard of them before). Guns were all moved by electric motors. As such, gunners didn't actually hold the guns and aim which had to be nice as I'm sure that was a rough job. The tail gunner is actually above the 2 .50 caliber tail guns. All the computers in the aircraft were analog computers, including the Norden bomb sight. Apparently the gun sight took into account flight factors and actually did the "Tennessee Windage" (leading the attacking fighters) for them. As such, tracer bullets were not required. The Palisade house is actually almost directly behind the plane in this photo.



A view out the tail gunner's window leaving the Grand Valley to the East. We flew almost to DeBeque, then went South over the DeBeque cutoff. Then back to GJ at the base of the Grand Mesa, right over the shop building! Then to the Colorado National Monument, Fruita and Walker field for full stop. The flight was very noisy (I brought ear plugs) but very smooth.



This was taken from the CFC blister looking back. The dome is the top machine gun turret, which has been riveted down. This is the best picture I have from this location.



This is what most pictures from CFC looked like. It was OK in person, but cameras pick up all the crazing in the old plexiglass. Sort of a shame, but all of these restoration projects are fueled by contributions so you use what you have.

Between the two engines you can see the DeBeque cutoff with the Grand Mesa in the background.



Couldn't resist taking a picture of the 'ole Palisade homestead as we flew over.

I'd seen most stuff by this time in the flight so spent some time in the waist gunner blister looking down. We were only at 700' or so. I was expecting to see lots of people out in their front yards staring up in awe but didn't see any.

If I heard this thing flying over I would be outside looking up drooling all over myself.



Glad I took this picture. On the left is the Colorado National Monument and the homes on the Redlands right at its base. These are BIG homes, and you can see that the planes wingspan is bigger than most of them! (141')

I remember Dad talking about the B29 compared with the B17 Flying Fortress. He said if you lost engines in the '17 you had a chance of gliding to a successful landing. He said there was no such chance with the SuperFortress – it was going to fall like a stone. Yet it looks so sleek. Probably has a lot to do with that 70,000 lb empty weight.



Colorado National Monument with Black's Ridge on the horizon in the center. Flaps up.



After we landed we got to go into the front cabin. Man was it hot in there with all that plexiglass! And the crew were all wearing full cover jumpsuits. This is the pilot's seat.

The pilot actually rarely touched the throttles. I talked to our pilot Mark Novak about that. He said that he used them when taxiing to turn the plane (the '29 did not have a steerable nose gear) and rare other times. This was the domain of the flight engineer. He basically told the engineer what he wanted to do and he controlled the engines to accomplish that.



This is the flight engineer's position. He was responsible for all aspects of engine operation from prop pitch to cowl flap settings. He was arguably the most important person on the aircraft.



Some nice person volunteered to take my picture. I'm in the most overrated crew position, the bombardier's alcove.



Ah, the Norden bomb sight. My Dad filled me with all sorts of romantic visions about this device. He told me about the 45 caliber service revolver he was required to wear so he could blast the thing should the plane ditch. He talked about the oath he took to keep the device a secret. He described how armed guards would take it off the plane to store it securely between flights. I bought books on this thing and thought it was the 8<sup>th</sup> wonder of the world in its day. An analog computer made by a Swiss watchmaker.

Then about a week before the flight I was researching this thing when I came across [THIS TED TALK](#) which shattered everything. It was some of the best time I've spent watching it, though. I do tend to embrace reality, at least when informed people help me understand what it is.



# THE END

