

Boeing PB-1G "Flying Fortress"



Historical Information:

The majestic and famous Boeing B-17 "Flying Fortress" joined the Coast Guard's aircraft inventory beginning in 1945. After the war, the Coast Guard realized the need for a long range search and rescue aircraft to supplement its peace-time SAR capabilities. Concurrently, the Army Air Force was retiring thousands of the four-engine bombers, many still "factory-new" as they were delivered too late to see action. The Coast Guard, always quick to take advantage of anything they could get inexpensively, requested that the Army Air Force loan eighteen of the bombers to the Coast Guard. The powerful, long-legged and stable bombers proved to be excellent additions to the Coast Guard's aviation fleet.

The Army Air Force had developed a lifeboat that was slung underneath the fuselage of a B-17 that would be dropped to survivors in the water. A parachute rig would deploy from the lifeboat after its release and allow it to descend safely to the surface. The Coast Guard adopted the lifeboat for many of its PB-1Gs (the naval designation for the Flying Fortress). Additionally, these aircraft were also used for the International Ice Patrol while another of the versatile PB-1Gs was modified to carry a nine-lens, 1.5 million dollar, aerial camera for mapping purposes. Interestingly, the Norden bombsight, used by the B-17s in their bombing campaign against Nazi Germany, was kept with this PB-1G and used to pinpoint targets for the camera.

The PB-1Gs served with the Coast Guard from 1945 through 1959. The final flight of the last PB-1G in Coast Guard service ended at 1:46 p.m. on Wednesday 14 October 1959 when PB-1G 77254 landed at AIRSTA Elizabeth City. She had faithfully served the nation's oldest continuous sea service for fourteen years.



PB-1G, on runway, with aerial lifeboat. No date/caption.



PB-1G, CG-77249, on runway in Argentia, Newfoundland, running up engines, International Ice Patrol, 15 February 1954. Photo No. 021554-01. Original caption states: "U.S. Coast Guard plane, PB-1G (B-17), taking off on a 9-hour patrol."



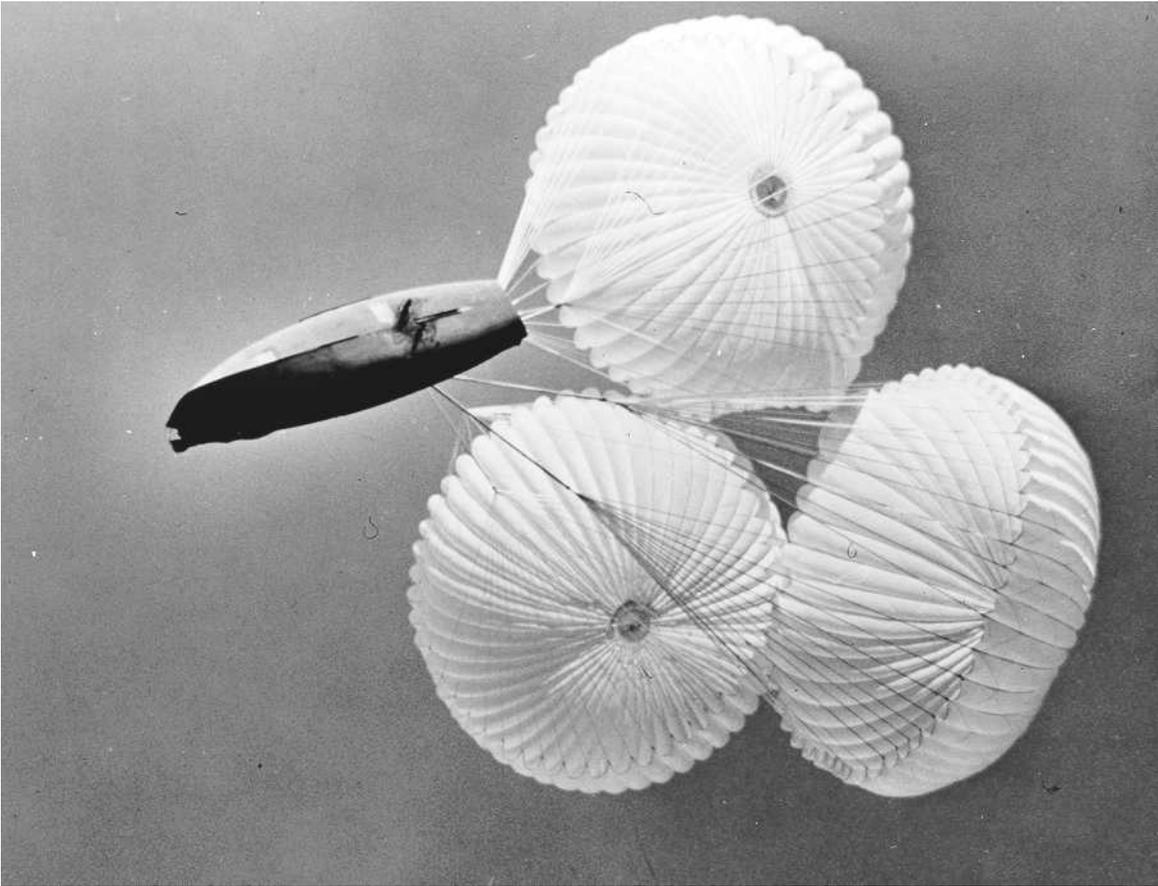
PB-1G, CG-77254, on runway at AIRSTA Elizabeth City, 17 February 1960. Photo No. 5CGD-021760(3). Original caption states: "OLD AND NEW ERA PLANES MUSTER BEFORE GOODBYE: A silver gray four-engine veteran PB-1G (front), last of the B-17 'Flying Fortress' bombers of World War II fame, takes a proud last stand beside a modern flashy orange and white Hercules C-130B turbo-prop jet recently commissioned into service at the U.S. Coast Guard Air Station Elizabeth City, N.C. Now awaiting dismantling, the old-timer was one of 18 Lockheed built B-17s transferred from the Army Air Corps to the Coast Guard in 1946 and reconfigured for search and rescue work. They were redesignated PB-1G. In addition to rescue work, some were flown until 1957 on annual International Ice Patrol and Ice Observation of Newfoundland. The CG-77254, call number of the PB1G shown here, served 12 of its 14 years of Coast Guard duty as a special photo plane. It carried in its belly a Coast and Geodetic Survey nine-lens aerial mapping camera coasting 1 1/2 million dollars. Its once deadly bombsight was used for pinpointing targets for the camera. Acceptance of the Lockheed built Hercules C-130B at the Coast Guard Air Station, Elizabeth City, January 12, 1960, introduced turbine propulsion for the first time into Coast Guard aviation history."



