

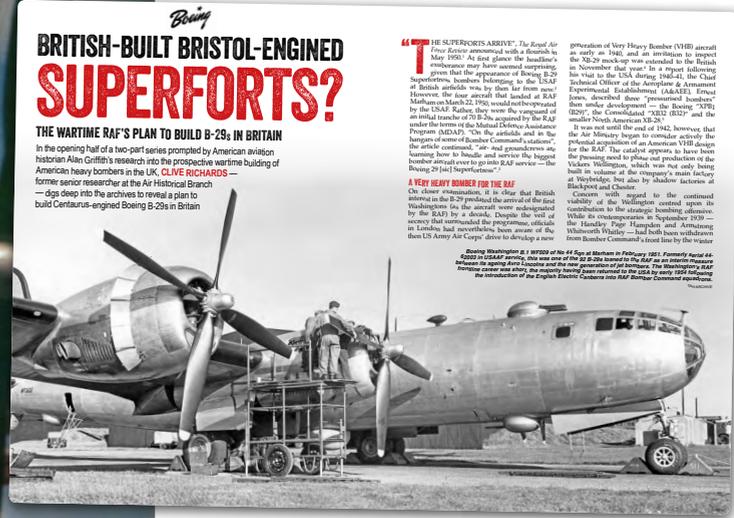


AMERICAN

DOMINATION?

BUILDING THE CONSOLIDATED B-32 IN THE UK: A SPECULATION

Based on research undertaken for a forthcoming book co-written with Nick Veronico entitled *Dominator — The Untold Story of the B-32*, **ALAN GRIFFITH** follows up on Clive Richards's article in *TAH38* on wartime plans to build Boeing B-29s in the UK with what is known (and a little guesswork) about the also-mooted prospect of building B-32s in Britain



BRITISH-BUILT BRISTOL-ENGINED SUPERFORTS?

THE WARTIME RAF'S PLAN TO BUILD B-29s IN BRITAIN

In the opening half of a two-part series prompted by American aviation historian Alan Griffith's research into the prospective wartime building of American heavy bombers in the UK, **CLIVE RICHARDS** — former senior researcher at the Air Historical Branch — digs deep into the archives to reveal a plan to build Centaurus-engined Boeing B-29s in Britain

THE SUPERSECRETS ARCHIVE: The Royal Air Force announced with a flourish in May 1943 that it had an invitation to inspect the B-29's development. It was a surprise, given that the appearance of Boeing B-29 Superfortresses, bombers belonging to the USAF Experimental Establishment (LAE) at RAF Marton on March 22, 1945, would not be until the USAF. Rather, they were the offspring of an initial transfer of B-29s accepted by the RAF under the terms of the Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP). "The article and in the article continued, 'an end product of the bomber aircraft was to go into RAF service—the B-29 had Superfortresses'."

A VERY HEAVY BOMBER FOR THE RAF
On closer examination, it is clear that British interest in the B-29 predated the arrival of the Superfortresses in the United States. Despite the fact of secrecy that surrounded the program, officials in London had nevertheless been aware of the then US Army Air Corps' drive to develop a new

diversion of Very Heavy Bomber (VHB) aircraft to the RAF. The B-29's development was extended to the British in November 1942, when a report following the Chief of the Air Staff's (CAS) visit to the USAF Experimental Establishment (LAE) at Marton, Iowa, described three "proposed bombers": the Consolidated "B-32" (B-32) and the Boeing "B-29" (B-29). It was not until the end of 1942, however, that the Air Ministry began to consider seriously the potential acquisition of an American VHB design for the RAF. The catalyst appears to have been the pressing need to phase out production of the Lockheed Wellington, which was not only being built in volume at the Vickers' main factory at Welby, but also by smaller factories at

MAIN PICTURE Following its somewhat protracted development, the Consolidated B-32 eventually entered service with the USAF's 312th Bomb Group (BG), part of the Fifth Air Force, at Clark Field in the Philippines in mid-May 1945. This example is B-32-20-CF The Lady is Fresh, of the 312th BG's 386th Bomb Sqn at Clark Field in 1945. This article is a companion to Clive Richards's British-built Bristol-engined Superforts?, published in *TAH38* (ABOVE RIGHT), in which he dug into the British archives to investigate a similar plan for the B-29.

VERONICO AND ARIC VIA AUTHOR

IN EARLY 1943 — and perhaps even as early as late 1942 — the British Air Commission (BAC) made several approaches to the US Army Air Forces office of the Chief of Air Staff, Materiel, Maintenance & Distribution (CAS/MM&D), Maj-Gen Oliver Echols, regarding obtaining "detailed engineering information to determine the possibility of production in the UK of the [Boeing] B-29 or [Consolidated] B-32 bombardment aircraft". These informal enquiries were finally formalised in a letter from the BAC dated June 3, 1943. Six days later, in a letter to the Commanding General of the US Army Air Forces, General H.H. "Hap" Arnold, Echols outlined the British requests as follows:

- the [USAAF] furnish detailed engineering

- drawings, design and construction data, etc;
- the [USAAF] permit visits of inspection;
- the [USAAF] arrange for engineering conferences for [BAC] technical personnel with Wright Field and the parent firms.

This development leads me to take a leap of imagination that, had these enquiries borne fruit, the B-32 may have reached production in 1943. The finished aircraft may then have been provided in 1944 to the RAF as the USAAF replaced its Consolidated B-24s in Europe with the B-32, which was the USAAF's original intention had production started earlier. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to pose questions, not necessarily provide definitive answers.

REALISTIC POSSIBILITIES?

The possibility raises a number of questions which would have had to be addressed. First, where would the British find the manufacturing capacity and raw materials to build this large, complicated all-metal aircraft? Secondly, if the British were actually interested in manufacturing either the B-29 or B-32, how quickly could they have accomplished this, and what aircraft would cease production in order to provide the personnel, factory space and machine tools to do so? Next, what would have been done about the USA's problematic Wright R-3350 powerplant and immense number of difficulties it would have engendered? Finally, where would the UK Air Ministry and RAF have found adequate sources of personnel to man an aircraft requiring a crew of up to ten men each, not to mention maintenance crews, plus infrastructure issues such as building longer runways and larger hangars?

Regarding the first and second questions, it is reasonable to assume that the British would not have been able to do it. Britain was pushed to its limits as it was, and such a resource-intensive aircraft as the B-32 and/or B-29 would have