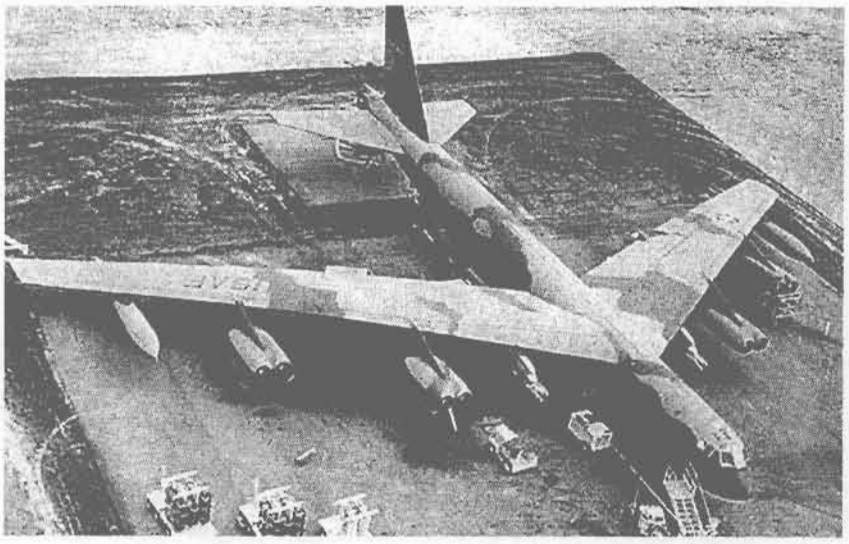
# Boeing B-52D

**History:** The B-52 is probably one of the most important and impressive aeroplanes ever made and it will probably remain in service for near enough to a century after its first flights. Its roots lie in the beginnings of the Cold War in 1948 when plans for the next generation of heavy bombers to replace the B-36 began to settle into shape. Until October 1948 the B-52 was planned as a turbojet powered bomber but was redesigned as an eight engine turbojet bomber to meet a new US Air Force requirement. After the decision was made to proceed with the design maximum effort went into the project so that, by 1950, the B-52 was beginning to take shape and the first flight occurred on 15 April 1952. Before the first flight had been made plans for production of 500 B-52 were drawn up with companies across the United States building components large and small for the big bomber. In September 1953 the decision was made to set up a second production line at Boeing's Wichita plant to free up production capacity at Boeing's main facility at Seattle that was gearing up to produce KC-135 tankers and Boeing's commercial airliners. On 29 June 1955 the B-52B was cleared for combat duty but there were numerous problems, particularly the engines and in February 1956 all the B-52s in service were grounded for a while because of engine problems. In all 744 B-52s were built, the only ones that remain in service today are around 94 B-52Hs.



The first version of the B-52 to be produced in significant numbers was the B-52D with a total production run of 170 that were built between June 1956 and November 1957. When the B-52 had been first planned it was to be a high altitude bomber but by the time the B-52Ds were being planned operational tactics had changed for bombers to avoid interception by flying below enemy radar that resulted in the need for strengthened airframe and upgraded avionics. In 1963 a study was conducted into converting B-52Ds to carry conventional weapons and the following year rebuilding commenced to permit them to carry 108 conventional bombs. This reconstruction coincided with the escalation of hostilities in South East Asia, in 1965 they began flying operations against suspected communist positions in South Vietnam and against North Vietnam in April 1966. Around this time the US Air Force began adopting camouflage schemes and the B-52Ds were given a modified version suited for their conventional bombing role. The heavy flying they did during that period wore out many of them but 80 B-52Ds were put through a series of modifications to the wing and fuselage structures which added another 7 000 hours to their flying lives. These days none remain in service though 25 have been preserved for display around the world.

**Data:** long range strategic bomber. *Engines* eight Pratt & Whitney J57-P-29-WA turbojet engines of 5489kg (12 100lbs) thrust. *Wing span* 56.39m (185ft). *Length* 47.727m (156ft 7in). *Maximum take-off weight* 204120kg (450 000lb). *Maximum speed* 893km/h (555mph). *Range*

11861km (7370 miles). *Crew* 6. *Armament* various nuclear or conventional weapons up to 108 conventional bombs or four nuclear free fall bombs plus four 12.7mm (0.5 inch) tail guns.

**The kit: Monogram 1/72**

This is an ancient kit dating back to the late 1960s but it comes from a period when Monogram was producing very high quality but somewhat simple (by today's standard) kits. For example, the cockpit is very simple with pilots moulded onto the seats and a lonely figure without any seat or other equipment sits in the tail gunner's position. However this is no great problem because little can be seen through the cockpit windows and Plan B ensures there is little to see anyhow. On the other hand, the undercarriage details are quite delicate and add a lot to the sense of atmosphere of the completed model. The kit includes quite detailed flaps that would look very good in the extended position (but I didn't do that) and alternative markings for the bare metal and white nuclear bomber and South East Asian camouflage version with external bomb racks for 24 little bombs.

Reviews suggest that, given the choice between this old Monogram kit and the more recent AMT kit, the Monogram one is more accurate. In either case if you can find a 1/72 B-52 kit of either kind you will need deep pockets because they are not cheap, a quick cruise of the internet suggest a price of around $70 or $80 would be reasonable. I paid about $30 for mine, but that was at a sale at Perth Hobby Centre more than a decade ago. Since then I've been looking at it on and off, trying to decide whether to make it or sell it, mainly because it is such a huge kit and the end result promised to be a huge model. In fact the manufacturers acknowledge the problem by moulding little hooks into the kit so it can be suspended from a hook in the ceiling when it is completed. But it is a long time since I have dangled any models from my ceiling and I was not about to do that again, so storage of the completed model looked like being a real problem, even the way I store them. However, in the end I decided to take on the challenge and started gluing the bits together...


Really there isn't much to say about this kit. It's not like the modern ones that more or less make themselves but it is accurate and the pieces fit together fairly well. However, it is necessary to pay careful attention at each stage, making sure that parts fit squarely and, in particular, ensuring that the wings are fitted on at an angle that allows the outrigger wheels to fit comfortably on the completed model. Even so, there are a few gaps here and there, particularly with the flaps up and the bomb bay door closed but, again, working carefully takes care of most of the problems.

The kit has lots of raised lines that I sanded off (as always) but some of them indicate where the extensive walkway lines go on the completed model. I should have carefully noted where they went, perhaps a tracing would have been the best way, because the kit decal sheet doesn't have any of the lines and they have to be produced separately. After several attempts I ended up producing a lot of black lines to the correct thickness on the laser printer and then spent four or five evenings sticking them on. As for the camouflage, it seems that every B-52D had slight variations on a basic theme so, since I was using the kit decals, I followed the kit's directions. I went through a lot of paint and thinner painting the model but that's only to be expected seeing how big it is, and I do mean ***BIG***. I'm glad I won't be doing it again.