

X-RAY BRAVO ALPHA

The Restoration

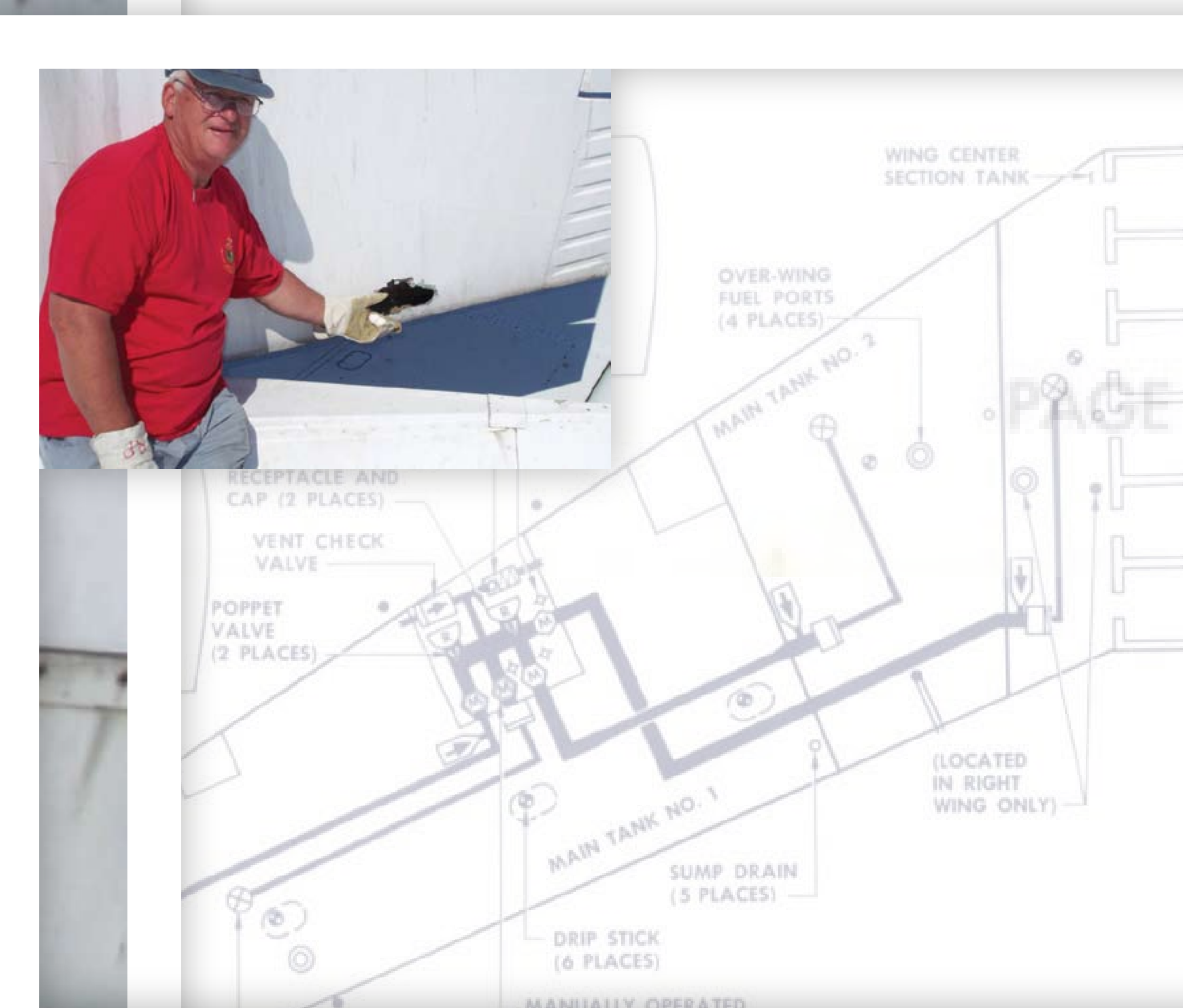
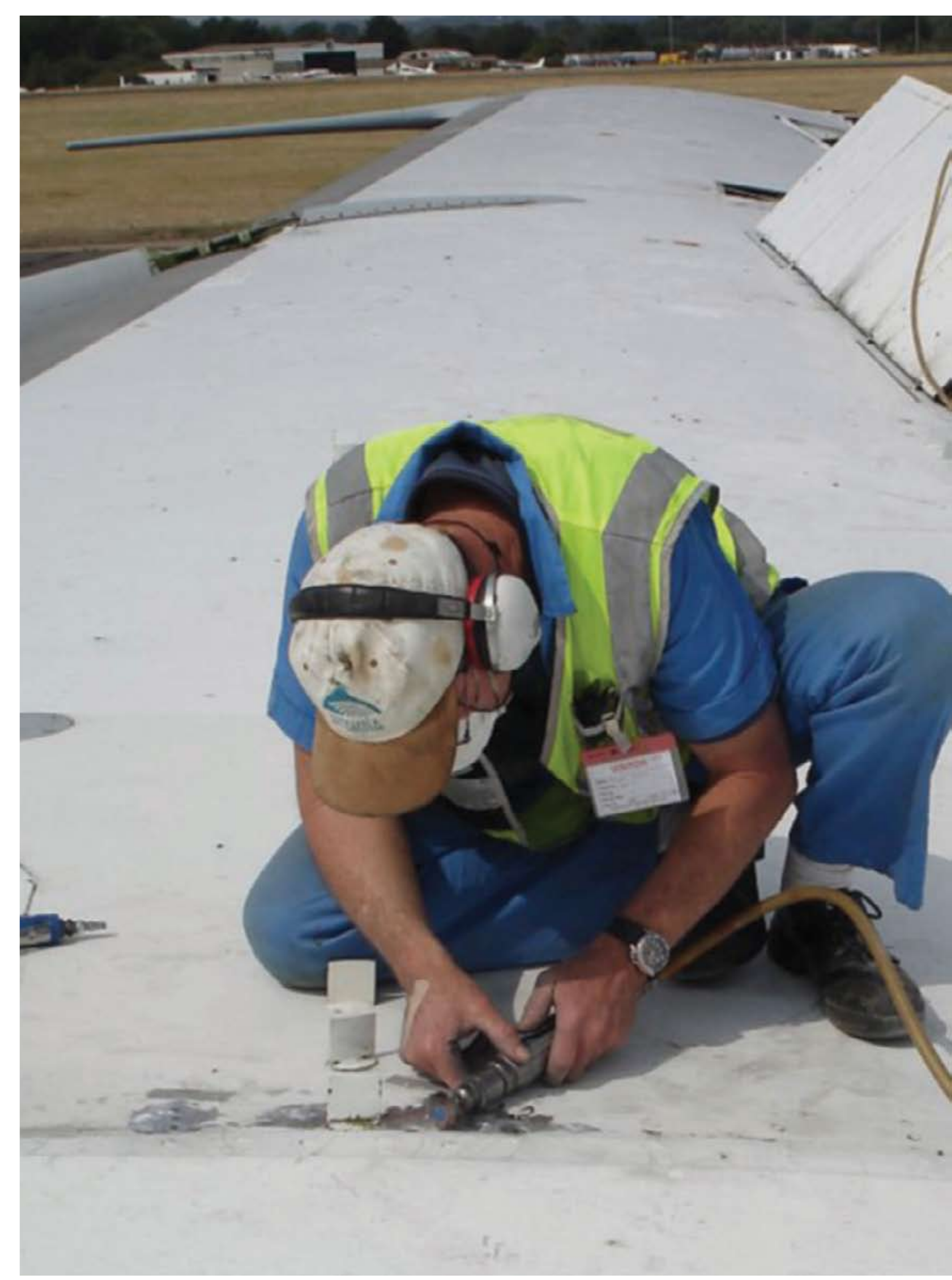
The work done to restore the 707 to an airworthy state was among the most interesting the engineers had seen, despite these volunteers having over 400 years of collective experience in the aviation industry. Among the first tasks was to establish an office, and the green Portakabin set up in a quiet corner of ATC Lasham's hardstand quickly became known as the Long-reach Embassy. Fiercely patriotic, the team hoisted the Australian flag, paired with the iconic Boxing Kangaroo, both of which flew proudly over the office throughout the entire time the team was on station. There was now a home for that most important side of the project - the paperwork.



