



# SAVING A KB-50J

**THIS RARE COLD WAR  
WARRIOR IS HEADING TO A  
NEW HOME THAT WILL  
RESTORE IT BACK  
TO ITS FORMER GLORY**  
BY RALPH M. PETERSEN

**F**or a several years there have been rumors that the Boeing KB-50J displayed at MacDill AFB in Tampa, Florida, would be moving to the Air Mobility Command Museum in Dover, Delaware. During 2017 those rumors proved true when the move was finally announced.

I visited MacDill on 6 January 2018, where a crew from Worldwide Aircraft Recovery was in the last stages of disassembling the aircraft in preparation of the move. Work had begun in mid-December and disassembly was completed mid-January with all of the remaining components loaded on trailers for the trip north.

A total of 370 B-50s were built by Boeing at its Seattle Plant 2 between 1947 and 1953. The design started life as the B-29D

— a very improved variant of the Superfortress. Orders for 200 were placed in July 1945, but the atomic bombings and unconditional surrender of Japan cut the orders to 60 and in December 1945 the type was redesignated B-50. The B-50 was conspicuous in that it was the lone piston-engine bomber in orders for a new generation of all-jet bombing aircraft. The B-29's troublesome Wright R-3350s were dropped in favor of Pratt & Whitney's massive R-4360 four-row 28-cylinder radial engine capable of 3500-hp. Production comprised several models but it became obvious that the day of the piston-engine bomber was over. Many were converted to aerial tankers while others were modified as weather and recon platforms. A few survived in USAF service until the mid-1960s.



This is how the KB-50J appeared on display at MacDill. The area's extremely corrosive environment soon started the plane on a downward slide. (RMP)

The beast at rest. The KB-50 was an imposing machine and KB-50J-75-BO 48-0054 is seen parked and ready for its next mission. The added jet engines provided required thrust needed for a new generation of jet warplanes. On 5 November 1962, this aircraft was parked on the flightline at MacDill AFB when an airman working on a nearby F-84F accidentally triggered a rocket pod and debris did extensive damage to the KB-50J. The plane was repaired and eventually flown to Davis-Monthan AFB where it was declared surplus to needs on 26 June 1964 and sold for scrap. (Gene Sommerich)



Corroded hardware and fasteners made the disassembly of the four-engine Cold War warrior difficult. On 10 January, the fuselage was being secured to a lo-boy trailer.

The MacDill aircraft is USAF 49-0389 (msn 16165) and it was delivered to the USAF in December 1950 as a B-50D-125-BO. This variant had a gross weight of 173,000-lbs and cost the taxpayers \$1,444,300 each. After serving as a strategic bomber at Hunter AFB in Savannah, Georgia, the airframe was one of 136 B-50s selected for conversion as aerial refuelers. In 1958, Hayes Aircraft Corporation converted the aircraft to a KB-50J, with the addition of two General Electric J-47 jet engines of 5200-lbs st

The aircraft in the process of being dismantled by Worldwide. (RMP)

each. The refueling system employed three hoses so that three aircraft could be refueled at the same time by the hose-and-probe method.

The aircraft's final assignment was with the 431st AREFS at Biggs AFB in El Paso, Texas. The 431st was the last unit to operate the KB-50J and flew its final KB-50J refueling mission on 26 January 1965. The increasing demands of the Vietnam War allowed the type to stay in service longer than predicted. When the planes were being phased out of service, many had their refueling gear and jet pods stripped out and transferred to the KC-97L tankers of the Air

National Guard. However, 49-0389 was kept intact and flown from Biggs to the USAF Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio, on 17 February 1965 for display at the museum. This flight was the last of a B-50 type aircraft (except one) and Maj. Anthony C. Pronier and a select crew flew the mission.

Displayed outdoors at the USAF Museum for 30-years, the plane's condition went downhill in the rough Ohio weather. The KB-50J was disassembled and moved to MacDill AFB in late 1995 for display in the base's new Memorial Park. The aircraft was marked as KB-50J 48-0114, which I find curious since 48-0114 doesn't appear to have any special history.

MacDill's Memorial Park is situated only a short distance