

How Grandpappy Ended Up In Diablo

By Louie Celerier, October, 2014

On February 5, 1935, the Army Air Corps initiated a secret project for an experimental long-range bomber, the BLR (for Bomber, Long Range). Two U.S. aircraft manufacturers entered the initial competition: Douglas and Sikorsky. Douglas was assigned the designation XBLR-2 and Sikorsky was given XBLR-3. Shortly afterwards, the Douglas proposal was considered vastly superior and Sikorsky's contract was cancelled. Next to enter the competition were Boeing, with their Model 294 and Martin. By then, the Air Corps had abolished the BLR designations and the competitors were assigned more conventional designations with Boeing being XB-15, Martin was assigned XB-16 and Douglas XB-19. Martin, being too involved with the Navy, dropped out as not being able to meet deadlines for delivery of prototypes.



Douglas XB-19. Note advanced tricycle landing gear, but obsolete single tire on main landing gear which damaged runways on landings.



Boeing XB-15. In this case, the landing gear is the old fashioned tail wheel type, but they have distributed the weight of the plane on double-wheel main landing gear.

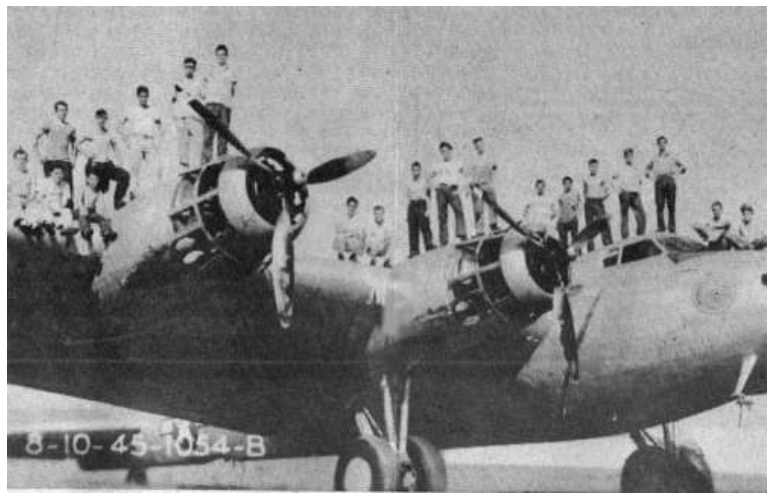
Boeing and Douglas continued with the Douglas model being the largest while Boeing was somewhat more advanced having the advantage of an earlier start on their own.

	<u>Boeing XB-15</u>	<u>Douglas XB-19</u>
Engines	Four 850-HP	Four 2000-Hp
Manufacturer	P&W R-1830	Wright R-3350
Cruising Speed	152 MPH	135 MPH
Wing Span	149 feet	212 feet
Length	88 feet	132 feet
Weight	70,706 Lbs.	86,000 Lbs.
Crew	10	16
Armament	Six 50 cal. machine guns	Two 37-mm cannon, six 30 cal. machine guns, and five 50-cal. mach. guns.
Bomb Load	8,000 Lbs.	18,000 Lbs.



Left: The Boeing XB-15. Note the tremendous size of the wings in relation to the fuselage. This same wing design would later lift the Boeing 314 Clipper flying boats. Right: The Douglas XB-19.

When war started, the XB-19 continued serving as a test laboratory for new equipment and later served as a transport until 1946 when it was flown to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona and placed in storage. In 1949 it was scrapped and cut up for scrap metal. The Boeing XXB-15 also served during the war as a test bed for equipment but mostly as a transport with the designation XC-105. As such, it was sent to Howard Air Force base in the Panama Canal Zone in March 1943 where it established a unique service record. Finally, as with the XB-19, it met an undeserved fate when it was ordered dismantled at Albrook Field, in the Canal Zone, and the pieces thrown into the Diablo Dump where it still lies under tons of other debris.



Left: The Xb-15/XC-105 when it arrived at Howard Field. Right: Balboa High School student assistants dismantling "Grandpappy" in the summer of 1945.

On October 19, 1979, THE PANAMA CANAL SPILLWAY ran a story by Susan Hall Liang about the fate of "Grandpappy" as the XB-15/XC-1105 was affectionately known. With it was a photo showing the Canal Zone Student Assistants that helped demolish the plane. No doubt some of our readers took part in this job and may be included in the photo. We would like to hear from you and your experience with this project.

SOURCES:

AIRPOWER, November 1999; WINGS, June 1979; THE PANAMA CANAL SPILLWAY, October 19, 1979; Goleta Air & Space Museum www.air-and-space.com; Douglas XBLR-2/XB-10 <http://home.att.net>, October 14, 2003 ; XB-15 Experimental Bomber, Boeing, www.boeing.com/history/boeing/xb15 ; "Grandpappy" - The XB-15, by Georges G. Bouche, Aerospace Historian, Fall September 1979.