First up the team removed all the inspection and access panels to allow the internal structure of the aeroplane to be examined. It was not surprising to discover several birds' nests, one complete with eggs. Sadly, the nests acted as moisture traps, and wherever a bird had made its home, there was also corrosion. The rudder suffered badly with a football-sized hole in the skin on each side. What to do? Dealing with such an old and long-superseded model was expected to be a challenge, with most others of its era long turned into beer cans. The concern most had when it was clear that it would need lots of replacement components would be whether these rare spares could be sourced. The recovery team's worries were to be proved unfounded, when new rudder panels, still on the shelves nearly half a century after XBA was constructed, were purchased with no difficulty. It would turn out that every part that was required was still available in one form or another with precious Boeing 707 bits being shipped in from around the world. The added bonus was the cache of parts still stored with ATC Lasham. The legendary Aladdin's Cave had nothing on the storeroom in the loft of one of the hangars in which many vital components had laid dormant for so long. These bits were part of the package that came with XBA and made the engineers' lives so much easier.

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Over the 6 months of restoration and refurbishment, a major part involved corrosion repair and control. A big effort went into the blending and treatment of this nemesis of all alloy structures with the wing upper surfaces the most affected. Not only was the removal time-consuming but also the mapping of all the spots where blending took place. The depth and location of the scores of blends had to be accurately recorded so that Boeing technical support engineers could do a stress analysis to determine whether the structure might need strengthening. It was a much relieved team that read the Boeing report giving XBA's wings a clean bill of health. They built them tough in 1959.



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