Aerial camera mounted on PB-1G CG-77254, 4 September 1959. Photo No. 13CGD-090459-3. Original caption states: "Checking the 1 1/2 million dollar nine-lens aerial mapping camera in belly of the U.S. Coast Guard PB-1G (B-17), last of the military "Flying Fortresses" of World War II fame, before one of its missions, is the following crew: (L to R): Lieut. Commander Fred T. Merritt, USCG, Plane Commander; Lieut. Commander Arthur R. Benton, U.S. Coast & Geodetic Survey; J. T. Smith, U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey photographer; Terrance K. O'Driscoll, U.S. Coast & Geodetic Survey photographer."



PB-1G, in flight with aerial lifeboat, underside view, 27 April 1948. Photo No. 5261. Original caption states: "COAST GUARD EMPLOYS AIRBORNE LIFEBOAT IN AIR SEA RESCUE OPERATIONS: Pictured in flight is Coast Guard plane (B-17 series aircraft) with airborne lifeboat suspended by four cables to the fuselage. In effecting a rescue, the pilot flies into the wind at approximately 1,500 feet, at 120 mph., and 'drops' the 27 ft. lifeboat directly over the distressed persons. The boat descends bow-down into the water at the rate of 27 feet per second, suspended by three standard 48-fot. cargo chutes which are opened by means of static line attached to keel of bomb bay cat walk, as the boat leaves the plane. The lifeboat, constructed of molded plywood, has two inboard motors, 80 sq. ft mainsail, 54 sq. ft. jib, and carries food and water for a crew of 12 for 14 days. The boat weighs approximately 3,250 pounds, including equipment, parachutes and fuel. Stowed in the equipment locker of the boat is an instruction booklet explaining the elements of sailing and operation of a small boat in the open sea."



Aerial lifeboat. No date. Photo No. 0221463. Original caption states: ". .AND A LITTLE BIT OF HEAVEN. ." (No. 2 in a series of 4): Three to one, parachutes slow the descent of a Coast Guard lifeboat, as it is released from one of the sixteen [sic] B-17's which the famous Coast Guard Air-Sea rescue unit will soon take over and adapt to such operations. This lifeboat contains provisions sufficient to sustain 12 castaways for five weeks, and a sail for motive power. (This series of photos was previously released but is being submitted at this time for its newsworthiness as a new Coast Guard activity)."



PB-1G, International Ice Patrol. Original caption states: "1958 Int'l Ice Patrol [;] One PB1G Ready For Take Off. USCG Air Detach. Argentina, Nfld."; Slide No. SL-3076 (35); photographer unknown. Scanned from a color slide.

Sources:

Arthur Percy, *U.S. Coast Guard Aircraft Since 1916* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991), pp. 320-321.

Gordon Swanborough & Peter M. Bowers. *United States Navy Aircraft Since 1911* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1990) (revised), pp. 432-435.

