

First B-29 Superfortress Was Built at Cost of \$3,392,396.90

This article, published in the October 15, 1944 edition of the Wichita Eagle, details the significant expenses related to the design, testing, and production of the B-29 Superfortresses built in Wichita, Kansas.

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FIRST B-29 SUPERFORTRESS WAS BUILT AT COST OF \$3,392,396.90

Current Production Models Costing Government Approximately \$600,000; Changes as Result of Tests Expensive, Officials Point Out

The first B-29 Superfortress cost \$3,392,396.90—the equivalent of 180,928 \$25-denomination war bonds—headquarters of the air technical service command at Wright field, Dayton, Ohio, announced yesterday. Current production models are costing the government approximately \$600,000, the announcement added.

In citing the B-29 as an example of the enormous cost of a new warplane, Brig. Gen. Kenneth B. Wolfe, ATSC chief of engineering and procurement and the man who practically nursed the battle colossus of the air from drafting board to the skies over Japan, gave facts and figures to show how tremendously difficult, expensive, and time consuming is the task of development.

General Wolfe was in charge of the mammoth B-29 production program from its inception and, at the time of the first raid on Japan, was commanding general of the 20th bomber command, of the 20th air force, with headquarters in the China-Burma-India theater.

How Cost Figured

"Into the cost of the first model of any warplane go all the years of engineering, experiments, tests and changes," Gen. Wolfe explained. "The very time it takes costs money—and the minimum time from the first design of a new plane to the completion of the first production model is about three years. Sometimes it takes five years.

"Even before the original contract for the first B-29s was let, \$84,150 was spent in obtaining preliminary engineering information, which necessitated wind tunnel models, long and costly tests and the building of mock-ups, which are full size wooden models never designed to fly but intended for use in the laboratories here and at the factory in determining the

interior arrangement of guns, seats, bunks, radio equipment, etc.

"The original contract was let for \$1,804,840, later reduced to \$1,674,880 when the government assumed certain flight risks. But this sum did not include the government-furnished equipment, which cost approximately \$493,300. Changes are always necessary before production can be started. On the B-29, which had a minimum of changes, it cost \$95,241 for tests to alter the tail, \$72,500 for enlarging the bomb bay, and \$15,600 for new propeller tests. Incidental changes to perfect the model ran the total up another \$94,897.90.

Airframe Is Destroyed

"Before the first Superfortress could be built on the production line, it was subjected to a final series of static tests in the aircraft laboratory of the air technical service command at a cost of \$861,828. A complete airframe was put on the rack and tested for stress and strain until it was completely destroyed."

The changes as a result of tests are expensive, General Wolfe pointed out, but they pay for themselves manyfold. They assure that a volume production will be of the highest quality and that the planes will be the best that American ingenuity and know-how can produce.

Once a new plane starts coming off the production line in quantity, the cost drops rapidly as the manufacturer gains efficiency through experience with that particular model and finds a hundred ways to speed production and cut down man hours, General Wolfe explained.