

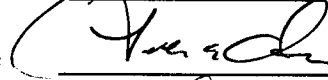
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Research Materials/Source Documents
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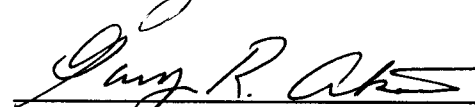
FILE TITLE: 1st Person to Fly Backwards Around the World: A1C Eugene Preiss

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BACKGROUND PAPER
ON
AIRMAN FIRST CLASS EUGENE PREISS
THE FIRST PERSON TO FLY AROUND THE WORLD BACKWARDS

1. During the nineteen fifties and sixties, the United States Air Force often engaged in events that showcased new aircraft. These events were meant to demonstrate the capabilities of these aircraft, and to gain public support. A1C. Preiss was a participant in such an event, it was called "Operation Power Flite."

2. In 1957, the B-52 Bomber was a new aircraft in the Air Force inventory. The Air Force had always described the aircraft as its new long range nuclear bomber. However the long range capability of the aircraft had never been demonstrated for the public.

3. The Air Force attempted to demonstrate this capability in November 1956. A B-52 flew around north America. The mission was successful, however, it did not capture overwhelming publicity. In fact, there were some in the media who started to question the long range capability of the B-52. In his oral history interview, then Major General Archie Old said: "We wanted to fly it, really, to demonstrate-- We did a hell of a lot of talking about our long range capability, but we hadn't done a hell of a lot of showing. The average Tom, Dick, and

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Harry walking down the street didn't have the slightest idea on how much range the B-52 had. So we came up with this mission at, I think a very opportune time" (4:482-482).

4. Operation Power Flite was the Mission that finally demonstrated the full long range capability of the B-52. The purpose of the mission was described in operation order No. 28-57: "The 93rd Bombardment Wing will dispatch five B-52B aircraft and crews on a round-the world flight. Three aircraft (the three in best mechanical position as determined by the B-52 air commander at Morocco), will continue around the world on an easterly flight path. The other two aircraft will divert to Brize Norton U.K. and exercise the B-52 post strike capability of that base" (3:6).

5. This mission was classified secret, until the day before take off, most of the flight crew did not know about the mission. Only those involved in the mission planning knew about it (3:7). This was at a time when tensions between east and west were high. It is not inconceivable that the mission could have been in danger had the route been announced. In addition, there was always the possibility that the mission might have been cancelled for reasons other than aircraft or crew failures.

6. On January 7, 1957, Brigadier General William E. Eubank, Jr., the 93rd Bombardment Wing Commander, chose the crews that would carry out the mission. In addition to the normal flight crew, other individuals were added as relief crews because of the forty five hour duration of the flight. A crew

chief was added to each crew to take care of any malfunctions that occurred in flight.

7. The aircraft maintenance people did an outstanding job of preparing the aircraft. This is documented in the diary that Major Patrick Montoya kept of the mission. He was a navigator and noted that: " Col. Townsend compliments the ground crew on their splendid cooperation and support. Those guys are the work-horses, and they appreciate tremendously any pat-on-the back. As keyed-up as the pilots are right now, I think it's note-worthy that Col. Townsend took a moment to say "Thanks"" (2:6)

8. January 15, 1957, five B-52 aircraft took off from Castle AFB Ca. Due to a malfunction in the aerial refueling system on one aircraft, it landed in Goose Air Base, Goose Bay Labrador. As planned another aircraft landed in the U.K. and three completed the mission and landed at March AFB Ca. as planned.

9. AlC. Eugene Preiss was assigned to crew No. L-03, aircraft serial number 53-397 as a gunner. This aircraft was one of the three that completed the mission. He was the lowest ranking crew member. His duties on the mission were to keep an eye out for enemy aircraft approaching from the rear. The guns that he operated were the only weapon system on the aircraft that were armed. He also had the responsibility to monitor the engine exhaust contrails and report anything that would indicate an engine malfunction to the pilot.

10. AlC. Preiss joined the Air Force in September 1953.

After attending Air Force schools, he was assigned to the 328th Bombardment Squadron, Castle AFB Ca. He was born in St. Louis, Mo. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Norman E. Preiss of Baldwin Mo. He married the former Marilyn Bertke of St. Louis Mo. As a B-52 gunner, AlC. Preiss sat facing the rear of the aircraft. His claim as the first person to fly around the world backwards, is documented in the January 1957 wing historical report. In addition his photograph and story appear on page 22 of the January 28, 1957, edition of Life magazine.

11. Operation Power Flite was declassified shortly before the three B-52s landed at March AFB Ca. The local and national press were there. Also there, was General Curtis LeMay. He had personally approved the mission (4:483). He presented each member of the three crews, the distinguished flying cross.

12. The mission was completed in forty hours and ten minutes. In addition to being an operational success, the mission was also a publicity success. The American public was aware of the capability of the B-52. The mission is summarized in the January 1957, 93rd Bombardment wing historical report as follows: "From an operational standpoint, POWER FLITE was a very successful venture. It achieved four important things:

1. It marked for history the first jet nonstop flight around the world.
2. It established a new round-the-world speed record, cutting the old record by more than half.

3. It proved-- as it was known almost for certain-- that the B-52 could take 45-hour missions in stride.

4. And it tested the capability of combat crews on extended long missions." (3:25)

13. In addition to A1C. Preiss, the following enlisted personnel, were crew members on B-52 aircraft that participated in Operation Power Flite.

MSGt. Glen Amburgey	Gunner
TSgt. M.E. Stanton	Crew Chief
SSgt. Jamel L. Bushboom	Gunner
TSgt. Joseph D. Armstrong	Crew Chief
TSgt. Albert Romero	Crew Chief
MSGt. C.H. Ballew	Gunner
TSgt. D.W. Higgenbotham	Crew Chief
SSgt. Albert T. Aroney	Gunner
SSgt. Thomas A. Rouch	Crew Chief (3:10-12)

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