

2519 AAF BASE UNIT

MISSION

Pilot School, Specialized, 4-engine

LINEAGE

2519 AAF Base Unit

STATIONS

Fort Worth AAFld, TX, 1 May 1944-18 Nov 1945

ASSIGNMENTS

WEAPON SYSTEMS

COMMANDERS

HONORS

Service Streamers

Campaign Streamers

Armed Forces Expeditionary Streamers

Decorations

EMBLEM

MOTTO

NICKNAME

OPERATIONS

In October 1944 the AAF Training Command was requested to prepare a training program for future B-32 air and ground crews. Since the Headquarters of the Army Air Force's Training Command, under Lt.Gen. Barton Yount, was located at FWAAF, the B-32 was assigned directly to the AAF Training Command. Previously, new combat aircraft were handed over to one of the "Training" Air Forces for transitional crew training. FWAAF was one of the few AAF pilot schools to undertake a complete aircrew training program (from pilot transition to phase training for entire B-32 crews) within one training facility. The entire B-32 training program was coordinated by Col. H.W. Dorr and Col. H.M. Wittkop, CO of the 31st Flying Training Wing. Lt.Col. Fred Easley was the director of training and operations, and was assisted by Maj. Robert LaPlante as director of flying. Lt. E.S. Paxton was assigned to prepare the engineering procedure manual. The B-32 Flight Crew Transition Training School was activated by the 2519th Army Air Forces Base Unit (AAFBU) at FWAAF in October 1944. At this point only three B-32s were available to be sent to FWAAF, and engineers from Wright Field established an Accelerated Service Test Branch there to find any bugs in the bombers through extensive testing. Pilots for the Accelerating Testing Branch were Capt. James Banks and Lts. Jack Frost, John Nett, Russell Newell, Francis O'Shaughnessy, Francis Session, and Julius Walker, who were all experienced B-24 pilots, and had little trouble adapting to the larger and faster B-32.

The 2519th did not receive its first B-32 (TB-32-5-CF/42-108485) until 27 January 1945, but soon more were on the way, as Consolidated-Vultee production increased. From that date until 6 July 1945 the Unit received nine TB-32-5-CFs (42-108485, 487, 488, and 490 through 495), 25 TB-32-10-CFs (42-108496 through 520), four TB-32-15-CFs (42-108521 through 524), 18 B-32-25-CFs (42-108551, 553, 555 through 670), and one B-32-20-CO (44-90486). Just as with the Accelerated Service Test units, the AAFPGC and AAFTAC did not receive B-32s for testing.

Two weeks later the pilot—at that time called the airplane commander by the AAF (as was the B-29 pilot)—and co-pilot arrived to take an eight-week course, spending the first week in ground school. In the next three weeks the pilot spent 50 hours of transition flying time in the TB-32, and the co-pilot flew 25 hours, and spent another 25 as an observer. Emphasis during this phase was on what the training crews called "circuits and bumps," as it consisted of takeoffs, following the traffic pattern and landings in a continuous cycle. Meanwhile, during the first month the various specialists, navigator, bombardier, radio/radar operators, and gunners were dispersed to study the application of their individual skills on the B-32. During the last four weeks of training the entire crew was gathered at FWAAF, where they flew 80 hours of crew time: 40 hours in a TB-32, and 40 hours in a combat-equipped B-32. After the crews had completed their transition training and were ready to complete their training, the original Training Command plan was to transfer them to the Fourth Air Force and the 426th AAFBU at Mountain Home, ID. The 426th received its first two B-32-25-CFs: (42-108550 and 549) on 26 May 1943, followed by two more B-32-25-CFs: (42-108550 and 552) on 30 May, and a single -25-CF: (42-108554) on 6 June. The AAF changed its plans, and all five B-32s and their crews were sent back to the 2519th AAFBU at Fort Worth on 27 June to complete their training under

the AAF Training Command. B-32 transition training, like the rest of the program, was beset with many difficulties, beginning with the shortage of aircraft, and continuing with the aircraft's chronic mechanical problems.

The most serious B-32 problem was engine fires, which had also plagued the B-29 program; however, the B-32 program was to suffer far fewer engine fires. On 8 March 1945 TB-32-5-CF (42-108495) was making a series of training takeoffs and landings from FWAAF. The aircraft's eight-man crew consisted of observers Cpl. L.J. Powell and S/Sgt. S.D. Krodel; crew chief S/Sgt. M.J. Hartings; instructor engineer S/Sgt. W.G. McDiffett and student engineer S/Sgt. H.A. Keller; student airplane commander Lt. F.O. Bock; student pilot Lt. C.N. Purlee; and instructor/pilot Lt. M.G. Alderfer. During the seventh landing a crewmember reported the smell of smoke, and although no fire could be found, Lt. Alderfer left the traffic pattern to try to gain altitude to further check for a possible fire. At 5,000 feet a fire was reported in the No.3 engine. The fire could not be extinguished or the propeller feathered, and the crew was ordered to bail out. Alderfer continued to try to extinguish the fire, but several minutes later he also bailed out. Post-crash investigation recommended that Alderfer should have landed and then checked for the fire.

The 2519th Supply and Maintenance Branch met problems obtaining replacement parts for its TB-32s when it found that the ordered part had been discontinued or modified, to be useless for that batch of aircraft. The bombardier's cabin bulkhead that had been damaged on the TB-32-5-CF (42-108488) that crashed due to a gear collapse on 25 April could not be replaced, as the similar part was being manufactured to different specifications. Meanwhile, aircraft 488 languished as Consolidated-Vultee had to fabricate a special new jig to build the part. Once repaired 488 was involved in another accident on 12 July that caused it again to be off flying status. The combat test report stated: "The maintenance requirements on the airplane were much less than expected. This has contributed much to the success of the project to date."

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Sources
Air Force Historical Research Agency. U.S. Air Force. Maxwell AFB, AL.