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Everett K. Gibson, Jr., PhD | | |  | | --- | | Texas Raiders is one of the most recognized and famous Flying Fortresses currently on the airshow circuit. It has been recognized by AIR CLASSICS magazine as the best restored B-17G bomber currently flying in the world. The aircraft has been restored to wartime configuration by an entire volunteer group of  dedicated supporters. The aircraft has one of the most unusual histories of any existing Flying Fortresses flying today and is one of the most active and visible.  This aircraft begin it's military career as B-17G-95-DL 44-83872. It was manufactured by Douglas Aircraft Corporation at Long Beach, California. (under license from Boeing Aircraft Corporation, Seattle, Washington) where it was delivered to the U.S. Army Air Corps on July 12, 1945. On July 21, 1945, this aircraft was transferred to the U.S. Navy.  Following Navy acceptance, '872  became PB-1 BuNo 77235. The aircraft was converted from PB-1 to PB-1-W which consisted of sealing the bombay doors, additional long-range fuel tanks and the installation of APS-20 search Radar with the rotating scanner located in a bulbous housing below the former bomb bay. '872 was one of the first "AWAC" aircraft.  On July 11, 1952 the '872 was transferred to and flew with the newly formed Sea search-Early Warning, VW-2 on the Atlantic seaboard until   June 3, 1953 when it under went it's second major overhaul.  The second major overhaul was completed on January 15, 1954. After this overhaul the '872 was transferred to Atsugi, Japan where it flew with VW-1 (which was the last operational assignment for this aircraft).  On January 15, 1955, PB-1W arrived at the Storage Facility at Litchfield Park, Arizona where it was maintained in Flyable Storage Status until stricken from record on July 14, 1955 and was officially retired from Naval service on August 25, 1955 following 77 months of service where this aircraft acquired 3,257 hours of flying time.  On October 1, 1957, this aircraft  was acquired by Aero Services Corp. (a branch of Litton Industries) and used as a cargo plane and aerial photographic aircraft. Upon entry into the civilian aviation fleet the aircraft was given the identification registration number and call sign N-7227-C.  While in the service of the Aero Services Corp., 27-C was used as a high altitude mapping aircraft and completed assignments in the North West United States, Venezuela, and the length of Chile. Another life cycle for 27-C began when it was converted into an aerial platform for all kinds of satellite tracking equipment.  The University of Alaska contracted 7227-C to participate in the recording of the eclipse of the sun from a flight position over Northern Canada.  Next, the aircraft participated in the oil and natural gas survey for the North Sea Project off western Norway and Scotland.  During the aerial photographic era, the aircraft acquired the first complete photographic coverage of the South American continent along with extensive coverage of Central America and the northern regions of  North America. The aircraft was used as a electronic geophysical and magnetometer platform for field surveys in the North Sea area north and east of Scotland along with extensive coverage of the North slope regions of Alaska. It was instrumental in acquiring data which lead to the discoveries of some of the major petroleum reserves in the world.  On September 22, 1967, N7227-C was acquired by the Commemorative Air Force, Mercedes, Texas from Litton Industries for the price of $50,000. It was the first B-17 to be purchased and operated solely for the purpose of preservation. The aircraft was painted in military colors and nose markings were applied as "Texas Raiders" with a Texas State flag by the CAF in 1970. During WW II no B-17 carried the name of Texas Raiders.   After a period of time the Texas Raiders was assigned to the Gulf Coast Wing  of the Commemorative Air Force in Houston, Texas. The Gulf Coast Wing has continued to upgrade and restored the aircraft to it's original combat configuration by adding the ball turret and top turret. All of the work was carried out by the volunteers of the CAF group in Houston. At the present time, the top turret is undergoing assembly prior to installation on the aircraft. This will complete the last major restoration item within the aircraft. When completed, TEXAS RAIDERS will be one of only a few B-17s which have operational top and ball turrets.   The Texas Raiders does not have an oxygen system for its crew and is restricted to altitudes below 12,000 feet. The only hydraulic systems on board the aircraft are the brakes and the cowl flaps for the four engines. All other systems aboard the aircraft are either electrical or mechanical.  The "TR" has undergone two major restorations. The first lasted three years (1983-86) and converted the "cargo" B-17 airframe to a fully restored "combat" B-17G . This restoration was done with volunteer labor and cost in excess of $300,000.  In 1993, the second restoration was carried out. The nine month effort was primarily to repaint the aircraft and complete the interior restoration of the bomber. Costs of the restoration was $180,000. This restoration was documented by Public Television and the documentary *"Honor Squadron"* was produced. At the conclusion to the restoration, the aircraft returned to the airshow circuit where it was awarded "Best Bomber" by the Experimental Aircraft Association's Sun and Fun Air Show and "Aircraft of the Year" by the Tico airshow in Florida. | | | |